I Once Had a Best Friend Who’s Now a Stranger

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Summary

AU. Robin of Locksley died in the Holy Land

Sir Guy of Gisborne, a Lord in his own right is given Locksley after he recovers from a debilitating illness that had seen him quarantined for many weeks. His recent brush with death had changed the Master at Arms and he aims to resume a past friendship with a boy he used to know.

Friendships are not to be taken lightly and though Lord Allan a-Dale is more than pleased to have his old friend back he gets more than he bargains for with terrible consequences.

(Don't like it? Don't read it)

Notes

Tags and warnings will change with each additional chapter
Chapter 1

Another sneer, that made three in less than an hour, were they trying to beat a personal best? A man could get the wrong idea from their blatant disdain and their desire for him to know it. It was a bit much, it was the King’s birthday after all you’d think they’d knock it on the head for one afternoon but would they hell as like. They thought he was naught but scum and he would never be welcomed just because he was given a Lordship rather than be born into it. How did they suppose they became noble? Someone down the line elevated their family name at some point and at least his Lordship was earned from hard honest graft than simply being born into the right family.

Hypocrites, the lot of them, dressed in their best drinking and dining in the house of a murdered man. He hadn’t known Robin of Locksley well, though the a-Dales were friends of the family as Malcolm of Locksley; Robin’s father gave his father Roy a-Dale a Lordship and lands. Bonchurch wasn’t a huge estate but it was big enough, could play a good game of hide and seek if the mood strikes and it was situated near the lake, so not a bad piece of land at all.

He saw Robin knocking about from time to time, firing his bow, which was impressive but Robin wouldn’t talk to him. Not his own doing, the boy had so many minders it was unreal and he was the local riff raff so they always pulled Robin away when he tried to play with him. So he watched him grow up from afar, watching the boy become a man sooner than expected when his father died in an awful fire. It almost broke him but out of the ashes rose a phoenix and Robin was a kind and just Lord and the village of Locksley thrived.

Robin was no saint though, who was really? People only put you on a pedestal to watch you fall off. He had everything, lands, titles a pretty fiancée and the respect of his people but it wasn’t enough. He longed for glory and he thought he would find it in the Holy Land and joined King Richard’s crusade but news returned some weeks ago that Robin had lost his life. It was a terrible price to pay for his ego and made worse when at the time they were under an agreed ceasefire. The letter claimed that four Saracens invaded the King’s camp and Robin dispatched three but the forth had come behind him like an honourless coward and put a sword through his chest. Defying death the young Lord staggered to the King’s tent and prevented the assassination of the King and fought with his attacker, sending him away and though he was treated fever set in and Robin of Locksley succumbed to his injuries.

Maybe it was correct to celebrate King Richard’s birthday in Locksley Manor, as it was thanks to Robin that the King saw in another year. Yet it was because of the King that the Locksley Estate became vacant, although land doesn’t stay vacant for long and as soon as news of Robin’s death reached the shores of England, Sir Guy of Gisborne was named Lord of Locksley, as he had been acting as during Robin’s absence.

Like himself, Sir Guy was another commoner given position rather than born into one. It was said his father, a foreign man from France came to England with his young wife for a better life and settled in Locksley and started a family. One day when he was collecting wood from the forest he came upon bandits robbing the then Lord of Locksley, Robert and with no regard for his own safety he charged in and saved the noble man. Robert was so moved by the gesture that he awarded him land, which they named the Gisborne estate.

Like the a-Dales, the Gisborne’s were not welcomed and Guy was raised in isolation because the other children bullied him because of his heritage and accent picked up from his parents. There was a five year age gap between himself and Guy and though it seemed short the age difference kept them apart. It was only by chance that he passed him one day by the lake. He didn’t recognize the quiet
lanky kid with long inky black hair that fell in front of his piercing blue eyes at first. In fact he did not see him at all until Guy startled thinking he was a bully about to push him in. That first day they sat together and said nothing until it was time to leave and they promised to return the next day.

Guy never was talkative and he believed it was because the kids and adults had shamed him for his accent. The silence between them was never awkward though and to be fair Guy didn’t need to talk as he could talk for England. Sometimes he worried that he said too much but Guy never asked him to be quiet or made any kind of expression to suggest he was annoyed with his constant chatter.

They were friends, Guy was the first proper friend he ever had and he thinks it was likewise with Guy. They were two kids shunned from society and withering in isolation until they found each other and the lake was their paradise and no one could take that away from them.

Their friendship lasted less than three weeks and it wasn’t a person but a fire that took it away from them. A fire that if rumours were believed Guy had started. He claimed it was an accident but the villagers became a lynch mob baying for blood when the fire claimed the life of Guy’s mother and Malcolm of Locksley. Guy and his young sister Isabella, a sweet young thing nice as pie, were chased from Locksley and even from England, driven back to France. The Gisborne estate became what it was before, nameless land, just another part of the Locksley Estate.

“Can you believe this?” Marian of Knighton asks in quiet outrage. “It is like they have already forgotten Robin.” Unlike him Marian was born into nobility though sometimes he did question it. She was a spirited lass, possibly too spirited for a lady of her position and she was still a maid at her age. He couldn’t fault her for her decision and besides he knew she was still waiting for Robin, she would have made him wait too, and earn her hand in marriage but that ship had sailed now.

“Nothing they do surprises me anymore;” he says with a shrug and it was true.

“If only the King were here,” she says put upon. Ever since news of Robin’s demise she had seemed down, which was normal but burdened as though she held a great weight on her shoulders.

“Not being funny but do you really think the King would want to come to Nottingham when he returns? It’s not exactly a tourist destination. Come to Nottingham where our poor are poorer than yours.” Marian laughs and he’s glad he put a smile on her face as she has been too long without one.

“I wish these cretins cared about the poor as much as you and I. Look at them stuffing their fat faces, it turns my stomach to look upon them.” He’s not quite sure how to respond to that. Marian was passionate about her beliefs but she was aware of her position in the system of things and knew when to behave. Since Robin’s death her actions have become wild and unpredictable with no thought to the consequences which was unlike her.

He’s failing to find a response, which surprises him as usually he has an answer for everything. However it seemed when the only noble that had the decency to talk to him was self-destructing he could do nothing but watch. Marian is nothing but tempered fury beside him with tense shoulders narrowed blue eyes and her mouth is set in a thin line.

He tries ever harder to come up with something witty to say when he is saved by the sound of spurred boots coming down the wooden steps. All eyes turn towards the staircase and they watch as Sir Guy of Gisborne descends down the stairs dressed all in heavy black leather with an impressive sword attached at his hip slapping against his thigh as he walks.

He wants to make a joke about him overcompensating but he won’t because he knows he won’t find it funny. The lanky kid he knew all those years ago would have laughed, maybe ruffled his hair and splashed him but that boy was gone. A man had returned in his place, tall and muscular with a point
to prove and no sister by his side. He was hardened by the cruelties his so-called betters inflicted upon him and vengeance burned in his heart.

It was best the boy was gone really, because he was a sensitive soul and wouldn’t have been able to return to be a Lord of repossessed lands. He must say he was quite impressed with Guy, as he refused to go by any other name even when he was told the land of Gisborne no longer existed. He practically courted ridicule and those first few months of his return some of the things that were said were simply ghastly.

Then the bodies started piling up and talk dried up when random tongues were removed. The killer was never caught but people learnt not to talk ill of Sir Guy as he was known to be dangerous. He wanted to laugh, Guy wasn’t dangerous, he was a sweet kid that kept to himself. It wasn’t until he watched him beat a man half to death with his fists that he thought there may be some validity in the claim.

Though there were bodies and talk, a lot less obviously, Guy was busy grafting at the castle earning promotion after promotion all the way to being the Sheriff’s lieutenant. He was proud of him, and he had even tried to tell him so but Guy had simply looked at him as though he didn’t know him and rode off. It hurt but what was he supposed to say, ‘Hey Guy, we skimmed stones for three weeks, be my friend.’ It would sound insane, creepy and it would make him seem like a fanatical stalker.

He thought he would be remembered being his first friend but there were other memories that would take precedence over their three weeks. Like before the fire when there was an accident with some fireworks and the villagers turned on Guy baying for blood like the blood thirsty animals that they were. It was an accident and one not caused by Guy but Robin the spoilt little shit, but he wouldn’t confess even though they wouldn’t try to string him up because he was born noble, but people like he and Guy were fair game.

Before that his father was banished to the leper colony after being discovered with the condition by Malcolm of Locksley. The poor sod only wanted to die in the company of his wife and children and he wasn’t even allowed that. Worse was to come when they learnt Malcolm had designs on the wife and that is why he outted Sir Roger, destroying a family because of his own selfish wants but that was fine because he was born noble and Sir Roger was not.

Best he turns his thoughts from such things; instead he focuses on Guy and is pleased to see he is looking incredibly well, really really well. Too well for someone that had supposedly just climbed out of his death bed. Sir Guy had not been seen for many weeks, suddenly taken ill and quarantined so only the physician had seen him during that time taking him meals. He had worried and tried to visit but he was turned away without anyone questioning who he was. Marian had tried to visit also and was turned away in the same fashion.

The guests applaud Guy’s recovery and he must take the name of Guy’s physician because he looks as good as new, better even and he is sure there is some colour to his alabaster skin, quite remarkable. Guy basks in their attention and he should, he has earned it and he was quite sure everyone within the manor was afraid of him.

“Is it just me, or is he smiling more?” He whispers to Marian who no longer looks so annoyed but relieved to see Guy looking so well.

“I thought the same thing, he should smile more he is very handsome when he smiles.” He turns to see a faint blush colouring her cheeks and he is glad of it. Guy had been attempting to court Marian for some time but his advances were always rebuffed. Now that Robin was truly out of the picture, and judging from her reaction to him they could finally be together.
“He’s the prettiest belle at the ball,” he teases with a flutter of his eyelashes. In all honesty Guy was handsome, even as a man he could appreciate good looks and Guy looked after his body and was always clean and his inky black hair still fell over his eyes. How Marian had turned him down time and again confused him, he was not stirred by men but even he would struggle to say no to such raw sex appeal.

“Stop, he’s coming over.” This is a new side to Marian he has not seen, he hates to say it but he always thought she was one of the lads not afraid to get dirty. He tries to ignore the fact that she so blatantly tugged down her dress revealing more of her chest and is breathing in making her breasts seem even larger. He feels as if he has just been let in on a few tricks of the trade and arches an eyebrow at her. “Oh stop, everyone does it.”

He can’t help himself and breathes in standing taller with his chest out. Marian laughs covering her mouth with her hand losing her composure. He had thought those actions before were unlike her and she shouldn’t change her ways. Guy was besotted with her for who she was, that was an accomplishment being wanted for who you are and not for whom you pretend to be.

“Lady Marian,” Guy greets and is that kohl smeared over his eyes? Strange but it does make the blue more striking as if he needed anything more with such a deep honeyed voice.

“I am glad to see that you are well, Sir Guy.” Marian states with a small curtsy. The action is true, sweet and welcoming and he expects to be forgotten in three...two...one.

“Allan,” Guy says in greeting and smirks before moving passed him rubbing his entire body against him as he does so. He stares after him wondering what in God’s name just happened.


“I didn’t even know he knew my name,” he answers in disbelief.

“Well he seemed awfully familiar with you.” He is assuming she means the smirk or had she seen him against his body? The manor was full and he was merely greeting his guests that he had probably not even realised how close they were as he squeezed passed. “I cannot breathe in here; will you come outside with me?” He nods and they head outside and sit at one of the benches placed by the window.

“I am uncertain what to do,” Marian confesses looking perplexed but he’s as lost as she is.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m thinking about leaving.”

“The party?”

“Home. I feel as if I have lost my way.” He understands that Robin was her guiding light which was extinguished and now she feels lost in the dark.

“What about Guy?” He doesn’t believe Guy has lost interest he was simply busy greeting guests as a good host should. He was probably looking for her right now. He looks through the window to test his theory and his eyes connect with Guy’s as the older man was watching him. Marian obviously, he just turned and caught his gaze is all. He smiles and winks and turns back cursing himself, a wink, really?

“He is a good man,” Marian says unconvincingly. “He was a good husband to Meg,” she offers as if she is trying to convince him or rather herself. He was a good husband for all of six months before
Meg died from complications during childbirth. The arrival of Seth, Guy’s son made their hasty marriage clear, not that anyone would have said anything as fear of Guy would have kept them silent.

Meg was a young noblewoman, perhaps too young to be around Guy and he’s not even sure how that came about. Meg reminded him of Marian, a free spirit with a devil may care attitude but whereas Marian was calculating Meg was careless, an unplanned pregnancy proved that. Still, Guy did right by her and married her as soon as he was told. It was a quiet affair and it was said only her father and the Sheriff were present as they did not want to bring too much attention on themselves.

From what he saw of them they seemed like a young married couple very much in love. Well Meg did, but Guy was dutifully by her side and more than once he saw his hand stray to the swell of her belly like a proud father. Then Meg died and Seth was sent to live in London and no mention of the pair was ever made as if they had simply been erased from history.

“He is kind and considerate and generous with his gifts,” Marian continues gaining momentum as if she is finally believing herself. “I could do much worse,” she says with a shrug and that slight arrogance irritates him. Do worse, she was lucky to have his attention at all. Do worse? He’d like to see her do better.

“Shall we go back inside?” She nods appearing much calmer and they join the party once more. Marian stays by his side though she has options to speak to the other nobles whereas he did not. The nobles shunned him; he was not like Guy who earned their respect through fear as he wouldn’t say boo to a goose. He likes that Marian treats the noblemen the way they treat him, her disgust of them meant more than his disgust as she was their equal whereas he was not considered the same.

The ale and wine flow freely and a fiddle player plays jaunty tunes that has some of the guests dancing. He would like to dance but ever since his mother died he had been without a dance partner. He offers his hand to Marian believing he will be rejected and to his surprise she takes his hand and they join the other dancers in the centre of the room.

He notices that Guy is not one of the dancers and finds him stood by the fire watching them. He flatters himself, Guy was clearly watching the dancers not only him and Marian and even if he were, he wasn’t looking at him. He almost winks again so instead he turns away and keeps his eyes to the floor as if he was not an accomplished dancer sure of his feet.

As the evening comes to an end carriages begin to arrive to take the guests home. The few that remain have become rowdy having drunk more than their fill and their behaviour towards the servants is disrespectful that he is glad that Marian had gone. He does not know why he lingers, or why he begins cleaning with the servants casting nasty glares at the nobles that dare to prevent or harass the staff.

He was not desiring a confrontation but he was clearly tempting one so it came as little surprise when a strong large hand gripped his wrist as he reached for a discarded silver chalice. He looks at his would-be attacker and sees that he is held by none other than Sir Guy of Gisborne.

“You do not need to clean in my house.” For one horrifying moment he almost said this was not his house. They both know what became of Guy’s house and it would be insensitive to remind him of such things. Guy was his friend, whether he remembered him or not and he did not wish to reminisce about that horrific night, held back in his mother’s arms while they chased his friend away.

Longthorn had stirred the ire of the people that night, as he had done on the night of the fireworks. He was the Gisborne’s biggest detractor, petty and jealous of their lands. He was a cruel man that terrorized Ghislaine while her husband fought in the crusades. It came as no surprise that Longthorn
turned up dead, facedown and bloated in the lake a week after Guy’s return.

“I have drank your wine and eaten your food, it is the least I can do, my Lord.” In all honesty he was only trying to stop those bigoted bastards from harassing the staff, whether he disgusted them or not he was still a Lord and they would do well to remember that.

Guy releases his wrist. “My Lord? Why so formal? Are we not friends?”

“We are friends?” He asks perhaps too enthusiastically, for a moment there he thought they were imaginary friends.

“Of course,” Guy replies with a smile and he returns it. Guy had ignored him for years so he had assumed he had been forgotten, it had only been three weeks after all but it had a profound effect on him. “Are you expecting a carriage?” Guy asks as another one pulls up outside.

“No, I am to walk home, I only live at Bonchurch.”

“I know,” Guy replies quickly, possibly offended. He was the one that had been ignored all these years so how was he to know what Guy remembered? “I cannot allow you to travel home alone, I will travel with you or you could stay the night.” He assumes that invitation was harmless and he meant nothing but sleep but the deep rumbling of his voice and the look in his eyes suggest otherwise. He’s had too much wine; Guy probably just wished to ask him about Marian, playing the friend to make him spill all his secrets.

“I can walk,” he reiterates and Guy looks disappointed if not slightly angry. “Would you like to walk halfway?” He offers hating the look of rejection on Guy’s face.

“I would like that.” He’s standing close, a little too close completely trespassing on his personal space. Had they stood this closely as children? Aside from the occasional play fight, which he very nearly won thank you, they tended to stand side by side as companions.

“If you get tired though and need to turn back, promise me you will.” Guy looks in perfect health but he has only just recovered from that debilitating illness and he does not wish to jeopardise his health.

“I promise,” Guy pledges and he takes him at his word and they leave Locksley Manor after the last guest departs. It’s a beautiful night, warm and with a full moon lighting their way. He had thought once they passed the village Guy would interrogate him about Marian but he doesn’t say a word. It’s nice, like that first time down by the Lake sat together without a need to talk, he hadn’t realised how much he had missed their friendship.

When they reach halfway he stops as he realises Guy was trying to trick him and escort him all of the way home. Begrudgingly Guy stops and they simply stare at each other and this time there is no denying it is awkward. It looks as though Guy wishes to say something and though he waits to hear it Guy remains quiet.

“So here we are,” he announces, when in doubt state the obvious. “Thank you for the party and walking me home. If you’re ever by Bonchurch feel free to visit, we could go the lake, skim stones.” He immediately shuts his mouth as he no longer trusts what he says. He’s pretty sure he just invited Guy around for a play date, they were not children anymore.

Guy laughs at the invitation and smiles at him and he knows then that he remembers those three weeks. “I’ll keep that in mind,” he replies but still does not take his leave. He is quite convinced he has something to say but once more he’s faced with the kid he knew who wouldn’t speak because of his accent. The accent is gone now but old habits die hard.
“Good night, have a safe journey home.” Guy seems shocked at his parting words, as though no one had wished him safe travels before.

He starts to walk away by the time Guy gathers his wits. “You too!” He calls from where he left him and he turns and waves glad to have his friend back, Guy waves back and also turns and leaves.

When he returns home his father is furious. “Where have you been?” Roy a-Dale demands. Ever since his wife and son died he had become overbearing and too protective of him. His worrying was doing him no good as his grey hair was thinning and he had become gaunt.

“I was with Guy, I was quite safe,” he soothes.

“Guy?” His father asks as he leads him back towards the chair before the fire. “Sir Guy of Gisborne? Your little friend by the lake? I thought he had nothing more to do with you.” He settles his father into his chair and pours him a small glass of wine for his nerves.

“I thought the same but today we spoke and he even walked me home.” He won’t say halfway because Roy will only become distressed and scold him about the dangers of the world.

“Well that is good news; it was about time you made another friend.”

“I’ve invited him around,” to play, he won’t say. “So do not be surprised if he shows up.” He walks over to the staircase. “But do not be surprised if he does not. Good night, father.” He waits on the stairs for his father’s reply.

“Good night son,” with that he retires for the night changing into his nightshirt and rinsing his mouth out with water before going to sleep.
Chapter 2

Come the morning Guy does not visit nor the days that followed. Instead by the fifth day a determined Lady Marian comes to see him and they sit in the front room to discuss matters that must be of some importance.

“I am leaving,” she states resolutely.

“What? You can’t leave.”

“There is nothing here for me. I have spoken to the Abbess of Rufford and she has a place for me in her order.”

“A nun? Not being funny but you don’t strike me as the nun type.”

“And what do you know of nuns?” Marian challenges.

“Plenty, I’m good with nuns.” Marian rolls her eyes. “But what about Guy? It will break his heart if you left.”

“Guy is...Guy is changed. Since he has recovered there have been no visits and no gifts. I passed him in Nottingham only yesterday and he did not see me. Have I become invisible?”

“You are as beautiful as you have ever been,” he soothes.

“You flatter me,” Marian replies self-depreciatingly.

“Listen it’s the truth and I will marry you if it will make you stay.” Marian laughs and lifts her head with a genuine smile.

“I thank you but I do not desire a pity proposal.” He racks his brain trying to think up a solution.

“If Guy were to make his intention known, if he still wished to marry you would you stay?”

“I would,” Marian confesses. “But you do not understand that he is not as he once was and I fear his feelings for me are gone with his sickness.” He takes her petite hands in his.

“I don’t believe that is true, you asked him for space once perhaps he is respecting your wishes. I will talk to him, he claims we are friends now and I will tell him that you are open to courtship and he will be at your door before nightfall.”

“Thank you,” Marian says with her blue eyes glistening with unshed tears.

“Enough of this, would you like to hear a funny story?”

Marian nods. “Please.”

“I only went and asked Guy to come to the lake and skim stones with me.”

“You invited him around to play?” Marian asks with a laugh. “What are you, twelve?”

“Apparently,” he laughs. “Could you imagine him talking to the Sheriff? ‘Sorry can’t torture anyone today I’m off to throw stones with Allan.’” Marian laughs at his terrible impression of Guy and she leaves in better spirits than when she arrived.
Why he frets about what to wear he does not know. He’s not proposing to Guy after all and it is highly unlikely that he would have to sing Marian’s praises. Guy knows her worth and she had a better understanding of him than any of the other available noblewomen. Not forgetting she was still relatively young and able to bear children and she was pretty. It boggled his mind why he himself was not interested perhaps because he always knew any man in her life would be second best to Robin.

He settles for a plain white shirt, green tunic and brown trousers with riding boots and a forest green cloak. He thinks it is worthy attire for an audience with Guy. He combs his hair and trims his beard so he does not appear to be a vagabond and considers smearing kohl around his eyes like Guy. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery after all but he decides not to for fear Guy may mistake it for jest and rides out to Locksley Manor.

The servants claim Guy is not in and he wonders if he is but he is not welcome. He frets and paces the front of the manor wondering what to do when he hears his name called and watches Guy dismount his horse and approach him.

“Why are you here?” He asks plainly as a stable boy takes the reins and leads his horse away.

“I need to speak to you.”

“Very well,” Guy says and walks away. He’s struck dumb for a moment, had he been dismissed? Guy opens the door and turns to look at him jerking his head towards the door meaning for him to follow. He then enters the manor and he follows him through the parlour towards the staircase and watches Guy climb the first step.

“It’s about Lady Marian?” He thinks that might stop him in his tracks but Guy starts walking up the stairs.

“I’m listening,” he calls but is he really? It is not proper to follow but he is quite sure Guy is leading him upstairs.

“I think you might like what I have to say!” He calls out, tentatively standing on the first stair.

“Indeed?” This is ridiculous. Hesitantly he climbs the stairs looking over the banister expecting to be shouted at at any moment and beaten with a broom. Luckily no such situation occurs and he makes it to the top of the landing and hears movement in the room right before him.

“It is good news,” he tries again.

“Tell me then,” as he thought Guy’s voice comes from the room in front of him. He steps forward without thinking and enters the room realising far too late that he has just entered Sir Guy’s bedroom. That was a rumour in the making that he could do without.

“I-I just wanted to let you know that Marian is open to the idea of you two courting.”

“Is she?” Guy does not seem pleased, rather indifferent as he pulls open his leather jacket and shrugs it off tossing it onto the four post bed.

“I thought you would be pleased,” he replies confused. Guy had made his intention towards Marian publicly known and more than once she had humiliated him but his affection had never waned until now.

Guy says nothing and instead pulls off his black undershirt revealing a pale torso and tight abdominals. His eyes are drawn to his right muscular arm to the black tattoo on his inner forearm the
design of which seems like the helm of a knight. He realises he’s staring and he’s not quite sure where to look as he wasn’t expecting a strip tease, the floor seems a safe bet or he should just run away screaming now.

“I do not intend to court Marian,” Guy finally speaks making no move to cover up. He’s not a prude he is just trying to offer his friend some privacy which it seems he does not want.

“An engagement?” It feels silly talking to the floor and if Guy doesn’t cover up soon he will look.

“I seek no courtship, no engagement and no marriage. Marian has made her feelings quite clear.”

“But that was before,” he protests lifting his head and well...that lanky kid certainly grew up. Guy smirks and looks down at his own chest and strokes a hand down his stomach and if he doesn’t stop he’s going to leave.

“While Robin was still alive,” Guy spits the name out as if it was vulgar on his tongue and thankfully walks up two steps towards a rack of clothes and pulls another long sleeved undershirt on. “Don’t look so surprised, they were engaged, it made sense that she would still have feelings for him.” He has never heard a sentence said with so much vitriol before.

“Yes but he is gone now,” he says stepping forward comfortable now that Guy is dressed.

“So you would have me be second best?” Guy asks, walking down the steps to stand before him, so close he can feel the heat of his body. “Do you think I deserve to be second best?” He has to tilt his head up to look Guy in the eye and really he could be considered beautiful, Marian was mad to turn him away.

“No one deserves to be second best,” he answers honestly and almost feels like he is betraying Marian.

“Then do not ask me again,” Guy warns and his tone brooks no argument. He steps away reprimanded and Guy’s gaze softens. “Besides there is someone else,” he adds but says no more and pulls his leather vest back on. What possesses him to pick up Guy’s sword and pass it to him he does not know.

“Nice,” he speaks before he can think and Guy smiles. “Nice that you’ve found someone else,” he tries to amend but they both know he liked what he saw. Guy steps forward but he steps back worried about this exchange between them. He should not have come and he’s quite sure he has done more harm than good. “Good day,” he says with a nervous bow and flees the room.

“Wait!” Guy calls as he makes it to the stairs. He turns to see Guy leaning against the doorframe with his arms crossed over his chest. “Can I still come around to skim stones?” He laughs; it’s a joke, right? He nods anyway and laughs all the way out of the manor and he’s quite sure if he didn’t laugh he’d cry because Guy was his last hope of making Marian stay.

He does not return to Bonchurch instead he goes to Knighton Hall and the former sheriff Sir Edward answers the door and smiles when he sees him. Like Marian, Sir Edward respected people on their own merit rather than family history and he was a fair and just sheriff until his gout cost him his position and from then on he remained at home.

“Is Marian in?” He asks and Sir Edward nods and disappears inside to call his daughter. He can hear Marian practically run down the stairs and he feels terrible because her enthusiasm is wasted. She appears before him radiant and wearing her favourite off-shoulder red dress and her long dark hair is up in a bun and decorated with flowers. The moment their eyes meet the smile is wiped from her red
“Oh,” is all she can say. She needn’t say anymore they both know she was expecting Guy and the fact that it was he standing at her door instead spoke volumes.

“Marry me?” He says without thinking.

“We’ve been over this before.”

“I don’t want you to leave.”

“I will only be gone a year and if you were my friend you would accept my decision.”

“It is because I am your friend that I will not,” he counters.

“My heart is broken, Allan. I feel as though I am torn in two, I am grieving, I need time.” He cannot argue with her as her decision was already made and it would only be for a year, she might not even last that long as her duty to her father would see her back.

“Yeah well, I’m gonna miss you,” he answers honestly disregarding fancy words and pronunciation.

“You are a dear friend Allan, and I will write to you.” She looks over her shoulder as if to see where her father was. “Come, there is something I wish to show you.” Together they walk around the front of the house to the stables where two horses are kept. In the far corner there is a gap between bales of straw and she squeezes through and he follows. By the time he is through and at Marian’s side he is not quite sure what he is looking at, the outline of a person perhaps? Marian pulls the dirty sheet from the figure with a flourish.

“You stole the Nightwatchman’s clothes?” He asks in disbelief staring at the tailor’s dummy dressed in beige trousers and short beige leather coat with a long faded hooded green cloak, scarf and mask and the brown boots are on the floor beside the sword and belt. Marian frowns and looks at him meaningfully. “You are the Nightwatchman,” he amends and laughs because of course she was. “You are bold, you sure you don’t wanna marry me? I could be your side-kick the Nightwatchman’s Watchman, could work?”

“You are not angry with me?”

“No, I think it’s brilliant. Someone had to do something, fight the good fight and all that. Throwing coins at them fixes the problem for a day before the Sheriff takes the coins off them. I admire you for that and it is another reason for you to stay. Marry me, let me be your side-kick I hear friends make the best spouses and well no one else is in a hurry to marry me.”

“You flatter me one moment and insult me the next,” Marian laughs and then sobers. “Please do not ask again, you know my heart. I have lost my soul mate and I would not prevent you from finding yours.” He nods ignoring the tears welling in his eyes.

“When do you leave?”

“Tomorrow at first light.”

“May I ride out with you on the South Road?”

Marian nods and smiles with tears in her own eyes. “I would like that. Before I take my leave of you this night I wanted to gift you with this.” He looks around not seeing anything that resembles a gift.
“Straw? Just what I’ve always wanted,” he teases and Marian slaps his arm.

“Not straw, the Nightwatchman, I’m giving him to you.”

“Not being funny but I don’t think our measurements are the same.”

“Must I do everything?” Marian grumbles good-naturedly. “Make adjustments and keep fighting the good fight.” He agrees and the outfit is shoved into a saddlebag minus the boots and sword, they would stay with Marian and do her well for her journey ahead. “I must pack now, but I’ll see you tomorrow, yes?”

“First light,” he agrees shouldering the saddlebag as they exit the stables. He sees Marian safely inside before he mounts his horse and makes his way home.

Morosely he enters his home desiring nothing to eat only to sleep but his way is blocked by his overly excited father.

“Guess who called for you today?” He shrugs as he can think of no one, except that dark haired carpenter, Will something but that was no cause for joy.

“No idea,” he shrugs knowing his father is bursting to tell him.

“Sir Guy,” he crows.

“Guy? But I was with him earlier.”

“Yes he told me,” his father suddenly sounds stern, just what the bloody hell had he told him? He prays to God that he did not say he followed him upstairs and watched him undress because it wasn’t true. Okay it was true, but it sounded much worse than what it really was and he was lured into his bedroom, lured, that was his defence. “You shouldn’t make promises you cannot keep,” his father reprimands and he is at a loss.

“You’ve lost me.”

“You said that Guy could come around later and you would go to the lake?” He doesn’t remember making that promise. Could it have been that joke about skimming stones? He hadn’t thought he was serious and certainly did not think he meant later that day. “I’ve told him to call around tomorrow.” He imagines he looks heartbroken when his father mentions the next day, because Marian would be leaving and he would not be good company. He did not blame Guy for her departure, why should he settle for second best? With all the tragedy in his life he deserved to be loved as passionately as he was clearly capable of loving someone. “Did I do wrong?”

“No father, it’s only...Marian is leaving.”

“Leaving? Why did you not say?” He sighs giving up the idea of sleep.

“I have been trying to prevent it all day.”

“Come, let us have some food and drink and you can tell me all about it.” He knows better than to argue with his father so they sit at the table eating bread, cheese and cold meats and drinking more wine than they both should. Then he tells his father about Marian and Robin, which he knew as did everyone else but what was lesser known was her continued feelings for the boastful Lord. He admits he selfishly tried to coax Guy to marry her so she would stay and the older man was more astute than he gave him credit for and told him off. He even confesses that he offered to marry Marian but was turned down.
His father listens to every word without interruption, only questioning things when he pauses. He expresses sadness that Marian did not wish to become Lady a-Dale but he reminds him that her refusal was done out of friendship. He also reminds him that she will be gone no longer than a year and it will go by in a blink of an eye and her letters would ease his heart and he wouldn’t be alone now as Guy was keen to be an active friend again.

So it is with a much lighter heart that he goes to sleep that night.
Chapter 3

In the morning he awakens at first light but he believes Marian would wait for him so once more he rides out to Knighton Hall and finds that he is correct. Marian has not taken much with her but the convent is no place for material possessions. She does however have some coins on her person to pay for her keeping so they must stay vigilant in the forest as it was crawling with outlaws. Though he knew most of them by name their number was ever growing as the Sheriff’s punishments were becoming increasingly worse, the crime certainly not fitting the punishment and there could be some unsavoury characters that he does not know.

As precaution he hangs a bag of silver on what is known as the Giving Tree and they take the South Road. There is no conversation between them on the road as there isn’t really anything to say. He has made his plea and she has made her intention known and it would do her some good to be away especially if what Guy says is true and there was someone else. How badly would she feel seeing the man she spurned countless times courting another with the same ardent passion in which he pursued her?

Thankfully they make it safely through Sherwood Forest and though that is where they were to part he was unaware Marian would be carrying so many coins so he travels further until Marian was safely joined with the Abbess of Rufford’s retinue.

“So, this is where I leave you.” Marian says after she had signed and tied her horses with the others. “Stay safe Allan a-Dale,” they hug briefly under the watchful eye of the abbess herself.

“Oh dear, Mother’s watching,” he says as they pull apart from their embrace. “Be safe and be happy and say a prayer for me, yeah?” Marian nods and he helps her up into the carriage with the other nuns. He watches her leave, waving to her all the while and much to her new sister’s disgust Marian waves back until they are out of sight of each other.

He mounts his horse and though his heart is heavy he is not sad. His father had spoken sense last night and he had five long years of friendship with Marian as opposed to his three weeks with Guy and she hadn’t been chased off and would still write. A year wasn’t long after all.

He’s caught up in his thoughts halfway home through the forest when his horse startles and he is thrown from the saddle onto the leaf strewn ground. He groans in pain as his ribs smacked against a rock on the ground obscured by the leaves.

“Woah there horsey,” for a moment he thinks he is saved but as he looks up three men approach while another holds his horse.

“Alright gents, mind helping me up?”

“Listen to ‘im,” a tall blond man with teeth too big for his mouth speaks. “Acting like he’s one of us.”

“I can smell the lavender on him from ‘ere,” a short dark haired man taunts stood over by his horse.

“Listen right, I don’t want no trouble.” The four men laugh and he recognises two of them, the blond was Royston White and the behemoth flanking him on the right was John Little, presumed dead.

“Pay your taxes and there will be no trouble,” the balding one he does not know states.

“I did pay,” he protests wincing as his ribs twinge in pain.
“That’s right, you did,” John agrees, so he was being watched. “But you left and came back again with no payment.”

“You have got to be kidding me.”

“We don’t kid,” Roy argues.

“I gave you all I had,” he confesses standing up and holding his ribs.

“Nice horse,” the little one speaks up.

“You’ll not sell it. The horseshoes are branded so they will know where it came from and what you are.”

“And what are we?” John growls and honestly he’s like a bear in the form of man.

“Stupid if you attack a friend.”

“You, I do not like.” John states and drives his meaty fist into his stomach. “Now pay your taxes and we’ll be on our way.”

“I’ve already told you, I’ve no more coin!” He should have expected the second punch to the stomach so he doesn’t know why he didn’t.

“Stick him with a knife and be done with it,” the balding one states.

“You cowards! You would kill an unarmed man. I am on your side, John I know your wife, and Roy what would your mother say?”

“We’ll not kill you then,” the balding one speaks up as John and Roy are clearly stunned that he knew who they were. The outlaw approaches him and uses his height to tower over him, a tactic all bullies used and it seemed that every Tom, Dick and Harry was taller than him. It was possibly why he liked Marian so much as she wasn’t taller than him.

The outlaw grabs his chin with a dirty hand tilting his head up as he tries to turn away. “Would be a shame to ruin these fancy clothes with your blood. Take them off.” He slaps the outlaw’s hand away and steps back.

“Look this has gone too far, you’re hungry I get it. Come back with me and I’ll see you all fed.” The balding one punches him this time and pulls his cloak from his shoulders.

“We’ll not tell you again, pretty boy, strip.” The balding one is quite clearly a psychopath and best avoided.

“John please,” the big man looks perplexed but is finally stirred into action but instead of coming to his aid he holds his arms behind his back.

“Get his boots off,” he orders and his two henchmen get to work pulling his boots off along with his socks to add insult to injury.

“What would your wife say, hey? I know Alice and your son Little John.” He tries to guilt trip him into letting him go.

“Take his trousers too,” John growls and he screams for help then. He realises no help is coming when his assailants mock him by crying for help too. His trousers are pulled down and off and he finds himself thrown to the ground and wrestled out of his vest and undershirt. He’s left in nothing
but his smallclothes and he watches in horror as the balding one starts to unlace his breeches.

“No, please don’t, I gave you everything.”

“Don’t flatter yourself,” the balding one sneers and pulls his cock out from his trousers. To his utter humiliation the man then urinates on him almost catching him in the face if he hadn’t caught on and moved backwards.

“Consider your tax paid,” John says. “We’re taking the horse too but don’t worry we’ll be sure to remove the horseshoes before selling her so thank you for telling us, good night.” Before he can say anything the butt of John’s walking staff smashes into his face and he feels himself falling backwards as all turns to darkness.

He wakes up cold and shivering in the woods. His face hurts, his ribs and stomach hurt and he stinks but thankfully he is alive. Alive and alone with no outlaws and no horse and only his smallclothes to cover him, but thankfully the sun is still up so he can start his journey home. His hip throbs in pain causing him to limp and he realises he landed on the rock again when he fell a second time.

The walk home is the most shameful and painful walk he has ever had and he tries desperately not to cry. Crying was weakness and it revealed too much but he had just lost his best friend and dignity in one day. The stones cut his feet and the thorns prick his skin but he continues as he could do little else and as luck would have it he passes no one. No one would help him anyway; just laugh and point maybe even add a kick for good measure. He was fortunate that the Bonchurch estate was near the forest that he could use the cover of the trees to return to the back of his land unseen.

He isn’t unseen though, as one of the servants is hanging laundry on the line and screams when she sees him, immediately running inside. His father exits moments later with the servant by his side and the look on his face is heartbreaking, so much so he fears what he looks like.

“What happened?” His father demands, coming towards him as if to embrace him.

“Don’t,” he warns stepping back knowing what he was covered in. “I could really use a bath,” he says and the servant rushes off. “Men in the woods,” he says looking down at his blooded feet.

“Outlaws you mean.”

“They are the same thing.”

“The animals do this to you and still you defend them? When will you see sense? Men playing at being dead, play no more I say, they should be dead!” His father sways unsteady on his feet and he reaches out to hold him still while keeping his body as far away as possible.

“Don’t upset yourself, I’m a big boy I can handle it.”

“If I lost you, it doesn’t bear thinking about.”

“I’m not going anywhere, just had a bit of a tumble and the lads got a bit rough.” He tries to smile and shake it off as no big deal.

“They have shamed you.”

“Have I shamed you?” He asks fearing his father’s response.
“No, never. Go up and take a bath and I will call a physician.” He does as he is told, refusing his father’s help as he limps into the house leaving bloody footprints on the floor and apologising for every single one.

He stares at his reflection in the mirror in the bathroom and he looks terrible. Leaves and twigs are tangled in his dirty blond hair, there is an unsightly large purple bruise covering his left ribs and another on his hip though smaller. Both eyes have been blackened near the bridge of his nose and his left is bloodshot as his left cheek is swollen and bruised.

The water is tepid as he climbs in and hisses as his sore body is submerged. He immediately starts to scrub his body pink from what that foul creature did to him. He knocks the forest debris from his hair and dunks his head so his tears and the water are indistinguishable.

How long he stays in there he does not know but the physician arrives and looks over his feet while he is in the bath and cleanses them with alcohol that almost makes him scream in pain. He exits the bath then and his feet are bandaged as the rest of his body is looked over. He is told the bruises are just that and given time they would heal by themselves but he must keep off his feet to give them a chance to heal.

He is helped into his nightshirt and bed and as the physician discusses his health with his father a maid brings him a meal which he has to chew with the right side of his mouth as the left side hurts from that wooden staff to the face.

He eats his dinner slowly and listens as the physician leaves and hears his father pouring cup after cup of wine to steady his nerves. He can hear the servants on the stairs mopping up his blood he can even hear the scullery maid in the pantry. He tries to make a game of it to stave off boredom, he can hear the washer woman scrubbing shirts outside his window and he can even hear the stable boy exercising their remaining horse in the yard.

He hears the approach of a horse, a lone rider, the physician again? A runner with some medication perhaps? The front door slams shut, his father has gone to speak with their visitor. Hushed voices, an argument, the door is opened, spurred boots sound on the wooden stairs as a stranger runs up them. Doors are opened and closed, a search. He can hear the sound of a broadsword tapping against a thigh, the crease of leather and then his door is opened and Sir Guy is before him looking dishevelled and wild-eyed.

“Your father told me,” that explained the hush voices. Guy approaches the bed and winces as he sees what has become of the left side of his face. “I will see them all hang for this,” he states and he has a feeling that was a promise. He could give him the names of two of them, make it easier for him but he won’t. They don’t deserve to die they were just desperate and desperate men act foolishly.

“It looks worse than it is,” he shrugs, no point riling the Master at Arms, people die when Guy gets riled.

“The woods have become unsafe, only last week pilgrims were attacked on the North Road. Those beasts in the woods have become monsters and they must be dealt with.” He will not say anything, as he does not agree and for all he knows that pilgrim story could be false to stir the ire of the people so the murder of the outlaws would be celebrated. He had thought Guy was better than crowd stirring having been at the mercy of a mob not once but twice.

“It is no longer safe for you here,” Guy continues, and he assumes he means Bonchurch rather than his bedroom, which Guy barged into so now they were even.

“I can protect myself,” he argues and Guy arches a brow at him. He’s slightly annoyed by the man’s
arrogance, he doesn’t know what happened in the woods, how he was surrounded because it wasn’t just those four, those buggers were everywhere.

“You need a husband,” Guy states and he laughs.

“You mean a wife,” he replies thinking Guy misspoke. Guy turns away saying nothing in response making him question if he had meant to say husband, and if so, why? Perhaps his friend is disgusted with him not being able to defend himself and was mocking him. He hoped that wasn’t true as he had just lost one friend and he couldn’t afford to lose another.

It appears Guy was not turned away from him but trying to locate his father and he shuts the door and joins him on the bed. He shouldn’t be scared but something about the way he checked to see if his father was close by and then shutting the door seemed ominous. He watches Guy remove his leather gloves and his heart pounds in his chest as he reaches for him, a surprisingly gentle hand cups his chin and turns his face so he can see the damage done to his cheek.

“Does it pain you?” Guy asks softly, treating him like...well...like a woman.

“I’ve had worse, we both have,” he adds trying to bring some equality back into their friendship. They were both kicked around by bullies growing up and while Guy let his hate change him, he just got by with a laugh and a smile.

“My mother had a cure for such injuries, would you like to try it?” Guy is far too close but at this point he’d take anything for the pain he is denying he is in and nods. Guy leans forward then and presses his lips against his cheekbone enough to touch but not enough pressure to injure. He’s at a loss for what to say, his mother also used to kiss his bruises to make them better but he did not expect Guy to.

Guy looks into his eyes as if gauging his reaction and leans forward again pressing another kiss just below the first. The scratch of stubble is a strange experience and he feels frozen as Guy kisses his cheek again, the third kiss is placed lower and then he tentatively presses a kiss to the corner of his mouth. It has gone too far, he should stop him but Guy looks at him again clearly finding welcome in his eyes as he covers his mouth with his.

The touch of Guy’s tongue against his spurs him into action and he pushes the man away. He won’t wipe his mouth because that would be cruel and the kiss wasn’t awful just unexpected and unwanted.

“Forgive me,” Guy apologises unable to look him in the eye. “I should not have...I am sorry.”

“It is fine,” he replies because he cannot stand the look on Guy’s face and really it was a misunderstanding. To his shock Guy kisses him again and it takes a harder shove to see him off which hurts his bruised ribs.

“Forgive me,” he apologises again but if there is any truth in it he cannot say. Guy is like a scolded dog that keeps making the same mistake, he does not wish to see him from his house but nor can he trust him inside it.

“I am very tired; it has been a long day. Could you see yourself out?” Guy stays seated on his bed clearly in emotional turmoil and he cannot help him if Guy thinks kissing him is any solution at all.

Finally he stands and he almost sighs in relief. “Very well, good night Allan, I shall visit you tomorrow.” With a half smile, possibly a smirk it was hard to tell with him sometimes, he pulls his gloves back on and leaves his room.
He plays his listening game once more and hears Guy walk down the stairs and pauses. He hears words exchanged between his father and Guy and to his horror he hears them both enter the dining room and hears the clink of chalices. He must warn his father that Guy is playing some game but one look at his bandaged feet and the dark sky outside his window he knows he cannot get his father’s attention without earning Guy’s.

He must stay a good long hour and then there was the scrape of chairs against the floor. Laughter on the way to the door, the closing of the door and then the sound of hoofs as a lone rider rides away. After a moment he hears someone climb the stairs and walk across the landing the creak of floorboards suggesting they are coming his way and then the door opens and his father steps, or rather staggers inside.

“I like your new friend,” his father says with glazed over brown eyes from clearly having drunk too much. “He is such a lovely young man,” if he hadn’t thought he was drunk before he certainly does now. “I’ve invited him around for dinner tomorrow and he even offered to carry you down so we could all dine together.”

“Please say you declined.”

“Of course not, we should all dine together. He even offered to bring a bottle of wine, or two,” he laughs but it is no laughing matter having his father lost in his cups. “I like your new old friend,” his father laughs at his own joke. “Be good to him,” he wonders what on earth has been said and what exactly Guy is trying to accomplish.

“Get to bed, father” he orders and his dad nods smiling a stupid drunken smile before leaving his room and staggering to his own. By sound alone he hears his father make it to his own room, fall upon the bed and moments later loud snores are coming from his room.

He is not impressed that Guy had supplied his father with alcohol and promised him more. He does not feel comfortable around Guy, he was happy to have his friendship but he was beginning to fear it was not enough for Guy. He does not wish for him to return to Bonchurch as he well knows judging from his desperate attempts to appease and befriend his father.

He blows out the candle at his bedside and settles down to sleep. This day has been surreal and he had no idea what he has done to incur such wrath but he hopes by tomorrow minds are cleared and intentions are made known.
Chapter 4

Come the morning both he and his father wake up late for entirely different reasons. The servants still continue with their chores without the Master of the house present and the day goes on much the same as any other day. Except for the fact that his feet are badly injured and he cannot leave the house when the monotony of the day drives him stir crazy.

The physician arrives late afternoon apologising for the delay but apparently there was a great spectacle at the castle, multiple hangings. It sickens him how gleeful the physician sounds, a man in his profession should value life not find entertain in the loss of it. What had the poor beggars done to deserve such a fate? Stolen from the Sheriff? He was the biggest thief of them all taxing the poor to feed the rich.

His feet are cleaned and bandaged with new cloth and he is glad when he is finished as he is sick of the sight of him. It comes as a surprise that not an hour later a second physician arrives at his house. A man known as Pitts, Guy’s physician, the miracle worker himself. His father greets him at the door as obviously he cannot and brings him upstairs.

He is told that Guy had sent him, and though he would have refused the kind gesture his father has already accepted. Perhaps that was Guy’s plan all along befriend his father so he was overruled in all things, it was both cunning and clever two things he would not associate with Guy. Not that he thought the man a fool, just a brute but he forgets he lied in wait all of those years so he was capable of patience cunning and manipulation he just never thought his so-called friend would use them against him.

Pitts tells him his ribs are not bruised but cracked and they are tightly bandaged to mend on their own. Ice is given for the swelling of his cheek and when he complains about his teeth Pitts checks and finds none dislodged and tells him the pain should recede with the swelling. His feet are checked but he can find no fault with his physician’s care and he re-bandages them once more and tells him he will not need to be back.

When his father leaves the room Pitts’ smile becomes predatory as he leans down far too close for comfort. “Now I see what all the fuss is about,” Pitts says but he has no idea what he is talking about. “Pretty little thing aren’t you? No wonder he won’t stop talking about you.” For a moment he wonders who ‘he’ is but he has a sneaking suspicion he is referring to Guy, which is odd. The man is a physician and though in a sense he should be familiar with Guy he sounds too familiar as if their relationship was not doctor/patient in nature but two friends as thick as thieves.

“You may leave,” the words may sound like a suggestion but his tone suggests insistent.

“Ungrateful cur,” Pitt insults him and moves away. “Guy will see to it that you learn your place. I imagine I’ll be coming to see you quite frequently if you do not learn to still that spiteful tongue.”

“Get out!” He hisses all pretences of politeness gone. Pitts glares at him in disgust and takes his leave and he can’t help but think about what he had said. Guy had sent him that much was known but he would see to it that he would learn his place? What did he mean by that? He was not Guy’s boy; he was a noble with lands and titles of his own, well in due course as his father was still Earl of Bonchurch.

The words are upsetting and made even worse by Guy’s arrival. He wastes no time on formalities and as soon as he is inside he can hear him run up the stairs. He moves his sheet aside and dangles his legs off the side of the bed. He does not wish to run as his feet were healing nicely but he does
not trust that man in his bedroom especially after the vulgar things he has heard.

“Allan,” Guy greets standing by the door. “I have a gift for you; I think you will like it.” Though he mentions a gift there seems to be none on his person and he wonders for a moment if he had given it to his father first ensuring he could not refuse. “Are you ready to go downstairs?” He was actually going to carry him, the absolute shame of it all. He nods thinking he will be put over Guy’s shoulder but instead an arm hooks underneath his knees and around his upper back and he is lifted as if he weighs nothing into a bridal carry. Had he even a scrap of dignity left after yesterday it would certainly be gone by now.

Being carried was bad enough but in this fashion was humiliating and worse still Guy was grinning wolfishly at him and his father was smiling as though he was pleased with what he was seeing. Whatever was happening should not be happening and should certainly not be encouraged.

Guy places him down in his seat and he minds his manners and thanks him but curses whoever set the table as rather than seating Guy across from him they had seated him next to him. He eyes the food on the table, chicken and bread and decides to show himself up by eating like a starving urchin hoping Guy would back off because of his appalling lack of table manners. He deliberately smears the grease around his mouth, tears into the bread and shoves it into his mouth washing it down with red wine. He even goes so far as to ask ‘are you eating that?’ with his mouth full and snatches the chicken leg from Guy’s plate before he could respond.

He thinks he had done it and he is glad of it because his teeth ache from chomping the food. Guy was all about appearance now and he couldn’t have anything less than the best. That was fair, he deserved the best he just needed to learn to take no for an answer and stop confusing friendship for interest. To his horror Guy snatches a piece of chicken from his plate and viciously tears into it smearing grease around his own mouth, showing him that he knows what game he is playing and proving he could match him tit for tac.

“Boys behave; there is plenty of food for everyone.” His father reprimands good-naturedly and he wishes his father could see what was happening but in truth nothing was, all he would see are two old friends mucking about at the table. Maybe that’s what it truly was and Guy had forgotten about the kiss and it was all on him stewing on it and not letting it go.

Seeing as his plan didn’t work he discards the rest of his meal as his teeth ache and he isn’t all that hungry. It won’t be wasted as the leftovers are taken home by the servants and given to the less fortunate so he feels no guilt. He becomes withdrawn as Guy and his father happily talk amongst themselves; Guy is a little too close to him as he is speaking to his father at the head of the table but that wasn’t necessarily his fault but the fault of his placement at the table. In fairness he doesn’t even spare him a look as they talk about the war in the Holy Land and how King Richard was winning. How killing more people on the opposing side could be considered as winning he does not know but he does not wish to sour the mood so he stays quiet.

“I have mentioned a gift,” Guy states when there is a lull in the conversation. “Though it is for Allan, I feel you may also appreciate it, my Lord.” He is smooth with his words; he’ll give him that, a world away from the child that would not speak.

Guy excuses himself and leaves the table and walks outside and he must confess he has his interest. So much so he turns in his chair and waits for his return and to his surprise Guy returns carrying a tall wooden staff. The gift leaves him momentarily confused until Guy approaches and stands in the candlelight and he realises what it is he is seeing. He had seen it possibly closer than anyone else as it was the same staff that slammed into his cheek almost costing him his vision in his left eye.

“What do you have there?” His father asks, and Guy turns to look at him.
“Should you tell him or should I?” He’s not quite sure what to tell him because though that was the staff that John Little used to knock him out he did not know how Guy came to be in possession of it. “I came by four men in the woods,” Guy starts, as he says nothing. “Boasting about overcoming a noble on the South Road. I had my men with me and they were arrested and later hanged, along with a dozen foolish friends that thought to rescue them.” He says with a smile as though it wasn’t a horrible thing he has done and his story seemed false. Came by them while he had a garrison of guards at his back? The outlaws hadn’t survived this long by being reckless, he didn’t come by them at all, he took his men and he went in search of them.

“That is good news,” his father is no better than Guy.

“It is not,” he protests. “Hanged already? What about their trial?”

“A trial was not needed,” Guy replies testily.

“In accordance to the law it is.”

“Yes and they are outlaws.” Typical, those men were killed on a technicality. “I do not see why you mourn them; they were already dead men so they cannot die a second time.”

“If that helps you sleep at night keep telling yourself that. Those men had families, John had a son!” If there was ever a time to walk away it was now but as luck would have it he could not walk away, perhaps he should throw something?

“You knew who attacked you?” His father asks outraged, standing from his seat.

“They meant nothing by it,” he tries to excuse their behaviour and he very much doubts they were boasting, Guy was just stirring the pot.

“I know what they did to you,” Guy confesses and he turns to him knowing immediately that he knows about the ultimate humiliation and he shakes his head at him willing him not to say anything. “I would not defend them so passionately had they done the same to me.” No, he imagines Guy would chop his cock off before the man was able to. Guy was a walking weaponry and the Master at Arms with little regard for life and he would have never found himself in that position because the outlaws knew to stay clear of him.

He wants to keep arguing but there is little point because they will never see eye to eye on this topic. Guy is not for the people he is for himself and he knows his selfishness was born out of contempt for the people of Locksley. He knows him, he understands him but that did not mean he had to agree with him. The staff is passed to his father and quite frankly he does not wish for it to be under the same roof as him. What they did to him was despicable and wrong, he is not excusing their behaviour but he understood what drove them to it and he forgives them. His forgiveness meant little now that they were truly dead and not playing at it.

“I am tired,” he claims wishing his father was of better health so that he could carry him. If they wish to dine together in future then they may dine in his room as he can no longer endure the humiliation of being carried.

Guy lifts him again, once more in the bridal carry while his father stays downstairs glaring at the staff as though it had personally offended him. He is carried to his room and gently placed on his bed and he cannot believe the man that is so caring towards him is the same one that had killed over a dozen men on this day alone.

“You did not tell your father the truth,” Guy states as though it was leverage.
“Nor did you,” he returns and watches Guy turn to close the door.

“How so?” He asks arching a brow and folding his arms defensively.

“You did not come upon them in the woods, you went in search of them and I do not think they were boasting as you say.”

“No? How do you suppose I found out which ones assaulted you?”

“The same way you find anything else out, you tortured the truth out of them. Planned rescue? Pull the other one those men only have loyalty to themselves. I think you went into the woods and captured as many as you could and tortured them until they told you what you wanted to know.”

Guy smirks and mock applauds him.

“Bravo, not just a pretty face.” He is certainly tiring of that expression, as if his looks had any merit on his character and currently he looked awful anyway. “Still, I wonder why you didn’t tell your father.”

“As if I would tell him that,” he whispers looking over at the door.

Guy turns to look as well and turns back with predatory grin. “You do not want him to know?” He does not like the way Guy says that, more of a statement then a question really. “It would be wrong of me not to inform your father after it took me so long to torture the truth out of them.” Unbelievable he is not even denying it and he is looking so smug as though he had the upper hand and unfortunately he did. He steps closer to the bed and stares intently at him, a look he has seen before when Guy was ardently courting Marian. “My silence can be bought,” he offers throwing him a lifeline. His father is sick and he does not wish to burden him with the extent of the atrocities done to him.

“How much?”

“I am a very wealthy man,” he boasts so very unlike the boy he once knew. “A few coins mean nothing to me.”

“What is it you want?”

“What you denied me yesterday.” His heart plummets as he realises his misgivings were not unwarranted. He should have known something was amiss the moment Guy welcomed him in his home. Years of being ignored and suddenly they were on first name basis without any prompting he knew it was too good to be true. “You would deny me again?” It makes no sense for him to demand such things of him. He knew relations between two men happened but it was frowned upon and claimed unholy in the Bible. “Your father is not well,” Guy says conversationally but he has proved himself an unlikely wordsmith and he does not trust what he says. “It would be a shame if I were to tell him,” he can dress it up as fancy as he likes but a threat is still a threat.

“Name another price.”

“You do not seem to understand how this works. You wish to silence me then do so with your lips and I will take your secret to my grave, do not, spurn me again and I might tell your father too much, enough to stop his fragile heart.” The man was a monster and no friend of his, what on earth had he been thinking inviting this viper into his home.

“I accept your terms.” He consoles himself that it is only one kiss, his first if truth be told and then Guy would leave and he would be wary of him in future.
Guy leans over his bed, one knee raised and resting on the mattress, hands either side of his hips caging him as his lips cover his own. He’s not entirely sure what to do, is Guy expecting a response? Where should he put his hands and should he close his eyes as Guy has done? He chooses to keep his eyes open so he can watch the door as the last thing he wants is for his father to catch them. His father already worried that he hadn’t found a wife and if he were to find Guy in his bed he’d be dragged to the church and cleansed of his perversion.

Their noses are bumping against each other’s so he tilts his head and their mouths slide together wet from the chicken grease. He parts his lips for Guy’s invading tongue and tastes the red wine they had both been drinking as Guy’s tongue meets his. He’s not sure how to respond torn between compliance and a desire to return the kiss. Surely Guy would want an active partner otherwise there were plenty of corpses to kiss at the castle.

Involuntary his hands come up, his left carding through the inky black hair while his right cups his strong stubbly jaw. Their tongues do battle while Guy raises his second knee onto the bed and one of the caging hands moves to his thigh. It is pleasant for a first kiss, hot, heady and passionate if he would allow himself to admit it but it was marred by the fact that it was forced. Had it been consensual he could envision himself on his back, legs parted and Guy between them taking his innocence away. He now knew that Guy was stirred by him, if not for demanding a kiss his own actions would reveal himself from his closed eyes, heavy breath and the hand inching up his thigh.

For a terrifying moment he wants Guy to overpower him, he wants to be wanted so passionately. Lust clouds his judgement as Guy’s hand reaches beneath his nightshirt and cups him through his smallclothes. He moans into Guy’s mouth as Guy manipulates his flesh bringing his cock to hardness and then tugs his smallclothes down slightly. The kiss ends and they rest their foreheads together both looking down watching Guy hike up his nightshirt and begin stroking his exposed cock.

The grip is too tight and his palm too dry but still his hips thrust up into his hand. It’s too much, he cannot bring himself to watch so instead his lips find Guy’s again and he loses himself in the kiss. In the back of his mind he knows that this is wrong, that when he thought about he and Guy being friends again he never envisioned this. He now wonders if they were given longer than three weeks would they have fumbled each other as young boys were wont to do.

They should know better now and he should ask him to stop, this wasn’t a part of their arrangement but Guy made him nervous even more so when he was told no. He doesn’t want to incur his wrath and certainly not now in this position and with what Guy knows. Thankfully it is not long before he feels a tightening in his groin whether from fear of being caught or simply turned on by their audacity, and with a bite to Guy’s full lower lip he spends himself in Guy’s hand.

They are both breathing heavily and he notices that Guy is hard. Unconsciously he licks his lips wondering what it would taste like, how it would feel in his mouth hot and heavy on his tongue. He shouldn’t think this way, what they were doing was wrong, unholy and yes it happened but just because it did doesn’t mean it should. It doesn’t feel wrong but then Nottingham had become Godless lately and it was clearly affecting him when he so shamelessly flaunted God’s law.

He is brought out from his thoughts as Guy’s hand moves from his softening cock, over his testicles and further still reaching for his hidden opening. “No!” a terrible word to use with Guy but he could think of no other as he slapped his hand away and firmly closed his legs. Guy retaliates by grabbing the wrist of his dismissive hand and bringing it between his legs making him feel him.

“Allan? Guy? Is everything okay up there?” His father calls from downstairs and Guy drops his hand, turning his attention to the door.

“We were just saying goodnight,” he calls back and they both listen and do not hear him depart.
instead he stands sentry at the bottom of the stairs.

“I wish you good night then,” Guy says and gets up from the bed. His hand is still covered in his seed and in an act that should disgust him he cleans it off with his tongue and he feels his cock twitch in response. He does not know why he feels so changed, he never had designs on the boy by the lake but the man in leather is an entirely different beast and he cannot think clearly around him. “Your secret is safe with me,” he says with a smirk and he can practically hear the ‘for now’ that was not spoken.

“Good night, Sir Guy,” he says trying to distance himself from the revived friendship that should have remained dead and buried.

Guy notices if the narrowing of his eyes were indicative of his ire. He stomps over to the door, opens it and hesitates on the threshold before turning to look at him.

“I will be back tomorrow,” he replies testily and he does not wish to think of the implications of his desire to return. “I will return your horse and clothing,” he adds giving himself a justifiable reason to return, an excuse his father would take in good faith but one he knew better.

“Thank you,” he returns as there is no point upsetting him. He must take precaution is all, steer clear of Guy as much as he was able and pray his feet heal soon. Guy smiles then, appeased so he shouldn’t go telling tales to his father but that doesn’t mean he won’t. The man is a snake and he cannot trust him but as duplicitous as he was he was also power hungry and knowing secrets gave him power over others so he would not discard it so carelessly.

He watches the man leave and listens as he briefly talks to his father, possibly about his intention to return tomorrow with his horse but he cannot hear the words said between them so he does not know. Guy leaves and then he hears his father’s tread on the stairs and realises how debauched he looks. He quickly pulls up his smallclothes and pushes down his nightshirt and pulls the covers over him and wipes his mouth on the back of his hand.

His father enters his room and stands by the door and in the weak glow of candlelight his face seems set in disapproval. Guy wouldn’t have said anything surely, he was a conniving creep but he wasn’t a fool. Maybe he did not have to speak and his father saw the state he was in, maybe his father heard him tell Guy no.

His father steps forward and there is a smile on his face, not disapproval. “He certainly thinks a lot of you,” his father states.

“Why do you say that?” He plays coy for fear he may give too much away.

“You didn’t believe him, did you?” He has believed too much but he does not know to what his father is referring to. “He came upon the very same outlaws that attacked you? That’s a falsehood if ever I heard one. How long have those outlaws run amuck in the woods and nothing was done. Suddenly you are attacked and the outlaws are rounded up and executed, do not think that was not done for you.”

“As if I didn’t feel guilty enough, I never asked him to kill for me.”

“But he did,” his father states proudly.

“No one deserves to die,” he’s surprised his father is so happy of their demise, usually he was as disgusted with the injustice as he was.

“Those men did,” his father’s tone brooks no argument. Of course he was protective of him ever
since his wife died giving birth to his son Tom, who died the next day. His heart was rendered in two and though one hand clung desperately to him the other clutched a cup of wine.

“I do not think Guy should call around so often,” he is ashamed he is asking his father for help but he can see no other option.

“Have you two had a falling out?”

“No, I would just like to be left alone.”

“I thought you were happy to have your friend back, you told me so yourself. What is this about, what has happened?” His father is too astute and his suspicion has been stirred.

“Nothing father, I do not know what I say, I am tired is all.”

“Guy will be around tomorrow, I could turn him away if you’d like?” It’s a lifeline and he’ll take it.

“If you could, I am very tired I just wish to sleep, perhaps when I am better I will be able to see him.” He lays it on thickly knowing his father’s need to protect him would cancel out all of the nonsense he has just uttered.

“Very well, get some rest.”

“Goodnight father.”

“Goodnight son,” his father returns and blows out the candles in his room before departing and he settles down to sleep in a bed he and Guy defiled.
Chapter 5

Come the morning all is much the same, the servants do their work and do their best to clean around him. His physician comes around to re-bandage his feet giving him some good news at last that the wounds were not very deep and two more days he should be as good as new.

His father goes to the council of the nobles and comes back with terrible news about the village of Clun. An outbreak of pestilence has caused the village to be quarantined as if the poor didn’t have enough to worry about.

In more troubling news he is told that Guy took his father aside and told him if his health was failing he could take his father’s seat. He is not so sure he could stomach a room full of cantankerous selfish opinionated old goats and it seems a ruse to bring him closer to Guy.

As promised Guy does return with his horse and clothing and he hears his father leave the house to intercept him. Hushed whispers become raised voices as he imagines Guy had been denied to see him. The front door is forced open, slamming against the wall as spurred boots stomp across the floor.

“Allan!” He hears Guy shout as he reaches the stairs.

“Sir Guy I must protest!” His father’s voice calls out. “You cannot just barge into my home, Allan is asleep, and he needs rest.” He hides underneath his blanket wondering if his father had talked the devil down.

“Very well, good day to you,” Guy’s words are polite but said with distaste and he leaves slamming the door behind him. He hears his father’s sigh of relief and fears he thought he was in danger so he can only imagine how fierce Guy looked. Upsettingly his father resorts to wine to calm his nerves and he knows before too long he will be lost in his cups once more as the wine Guy brought around yesterday was rather potent.

Something falls by his open window and he lowers his covers to see what it is but sees nothing. It sounds again so he pushes his covers off and gets up off the bed, there is a chair by the window, and he need only take two steps to reach it. His feet are tender and not aching as they had been and he sits in the chair and looks out of the window and is immediately struck by a small stone.

“Ow! What the devil?” he accuses looking out of the window once more.

“Liar,” Guy hisses from beneath his window.

“That makes two of us!”

“Invite me inside,” he orders.

“No, I am sleeping.”

“And I’m Robin of Locksley,” Guy counters. “Tell your father you are awake and invite me up.”

“You do not know how invitations work, they are earned not demanded.”

“I'll not tell you again.” He does not know how to respond to that warning tone and he does not believe Guy would barge into his house a second time. Sheriff’s lieutenant or not the law was the law and he was not above it.
For a moment he thinks Guy is walking away but he watches him climb the bales of straw delivered that day and not yet placed in the barn. From the top bale he jumps onto the thatch roof and walks all the way around to stand at his window, he’s tenacious he’ll give him that.

“Get down, you’ll fall and I’d hate to explain to the Sheriff that his best man was killed behaving the fool because he wasn’t invited inside.”

“Would you mourn me?”

“Of course I would, what kind of question is that? Now be gone with you.” His smile is so beautiful, so tempting, if he were to lean forward...no.

“It would be a shame if I came all this way for nothing.”

“You returned my horse and I thank you, now be gone.” Typically Guy stays.

“You say thank you with your mouth but I would prefer it with your lips.” Their last kiss became something it shouldn’t and he dare not kiss him again.

“As always you ask too much, be off with you.”

“One kiss?”

“It is never just one kiss with you, be gone before I push you.” Thankfully their exchange seems more jovial than serious.

“You do not mean that.”

“How much are you willing to bet? You are a very rich man by your own admission and I am in need of some new boots.” Guy laughs, he actually laughs he never thought he’d see the day.

“When can I see you again?”

“When I am well,” he replies aloof.

“And when might that be?”

“When it happens now please before you damage my roof be off.” For a moment Guy clearly weighs the decision before nodding to himself.

“Very well, but you still owe me a visit to the lake and I always collect that which I’m owed.” That sounded ominous and he’s not sure if it was meant to be flirtatious or cruel, he believed the former unless Guy saw him as tax.

He watches Guy leave partly to make sure he gets down safely and partly to make sure he does leave. Their exchange today was worrying as he was quite sure they were flirting and it was wrong. Nothing could be accomplished by them being together, they could not wed nor have children and such sins of two men lying together was punishable by death. Guy seemed to be courting him, and he was flattered because Guy was a very handsome man with much to offer a spouse so he should stop wasting his time on relations that could go nowhere except an early grave.

“What are you doing out of bed? Who was that you were talking to?” His father demands from the door.

“I needed some air and I was talking to no one.”
“No one named Guy?” His father asks suspiciously.

“No one named No One as I was speaking to no one.”

“No one seemed to want a kiss,” his heart freezes in his chest at his father’s words. “I knew there was something between you and that boy.” His father does not seem to be angry but then he was never one to raise his voice and he had never quite done anything so outrageous before.

“It is nothing, I am only his friend.”

“Marian was his friend,” his father reminds him and walks over and takes a seat on the edge of the bed. “You must be careful...”

“Because he’s a man?” He interrupts waiting any moment to be doused in Holy water.

“No, because he is Guy. You think of him and you remember a child and you cannot see what he has become. Do not think he is at the Sheriff’s side under duress he is there because he is the same as him and wishes to be there. If that were not bad enough remember his pursuit of Marian? Passionate, relentless and then nothing, what happens when he tires of you? He has ignored you before what is to say he will not do it again? I do not wish to see him break your heart.”

“He will not break my heart because I do not love him,” he confesses quietly should Guy not truly be gone.

“You have kissed him.” He assumes his father had realised by his words to Guy and though it was coercion he does not wish to tell his father.

“A mistake, he was holding me and I was confused. I kissed him.”

“He does not seem to think it was a mistake if he is risking his life to kiss you again. If you care nothing for him tell him plainly, Guy is your friend you do not want him as your enemy.”

“I will father, I just wish to be his friend.” His father stands looking weary and gently places his hand on his shoulder.

“You may have to forgo your friendship; he may leave you little choice.” He does not wish it to be true but his father is wise and has seen more of the world than he has. He does not believe that Guy has feelings for him and he is only pawing at him because they couldn’t experiment as children. He is quite sure that when he explains himself Guy will understand and their friendship can continue as it should.

Surprisingly Guy keeps his distance and two days later the bandages are removed and two days after that he is able to walk some distance. A letter arrives from Marian and he reads it as he takes a casual stroll around the lake. He is glad that she has written so soon knowing he would miss her. In the letter written in her elegant joined script she says that she is well and is missing their conversations as her sisters have taken a vow of silence. She says the daily chores and prayers keep her busy and that she feels closer to Robin and her heart is at ease. She goes on to enquire about the health of her father asking him to be truthful and then asks after his father’s health and his own. She also wishes to know about his friendship with Guy and if they are still close to wish him well from her.

He wishes to write back but is unsure what to say. He and Marian had no secrets it was why he valued their friendship so highly but he would have to keep secrets concerning Guy, especially as the Abbess was likely to read his letter. He also did not wish to burden her with details of his assault and
because of the actions of those scoundrels he had yet to visit Sir Edward.

He stops to skim stones while he thinks. He is healed now and he was able to visit Sir Edward and to him he will confess his assault as he would have to as his left eye was still bloodshot and his cheek was bruised. His ribs still caused him pain and were bruised as was his hip but those injuries were not seen. He skims another stone watching it bounce on the surface twice before sinking. Then he is startled by a loud splash near where his stone had sunk and watches the ripples of the water.

“You never were good at skimming stones,” he says still looking out onto the lake. “You always picked up rocks.” He turns then to see Guy of Gisborne leaning against a tree watching him.

“Yet I hold the record of four skims.” He’s surprised Guy remembers and more than ever he wants to know why when he returned he ignored him but he cannot bring himself to ask.

“A record I shall beat this day,” he boasts challenging his old friend.

Guy leans down, selecting a stone from the ground. “We shall see,” he says arrogantly and tosses it towards the lake and to both of their surprise it skims four times and he grins triumphantly.

They take it in turns skimming stones under the blue sky and no words are said or even needed. It is tranquil and a world away from the starvation of the poor and the outbreak of pestilence in Clun. They must skim stones for hours as they did all those years ago and as the sun begins to go down he hasn’t beaten Guy’s score though he had come close with three.

“I must admit defeat and bid you good day,” he states thinking Guy would bask in the victory but instead he frowns.

“You do not stand correctly, stay, let me show you and you’ll have bested me before the sun goes down.” It is an odd request but he has enjoyed their time together and one would never know how soon it could all end. He highly doubts a lynch mob are going to appear and take Guy from him a second time but there were other circumstances that could see them apart so he was going to enjoy the time that they had.

“Very well,” he agrees and Guy approaches and shows him how to stand at an angle, left foot pointing in the direction he wanted the stone to go. He then stands behind him, left hand on his hip while he places a smooth stone in his hand and holds his wrist. He stands closer than necessary as he can feel his crotch pressing against his posterior but Guy is saying nothing and he guides his hand to throw the stone which immediately sinks.

He turns his head questioningly towards Guy and immediately his lips are caught in a kiss. He keeps his lips firmly shut so Guy presses kisses along his jaw and down his neck. Guy’s right hand releases his wrist and cups him between the legs and presses him closer to his own body. He leans his head back exposing more of his neck for Guy’s mouth and feels his companion’s arousal. For a moment he is lost in a world that only consists of himself and Guy and he wants to surrender to the pleasure of the flesh and deal with the consequences later.

“Stop,” he says pushing Guy’s groping hand away and putting distance between them. He cannot think when Guy is in such close proximity and he lets him get away with far too much. “Stay back,” he warns as Guy approaches and his rebuff earns him a glare. He remembers his father’s words about not wanting Guy as an enemy so he knows he has to calm the situation. “I want to be your friend, only your friend.” He tries to reason with him, how they have come to cross purposes over a friendship he does not know.

“Amend your behaviour then,” his eyes widen at the comment and he is offended.
“My behaviour? Stop pawing at me!” Guy steps forward smirking, possibly misconstruing his words thinking it was some game and he was playing at being coy. He steps back so the distance is not breached and considers hiding behind a tree and feels thoroughly ridiculous for the thought. “Stay where you are, I cannot think with you pressed against me.”

“What is there to think about? Come here.”

“No!” The tree doesn’t seem like such a ridiculous idea after all. “Your presence is suffocating,” it’s a horrible and potentially dangerous thing to say, he should really throw in a compliment to take the edge off.

“What did you just say to me?” The playful tone has gone, and he does not wish to know he is daring him to say it again. He was a fool to say it once, he’s not about to repeat himself, Guy was once the Dungeon Master he is not about to upset him, well anymore than he already has.

“We can’t be friends anymore,” his mouth is against him and he should really throw in that compliment.

“Why?” Now Guy sounds upset and it hurts because he has been hurt in the past by so many people and he never thought he’d be one of them.

“We do not view friendship in the same way.”

“My mother used to say...” he rolls his eyes at another mother anecdote, nothing good comes from them. “If you have wronged somebody or if they are upset do not be proud to offer them friendship.” He’s not quite sure where he’s going with this tale but he takes a step forward so he takes a step back. “If they reject you, offer a second time and a third until they accept.” He shouldn’t think ill of the dead but teaching her son not to take no for an answer? What kind of parenting was that? “You are still my friend, Allan.” He does not know what else to say, the man is clearly deluded and will only hear what he wants to hear.

“It’s getting dark, I must return home.”

“I’ll escort you,” Guy offers as though their earlier conversation never happened. He even goes so far as to close the gap between them and take up his wrist forcing him to pull away.

“Stay away from me!”

“Allan,” his tone of voice is deep dark and dangerous and he holds his hand out expectantly. He is no maiden and he refuses to be treated as such.

“Go home Guy,” as soon as he says it Guy’s right hand swings at him but a look of horror crosses Guy’s face and his hand falls before he is clipped around the ear.

“I’m sorry...I didn’t mean...forgive me.” His temper will do him a disservice and he desires no friendship with someone who behaves so irrationally.

“Good night,” he says testily and leaves as quickly as possible without actually running. Guy makes no move to follow but he can hear him shouting in rage and he knows it is in his best interest to stay away from him.

When he arrives home his heart is still pounding in his chest and he’s ashamed to admit that Guy had scared him. For a moment he had seen the monster everyone claimed him to be, but even after seeing it he didn’t want to believe it. He had wound Guy up unknowingly leading him on as he had relaxed against him, offered him his neck, rubbed against him and then denied him, what man would not
react violently?

He had a horrible sinking feeling that he was the one that had started all this. He had asked Guy to
play and Guy was certainly playing with him and it was a dangerous game with terrible
consequences. All he could do was keep away from him and hope that Guy loses interest sooner
rather than later.
“Where are you going?” His father asks as he finishes saddling his horse, though they are Lords they are not rich and cannot afford to have a stable boy at hand at all hours and some tasks must be done themselves.

“Knighton Hall,” he replies checking to see if the saddle is tight enough. “I promised Marian I would check on her father and Sir Edward must be lonely there all by himself.”

“Very well but be back in a decent hour.”

“I will,” he replies grinning and pulls his father into a brief hug before mounting his horse. He tugs on the reins fully aware that his father is watching so instead of a canter he trots off towards Knighton Hall until his father is out of sight and gallops the rest of the way.

Sir Edward greets him at the door looking troubled but well and he invites him inside and they sit across from each other at the dining table. He keeps looking towards the stairs expecting Marian to come down at any moment and it pains him to know she will not.

“I miss her too,” Sir Edward says, noticing his glances. “I suppose she sent you to check on me?” He nods, as they are both aware of Marian’s concern for her father. His dark hair is thinning and greying combed backwards revealing the extent of his receding hairline and his moustache and goatee are also greying but there is colour in his cheeks and a light in his eyes that suggest naught but age is against him.

“She cares,” he says with a shrug.

“Too much perhaps. I hear you got into some trouble on the South Road?”

“On the return journey,” he quickly confesses so Edward knows that Marian was safe. “I saw Marian safely to the Abbess and on my return I was set upon by outlaws. I had paid my way so that Marian and I would be safe but as I had left the woods they demanded a second payment and I had nothing.”

“Scoundrels!” Edward exclaims. “I know we live in desperate times but to attack a sympathiser,” he shakes his head sadly.

“They did not want my sympathy they wanted my money.”

“It’s all about money these days, the town reeks of corruption. They were good men the Sheriff hanged, misguided perhaps but good. The forest was a haunt for dead men a shame then that all men must truly die and a forest deemed cleansed.” Edward says bitterly but his words have him confused.

“I hardly think hanging sixteen men is cleansing the forest.”

“That was sixteen men the first day. Every day since Guy and his men have returned to the forest capturing whoever they can and torturing the whereabouts of the others from them. The Sheriff needed those woods safe, the outlaws had become too bold apprehending anyone friend or foe.” Edward leans forward then and lowers his voice. “There have been riders, I have seen them dressed all in black and covering their faces. The Sheriff is planning something, I do not know what but he is not alone. These men, they wear a silver ring as though they belong to some order.”

“Perhaps a pilgrimage?” He offers as he does not wish to entertain conspiracy theories.
“A pilgrimage in Nottingham? Unlikely. No, something is afoot the Sheriff is behaving as though the
world is his and his dog is no better.” He tries to show no reaction as Edward calls Guy a dog but he
is sickened by that comparison. It wasn’t fair comparing Guy to a beast and he knew it was because
of his breeding rather than behaviour. As liberal and free-thinking as Edward clearly thought he was
he could still be a bigoted pious noble.

“What has Guy done?” He uses his name to humanize him in Edward’s eyes.

“You have not heard?” He shakes his head. “Last night he returned to Locksley Manor in a foul
temper, throwing things and cursing the staff. Not long after arriving he stormed out once more
yelling and causing a disturbance. His screams awoke Jane Smith’s baby and she went outside to see
what all the fuss was about and as you know she never liked Guy, he never earned the people’s love
and respect like Robin had. Well she saw it was him and her expression must have said a lot as he
stormed into her home torch in hand and put her home to the torch while the baby was still in the
cradle.” He has that horrible feeling again that he was responsible for Guy’s temper.

“Did they put the fire out?”

“No, he wouldn’t let them. Jane saved her baby but the home and barn were burned to the ground
and then he banished her from Locksley. It’s not right, she has a new born and her husband is
quarantined in Clun. He should not be allowed to get away with that but as the Sheriff’s kept pet it
would seem that he could do whatever he wants.” There he goes dehumanizing him again. “Marian
tells me you and Guy have become friends, as a friend I would tell you to end the friendship, that
boy is no good and has always been no good. I would have never allowed my daughter to marry
him, he terrorized her for months following her and leaving her gifts. Be thankful it is only friendship
he seeks with you.”

He’s not sure what to say to that so he says nothing and listens as Sir Edward talks about the men in
black hoods convinced that one of them was Lord Winchester and asks if he had seen him. He’s not
surprised by the question, Lord Winchester or Uncle Harold as he liked to call him was an old friend
of his father’s so close they were almost like brothers hence why he referred to him as uncle. He
hadn’t seen him for some time, he was too busy lording it up at the south coast and he believed had
Harold been in Nottingham as Edward thinks he would not have ignored his father and would have
visited. He used to enjoy his uncle’s visits as he always brought him a seashell, the prettiest he could
find and he had an admiration for pretty things and had a line of shells on a shelf, though there were
only five.

He does not wish to say anything but he does believe Edward is losing his mind making phantoms
out of shadows. Yes Sheriff Vaisey was a corrupted rat-faced despicable man but he was behaving
no differently and he was well aware of what stirred Guy’s ire and he’s sure it was not men in hoods.
Secret rings and secret orders, it was all rather fanciful and sounded like the ravings of a mad man
and he was sure Edward still had his wits. Perhaps he was just lonely now that Marian was gone and
men in search of shadows were bound to find them and he always thought so negatively of the
Sheriff for good reason, but that meant any and all things the man does could be construed as
suspicious.

He worries for him and how invested he has become in village gossip which is usually no more than
falsehoods. He will have to send his father around and see what he thinks before he pens his reply
letter to Marian.

He takes his leave of Sir Edward and is gifted a bottle of wine for his father which he takes
reluctantly. He understands Edward gave it as a show of goodwill and does not know of his father’s
apparent unquenchable thirst. He considers tossing it on the ride home but he cannot bring himself to
do it and it makes it safely home with him.

He is fortunate that the stable hands are working at that hour and they take his horse for him and he enters his home. His father is sat at the dining table staring into a golden chalice that he immediately thinks he is lost in his cups once more.

“Keeping secrets from me?” His father snaps as he hangs up his cloak, he turns all wide-eyed innocence wondering what he knows. “Do not use your mother’s eyes on me, Guy told me.” So Guy had been around in his absence and taken his revenge, it was rather petty telling tales perhaps he gave the man too much credit.

“I was going to tell you,” he argues but it was pointless really, they both knew he was lying.

“You must have been terrified.”

“A little, at first,” he confesses remembering misconstruing the outlaw’s act of indecency.

“He is so much bigger than you.”

“Not by much,” he argues hating being reminded that he was short.

“And you were getting along so well.” He is missing something, he would not say he got along well with the outlaws, they existed in the same world and they were aware of each other but that was all.

“What do you mean?”

“Guy confessed that last night he lost his temper with you and almost struck you. He waited for you to leave today and gave you this,” he gestures towards the golden chalice. “I tried to refuse on your behalf but he would not have it, he claims you are friends and that he will keep on giving.” The chalice is beautiful but it is far too expensive and a gift not given lightly. “Now what foolish thing did you do to make him want to hit you?” His father sounds angry and he steps back, holding his hands up in surrender.

“I told him to go home.”

“Why?”

“Because I no longer desired his company.”

“Why?” His father demands stepping closer desiring to get to the root of the problem.

“Because he kissed me! I told him we could no longer be friends.”

“I warned you, you’ve stirred up a hornets’ nest now. Keep to your room and I will try to ward him off in future. You silly boy, no friendship is worth this, here!” He grabs the chalice and forces it into his hands. “Take that to your room to remind you of your folly,” it is strange being reprimanded by his father. He knows his father loves him and that he must have made a terrible mistake if his father must say such things to him.

He climbs up the stairs and then stops. “Father have you seen Uncle Harold recently?”

“Not recently no, why?”

“Sir Edward thought he saw him at the castle but I said he was mistaken.”

“At the castle? What business would he have at the castle?”
He shrugs. “None that I can think of, but Sir Edward was quite convinced it was him. Perhaps you
could visit him? He gave you a gift which I’ve left in the kitchen.” It is too early to go to bed but he’s
quite sure his father has dismissed him so he goes up anyway and stares out of his window.

There is still smoke billowing from Locksley, the remnants of the Smith’s home undoubtedly.
Another of his mistakes which he would rectify as best he could, he and his father were not rich but
they were well off and they were well liked by the villagers so he was sure he could help in some
way.

He can’t stop looking out of his window expecting to see Guy hiding in the shadows; he was a
master at lurking so Marian used to say, hiding behind pillars and walls to get her unawares. He
supposes this could be seen as comeuppance because he had laughed when Marian was annoyed
verging on frightened because of Guy’s behaviour. Perhaps he flatters himself, Guy wished to marry
Marian and start a family with her he could not have the same goals with him for obvious reasons. If
he was anything to Guy it was an itch to scratch and nothing more, Guy would find a suitable
woman and enter into a marriage he had always craved and maybe then their friendship could
resume.

He eats his dinner in his room that night by the window as his father is still upset with him. He could
leave, he was a man after all and able to make his own way in life but he could not leave his father.
In a way he liked the way his father was protective of him, it proved that he was loved and valued
above all else and as a child he was either too good for the locals or not good enough for the nobles
but he had always been perfect to his father. It was almost sad that he needed that constant reminder
in his life that he was worthwhile and worthy of love.

There is nothing to see outside of his window, as he knew there would not be. Guy had better things
to be doing than watching him and he tried to tell himself he was not disappointed. It was for the
best, he did not like how he responded to Guy’s touch and he certainly did not like Guy’s temper.
An open hand slap could soon become a clenched fist and a fist could easily be holding a sword and
he did not want to lose his life over something as petty as a kiss.

Changing into his nightshirt he climbs into bed and blows out the candles.
Chapter 7

The following weeks become a similar pattern; Guy would arrive before he left for his duties at the Castle and would leave a gift with his father. He was never called for and as one rumour had it Guy was courting his father with his daily gifts which was laughable. The gift would always be denied no matter what it was and Guy would insist to the point of shoving it into his father’s hand and stepping away and then he would leave. Sometimes he would hesitate beneath his window and turn to look up and sometimes he would let him see him and they’d stare at each other like star-crossed lovers doomed to be forever apart.

When he’d feel guilty for having wronged Guy a villager from Locksley would petition his father with a tale of Guy’s recent cruelties and he would no longer feel guilty. The wrong-doings varied from rough handling to damaged goods and spiteful over-taxing which was blatant robbery in their eyes.

Dan Scarlet was beaten to within an inch of his life taking the flak for his son’s, Will’s, explosive temper. The kid was quiet as a mouse but he had his moments and it was not the first time Dan had taken a punishment for his sons; he had also lost his arm last winter for their thievery.

The local potter Rebecca had had all her pots destroyed and no source of income and her only son Matthew was ill and she was unsure how she was going to feed her daughter’s Kate and Maggie, never mind herself.

How his father takes the brunt of their outrage he does not know but his father keeps a clear head and helps in any way he can, in a both practical and safe manner. He could only wish for some of his father’s good sense because when he is approached outside by another outraged villager he listens to her story instead of having the sense to send her to his father.

Megan was a disciplined God-fearing woman and was a firm believer of an eye for an eye. She was a good woman, brash and bold and when he was a young rascal and stole a pie from her windowsill she didn’t hesitate to lash him, noble or not. He respected that and he certainly never tried to touch a pie cooling on her windowsill again. It is because it was her that he had to listen to her tale because he could not believe Guy would do something to her and she would not kick him up the backside.

As it turns out it was not Megan that was wronged by Guy but her daughter, Eleri. Apparently Eleri had gone to the Castle to seek Guy’s permission and blessing to marry her childhood sweetheart. It was all very respectful treating him as the Lord of Locksley but Guy was in a mood, the same one he had been in for many weeks and demanded payment upon seeing her necklace. The necklace was why Megan was petitioning him, as it was a family heirloom given to her from her mother on her wedding day and now passed to her daughter and it was the only thing of value she owned.

Realising the only way to get the necklace off Guy was to ask for it, he finally relents and sends Megan to his father but she will not budge. She confesses that she had seen him and Guy by the lake throwing stones and nothing more thankfully and she is aware he comes around daily for reasons unknown. He could wait, hope that Guy gives him the necklace as a gift but it was unlikely that he would. Guy had realised he had a liking for shiny pretty things and though the first day he brought him a brand new pair of boots, possibly as proof that he listens, the subsequent gifts have all been small shiny gems which he placed on his shelf between his seashells.

Megan makes him promise that he will retrieve the necklace and like a fool he makes the promise. She had always been like a mother to him and he wanted to appease her but now she was gone he was able to think once more and he was well aware of the terrible mistake he had made. He could
ask for it back, but Guy took it as payment for his blessing and Eleri gave it, well it was pulled from her throat allegedly but she made no move to retrieve it. Lawfully the necklace belonged to Guy and under no circumstances did he have to give it back, never mind if it were the morally correct thing to do. So asking for it back was out of the question, and so was buying it back as Guy had said on numerous occasions he was a man of wealth and he obviously took the necklace because he liked the look of it so no amount of money could buy it back. He wasn’t in a position to ask a favour of him and nor was his father, which left two options trade for it or steal it. A trade made sense and was the lesser of two evils however he was unsure of what Guy would ask for and considering their recent problems it was unwise to give him the option to ask for anything outlandish.

So he was left with theft, but as luck would have it he was in possession of the Nightwatchman’s clothes. The beige trousers had no hope of fitting as he only managed to pull them up to his knees, so he added brown trousers and his own boots. The beige leather vest was tight around his waist and riding up making it hard to breathe but he had no other top like it and he had to resemble the Nightwatchman to some degree. The cloak, mask and scarf fitted perfectly and he covered his eyes and pulled the scarf up over his nose, and lifted the hood. He undoubtedly looked ridiculous but the thing about the Nightwatchman is that he struck in the night so hopefully no one would see him.

Locksley Manor was dark and gloomy in the dead of night. He tied his horse some distance away and approached the Manor looking for any way in. He could try the door but that seemed to be asking for trouble so he steps back looking at the first floor. There is a flicking candle light in a room with an open window and he knows that it is Guy’s bedroom but there is no sound. It is all very calm and eerie as he walks around looking for a way to climb onto the roof. Unfortunately he can find no bales of straw but there is a post he could pull himself up, hook a leg and climb onto the roof. He was good at climbing and he had plenty of upper body strength from playing hide and seek and always hiding in the well, or when it rained and he played inside he would dangle out of the window.

He jumps up and catches hold of the bar and pulls himself up trying to not make a sound. It has been a while and his outfit is ill fitting but at last he gets his leg hooked and pulls himself onto the roof. He dare not stand fearing the roof could collapse at any moment so instead he crawls up to the open window and peaks inside. Two standing candelabras are lit either side of the bed giving the room a soft orange glow and revealing the figure laid in the bed. Guy is unmoving laid on his front, face turned to the window but his eyes are closed.

He climbs in through the window and looks around the room. He notices Guy’s clothes strewn on the floor and he walks down the two steps and retrieves them, routing through the pockets and then folding them and placing the items on a chair. He mentally reprimands himself; he was supposed to be the Nightwatchman not the Night Maid. He looks around the room once more and sees a box on a table by the door, it is only a square wooden box and looks like Will Scarlet’s work but something about it attracts him and he lifts the askew lid. He almost cheers when he sees set upon many letters with a seal unknown to him the silver Celtic necklace.

He grabs it and rushes towards the window thankful to be away but in his haste he forgets the two steps and trips falling to the wooden floor. He lands with an almighty crash and the second step drives into his tender ribs knocking the air from his lungs.

“The Nightwatchman!” Guy shouts jumping from his bed and unsheathing his sword. He can’t breathe or scramble away as Guy approaches with a cruel smirk. “I have you now,” he boasts victoriously and raises his sword to put an end to him.

“Guy, stop! No! It’s me!” He shouts panicked pushing the mask up and scarf down revealing his face.
“Allan?” Guy staggers back as though a physical blow has been dealt. “You are the Nightwatchman?” He asks in disbelief looking betrayed. He had forgotten the rivalry between Guy and the Watchman and really he should have known it was Marian as nobody liked to wind Guy up as much as she did and he always thought the Watchman was a lunatic for constantly poking the beast.

“Would the Nightwatchman trip on a step?” He asks with a brief laugh at his own incompetence but then his ribs twinge and he clutches his side.

Thankfully Guy lowers his weapon. “Why are you in my bedroom late at night?” The question sounds bad and he’s not sure if it was asked innocently or Guy was trying to imply something. He holds up his hand revealing the silver necklace. “You have come to rob me?” There’s that betrayal again.

“Forgive me, I could think of no other way.” He tries to stand and Guy offers him a hand and pulls him up.

“You could have asked me,” now he sounds disappointed.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking,” reluctantly he hands back the necklace. “I should go,” he heads towards the window thinking he should leave the way he came but Guy grabs his arm stilling him.

“I cannot let you do that, Allan.” He pulls him back until they are face to face. He properly looks at Guy then noticing the state of his dark hair and blue eyes free of the kohl he smears around them. He looks pale, beautiful and deadly in the candlelight even when he is only wearing a white nightshirt. “You have broken into my home, you have broken the law I must tell the Sheriff.”

“No!” He protests, he clearly didn’t think this through. “I have given it back and I am sorry, please don’t tell the Sheriff.” Noble or not the law is the law and this news could kill his father.

The restraining hand on his arm becomes a caressing one. “As you know my silence can be bought.” The sweet tone of his voice sounds alien and creepy and he realises Guy once again has the upper hand. He is tired of being outmatched so he reaches out and pulls Guy down into a biting kiss enjoying the way the older man startles and then immediately grabs him kissing him back as though his life depended on it. Strangely the kiss makes him feel powerful, he feels in control for once, in control of the kiss and more satisfying in control of Guy. The man is desperate against him, starved of affection and for an insane moment he wants to push him back onto the bed and give him all of his attention.

The kiss ends as abruptly as it began and they are both panting with wet swollen lips. He turns for the window once more but once again Guy grabs his arm pulling him back. “You have paid for my silence for you breaking into my home but you are also a thief, a crime punishable by the loss of a thieving hand.”

“No Guy please, I gave it back,” Guy’s grip is unrelenting. “Can your silence be bought on this matter?”

Guy smirks, appeased. “It can but my price is raised.”

“Name it,” Guy guides his hand beneath his nightshirt and between his legs and he finds his price is not the only thing raised. Tentatively he wraps his hand around the hardened flesh and begins to stroke. His palm is sweaty from nerves so his hand runs smoothly up and down and it is really no different from when he takes himself in hand. Sure of his actions he tightens his grip and quickens his movements and feels Guy thrusting into his hand.
He expects Guy to kiss him but his eyes are lowered watching his hand beneath his shirt. He moves his hand and brings it to the hem of the shirt and lifts it and Guy raises his arms in help and he flings the shirt to the floor and grips him again. He can’t help but feast his eyes on the flawless pale flesh before him and he wants to touch the toned abdominals and kiss each one. He leans forward and licks a small pink nipple and enjoys the way Guy’s body shudders and he gives the other the same treatment.

Guy’s breath hitches and before he fully understands what he is doing he pushes Guy back against the bed post and sinks to his knees in front of him. He does not know what possesses him to lean forward and take Guy’s cock into his mouth but he does and frowns as pre-cum coats his tongue. The taste is unpleasant but Guy’s reaction is heady and it excites him that he has caused such a reaction. One of Guy’s large hands makes its way into his hair guiding him encouraging him to take more into his mouth. He does his best and looks up watching Guy watching him as he grips the remaining length he cannot manage and begins to suck moving his mouth up and down with his hand following.

He uses his right hand to grip himself, surprised by how turned on he was. He had considered reaching their completion together but Guy is too far gone panting and murmuring encouragement in French. With a thrust of his hips Guy cums in his mouth and the taste is bitter and he quickly pulls away and spits into the bedpan hidden beneath the bed. Guy does not seem offended by his response as he slumps against the bedpost wiping his sweaty brow with a smile on his lips.

He gets up ignoring the ache in his knees from kneeling on the wooden floor and heads for the window once more. Again he is caught but this time dragged to the bed and pushed down onto his back. Guy climbs on top of him, mouth covering his own as a hand opens his trousers and roughly strokes his semi hard shaft. Both his hands end up clutching Guy’s hair holding him in the kiss as their tongues do battle once more. He tries to buck upwards into Guy’s touch but his body keeps him pinned and at his mercy.

Twisting his hips he knocks Guy off him and immediately climbs on top of him seizing his mouth once more and rubbing against him. It becomes a game of one-upmanship as they roll on the bed pinning each other to the mattress until Guy finally brings him off with his hand and they both lie on the bed, Guy on his front while he’s on his back staring at the ceiling and both of them try to regain their breath.

“I should leave,” he says when sense comes back and he quickly buttons his trousers. He sits up but Guy grabs his arm and pulls him down again kissing him soundly on the lips.

“Stay.” It is tempting especially as Guy has yet to cover himself and he can see nothing but alabaster skin that would look better with his teeth marks marring the flawless flesh.

“I have to go,” he says and presses a kiss to Guy’s shoulder. He gets up and walks to the window once more.

“Wait!” Guy calls and he stops and turns and is almost blinded by the necklace thrown at his head but he catches it in time. “I would have given it to you if you had only asked.”

“I think you’re glad that I didn’t though,” he adds cheekily with a wink.

“You don’t have to exit through the window, I can see you out.”

“Stay, sleep, dream about me. Good night Guy,” with a blown kiss and a wink he climbs out of the window and grabs the post and swings down. He stares up at the window but Guy does not come to wish him good night so instead he leaves to collect his horse.
He is surprised by the turn of events and how much he had enjoyed them. The Bible was wrong, surely because being with Guy made him feel alive and when he pushed him away people got hurt. It made sense for them to be together, he does not know why he ran from him when he has possibly had the greatest night of his life. He knows he cannot tell his father, he cannot tell a soul because of the circumstances of their tryst but his smile may reveal too much.

He looks at the necklace clutched in his hand and smiles. He had killed two birds with one stone this evening and yes he may have damaged the Nightwatchman’s reputation on his first night but it was well worth it. He felt giddy riding home and sneaking into his bedroom. Keeping secrets never did anyone any good but for the time being Guy was his dirty little secret and he was looking forward to answering the door to him tomorrow.
Chapter 8

In the morning he is soon out of bed washing and dressing quickly so that he could sit by his window and wait for Guy. He waves and greets each of his servants as they arrive and his smile must be infectious as they smile in return and wave back.

He does not know how long he waits before he realises that Guy is not coming. He does not know why he expected him to since his daily gifts were an apology and after last night he owed him nothing and a second gift was given.

He goes downstairs and enjoys an afternoon meal with his father, giving false answers as to why he was smiling so much. He could not tell him, falling in love with Guy was a terrible thing to do and the things they did together last night. None of it should have happened, but it had and he had enjoyed it and wanted more of it.

He decides if Guy will not come to him then he will go to Guy. He does not wish to make a bad impression so he has a bath first in rose scented water and chooses an outfit he feels Guy might like. He selects black leather trousers, a white undershirt and a black vest with the new boots Guy had bought him. The outfit is tighter than what he is used to but that was the point and he heads downstairs only to be intercepted by his father.

“What’s this then, some lass finally caught your eye?” His father asks with a smile and he does not wish to disappoint him so he smiles back.

“Early days yet.”

“As if she’ll resist you, what’s her name?”

“Gu-Gilly,” he corrects and notices his father’s dark eyes narrow in suspicion.

“Do I know her?”

“No, she’s from Lincoln visiting her cousins in Nottingham they run the vegetable cart in the market before the castle.” In truth he had no idea who owned that cart and he hoped his father was unaware too. His father nods appeased so he assumes he had no idea.

“I imagine she is beautiful.”

He thinks of Guy laid on the bed last night covered in only the glow of the candlelight. “Beyond compare.”

“Well then I’ll not keep you from her.” He pats his father on the arm and leaves, not bothering to collect his horse as it was a nice day and he could do with a walk. Bonchurch was originally a part of the Locksley estate so Locksley Manor is not a far distance and he wishes to pass through the village to visit Megan.

Megan is delighted to have her necklace returned and offers to make him a pie and bring it around later that day. He thanks her and takes his leave and does his best to navigate around the village so that he is not accosted by others who wish for a simple chat. Any other day and he would be pleased with the attention but today there was only one person’s attention he craved.

It takes him longer than he had planned but he could not be ignorant and his smile seemed to attract people like moths to a flame. One of the benefits of passing through the village was walking by
Thornton, the head servant at Locksley and hearing him claim that Guy had given the staff the afternoon off. He wonders if Guy knew that he was coming and if he had taken precaution.

Either way he is eager to get to his door and as he arrives he chooses not to knock and instead looks through the parlour window. He spots Guy stood by the stairs holding a roll of parchment looking thoughtful and he puts his foot on the windowsill to climb in through the window as he did the night before. Just as he is about to pull himself up Sheriff Vaisey comes into his line of sight and he quickly lowers his foot and plasters himself against the wall.

“...wasn’t for your vendetta, still not all bad considering.” He hears the Sheriff finish saying.

“I failed.”

“Now, now no need for a pity party, keep behaving like a girl Gisborne and I’ll put you in a dress...There!” the Sheriff cheers out merrily. “There’s that fire, I knew I didn’t waste my time on you. Now what news on your little friend?”

“Things are going well.”

“That slowly? Boring! Anyway are my woods safe?”

“No outlaw has been seen in weeks.”

“Good, that’s good. We are so close Gisborne, the pact will be signed and England will be ours.”

“What about what I want?”

“Yes dear boy that too but first we have to scratch his back before he scratches ours.”

“When do I leave?”

“Not this time, I already have someone in his camp awaiting my word. You’ve done enough, stay here and revel in your spoils Earl of Huntingdon.” It sounds as though they embrace and move on out of range of his hearing and he feels sick.

He looks through the window making sure they were both out of sight and runs. He does not know what he has heard but he knows what it sounds like, Sir Edward was not crazy and there were men in hoods plotting to assassinate the king. An attempt had already been made and it was Guy that did it, he claimed he had failed because Robin had saved the king. The Sheriff mentioned a vendetta and Guy had always hated Robin even long after his death he still hated him; had he killed him? Was he not truly in his death bed but in the Holy Land murdering his own people? He didn’t want to believe it, but he remembers that night when Guy came down the stairs smiling with sun kissed skin. His lack of interest with Marian suddenly made sense; he claimed he knew her feelings for Robin so he deliberately courted her. It was a game of one-upmanship, he just wanted to take everything that Robin held dear and with his rival gone there was no need to keep pretending that he desired Marian.

He does not know what to do, how could he have got Guy so wrong? Why could he never listen to what he had been told? The man was a monster if he could betray his own people and kill his own King and for what? Greed, wealth, power? It made no sense murdering King Richard as there would be no power vacuum as Prince John would take the throne...unless...unless ‘he’ was Prince John.

The moment he’s home he runs up the stairs ignoring his father and enters his bedroom. He needs to leave, he is not safe, he might have been seen and even if he wasn’t he knows his expression would give too much away. He must warn the king that traitors were in his camp, he’d have to take Sir Edward too, perhaps he knew more than he was letting on.
“Allan! What in God’s name has gotten into you?” His father demands as he shoves his clothes into his bag.

“We need to leave, pack your things.”

“Oh no, what have you done now?”

“Guy killed Robin.”

“Robin who?” He stops what he is doing and turns to his father.

“Robin of Locksley!”

“Have you had a knock on the head? Robin died in the Holy Land defending the king.”

“Yeah, from Guy!” He hisses noticing his father’s disbelief.

“Guy can be in two places at once can he? The poor man was ill, you visited him yourself.”

“And I was turned away at the door as was Marian and anyone else I should imagine. Only his physician saw him, rather strange don’t you think?”

“He could have no visitors for risk of spreading infection.”

“He could have no visitors because he wasn’t there!” He shouts and really he should lower his voice but he can’t because his father won’t listen.

“Has he done something? You really seemed to like Gilly this morning.” He stops and looks at his father in shock. “What? Did you really think I didn’t know Gilly was Guy? You practically said Guy to my face and the Millers own the vegetable cart and have no relations in Lincoln.” Well damn, he’s surprised his father allowed him to lie to his face.

“Nothing happened, well no something did, we...I...we did things...to each other...that’s not the point. I heard him and the Sheriff talking, I think they mean to assassinate the king!”

“Lower your voice!” His father reprimands. “Where is your proof of any of this?”

“Guy’s tattoo.”

“Tattoo, what tattoo?”

“On his right arm. The letter we received about Robin, it said before he died he kept on speaking about a tattoo on the right arm of the wood-be king-slayer.”

“Robin was unwell in his final hours, those were the mutterings of a dying man sick with fever, he did not know what he was saying.”

“Stop defending him! You know in your heart that it was him, as do I.”

“Okay, for the sake of argument say that I believe you, what is it you plan to do? Robin is dead, Locksley now belongs to Guy and before long he will be named Earl of Huntingdon.”

“As of today he is the Earl of Huntingdon and we must leave and inform the king. There are not only traitors in his country, they are in his camp as well and I think Prince John is behind all of this.”

“You sound mad and they’ll lock you away if you don’t swing for your words.”
“There is a pact, soon to be signed. Don’t you get it? It is a traitor’s pact, Guy was rounding up outlaws to clear the way for the men Sir Edward saw. We must pack, collect Sir Edward and leave.”

“And go where?” His father sighs, still not believing a word he has said.

“We’ll go to the south coast; Uncle Harold would take us in.”

“I have visited Sir Edward and he would not travel to the south coast as he is convinced Harold is one of these dark riders.”

“Lincoln then.”

“Good friends with Winchester.”

“London,” he offers.

“Where the prince resides? If what you say is true then nowhere is safe and no one can be trusted.”

“Why won’t you believe me?”

“I want to,” his father replies, sadly. “Bring me proof and I will see to it that the King is informed of this treachery.”

“What, shall I just steal the pact? It will be too late by then.”

“Bring me names then, but you must be careful and not speak a word of this to anyone not even Sir Edward.”

“I promise,” he says solemnly and means it. He will not let this lie as he had wished to fight in the Crusades and would have if his father did not beg him to stay. Would Guy have thrust a sword in his chest as easily as he did to Robin? That attempt on the King’s life had re-started the war, how many other Englishmen died for his actions? Did he even care?

He can’t believe he had let that man touch him, that he had gotten down on his knees and done...that to him. What kind of monster did that make him? To be in love with a killer, well not anymore, they were done and it was over. His Guy would have never done those horrible things and he had to come to terms with the fact that his Guy was gone, dead beneath all the hatred that had twisted a once sweet boy into a blood thirsty selfish murderous fiend.

He was unsure where he would find his proof but it seemed the best place to start was the snake pit itself, Nottingham Castle. There would be a council of nobles on the morrow and he would go in his father’s stead and once there he would try to uncover the identities of the mysterious black riders. It wasn’t much to go on but at least it was a start.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Warning! Change of tags, graphic description of a flogging

He does not know what he was expecting to find at Nottingham Castle, it was not as if they would have a list of nefarious activities pinned to the wall where anyone could sign up. These Black Knights for want of a better word were all clandestine meetings and whispers in the dark; they lived in shadows and fed on treachery. It was foolish to think this would be an easy task; these cowardly men were in no hurry to be exposed for the villainous scum that they were and would go to great lengths to protect their identity.

He too must play his role in this and play the self-obsessed noble with his head up his own arse that he cannot see anything else. Give the Black Knights no reason to suspect anything and exploit their blunders when their own egotism sees them reveal too much. It was a waiting game but time was of the essence.

He never gave much thought to the Council of Nobles before, if anything he thought it was a room full of old men in a study bickering and drinking wine. Instead he finds the meeting is held in the Great Hall with a semi-circle of chairs surrounding Sheriff Vaisey’s desk. The ‘old goats’ weren’t that old either, in fact Sir Edward and his father were the eldest in attendance, or would have been had he not taken his father’s seat. The other Lord’s are middle-aged, dressed in their finest with an air of indifference surrounding them. Then of course there is Guy, the new Earl of Huntingdon still dressed in black leather only his leather jacket has been replaced with a surcoat and his riding boots are a far better quality. He is sat on the seat nearest the desk ignoring all the others until he had arrived and he had the audacity to smile at him, a genuine smile, damn him.

He sits beside Sir Edward as he is his only ally and the noble that sits to his right does so with disgust and seems about to cause a fuss but one glare from Guy silences him. He can feel Guy’s eyes on him and though he wishes to speak to Sir Edward he dare not for fear Guy was able to read his lips. Instead he turns his attention to the Sheriff’s seat, practically a throne for the delusional despicable rat.

The upstairs doors open with a thud striking the walls completely unnecessary, overdramatic and entirely the Sheriff. “Sorry I’m late, things to do people to torture ha ha!” The Sheriff announces jogging down the stairs while the nobles laugh as if on cue and he realises they don’t have a spine between them. “Glad to see you could all make it,” he says sharing a look with Guy as he walks around his table and stands before his chair. “As you may have noticed we have a new member among us, Sir Guy of Gisborne, Lord of Locksley and Earl of Huntingdon, yadda, yadda, yadda, welcome!” There is a smattering of applause but Guy takes it in his stride and inclines his head in acknowledgement or thanks, maybe both. “Well if it isn’t Baby a-Dale, is your father dead?” He asks plainly as his eyes finally fall on him.

“My father is ill,” he answers back just as plainly.

“Shame, oh well, I know you know Guy, maybe after this you could get acquainted.” He stares at the Sheriff in disbelief and completely ignores the way Guy watches him. He had told him, of course he bloody had, Vaisey was like a father to him and he was the one that had brought Guy back to
Nottingham. “So I have good news from the village of Clun, no new outbreaks in a fortnight. The pestilence or whatever it was is gone.”

“So we can lift the quarantine, feed the survivors.” Sir Edward states, as apart from himself he is the only one that seems to care.

“The people of Clun are a grubby people, the great unwashed, low on taxes high on moaning, the quarantine remains.”

“They must be fed or they’ll die,” he argues while Sir Edward shakes his head at him.

“Aww sweet, are you all seeing this? A little boy trying to be a man. My dear boy you must understand these are incapable people; they do not look after themselves. We must not, we CANNOT carry them.”

“But how can they look after themselves if we cannot allow them to leave their village?”

“I agree, this is a conundrum,” the Sheriff says testily narrowing his eyes. He walks around the table to stand before the nobles. “Another conundrum is this,” he begins and slowly walks by each of them and stops before him. “Whom do I tax to pay for the homeless of Clun hmm? Do I rob from Peter to pay for Paul?” He asks looking around but otherwise not moving. “No,” he mutters and walks away to stand beside Guy. “Simpler to keep the quarantine in place and after one or two weeks we say the village has been...cleansed.” The cheek of the man is outrageous; first he cleansed the forest and now Clun? Under his regime none had the right to live. “I may house my garrison there,” the snake speaks the truth at last, that there is something in Clun that he wants.

“You cannot let healthy people die, it is barbaric. If it became known...”

“If it became known?” The Sheriff rages, stomping towards him. “Are you threatening me? Tell me, who would believe you over me? You’re just a commoner in fancy clothes and would be in the gutter if not for Malcolm’s bleeding heart. Next council meeting send your father, you have no head for politics, and silly little boys like you should just play with stones and stay out of daddy’s business.” He has no words only rage as some of the nobles chortle and the Sheriff returns to Guy’s side. “Sort your boy out, he’s embarrassing himself.” He then turns to glare at the gathering. “Show’s over, get out!”

The yellow-bellied nobles are quick to leave their seats as the Sheriff dismisses them while he takes his time glaring at the Sheriff. He is an average man, short in stature with a bald crown and short white hair, grey sideburns and a neatly trimmed grey beard. He would not say he was a handsome man although he could be if not for the dark suspicious eyes and the too-wide toothy grin.

“Come along,” Sir Edward encourages him, pulling on his arm. Reluctantly he stands and shares one last mutual glare with the Sheriff before Vaisey turns away to whisper to Guy and he leaves the hall with Sir Edward.

“What is in Clun?” He whispers to his companion when they are out of earshot.

“Starving villagers.”

“What more?” Sir Edward stops, suspicious.

“What more would there be? Do you know something?” He promised his father he would not bring Sir Edward in on his quest and though he could do with an ally he would not break his word.

“I do not know what I say, the Sheriff has me riled,” a lie is easily swallowed when surrounded by
the truth.

“Allan!” He freezes when he hears Guy call for him, but he must act natural for Sir Edward’s sake. “Sir Edward,” Guy greets when he catches up to them. “How is the Lady Marian?” Like he even cares, the two-faced wretch.

“She is well,” Sir Edward replies but says no more and the silence becomes awkward.

“Allan may I have a word with you?” Guy asks politely and he wants to grab a hold of Sir Edward and beg him not to leave him. “I’ll see you soon, good day to you both.” Sir Edward takes his leave and they both watch him depart and for a man suffering from gout he seems to move exceptionally well.

“Your act today was not very clever,” Guy reprimands.

“What act? That I care for the villagers of Clun? That I dare defy the Sheriff? Has he set his dog on me?” He should not say such things but he cannot help it.

“Still your tongue,” Guy warns.

“Why? Will you take it? You’re very good at that.” Guy grabs his wrist but he pulls his hand away. “Get off me, don’t you dare touch me.”

“Let us talk in private,” Guy says smoothly, measured and most definitely threateningly. “I have a room...”

“I’m not going anywhere with you!” Guy grabs his wrist again. “Guards! Guards!” He screams, they’d probably do nothing but it makes Guy release his wrist.

“Why are you behaving like this? I tire of your moods.”

“Yeah, well I tire of you.” He snaps and turns on his heels to walk away.

“I wonder how long it will be before you climb through my window once more.” He should not take the bait and walk away but he cannot and turns towards Guy once more.

“You know why I was there.”

“Keep telling yourself that you came for the necklace if it helps you sleep better at night.” He should not be surprised Guy is using the same insult he himself used on him. “But we both know why you climbed through my window.”

“You are mistaken.”

“Am I? I do not recall asking for your mouth but you fell to your knees as though I was your God.”

“A mistake and one not to be repeated,” he’d spit on the floor if it wouldn’t give Guy ideas.

“A shame, but I do not think you would be opposed to reciprocation?” He pushes Guy away as he stands far too close.

“You are wrong, I do not want your lying filthy mouth anywhere near me. You disgust me!” He sees Guy’s hands clenching and knows he is playing a dangerous game. “You want to hit me? Hit me then, prove to me what you are. You are a God damn child throwing a tantrum when you do not get your own way and I am sick of it. I am not your friend and you are not the Earl of Huntingdon, some
things you cannot steal from a dead man.” How he is not beaten to within an inch of his life he does not know, Guy shows a tremendous amount of self-restraint and simply stands and takes his tongue-lashing.

“I was a good friend to you; you’ll do well to remember that.” Guy looks sad but he refuses to be moved by him, his friend was gone, his friend never returned it was the devil that came back wearing his friend’s face.

He takes his leave with no goodbye and hurries to the stables in the hopes of finding Sir Edward. This mission is bigger than him and though he promised his father he would not involve Edward he feels as though he is already involved. He is aware of the Black Knights, should he stay at the castle, perhaps complain of his gout he could try and find the identity of one and then they would have their proof. He need not know about the pact or the assassination attempt, the less he knows the better should he be caught snooping. He would stay at the castle himself but for his gut feeling that something was amiss in Clun and unlike Guy he could not be in two places at once.

Unfortunately he arrives too late as the stable boy informs him Sir Edward has already left. He has no desire to chase after his old friend and place him in danger so instead he goes into the market and buys as much food as he can afford and hires a horse and cart. There is something in Clun he must see, he is sure of it and if he is mistaken there were still villagers dying of starvation.

The wailing of desperate villagers assaults his ears as he rides up to the wooden barricade. Six guards stand sentry with another six further afield cooking rabbit over an open fire the despicable fiends. One guard leaves his position and raises his hand to halt him and he plasters on his most charming smile.

“Milord, where are you going?”

“I’ve business in Clun.”

“Pestilence, I can’t let you through I’m afraid.”

“Aww please? I won’t tell anyone,” he cajoles.

“What’s it worth?” The man asks and he regrets spending all of his coins without leaving some for a bribe.

“I have no coins but I could pay you later?” He offers and the man looks over towards the others and back and rests his hand on his thigh.

“Not all men desire money. I’ve been lonely these past few weeks, missing the warmth and comfort found between a pair of thighs.” He slaps the man’s hand away and he turns to look at him with utter contempt as the other guards slowly approach his cart. “I’ll open the gate if you open your legs, for all of us,” the man calls out and the guards look at him with hunger in their eyes.

“Do you promise?” He asks timidly, playing the role the foolish guard had given him. The man nods eagerly in disbelief and holds out his hand to help him down from the cart. He takes his hand and steps down and is immediately pulled against the man who fumbles with his own breeches. Another man comes to stand behind him pressing his crotch against his ass and he moans shamelessly and watches the man in front of him fail to untie his laces in his excitement. He leans forward, as if to help the man but instead he pulls the dagger from his belt and thrusts it into his thigh and then pulls it out and thrusts it into the thigh of the man standing behind him.

The pair cry in pain and he runs towards the barricade as the other six guards are too far away and
the other four are checking on their fallen comrades. With a shove he releases the wooden plank barring the door and watches the gate come open and the starving villagers are free.

“Go, there is food in the cart!” He encourages and watches the people surround the cart, passing food to the most in need before helping themselves. It is beautiful to see that there is still some good in the world. He looks through the open gate and only sees the village of Clun and nothing more.

Just as he is about to cross the threshold both his arms are seized and pulled behind his back and cuffed. “Don’t think you’re getting away with this, pretty boy,” the guard he had stabbed hisses with a cruel smirk. “Take ‘im to the Sheriff!” He begins to be pulled towards the guards’ horses and he sees some of the stronger villagers look over and move as if to help. He shakes his head at them, willing them to stand down.

“What is in your village?” He shouts instead.

“Nothing,” a young boy replies and has the innocence of youth so he runs up to him.

“Has the Sheriff been?”

“Only to barricade us in.”

“No one has been to your village?” He asks in disbelief.

“Only you, Sir, thank you, Sir.”

“’Ere off with you, yer vermin,” one of the guards tells the boy and kicks out his leg luckily missing the boy as he scarpers back to hide behind his mother’s skirt. So there truly was nothing in Clun, the Sheriff would let the people die on a whim, the man was a monster.

The guard leads him over to a horse where already a rider sits and he is helped on behind him, hands still cuffed behind his back and a rope is tied around his middle and the rider’s so that he does not fall. It is a very awkward ride to Nottingham and thankfully one done in silence and he is almost glad to be taken to the dungeon, uncuffed and then tossed into a cell.

He wasn’t cut out for this cloak and dagger routine and he certainly was not made for a cell. The place stinks and the straw is dirty covered in God knows what, he isn’t alone either an elderly man sits chained to the wall mumbling to himself. He needs to escape but that would land him in even more trouble. He paces wondering what to do when the old man grabs his ankle grunting at him.

“What...what?” He demands but the man says nothing and he shakes him off and runs to the bars to find Guy staring at him and almost jumps out of his skin. “Jesus Christ!”

“No, just me.” He’s changed his attire again, back to the leather vest and trench coat.

“Would you believe you have the wrong man?” He asks sweetly and Guy smirks crossing his arms.

“Oh I doubt that, your father has been informed, I thought you should know.” Guy states almost gleefully.

“You bastard.”

“Don’t insult me; you know my parentage as well as I know yours.” There is silence between them and he wishes for Guy to leave but he will not go. “Had we been friends I could have pulled some strings.”
"I’ll take my punishment,” he states, resolute.

“When will you stop with your wilfulness?”

“When will you stop treating me like a maid? I am not a woman and I am most certainly not your woman.”

“No a maiden would be more easily won than you and play with the mind much less.”

“You think I play with your mind? Then let me talk plainly you disgust me and I want nothing to do with you. You are not the boy I used to know, I think you are rotten to your core. Have I said enough or would you like to hear some more?”

“They say I’m mad,” the old man mutters to himself.

“Say what you will there is no denying that you are stirred by me, why else would you claim to hate me so passionately? I think you enjoy talking this way to me; it warms your blood like I do when I kiss you and touch you. Even now the very sound of my voice has you aroused I can see it in your eyes but deny me, you’ve denied me before and soon fell on your knees, and you’ll do it again.”

“I won’t.”

“Fine then stay, rot, see how much I care. Now I must attend to your father, I was told he was awfully upset, I wonder how upset he will be when he learns his son is a whoring thief among other things.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Really?”

“You promised.”

“Yes well apparently I have a filthy lying mouth and I’m rotten to the core. You should choose your friends more wisely.” He does not know what card to play as he has none and he refuses to apologise for speaking the truth.

“Guy, don’t;” there is nothing left to say.

“Tell me that you want me.” He says approaching the bars.

“I don…”

“Tell me!” He shouts startling him and the old man.

“I want you,” he replies unconvincingly, Guy only told him to say the words and not to mean them.

“How, where, when, tell me.” He’s beginning to think Guy wasn’t hugged as a child with this need to be loved and wanted. It’s just sad, it really is surely there was some lass willing to take pity on him, he was a handsome man, rich, and a great kisser, emotionally unstable with a heart of stone and a soul as black as night but still.

“All the time, with me, by the lake, at the table, in my bed.” Sad that only two days ago that was true.

“I want you too,” Guy confesses as though he was not forced to say what he had instead treating it like a confession. “I want you to open your legs for me and only me. I want you to give yourself to
me and let me look after you. I could give you so much if you would just let me.” He feels the words are genuine but the price is too high.

“At the cost of my soul? No thank you.” Guy’s eyes narrow and he closes himself off having revealed too much of himself. He had exposed his heart and his longing and in return he had trampled on it.

“Enjoy your stay,” Guy growls and turns but he saw the tears in his eyes and he feels terrible. He should not care; there were good men dying in the Holy Land right this minute because of Guy and men of his ilk. Guy leaves then, not sparing him a look and he walks over to the bench in the cell ignoring the old man shaking his head at him.

He does not know how long it is before someone else enters the dungeon. He gets to his feet believing they have allowed his father to visit but he is disappointed to find a smug looking Sheriff making his way towards his cell.

“Do you like your room?” Vaisey asks.

“I did until the vermin arrived.”

“There’s that spirit, tell me was it worth all the upset you have caused to save those dim-witted layabouts?”

“I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

“You’d see your father to the grave first, terrible boy and what have you been saying to Guy hmm?” He turns away unwilling to speak of his father and Guy. “Oh come now, do you think I don’t know? Guy tells me everything and I mean everything,” he lifts his head wondering if the Sheriff was only teasing. “I always thought you were a prude but it seems I was mistaken and you’re quite the filthy boy. What did you say to him?”

“Guy tells you everything, ask him.”

“I don’t know why he wastes his time on you; he’s far too good for you. If only he could see what I see, an ungrateful self-righteous bitch. You keep hurting him and you won’t have to worry about him you’ll have to worry about me. Your pretty face does nothing for me and I would have no problems disfiguring you.” He does not know what to say to that, Vaisey was like a father to Guy and it seemed he was protective over his adopted son. “Your actions today cannot go unpunished, I am the law in this town and you have questioned my authority. I cannot be seen in a bad light that would create anarchy. You will be punished tomorrow at noon and I will be selfless I will put your father up for the night while you stay here and think about what you’ve done. Times are changing, boy; you’ll do well to stay on my good side.” With that warning the Sheriff leaves the dungeons and he realises he will not see his father.

The floor is too dirty to sleep on so instead he lies on the bench and thinks what his punishment could be. He doubts an execution because the Sheriff would not have been able to contain his joy, no; it was to be a spectacle, a loss of limbs? A public flogging? Perhaps a branding? Would he be stretched until his bones popped and his muscles tear? Maybe they wish only to humiliate him and would tie him naked to a post for half a day.

How he sleeps with such thoughts in his head he will never know but too soon he is being awoken by a bucket of cold and possibly dirty water being thrown over him. He startles and sits up glaring at the guard with the bucket and his companion who holds a white tunic in front of him with a smirk. They unlock the door and beckon him forward and the moment he steps out he is struck in the
stomach and doubles over and they grab his tunic and pull it off along with his undershirt.

When he regains his composure they thrust the white tunic into his arms and he puts it on wondering at the lace all the way down his back. The guards then escort him through the castle rather than straight out into the courtyard and he spots Guy and the Sheriff by the open doors awaiting his arrival. Guy cannot meet his eyes but the Sheriff seems pleased as he is escorted through the double doors and down the steps.

His father is waiting outside on the steps and calls his name and reaches for him but he cannot look. Instead he keeps his eyes on the platform with the two hangman’s posts and climbs up and then turns to face the Sheriff to hear his punishment.

“We cannot have challenges to our authority, the law applies to everybody even the privileged.” He says while pointing at him. He’s laying it on a bit thick; one would think he was plotting to kill the king the damn hypocrite.

The Sheriff nods and he is turned around to face the people and his tunic is unlaced and pulled from his shoulders. He feels exposed under the scrutiny of the crowd but his chest is toned, his stomach flat and his arms are muscular. The guards tie his wrists, one to either post stretching his arms out exposing his back and he knows now that he will be flogged. When the guards have finished tying him he looks over his shoulder to see one of them take up the cat o’ nine tails and he is thankful that it is not Guy.

“Shall we say five lashes?” The Sheriff asks but the crowd say nothing still stunned that a noble was being publicly humiliated in front of them. Some even look sad, as if they know he was being unfairly punished. He sees the whip unravelled and turns to face the crowd bracing himself for the first sting of the whip. Instead he hears spurred boots on the wooden platform and against his better judgement he turns and sees Guy taking the whip from the guard. He approaches then, standing at his side resting the whip against the back of his neck letting him feel the glass and bone embedded in the knotted rope and he leans in close to whisper in his ear.

“Let this be a lesson, you do not want me as your enemy.” He leaves his side and takes up his position and the whip strikes his back in nine places diagonally from right shoulder to left hip. He grunts in pain inwardly screaming but not giving Guy or the Sheriff the satisfaction. The whip hits him a second time on the opposite side and his back feels sticky, wet with blood. The third strikes goes in the way of the first and he screams in pain wishing he had a gag as tears spill from his eyes.

He sees the crowd flinch before the fourth stroke hits in the same places and he feels light headed and his knees weaken as his blood splashes onto the platform. A woman in the crowd faints and some children are crying. He makes eye contact with one man, a villager from Clun, he had seen him distributing food from his cart and he had attempted to help him with the guards. A good man, so very few of them left, he takes his strength from the man and sees him nod as the final lash splits open his skin. He makes no sound but his knees give out and the guards once more appear to untie him. He had thought Guy might come to his aid but he seems cold and distant coiling the bloody whip as he is dragged passed him.

His father looks pale and sick as the guards help him up the steps and into the castle and he follows after them. He is taken towards the dungeons and helped onto a bench while one of the guards retrieves his tunic and undershirt and they then leave him in peace. His back aches and he feels sick and light-headed but he cannot stand to be in the castle a moment longer than necessary and he pulls his tunic over his head hissing as the material brushes against the open wounds on his back.

“Allan, what in God’s name are you doing?” His father demands.
“I am going home,” he replies breathlessly as his vision spins and blurs.

“You are in no condition to travel, you need a physician.”

“I will not spend a moment longer in this hell hole!” His vision spins again and he tries to stay upright as he staggers down the hallway. He needs to leave, he cannot stay, his vision becomes distorted and he must walk into the wall as something blocks his path hard and unmoving.

“Why is he walking around?” Someone argues from above him, he knows the voice.

“He will not see reason,” his father answers. Were they talking about him? Bile rises in his throat and he hopes it lands on Guy’s fancy boots as he doubles over and spills his guts. Someone gently strokes his hair as though he was a dog.

“You’re a dog, I’m going home,” he has to leave but his legs feel so weak.

“I’ve got you,” he feels weightless, was he flying? Was he dead?

“What’s wrong with him?”

“Blood loss, Allan, stay awake.” Why the hell should he, he owed Guy nothing; if he was so worried about him he shouldn’t have done it in the first place. “Stay wake!” He insists with a full body shake, how? Was he in the man’s arms? “Tell me how much you hate me.” His tunic was soaked in blood; he was never going to get that out. “Guards! Someone fetch the physician. Stay awake.” It would be easier to sleep, if he closed his eyes the pain might stop. “Allan! Don’t you dare...Allan! Where is the physician? Open your eyes...Allan...Allan...Allan...”
He awakens disorientated and his back feels like it is on fire. He is laid on his stomach on a bed but where he is he has no idea. His torso is bare and his back is no longer sticky with his own blood so he thinks his wounds must have been tended. He was at the physician’s perhaps? The bed dips as another body joins him and he opens his eyes to find Guy laid beside him.

“Get away from me,” he tries to move away and his jerky actions upset the wounds on his back and he cries in pain dropping back down to the mattress.

“Calm yourself.”

“I’d be calm if you left me alone haven’t you done enough?”

“Ungrateful wretch, isn’t he?” Another voice calls out, the Sheriff? Must he endure more humiliation?

“What do you want?” He tries not to think about Guy in bed with him while the Sheriff watches because...no, just no. His stomach is empty but the thought turns his stomach regardless.

“Just making sure you were still alive and you are and as obnoxious as ever. I thought that whipping might have extinguished your fire, though it seems I was wrong.”

“Get out and take your dog with you,” he hisses.

“My dear boy do you not know where you are? You are in my castle, in Guy’s room you are in no position to order us out of anywhere. Is he always like this?”

“Unfortunately,” Guy responds as though he was not in the room and he gets up from the bed. “Your father is worried sick, I shall have a second bed brought to my room and you may both stay here until you are well.” Though he says ‘may’ be has a feeling his stay was not optional.

“Selfless, strong, noble,” the Sheriff begins to list, were they meant to be Guy’s attributes? “You need a big strong man to protect you from yourself.” He must have fallen and hit his head as he cannot believe the Sheriff is actively encouraging him to court Guy. It was madness, complete insanity and he wanted no part of it.

“It was a big strong man that hurt me,” he reminds them both. Guy was overeager with the whip and the lacerations were deeper than they needed to be and would undoubtedly scar.

“If that is what he is willing to do to you imagine what he would do to your rivals.” It is a piss poor sales pitch, Guy needed a better representative if he wished to ever be endeared to him again and frankly he did not see that happening. “We’ll leave you in peace, let you think things through.” They both leave and he wonders what it is he is supposed to think through.

He had a horrible feeling that the Sheriff was throwing Guy at him but why? If he cared at all for Guy then he should speak sense to him and not encourage him to pursue a loveless relationship that led nowhere. Guy was still young, he could father more children and he would make a good dutiful husband as he had already proven but his pursuit of him had to stop. He would sleep with him if he thought it would put an end to it but he has a feeling it would not. He is missing something, something was set in motion on the King’s birthday, Guy had dropped all pretences of courting Marian and instead turned his attention on him. He had thought it was his own words inviting Guy to play that had started this whole mess but perhaps he was mistaken. Guy had used his name, rubbed
against him, watched him all night and then insisted on walking him home. Guy had killed Robin, attempted to murder the king and returned home changed and wanting him. He was missing something, there had to be a reason for his pursuit and whatever it was it didn’t bode well for him.

“I hope you are pleased with yourself!” Another scolding, this one from his father, wonderful.

“Told to do something!” He protests.

“Through here, next to the bed.” He looks over his shoulder wondering what his father means and sees two guards carry in a single bed. They place it beside the bed he currently lays on and depart. “What exactly does getting yourself killed accomplish?” His father asks and sits on the new bed. His skin is pale and his eyes look sunken with bags beneath them as though he has not slept.

“I thought there was something in Clun,” he confesses.

“Stop this witch hunt, your back was a warning it’ll be your neck next. We must make peace with them; prove that we are loyal to the Sheriff.”

“They mean to kill the king,” he whispers angrily, ashamed of his father’s cowardice.

“So what if they are? The king has been gone too long fighting Rome’s war, he has betrayed his people. Men die at war all of the time, are we not all equal?”

“You do not truly believe what you are saying.”

“Better if I did, but even I know a lost cause when I see one. These men, those dark robed anti-Christ’s I have seen them. They are within these very walls and we are trapped within the lion’s den. We must be careful and compliant and I would see you make amends with Sir Guy.”

“No!” he cries, outraged. “You have seen what that man did to me.”

“To punish you, to show you what he was capable of. He almost killed you.”

“And you would throw me to him.”

“It is for your own good.”

“You speak as if you have sold me already, have you father? Have you sold out like those other yellow-bellied nobles? Thank God I was born a male or you would have me marry him.”

“You could do worse than Sir Guy.”

“Tell me you haven’t sold me.”

“I haven’t sold you!” His father finally snaps. “Though if he were to make an offer I might accept. You need protecting and I can no longer protect you.”

“I need protecting from those offering protection and I can protect myself. If you do not think so and think me no better than a child or a woman then leave and consider yourself no longer my father.” His words are harsh but true and he can no longer bring himself to look at his father.

Nothing is said in a long while until he finally hears his father move from the bed. He expects to hear the door a moment later but instead the bed dips beside him as his father sits down. “We must be careful, I watched you come into this world I do not wish to see you leave it.”

“I will heal and I will get you your proof and all will be well, I promise.”
“One name and it will be enough, tread carefully.”

Not much treading is done in the first few days as sudden movements tended to split his skin so he was laid in bed. His father attended him as did Pitts the physician looking smug as he rubbed alcohol onto his wounds and smirking as he cried out. Guy would come and go claiming the room was his and he could do as he pleased, his father tried to intercept him as much as possible but he was a wily determined predator and always found his way onto the bed beside him. To appease his father he behaved himself and allowed Guy’s touch but did not encourage it and answered his questions politely.

By the fifth day he was out of bed and thankful for it. Lately it seemed he was wasting away lying in bed suffering from some injury inflicted by an assumed friend. The Sheriff and Guy insisted that his father should leave now that he was able to stand and claimed they would take care of him. It was not a suggestion and as they were both playing along his father reluctantly left while he stayed behind in the snake-pit.

He tried to be moved to another room but Guy would have none of it and once his father left Guy immediately returned to his room choosing to sleep on the second bed. It was nice sharing a room, almost like having a brother and he wonders if that was what it would be like had Tom survived. He wonders what happened to Isabella when he thinks of his own sibling. Guy was a doting older brother and once brought her down by the lake; she was a bookish girl, quiet as a mouse and certainly didn’t deserve to be chased off her own land. He can only assume that she had died as the open road was not safe for a young girl and Guy refused to mention her.

After the first week they begin to lock him in the room with no warning. He does not know why, his snooping had not been obvious rather wishful as he was hoping one of the Black Knights would pass him in the hallway. Still he sees it as an opportunity to go through Guy’s things and aside from an array of weapons and an abundance of black leather there really isn’t much more to the man. No wedding ring in remembrance of Meg, no lock of hair from his son Seth, his family things were lost in the fire and the only thing he finds is a stone hidden on the top shelf. He had to climb on a chair to see it and he can find no reason for it being there, perhaps it was lodged in his boot one day, but why would he place it so high?

He wonders what they are up to when they lock him inside. Surely it is something to do with the traitor charter, or they are eating cake and he can’t have any, the Sheriff had his moments of being completely ridiculous and utterly spiteful. Guy was guilty of the same, like father like adopted son. He did not know Sir Roger but he imagines he was spinning in his grave with how his son turned out.

He wants to ask why they lock him in but the question would do more harm than good. Better to pretend he does not know, better to pretend he is a lazy noble that spends most of his day in bed being waited on. It works, perhaps too well as Guy keeps sneaking into his bed while he is sleeping. He does nothing, they are not even touching when he awakens to find him in bed with him, it’s as though he just wishes to be near him which would be sweet if it did not make his skin crawl.

On his third week at the castle he takes to lingering around the War Room as he has noticed the scent of smoke from recently used candles in the usually vacant room. He uses a staff to walk around, which is completely unnecessary as he can walk perfectly fine but it makes him appear weak and unthreatening and he is overlooked.

It is on a journey to the War Room using the servant’s corridor that he finally sees his first Black Knight. He is striding purposefully in his direction and he quickly hides behind a wall as he has yet
to be seen. The moment the Knight approaches he steps out and collides into the man, dropping his staff to the floor and moaning pitifully. To his surprise the Knight leans down to collect his staff and he pretends to trip, grasping out towards the man, pulling the material from his face as he lands on the floor and genuinely cries in pain.

He looks up startled to see Lord Buckingham staring back at him in concern. He holds his hand out to help him up and he takes it, discreetly sliding off the too big silver ring and pocketing it while the man retrieves his staff and passes it to him before striding off. It is hard not to look over his shoulder and stare at him in shock. Lord Buckingham was one of the men responsible for recruiting soldiers for the crusade and he believed he was one of King Richard’s staunchest allies.

As alarming as it is he has all the proof he needs and he means to petition the Sheriff so that he may leave. There were too many ears in the castle and what he and his father were about to do was dangerous should the wrong people get wind of it. Fortunately he is allowed an audience with the Sheriff and he parts with his staff and marches into the Great Hall without a wince of discomfort.

“Ah Allan, come to ruin my day?” The Sheriff is sat at his table, quill in hand with many letters before him. Guy is there too, sat on the edge of the table with his arms folded looking disapproving.

“I have come to ask if I may leave, I thank you for your hospitality my back is now healed and I wish to return to my father.” He does not like the desperate look Guy casts the Sheriff.

“I think it best you stay here where we can keep an eye on you in case you do yourself a mischief.” Guy noticeably relaxes and he realises this is going to be harder than he thought.

“Am I under arrest?” He asks and the Sheriff shakes his head in reply. “Then lawfully you cannot keep me here. My father is ill as well you know I must be with him.” He takes enjoyment from the Sheriff’s narrowed eyes but does not show it.

“Very well, Guy will escort you home.”

“No!” He answers too loudly and too quickly by the expressions on the two men’s faces. “I could not impose on anymore of your generosity than I already have.”

“Guy will escort you,” the Sheriff reiterates and resumes writing his letters leaving no room for argument.

“Thank you,” he says with a bow possibly laying it on too thick but the Sheriff has lost interest anyway so it matters little. Instead Guy follows him out and they head directly to the stables as there was nothing to pack in Guy’s room. The trousers, undershirt and boots he wore were his own, washed and finally returned. His tunic had been soaked in blood and was ruined and had been thrown away. During his stay he had been given clothing, black, too large for him and he had a feeling he was wearing Guy’s old clothes if the expression on his face was anything to go by. He made sure to leave every item behind and take only what was his, which were the clothes on his back.

His horse had been left in the stable since the Council of Nobles as he had hired a horse and cart to travel to Clun. He finds himself waiting as the stable boys saddle both his horse and Guy’s. Guy is quiet beside him most likely sulking because he hadn’t gotten his own way, he could be terribly childish for a grown man. He prefers the quiet as he was less likely to give the game away if nothing was said and what could he possibly say to Guy, a man that deliberately misconstrues everything and he knows it is deliberate, the man was not a simpleton.

Guy keeps casting looks his way and opening and quickly closing his mouth. He wishes he would
just say it whatever it was but Guy was a man of few words, he’d engage in an argument but once that ended it was back to sulking and dark glares. He must remember not to lose his temper with him; after all he was riding alongside a man that almost whipped him to death. He would have behaved himself had he known there was glass, nails and bone embedded in the whip or he’d like to think he would but truth was he’d do it all over again to save starving villagers.

They come upon the village of Locksley and Guy has yet to speak even though he clearly wishes to. The Good Samaritan in him wants to help and open the channel of conversation for him but he won’t, he can’t. They arrive at Bonchurch and Guy dismounts and helps him down as though he was incapable or a woman, he was tired of being treated like a woman.

He stares at Guy expectantly because he was most certainly not getting an invitation inside. “Would you come by Locksley Manor tomorrow?” Guy finally asks but instead of his usual tense stare he seems off as though scared of rejection. “It is my birthday and there’s to be a party,” he could almost jump for joy and kiss the man. A party where all the corrupted nobles would be along with the Sheriff of that he had no doubt. He and his father could send a message to the king without detection.

“I would love to come,” he says far too enthusiastically, which seems to startle Guy as he was undoubtedly bracing himself for rejection.

“Truly?” He nods and Guy smiles and it would have warmed his heart had Guy been a good man but he was not. “I will have a seat for you at the head table.” A seat of honour and one beside Guy and the Sheriff; a good seat to have to keep tabs on them both.

“Thank you, I shall see you tomorrow,” he leans up and presses a kiss to Guy’s cheek and steps away. Guy likes to treat him like a woman so he would behave like one and give him something to think about. Guy touches his cheek in disbelief while he makes it to his door and waves, Guy waves in return and he enters his home locking the door behind him.

“Allan? Allan is that you?” His father asks walking from the kitchen into the parlour.

“I have proof, father;” he whispers and then holds a finger to his lips and listens for Guy to leave. Once he does he pulls the stolen ring from his pocket and hands it to his father. “Buckingham.”

“Buckingham?” His father asks in disbelief. “If Buckingham is signing then Spencer must be one of them too, I cannot believe it of him, surely he is there under duress.”

“Does it matter? The Sheriff got to him and he was one of the King’s most loyal followers, so who else could he have got to? The Knights are readying to sign; while I was at the castle they would lock me in my room and I think it is because more of them arrived. As I left the castle stables today there were twice as many horses from when I arrived. We must warn the King.”

“I know a man, Roger of Stoke. He means to ship out and join the crusade, if I could send a message to him he could warn the King but I do not know how when you are under surveillance.”

“I am under surveillance but you are not and tomorrow is Sir Guy’s birthday and I have promised I would attend. The Sheriff will be there, some of the Black Knights too; it is the perfect opportunity to send the message.” His father nods.

“We’ll see it done then, no matter the consequences.”

“No matter the consequences,” he agrees.
For Guy’s birthday celebration he adorns robes as red as blood and manages to find him a gift. A knife, the man is fond of his weapons after all and it was a strange thing, small with a curved blade, Saracen design apparently, he had bought it off a returning wounded soldier. He had wanted to keep it but he had no other suitable gift and it was a small sacrifice for the greater good.

He sees his father off as he rides out to Nettlestone to meet with Roger of Stoke and he watches to make sure his father is not followed and then walks the short journey to Locksley Manor. The place is full of well-wishers and there are several guards outside that eye him suspiciously as he enters, possibly because he had stabbed two of their friends in the thigh.

As he walks in there is a fool dressed in orange and green entertaining the crowd. To the left at the far wall a long table has been set and the Sheriff occupies the first seat, the second by Guy and a third remains empty by his side. He has not been seen and he walks around the perimeter of the room, excusing himself as he has to push passed people to get to the table.

“Allan,” Guy says while standing and coming around the table to greet him. “I did not think you would come.”

“Forgive me, I could not find anything to wrap your gift with,” he half lies and brings the knife from his pocket wrapped in silk.

“You did not have to get me anything,” he says the words but eagerly takes the gift and he wonders if no one else had brought him gifts. “I have never seen a knife of this like before,” he finds that hard to believe from a Saracen impersonator.

“I hope you like it.”

“I...I do not have the words, thank you.” To his surprise Guy leans down and presses a kiss to his cheek in front of his guests and not one word was said, not even a look of disgust, as if the action was natural. Guy takes his hand and leads him to his seat and he cannot complain because he had opened this door, yesterday he had behaved like a maid and now he was being treated as such.

Guy helps him into his seat and sits beside him and he notices the Sheriff smirking at him so he smiles back. Playing nice with his boy means he is playing nice with the Sheriff and right now he needs them to believe he is one of them.

“Could your father not attend?” Guy asks conversationally rather than suspiciously taking a deep drink from his cup. He notices the wine pitcher on the table and fills Guy’s cup when it is put down as well as filling the Sheriff’s and his own.

“He is unwell and sends his best wishes and apologises for not being here.”

“At least you are here,” his hand reaches up to caress his cheek and he leans into his touch. No one seems to care about how open they are being or that their actions warranted a public execution. There seemed to be no disgust or ill-will as though two men together were not seen as unnatural to them.

“My Lords and Ladies, give me your ears!” The fool announces and Guy drops his hand to hear what he has to say. “Richard the Lionheart they call him, now going into battle in a foreign land it’s not the heart of a lion you want is it, huh?” Some of the guests laugh as the fool disparages the King. “Since when did a heart hurt anybody? Come on then! Come on, I’ve got the heart of a lion!” The
Guy turns to him and he wonders if he wished to know if he enjoyed the entertainment so he claps the loudest and wipes imaginary tears of mirth from his eyes. Thankfully the fool departs to do some tricks outside while the guests eat their fill and drink the wine while some minstrels come to play music. He stays seated beside Guy and constantly tops up his cup and tries to do the same with the Sheriff but unlike his father the Sheriff knew his limits and wished to keep a clear head, for what he did not know.

That does not mean the man is opposed to having fun as he manages to talk the Sheriff into dancing with him, which encourages others to dance, multiple same sex pairings much to his surprise. Guy eventually leaves his seat unsteady on his feet and he takes him off to the side so they can sway together as the dances are too complicated for his drunken state.

He loses sight of the Sheriff and he does not see any unfamiliar faces in the crowd so he believes he is mistaken for thinking the Black Knights would show themselves here. A commotion outside gets his attention, more guards appear talking insistently amongst themselves and pointing towards the manor. He has a terrible feeling that it is something to do with the letter but he knows without Guy the guards were useless to act.

“Come,” he calls pulling Guy along to the back door.

“Where are we going?”

“I have another gift for you, come.” Guy follows obediently and they exit the manor. He looks aroundmaking sure all the guards have fled to the front of the house and leads Guy into the stables. The older man watches him with glazed over eyes and a smile on his lips but does not touch him. To his horror the guards begin to call for him.

“I must go.”

“What about your gift?” He tries to cajole and reaches for the button on Guy’s leather trousers.

“They can wait,” he says leaning against the wall. He quickly unbuttons his trousers and sinks to his knees staring into Guy’s eyes as he releases his cock and takes him in hand. He hadn’t thought he’d ever be in this position again, but he promised his father he would buy him as much time as possible, whatever means necessary.

“Gisborne!” He stops as he hears the Sheriff call for Guy.

“There is no privacy here,” he says with a pout as Guy tucks his cock away and moves as if to answer the Sheriff’s call. “Come to the lake with me,” he offers because though the Sheriff was capable of acting alone he usually preferred Guy to do all of his dirty work.

“Gisborne, where the hell are you?” The Sheriff sounds closer and in an act of desperation he grabs Guy’s leg.

“Don’t go, come with me, I want you, Guy, I. Want. You.” He’s selling himself for King and
country but it was a worthy sacrifice if an immoral one. Guy looks torn, needing to adhere to his
master while wanting to go to the lake.

“Gisborne, what are you...oh I see, didn’t see you down there, Allan.” He doesn’t like the way the
Sheriff looks between them and really he should get off his knees and quit clutching Guy’s leg.
“Kissing in the dark? Plenty of time for that later, right now I’m not paying you to entertain the
locals, come along.” Guy helps him up and they both follow the Sheriff to the front of the manor
where even more guards have appeared.

He wants to ask what is going on but he dare not. Instead to his horror he watches a Black Knight
ride up holding the reins of a second horse that has a body slung over the saddle. Guy walks over
after speaking with the Sheriff and pulls on the man’s legs pulling him off the horse and the body,
who he assumes is Roger of Stoke falls to the ground on his back.

His heart pounds in his chest as he watches Guy route in the dead man’s clothing searching for
something. How did they know about the letter? Had his father signed the note? Guy finds the letter
and pulls it out along with the stolen ring and hands both items to the Sheriff. His father must have
been watched by the Black Knight that was staring at him, who was it, Buckingham? Spencer? Why
would they follow his father or perhaps Roger of Stoke was under surveillance.

There is an air of confusion surrounding the note and the dead man and he uses it as a cover to
escape. He takes one of the guard’s horses and gallops all the way to Bonchurch and immediately
runs inside finding his father in the parlour steadying his nerves with a cup of wine.

“We must leave!” He shouts grabbing his father’s arm.

“The message, it is sent, it is done.”

“We are done,” he hisses knocking the cup from his father’s hand. “We have to leave.”

“I shall pack.”

“There is no time, please hurry.” He half carries his father outside and tries to help him onto the horse
he had taken when their courtyard is suddenly overrun by the Sheriff’s men and the Sheriff himself.

“Going somewhere?” The Sheriff asks and reluctantly he releases his father and stands beside him.
“A little birdie told me you were up to no good,” the Sheriff continues addressing his father. “Telling
tales to the King? Tut tut, I thought you had learnt your lesson when I had your son flogged for
questioning my authority but perhaps another lesson is in order. Guards!” Two guards step forward
with lit torches and make their way towards his home.

“No!” He calls out, blocking their paths leaving his father vulnerable and he is grabbed by two
guards in his absence.

“Gisborne!” The Sheriff calls and Guy approaches looking murderous as though he was completely
aware of what happened in the stable was all a ruse and he was far too sober for his liking.

“Guy, please don’t,” he ignores the other two nonentities and tries to reason with Guy. “You lost
your home in the same way, please don’t do this.” Guy cups his cheek and looks down into his eyes.

“You think I care,” he says softly and draws the caressing hand back to smack him across the face.
He holds his cheek stunned while Guy snatches one of the torches from a guard and marches
towards his home. He gives chase hearing his father call out for him begging him to stand down but
he cannot let this happen. Instead he grabs Guy’s arm and the Master at Arms draws his hand back
and smacks him across the face with the back of his hand splitting his lip and knocking him to the
floor. He follows up with a hard kick to his stomach knocking the air from his lungs but he gets on his knees despite the pain to stop him. “Hold him,” Guy barks at the guards and they take an arm each, holding him down on the ground while Guy enters his home.

All is quiet as everyone stares in wonder and not five minutes later Guy exits leaving a burning inferno behind him. A madness comes over him and while the guards are distracted he runs towards his home but he is apprehended before he makes it to the door cursing and screaming as he is dragged away.

They place his father in a wooden cage and due to his behaviour he is tossed in too. His father holds him as they are taken away watching their home drown in flames and all of their worldly possessions go up in smoke.

It is a sombre trip to Nottingham and no one speaks, not even the Sheriff to boast about his coup. He takes the time to cry silently so they may never see his weakness and see how much they have hurt him. He supposes it does not really matter as he and his father were likely to die on the morrow. His father remains composed beside him keeping a stiff upper lip and he tries to draw his strength from him.

When they arrive at the castle both he and his father are marched into the Great Hall surrounded by guards as they are not cuffed and are brought to stand before the Sheriff, who does not look boastful but rather scared.

“Who else have you told?” The Sheriff demands slamming his hands down on the table.

“No one,” his father replies without fear.

“Do you expect me to believe that? What about your friend hmm? Sir Edward? You two are thick as thieves always trying to undermine me!”

“I sent a letter, I told no one.” His father replies evenly, looking ahead indifferent to the Sheriff’s ire.

“Well perhaps a stay in the dungeon might jog your memory.”

“Sheriff I must protest my father is ill and the dungeon is no place for him.”

“Well he should have thought about that before he backed the wrong horse and as for you, you are under house arrest, oh wait castle arrest seeing as you no longer have a home.” The Sheriff cruelly teases smiling widely.

“Put me in the dungeon.”

“Aww do you wanna stay with your daddy? Too bad! I’ll find you a room.” The Sheriff teases coming to stand in front of him.

“Not with Guy!” He protests.

“Oh don’t worry about that, Gisborne doesn’t like you anymore, he’s finally opened his eyes and seen you for what you are.” The Sheriff moves on to stand before his father. “You’ve raised a right one there; did you know he offered to sleep with all my guards? We had to whip his back to keep him off it.” His father’s fists clench in anger and he reaches over to hold him back. “Ooh touched a nerve, did I? There’s fight in the old corpse yet! Guards!” The guards step forward awaiting instruction. “Take him to the dungeon,” he orders pointing to his father.

“Please Sheriff, please send me instead, punish me.” Guards hold him back as he tries to reach for his
father as they take him away.

“Oh but my dear boy I am punishing you, it’s just killing you knowing he is in a cold dank dirty cell because of you. You will learn obedience or else I might just forget to feed your father.”

“No!”

“No breakfast.”

“No!”

“No dinner either, you really must hate your father.”

“Please, please let him go he is old and cannot harm you. Punish me, kill me!”

“Kill you?” The Sheriff asks alarmed. “But if you’re dead then who will entertain my guards?” His eyes widen in disbelief, the Sheriff can’t mean what he thinks he means. “You should be careful of the promises you make. Guards, take him to the guest suite and lock him in.” The guards grab him and drag him from the hall and up endless stairs to almost the top of the castle where he is thrown into the first room and the door is slammed and locked.

He doesn’t bother to look around instead he beats at the door and screams in frustration. The Sheriff has deliberately chosen this room to keep him as far away from his father as possible. This high up the servants would not be the same so there was no way to check on his father or pass messages across not that there was anything to say. There was always a chance they would be caught, they knew the risks and now they must suffer the consequences.
Chapter 12

For one week he is left alone in isolation, he is clearly on a disused level and too high up to call to anyone below. He thought the starvation would be crueler than the isolation and he’s surprised to find that he is wrong. It was strange missing sound, the crackling of a fire, the scraping of a chair against stone, the splash of water during washing even that annoying cockerel crowing every morning.

He has never been on his own before, his father has always been there. It is strange not hearing the floor boards creak as his father tries to sneak down the stairs without waking him or the endless pouring of wine he has unfortunately become accustomed to hearing. He hopes his father is well and that they are feeding him, at least in the dungeon he would not be alone though it was a small comfort. He dreads to think what the Sheriff is telling him, but thankfully he had not fulfilled his threat of giving him to the guards. He had thought a room so high up was an inconvenience for guards looking to slake their lust but that first night he had not moved from the door expecting it to be opened and he would be assaulted.

Distantly he can hear the bell tolling in welcome and he goes over to his window and looks out. The fanfare sounds next as he sees a carriage enter the courtyard but the men that climb out look no more than ants at this height and he cannot see who it is.

He was fortunate to be given a room with a window and he believed they had made a mistake but even if he tied all of his bed linen and his clothes together he could still not make it safely down. He had considered setting light to the carpet causing enough smoke to cause panic and in the confusion he would crawl out but considering no one has checked on him he is glad he had not done that as it would have only resulted in his death.

He sits back on the four post bed and wonders who could be in the carriage. Prince John maybe? As far as he knew the traitor charter had yet to be signed and King Richard was still alive so it made little sense to be him. Due to the secrecy of the Black Knights a member of their flock would not receive a fanfare, so he was at a loss.

A key in the lock makes him turn to face the door in surprise. A face, a person at long last and perhaps some food. The door opens and he looks into the gleeful eyes of the Sheriff and behind him stands Guy with something in his arms and his spirits are dashed as soon as they were raised.

“Thought I left something in here,” the Sheriff states and enters the room with Guy following silently behind him refusing to make eye contact. He deliberately stares at him forcing him to face up to what he has done. “I see you have been redecorating,” the Sheriff observes kicking aside a knocked over chair.

“To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“No one of that fire is gone, good. I have a job for you.” He wants to outright refuse but perhaps there could be something in it for him, or at the very least he could earn a favour for his father. “I have a guest, a Count, Friedrich of Bulgaria and I would like you to keep him company.”

“In what way?”

“In whatever way he desires, Friedrich likes pretty boys and what kind of host would I be if I denied him your company?”
“And if I refuse?”

“You haven’t asked about your father, he is doing well but anyone could have an accident in the dungeon, it’s a dangerous place.” The threat is obvious, do not do as he asks and his father’s life is forfeit.

“What if he realises my heart is not in it?”

“That’s fine; it’s not your heart he wants.” The Sheriff makes a gesture with his hand and Guy slings burgundy leather clothing at his head. “Clean yourself up and put those on there’s a good boy.” The Sheriff then leaves but Guy stays behind.

“You can’t make me do this.”

“Why? I thought a duplicitous tramp like you would jump at the chance to be on your knees again. The Count is very rich, you like that, don’t you? He could fuck you on a bed full of gold coins,” Guy turns away, disgusted with him or disgusted at what he just said, probably both.

“I am not a whore.”

“For the right price you are.”

“Bitter that you can’t afford me?” It’s a terrible idea picking a fight with Guy but damn the man was insufferable.

“You heard the Sheriff, make yourself presentable and meet us in the Great Hall, chop chop.” Guy then storms out of his room but leaves the door wide open. Reluctantly he collects the clothes that were thrown at him and leaves the room in search of a servant who might show him the way to a bath.

He wants to take his time but he knows he will not be punished for his tardiness but his father will be. They knew his weakness and they would exploit it at every opportunity. So he bathes quickly and washes the smell of smoke from his hair and trims his beard as it has grown during his captivity. He can’t decide who is responsible for the leather attire as it was tight fitting and left nothing to the imagination and it was difficult to walk.

Heads are turned as he makes his way to the Great Hall, both men and women stare at him appreciatively some not even attempting to hide the hunger in their eyes. He should feel flattered but it only makes him feel sick. He takes deep breaths before entering the Great Hall and looks over the balcony surprised to see the hall has become a games room. He walks down the steps and takes the offered hand that reaches for him as he reaches the last step and turns to see Guy looking at him with a fierce hunger he remembers.

“You look...” he shakes his head and the hunger turns to disgust. “Cheap.”

“So do you, darling,” it is petty, this bickering between them.

“Ah Allan!” The Sheriff calls far too cheerfully for his liking. He strides over to him with a man following behind him and Guy drops his hand he hadn’t realised he was still holding. “Count Friedrich, meet Allan a-Dale.” A man in colourful clothes steps forward and doffs his pointed white hat with an elaborate bow. His hair is short, curled, and dark but greying at the temples but his face is smooth and his dark eyes are warm and he is glad he is a middle-aged handsome man that clearly cares for his grooming and personal hygiene.

“Had I known what awaited me here I would have employed winged horses,” Count Friedrich says
in an accented voice, looking at him and no other. He can hear Guy shift behind him and no doubt the overgrown child was pulling faces.

“Allan has made it his personal responsibility to make sure your stay is as comfortable as possible.” The Sheriff practically whispers seductively with emphasis on the word comfortable.

“Really?” The Count turns to the Sheriff eagerly.

“I’m very happy to make your acquaintance,” he finally speaks as the Sheriff glares at him over the Count’s shoulder.

“Oh come come acquaintances are for old ladies and priests, we will dispense with such formalities. I am already your friend and always your servant.” The Count takes his hand and kisses the back of it and he can hear Guy tutting in disgust and smiles. “Do you play?” The Count asks, sweeping his arm out towards the games room. The Sheriff is nodding wildly behind the Count that he too finds himself nodding. “Good, I have some skill at dice, perhaps I could teach you?” The Sheriff is nodding again so he nods. “Use your voice; I do love your accent.”

“I would love for you to teach me dice, I have some skill at cards, perhaps later I could show you?” The Count holds out his arm and he holds the crook of his elbow and turns to smirk at Guy. “I have so much to show you.” He says while glaring at his old friend.

“I look forward to you showing me.” If looks could kill he would surely be dead as Guy glares right back at him but the Sheriff looks cheerful and waves him away as the Count takes him over to the dice table. “I do not think your tall friend likes me,” the Count confesses as they reach the table.

“Do not mind him, he does not like anybody.”

“Not even you?”

“Especially not me.” The Count eyes him suspiciously but says nothing and patiently waits his turn to throw the dice. He takes the opportunity to look around the room wondering what it was all in aid of, were the Black Knight gamblers? Were they ready to reveal themselves and coming to a games room to gamble could be a smoke screen for the fact that they were here to sign a pact. He could not see Buckingham or Spencer so perhaps the pact was still unsigned.

“You do not say much,” the Count observes as the noble woman playing is on a winning streak. “Perhaps some wine?” He nods but in truth he would prefer food and to see his father and he’s not entirely sure why he is at the Count’s side. If he was to merely warm his bed why make him act the companion, why was he even here? That dandy wasn’t a Black Knight and he was quite sure he was not plotting to kill the king he seemed to be a rich Count looking to enjoy himself in a foreign country.

They were going to fleece him, of course. The games room was no smoke screen it was just a way to cheat their guest out of his money. The tables were possibly rigged, he’s heard of such things and he was quite good at sleight of hand himself, a rather good pickpocket too. So then he was also a cover a pretty face to distract him and ply him with drinks, someone the Count could show off for and make ludicrous bets in front of. He almost feels sorry for the man as he was undoubtedly invited here under false pretences just so they could empty his pockets.

The Count passes him a cup of wine from a passing waitress and they tap cups and take a drink. He knows the wine, dark red and potent the same Guy supplied to his father and to him the night he took advantage of him in his bed. He looks around the room noticing rather a few serving girls wandering around with a tray full of cups of wine. Were there more nobles being fleeced as well as the Count?
The woman on the winning streak audibly moans and drops her head into her hands. He looks to the table and watches her money taken to the house. Foolish woman, the house always wins.

“Perhaps I will have better luck,” Friedrich announces and throws the dice rolling a seven. He does not know the rules of the game but apparently that was a win. Those around the table cheer and he wonders if they are hired as they did not cheer so fervently for the woman that played moments ago. He looks around again noticing Guy glaring at him across the room but pays him little mind and sees people stood around but not playing, as though they are extras in a play. He realises the room is naught but a stage and he is a player albeit under duress.

“You bring me luck,” Friedrich announces and kisses his cheek before finishing his cup and snatching a new one. He is a player too and right now he is playing his role far too well. The wins keep coming and the false cheer increases but the Count’s bets stay small and measured clearly the game play of a man that likes the game rather than the money.

When the Count is into his fourth cup the planted audience start to suggest he up the ante and their favour and joy encourages him to higher the stakes and the next roll is a win. When he higher it once more he takes the first loss of the night and the snakes with their hisses encourage him to go higher and win back what he lost. It is a slippery slope and he cannot bear to see this man swindled when he had done nothing wrong but accept an invitation from a friend, in Nottingham that was a very damning thing to do.

“Apologises my luck must have ran out,” he says taking hold of the Count’s hand when he goes to place another bet.

“Another game perhaps?” Friedrich offers so willing to be parted from his cash. Guy is still glaring but now the Sheriff is looking murderous.

“I think you need a lie down,” he whispers and Friedrich smiles and leans up and kisses him. He’s happy to lean down being the taller of the two and opens his mouth while his eyes remain on Guy who is clenching his fists and being held back by the Sheriff. The Count’s tongue moves against his slowly almost timidly and he returns the kiss in the same fashion. He realises Vaisey and Guy had never meant for him to sleep with Friedrich calling him a whore was simply that, name calling.

“Yes, I think you are right.” Friedrich orders his men to collect his winnings and then takes his hand and leads him from the hall. He notices Guy lurches forward as if to follow but once again he is held back by Vaisey. He enjoys Guy’s rage, the man deserved it but then it dawns on him what he has accepted just to spite him.

Friedrich’s room is on the third floor, his guards and money in the room beside his own. He opens the door like a gentleman and he walks in feeling queasy. Friedrich locks the door behind him and sits on the bed and stares at him expectantly. With shaking hands he unclasps his burgundy leather coat and wills his tears away as he shrugs it off his shoulders.

Friedrich’s smile vanishes and he stands up and takes a hold of his wrists. “Why do you cry? I would not force myself on you; have you not come to me willingly?” The man is astute and he releases his wrists as if to prove himself while he turns to place his jacket onto a chair. “Did they do this to you?” Friedrich asks aghast and he realises he had shown the Count his scarred back.

“Yes,” he replies honestly.

“Did they tell you to sleep with me?”

“Yes.”
“I will be having words with this sheriff.”

“No, please don’t. He has my father in the dungeon and he will hurt him.” The Count looks riled but then sits on the bed confused.

“Why did he do this? I did not ask for this.”

“I gather he means to swindle you.”

“Ah, yes I thought my luck was too good to be true. Did he tell you to distract me and ply me with drink? I recall collecting my own wine.”

“He said I was to keep you company in any way you desired, truly that was all that was said. He dressed me like this and I realised the rest as the night progressed.”

“So they think me a foreign booby? I heard the Sheriff say as much.”

“I am sorry.”

“Not as sorry as I am, I think it wise I leave before these vultures peck my bones.” A nasty thought enters his head and it may cost him in the long run but it would certainly be fun to try.

“What if there was another option and you leave with extra coin and revenge?”

“I am listening.”

“The tables are set for you to win and only lose when you higher your bets, enjoy your stay here as you enjoy the games rather than the money, play as you have and you will leave with more than you came with. Not much more, the Sheriff will soon see you lose when he catches on and then you cut your stay short. The absence of your money and the loss of his own will hurt the Sheriff.”

The Count nods, listening avidly. “And what do you ask in return?”

“I wish for you to pretend that we have become lovers.”

“Your tall friend, he will not be pleased.”

“Good, it is my intention to displease him.”

The Count smirks and winks. “I accept your terms.”

“Excellent now could you order up some food, I’m starving.” The Count does as he asks and they spend the night eating pork and roasted peacock and bouncing on the bed making the most obscene noises while trying not to laugh.
In the morning they deliberately leave the room late and join the Sheriff and Guy for breakfast and they make a show of themselves kissing and touching each other. The Sheriff does his best to seem indifferent but Guy had always struggled with his emotions so he excused himself before he killed the Count, or him or anyone within the local vicinity.

After breakfast the Count asks him to accompany him on a horse ride and though he was under house arrest the Sheriff could not admit as much and agreed. It was all a plot for him to ride out to see what was left of Bonchurch and see if anything could be salvaged.

When they arrive it is far worse than he imagined and there was naught but scorched earth and debris as the rest had either burned to ashes or was looted. “What happened here?” Friedrich asks, as he gets down from his horse.

“The Sheriff happened,” he replies cryptically and walks over to the scorched earth kicking aside burnt wooden beams that were neither use nor ornament. He realises the Count is confused knowing there was somewhere he wished to visit and not quite comprehending the significance of the remnants of a bonfire. He does not have the words to express the importance of the building that once stood there that was now reduced to ashes. It was his home, his birthplace, the last memories of his mother and of a brother he knew for a day. It was a triumph for the a-Dales, a haven for the wronged locals and now it was gone.

He kicks another lump of ash and looks down to find a blackened seashell. He leans down and wipes the soot off as best he can and then pockets it before returning to his horse. There was nothing here for him now that much was certain; he was nothing more than the Sheriff’s pawn forced into a life of servitude.

“Do you wish to return?” Friedrich asks concerned noticing his sombre mood.

“No, I am enjoying my freedom; shall we ride through the woods?” It is strange riding through the woods without leaving silver at the Giving Tree and knowing they were safe regardless. He wants to keep on riding until he was safely away but nowhere was safe and he could not leave his father at the Sheriff’s mercy. Instead they ride back to the castle and find the Sheriff and Guy waiting for them.

“Nice ride was it?” The Sheriff asks with false sincerity.

“I thoroughly enjoyed myself last night,” Friedrich answers and he laughs and walks over to him. “Not that ride,” he corrects and presses a brief kiss on his lips noticing the Sheriff roll his eyes while Guy looks angry.

“Oh, yes it was pleasant.”

“I suppose you’d want to go to the games room now?” The Sheriff says making his motives clear and vindicating his earlier assumption and Friedrich yawns in response.

“I am very tired, this one is very spirited,” Friedrich says and pats his backside.

“Of course, we’ll see you fed and well rested.” He can almost hear the pain in the Sheriff’s voice. The Count doffs his hat with a bow and takes his hand and they pass by the Sheriff only the Sheriff grabs his arm, stilling him. “I require a word with Allan.”
“Very well,” Friedrich answers unsure looking towards him but he nods and waves him away.

“Well I’ve gotten you all wrong,” the Sheriff observes walking around him. “Fancy him do you? You certainly seem smitten.”

“I am only doing what you told me to do.”

“Oh because you are so obedient, I don’t trust you. I want him in the games room spending his damn money, stay off his cock and deliver him to me or do I need remind you what will happen to your father?” The Sheriff threatens invading his personal space.

“I have done nothing wrong; I am doing what you told me to do. I’ll bring the Count to the tables after he has rested.” The Sheriff glares at him as though he does not quite believe what he says.

“Very good, run along then.” He runs up the steps away from the Sheriff only to be caught by the arm by Guy and dragged close to him.

“Whore,” he whispers in his ear and he smacks Guy’s hand away and enters the castle going directly to Friedrich’s room.

“What did he say?” Friedrich asks as he bolts the door behind him.

“I am to bring you to the games room after you have rested.”

“What more?” Friedrich asks in concern and he sighs defeated.

“He threatened my father and Guy...nevermind about him.”

“The tall one? He has upset you.” Friedrich states rather than questions. “Why do you let him hurt you?”

“I do not let him do anything, Guy does as he pleases.”

“You must care for him to be so deeply hurt by him.”

“He was once my best friend who’s now a stranger and he thinks I’m a whore.” It sounds stupid saying it out loud because wasn’t that the point? He was deliberately hurting Guy in the same way Guy was deliberately hurting him. They knew each other far too well and now that the knives were out they were lunging at each other without mercy while both pretending neither cared.

“Shall I confess that we did nothing together?”

“No!...no I do not care what Guy says about me.” A lie and Friedrich can see it for what it is. “Get some rest and I’ll meet you in the games room. I will try and see my father.” Friedrich nods his consent and he unbolts the door and leaves the room.

He is not even at the end of the corridor before he passes Guy stood behind a pillar and he jumps, startled. “You’ve got to stop doing that,” he says clutching his frantic heart.

“Finished with your master already?” Guy practically spits the words and he realises he had come to spy on him. It seemed a silly thing to do, upsetting himself for no good reason or perhaps the Sheriff had sent him seeing through their ruse. He doubted it, the Sheriff wasn’t that perceptive so this must be Guy’s own doing.

“May I see my father?” Guy’s riled, no point upsetting him further with demands, politeness goes a long way.
“Why?” Guy finally asks after a rather long pause.

“Because I want to see if he is well.”

“No, why him?”

“Because he is my father?” He says questioningly convinced they were at cross purposes again.

“Will you cease with your incessant chatter about your father! Why did you spread your legs for the Count?”

“Oh...I...what?” The question threw him and he can only babble in reply.

Guy steps forward into his personal space. “Why him and not me?” He sounds heartbroken and vulnerable and perhaps he has been too long in the Sheriff’s company but he wishes to exploit that weakness.

“Is that what you want?” He asks seductively and takes one of Guy’s hands and places it on his leather-clad posterior. “You want me to spread my legs for you?” There is little point asking as Guy had confessed as much in the dungeon. “Do you want me to dress up as the Nightwatchman again and sneak into your bedroom and you catch me in the act and put me over your knee before putting me onto my back?” Okay he had thought about that scenario but that was in happier times.

Guy is breathing heavier and he leans up to press a kiss to his lips and he is denied when he tries to deepen it. “Tell me what you want,” he whispers against his lips. “I’ll do whatever you want,” Guy is practically putty in his hands now it was time to mould and shape him. “Let me see my father and look after him and I’ll be yours, once a week, I’ll do anything you want.” Much to his surprise Guy shoves him away with a look of disgust.

“Is that what you think of me?”

“Twice a week?” He offers instead.

“I would not bastardise my love for you in that way.” He feels as though he had been sucker punched as the air leaves his lungs and he feels like he is fighting for breath. Guy loved him...when, how, what? It made no sense; he burnt his house down for Christ sake that was not the action of a man in love.

The silence between them is tense and awkward and the expression on Guy’s face suggests he had said too much and unfortunately none of it was false. So he believed he was in love with him, hadn’t he felt the same way before he learnt who Guy truly was? So it was possible his feelings were genuine but then he thought the same with Guy and Marian and that had been one massive sham to spite the man he ended up murdering anyway.

“Three times a week?” He offers instead and Guy looks thoroughly insulted and storms off before he more than likely hit him again. He wants to call him a coward for leaving but really he’s not sure he could stomach his presence a moment longer.

He’s not sure what to do, if he continues on his journey it would look as though he was following Guy and he does not wish to take up anymore of the Count’s time by telling him things he need not know. More than ever he wishes Marian was here, she had a good head on her shoulders and he was sure she would give him some helpful advice. Failing that it would at least be nice to have someone to talk to so he could sort everything out because it was one big mess and he’s no longer sure who had caused it.
He stands in the corridor for a while giving Guy a chance to put distance between them before he continues his trek towards the dungeons. They probably will not allow him through the door and if he must he will shout just to let his father know that he was well and safe and hopefully his father will call back.

“Where are you going?” A guard asks at the entrance of the dungeon and really he should mind who comes out rather than who goes in.

“I have come to see my father,” he announces loudly in the hopes that his father could hear him. The guard before him is cold and unmoving until his companion places a hand on his shoulder.

“Stand down, Guy says it’s okay,” he informs them. “Go through,” he’s struck dumb for a moment. Guy said it was okay, when? Deciding not to look a gift horse in the mouth he runs down the steps should they change their minds and finds his father in the first single cell on his right.

“Allan?” His father looks frail and old and pale in the darkness of the cell.

“Father, are they mistreating you?”

“They will not bring me wine,” he laughs making a joke of his affliction.

“Tell me truly, are they feeding you?”

“Two meals a day and I have my own bed, fresh straw on the ground and they empty my chamber-pot daily. How are they treating you? I was told you were locked away and not fed but now you are before me,” it warms his heart to know his father is looked after and relieved to see him. “Why are you dressed like that?”

“The Sheriff has me entertaining his guest.”

“No!” His father replies aghast knowing what it meant.

“The Count is a good man and has done me no harm,” he tries to ease.

“A Count? From where? Is he one of them?”

“Bulgaria and no he is not he is just a rich man they wish to fleece and he will be leaving soon.” The Sheriff will catch on sooner rather than later that there is no money to be had and Friedrich would be forced to leave.

“Go with him.”

“What?”

“If he is a good man as you say he will take you with him. I imagine the Sheriff would wish to remain friends so then he will have to allow him to take you with him, say you are in love.”

“And leave you here?”

“Allan you must listen to me, go, get out while you still can.” The desperation in his father’s voice frightens him.

“You’re scaring me, what is the matter?” The slap of leather and the clink of spurs sounds on the top step and they both turn to look.

“Stay away from Guy, get away, I was wrong, I was so wrong, get out.”
“I can’t leave you.”

“You must, please you must get away from that man.”

“You’re not making any sense, what has he said? What has he done?” His father stills while looking over his shoulder and he knows that Guy is behind him. He wants to accuse him of winding up his father but he has no idea what could have possibly been said to scare his father so much.

“Lord Roy,” Guy says in greeting strangely playing nice with his father. “Allan, you are wanted in the games room,” he informs politely as if behaving for his father.

“Is there anything you need, pillow, extra blankets, more food?”

“You know what I want.”

“Come,” Guy says holding his hand out. He takes it unthinkingly while his father shakes his head at him.

“You know what I want!” Roy shouts after them.

“What does he want?” Guy’s asks tactlessly.

“What does he want?” Guy’s asks tactlessly.

“To be released from the dungeons,” he lies. As much as he loves his father he cannot do this for him, he cannot leave him behind. He does not know what has him spooked but he is sure it is only Vaisey whispering lies to upset him.

Guy does not release his hand as they leave the dungeon and instead he believes he will be escorted in this fashion all the way to the Great Hall. For a reason unknown to him Guy takes him around the servant corridor, a longer and senseless route but he does not question it. He once thought he had a great understanding of the man but lately he was truly a stranger to him blowing hot and cold on a whim.

They take the servant stairs to the first floor and walk along and there he encounters his second Black Knight. Though all he can see are his dark eyes something seems familiar about him, was it Buckingham again? The hall is not wide enough for three men side by side and so the Black Knight brushes against him, like Guy did to him so long ago, and as he passes his hand pats his backside.

His jaw drops but he remains staring ahead unsure of what just happened. That was not Buckingham, Buckingham was shorter and he did not have the guts to touch him in that way in front of Guy. The man clearly had a death wish and he longs to ask who it was but Guy wouldn’t tell him, as far as they know he knows nothing about the Black Knights, or so he thinks. Surely they must know as Roy had a ring and Buckingham would have had to confess that it was his and he would have given the description of the beggar who stole it.

Guy must not have seen what happened considering no one died and he is taken to the Great Hall in silence. The room is full once more though if they are genuine gamblers he does not know. To his surprise Guy leads him over to the dice table where Friedrich stands looking dishevelled and unwell and bows to the Count while dropping his hand and walks away smirking. Friedrich looks deathly pale as though he was about to be sick and he grabs his arm as he seems unsteady on his feet.

“What is the matter?” He asks alarmed. “I’ll get you some wine.” he takes a cup from a passing waitress and passes it to Friedrich who drinks deeply as if to steady his nerves. “What is the matter?” He tries again, as Friedrich should be in his room sleeping not at the tables gambling.

“Your tall friend,” Friedrich begins and looks around making sure no one was listening. “He came
into my room,” his eyes widen in disbelief; Guy wouldn’t sabotage the Sheriff’s scheme would he?
“He pulled me from the bed and demanded I tell him all that we had done together. Forgive me but I
told him the truth.” Well that explained the hand holding and Guy willingly giving him away
moments ago.

“What exactly did you say?”

“Only that you were worried that the Sheriff would be mad if we did not sleep together so I agreed to
play along.” The man was a saint, a poorly looking one.

“Thank you.”

“I must ask for your forgiveness once more.”

“Why?”

“I am leaving, your friend suggested I should and he warned me not to take you with me. Please
understand I only came here to gamble,” the apology seems genuine and Friedrich is no white knight
come to save him.

“I am so sorry.” He genuinely is, he knew their actions would stir Guy’s ire but never did he think
Guy would attack him in his own room.

“Here, place a bet for me,” he says placing some coins into his hand and kissing the back of it. “I
wish you well, auf wiedersehen.”

“You’re leaving now?” He asks in disbelief.

“Indeed and here is where I leave you,” he doffs his hat and bows and then takes his leave and he
watches a flustered looking Sheriff follow after him. He looks down and opens his hand and finds
the twenty pieces of silver Friedrich gave him and then looks around the room. The tables are rigged
but the game of skittles looks fun and a brief knock into the table would prove if that game is rigged
also.

He walks over and knocks the table watching all the pieces fall and decides that is the game for him.
For one silver piece he is given three swings of the ball to knock all nine pieces down which seems
fair until he is told the ball can only do one rotation each swing which is the obvious catch of the
game. Still it gives him something to do and on his first go he manages to knock six pieces over and
pays to have another go.

At some point around his fifth or sixth try Guy joins him and pays to have a go, knocking down only
five on his first go. They both know the game is rigged but they take it in turns trying to best each
other rather than win. It is purely a fluke when he manages to knock down all nine pieces and if he
didn’t know any better he thinks Guy bumped the table. He cheers in celebration and to his surprise
Guy lifts him celebrating with him, or showing his strength picking him up as though he weighed
nothing. His legs lock around Guy’s waist and before he can understand what is happening he finds
himself kissing Guy passionately in a room full of people. How they are not stoned to death or strung
up he does not know, Nottingham clearly was Godless.

Someone applauds them, slowly possibly sardonically and he breaks the kiss to see an irate looking
Sheriff approach them. “I do believe you are entertaining the wrong Lord,” he observes while Guy
puts him down.

“I’m fleecing this one for all he has, he’s terrible at skittles,” he teases winking at Guy.
“Indeed, I suppose you think you are clever hmm? Did you tell the Count I rigged the tables?”

“Rigged?” he asks sarcastically aghast. “I would never believe it of you.”

“How much wine have you had? Like father like son? Take him to his room and lock him in, let him dry out.” He does not know why the Sheriff accuses him of being drunk when he only had the one cup Guy passed him while they played although he does feel strange almost detached from himself.

He collects his winnings, three silvers leaving him with seven and allows Guy to escort him to his room, thinking they mean to take him to the top to punish him again. To his surprise they turn off on the seventh level and he realises Guy is taking him to his room. He tries to struggle but his arms feel heavy and he is too tired to put up much of a fight.

When the door is opened he sees the second bed is gone, no doubt the same bed now used in his father’s cell. He watches Guy lock the door and then approach him but his vision is fuzzy and his eyelids feel heavy. He assumes he is only standing because Guy is holding him and unbuttoning his jacket. They never gave him an undershirt so the moment Guy gets his jacket off his chest is bare and then Guy reaches for his trousers. It feels strange like an out of body experience he knows it is happening but it doesn’t feel as if it is happening to him.

Guy leads him over to the bed and sits him down but he falls back immediately as though he has no control over his body. He feels his boots being removed and then his trousers are tugged down and off leaving him naked. He should feel embarrassed but he doesn’t feel anything and he can’t understand why.

Guy begins to undress and he watches him with heavy lidded eyes. There’s a tattoo on his right forearm which he knows he loathes but he cannot think why. Perhaps it is because it looks unsightly on his beautiful pale body. He watches Guy strip down to nothing and join him on the bed crawling on top of him to press a quick kiss on his lips.

“I’m sorry,” he apologises and manoeuvres him into the bed and gets in beside him.

“For what?”

“Putting a sleeping draught in your drink, I just wanted to spend the night with you.” He’d be angry if he could muster up the energy but instead he simply yawns too tired to argue and closes his eyes.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Warning! Change of tags attempted rape/non-con in this chapter

In the morning it feels as if his head is going to explode and he does not know why. His recollection of the night before is sketchy, he remembers being in the games room but he was alone, had Friedrich gone? He does not recall drinking though he must have been if the pounding headache was any indication.

If Friedrich had left then his current location left him confused. Had he returned to the Count’s room? Would the Sheriff even allow him to considering he was only released from his fancy prison to entertain the Count? And if he was in the Count’s old room why was he naked?

He does not wish to open his eyes for fear of what he might find but he gathers his courage and cracks open his eyes and sees broad shoulders and a pale back. He need look no further as he already knows who it is and he prays they both kept their hands to themselves. Considering he is naked and from the covers resting low at Guy’s hip he is quite sure Guy is naked so the evidence suggests they most certainly did not keep their hands to themselves.

It does not make sense why he would be in bed with Guy; the man had called him a whore. Though at some point he remembers they were holding hands and had they been gambling together? What happened afterward is a blur, maybe Guy had taken him up on his offer since he was allowed to see his father.

“Guy?” He calls realising he will get no answers left with his own distorted memory.

“Hmm?” He’s surprised to find he is awake but he should have known Guy sleeps on his stomach not his side but why he was presenting him his back he did not know. Was it an act of trust or was he simply turned on his side watching the door?

“What happened last night?” He asks plainly as he does not know and will not pretend that he does.

“You don’t remember?” He can practically hear the smirk in his voice, before Guy turns over and he sees it for himself. “I could tell you that we made love for hours but I won’t because I wouldn’t lie to you. I am only guilty of bringing you to my room, undressing you and tucking you in bed.” It doesn’t ring true, but he does not wish to argue as they were as stubborn as each other and it was pointless.

“I thank you then.”

“I can be good to you,” Guy says reaching out his hand to run his fingers through his hair above his right ear. “Let me look after you, protect you. I’ve always cared about you, Allan. My feelings for you, I thought they’d gone away but they haven’t they’re stronger than ever.” He leans in for a kiss but he is wise to him and pushes him away. “Why do you push me away?”

“Because I know what you are,” he snaps and sits up.

“And what am I?” Guy asks calmly, sitting up but there is a storm in his eyes.
“A murderer.”

“Don’t pretend that you did not know.”

“I didn’t!”

“Please...don’t insult me.”

“You said you would not lie to me now tell me truthfully, did you kill Robin?” To his horror Guy looks away guilty.

“What if I did?” He asks giving nothing away while giving everything away.

“No,” there was always a chance that Guy was innocent, a small chance but a chance and it was gone now.

“Do not mourn for him, he was no saint.” Guy insists angrily.

“At least he wasn’t a Judas.”

“That doesn’t make him Jesus.” They glare at each other for some time until Guy finally kicks off the covers naked as the day he was born and completely unashamed and walks over to his trousers and pulls them on. “That glory-hungry vain obnoxious brat cost me everything,” he rages while dressing. “I lost my father, my mother, my home, my land my dignity and he cost me my sister and you.”

“Me?” He asks shocked.

“You. You meant everything to me and those cowards chased me off and I was too young, too weak to stay. So you ask me if I made them pay for what they did the answer is yes.” There are no words, none, Guy was a remorseless killer hell bent on revenge he could not see how outrageous his own actions were.

“Where are you going?” He asks as he watches Guy tightened his sword belt.

“I have business to attend to.”

“What business, tell me truthfully,” Guy rolls his eyes at him.

“It’s the signing of a very important document.” The traitor’s pact, it was to be signed today aligning the signees in victory or defeat and defeat would mean they would all hang by the neck until dead.

“Don’t go,” he begs. Guy had done terrible things but he was only reacting to what had been done to him. It wasn’t his fault that a snake like the Sheriff got to him and whispered venomous words into his ear. He was a pawn in the Sheriff’s scheme and he did not deserve to die, he could not watch him die and nor can he watch him win.

“This document brings me closer to real power and that in turns benefits you...could benefit you...in time.” In time for what? Signing that document would see them swing together.

“Guy think this through,” he can see him edging towards the door. “Guy don’t go, stay here with me, get away from that door.” He’s not listening so he abandons the covers and gets up from the bed to fetch him instead.

“I’m sorry,” Guy bolts and leaves the room and he can hear the key in the lock. He runs at the door trying to open it.
“Don’t be a fool!” He shouts and punches the door.

“I’m doing this for you.”

“Don’t put this on me you bastard! You stupid bastard, do not sign! Guy? Are you even listening to me? Open this door right now, please don’t sign. Guy?...that pact is a death warrant, don’t make me live in a world without you...Guy?” He presses his ear against the door wondering if Guy had left already and then he hears the clink of spurs and knows that Guy had stayed to listen but did not comply.

He wants to scream in frustration and deep down he knows he shouldn’t care. So Guy wants to sign his life away, it should matter very little, how many people would be saved if Guy lost his life? He wants to believe the man is a monster but his father was right when he said he looks at Guy and he sees his childhood friend first and foremost. He cannot reconcile that boy to the man he became and guilt eats away at his heart. Like Guy he was a helpless and weak child too and he could not come to his friend’s defence, it did not mean he went on a murder spree killing everyone who so much as gave him a sour look.

What if their coup was successful, what then? What did that mean for his father and himself? Would they be forced to bend the knee to Prince John and denounce King Richard? Surely they would be free to go, after all what could an old man and his son do to harm the new regime? He fears it will not be as simplistic as all that now that Guy has sunk his claws in him and in his own mind is acting on his behalf. He has no idea what motivates the man or perhaps he is wrong as he is forever going on about power and position, what he does not know is where he comes in to all of that. He was a lowly lord of scorched land that can in no way benefit Guy. Hadn’t Guy known that, said as much? Him signing could benefit him in time? He cannot see how, Guy was only going to get himself killed and he’d drag him down with him.

He punches and kicks at the door just to feel better and stops when his hands are sore and his feet are numb. He feels faintly ridiculous completely naked and taking his anger out on the door so he looks around the room for his clothes. He doesn’t want to wear the burgundy leather trousers but Guy’s are too long in the leg and ride low on his hips with no belt to hold them around his waist so he is forced to wear them. He does pilfer one of Guy’s long sleeved undershirts and pulls his boots back on and leaves his jacket slung over the back of the chair.

There’s a cracked mirror over by the wardrobe but he does not wish to see his own reflection. He’s not sure he would recognise himself if he looked. He was Guy’s creature now as he was sure their fates were being signed and sealed together. He had only wanted his friend back, to have a male to talk to because Marian was a great friend but there were certain things he could not speak to her about for the sake of propriety. He and Guy did not talk, they bickered and raged and ultimately he would submit because as much as he hated Guy, and the man was worthy of his contempt, he foolishly loved him.

Count Friedrich had seen right through him and saw his heart for what it was. His longing for his childhood friend had morphed into something it should not have and he was unaware his feelings had changed until Guy started touching him. He had thought it was weakness of the flesh letting Guy move his hand up his thigh and it had scared him how much he wanted him. It was easier to push him away and deny his basic wants but that need to have his friend back that yearning for something lost long ago, it had always been more than it should. He had even encouraged Marian to accept Guy so that they could become a trio, he never really considered they’d be married and he’d be rejected, he hadn’t thought that far he just wanted Guy back in his life.

Now Guy was back with so much blood on his hands he could bathe in it and somewhere along the
line he had sold his soul to the devil. How he could love that which he hated was beyond him and it
was a secret he would take to his grave. He cannot imagine how Guy would react to acceptance
when he behaves so obsessively when faced with rejection.

To distract himself he goes through Guy’s things again and pulls out the chair to look at the top shelf.
The smooth stone is still there and surprisingly clean considering the rest of the shelf was covered in
a thin layer of dust. He had not touched it on his last inspection so he wonders who has.

He does not hear the key in the lock only the door slamming open and he almost falls off the chair. “I
wasn’t doing anything,” he protests even though it was painfully obvious he was. Guy looks
panic, wild-eyed looking over his shoulder and he looks back at the shelf wondering what could
be there to receive such a reaction. There is just the stone, a quill an inkwell with dried up ink and a
book on its side which he had opened before about weapons.

“You’re leaving, now, a deal has been made with the Sheriff, you’ve become a part of the
negotiation.”

“Pardon?” He asks dumbly still stood on the chair.

“A Black Knight wants you.” A Black Knight? They were honestly calling themselves that? He’s
surprised he got it right but then what else could they call themselves without seeming outlandish or
ostentatious? He’s so focus on their name he barely catches what Guy said.

“Tell him he can’t have me.”

“The Sheriff has agreed, I can’t protect you. Allan, listen to me you have to run now.” Guy sounds
desperate and looks frightened, which in turns strikes fear in his heart if something is scaring Guy.

“I can’t my father.”

“I will take care of your father.”

“I cannot leave him.”

“Allan why do you always resist me? I’m attempting to help you!” The worst part is he believes him.

“I know I can see that and I’m grateful,” he tries to soothe. Guy comes over to him and lifts him from
the chair and places him on the floor with his arms still around his waist.

“If the Sheriff knew that I was doing this my own life would be in danger.” If there was ever an
opportunity to turn Guy against the Sheriff and stop him from signing it was now.

“Why do you work for him?”

“I have no one,” the reply is heartfelt and twists the knife embedded in his own heart.

“So you choose him?”

“I choose power; he is my route to position, standing.” He drops his arms and inches closer to the
door.

“He’s mad, you know that.”

“No he is singled minded; he does not allow distractions to divert him from his course.”

“Distractions? Like a little humanity?” Like me, he does not add.
“Humanity is weakness,” he is Guy’s weakness, hadn’t the Sheriff told him as much? “You must leave this place,” he insists and presses a bag of coins into his hand. “This money will secure your passage and I’ve instructed a man on the wall on the West Gate to let you out.” This is all too cloak and dagger for him and he’s proven his incompetence with that routine already.

“I will not go,” he states as Guy throws his burgundy jacket at him.

“Allan,” Guy warns and he wonders if the man is above throwing him out of the window.

“I will not go without you,” if Guy fears for his own life then he was not prepared to leave him in the lion’s den.

“Do you mean that?” Guy asks shocked and needy and it is moments like these that he knows why he loves him.

“Yes,” he replies resolute and Guy smiles and takes his hand. They leave the room and stay close to the wall as they attempt to make their way to the West Gate and he begins to wonder why their lives are in danger. A Black Knight wanted him, negotiated for him and the Sheriff accepted? The same Sheriff that was throwing Guy at him, the same Sheriff that was practically a father to Guy and gave him a lecture about hurting him? What on earth did the Black Knight have on the Sheriff? Vaisey would not do this to Guy not unless he didn’t have a choice.

“What do you know of Lord Winchester?” Guy asks checking to see if the hallway was clear.

“Uncle Harold?”

“He’s your uncle?” Guy turns to him looking sickened.

“He’s not my real uncle, he grew up with my father and they were like brothers.”

“Come on, this way.” They turn off down another straight hallway and run as there is nothing to conceal them until they reach the servants stairway. He is not familiar with this part of the castle so he depends entirely on Guy and he knows he is safe, for once Guy is not the danger.

Before they reach the stairs guards start climbing up and spilling out into their hallway. They turn as if to go back the way they came but guards are also coming from that way too blocking both exits. Guy releases his hand and pushes him behind him while backing up to the wall and unsheathes his sword and he sees the guards cower but remain defiant.

“Guy, don’t,” he whispers, pressed against his back. There are too many of them and as good as he is the numbers would work against him.

“Ah bringing me my prize?” Someone asks with a strangely familiar voice. He peaks over Guy’s shoulder and sees a Black Knight emerge from a swarm of guards. “The castle is enviably large so I shall forgive you for losing your way.” The man sounds like a pompous ass but even his arrogant forgiveness will not make Guy stand down. “Don’t be a silly boy; you don’t want me to tell the Sheriff, do you?” The man has a death wish but his voice...he knows that voice. “You are very tiresome, guards, bring Allan to me.” The guards approach cautiously.

“Stand down,” he insists but Guy does not listen. “Don’t make me watch them kill you,” Guy pauses and he takes the moment to step from behind him with his hands up. “Stop! I come willingly,” he only takes four steps forward before he is apprehended by guards and forced into handcuffs and leg irons and pushed towards the Black Knight.

“You have your mother’s eyes,” the Black Knight claims stroking his cheek. He can hear Guy
practically snarling and he tries his best not to flinch at another man’s touch. The Knight reaches behind his head and removes the cover from his face and he’s surprised to see the face of Winchester.

“Uncle Harry?” He questions confused and is startled when Harold grabs his chin.

“I am not your uncle,” he replies testily and releases his hold.

“I will not be treated like this.” He protests after the rough treatment.

“You’re quite right, these handcuffs and leg irons; can they be made a little tighter?”

“How dare you!”

“Oh gag him for God’s sake, he’s pretty until he talks.” Clearly Guy has heard enough as he lunges at a guard thrusting his sword through his heart and as he pulls it from the dead man’s chest he pulls the knife from his hip slashing a second guard across the throat. Winchester actually looks scared and he relishes it and eyes the sword on the floor as two more guards fall to the floor dead.

“What the hell is happening?” The Sheriff squawks and makes his way over pushing guards out of his way until he is standing by Winchester. “Gisborne!” Guy stops and pushes the impaled body off his blade. “I’m sorry for the inconvenience,” the Sheriff aplogises. “Gisborne? A word.” The Sheriff stomps over to his Master at Arms and grabs a hold of the back of his neck, pulling him down so he can whisper in his ear. If there was anyone that could calm Guy in this situation it was the Sheriff and he wonders what is said between them as Guy looks heartbroken on the verge of tears, if he has not already shed them.

“Take him to my carriage,” Winchester orders and walks off. Two guards seize him grasping an arm each and lead him away. He can feel Guy’s stare practically burning a hole in his back but he will not look back even when the prospect of looking forward is daunting.

Sir Edward was right; Winchester was a Black Knight but why? He was a peace loving man quite content at the south coast. Was it a ruse? Was he trying to save him? Harold had always been kind to him, bringing him seashells and promising to take him to the south coast, maybe he was just fulfilling that promise.

He calms down and walks out into the courtyard without any prompting and does not even protest when they gag him. Once in the small two-seat carriage one cuff is released but only so the chain can go through an iron ring on the roof of the carriage and his hand is cuffed once more leaving his arms suspended above his head. The same is done to his feet but instead there is an iron ring on the floor. It is far too much but he realises Harold means only to make it look authentic so he does not kick up a fuss and the guards exit the carriage once they are done.

It is some time before Harold finally joins him in the carriage in his tight fighting grey robes the colour of his house. He is a slender older gentleman but one that looks after his body for vanities sake. He is always well groomed with a neatly trimmed grey beard and short combed grey hair and thick black eyebrows reminiscent of the colour his hair once was. His skin is smooth and his teeth are small and white and the scent of lavender always clings to his clean skin and his light brown eyes gaze at him fondly and he knows he has been saved.

They are out of the Nottingham when Harold finally removes his gag. “I’ve a gift for you,” he states rummaging through a small leather bag and brings out a polished spiral seashell and holds it out for him to see.
“It’s beautiful,” he says honestly and thinks about putting it with the others when he realises he no longer can.

“You always did like pretty things; you take after me in that regard.” He looks at Harold questioning when the older man strokes his cheek. “You should have been my son,” he says wistfully and dread settles in the bottom of his stomach as he realises he may not have been saved.

“Uncle Harold...” the stroking hand slaps him in the face short and quick not so much to hurt but as to warn.

“I am not your uncle,” he reiterates and he does not know why. He has called him uncle all of his life and he does not know what has changed. “Did your father ever tell you about me and your mother?” Harold asks casually and puts the shell away. “We were sweethearts until your father came and took her from me. Why she chose him over me I do not know, he was penniless while I could have given her everything.” He takes a moment as he has clearly riled himself. “I had hoped they would have a daughter so that one day I would have my chance at revenge and put my baby in her belly. Still, I will make do with the prodigal son with your mother’s eyes and her lips.” Harold leans forward to kiss him and he pulls back as much as he can. “Oh come now do not play coy, I have seen you with the Sheriff’s boy.”

“Don’t touch me!” he hisses.

“I am your master now; you’ll do well to remember that.”

“Uncle...”

“Ah!”

“What shall I call you then?” He snaps.

“Soon you can call me husband,” Harold has quite clearly lost his mind. They were both men and their union would not be recognized as it was blasphemous and unholy and there was the simple fact that he had no desire to marry him.

“Not being funny, but you’ve lost your mind.”

“I tire of your ceaseless chatter, put your mouth to use or be silent before I put that filthy rag back into your mouth.” He shuts his mouth and stares ahead not willing to say another word as this was all so wrong and Guy knew what he wanted, that was why he looked so sickened when he told him Winchester was his uncle.

He couldn’t get his head around the fact that Harold hated his father but now that he knows little things start to make sense. Like for instance he had only visited five times in twenty five years, he was a busy man and it was a three day journey if you take your time which Harold liked to but still he could have made more of an effort or invited them to visit which he never did.

Why hadn’t he believed Sir Edward when he had told him Harold had been seen? If he had believed him Roger of Stoke might still be alive because he realises now that the Black Knight that arrived at Locksley with Roger’s body was Harold. Roger was not under surveillance his father was. Harold must have been following him hoping against hope that he would do something foolish. He had lost his home because of a man he had always considered family and now he was the man’s prisoner.

The terrain becomes bumpy and he realises they are travelling through Sherwood Forest and he tries his best to stay close to the carriage side and as far away from Harold as he can muster with the give of his chains.
“Oh I do hate for you to be like this,” Harold croons and he shivers in disgust. “It is not so bad and if you treat me right,” he pauses to rest a hand on his thigh. “I will let you rule over Sussex in your own right.” Sussex? He has no jurisdiction in Sussex, more lies and as if a title and lands would make him forgive him. His father was languishing in a prison cell because of him!

“Don’t you touch me!”

“I am going to touch you. At the first tavern we come to I intend to try before I buy.” He used to laugh at the way Harold talked so measured and snotty but now he hates the very sound of it. He had thought Guy was the most deluded person he ever had the displeasure of conversing with but now he’s beginning to think all of these Black Knights are delusional.

“I won’t let you.”

“Well then I’ll just have to tie you to the bed. Really, I don’t see why you are being so difficult it is not as if you have never had a man between your thighs.” Harold looks him in the eye and quirks an eyebrow. “Oh you haven’t, well that explains why that little ardent Romeo was so ruthlessly fighting for you. You should have heard his impassioned speech he gave when I named you as a part of my terms, it was quite moving. Still I have waited too long for this moment to just hand you to the Sheriff’s brat.”

“Guy is not his son.”

“Guy is it? Well I’ll be merciful and I will let you close your eyes and pretend that I am him.”

“I do not want Guy and I do not want you, let me go!” He tries to pull his hands to his chest pulling on the iron ring but it will not give.

“Hush child you only fear that our union will pain you and I promise I will not hurt you, you might even enjoy yourself.”

“I won’t!”

“So defiant, it is tedious I don’t know why that boy puts up with you; I can’t imagine you have done nothing to encourage him.” Harold stares at him again and he worries how well he can read him. “Oh you have, what did you let him do?”

“Go to hell!” Harold’s dark eyebrows furrow in annoyance.

“I did warn you,” he states before the gag is shoved back into his mouth and tied once more. “I was looking forward to hearing the sounds of your pleasure.” He wonders what he means by that until he feels a hand unbuttoning his trousers. He tries to shift away but there is not enough give and he screams through the gag as Harold pulls his trousers down to mid-thigh.

Tears sting his eyes as he watches Harold route through his bag once more and retrieves a small bottle. When he pops the cork a sickly sweet smell permeates the air though he is uncertain what the scent is.

“You’re not quite so little anymore, are you?” Harold asks unashamedly looking between his legs at his thankfully uninterested flaccid penis.

“Please don’t do this Uncle,” he says through the gag hoping that he was heard as Harold pours thick liquid from the bottle onto his fingers.

“Now what have I said about calling me uncle? You don’t want to make me cross, but if it makes
you feel better you can call me daddy.” Bile rises in his throat and he swallows it back down rather than choke on it. Though he soon wished he hadn’t as death by asphyxiation was a more welcoming prospect than having Harold’s wet fingers between his thighs and reaching beneath him. “Settle down, I want you open and ready for me by the time we reach the tavern.”

Tears leak from his eyes as Harold presses a finger inside him. It does not hurt but it feels strange and unnatural. By the second finger he is outright sobbing because Harold won’t stop and he can’t make him stop. He wishes he had taken up that sword on the floor and thrust it through Harold’s gut instead of walking willing into this God forsaken trap.

Harold shoves two fingers deeply inside him and crooks his fingers hitting something inside him that makes him shiver. “Ah there we are, I have found even the most resistant bed mates can become the most wanton whores once that spot is found.” He does not wish to believe him but as Harold begins to thrust his fingers into him deliberately hitting that spot within him he can feel his legs parting and his cock stirring.

The first moan torn from his throat is followed by a cry of humiliation and he turns away disgusted with himself as he feels his cock swelling in response. He has another attempt at the iron ring on the roof but it remains unmoveable and just when he tries to kick up his legs to dislodge the ring on the floor the carriage stops and both he and Harold lurch forward at the abruptness.

“What is the meaning of this?” Harold says bitterly and removes his fingers from him and wipes them on the carriage cushion. He pulls the curtain aside and pokes his head out of the carriage. “Why have we stopped?” He hears no response and Harold grumbles to himself and leaves the carriage.

Some words are said but he cannot make them out and then he faintly hears Harold cry out in pain. Outlaws? He had thought the woods were safe. He struggles in earnest trying desperately to free himself and not be found in his current state. The curtain is pulled aside revealing one of Harold’s men dressed in a grey cloak the colour of Winchester with his emblem in red. The man’s hood is up and he cannot see his face until he finally acts and lowers his hood.

He has never been so glad to see Guy in his entire life and tears spill from his eyes in relief. Guy’s smile soon turns to a frown as he sees the state he is in cuffed and gagged with his trousers down to his thighs and his cock at half-mast while his eyes are red from crying. He climbs into the carriage and quickly unlocks one of the handcuffs so he is able to pull the chain through and pull off the gag. He drops forward covering himself and crying into his hands while Guy leans down and releases the leg irons.

Once his legs are free Guy unlocks the remaining cuff and pulls on his wrist trying to coax him from the carriage. He doesn’t have the words but then who would in a situation like this? He does not wish to exit the carriage but nor does he wish to remain within it so he chooses the lesser of two evils and takes Guy’s hand.

He notices Guy is actively shielding him from someone by the horses giving him chance to pull up his trousers and button them. When he is decent Guy steps aside revealing the Sheriff releasing the carriage horse also dressed in Winchester robes. He hears pitiful moaning and turns to see Harold laid on his side on the grass pulling a small blade from his stomach and he recognises it as the one he gave Guy for his birthday.

“You bastard!” He cries and takes a running kick at the dying pervert.

“Stop,” Harold wheezes and he kicks him again.

“Stop?” He questions with another kick. “Did you stop when I asked you to?” Another kick. “I
begged you,” two more kicks. “If you want me to stop then call me daddy!” He’s mad; he’s been driven insane there is no other explanation for his desire to see Harold dead.

“Here,” Guy says passing him a sword. “End his life.” He takes the sword and kicks Harold over onto his back and stands over him, feet either side of his hips and holds the hilt of the sword in both hands, blade pointed down above Harold’s cold heart.

He wants to press the sword down as hard as he can and watch the life drain from the foul creature but he can’t. He won’t. He is not a killer and he would not dirty his hands. He tosses the sword aside and glares down at Harold.

“I loved you, Uncle Harry,” he then steps over him and ignores him as he reaches out for him.

He moves around to the other side of the carriage and empties the content of his stomach onto the grass. He assumes Guy has collected his knife and sword and then mounted his horse as he approaches on horseback and holds his hand out to him. He takes his hand and allows himself to be pulled on behind Guy and his hands automatically go around Guy’s waist and he presses his head against his shoulder feeling safe once again.

“Sweet, very sweet,” the Sheriff comments riding passed and he should have known the Sheriff would double cross Winchester and for once he is thankful for the duplicitous actions of the man.

He can’t help but cling to Guy, scared of what could have happened; mortified by the way he was found and relieved that he was saved. Guy does not seem to mind his clinginess and holds both of his hands over his heart and they ride back to Nottingham without a word.
Chapter 15

Waking up the next day he is still shaken, confused, angry, suffering from a whole maelstrom of emotions over Harold’s betrayal. He is surprisingly thankful for Guy and the Sheriff for allowing him to stay in the Count’s old room and giving him clean normal clothes and taking the horrible burgundy leather outfit away. They had still locked him in though and he realises it was the key turning in the lock that had awoken him.

The door opens slowly, cautiously and Guy pokes his head in looking directly at him possibly to see if he was awake. He manages a small smile and Guy enters the room but immediately he knows that something is wrong. He has not seen this expression before, his face is ashen and he keeps covering his mouth seemingly lost. It is devastation, he realises but what could have caused it he does not know.

“Guy?” He calls out unsure and sits up.

“I’m sorry,” Guy chokes and he begins to panic. He hadn’t behaved this way when Harold had tried to take him.

“What has happened?” He thought it might have something to do with the Sheriff until he apologised.

There is a long pause where Guy is simply standing there looking lost. “Your father,” he says but covers his mouth either preventing the words or incapable of saying them.

“My father what?”

“He’s gone.”

“Where?” He asks confused but he can see Guy’s eyes welling with tears. “Where?” He asks again with dawning realisation. “Where?” He asks with tears in his own eyes.

“I’m sorry.” In that moment he hates Guy, he hates the Sheriff and he hates Harold. He gets out of bed and pulls on a pair of brown woollen trousers and his boots and leaves his nightshirt on.

“Where is he? Take me to him!” Guy nods and he follows him out of his room and to his disgust he leads him to the dungeon. His father’s cell door is open and his father is laid on the bed unmoving.

He runs to his side and drops onto his knees and shakes his shoulder. “Father? Wake up!” He shakes him again and feels the coldness of his skin and the stiffness of his joints. “Don’t leave me here, come back.” He remains unresponsive with his eyes closed and his skin ashen and there’s a blue tinge to his lips. “What happened?” He demands checking his father over but he can see no tell tale sign of foul play.

“Winchester,” Guy begins and then pauses. “We did not know that Winchester came to the dungeons,” he amends. “He made his intention towards you known upsetting your father. The gaoler says he paced his cell fretting then clutched his chest and fell to the floor as his heart simply stopped.”

“No...no...no...Father I’m sorry, I’ll be good, I’ll behave just come back.” He stares at his father’s
face hoping for a miracle.

“Allan he’s gone.”

“Shut up! Shut your mouth! This is all your fault!”

“My fault?” Guy asks stunned acting the innocent as always.

“You burnt down our home, you tried to kill the king, you are still trying to kill the king and you threw an old man in a dungeon. You heartless bastard!” He doesn’t care what he says anymore, his father is gone, he has no home, no family, there is nothing left for him.

“I was never comfortable with the way the Sheriff treated your father.”

“You’re all heart, why didn’t you do something then? If you were so concerned, oh that’s right because Guy only cares about Guy.” He gets up and with one last look at his father he leaves the cell.

“You know that isn’t true, my feelings for you…”

“Stop it!” Guy reaches for him and he slaps his hand away. “The last thing my father told me to do was stay away from you. You’re dead to me.”

“You don’t mean that.”

He ignores the wounded look on Guy’s face and clutches his hate tightly against his heart. “Yes I do,” he exits the dungeon before Guy can say another word and he returns to his room as there is nowhere else for him to go.

Far too soon he can hear Guy approach and he looks for something to throw but his door never opens instead the key turns locking him in. “You coward!” He screams and hears Guy stomp off. In a rage he trashes the room and tears up the bed linen as there was not much to break before finally succumbing to his sorrow and collapsing beside his ruined bed.

His father was dead.

Dead.

Gone.

It was too surreal a concept to acknowledge. True his father had been unwell for some time, his health began to deteriorate with the passing of his wife and son and it had been on a downward spiral ever since. Now he finds he was a contributing factor to the death of his father, the one person in the world that thought he was worthwhile.

What had Harold said? Had he made his intention fully known? Did his father die believing he was going to be raped and forced to stay with Harold? The marriage claim was bogus as they were two men it was just a way to dress up his eternal servitude. He hopes Harold had only said he means to take him away but he had a feeling that was not all. Why else would his father fret so much? He would miss him but he had told him himself to escape, that Guy was the threat. No his absence would not have stopped his heart, his rape would have.

He wishes he had thrust that sword in Harold’s heart now. Not that it mattered, the parasite was dead and what did his death accomplish? Nothing. His father was gone and for once in his life he was truly alone in the world and it was his entire fault. If he had just stayed away from Guy but he didn’t,
he couldn’t because his damnable heart wanted what it wanted with no regard for anyone or anything else.

A fool in love, that’s what he was. So desperate and so selfish to have Guy back in his life it had cost him his father. Had he stayed away, if only, had he not overheard anything. Even though he had was it necessary to involve his father? Roy didn’t need to know but his damn selfishness struck again and he wanted his father with him and told him all, worst still made him his accomplice. Winchester could not have acted had he not put them both in the position they were in.

What had the Sheriff called him? A silly boy with no head for politics. Why hadn’t he listened because the Sheriff was right for once, he had no business being on the council not when his heart ruled over his head. These were dark times and it looked as though the bad guys were winning so why hadn’t he buried his head in the sand like everyone else? He could blame Guy, the Sheriff, or Harold but the truth was the death of his father was on him.

The truth of it is too much to bear and he lies down on the bed and screams and sobs into the pillow until he is emotionally exhausted. He does not sleep, as the guilt will not let him he just lies there as still as his father as tears roll down his face.

When he hears a key in the lock he is too tired to get up and find something to throw at Guy so he just lays still and watches the door open. To his surprise the Sheriff enters dressed all in black though he doubts it is in mourning. Shockingly he is not smiling and seems vaguely serious for once in his life.

“So you’ve heard,” he states pacing the room and kicking broken furniture with distaste. “I’ll make this brief, your father, did he want to be buried or cremated?” He doesn’t want to acknowledge the question and make it all real but if he stays silent the Sheriff would do as he pleases.

“Buried next to his wife and son in Locksley,” the Sheriff nods stiffly and then walks towards the door and pauses.

“I gather your behaviour towards Guy was due to your shock, so we shall forget your little outburst in the dungeon.” He then leaves and locks the door and he does not know why he is even surprised anymore. Guy couldn’t run to his father and tell on him so he went to the Sheriff instead the thrice damned child! Why must he make everything about himself while taking no responsibility for his actions? He was sick of it, sick of him, sick of everything. He was a lowly lord of now scorched earth and he was not worth this much aggravation, he should not have been capable to cause this much devastation.

Nothing makes sense anymore, though come to think of it things had started to not make sense for quite some time as far back as the King’s birthday. Everything had seemed so positive then, Guy had recovered, he had actually worried himself sick thinking Guy might die and all the while he wasn’t even in the country. Then out of the blue his friend was back willing to spend some time with him, and best of all he actually knew who he was. That didn’t explain why he looked right through him when he tried to congratulate him on his promotion and he rode away like he had leprosy but Guy was never forthcoming with explanations as he was a man of action.

For a moment, less than a week everything was perfect. He had everything he could possibly want and now he had lost everything. The price was too high to have his friend back considering what he got was not his friend but a stranger wearing his face. Had he not gone that night, would things have been different? Would Guy have no distraction from Marian and continue his pursuit of her?

He doubts it, though he wishes to believe it. Guy would have come for him no matter what and given the circumstances he would have welcomed his friend with open arms being none the wiser.
They might have even kissed if Guy would have let their friendship progress naturally and not come at him aggressively and manipulate the situation in his favour. He does not know why Guy did that to him when he had been so patient with Marian he was practically a saint. Something happened in the Holy Land, something that made Guy feel as if he was entitled to him. He wasn’t a person to Guy merely a possession and not just any possession but his. Friedrich learnt the hard way and so did Harold and even his father.

Had his heart truly stopped or had Guy killed him? His father had told him to leave, run, escape Guy, had someone overheard and told him? Guy behaved erratically when he was told he could not have something that he deemed was his and he was always perfectly behaved for his father. It is for that reason he does not believe Guy took his life, as he had worked too hard to win his affection.

The what if’s and if only’s are tearing him apart. What’s done is done and time cannot be reversed, actions cannot be undone, words cannot be unspoken and the dead cannot be given life. All that is left is pain from a wounded heart and the absence of the presence of someone who had always been there.

It makes him consider mortality and how fragile and fleeting life is. He realises then he had no wish to die, well all men must die but he would like a long life. Maybe he’s scared of the great unknown and what lies behind the veil of death if anything. His life has been cruel but his father would wish for him to live and so he must, for him. He will take his father’s advice for once; he will cease his witch hunt and make no moves against the Black Knights. He will behave himself and truly earn the Sheriff’s trust and once he is released he will rebuild Bonchurch and find himself a wife and start a family and he will name his first son Roy.

Dinner is brought to his room by a shy brunette girl that cannot make eye contact. She does not say a word and leaves the tray on the damaged dresser and leaves locking the door behind her. He does not bother to stand to see what it is as he is not hungry. There is an aching emptiness inside him that no meal could fix though he wishes it was that simple.

He lies back down and considers his plans. Re-build his home, find a wife, start a family and simply live.

Chapter End Notes

I have Roy's death tagged under minor character death due to the fictitious nature of his character. However I realise he has a rather important role in this story so his death could be tagged as major character death. If you feel I should change the tag let me know.
Chapter 16

In the morning he is surprised to awaken as he thought sleep would elude him but he had been emotionally exhausted and extremely low that his body simply gave up the fight to remain conscious. Again it is the key in the lock that had awoken him and he watches the door open revealing Sir Guy of Gisborne holding a bundle of dark clothes with a neutral expression on his face. Clearly he is anticipating a nasty reaction and he shouldn’t because he isn’t worth any reaction. The Sheriff told him to play nice but he would play indifferent to try and follow his father’s last wish. Stay away from Guy, obviously the Master at Arms was making that difficult but emotionally he could distance himself. He had let Guy into his heart once and what a terrible costly mistake that was but it was a lesson learnt.

“These should fit you and the funeral procession starts at noon.” He places the clothing on the dresser beside the untouched food and turns to walk away before he pauses, reaches into his pocket and places something on top of the clothes before walking to the door. Before he shuts the door there is a small smile on his lips and he hates him for it, only Guy could misconstrue indifference for acceptance the deluded moron. He is not that stupid but he keeps playing at being daft and he has no idea why. Has he simply become that manipulative that he has to twist everything into his favour?

He gets up off the bed and heads towards the clothes as he does not know what time it is. Unfortunately he is intrigued with what Guy left on the top of the pile and he finds a ruby in the shape of a heart. The games have begun again and he is sticking to the belief that he is in love with him. He wants to grind the gem under his boot but he cannot as such an act would show too much emotion and he wishes to show none. He would keep it instead, and anymore that were sure to follow and when it came time to leave the castle and continue with his life he would return everything.

The clothes are as he feared Guy’s hand-me-downs. He’d dressed him in his clothes before and the look on his face proved how much he liked seeing him in his clothes. He never touched him but sometimes his looks were so filthy he didn’t need to. Today was not the day to play dress up, surely there was a seamstress within the castle or a guard of his size but no he was forced to dress like a mini Guy and it was belittling.

He wants to argue and kick up a fuss but he is just too tired. It would be pointless anyway; the Sheriff is clearly trying to make up for his behaviour over agreeing to hand him over to Winchester so he would do almost anything to appease Guy. There was no higher power and no justice and he simply had to keep his mouth closed and endure.

The clothes fit quite well and he places the ruby in a safe place and finds the blackened seashell he had collected from Bonchurch and he does not hesitate to throw that to the floor and crush it with the heel of his boot till it was naught but powder.

Soon after the Sheriff comes to collect him accompanied by two guards and to his shame they cuff his ankles and wrists like he’s a common criminal and escort him to the courtyard. It is a sombre muted atmosphere in the courtyard with the guards standing sentry along every wall and in the centre lays his father dressed impressively in fitting black robes on a cart with a bunch of daisies clutched to his breast.

He walks over without difficulty as there was enough chain between his ankles to not compromise his gait and he presses a kiss against his father’s pale cold sagging cheek. He does not wish to remember him like this, Roy a Dale was a strong honourable man who followed the law and tried to do right by everyone. Even after suffering the loss of his wife and son he still tried to do right by
everyone even though his heart was broken and his soul was fractured from the breaking of a bond. Harold had said he could not understand why his mother chose Roy over him but that was because he was selfish and greedy and knew nothing of love. His mother and father were soul mates and if there was any solace to come from this tragedy it was that finally they would be reunited and hopefully he would be with a son that would make him proud rather than one that failed at every turn.

The bell tolls signalling the hour and the portcullis is lifted and the guards close in and take hold of the cart. A dark skinned stocky monk leads the procession with four guards side by side behind him, followed by another four holding the jutting poles to pull the cart along and another four at each corner of the cart, followed by another pair behind them and that is where he stands with another two guards behind him. He is not sure why they are so well guarded or what the Sheriff is trying to prove. Two horses are just behind the monk and one of the riders is Guy the other he thought to be the Sheriff but a look over his shoulder showed the man on the steps refusing to budge. He looks ahead again and is heartened to see Sir Edward is the second rider.

The monk begins to lead the procession speaking verses from the bible as they leave the courtyard and walk through the streets of Nottingham. He had thought the locals would come out in droves to see his father off and he is quite disappointed with the meagre turn out. Still those who had bothered to pay their respects throw flowers and bow their heads in respect as his father's body passes by.

He tries not to be insulted by the lack of love in Nottingham, but it is hard considering how selfless his father was and these people did not care. Roy would not mind as he was far too understanding and forgiving but to see him off on his final journey, really was it so much to ask? Roy had died for them, for England and no one seemed to care.

He does not wish to be angry but he is angry, he has been angry ever since Guy came into his room and told him his father was gone. Hate and anger had swelled in his chest constricting his heart so he could feel little else while guilt ate away at his sanity. He wants to think positively, he wants to laugh and smile again but somewhere in these months of madness he has lost his smile, he has lost his way and he is no longer certain of who he is anymore.

He never thought he would miss his identity as an unworthy commoner granted a lordship and lands. That he would miss the blatant disdain from those born in position because though they still loathed him they feared Guy and could no longer express their displeasure of his company. It had been a lonely existence but a simple one and there was Marian too when it got too much.

This was too much and he was buckling under the stress of it all. He needed his father as much as his father once needed him; they were a crutch for each other. He gave his father solace that one member of his family survived while his father gave him an excuse not to live his life. It was so easy playing the devoted son to the sick father, it was his excuse to shun society and hold firmly to a childhood he was not ready to part with. As long as Roy was alive he was merely an heir, a nonentity that could do as he liked. Perhaps that was why he was so reckless as he had never had to answer for past transgressions but in truth he had never tried to do something so bold as to defy the Sheriff and save the king.

He is distracted from his thoughts by wailing sobs and he lifts his head surprised to see they have reached Locksley and all of the villagers have left their homes to line the street. The cart is soon strewn with flowers and he is thankful for their devotion and his heart is not so heavy. Some take to following the cart, not many as the graveyard was small but the Scarlet's were welcomed, as was Rebecca with her three children Kate, Maggie and Matthew. It seemed fair that it was those seven to see his father off as they were the last people in Locksley he had helped before Bonchurch was burned to the ground.
Nobility were normally buried upon the hill on the Locksley plot but Roy made no such demands when his wife died and placed her in the common graveyard with her son clutched in her arms and reserved the space beside her. That space was now dug awaiting his body and he realises the Sheriff means to give him no coffin. Criminals were not afforded such luxury in death and anger coils around his heart as he watches his father’s body lifted from the cart by a stretcher carried by two guards and Sir Edward and Guy.

He follows after them and watches his father’s body slowly lowered into the ground and then the stretcher is pulled back up and the guards retreat to the cart giving family and friends the space to mourn a friend. The monk stands at the head of the grave and he stands to his left while Guy and Sir Edward and the others line up on the right.

“The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again,
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E’en for his own name’s sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill:
For thou art with me, and thy rod
And staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me;
And in God's house for evermore
My dwelling-place shall be.”

“Amen,” they all reply in unison.

“We now commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.” The monk makes the sign of the cross and the others follow and then drop flowers into the grave before departing.

It does not seem real and it is far too quick. More should be said! There should be eulogies and hymns but he forgets his father died a presumed criminal and he was lucky the Sheriff had allowed him this. Maybe it was Guy’s doing or maybe the Sheriff did truly have a conscience but he doubted
He watches the others leave casting worried looks his way until he is the only one left within the graveyard. He sits down between his mother and father and decides to give the eulogy his father was denied.

“Roy a-Dale, husband, father and the most brave and honourable man I have ever known. I love you; I don’t think I told you that nearly enough. You were my world and I didn’t deserve you and I don’t know how to cope without you. I hope wherever you are that you are happy and reunited with mother and that your heart is finally mended. Mine is now broken without you but I promise with my time left on this earth I will make you proud.” He finishes speaking to the sky hoping his father is looking down on him. “I’m sorry; I shouldn’t have gotten you involved. I should have taken your advice but I didn’t and I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. I do not deserve your forgiveness for what I have done, you were always there for me and I wasn’t there for you. I caused you so much pain, I’m poison and I ruin everything. I know you’d forgive me; you would forgive me anything but this? What I’ve done, to you to the a-Dale legacy? I cannot be forgiven for this. I let you die, I practically killed you myself and I’m sorry and it’s not enough. I don’t want to live without you; I don’t want to be alone.” He lies down and gives in to his sorrow and cries his heart out.

How long he lays there he does not know but his tears have stopped as he had none left to cry but his body still shook from the force of his tearless sobs. Someone comes to collect him and he is unsurprised to find Sir Guy holding a hand out. In fairness the Master at Arms looks just as heartbroken as he imagines he does but it is of little comfort, they are both to blame for his father’s demise and he refuses to pretend otherwise.

He ignores his offered hand and stands by himself. He was alone now, in all things; it was time he got used to it. Guy is as determined as ever and grasps his arm as he stumbles but he shrugs him off and makes his own way out of the graveyard. There is no one left save from the monk and two gravediggers awaiting his exit to cover his father’s remains. He wonders why Sir Edward has not stayed behind but no doubt Guy had warned him away, this was not a social outing and he was still considered a criminal.

“Let me take off those leg irons and I’ll give you a ride back to the castle.” Guy offers touching his arm once more, forcing him to shake him off again.

“Will you stop touching me!”

“Allan,” Guy uses that warning tone again.

“Guy,” he counters.

“I offer you a ride home and this is all the thanks I get.”

“Oh you’re so selfless Guy, I’m so lucky to have you in my life; this day is all about you!”

“You’re upset, I know...”

“No you don’t, you don’t know anything.”

“Fine then!” Guy stomps over to his horse and retrieves a coiled rope from his saddlebag and for a moment he thinks he is going to be whipped with it until Guy approaches and ties his already cuffed wrists together. “Walk, I do hope you can keep up.” Guy then mounts his horse tying the rope to the horn of the saddle and pulls the reins making the horse do a steady walk. He lets the rope pull taut and drag him before he reluctantly starts walking.
“You seem troubled my son,” he jumps startled to find the monk walking beside him. “My name is Tuck, I won’t shake your hand for obvious reasons,” the man sounds jovial and there is something warm and welcoming about him but now was not the time.

“Not being funny but if he turns around and catches you talking to me you’ll be in for it.” He does not know why he converses with the monk so commonly but he is tired of his affected speech.

“I am a man of God so I fear no man,” Tuck replies confidently.

“He is no man,” he replies bluntly.

“Your faith seems shaken.”

“Yeah you could say that.”

“Would you like to talk?” He really would but now was not the time.

“Some other time, please leave before he turns around.” Speak of the devil and he doth appear or turns and finds him conversing with a monk.

“Oi, did I say you could talk to him?” So folks needed permission to speak to him now, great. He shrugs at Tuck, after all he did warn him.

“Are we not all God’s children? I did not know I needed permission to speak to one.”

“Well now you do, come along, Allan,” the walk becomes a steady trot and he casts an annoyed look at Tuck for making him speed up.

“I will be staying in Nottingham for some time if you need to talk.” Tuck shouts after them and Guy goes a little faster making him jog behind him. He didn’t ask Tuck to talk to him but he is certainly getting punished for it.

He is forced to jog all the way back to Nottingham and he is sure the leg irons have rubbed the skin of his ankles raw. He watches Guy get down from his horse and untie the rope and he thinks he will be untied and uncuffed until Guy starts walking and tugging the rope pulling him along.

“Stop it,” he cries out when they are inside the castle and he is led up the stairs. Guy ignores him and he follows him up the spiral stone steps and freezes in horror when Guy continues passed the third floor. “No!” He protests convinced Guy was trying to take him to his bedroom. He turns off down the hallway until the rope is taut and he begins to pull, Guy pulls back and he stumbles losing ground as Guy is stronger than him. Instead he sits down knowing he cannot win with strength and Guy will grow tired having to drag him across the floor.

It takes longer than expected as Guy is tenacious but eventually he gives up his high ground and stomps down the stairs and stands before him unimpressed. “I’m not going to your room,” he informs him refusing to look at him. He realises he seems childish and petty sat on the floor with his arms crossed but he had to do something and Guy was just as childish, another reason why they should not be together as they bring out the worst in each other.

Guy relinquishes his hold on the rope and for a moment he believes he has won until large deadly hands clutch his biceps and pull him to his feet. While he is regaining his equilibrium Guy leans down and pulls him over his shoulder and turns around back towards the stairs. He kicks, wriggles and screams and even beats at his back but Guy continues until he mercilessly grabs his hair and pulls. It’s a shameful way of fighting but effective and Guy turns once more and carries him into the room he has been staying in.
The room has been cleaned and all of the broken items have been taken away but not replaced and the bed linens have been changed from the tatters he left behind. Guy takes him directly to the bed and puts him down onto his back and follows him down covering his mouth with his own. He pushes at his shoulder trying to get him away but he will not budge so he turns his face instead.

“Get off me!”

“Stop denying me we both know you want this.” Guy’s hand rubs between his legs but thankfully he is unstirred proving Guy’s words false.

“I just buried my father!” Protests aren’t working but perhaps some truths would make him stop. It seems to work and Guy gets off and unties the rope around his wrists and coils the rope to distract himself. The silence in the room is deafening and he wishes Guy would just leave but he knows he won’t.

“I will let you grieve,” Guy allows as if he needed his permission. “Though I wonder what excuses you will make now that daddy is gone.”

“You uncaring bastard!”

“Can you not see what you do to me?” Guy asks as if he had not heard him. “My passion for you, I have never felt like this before. I will leave you to your grief but know that you will find solace in my arms.” His eyes briefly go to his chained ankles and though he is certain he has the key he leaves the room and locks the door leaving him cuffed.

He turns over onto the bed and screams into the pillow.
Chapter 17

Hours become days and days become weeks and before he knows it a month has passed by since his father’s passing. He keeps the promise he made not to cause any trouble and the Sheriff has not heard a sound from him as he had refused to speak and the cost of his keeping was minimal as he rarely ate and refused to leave his room.

In truth he was not coping and he did not know how to cope. The Sheriff named him the new Earl of Bonchurch but he scoffed at the title and refused to take his seat on the small council. He was not Guy; he could not accept a name of a place that was no more than ashes. The land was still his and the lodge could be rebuilt but that was not the point, his home was gone and because he knew what he knew he was still under house arrest.

To his surprise Guy had backed off unsure of how to approach him now that he was depressed or simply because he had won. It was always a game between them and rules were broken and feelings were hurt and ultimately there had to be a winner and a loser and he had lost fantastically. There was no more victory to be had; no test of strength and no fight, Guy had won. Maybe he had lost some of his shine with the loss or maybe Guy was done with him and another pretty face had caught his attention. Poor sod if they had but at least he was off the hook.

It would be unfair to say Guy was completely ignoring him as that just wasn’t true, he saw the man every day but he seemed distant and no longer overbearing. The gifts did not discontinue but were given sporadically and no longer passed over with the same confidence. It was almost as if Guy no longer knew who he was and he could understand because he was uncertain about whom he was too. He felt lost and he had no one to talk to, Guy could make bold claims and heartfelt confessions but he was no conversationalist and they both knew that and knew why that was.

Due to what he knew the people who he could freely converse with fell substantially in number not that he would confess to anyone, he had tried that before and it hadn’t ended well. So he is rather surprised to have his door open and instead of the shy brunette a dark skinned monk wearing plain grey robes enters his room.

“I know you, don’t I?”

“Tuck,” the monk replies and holds out his hand and he shakes it.

“I would offer you a seat but...” he shrugs as he had no furniture save from a damaged dresser and a bed.

“That’s quite alright I can stand,” he replies with enthusiasm and it is almost exhausting hearing him speak.

“What can I do for you then?” His accent shifts back to what it once was and he wonders what it is about the monk that makes him speak that way.

“I was told you needed to speak to someone.”

“Look, I ain’t got nothing to confess, alright? You go tell the Sheriff that, my lips are sealed.” Tuck regards him with caring brown eyes and he has to turn away from him.

“You are lost; the passing of a loved one can affect us all.”

“Why do you say I’m lost?” He asks intrigued.
"Your speech, forgive me for speaking bluntly but before you were well spoken and now you speak like a commoner. I can only imagine your loss of self has caused you to speak differently as you struggle to find your true self."

"Yeah?" He does not know what else to say as Tuck was correct and he feared speaking with him further.

"I was told you were struck with a string of tragedies recently and any one of those could test a man’s faith and from what I hear you are a good man Allan a-Dale, a good man that has simply lost his way but the Lord is our shepherd and he watches over his flock even when they stray from the path."

"And what do you know about me?" He asks aggressively tired of being judged.

"I know that your mother died when you were eleven and your brother lived for a day before joining her. I know that you lost your best friend when you were ten and remained alone again until you were sixteen and a girl became your friend when her fiancé joined the crusades. I know that Marian joined the convent recently; I know your father was ill for some time and I know about the public flogging. Shall I go on?" He nods. "I know that you lost your home and then your father and you are still under arrest but what for I cannot say."

"No and nor can I."

"I thought as much but I am here to listen to you, confess if you must or simply talk, a problem shared is a problem halved."

"I don’t know what to say."

"It must be lonely cooped up in here all by yourself; perhaps some company would do you the world of good."

"It was the need for company that got me in this mess," he confesses and sits down on the bed dropping his head into his hands.

"Would you like to elaborate?"

He lifts his head and regards the monk uncertainly. "I made some really bad choices and I didn’t listen to my father and now he’s dead because of me."

"Now that is not true, God had other plans for your father and his presence was required in heaven."

"I’d like to believe that."

"Then do, God is not malicious he has a plan for us all and he has not abandoned you. From time to time he tests our faith but only so he can welcome the righteous into his home on the day of judgement."

"Why would he send distractions to lead us from the path?"

"You speak of the devil’s work, God tests our strength of faith but the devil uses temptation to lead us astray from the path of the righteous. Have you been led astray?"

"I have," he confesses but can say no more.

"And that is why you are lost and you feel as if God is punishing you for your sins?" Tuck enquires
and he nods. “God is merciful and he knows that mankind is flawed but those that are lost can be found again.”

“I’d like that.”

“God has not abandoned you but you are less likely to feel his presence in this castle. I will petition the Sheriff and ask that you accompany me back to the monastery.” He can hardly believe his ears; Tuck was offering salvation and an escape from the corruption of Nottingham.

“I would like that but they will not let me leave.” He replies truthfully and his momentary elation plummets.

“This is a higher calling; the Sheriff has no jurisdiction over God.”

“Truly?”

“Truly. I will speak to the Sheriff and then I have some affairs to put in order and then we shall leave on the morrow if that is alright with you?”

“Yes!” He calls and gets up from the bed. “Thank you,” he states grabbing Tuck’s hand and shaking it rather too enthusiastically. “Thank you so much.”

“Have a proper meal and get some rest, it is a long journey ahead.”

“I will, thank you,” Tuck smiles and takes his leave and the key turning in the lock after he departs no longer upsets him. His father’s final wish would be fulfilled, he would get away and find himself again and maybe just maybe he could find his smile.
That night he sleeps restlessly and come the morning he is up at first light pacing nervously. He had thought to pack but the clothes were not his and he would simply take what he was wearing. Guy’s gifts were safely tucked away in the dresser draw and though he wished to leave a note he had no ink or parchment to do so.

Though he had eaten his stomach feels awful as though coiled tightly from his nerves and he paces wringing his sweaty hands. Once Tuck arrived all would be well he knew but the waiting was driving him insane. Tuck had never given him a time to be ready by and he had only wished he could have foreseen his nervousness and could have corrected that oversight.

Still it could not be very late as they would want to make good time. He stops pacing as he hears a key in the lock and he turns to face the door. To his disappointment Guy enters and shuts the door and glares at him with narrowed eyes and a set mouth.

“You want to be a monk; I’m surprised you’ve not mentioned this to me before.” He states folding his arms across his chest and leaning against the door.

“Should I have?” He asks dismissively.

“Yeah,” Guy snaps petulantly and he so desperately wants to cheer as the game is not over and he is grasping victory from the jaws of defeat.

“It is done now; I leave with Tuck this day.”

“I thought we were friends.” He swallows nervously when friendship was mentioned between them bad things tended to follow. "I thought in time you would consider...” Guy looks away unwilling to finish the sentence.

“What?” He prods but truly he cares little what Guy has to say.

“Marriage,” Guy announces looking at him like he’s stupid. “That you would consider...” he trails off again.

“Perhaps I’m not the marrying kind,” he says with a shrug. What he truly wishes to know is what have these Black Knights been drinking thinking they can marry men all of a sudden? Still it is none of his concern and Guy can consider their friendship lost because he got greedy and demanded more.

“I have signed the pact,” Guy announces apropos of nothing.

“And?” He told him not to sign but he made his bed and the outcome had naught to do with him.

“It means everything. It means that I am a man of substance, wealth, I can provide for you. I am a man of power and of lineage; the Gisborne heritage is a proud one, I would be happy to share it with you with you as my husband.”
“Not being funny but have you listened to yourself?” For a moment Guy’s expression strikes fear in his heart and he realises Guy mistakes what he says assuming he is mocking his name and he would never do that. “I’m a man we can’t get married,” he clarifies and Guy lowers his head and mumbles, he hates when he mumbles practically whispering secrets to himself and then claiming he told the truth, he knows him too well.

“In time,” Guy’s magical answer to everything and he is quite sure the bible is not going to change anytime soon.

“I am leaving with Tuck,” he states firmly and Guy remains by the door blocking his path.

“No you are not,” Guy replies just as firmly and pulls the key from his pocket and locks them in together.

“Give me that key,” he demands and Guy smirks.

“If you want it,” he taunts holding it up high. “Come and get it,” and in a move he does not anticipate he drops the key down his trousers.

“You can’t keep me here!”

“Tuck is already gone; I sent him on his way and told him you had a change of heart.” Guy informs with a shrug and he is uncertain if he is telling the truth or lying.

“No...I don’t believe you.”

“Look for yourself,” he points to the window and against his better judgement he goes over and looks out and sure enough there is Tuck leaving the courtyard without a backward glance. He opens his mouth to call to him but a large hand covers his mouth and pulls him away from the window and against a solid leather clad body. “Ah ah don’t be foolish,” Guy warns and he considers how close he is to the key but he cannot bring himself to reach for it. Guy releases him and he takes the chance to put distance between them.

“So you want me to be your wife?” He asks with distaste.

“Husband, my equal,” the deluded fool sounds like he means it.

“I can’t give you children,” he states thinking Guy might understand if he is given facts.

“I have an heir,” Seth of course, he hadn’t considered him due to the fact he was never mentioned along with Meg and Isabella and his family.

“I don’t want to marry you,” he’s playing a dangerous game saying such things to Guy. “I want a wife and a child of my own.”

“You can raise Seth as your own.”

“No, I want my own son; I want another a-Dale. I want Bonchurch back and I want out of this miserable castle. I’m happy to remain your friend but only your friend, no more kissing and touching, I dare not even hug you anymore or even shake your hand but we can rebuild our friendship.” He speaks from the heart and Guy remains quiet with his face turned away so he cannot see his reaction.

When he does finally turn to look at him he does not like what he sees. There is madness in his eyes and determination expressed on his face. “It’s time you put your childish dreams to bed because we will be together.” His eyes widen in disbelief over the sheer audacity of the man.
“I would rather die than marry you,” he says spitefully casting a look at Guy’s hip thankful the sword is absent as he had no desire to be impaled.

“No, you don’t mean that,” he sounds heartbroken and there are tears in his eyes and he realises he must say something he wished to never say to turn Guy away.

“Why would I want to marry you? A Lord of reposessed lands, you are a joke. Gisborne is a proud heritage? Can Seth point it out on a map?” A fist in his face prevents any further insults and he falls to the floor dizzy. It is a shame it had to become violent between them but tensions are high and the adrenaline needed to be spent in some form and what he said was awful and he will take a beating for it.

He expects a further assault, perhaps some kicks and though he braces for their impact Guy takes to pacing instead. “The Sheriff warned me you would behave like this and I said he was wrong. I said that you would understand, that you knew my heart but you keep resisting me and I do not know why. Had you felt nothing I would understand but you want me as much as I want you.”

“Maybe once,” he concedes. It seemed pointless to deny it after all he had sneaked into the man’s bedroom and got onto his knees for him. “But then I learnt who you truly were.”

“I am the same person.”

“No you are not, my best friend would never raise a hand to me and he wouldn’t have ignored me for years!” He finally gets up off the floor tired of allowing Guy the advantage over him and angry with himself for revealing that hurt.

“Is that what this is about?” Guy asks completely ignorant to his own murderous behaviour. Of course being shunned by a friend hurt but it was a far worse hurt learning said friend tried to kill the king. He doesn’t answer, he can’t because Guy just doesn’t understand and he does not wish to argue about being ignored and making this about him and his feelings when it was so much more than that. “I never ignored you.”

“Liar! You came back from France and pretended that I didn’t even exist.” He snaps and retreats to the corner of the room.

“How could I have come back from France when I never went to France?” Guy challenges and he’s stunned. He had always believed the night of the fire Guy was chased away all the way to the docks and forced to leave the country and he took that as truth even when certain parts of the story seemed untrue. He realises he has been naive about so many things, taking things at face value believing Harold was a friend of his father’s when the evidence suggested he wasn’t and believing Guy had left the country when England was his home and he had no family in France. It also shed light on how Vaisey had found him as it was always sketchy how their paths crossed and he could not believe Vaisey travelled to France in pursuit of a young lord and his sister. She was also another gap in the story, where was Isabella, he had written her off as dead at sea or on a lonely road but now he didn’t know what to believe anymore.

“Where were you then?”

“Dover,” Guy replies with a shrug and does not seem forthcoming with any more information. He stares expectantly at Guy awaiting more information knowing the Master at Arms didn’t like to talk much. That needed to be rectified as it was their lack of communication that had wrought so much destruction recently and they needed to talk, actually converse not just say filthy things and make confessions. “Longthorn hired men to see us off thinking he could have our land. They tried to steer us toward the coast but we fled south but they were still pushing us towards the east until we ended
up at Dover. They forced us on a ship heading to France and paid a man to tie us in the hull and left. One of the crew untied us and we fled but we had nowhere to go so we stayed in Dover and Isabella sold cockles while I took work where I could find it, helping with the days catches, fixing traps or scrubbing decking.” He blinks in surprised certain that was the most Guy had ever spoken to him.

“And that was where Vaisey found you?” Guy nods. “Where is Isabella?” Guy’s shoulders become tense and he knew it was a sore subject but it needed addressing considering he had confessed she was alive and well.

“That is none of your concern.” The glare and tone of voice suggest he would not like the answer if it were given.

“What did you do?” He wouldn’t have hurt his own sister, surely not he loved her, but then he thought he had loved Marian. “What did you do?!”

“She is a lady now, married and rich,” Guy deflects as though married and rich are more important than in love and happy. It is clear to him that he has wronged his sister in some way but as always he spins whatever happened into his favour. “I did what I did so I could come back to you,” he deflects again placing the blame on him and he will not stand for it.

“More lies? If you returned for me why did you marry Meg and what was that between you and Marian? How can you claim to love me, return for me and do that to me? I approached you in Nottingham, I tried to congratulate you and you looked right through me like I was less than nothing.” Guy begins to pace again refusing to make eye contact.

“Meg was a mistake,” he snaps. “I had needs and she was willing and I thought she had taken precaution but as I was told three months later she had not. Would you have preferred me not to marry her and own up to my responsibilities?” He has a horrible feeling all was not as it seemed with Guy’s dismissive attitude towards Meg.

“Did you kill Meg?” He’s almost afraid to ask and he is thankful for the affronted look on Guy’s face.

“No, she died after giving birth I am only responsible for her death because I put the baby in her belly.” It is a small comfort but now he felt awful for Meg, a bright young girl that had her life cut short by giving a man that thought of her no more than a broodmare a son.

“Marian?” He questions but in truth he has already solved that mystery.

“Robin took you,” Guy says with a shrug back to deflecting and blaming again.

“How could you treat Marian like that?” He’s insulted for his friend and he cannot believe how insensitive Guy is after everything that was done to him and considering what a sweet boy he once was.

“Marian enjoyed the chase.” Like a mouse enjoys a cat chasing it.

“You would have married her,” he states firmly. It was true, he had even encouraged it.

“Why does that matter?” He mumbles again, he hates it when he mumbles.

“It matters because it shows how insincere and shallow you are. You claim you came back for me but yet you bed hop with any willing female, and judging from your behaviour I would not be surprised if some of them were unwilling.”
“Is that what you think of me?” Guy asks sadly.

“That’s what I know of you.”

“Very well, get on the bed.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” Guy snaps and reaches for the button on his trousers. A shiver runs down his spine as the icy touch of dread grasps his heart.

“Guy, please don’t,” he had made this plea before to save his home but it hadn’t worked then but he hopes it will work now.

“Get on the bed before I throw you on it.” He trembles in fear as his heart pounds frantically in his chest and he slowly edges closer to the bed.

“Please,” he whimpers ashamed of himself as he sits on the edge of the bed adhering to Guy’s order but taking liberties knowing what the other man truly wanted.

“Take your clothes off.”

“I won’t,” he refuses.

“You behave as if I have given you a choice.”

“What the hell is wrong with you?” He demands and stands from the bed, high on adrenaline. He stares Guy down unwilling to be ruled by the fear of the serpent stood before him wearing his friend’s face.

“If you will not submit willingly then I will take you by force.” Guy replies carelessly unconcerned by the magnitude of his possible future actions. He does not know why he is surprised, a murderer stands before him, attempted king-slayer why would he avoid rape when his entire nature was deviant.

“You are going to let me out of this room right now,” he says with false bravado.

“Am I?” Guy asks dubiously and begins to unbuckle his leather jacket. “Take your clothes off before I tear them off,” Guy states tossing his jacket onto the floor. He wants to scream and call for help but who would answer? Tuck was gone, the Sheriff wouldn’t care and his father was dead while Marian was in the convent, not that he would call for Marian, he would not put her in harm’s way.

Fear and adrenaline course through his veins and he is left with the decision of fight or flight but as the room is locked there is only one option. He is under no illusion that he could take Guy in a fight but one good punch with the element of surprise he may just make it out of this ordeal unscathed.

He approaches Guy as he is lifting his undershirt over his head and he helps like he did all that time ago when he stripped Guy naked in Locksley Manor. Once the shirt is removed Guy looks down at him cold and calculating not trusting him for a moment. He realises he must lead him into a false sense of security so he tentatively reaches out with his left hand and when he is met with no resistance he places his hand against his chest. His skin is hot beneath his hand and he moves his hand lower over washboard abs and further still. Guy’s trousers have been loosened so he slips his hand down the front hoping to feel the key against the back of his hand with no luck. Guy takes an audible intake of breath as his fingers brush against his penis and he moves his fingers further along rubbing against the sensitive head and toying with the slit before wrapping his hand around the
hardening flesh.

If Guy believes his actions are false he cannot be sure but he is stirred by him as his cock pulses in his hand and his hip buck steadily. He’s standing too close to see his face but he can see his shoulders are no longer tense as he practically curls against him pressing kisses in his hair above his left ear.

“I knew you would come around,” Guy whispers smugly against his ear and he can almost feel the smirk on his lips. “I'll make this good for you, I'll make you come,” he promises moving his mouth to his cheek and down until their lips are pressed together and they are breathing each other in.

He clenches his right hand into a fist and swings striking Guy on the cheek and he knows instantly he had made a mistake. He was standing too close and could get no extension in his arm so his punch lacked strength but not intent. Guy steps away from him stunned one moment and angry the next and he lashes out striking him in the face with the back of his hand. He stumbles back and his hand slips from Guy’s trousers as the Master at Arms approaches him and backhands him again knocking him onto the bed.

He screams as there is nothing left to do. Perhaps screaming bloody murder someone might intervene, though considering his assailant is Guy they probably wouldn’t but it was worth a try. Guy reaches for the laces of his breeches and he grabs his wrists to stop him but bending steel would be an easier task. His defiance is in vain as Guy unlaces his breeches and pulls them down and off exposing him from the waist down. He tries to cover himself with his shirt but it is too small so he covers himself with his hands willing his tears away.

Guy looks at him, his face a mask devoid of emotion as he reaches into his pocket and tosses something onto the bed. Against his better judgement he looks and sees a small corked bottle and to his horror he realises it was the same one Winchester had in the carriage and he cannot stop the tears that fall.

“Prepare yourself,” Guy orders and he brings his knees to his chest and shakes his head, hiding his face. “Do it because I won’t and if I hurt you that will be your own fault.” He wants him to be an accomplice in his own rape and once again he is deflecting and blaming turning it on him as if he is to blame for this.

“Please Guy...”

“Sir Guy,” Guy snaps.

“Please Sir Guy,” he amends and lifts his head revealing his tear stained face to his tormentor. “Don’t.”

“Beg me.”

“Guy- Sir Guy, please I beg you, have mercy and do not do this.”

“Better,” Guy replies with false cheer. “But not good enough,” Guy approaches the bed and so he reaches out grabbing the bottle.

“Stop, let me...I...please,” he babbles crying openly but Guy is unmoved by his sorrow. He uncorks the bottle and is assaulted by the sweet unknown smell of the liquid and he pours a liberal amount onto the fingers of his right hand and parts his legs.

He watches Guy as he presses a finger into himself because he has to see him, truly see him. His traitorous heart had to be broken because he could not love him after this; he should not have loved
him at all. Guy did not love him no matter what he says as he was proving the extent of his affection and it was naught but a carnal desire to possess his body with or without his consent. He adds another finger and watches Guy absently rub over his tented trousers as he watches him with undisguised hunger. This was merely a show for Guy; he did not care for him he cared for the act as he so shamelessly confessed to earlier. Nottingham Castle was the setting and the bed was his stage and he had never ceased to be a player ever since stepping into the games room.

“Another,” Guy orders huskily, slipping his hand down his trousers and taking himself in hand. He follows his command grimacing in discomfort at the burn of being unnaturally stretched open and he feels shameful and sick for performing for Guy’s perverted pleasure. “Good, now get me ready,” Guy approaches and instead of dropping his trousers he simply lowers his zip and brings his cock out. He stares at him unsure of his intent and Guy casts his eyes to the bottle and then to his erection and he realises what he wants.

Swallowing back his cries of betrayal he removes his fingers from himself feeling dirty from the act and takes up the bottle once more, spilling liquid into his palm. He kneels up on the bed and takes Guy’s cock in hand covering his length with the thick liquid as Guy bites his lower lip and thrusts his hips as if his actions were not malicious and he was not forcing his supposed friend to pleasure him. He can’t help but glare at him as Guy’s eyes close and he surrenders to the pleasure. He is unfairly beautiful and he hates him for it, he wished he was as unattractive as his selfish black heart. Taking advantage of Guy’s distraction he slips his hand down the back of Guy’s trousers and feels the firm globes of his ass before pressing slick fingers against his opening.

“Not tonight,” Guy says, startling him by not outright refusing his actions. Guy then takes hold of his wrists and forces him down onto the bed and climbs on top of him. He turns his face away as Guy attempts to kiss him and Guy makes a noise of disapproval before releasing his wrists and pushing his thighs apart, spreading his legs wide so he can settle between them.

“Stop,” he insists but he knows Guy will do no such thing. “Not like this, I don’t want to see your face,” he says with as much venom as he can muster and Guy has the cheek to look wounded as he complies and allows him to move onto his stomach. He could have used the momentary distraction to run but it would be pointless without the key and he had not felt it during his exploration of Guy’s body.

Guy pulls on his hips and he gets onto his knees and rests his elbows on the mattress as Guy kneels behind him. He can almost feel a scream forming in his throat but it would make no difference as Guy presses the slick head of his cock against his opening and pushes forward breaching his tight passage. His hands fist the quilt and his knuckles turn white as he drops his head down resting his forehead against his right hand as he grunts in pain. Guy’s intention is not to hurt him but he feels as if he is on fire while being torn apart even as Guy takes his time pushing in slowly.

His back feels twisted and his heart hurts like a physical ache as Guy pushes all the way inside him and holds still pressing kisses across his covered shoulders. He’s surprised Guy is taking the time to allow him to adjust rather than simply slaking his lust and leaving him in a cold room with dirty sheets. Instead his hands explore his body, one hand running under his shirt and up his back to his shoulder almost massaging his tense muscles while his other loosens his shirt and toys briefly with his nipples, pinching them before moving lower to wrap around his flaccid cock making good on a promise he made earlier.

The first thrust of his hips is tentative and shallow as are the ones that follow before he becomes more daring withdrawing further to thrust back inside. He cries out from the ache of it while Guy grunts in pleasure no better than a beast in the way that he takes him. He squeezes his eyes shut
demoralised when he feels himself responding to Guy’s touch, the Master at Arms pace is brutal and hard like the man himself and his light barely-there grip on his cock makes him thrust into his hand forcing him to participate in his own rape.

Tears fall from his eyes as moans are torn from his throat and he resents their newfound stamina. Before they were no better than randy teens quick to orgasm after a few brief touches but now Guy fucked him like a man possessed and there was no other way to describe this. Guy could not spin this as it was what it was which was a brutal fucking, he could not claim this was making love or two men enjoying one another it was a man taking what he wanted with barely a thought to his partner beneath him.

Had he behaved this way with women? Had Meg been treated this way and then burdened with carrying his child which led to her premature death? He does not believe that is true, he always remembered Meg with a big belly and an ever present smile once she married Guy, as if all her dreams had come true. Meg was a hellion too, had Guy mistreated her the whole of Nottingham would have known about it so it seemed this special kind of hell was reserved solely for him.

Guy grabs his shoulders and presses down against him dropping his weight onto his back forcing him flat against the mattress. One of his hands combs through his hair before gripping the dirty blond strands and pulling as the other braces against his hip as he thrusts into him hitting that spot inside him on every stroke. His thrusts are slow but hard and deep, precise, practically an assault on his prostate gland and he screams into the mattress as the force of Guy’s movements make his cock rub against the quilt beneath him.

It is too much, the pain, the pleasure the absolute debauchery of it all and the moment he feels Guy’s teeth bite down onto the meat of his exposed shoulder he sees stars and arches as he spends himself on the sheet below. He hears Guy moan behind him as his muscles contract around his member and not four thrusts later he can feel Guy release his seed inside him and he feels dirty and used.

Guy remains on his back with his full weight and licks at the indentations of his teeth on his shoulder that thankfully did not break the skin. He wants to knock him off and send him on his way as he felt sticky with sweat and he was sure his skin would stick to Guy’s leathers if he did not remove himself shortly.

“I did ignore you,” Guy confesses and for a moment he is uncertain about what he means until he remembers their earlier conversation. “I came back for my friend, I visited Gisborne first and then I went to Bonchurch and I saw you. You were not as I had imagined, while I was away you were a ten year old boy and that was how I remembered you so imagine my surprise when I found my friend was now a man, an extremely attractive man.” He presses kisses across his neck as if to prove a point. “I knew then that I could not be your friend because I wanted to share my life with you and the law would not allow that and you being my friend would have not been enough. When you approached me in Nottingham it killed me to ride away from you.”

“What changed?” He asks not sure he wanted to know the answer but he needed to know. Guy pulls out and leaves him feeling hollow and numb, something has been broken between them and Guy was behaving as though it was consensual.

“I could have you,” Guy confesses and lies next to him. He turns on his side to glare at Guy as he feels the man’s seed run down his thigh. “Not in that way, in the way that we want, all I had to do was kill the king.” His jaw drops at the confession, he had said it, it was true and how weak he must think he is to say such things to his face.

“Was killing Robin just an added bonus?” He snaps.
“Robin got in my way.”

“Of course, I’m sure he just ran into that sword in his back.”

“Why are you defending him? I don’t recall you being friends.” For a moment he thinks he sees jealousy in Guy’s eyes.

“He would have made a better friend than you.”

“But he wasn’t your friend, was he?” Guy taunts and sits up. “No one was your friend except me. No one loves you as much as I do; I tried to kill the king for you.”

“Oh no you don’t!” He snaps and sits up as well grimacing in pain. “Don’t you dare blame your behaviour on me, you tried to kill the king because you are a selfish murderer. You did it for money and power and you don’t love me, you don’t hurt the ones you love and you’ve hurt me, Guy.” He’s ashamed that his voice breaks and he begins to cry again, he had thought he had no tears left to shed.

“Was I too rough?” Guy asks concerned completely unaware of his horrible actions.

“You raped me!”

“You were not unwilling,” the sheer gall of the man. “Do not claim otherwise,” Guy snaps as he opens his mouth to refute his claim. “The proof of your enjoyment is beneath you while the proof of mine is inside you.”

“You are a monster.” There is no talking to him; he will not accept responsibility for anything. “But you got what you wanted so now let me go so that I may catch up with Tuck.”

“No!” Guy snaps petulantly.

“I will not speak of this; I shall take a vow of silence. My back is scarred, my father is dead and my home is no more I have learnt my lesson.” He solemnly vows but he already knows from the look on Guy’s face that he will be denied.

“Have you not listened to a word I have said?” Guy demands angrily. “We will be together, all I have done has been for this moment for our bodies to be joined and soon our hands will be. I will not let you become a slave of God.”

“No, you’d rather me be your slave.”

“My equal in all things as we have always been.”

“Let me go.” He says dismissively.

“You do not listen!” Guy rages and climbs from the bed and retrieves the key from his trousers before buttoning them once more. “You will be mine, we will be together and we shall marry.”

“It’s time you put your childish dreams to bed,” he says spitefully using Guy’s earlier words against him. “I will never be yours, I don’t belong to you, and I’m not a possession.” Guy grabs his jacket from the floor leaving his undershirt behind and walks over to the door.

“Fine, if you will not be my spouse then you will be my whore.” He routes through the pockets on his jacket and retrieves one silver coin. “Do not come to me looking for a favour, I owe you nothing, I paid you.” He drops the coin onto the floor and with a final glare he unlocks the door and departs immediately locking the door behind him.
He glares at the door for some time and screams in frustration, but it all seemed so pointless. Tuck was gone and he was no more than Guy’s whore and to think he once thought he actually meant something to him. He grabs the soiled sheet beneath him and rubs between his legs removing the traces of Guy’s semen from his ass and thighs.

The room stinks of sex, a combination of sweat and spent seed so he gets up from the bed and opens the window. He looks down onto the courtyard and moves back from the window when he sees Guy, the Master at Arms was barking orders at some young boy who scurries off and then he looks up at his window. He must have seen it open and knew that he was there, after all where else could he be, Guy had locked him in. He cannot see much stood so far from the window but he can see just before the portcullis and he hears the sound of hooves and sees the boy reappear with a saddled horse, a bay mare, Guy’s horse. He was leaving?

He stays back and watches the gate and sure enough Guy rides out moments later with no retinue of guards. Not that he needed them, everyone was scared to death of Guy and for good reason, had he only listened to the people he would have been too but he hadn’t listened. He would not listen and he defended Guy against all the naysayers because he thought their ire was stirred by his parentage and not for the fact that he truly was a heartless cruel self-centred monster.

He is still not sure that is entirely accurate and he hates that small part of himself that would defend Guy to the death. After all the man has done to him and his mind still tries to reason his behaviour, Guy’s mania has clearly been passed to him and they were as mad as each other and doomed for it.

There is barely a breeze and the smell remains making him feel dirty and sick and so he walks over to the second window and looks down at the back of the castle. There is nothing below him except freedom and an idea suddenly forms so he quickly runs to the bed and strips it of the dirty sheets and begins tying them together. Before when they had locked him inside he was too high up but now situated on the third level he has the opportunity to escape and he would go and try to catch Tuck and when he was safely in the monastery he would warn the king.

He’s thankful for their oversight leaving him so many covers but he adds Guy’s shirt to the rope out of spite and ties it to the bedpost. His shirt is soaked with sweat but he had no other and refused to wear Guy’s so he kept his on and he pulls on his trousers and boots and drops the make-shift rope from the window. He watches it swing not reaching all the way to the ground but he deems it close enough and he pulls firmly on the rope confirming that it could take his weight.

He hears no cry from the guards so he goes over to the window and holds the linen tightly as he lowers himself down from the ledge. He looks down wondering if the drop would kill him and he sends a prayer of thanks to God for not giving him the particular malady of fearing heights. He scales down the wall as quickly as possible and finds there’s a good seven foot drop but he continues until he dangles from the very end of the rope and releases it dropping down onto the ground.

He bites the back of his hand to stifle his scream as his right ankle buckles from the sudden weight that landed on it. Tears of pain sting his eyes but he limps off knowing he does not have a moment to lose and he must find Tuck.

He stops for a moment unsure where he is as he has been turned around by exiting the back of the castle. He tries to get his bearings as he knows that Tuck left the courtyard and turned left but he did not have the foresight to see which direction Guy had chosen and it wouldn’t do to be found by him of all people. He has the advantage here and he cannot lose it by an oversight, Guy knew of his plan
to leave with Tuck so he would send a search party to intercept him and drag him back to the castle so he could not pursue Tuck. He imagines the castle will be in an uproar and the guards would be sent in search for him expecting him to scarper on foot so the only logical thing to do was hide in plain sight and stay in Nottingham.

It was a risk but he hoped it was so overt it was covert and he could not make much ground on his injured ankle even if he chose to flee. Staying in Nottingham was his best chance of freedom though standing in the middle of the street was simply asking for trouble so he limped off between two houses and tried to mentally map where he was.

He was behind the castle and turned left, if memory served him well he was on Batley Street. He does not recall visiting Batley Street before as during his unappreciated freedom of his youth he rarely ventured to Nottingham so the chances of being recognised are slim to none. Of course recently he had been trussed up like a common criminal as he followed his father’s funeral procession but few had turned out to show their respect and he had kept his head down for the most part of the journey.

Lady Luck was on his side as he spotted a physician’s up ahead. It was a plain building, hardly distinguishable from the others but the sign above the door revealed the true nature of the place. He limped over hoping the physician would show him kindness and look at his ankle for free as he was without money and had nothing to trade. He almost wished he had pocketed that silver coin but no, to take the money would be to agree with Guy that he was indeed a whore and a cheap one at that. He’d rather remain in pain until the end of his days than to take that money.

The door is open but he knocks regardless. “Hello?” he calls and limps into the physician’s home and takes a seat at the table before him wondering if the man was with another patient.

“One moment,” a voice calls from above and he hears someone coming down the stairs on his right. “Well well well,” a familiar voice speaks behind him and he turns quickly and to his horror he sees Pitts. “Now you shouldn’t be out, should you?” Pitts says smugly and he wants to crush his oval shaped head.

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“How do you intend to pay for my silence?” Pitts asks and he takes a proper look at the man, he is the wrong side of forty with thinning brown hair greying at the temples and sun kissed skin. He is slightly taller than him with good white teeth and dark eyes that reflect his dark heart.

“I have no coin but I could...” he trails off unable to confirm that he would sell himself for his freedom. Guy was right, for the right price he was a whore.

“Do you honestly think that I would touch you?” Pitts asks disgusted and to his horror he is offended. “If I so much as lay a hand on you Gisborne would take my life, is this a test? Has my loyalty come into question? I’ll show the Sheriff that I can be trusted, Guards! Guards come at once!” He stands up from the chair to flee but Pitts pushes him back down. “Back to your Master with you, I am not disloyal.”

“Let me go,” he insists when Pitts pushes him down once again.

“So you can tell the Sheriff lies? I have seen men of better position cut down for less.” The man genuinely seems scared and keeps looking towards the door but as of yet no guards have appeared.

“I am not working for the Sheriff; I came only so you may look at my ankle.” He withholds the information of his escape hoping that Pitts would simply do his job and let him go but the man seems
to calm at his words and his sinister smile returns.

“They would call for me and not send you; you’ve escaped and hurt yourself in the attempt no doubt. Silly boy, did Guy make you want to run away?” He asks in a childish voice mocking his dilemma.

“I’ll tell Guy you did not help me,” he bluffs.

“Please, you’ll tell Guy ‘yes’ and ‘more’ and no more than that.” His eyes widen at the insult and the accuracy of it. “Did you think I did not know when you come to me smelling like that? Like him? I thought you were a Lord in your own right but I suppose you were originally from the gutter and folks from the gutter should stay in the gutter.” The clang of metal sound the arrival of the guards and Pitts smirks arrogantly. “Looks like the cavalry has arrived and it is back to bed for you.” The snake clutches his arm and drags him from the chair and pushes him into the arms of the two guards that had entered. “This belongs to Sir Guy, be sure it is returned to him.”

“You’ll pay for this!” He hisses as the guards drag him towards the door. “Guy is from the gutter too, I’ll be sure to let him know what you think of him,” Pitts looks mildly worried and he wants to strike fear in his very heart. “And his spouse!” The guards drag him from the building but Pitts follows looking uncomfortable.

“What?”

“Oh did I not tell you? We’re engaged and I’m going to ask for your corpse as a wedding present so get running.” He would never ask Guy to kill for him but Pitts does not know that and he has no desire to correct him as the physician nigh on wet himself and it served the coward right if he had. The guards pay no mind to their exchange and once he has said his piece he throws his arms over the two guard’s shoulders and limps back to the castle without complaint as three more guards follow behind. His freedom was short lived and he wants to laugh at the ridiculousness of it but he knows if he didn’t laugh he would cry.

The guards escort him to the Great Hall where the Sheriff is sat at his desk wearing a black fur coat and is scribbling furiously on a piece of parchment. He looks up from his work like a mean spirited ferret while his hand continues to write making him wonder if he was actually writing anything. The Sheriff was always one for dramatics from his outrageous clothing and exaggerated mannerism so pretending to be busy was not beyond the realm of possibility.

“Ah Allan,” the Sheriff states with a sigh and drops his quill and pushes his throne-like chair out. “Did someone leave a door open?” He questions looking towards the guards as he makes his way around his table. “Oh no, not a door, a window perhaps?” He asks staring directly at him. “One should not air their dirty laundry, Allan-a-Dale,” Vaisey warns coming to stand before him and makes a show of sniffing him and pulling a face. “Eww you smell worse than a tart’s hanky but good to see Guy is finally putting you to some use, I thought he left here with a skip in his step.”

“Where did he go?”

“Why? Missing him already?” Vaisey asks with an insincere smile. “No need to fret, dear boy, he had business in Locksley but he’ll be back in time to play hide the sausage with you, don’t you worry about that.” A wave of anger hits him and he swings at the Sheriff and enjoys the way the man cowers but his blow never impacts as the guards pull him away. “Feisty aren’t you? I see Guy’s going to have his work cut out for him, I might give him the week off.” He lunges for him again but the guards are wise to him and he does not even get close. “Come now, don’t be so sensitive...I could send a guard to please you if you are missing him too much.” The man is a menace and cannot help himself and he kicks out only managing to kick his coat but the Sheriff looks displeased. “I’m
your friend, Allan; don’t make me your enemy.”

“You’re my friend?” He asks incredulously. “I have enough friends, thanks.”

“You don’t have any friends,” the Sheriff snaps. It’s not true, he had Marian and the carpenter’s son liked him well enough and Count Friedrich was nice to him. “Now I don’t think it necessary to tell Guy about your little escapade but a room change is in order and a bath because you really do stink.” He pauses and looks to the guard stood on his right. “Scrub him ‘till he’s pink and then dress him in one of Guy’s nightshirts,” he orders and turns back to face him with a smirk. “I doubt you will be needing clothes.”

“You bastard!” He attempts to lash out again but he is firmly held back.

“Temper temper; get him out of my sight.” He tries to fight as best he can but his ankle pains him and there are five against one and they lift him and hold him firmly hurting his wrists and ankles in their harsh grasps.

They follow the Sheriff’s order and he is taken to a bathing room first while one of the guards leaves and the others toss him into the water and tear his sodden clothes and boots off before attacking him with scrubbing brushes and cloths. He won’t permit them to see his tears or hear his screams instead he makes noises of disapproval as he is washed harshly and dunked multiple times as though they thought he was a witch.

When they deem him cleaned he is pulled out and practically scrubbed dry as the guard returns carrying a nightshirt. If it is Guy’s he cannot be sure but it reaches just passed his knees and then he is marched upstairs as the pain in his ankle has subsided. He loses count of the level and they shove him into the first room of whatever level and lock the door.

He turns around and looks over the room and sees there is an unlit fire and no windows. The bed is large and covered in furs and there is a trunk at the end of the bed, a table and two chairs and in the far corner there is a wooden door. He walks over and opens the door and sees the wall has a circular edge as it was one of the turrets and there is a wooden lid and he lifts it and sees a hole that is far too small to climb out of and judging from the smell he most certainly does not wish to climb down there. He closes the lid and exits the lavatory and goes over to the bed and sits down covering his legs with the furs.

He had failed again and quite frankly he had run out of options, the King was on his own. Perhaps he was never meant to be King Richard’s salvation but the king was to be his salvation. King Richard was no fool and he had survived this long in the Holy Land surrounded by loyal men, men like Robin who would give their life for him. Surely his personal guard would stay vigilant and when the Sheriff’s man went to act he would be dealt with. If he was captured they could force him to confess and the king might come home and deal with his treacherous brother and bring law to the land once more. The Sheriff would have to answer for his crimes and the king would find him locked up and know that he played no part in his attempted assassination. He would speak for Guy as he could not bear to see him hang but he would see him imprisoned for his association with the Sheriff and he would not speak of his tattoo or his time in the Holy Land. Guy was easily influenced and too passionate to truly consider the backlash of his actions. He was woefully naive at the best of times and his lack of judgement did not warrant his death and if it did then hang him too, there was no Allan without Guy.

Maybe there was just no Allan anymore.
Chapter 20

The passage of time is hard to follow with no windows, though he assumes Guy visits once daily it could very well be twice for all he knows. During his incarceration he has only seen Guy and no one else, Guy brings him a meal and one cup of water and when he feels generous he brings in a bowl of water and washes him as though he was an incapable child.

It is a precarious existence living on Guy’s mercy when the man was so volatile and unpredictable. Some days, most days to be fair a saint comes to visit him but it meant he was likely to see the sinner soon and it never truly mattered how Guy behaved as he always left in the same manner, foul tempered and throwing a coin at him or on the floor.

The floor was covered in silver coins as he refused to collect them, Guy considered it payment for use of his body and therefore would not touch them and there was no maid to clean his room. He was given no clean sheets, or wood for the fire and Guy was so scatter-brain he hardly remembered to bring him candles so he was limited to one beside his bed for fear he may run out and be bathed in darkness. He did not fear the dark but he certainly did not desire an eternity of it and he hoped his use of one would remind Guy to bring him some more.

His relationship with Guy was as it ever was, a constant battle of wills, a fight that was evenly love and hate with an ambiguous moral compass. History should have taught him he could never defeat Guy, he lost when they splashed each other as children by the lake and he was losing fantastically now but he did not stop. Accepting defeat was the pinnacle of losing and as long as there was breath in his body he would fight.

It was clear to him the only available exit from the room was the door so numerous times he had tried to rush the door, tackle Guy and flee and he had made it into the corridor once but Guy would not relinquish his hold on him and soon pushed him back inside and denied him his meal. It was his best idea so he tried again and again but Guy was wise to him and even when he attempted it much less frequently Guy was still untrusting of him and caught him each and every time.

Any escape attempt soured Guy’s mood and he would not even try to play happy families with him, asking him how his day was and if he was hungry. When he had been angered he would drag him over to the bed and get what he came for, which was usually a hand job as he very rarely penetrated him as though he was fully aware that he was crossing a line. He was content to simply pull him onto his lap and unbutton his own trousers and stroke their cocks together taking perverse satisfaction when he made him orgasm.

Some days he would not attempt to touch him and he was happy enough being in his company watching him eat or lying on the bed beside him. They didn’t make much conversation but their last heart to heart ended rather badly so he was thankful for the well rehearsed lines and he gave his well rehearsed answers playing at being normal. However even on those days he would say something or Guy would and Guy would be forced to leave before he undoubtedly punched him in the face.

Guy had only physically attacked him once and only because he had started it. He had waited behind the door with one of the wooden chairs in hand holding it by the backrest so the chair legs were in the air. Guy had entered and he struck him across the back making Guy drop the meal and water and he turned with such a look on his face he thought he was going to be killed. Guy wrestled the chair from him and struck him repeatedly with it until he was face down on the floor unable and unwilling to get up. Guy had been so furious he followed him down and forced himself on him, fucking him on a dirty floor strewn with silver coins with no preparation. He had meant to hurt him, and he did and left him on the floor with his meal and drink spilt across the floor.
The next day he visited as though nothing had happened but he had brought a bowl of water, a cloth and a towel which spoke of his guilt. Needless to say he never tried a sneak attack on Guy again but he found other ways of upsetting him. Guy did not like it when he lay perfectly still and allowed him to do as he liked. At first he only used it as a coping mechanism, surrendering his body so Guy could take his pleasure and leave but Guy did not want a warm corpse and would rage at him and shake him and when all else failed he would use his mouth on him.

Guy was determined to see him climax as though he needed it and he probably did. It could very well be how he was reasoning his behaviour to himself and anytime they touched he made him orgasm first except the day of the chair incident. He had wanted to get across to him that an orgasm against your will was not considered consent or acceptance but as usual Guy would not listen so he had tried to show him instead.

He cannot remember when the incident took place though he imagines it was early on as there were many candles burning. They were both on the bed laying on their sides, naked and facing each other and touching each other. Their touches were innocent as though they were two young lovers exploring each other’s bodies for the first time. Considering all the things they had done before this was perhaps the most intimate as there was nothing between them no assassination attempt or enforced captivity just two people who obviously cared about each other devotedly caressing each other’s bodies.

In truth it made him miserable because he could have had this had he only stayed home that day. Ignorance was bliss but he knew the truth and however much he enjoyed touching Guy in this way he knew he could not truly have this. Things would sour between them as it always did so he took it upon himself to teach Guy a lesson while he was relaxed and docile enough not to catch on. Guy had brought oil with him, as he always did as he had tried to leave some in the room but he would suffer from a bout of aggression and promptly smash the bottle. He used the oil on his fingers of his right hand and then moved his hand to Guy’s hip, stroking over the jutting hipbone before sliding his hand down over his posterior and between his legs. To his surprise Guy was only watching him with intrigue as his hands explored his pectorals, he was in the perfect position to push him away but he chose not to and allowed his finger to breach him.

He went on to further surprise him pushing back and requesting another and he thought for a moment he must be dreaming. He didn’t hesitate to press another finger inside him and probed intently to find that spot within him and watched Guy’s back arch when he brushed it for the first time.

‘So that’s what it feels like,’ Guy had said in awe and moved away from his fingers so he could lie on his back. He watched his beautiful long legs open for him and immediately put his hand between his legs and pushed his fingers inside him brushing that spot without mercy. He was shamelessly aroused by Guy becoming undone beneath him that he straddled his thigh and leaned over him covering his mouth and the swallowing the older man’s moans of pleasure.

He became drunk with the power this act afforded him and he took advantage of the situation and entered another finger inside Guy and delighted in the way the man shifted in discomfort. He liked hurting him as much as he liked pleasuring him it would seem and he continued fucking him with his fingers considering a fourth when Guy forced him to stop.

He thought he would be punished for taking liberties but Guy only pushed him onto his back and took up the oil to cover his cock. He had already been fingered open earlier and he spread his legs and locked them around Guy’s hips as the man penetrated him. He had pulled Guy’s hair forcing him down into a biting kiss and held him there until they both climaxed in an embarrassingly short amount of time.
He had enjoyed himself and the unspoken promise was there, that he could have him but Guy would not lie down for him outside of marriage. It was almost laughable, as though Guy would be some virginal bride but it certainly made the prospect of marriage more appealing. The fact was that he shamelessly wanted him whether Guy would be on his back, or he would it didn’t matter, he wanted him and he hated himself for it.

That particular night ended as all their nights ended with an argument. It was as rehearsed as their greeting, Guy would insist his feelings had changed and he would reply that Guy was still a murderer. Guy would mentioned their marriage and he would claim he had no desire to marry him and Guy would get upset and say something nasty that tended to vary but usually something negative about his father. He would then say something about his father and Guy would leave, tossing a coin on the floor before they killed each other.

It was a vicious cycle that they seemed doomed to repeat no matter what happened in the middle it always ended the same. So he is rather surprised when the routine is broken and Guy visits him some hours earlier than usual. He has no concept of time but everything follows a pattern and it is usually quite some time after he awakens that Guy comes for him. He could have overslept but he does not think so and judging from Guy’s quick steps he is eager to see him.

He gets up from the bed and rolls up the furs and puts them away in the trunk at the foot of the bed. He was never given any wood or coal for the fire so the furs were his only source of warmth and he had no desire to dirty them and always put them away before Guy arrived and dirtied his sheets instead.

Guy opens his door and he is surprised to see the sun at his back as usually he was framed by an orange glow of the torchlight. There is a small smile on Guy’s face which has him worried immediately because Guy was clearly happy about something and though he assumes he would be pleased too he very rarely is.

“Come with me,” Guy holds his hand out and he stares at him across the room wondering if it was some kind of test. He remains by the bed blinking owlishly at him as the light of the day hurts his eyes. Guy retracts his arm only to hold it out once more while inclining his head gazing at him as though he was a simpleton. “Here, now,” Guy orders and he cautiously walks over and ignores Guy’s proffered hand and stands by the door. “I am taking you to the bath, will you come willingly or must I carry you?”

“I have no boots,” he replies thoughtlessly not realising he had opted for Guy to carry him. Guy grins wolfishly at him like he did all that time ago in Bonchurch when his feet were injured. Had that only been some months ago? It felt like a lifetime. Guy tugs on his wrist and pulls him from the room and into his arms choosing the bridal carry once again.

The light feels as if it is burning his retinas so he squeezes his eyes shut and presses his head into the crook of Guy’s neck as he is uncomfortable with the warmth of the sun on his skin.

Guy makes no complaint no doubt basking in his submission and he carries him as though he weighed nothing. He was aware that he had lost weight during his captivity wasting away on one meal a day but he understood that he could not be trusted and given more food he would become wasteful and throw it across the room.

He has time to think while being carried like Guy’s doll and he casts his mind back trying to pinpoint the exact moment when things went wrong between them. With hindsight he can see the subtle and not so subtle hints Guy had dropped before they had even kissed. He was too naive the night of the King’s birthday as he was convinced Guy loved Marian and so when Guy offered him a bed for the night he did not consider he meant his thinking he meant only to drink and pick his brain about
Marian. Then of course he confessed that his feelings for Marian were spent, if in fact they ever existed and she was more than just a pawn to spite a boy from his youth. He had claimed there was another that held his interest to his face and he would not have guessed Guy was trying to tell him then that it was him. The man had tricked him into following him into his bedroom and stripped in front of him and he had thought nothing of the indecency and instead worried that he would tell his father he was spying on him.

Then the very next day he had told him he needed a husband and he took it for jest or a slip of the tongue when all the while Guy was trying to tell him. Words were never Guy’s forte and though he was an able wordsmith when he chose to be he was a man of action and he had kissed him. He had thought that the act was random never realising before how hard Guy was trying to tell him, he even chose to carry him in the bridal way to convey his intent and he had not seen.

So given the facts perhaps Guy was not speaking falsely and upon his return he did truly visit Bonchurch and saw him as he had said. He claimed he could not settle for friendship between them and it was either all or nothing which would explain why Guy ignored all of his attempts to re-establish their friendship and nothing more.

All the while he had been blaming himself thinking he had led Guy on when in truth he was woefully unprepared and misinformed with Guy’s pursuit. He did not stand a chance against him and he wonders how Marian had resisted when in truth he was woefully unprepared and misinformed with Guy’s pursuit. He did not stand a chance against him and he wonders how Marian had resisted when he had failed spectacularly. Perhaps because they were not in love, as Marian’s heart belonged to Robin and Guy claims he is in possession of his heart. The painful truth is that Guy has always had his heart since they were boys he just hadn’t realised it. He was his first friend and he accepted him entirely and he understood him and his life as he had lived it himself. Had things progressed naturally he would have been his first kiss and his first lover as he was his first love, his only love and he had meant everything to him and no other had made him feel close to how he felt simply by being beside Guy. His heart was fit to burst when Guy returned to Nottingham older, handsome but undeniably broken and he had looked right through him. Guy says it killed him to ride away but he does not consider how he felt standing there in the kicked up dust rejected and then hearing a week later that Guy had married a girl he hardly knew.

When they reach the washroom Guy puts him down and strips him of his nightshirt. He does not attempt to cover himself as Guy had seen him naked many times it would seem pointless. There was nothing left to hide as he felt his soul was laid bare and his heart had been dissected and torn apart and he simply felt raw. Guy walks over to a wooden tub and dips his hand beneath the surface of the water and nods to himself as though he deemed the temperature satisfactory. He gestures for him to approach and so he does and climbs into the tub and lies back in the warm water.

He had certainly missed having a bath as Guy had taken to giving him a bed bath that was always awkward and his last time in a tub was an all-out assault as he was dunked and scrubbed against his will. He wishes to relax and wash away his sins but Guy seems adamant to attend to him and he lets the older man run a cloth over his body as though he even had a choice.

Guy surprises him by not simply exploiting the opportunity for a cheap feel and instead he has noticed his relaxation and gently washes him soothing his tense muscles. He closes his eyes and takes advantage of Guy’s generosity as he was unsure when he would be treated like this again and he wanted to make the most of it. Living in the shadow of Guy’s temper he had learnt not to look a gift horse in the mouth and to take every day as it comes.

Guy is a very diligent attendant and washes him from his neck down to the black dirty soles of his feet before wringing out the cloth and moving away. He had hoped for a while longer in the tub and to his surprise he feels Guy’s hands on his shoulders massaging his tense muscles relieving the pressure on his neck.
“That’s good,” he compliments not realising how much tension was in his body. “What do you want?”

“What makes you think I want something?” If Guy is playing at being innocent he fails miserably.

“Because I know you.”

“It’s the Sheriff’s birthday today.”

“Is it? I haven’t gotten him anything with being imprisoned and all.”

“Don’t be like that,” Guy sighs put upon. “Will you accompany me?” A choice, a genuine choice, he had almost forgotten what decision making was.

“Will there be wine?”

“Plenty and roasted pheasant and peacock and he will also be serving swan.” The Sheriff has some gall eating an animal that was deemed property of the crown when he had hanged poachers in Sherwood Forest. He does not know why he is even surprised, of course he would have swan on his birthday the way he flaunted the law, he cared little for trivial things such as laws and not killing one’s own king.

“Yes I will accompany you,” he agrees. Celebrating the Sheriff’s birthday is not on his list of priorities however it certainly bested sitting in a dark room staring at a wall waiting for Guy to come torture him in his own special way.

“Excellent, lean forward so I can wash your hair.” He is quite sure he was capable of washing his own hair but he does not wish to fight and does as he says. Guy uses a pitcher to wet his hair which beats being dunked and he is uncertain what he uses in his hair but it smells like berries. Guy takes his time lathering his hair and massaging his scalp and it always makes him nervous when Guy is being gentle with him as more often than not it meant he was up to something. In Guy’s own mind he probably thought he was a gentle lover and he certainly tried to be but he was so quick to temper and he was able to upset him so easily that try as he might he would always reveal his true self.

He tips his head back as Guy rinses out whatever he used in his hair and once done he is helped out of the tub and towelled dry. He is unsure what exactly Guy is trying to prove but if Guy wishes to treat him like the most precious thing on earth then he certainly was not going to stop him.

“You are in need of a shave, may I?” Guy asks gesturing to a chair in the corner. He nods and goes over and takes a seat unaware of how he looked. Undoubtedly he looked like an unkempt vagabond and if Guy meant to show him off he could not have him look that way and smell of sex.

He leans his head back and allows Guy to lather his face and neck in a thick soap and he watches him as he concentrates on his task as if nothing else matters. He shouldn’t pay attention to him; he shouldn’t want him as much as he does but seeing those eyes regard him so intently and being touched so gently and reverently he wants for nothing more. Guy notices that he is staring at him and his lips curve up into a small smile and he closes his eyes before he says something stupid like telling the Master at Arms that he was gorgeous.

It feels like the longest shave in his life and made all the more awkward with his attraction to Guy while the man was dressed in leather and he only had a towel around his waist. Finally a towel dabs away the remaining soap around his mouth and neck and Guy presses a mirror into his hand not before rubbing over his closed eyes. He opens his eyes and blinks noticing kohl smeared around his own eyes thickening his lashes and making the blue of his eyes more prominent. He wonders if it
was something they did in the Holy Land considering Guy had never worn the stuff before but since returning he was hardly without it, not that he minded, he could get lost in his eyes all day.

He looks further down and sees that his neck and cheeks are clear of any stubble. His sideburns have been trimmed back and join with his beard that runs in a small line across his jawline. His moustache has also been trimmed back resting over his top lip and running no further while a thin line of hair runs from the middle of his bottom lip and down to his beard. He’s impressed Guy remembered the way he kept his facial hair and he picks up a comb and starts combing his short hair. Captivity has done nothing for his colouring as the blond in his hair has faded and it seems brown almost auburn.

“I hope you will wear these,” Guy breaks his vain assessment and carries over some clothes and the abundance of leather is not lost on him nor is the absence of smallclothes, he is beginning to forget what it was like wearing them. He places the mirror and comb down and stands from the chair and looks over what he has brought. Black leather trousers though considering the size of them they were not his own, a velvet long sleeved undershirt, again not his own and a thick leather and velvet vest with three buckles down the front.

He does not wish to wear it as he has no desire to be dressed as a mini Guy again. Was he trying to prove to everyone that he was his stooge, or some lost waif imitating his master? Or maybe he is taking insult when there was none as Guy is not gloating so perhaps he genuinely wants to see him in leather, it made sense, as the man wore little else and clearly had an attraction for it.

“My boots were ruined,” he speaks up, apropos of nothing.

“I was informed and bought you a new pair,” Guy replies and collects some boots and socks from beside the door. For a man that forgets to bring him candles he seems well prepared so the day must really be important to him but he supposes the Sheriff is the equivalent of his father so he can understand he wants the day to go by without a hitch.

He dresses quietly and keeps his sour looks to himself when he notices how tight the outfit is. How Guy can walk comfortably in leather is beyond him, he even saw him run once; he ought to be dunked in the lake for that one as it was clearly witchcraft. He’s so focused on how tight his outfit is he does not notice Guy skulking behind him until cloth is placed over his eyes and tied behind his head.

“What is the meaning of this?”

“I have a surprise for you.” He knew Guy was planning something the way he was creeping around him. He is not even asked if he would like to walk or be carried this time as Guy lifts him and carries him from the room. He was blindfolded, dressed in leather and being carried like a maiden he was very glad he had given up on dignity a long time ago.

The fresh air hits him first and then Guy walks down some steps before placing him down and by deduction he realises they are in the courtyard. “Really I do not like surprises.”

“Well you’re going to like this one,” Guy replies self-assured and unties his blindfold.

“Oh he’s beautiful,” he exclaims without thinking staring at the sixteen hand Cleveland bay stallion. He walks over to the saddled horse thoroughly impressed with the pure bred with the plaited mane and tail. “But I cannot possibly accept him.”

“Why not?” Guy asks disappointed.

“The expense,” he dare not even consider how much this horse had cost, enough to feed the villagers
of Locksley twice over he’d wager.

“What expense?” Guy asks with a shrug. “My fortune is secure, I can provide for you.”

“Really?”

“That is what I have been trying to show you, humour me, just put him through his paces.” He waves to the man at the gate and to his horror he hears the portcullis lifting.

“Please,” he whimpers and Guy’s eyes narrow in confusion. He doesn’t want to be outside anymore he wants to go back to his room. He does not trust himself not to climb onto the horse and ride away never to return. He would be chased and Nottingham was crawling with Black Knights and the horse did not deserve to be ridden to death as would be the only outcome and lead to his inevitable capture.

“What is the matter?”

“I don’t want to ride the horse,” he sounds like a petulant child.

“Why?”

“Because if I ride away I will not come back,” he confesses. Guy’s eyes widen in shock and he immediately waves at the guard and the portcullis lowers and he can breathe easier. He leaves the stallion and goes to stand before Guy. “Beautiful horse though, you keep it, besides I would much rather ride you.” He does not know what possesses him to say that, or to walk passed Guy and slap him on the backside. “Wine!” he announces walking up the steps. “You promised me wine,” he calls as Guy seems struck dumb. It takes a moment for Guy to come to his senses but he soon hears him run up the steps to stand at his side and offer his arm like a gentleman.

If they resemble the couples he used to mock by behaving in this fashion he cannot be certain as he has no idea what two men in that position would look like. Still he has Guy on his arm, or more correctly he is on Guy’s arm so he doubted very much that he would hear derisive comments made towards them as the opinionated cowards tended to value their tongues.

He’s escorted to the Great Hall and he’s surprised to find there are many guests already arrived enjoying an afternoon meal. The Sheriff’s table is situated at the back of the hall, in the centre and horizontal like the way he has it for the council of nobles. His ostentatious chair is centre with two more seats on his right but no more. The table is laden with food as are the four long vertical tables that run the length of the hall for his guests. Casks of ale and pitchers of wine are placed around the hall against the walls with a servant standing station at each table and black banners with silver hawks the like he has never seen before hang from the walls.

There’s enough food to feed a small army and enough seats to sit a garrison and he worries how many friends the Sheriff has. For the first time he realises how truly out of his depth he was by taking on the Sheriff. The corruption in England had been left to fester for too long and he was uncertain how far it had spread but considering the Sheriff’s audacity it had certainly spread far enough for him to consider himself invincible.

Guy leads him directly over to the Sheriff and they both bow to the birthday boy. “My Lord, we have brought you a gift,” Guy says magnanimously and he is momentarily thrown by his choice of words. Guy unhooks the sword at his hip and offers it to the Sheriff as it rests on his open palms; Vaisey seems to perk up at the gift and looks at the hilt of the sword which was the head of a hawk crafted in silver and then pulls the blade from the scabbard and holds it up.
“Very nice, a good weight, I’ll be sure to make use of this.” It’s as close to a thank you as Guy is going to get but he seems pleased with himself and once the blade is returned to its scabbard and passed over Guy takes his seat beside the Sheriff and he takes his seat beside Guy. Considering the nobility already in attendance and those due later he is quite surprised that two kids from the gutter have been given the only seats of honour.

As the day progresses he slowly watches all the seats begin to fill and an endless supply of food is brought from the kitchens so the tables are never bare. It makes him sick watching these self centred nobles making gluttons of themselves for the simple fact that they could rather than find it in their hearts to abstain from eating or simply eating their fill and giving the rest away to the poor. He can only pick at his food but he helps himself to a healthy amount of wine as he looks down upon the people who had once looked down on him.

He’s surprised no one has kicked up a fuss about the absent Lord Winchester whose corpse was rotting in the woods as far as he knew. He thought a murder of one of their own would set the cat among the pigeons but he forgets that there is no honour among thieves and one less meant more for them.

At some point the guests begin to stand and mingle and Guy makes the rounds making sure everyone is well fed and catered for. He had thought to follow him but frankly he did not wish to and Guy made no motion to him so he stayed seated until he was the only one and was standing out for it. The Sheriff was lingering by the main table being approached by a number of his cohorts but making no effort to seek them out. He chose to linger by the main table too and hoped no one would converse with him. He watches Guy make the rounds and he keeps turning to look at him and he wonders if he fears he would bolt if given the opportunity. He should have bolted earlier but he had talked himself out of it and he wasn’t sure if it was the voice of reason or fear that had gotten the best of him. He would like to think it was the voice of reason.

“My Lords, Ladies and gentleman, thank you for your attendance here today,” Guy announces and the room goes quiet. “As you know we are here to celebrate the Sheriff’s birthday,” Vaisey raises his goblet smiling widely like the vain obnoxious git that he is. “We wish him success in his endeavours and pray that he sees in many many more years. Please raise your goblets in a toast to the Sheriff of Nottingham.”

“To the Sheriff of Nottingham!” The crowd reply and he mutters along begrudgingly raising his goblet. He’s quite surprised how Guy commands the attention of the room but he was easy on the eyes and his voice...he could read the Bible and make it sound like utter filth.

“I myself have a particular reason to celebrate on this day,” Guy continues looking directly at him. “This beautiful creature, Lord Allan a-Dale has consented to marry me.” His jaw drops at the announcement while he is deafened by the applause. Consented? When? He and Guy clearly had differing opinions on what consent meant. “Before I toast my future husband there is something I would like to present to him.” Guy walks over to him and pulls a silver Celtic design ring from his pocket and holds his left hand. “May I?”

“You leave me little choice,” he whispers as they have a rather large audience.

“I thought you had already made your choice.” Guy snaps and true enough he had and he was quite sure he had said no quite vehemently.

“I have,” not like he could say it now, announcing their engagement like this was the equivalent of running to his father. “This means so much to you, doesn’t it?”

“This means everything to me, have I not expressed myself? You mean everything to me.” He’s
insane, too many rocks to the head by the bullies he’d wager but he allows him to place the ring on his finger and the Celtic design is not lost on him. Guy takes hold of his wrist and holds his hand up showing off the ring which the crowd would not completely understand but Vaisey would, Vaisey knew every sordid detail. “My Lords and Ladies I give you the future Lord Gisborne,” he’s hurting his wrist as the crowd applaud as if they were genuinely pleased for them. Why did he have to become a Gisborne, why couldn’t Guy become an a-Dale...what the hell is he even thinking? They can’t get married! He’s becoming as delusional as they are and he cannot tolerate this insanity sober.

He finishes his wine and quickly refills his cup as Guy releases his wrist and simply watches him. It would be sweet if it wasn’t so terrifyingly creepy, he pours another cup and passes it to Guy and they clink goblets before drinking deeply. He is aiming for oblivion and he cares little if Guy wished to join him as the last time he deliberately tried to get the man drunk he burnt his house down.

He could not have true freedom but he could achieve a form of escapism allowing the alcohol to take the edge off his blighted existence. He could drink until his problems no longer mattered and the Black Knights insanity started to make sense. Did it truly matter if he lost himself in his cups? Had he not already lost himself? And now they wished to take the last of him and make him a Gisborne. His father would not approve of his excessive drinking but his father was no longer here and he imagines his father would not approve of a great many things. He had failed him as a son and he wishes to drink to forget and to simply no longer care.

He’s not sure how many cups of wine he has had when the tables are moved near the walls and the minstrels begin to play. Space has been made to dance but no one seems interested either still stuffing their fat faces or nattering incessantly. It’s rude, the musicians are playing their hearts out so he steps out into the space provided with a goblet of wine in one hand while he can almost feel the rhythm of the music in the air with his other.

He tilts his head up and stares at the black banners with a silver hawk. The Sheriff’s crest or one for the Black Knights as that was the symbol on their rings. He does not know and quite frankly he does not care because as he turns it looks as if the hawk winks. He turns the other way and sure enough the bird winks and he keeps spinning going faster wondering if the bird of prey would take flight.

He is so engrossed in what he is doing he was unaware that anyone had approached him until large hands grabbed his shoulders stilling him and he dropped his head staring into the concerned eyes of Guy.

“Are you well?”

“No, I’m Allan,” he tries to keep a straight face for all of a second before he laughs at his own joke and Guy smiles patiently at him.

“Right well I think you’ve had enough to drink,” Guy says reaching for his drink and he pulls his hand back spilling wine on his hand as he does so.

“No I can still see your face so I have not,” he pointedly takes a drink.

“Don’t do this here.”

“What? I’m dancing, leave me alone.”

“You’re making a fool of yourself, and I’ve said you’ve had enough.” He snaps reaching for his wine again.

“You’re not my father, get off me!” Guy manages to grab a hold of his goblet but he refuses to
relinquish his grasp and the wine sloshes as they battle between themselves pulling it back and forth until he loses his grip from the wine coating his hand and Guy pulls back forcefully and tips the wine down his own chest. “That was a waste of perfectly good wine!” He complains ignoring the look of outrage on Guy’s face.

He looks for the nearest table of beverages and Guy takes it upon himself to grab a hold of his wrist and pull him from the Great Hall, along the corridor and towards the winding stairwell. “I want to go back to the party, I’m not tired,” he whines as Guy drags him up the stairs.

“You’re going to sleep it off.”

“I hate you.”

“Hate me then.” Fury coils in his belly and he tries to pull the ring off without success.

“If this ring wasn’t stuck I’d throw it in your face!” Guy turns on him then so sudden and furiously he loses his balance and falls forward knocking into Guy’s legs and knocking him down onto the stone steps. He crawls up Guy’s body and rests on top of him glaring down at him. “I hate you,” he tells him then sees a drop of wine on Guy’s neck and leans down to lick it up. “I hate you so much,” he presses a brief kiss against his smiling lips. “So much,” he attacks his mouth and they share a desperate kiss and part breathing heavily. “Fuck me,” Guy’s hands immediately go to the button of his trousers while he toes off his boots and then he helps Guy rid himself of the leather trousers and stands up and faces the wall bracing his hands above his head against the rough brick.

He hears Guy stand up and he parts his legs further welcoming him. He can smell the oil Guy uses and so he assumes he had it on him the presumptuous bastard. He waits eagerly for the penetration but it does not come and instead Guy grabs his wrist and turns him around and makes him face him. There is naked hunger on his face and his stiff prick is wet with oil while his leathers are around his knees. He reaches out a hand to stroke his cock but his hand is slapped away as Guy grabs his bare thighs and lifts him while stepping forward.

He groans from the initial penetration as his body becomes accustomed to Guy’s size once more and he wraps both his arms around Guy’s neck as he steps forward pressing him against the wall as his legs lock around his waist. “Fuck me,” he orders and Guy moans in response fucking into him with quick sharp thrusts that has his back rub painfully against the brick at his back pulling at the thread of his undershirt and scratching against his lower back and ass. “Do you like that hmm? Fuck me,” he whispers into his ear and bites down on the lobe and feels Guy’s rhythm falter before he feels Guy’s seed spill inside him.

Guy remains holding him up with his cock still inside him as he recaptures his breath and he feels slightly cheated as he was awfully quick and he had yet to reach completion. Guy finally lowers him and removes his softening cock and pulls his trousers back up. He thinks for a moment he means to leave him without relief until Guy lowers himself down onto his knees and takes his cock into his mouth.

His head falls back, thudding painfully on the brick as Guy takes him eagerly down his throat as though he had done it before. He had to him on numerous occasions but he feels a spike of jealousy thinking Guy had been with other men. He could hardly forgive him for sleeping with females he does not know what he’d do if Guy had been with men too.

He drops his hand to Guy’s head and runs his fingers through the inky black strands before becoming more daring and pushing him forward. He tries to listen for the approach of someone, anyone as the prospect of being caught excited him. He wanted them to see Guy on his knees for him and see what he had reduced the fearsome Master at Arms to.
He stumbles as Guy places one of his legs over his shoulder, parting his thighs so he can push two fingers easily inside him. He’s unashamed of the wrecked sounds of pleasure he makes and he claws at the wall with his left hand while his right remains in Guy’s hair before Guy reaches out and takes a hold of it lacing their fingers together. A filthy act should not be accompanied by a romantic gesture and he fears the lines are blurring between love and lust confusing the both of them.

His leg over Guy’s shoulder spasms as he brushes against his prostate and Guy aims for that spot each time while swallowing around his cock. He feels a tightening in his groin and tries to push Guy away but he remains and he spills his seed into Guy’s mouth and drops against the wall spent.

His body is an over sensitised mess as Guy keeps his mouth on him and had not pulled away like he would have done. Instead he has swallowed and the knowledge makes him shiver in excitement or that was due to Guy’s fingers still inside him mercilessly teasing that spot inside him.

“No more,” he pants breathlessly as the pleasure is beginning to become pain. Guy removes his mouth first and then his fingers and sits back on the steps allowing him to put his leg back down. He slides down the wall until he is sat on the stairs slightly below Guy. “Can we go back to the party now?”

Guy laughs honest and openly. “Looking like we do? No.”

“You look good,” he compliments and Guy eyes him warily. “You’re pretty.”

“You’re drunk; I’m taking you to bed.”

“You already did.”

“A proper bed to sleep,” Guy corrects and collects his trousers and helps him up and get dressed back into his leathers and boots.

“When we’re married...” he trails off as Guy helps him up the stairs. “When we get married...” he loses his train of thought again and tries to remember. It isn’t until they are back at his room that he remembers what he was trying to say. “When we are married can I fuck you?”

“No,” Guy answers back quickly without hesitation and pulls him into the room. To his surprise there is a roaring fire and a clean floor and all his candles have been replaced and lit and his sheets have been changed and extra furs have been given. Guy leads him over to the bed and sits him down and kneels down to remove his boots. “No you can’t fuck me, but you can make love to me.” It sounds absurd and he is quite sure he has never heard anything as erotic as Guy promising to lay down for him.

“Would you consider becoming Guy a-Dale?”

“No,” Guy replies sadly. “I have done too much to restore my family name and honour.”

“What about mine?”

“Your family is buried in pauper’s graves.” Guy says while standing up.

“So are yours!”

“This is non-negotiable.”

“I can remain Allan a-Dale.”
“No!” Guy snaps. “I will not have you confuse my son, you will be my spouse and you will take my name.”

“I hate you,” he hisses.

“Yes, you’ve said that earlier before you turned into an insatiable whore for my cock.” Incensed he pulls the ring from his finger and slings it at Guy.

“Did I do that earlier?” Guy picks up the ring from the floor and pockets while casting a nasty glare at him.

“Sleep it off you drunkard, your father would be so disappointed with you.”

“Fuck you!”

“No Allan,” Guy says and opens the door and throws a coin on the floor. “Fuck you,” he then leaves and locks the door behind him.

“Bring more wine tomorrow!” He calls not knowing if Guy heard or not as he goes around the room blowing out candles and he uses the light of the fire to return to bed.
Chapter 21

It takes some cajoling and endless arguments but Guy eventually learns to bring a pitcher of wine with him on his nightly visits and if he is expecting intimacy that night he visits during the day to deliver one or two pitchers. It weighs heavy on him, he can tell by the hesitancy of the drop off and he can sense the inner conflict, but both their moral compasses were askew and he could hesitate as much as he liked but he was still there and he would still supply him with alcohol.

He had spent most of his captivity since the Sheriff’s birthday pleasantly drunk. How long ago that was he could not say, some months surely. Time did not matter to him anymore as wine was his only focus. He had come to depend on it to drown his terrible thoughts and numb the pain of all the things he had lost. The wine silenced the voice that berated his love for Guy and he could take him in his arms and between his legs without regret.

That did not mean to say their relationship was any less volatile as they still argued only the topic had changed. Marriage hadn’t been mentioned between them since the announcement of their engagement instead Guy complained about his drinking and he complained because Guy was complaining. It was all dreadfully petty and he drank to forget.

There was a lot less tension in their disagreements as the alcohol numbed his feelings and muted his voice of defiance. Once upon a time he thought they would kill each other but now the only nastiness that passes between them are glares and the occasional raised voice. Guy still leaves a coin for him on the table as it has become old hat and no longer means what it once did.

If they talk he cannot recall and he certainly hopes he does not say anything outlandish while under the influence. Guy had once told him when he visited during the day that the night before he kept telling him that he was pretty while encouraging him to perform a sex act on him. He could not refute the claim as he could not remember and he did think Guy was pretty in a certain light so he very well could have said it.

The only downside to drinking was the headaches, the occasional need to vomit, disorientation and the memory gaps. Those and the unexplained cuts and bruises he found on his body. The day after the Sheriff’s party his lower back was on fire and when he touched his skin he found it scratched as was his posterior and he most certainly did not wish to know what had happened. He was sure Guy would relish the chance to tell him so he did not give him the opportunity instead he took a page out of Guy’s book and ignored it and pretended that nothing had happened.

He’s distracted from his thoughts by the sound of his door opening. He hadn’t heard Guy approach and he normally heard him on the stairs since he was anything but quiet and a dog was aware of the sound of its master. It is far too early and he had only woken up no more than ten minutes ago and he had no intention of getting out of bed any time soon.

“Just leave the wine on the table,” he calls since Guy is playing his hesitation game. He hears no movement and he would roll his eyes if it wouldn’t hurt so much. “I don’t want to argue with you,” their arguments were pointless as they were as stubborn as each other. “Don’t be like that,” he says as Guy remains quiet no doubt glaring at him. He pulls the covers back exposing his back as he is laid on his side facing the wall. “Come on, get in.”

“A lovely offer,” not Guy replies. He drops the covers and quickly sits up upsetting his already aching head and to his horror he realises he had just flashed the Sheriff.

“What do you want?” He asks dropping his head into his hands.
“Well it certainly does smell in here, no need to ask what you and Guy have been up to. You should really open a window, oh but you can’t can you?”

“What do you want?” He reiterates tired of the Sheriff’s taunts.

“Well that’s no way to treat a man that has brought you the news you have longed to hear.” He lifts his head and looks at the Sheriff in confusion. “The King is returning to England,” he announces. That is good news, for him but not for the Sheriff and his Black Knights. There must be some trick, perhaps it is not the king but an impersonator come to weed out the remaining Lords faithful to King Richard such as Lord Edward and his friend Lord Merton. “In a coffin,” the Sheriff adds with a smile and his thoughts grind to a halt.

The King was dead.

“You lie.”

“About a great many things but not this, I received the news today.”

“And you’re telling me, why?”

“Because Guy does not know.” It’s too early in the day for the Sheriff’s mind games. “Do you know why Guy went to the Holy Land?”

“To kill the king.”

“That was the task, yes but I asked you why do you think he went? Why do you think he wanted to kill the king?”

“To appease you and line his pockets.”

“Oh no my dear boy, he went for you.”

“Stop it right now; I will not be blamed for this.”

“You are not to blame, Guy failed.” The Sheriff replies with a shrug. “Do you have any idea how much he loves you? When I first met him and promised to bring him home all he could talk about was you. He thought you hung the moon and stars but I fail to be impressed.”

“Why are you telling me this?” He asks confused as the Sheriff was certainly behaving oddly and he was far too sober for this, whatever this was.

“Because Guy won’t and you need to know. He was supposed to bring you to me as I wished to meet this legendary best friend, but instead he returns to me forlorn and I’ll admit I was ready to slash your throat.” His eyes widen in shock at the ease of his confession. “I thought you had turned him away so imagine my surprise when he told me he was in love with you and wanted to marry you. You had sent the boy mad on his first day back; I’m surprised your father never told you how much he asked after you. Every council meeting he would approach your father asking if you were well, and more importantly seeing anyone.”

“Stop it! Stop pretending that he loves me when he married Meg and harassed Marian.”

“He is a man and Meg threw herself at him and if you haven’t guessed his pursuit of Marian was vengeance because Robin’s father stole his mother and destroyed his family. Besides during these pursuits he could not have you in the way he wanted, the option was not there and the moment it was he was quick to drop Marian, so stop acting so hard done by.”
"What option?"

"Marriage, to you, his deal with Prince John. For his part in killing the king Prince John would have the Bible translated into a more open minded version and change the law allowing two men or two women to be married. Money did not motivate him, nor wealth or position it was you."

"You knew the king would be murdered, that’s why Guy announced our engagement."

"Very good, yes my birthday was the chosen date of attack but news travels so slowly that only now I learn of the success of it and apart from me and Prince John only you know."

"Why me?"

"I’ve seen your expression when Guy mentions marriage as though you think he is crazy and I realised he had not told you. So now I’m telling you, you will marry Guy, I’ll keep the news from him for say, five days? During that time you should stop drinking like a fish and endear yourself to him because he will be your husband and I might even sing at your wedding."

It’s too much to digest, the king was dead, the marriage he had been laughing off was no joke and for once Guy had told the truth. He was going to be married; he would lose his name and what would become of Bonchurch? King Richard was his last hope and now he had nothing but the scraps that Guy gave him.

He was Guy’s boy. He should have fled when he had the chance, but now he had nowhere to go and no money. The coins Guy had left him could probably see him cleaned with new clothes and he might even make it to Lincoln but they’d be sure to put a reward for his capture. He could see no other option than to take Vaisey’s offer and be kind to Guy.

"May I have permission to leave the room and have a maid clean it?" It’s almost like a physical pain asking the Sheriff for permission.

The Sheriff eyes his sceptically. "You aren’t thinking of running, are you?"

"And go where?"

"Quite right, I’m glad you’ve finally seen sense. I’ll leave your door open so you can have a bath and make yourself presentable for your future spouse." The Sheriff then leaves making good on his promise by leaving the door wide open.

He stares at the open doorway even though the sun flooding the room hurts his eyes. It is a blatant mockery of freedom and he has never desired a drink as much as he yearns for one now but he must abstain. His drinking is what caused their arguments and now he must behave like the doting wife, they can say husband as much as they wished but he was well aware of his role. Guy could say he was his equal in all things but if that were true he would have not been locked away and have his choice taken from him.

There was little he could do now so he must look at the positive side; at least someone wanted to marry him. There had been zero interest before and even Marian refused his proposal thinking he gave it in pity when the truth was he was hoping she would take pity on him. He was willing to play second fiddle to Robin if it meant he would be married to a Lady because the upper class snubbed him and Marian was the only woman with position that would marry him and even she would not.

Not that position and titles were important because they weren’t and he would have happily married a common girl but he would have preferred that to be his choice and not because he had no other. So he should be pleased that he had a spouse of great wealth, position and power and he believed Guy’s
feelings for him were genuine.

Had he not once listed Guy’s qualities to Marian? The man was loyal to a fault, attractive and great in bed. Of course he had no other to compare him to but that was fine as he worried he would be damaged goods marrying another, by marrying Guy he would not be sullying his marriage bed. In the mess they’d made of their relationship there was genuine affection and as much as he despised Guy he loved him, though given the choice he would not marry him. Feelings aside, he wanted a child of his own and to leave a lasting legacy on this earth and that had been taken from him and Guy could not understand because his name and future was secure in his heir.

Knocking on his door snaps him out of his reverie and he looks up and notices the shy brunette waiting by the door with her head down. There’s a clatter behind her and two more servants appear, one with a mop and bucket and the other carrying fresh linen.

He climbs out of bed and quickly dresses into a nightshirt Guy had given him some weeks back and walks over to the corner of the room, collecting the clothes he had worn on the Sheriff’s birthday. He had worn them for as long as he could before they undeniably needed washing and the undershirt was strangely torn at the shoulders so that would need mending as well. He passes the items of clothing to the brunette with a smile.

“Could you please have these cleaned? Also I would like wood for the fire and a meal for two brought up later.” He walks over to the table and counts out fifteen silver pieces and gives each servant five much to their surprise. “I once wore a burgundy leather outfit, could you find it for me?” In truth he had no desire to wear that outfit again but his other clothes were usually Guy’s and Lord knew what happened to his original clothing since the ruin of Bonchurch.

They nod in acquiesce and he wonders if they were warned not to speak to him. It seemed petty not allowing him to converse with anyone but much of his interaction with Guy and the Sheriff had been petty that he would not put it passed them to issue such an order.

He leaves the room so they may do their work and he half expects to be pushed back inside and told it was all a ruse. Perhaps it was, the King had been gone for so long could anyone truly remember what he looked like? There may very well be a body returning from the Holy Land but who was to say it truly was King Richard? Anyone could place a crown on a corpse and claim it was the King and if Prince John is aware of the deceit, which he would be, as his brother he could claim it true even when it was false.

Surely there would be questions but if Prince John was staging a coup d'état would it matter as he would be named king stealing the throne from beneath his absent brother. The king would be forced to return and reclaim his crown, though that seemed too confrontational for Prince John. He was weak and craven promising riches and spoils to whoever would do his dirty work, it was unlikely that he would act with the possibility that his brother would return and challenge him.

The king was dead, of that he was sure.

He travels to the washroom and climbs into the tub beside the large roaring fire burning bright and he thinks briefly of the king. Richard the Lionheart, honourable, brave and betrayed by his own flesh and blood. He had thought his private guard would have seen off any attack but perhaps his camp had more members of the Black Knights than he had realised. That seemed the likeliest explanation as only having one man in a war-torn country was a weak hand to play should he get himself killed in the conflict.

He wonders if he had got a message to the king would he have even received it? It was such a long distance to travel and easily intercepted and the king may have one of his men read his letters and
that man could easily be a Black Knight and destroy the evidence. He shouldn’t think this way because he feels helpless and even guiltier for his father’s death and he truly wants a drink. He had been existing in the fuzzy numb world of alcohol where all his cares were drowned and having this all thrown at him on his first day of trying to remain sober was too much.

He turns his focus to something else and tries to recall the song his mother used to sing to him as she bathed him. He can barely remember the sound of her voice and only one or two of the lyrics come to mind but the melody remains and he hums along as he washes himself. His mother, Lily, would have approved of his match with Guy, even though she had held him back on the night of the fire she was crying as much as he was. At first he thought she was in mourning or emotional due to her pregnancy but she had revealed that her heart ached for him. Had she known then what he failed to realise? Surely he was too young and they were just a pair of rejects mucking about by the lake, no one could have foreseen this.

He takes awhile in the bath as his room was quite dirty and he does not wish to rush them. That and he is unsure of his freedom as it was given by the Sheriff and not Guy when Guy was supposed to be his master but the Sheriff was his. As he remained unmarried the Sheriff ruled over Guy however once he married he would answer only to Guy, he assumes. It’s too confusing and once again he is considering the role of a woman as that was all they had left him with.

He applauded Guy for his revolutionary thinking; well no he is giving Guy far too much credit. He applauded Guy for being selfish enough to change a silly law that benefitted him and many others. Love had no gender and as long as two adults consented –consent was key- to be wed then they should be allowed and their love should be celebrated. There was enough misery and sorrow in the world without putting a restriction on love.

But he hadn’t consented.

He gets out of the bath and dries himself with a towel before making his way to the shaving equipment. He lathers up his face and neck and slides the blade against his skin taking away the unwanted facial hair. His hair has grown during his captivity and remains darker when he looks at his reflection in the mirror. He has certainly looked better but now the whites of his eyes are red, his skin is a deathly pallor and there are bags beneath his eyes and his lips are cracked from sleeping in a cold room. If there is any good to come of this it is the prospect of sharing a bed with Guy because he was like a furnace between his thighs and beside him so he would never be cold again.

He dabs away the remaining soap and quickly trims his hair above his ears and at the back of his neck. It could very well be a hack job at the back but he cares little and dresses in the dirty nightshirt again and returns to his room.

The servants are finishing up as he returns, one is smoothing out a crease on the fresh bed linen and another is building a fire while the third is missing along with the mop and bucket. The room no longer smells, though he was so used to it he hadn’t thought it did but there is definitely a freshness to the room with having the door finally open for more than a minute.

He looks over by the table and sees a pitcher of wine from last night and draped over the back of the chair is his leather outfit. He walks over and pulls his trousers on surprised by the ease they pull up his legs and he is able to button them with room to spare. When he had first been given them they were tight on him which only showed how much weight he had lost recently. He pulls his nightshirt off and hands it to the servant collecting his dirty bed sheets.

“Could you also have this washed for me, please?” She nods while keeping her head down clearly having no desire to converse with him but truth was he was used to being ignored. “Oh and I’m done with this pitcher,” he calls and though there is still wine in it the other lass collects it. They both leave
soon after and he puts on his jacket finding that is also loose and simply sits and waits. Is that not what a doting wife does? Oversees the chores and simply waits for her husband’s return because without her husband she is nothing. Without Guy he is nothing, a horrifying truth and there was naught he could do but accept his position in life so like a doting wife and a loyal dog he waits for his master.

He can tell the passage of time from the fading sunlight from his open door and the servants return with two meals and light all of the candles and the fire while he simply sits at the table ignoring them as much as they ignore him. He’s had time to think but he hadn’t used it productively as he had barely considered what he would say to Guy. The Sheriff had gone out on a limb for him telling him of King Richard’s demise while withholding the information from Guy for as long as possible, giving him an advantage. Of course the Sheriff was not acting with his interest at heart; instead he was making certain he would behave for Guy when he was finally informed instead of thrashing and screaming.

He hears the sounds of spurs on the steps and the crease of leather and sits up alertly. Usually the sound of a sword slapping against his thigh was a commonplace sound with Guy’s movements but since visiting him his sword has been absent as though he feared he would grab for it and end him. It was a likely scenario as they were far too passionate and when their tempers were stirred they both became mean spirited and hurtful.

“Oh no,” he hears Guy mumble and watches him cautiously enter the room with tense shoulders and a look of fear on his face. He looks to the bed first and then takes a few more steps before turning his attention to the table and the moment his eyes fall on him he sighs in relief.

He’s unsure what that reaction was about but he seemed startled to find his door open. Had the Sheriff not informed him of his visit? Had Guy truly believed he had fled? Where would he go?

“I’m not sure if you have already eaten so I had a meal brought up, come, sit with me.” Guy eyes him with caution and he supposes he cannot blame him. Slowly he approaches the table and he takes a moment to savour the Master at Arms nervous because of him. It was nice to have the tables turned for once. “How was your day?” Maybe he’s laying it on too thick as Guy pauses and narrows his eyes warily.

“Oh for goodness sake,” he exclaims and makes a show of changing plates and taking a bite of chicken. As if he would poison Guy, their fates were interwoven and if he was to do away with Guy he may as well kill himself because the Sheriff would see him dead for harming his precious boy.

Guy is still cautious but takes a hesitant bite. Fool, if he was going to poison him he would use a slow acting poison like arsenic. In small doses over a period of time it would seem like a natural illness and leave behind no hint of foul play, and was not poison a woman’s weapon of choice? It would serve him right but he could not live with himself with Guy’s death on his conscience. He could not imagine a life without Guy period.

“He has you been busy?” He tries again trying to build a rapport between them.

“I...” Guy hesitates.

“Speak, we are not children anymore, no one will throw stones and damn them for doing so, I
adored your accent.”

“I went...why are you doing this?” Guy demands dropping the piece of chicken and pushing his chair back glaring at him defensively.

“Doing what?” He asks innocently.

“Behaving in this way.”

“Can I not take an interest in your day?”

“No!” Guy snaps. “I mean yes you can, of course you can.” He’s floundering and he realises it is because no one has ever shown him kindness and he does not know how to react.

“We were friends once and I can no longer tolerate this discord between us. I wish to make amends with you and repair our friendship before we further our relationship.”

“And you desire to further our relationship?” Guy asks timidly looking so vulnerable his heart aches for him.

“Yes. Much has passed between us but I would like to take things slowly if you are willing?”

“Yes, of course, I apologise for my behaviour. I miss my best friend; I would certainly like to see him again.” He smiles, finally at ease and tucks in his chair once more and begins to eat without suspicion.

He picks at his meal unsure how the night should progress. It was easy to speak of friendship but how were they to repair something that was born in silence and strengthened by separation especially with how they have distorted it. He could only hope it would mend itself.

“Should I...could I take my evening meal with you every night?” Guy asks when he finishes his meal.

“I would like that.”

“I see that your door is open, I never wished to trap you, you should not be caged but for my sake if you wish to leave the castle could you notify me first? I will accompany you or in the very least be at ease knowing where you are.” The request surprises him as he was under the assumption Guy knew nothing of the King’s death and the reason for his house arrest was because he knew of the plot. Now he was allowed passed the gates if he so wished? Did Guy know or was it his simple wishful thinking knowing the deed was to be done on the Sheriff’s birthday and assuming it was a success? After all he did have his head in the clouds most of the time.

“There is nowhere I wish to go; perhaps I will walk around the castle but no further.” If he were to leave the castle and come across Pitts heaven help him he would see the man severely injured.

There is silence between them but unfortunately it is awkward and not companionable as it was in their youth. Too much had passed for them to simply be at ease in each other’s company and not expecting a row that has become commonplace between them.

“I should go?” Guy offers uncertainly and he stands prompting Guy to do the same and they walk to the door with a noticeable space between them. “Thank you for tonight...I confess I am unsure what to do.” He could understand his confusion suddenly adhering to the code of courtship when they have slept together every night for the past few weeks.
“Would you settle for a kiss goodnight?” He questions and Guy nods and steps forward and reaches out to tilt his chin up and leans down to cover his lips with his own. It is a brief kiss no more than pressing their lips together and then Guy pulls away apparently satisfied. “Not being funny but you call that a kiss? Come here,” he grabs Guy by the back of the neck and pulls him down to his lips. There is nothing chaste in the way he kisses Guy, practically plundering his mouth with his tongue while Guy hesitates to return his ardour. He does not know why when their tongues have been all over each other but perhaps Guy was unsure just how slowly he meant.

He breaks the kiss before he loses himself to lust and demands more. Guy does not seem to mind but he has been thrown off kilter all evening and possibly longs to leave to make sense of things. He watches him leave and his hand strays to the door as if he means to shut it and lock it but he remembers himself and leaves it alone.

“Oh one more thing!” He calls, following Guy out into the corridor. Guy stops and turns around with a raised eyebrow. “I would like my engagement ring back,” Guy startles as though he had just been sucker-punched and he smiles knowing he had done the right thing.

He had meant for Guy to bring it tomorrow thinking it was kept safe in his room or at Locksley so he is surprised when Guy approaches and gets down on one knee before him. He reaches into his jacket pocket and retrieves the silver ring and then takes a hold of his left hand and places it on his fourth finger. “I’ll never take it off again, well until you replace it,” he promises and Guy stands once more and presses a kiss against his cheek.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” he sounds hoarse and if he didn’t know any better he would assume he was crying. The fact that he turns and quickly departs suggests he was overcome with emotion and was unwilling to let him see. He almost feels choked-up himself by Guy’s reaction and he returns to his room before he chases after Guy to tell him he loves him. Neither are prepared for that confession, not yet and to speak those words now would do more harm than good.

Instead he finishes off his meal and pours himself a glass of water and considers his plans for the morrow.
Chapter 22

When he awakens in the morning he’s surprised by how clear headed he is rather than awakening to a raging headache and his mouth doesn’t taste as though something had died in it either which was a plus. He sits up and notices last night’s plates have been taken away and there is a plate of food on the table and clothes folded over the back of the chair.

He gets up as naked as the day he was born and walks over to the clothes finding his clothes from yesterday have all been washed. He pulls the black leather trousers on and inspects his undershirt and finds the tears mended and pulls that on too. He looks at the plate of food considering the cold meat but his stomach is accustomed to one meal a day and the thought of eating so early makes him feel nauseous so he ignores it.

There is still no mirror or even a comb, which he will have to ask for instead of trudging all the way down to the bathing room. He might even ask for shaving utensils and a bowl of water though he may be pressing his luck, still it was worth a try.

He walks over to the bed and sits down and pulls his boots on and considers his course of action. It was true that he did not wish to leave the castle grounds but some air would be nice and a stroll around the courtyard would not hurt anybody.

He leaves his room and walks down the stairs and considers asking for a room change as he was far too high up for anyone’s convenience especially now that he was being acknowledged and servants were attending to him. He wasn’t an escape risk anymore and it would be nice to have a window again.

When he finally makes it to the bottom he walks along the corridor towards the front door and hears a strange clatter coming from the courtyard. Stepping through the door he’s surprised to see a dozen or more boys standing in a line clutching wooden swords while one of their number challenges Guy one on one. It’s a brief fight as the young lad stumbles and Guy presses the tip of his wooden sword against the boy’s abdomen and he steps aside while Guy signals to another.

“More haste, less speed,” Guy instructs after quickly dispatching that cadet and signals another. The new cadet is enthusiastic to say the least, swinging his sword without a clue but hoping for the best. “You come at me like a butcher,” Guy chides while stepping back and ducking only to rise to his full height and tap his sword over the boy’s heart. “More finesse, next!” He doesn’t hold out much hope for the next lad, clearly the runt of the litter but he uses his size to his advantage ducking Guy’s swings and almost lands a blow to Guy’s thigh. Clearly annoyed, Guy sweeps the legs from under the boy and taps his sword against his stomach. “Be prepared for anything,” he warns but holds out a hand to help the boy up begrudgingly impressed with him.

It is good form and he applauds the sportsmanship and earns Guy’s attention by doing so. “The rest of you,” Guy calls to the remaining nine cadets while four bested cadets sit on the bottom step. “Come at me at once,” he orders and sends a wink his way letting him know he was putting on a show just for him. He can’t help but shake his head amused and walks down the steps secretly hoping the cadets get the best of him because of his arrogance.

The way they look at one another suggest they may fail to work as a cohesive unit and unity was key if they were to best Guy. They do not attack as one but instead approach cautiously while one of them issues a war cry with his sword raised above his head with both hands and Guy immediately pokes him in his exposed stomach. “What even was that? Be ashamed.” The boy sulks at the scolding and walks over to the step and sits down shaking his head.
The others seem to have established some form of attack and cleverly circle Guy using their numbers against him. He’s quite impressed as two flanking his right step forward as if to attack but fall back as two flanking his left move in for the attack. It was a great scheme and might have been successful had one of the cadets not smirked giving the ploy away, allowing Guy to duck missing the thrusting swords aimed for his upper back. He stays down and turns running his sword across his two attackers legs and they fall to their knees rather than return to the step.

“Explain the rules to me?” He asks the overzealous latest victim.

“A tap of the sword is considered a stab; if the blow is considered fatal you take a seat but if it is not you lose the use of the limb. Usually when struck in the leg you stand on one leg but they have fallen to their knees because both legs were struck. Sam just had his arm struck so now he must place his arm behind his back.” Sure enough a blond has been struck in the arm, and he is quite sure Guy goes out of his way to strike his second arm.

“What happens now? He has no use of his arms.”

“He waits for the killing blow, he could run but he would be considered craven and lacking of honour, best he wait.” It sounds awful but there is truth in Guy’s lesson and he notices he does not deliver the killing blow to Sam or the two others who have lost the use of their legs. It would be considered a mercy killing if he did and mercy was so very rare on the battlefield, best they learn now and resist incapacitating blows in the future.

He’s surprised the fully functional five have lasted so long but as he watches he can see Guy is toying with them, practically dancing between them allowing them to believe they can actually fight on Guy’s level. It is a clever tactic and he can see the boys are becoming sloppy and reckless in their assault fighting offensively rather than defensively convinced of their superiority.

He wants to warn them that it is a game of cat and mouse and they were fools to consider themselves the cat but it is too late. Guy’s merciless attack is elegant and beautifully deadly as he practically glides from one cadet to the next, tapping out four chest wounds and one neck wound before finally dispatching the two crippled boys who try in earnest to strike him but get a head wound each before he stands before Sam and makes him kneel before he finishes him with a heart tap.

“Nice try boys but keep your arrogance in check, remember you may be good but there is always someone better than you. Right now that person is me,” he gloats completely bastardising what he just said which makes him laugh. “To the victor goes the spoils,” he announces holding his hand out to him and against his better judgement he walks over to him and allows himself to be pulled into his arms and spun around so his back is to Guy’s chest. “When you are half as good as me all of the pretty lads and lasses will fall at your feet, but not this one, this one is mine, only the best for the best.”

“Oh is that right?” He asks breaking out of Guy’s loose grip and leaning down to pick up Sam’s discarded sword. “Bold claims when defeating children how about you pick on someone your own size?” He challenges good-naturedly.

“When might that person arrive?” A rather loud ‘Ooh’ comes from the cadets seated on the steps.

“That’s it, me and you, right now.”

“In front of the children?”

“You know what I meant, unless of course you’re scared.”
“Your funeral,” Guy says with a shrug and lunges at him and he sidesteps and watches Guy charge passed him. He swings his sword after him, trying to go for his vulnerable back but Guy turns and their swords clash. The cadets applaud and they step back and try again clashing swords and pushing against each other and whilst their blades are crossed Guy steals a kiss.

“Do you kiss all your cadets?”

“Only those engaged to me,” he answers back and shoves him, hooking his foot behind his leg and knocking him to the floor. He rolls aside as Guy tries to bring his sword down and then scrambles onto his knees dropping forward to cut the legs from beneath Guy but he jumps avoiding the blow. He rolls again as Guy tries to stab him and manages to stagger to his feet as Guy aggressively attacks but he manages to deflect each blow while incapable of mounting an offense. Guy’s got him on the back foot and he has lost too much ground and Guy continues to come at him relentlessly. As he tries to lift his sword arm Guy grabs his wrist forcing his arm to his side and pulls him close allowing his sword to press against his stomach and then he shoves it beneath his arm as if to finish him off in front of the cadets.

He can’t help but play along and falls back while Guy catches him and lifts him into his arms. “What have I done?” He cries laying it on so thick he can imagine tears in his eyes. “I will build you the biggest pyre that...”

“Hang on, what? You’re not putting me on a bonfire.” He exclaims breaking character.

“It is an honourable funeral for a warrior.”

“I expect to be buried, in fact I expect you to dig my grave with your bare hands for murdering me.”

“You’re a demanding ghost,” Guy comments and puts him down.

“Best two out of three?”

“I’ve got a better idea,” Guy says smiling and turns to the cadets. “Up you get, Daniel fetch another sword,” he waits until another sword is retrieved and given to Sam. “You lot verse us two, keep in mind what I’ve told you, work as a group, don’t get cocky and Peter whatever that was before, just don’t.”

“You’re not going to push me behind you and treat me like a damsel in distress are you?” He asks suspiciously.

“Against these hungry young pups? No, we’re in this together, I’ve got your back and I hope you’ve got mine.” They haven’t worked as a team before too busy trying to best each other so it should be interesting.

The cadets take advantage of their chatter and charge at them and they are soon separated fighting their own battles. The boys are working as a cohesive unit and their actions are measured and calculated so they are not wasting moves exerting more energy than necessary. Peter is the first to fall as he tends to get far too excitable near Guy and he was a big lad with a slow gait that knew nothing of a defensive stance. To his surprise Peter falls to the floor and lays there without returning to the step clearly entertained and inspired by their earlier theatrics. It makes sense for him to lie where he fell as the battlefield was strewn with bodies and it would make the cadets consider their surroundings and footwork.

He sidesteps a lunge and brings his sword down across his assailant’s wrists and finds Sam has lost use of both arms once more. He steps behind him and wraps his left arm around the boy’s throat
using him as a shield and manages to dispatch four cadets before a fifth fatally stabs Sam and he lets his shield drop dead to the floor. His current assailant is the agile one that Guy helped up and he certainly gives him a run for his money while he tries to see what Guy is doing. The courtyard is strewn with bodies of the cadets and he can see Guy has one left and to his knowledge he also has one.

Mimicking a move from Guy earlier, the moment their swords clash he steps forward and hooks his foot behind the boy’s leg and pushes knocking him onto the ground. It is a sweet victory and he raises his sword above his head to strike down the killing blow when Guy calls his name, taps the neck of his foe and runs at him shoving him aside.

He stumbles and almost loses his balance before he turns in time to see the boy on the ground lift his sword and press it against Guy’s chest while another he did not see comes behind Guy and taps him on the back. There is a genuine look of shock on Guy’s face but he plays the game possibly too well milking his death scene for all it was worth making the other cadets laugh where they lay in the dirt. The backstabber helps the agile one up and they look over Guy with companionable arms thrown over each other’s shoulders and he chooses that moment to come up behind them and tap them both on the back and neck.

“Don’t bask in the victory, just because you killed the best doesn’t mean you killed them all.” He warns and the pair audibly moan before dropping to the ground. He looks around the courtyard and it certainly does look like a battlefield minus the blood and severed limbs. He walks over to Guy and sees he’s still not given up even though that chest wound was fatal. “You’re still not dead?”

“No, there is life in me yet but I am fading, a kiss might save me.” He laughs and leans down and stops when he is bent over.

“I would, but I really want your horse.”

“What?” Guy asks aghast and many of the corpses snigger.

“It was my horse,” he says with a shrug. “Oh do I get Locksley as well? Just close your eyes.” He encourages and stands up straight and goes to walk away when his ankle is caught and he falls face first to the dirt and is tapped on the back three times. “Did you just kill me?” He asks in disbelief looking over his shoulder at Guy.

“A dying foe is still a foe and it’s not nice being stabbed in the back, is it?”

“What is going on out here?” The Sheriff demands from the top of the steps and he realises it must look strange having a courtyard full of people playing dead. He thought it was a rather good training exercise with a lot of lessons being learnt. They now knew that the numbers game wasn’t necessarily an advantage and the tide of war was forever changing and no true conflict is ever really won and that betrayals do happen even on the battlefield. “You’re supposed to be training them not playing with them!” The Sheriff throws up his arms and stomps off and the corpses snigger once more.

“Oh no, Daddy is upset, playtime’s over kids,” Guy calls jokingly and they all rise from their dirty graves. He’s quite surprised by Guy’s juvenile response to the Sheriff as he seemed far too jovial a world away from the broody lieutenant he had come to know for the past five years. “Peter!” Guy calls and the hefty dark haired boy ambles over and looks up at Guy with nothing but adoration in his dark eyes. “See to it that all the swords are accounted for and put away,” he orders and passes his sword over and Peter walks over to him with a less favourable look and takes his sword before collecting the others.

“Seems I have some competition,” he quips as they walk back into the castle but Guy looks at him
confused. “Peter.”

“What about Peter?” He can’t help but stare at Guy incredulously.

“As if you do not know,” Guy shrugs. “You don’t know, Peter has a crush on you.” It’s Guy’s turn to look incredulous and he cannot believe how oblivious he can be. “Why else do you suppose he fails to put up a decent offense against you? I almost feel sorry for him, I remember being his age with raging hormones but I never had a teacher that was a walking wet dream.” He shuts his mouth and hopes that Guy did not hear him but judging from the devilish smirk he certainly did. “So do you teach them often?” He asks trying to change the subject and ignores the possible colouring of his cheeks.

“Once a week.”

“You should teach them defence, you fight offense and they are not you. They leave themselves too exposed as do you but whereas you have the height advantage they do not.”

“Is this your way of asking to train them with me?”

“Could I?”

“Of course, since I’m doing such a terrible job.”

“I didn’t say terrible,” he argues. “I simply said they are not you.” They continue walking and he wonders where Guy is off to in such a hurry and so early in the day. “You seem in a hurry.”

“I have work to do in Nottingham.” He answers back without the slightest hint of what he intends to do and it leaves him intrigued.

“I shall accompany you.” Guy stops.

“I’m on business.”

“Sounds interesting,” he teases but Guy huffs annoyed.

“Allan, it’s private.”

“Sounds doubly interesting,” truth was it sounded boring but he had no idea what it was Guy actually did.

“Allan, no.” Guy states firmly treating him no better than a dog.

“Why can’t I come with you? I am to be your husband so there should be no secrets between us. Do you have any concept of marriage or do you just like threatening me with it?”

“You’re up to something,” Guy says ignoring his previous comment.

“Yes, I was trying to charm you so that I may follow you and see what it is you do. That is me being honest, now you try.”

“I have business in Nottingham that doesn’t concern you so stay in the castle.”

“Unbelievable, you say I’m your equal but constantly treat me like your lesser. What are you up to now huh? What is worse than trying to kill the king?”

“Still your tongue!”
“Fuck you,” he hisses back and walks away.

“Get back here!”

“If you want a pet, get a dog.” He calls back without stopping.

“Allan!”

“Drop dead!” He shouts back without a faltering step and manages to make his way to the castle parlour before he realises his error. Time is of the essence, he cannot wait until tomorrow so they can both pretend today never happened as he only had five days to change Guy’s perception of him and they still fight like cat and dog.

It was entirely Guy’s fault for being absolutely obnoxious and unreasonable. They were getting along perfectly well until he opened his damn mouth. What was so important that he could not tell him? The king was already dead, what more could there be? The day may not be salvageable but he would find out what Guy was up to and hopefully use it as leverage to put an end to their engagement.

Spotting a velvet hooded cloak with a black and yellow fur trim on a peg he goes over and pulls it on convinced it was the Sheriff’s as no one else dressed quite so outlandishly. He walks over to the window and looks out seeing Guy by the portcullis looking irritable as he converses with the man on the gate before departing on foot. He quickly runs out of the castle and down the steps and across the courtyard and peaks out from behind the wall watching Guy walk off.

He pulls the hood up and follows after him. Wednesday was always considered market day and the streets were bustling giving him plenty of opportunities to hide should Guy turn and realise he is being followed. He watches Guy head into the butchers and fakes interest in some fabric while watching the building. Guy had no business with the kitchens so why he would have business there makes no sense. He drops the fabric and heads towards the butchers and looks through the window in time to see Guy hand money over before departing empty handed. There is a nasty stink to the place not just of fresh and old blood but something foul and off and it takes him a moment to realise it is rotting meat.

He looks at the chopping block and sure enough there was meat with a green tinge being chopped up for sale. He wants to kick up a fuss and warn people away, what the hell was Guy up to? People were paying good money to be poisoned and he would not stand for it. He couldn’t very well burn the place down but rumours spread like the plague and one word would see the business in ruins as it deserved to be.

“Well I never!” He exclaims lowering his hood and walking from the building thoroughly insulted putting on a performance that no gossip could ignore.

“What’s the matter, dearie?” An elderly lady asks.

“That butcher,” he states pointing to the place in question so there could be no mistake. “He tried to sell me cuts of rotten meat and dares to suggest I insulted him when faced with the truth.”

“Rotten meat?” A passer by stops to question.

“Look through his window if you do not believe me.” His outburst is causing quite a stir and he hopes Guy is far enough away not to notice.

“It’s true! Come look at this,” A woman cries outraged and he pulls up his hood and continues his pursuit of Guy while the people confront the vile butcher.
Tracking Guy is possibly the easiest hunt he has ever been on given the fact the man is a towering six foot two dressed in heavy black leather and glowers at anyone that dare stand too close to him so that he is given a wide berth. Had Guy not stuck out the parting sea of people would have given his location away but it gives him an opportunity to follow at a safe distance and he watches Guy check the perimeter of Nottingham overseeing the city wall and conversing with some guards. He even watches him berate and slap a guard that had the audacity to abandon his post to relieve himself and he refuses to pay him his weekly wage and threatens to part him from his cock should he do it again. He would have laughed had Guy not been deadly serious and considering no one else laughed at the spectacle showed they were all aware of what he was capable of.

He didn’t like this side of Guy, it was almost as if he was two people, the domineering murdering bastard that worked for the Sheriff and then the childish vulnerable tender lover and there was no in between, you either got one or you got the other. No wonder they failed to get along when Guy’s whole personality would change on a whim.

He considered returning to the castle until Guy strode into the market and against his better judgement he followed him around from stall to stall. He watched Guy talk with the Millers by the vegetable cart and then on to the fishmongers and he even seemed to put in an order at the fabric sellers completely confusing him as he had no idea what Guy’s job was. There was a brief moment when Guy randomly looked up and his heart stopped as he thought he had been spotted but he lowered his head and continued looking at the fabric.

Money changes hands between Guy and the baker before he leaves the market and goes into The Trip Inn, a tavern before the castle. He’s not visited the place himself but he has heard stories and knows it is the local haunt for the scummy filth of Nottingham so Guy should fit right in. He chooses not to enter as his pilfered cloak would make him stand out and instead he lingers by a window and finally gathers the courage to look inside.

Nobody seems to be paying him any mind too lost in their cups so he can continue staring blatantly at Guy as he whispers to the voluptuous blonde serving maid. He desperately wants to scream ‘whore’ but he is uncertain as to who he would be referring to. He seethes in jealousy as Guy passes the bint a bag of coins and she makes a show of placing it between her ample breasts and walks away with a wink.

He moves away from the window and marches back into the market furious and in his anger he realises he should have returned to the castle. He can’t think, not when all he can see is that image of that tramp all over Guy while he stood there practically encouraging her with the way he was dressed. It wasn’t fair that he had to marry the biggest man-whore in Nottingham while he was untouched, well he had been until Guy got his filthy mitts on him.

He ought to find a wench and teach Guy a lesson, but the truth was women did not interest him. He hadn’t noticed before as he was convinced the right one would come along and they would be married so he left it to fate and assumed that was why no lass caught his eye. He had always known Marian was beautiful and he was convinced it was her love for Robin that kept his feelings at bay as well as wishing not to jeopardise their friendship but now he wasn’t so certain.

He wishes to buy some fruit and sling it at Guy to convey his disdain but he had left all of his ill-gotten gains in his room and he would only start a riot. Still, might be worth it, how would Guy explain his marriage to one so rebellious? But he forgets Guy answers to no one except the Sheriff and he will continue to do as he has always done, whatever the hell he wants because there was no formidable foe to stop him.

It is pointless walking around the market with no coins so he turns back and stomps passed the Trip
Inn, casting a glare at the window before keeping his head down.

“Allan,” his heart lurches in his chest and he stops in his tracks hearing Guy’s voice.

“Guy,” he lowers his hood and turns finding Guy leaning against the tavern wall with his arms crossed.

“You’ve been following me.”

“Me?” He asks blinking innocently, it used to always work on his father but Guy does not look moved but then he had his mother’s eyes.

“Don’t deny it,” he says moving away from the wall.

“No I...”

“I saw you at the stall earlier now here, coincidence?”

“I was only...”

“I don’t think so. You disobeyed me.”

“Guy please, you do not understand and you will not let me speak so just punish me.”

“Punish you? Why would I punish you? What have you been doing?” Funny how he’s a clever bastard when he wants to be making him incriminate himself.

“Forgive me; you were right I disobeyed you. I just wanted to spend time with you.” He should just roll over and play dead because he disgusts himself with how easily he submits to Guy.

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Well I’m honoured Allan, but I told you I was on business.”

“How about we go into that tavern and get a room and I can show you how sorry I am?” He could also show that slag who Guy belonged to, and by the end of the day everyone would know.

“You’re too good for that place.” So he wished to keep his whores in the taverns while he keeps the precious wife at home unsullied by his perversions. “Shall we?” He holds out his hand and he’s slightly surprised by the gesture as there was some distance between the tavern and the castle gates, not much but enough to be seen by passer-bys.

Throwing caution to the wind he takes Guy’s hand and they walk back to the castle. “If you wish to stalk me in future do not do it while wearing my cloak.”

“This is yours?” He asks stunned and tries to disguise his laugh as a cough.

“What’s so funny?”

“This awful cloak and you in it! Ha! You emulate the Sheriff; you want to dress like him?”

“That cloak was a gift from the Sheriff last Christmas,” Guy replies sternly.

“Bet he made you put it on,” Guy glowers down at him and he laughs. “He did! Can’t disappoint
“Stop laughing,” Guy says sternly but cracks a smile. Laughter is infectious and by the time they are both back inside the castle Guy is laughing too even though the joke was clearly on him. He’d pay for it later but at the moment he was amused.

“So, dinner tonight in my room?” He asks and hangs the cloak back where he had found it.

“I thought you wanted to spend some time with me.”

“I did, I do, I thought you were busy?”

“Not anymore.”

“Well then I’m all yours, what did you have in mind?”

“We could go to my room,” Guy offers and he raises an eyebrow and smirks in response. “To talk,” Guy clarifies.

“Lead the way then, handsome.” He expects the quirked eyebrow in response as Guy was unused to compliments and doubted their genuineness. He takes his hand nevertheless and they walk up the spiral steps and he has the strangest feeling something happened between them on the stairwell but it could be a dream from his hazy memory. Although he can almost remember the rough brick against his back and the overpowering smell of wine as though they were both bathed in it.

They turn off at the seventh floor and walk along the hallway and enter Guy’s room. Nothing has changed from when he last visited; the room is only a means to an end lacking any personal touch. Guy walks over to the table and lifts the pitcher that was on the table.

“Some wine?” He asks but he shakes his head while Guy pours himself a drink. Unable to contain his curiosity he looks up at the top shelf able to see it from where he stands so far back. The inkwell and quill remain as does the book but the stone has been moved and placed on top of the book and he wonders why.

He should not question it but he turns to Guy intrigued and finds the older man staring at him while taking a drink of wine, staining his lower lip red. He has no idea what comes over him as he knocks the cup from Guy’s hand and wine splashes between them, had that not happened before? He gives it very little thought and presses himself against Guy, pulling on his leather vest to tug him down so he can kiss him.

Guy startles against him clearly unsuspecting his unprovoked assault and his mouth opens against his onslaught spilling wine into his own mouth. He swallows convinced it was the best wine he has ever tasted and pushes Guy back towards the bed until he is sat on the edge of it. He climbs onto his lap knees either side of his thighs and seals their mouths together as he slowly rocks his hips against Guy’s.

To his surprise Guy breaks the kiss and holds him back with his hands on his shoulders as he attempts to kiss him again. “I thought you wanted to take things slow?”

“This is slow,” he contradicts and rubs his crotch against Guy’s. He can see Guy looks uncertain and is mentally wording his protest before it passed his lips. “Shut up and kiss me,” he orders knocking Guy’s hands off his shoulders so he can lean forward and run his tongue over Guy’s bottom lip tasting the wine that had inspired his lust.

He kisses Guy aggressively determined to have him submit and comply to his demands for once. He
is not disappointed as Guy’s hands run down his back and grabs his posterior pulling him more firmly onto his lap and thrusts against him. He moans into his mouth and practically bounces on his lap as he runs both his hands through Guy’s hair holding him tightly against him.

He wants to laugh at their imitation of fucking but he is so aroused by their actions. The lust was evident between them and the primal animalistic instinct to rut was heady and consuming. He felt alive in Guy’s arms after he had felt numb and dead inside for far too long. He hadn’t felt this way before, and for a terrible moment his mind wanders and he is faced with the image of that blonde tramp all over Guy and he imagines her in his place and he stops abruptly breaking the kiss.

“How many women have you been with?” Guy sighs annoyed and slows his thrusting but does not stop.

“Two.” He replies without making eye contact.

“Don’t lie to me.”

His hips stop as he glowers at him. “Why must you always ask me questions you do not want the answer to?”

“Just tell me.”

“No more than twenty five.”

He can’t help but sit back disgusted. “And men?”

“One,” he replies insulted. “That was you, how many women have you been with?”

“None!” He replies insulted and climbs off Guy’s lap.

“Alright men then?”

“One, you.”

“Liar.”

“How dare you! I’m not a slut like you.” Guy gets up off the bed looking thoroughly insulted, good.

“As if, I was not the first man between your thighs.” His jaw drops at the claim and he wonders why Guy thinks that of him.

“I don’t have to listen to this,” he exclaims and heads towards the door until Guy grabs his wrist.

“You’re not running from me again.” Guy warns and pulls him into his arms, lifting him and pushing his back against the wall. “Don’t pretend to be pure and wholesome, I know what you are.” He finishes his statement with a thrust of his hips rubbing against his unabated erection.

“I have only been with one person,” he reiterates locking his legs tighter around Guy’s waist. Guy ignores him and kisses his neck and so he grabs his hair pulling his head back forcing him to look at him. “Why won’t you believe me? There has only been one, I have only ever wanted one person and that is you, you stupid fool.” Guy covers his lips with his own and he wraps his arms around his neck as they continue to hump like hormonal teens. “I can’t stand the thought of anyone touching you, you’ve always been mine,” he confesses against Guy’s throat when they part for breath.

“You’ve always been mine,” Guy returns.
“I don’t want you to go to the Trip anymore, I don’t like the way that woman looks at you.”

“Who, Sally?”

“I don’t want to know her name,” he snaps testily.

“I haven’t touched her; she’s my informant, keeps an eye out for any unsavoury characters in the Trip and sends for me.” Only they could argue while rutting against each other like desperate lovers. “I haven’t touched anyone since my return except you and I will only touch you for the rest of my life.”

“I’ve only ever wanted you.” He kisses him again before he says something he shouldn’t and enjoys the moment pressed tightly against the wall while Guy fucks against him. He is held too tightly to reciprocate and he wishes they had the foresight to undress as he wants to feel Guy’s cock inside him as his tongue fucks his mouth but they were supposed to be taking it slowly. He had planned for intercourse on day five not day two and if history had taught him anything it was that they were incapable of keeping their hands off each other.

It is stifling being held so close to Guy while the Master at Arms practically eats him alive. He never thought he’d wish to be so devoured but the tightening in his groin is unmistakable and before long his moan of completion is swallowed by Guy as he climaxes in his trousers. Guy is not long after him as though he had deliberately held off long enough to see him come undone first.

The kiss ends but they do not move and simply breathe each other in as they catch their breath. Once their heart rates have slowed Guy eventually puts him down and steps away looking like a debauched mess with flushed cheeks and his dark hair in disarray. He would gloat but he was quite sure he looked no better.

“So000,” he drags out the word unsure where to look. “Dinner tonight in my room?” He asks attempting to put his plan back on track.

“Yes,” Guy agrees and they share an uncertain look between them. What follows next are all false starts and side steps between them that it almost looks as if they are dancing before they give up misconstruing each other’s actions and he simply waves and leaves Guy’s room and heads directly towards the bathing room.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Terribly sorry for the delay, almost finished thanks for bearing with me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was all very well playing nice with Guy and not running away but on the whole it was a poor pretence of compliancy. Should anyone look closely they would easily see the game he was playing and his motives were not to be known. He had to do more to prove that he was content even though it wasn’t true, and he knew he would have to take his vacant seat on the small council.

He still did not fully understand his position anymore. Was he even Earl of Bonchurch? Should his land and title not be confiscated due to his arrest and imprisonment? Both Guy and the Sheriff had claimed he was welcome to take his seat on the council so he was still a lord then. Though that did not explain what would happen to Bonchurch when he married Guy and lost his name, would he even be an earl anymore?

No one was forthcoming with those answers and though Guy mentioned marriage often it was clear he had no concept of it. Whatever horrors he had seen in his life his childish fantasy of marriage hadn’t been shaken and he seemed to view it as something magical. Marriage was hard work, his father unquestionably loved his mother but they still argued and their relationship was tested time and again. It was even said Guy’s own mother succumbed to Malcolm’s constant harassment and betrayed her husband while he fought in the crusades so Guy should not believe in marriage as much as he did.

As far as he knew he was Earl of Bonchurch and no longer considered a criminal so he would embrace his title for as long as he had it. From what he remembers of his first and only council meeting was that the nobles seemed to dress for the occasion like the pompous asses that they were and given he only had two outfits to choose from he would have to wear the burgundy leather again.

He makes noises of discontent dressing in the leather again and realises his list of demands were growing by the day. Maybe Guy would like it, as he was always desperate to show his wealth and take care of his needs, though the latter was always said though rarely done when his need conflicted with his own interests. Still he’d play the fussy wife to watch Guy jump through hoops for him since he did deserve a little payback for all the wrongs done to him.

He has no idea of the time so he hopes he isn’t late as he rushes along the ground level corridor towards the Great Hall. He could have turned off at the first floor and walked down the stairs but if memory served him well the Sheriff chose that way and if he was late and upstaged the Sheriff life would not be worth living.

The ground floor door is still open which looks promising and he sneaks in as to not cause a scene. The semi circle of chairs are full save one beside Sir Edward and he’s surprised the Sheriff has kept his word and left his seat vacant though he shouldn’t be surprised. Leaving his seat suggests he is avoiding the council rather than the fact that he has been locked in a room these past few months and it was rather clever, washing his hands of any wrong doings and pointing the finger of blame at him once again. No wonder Guy became a master at deflection with Vaisey taking him under his wing.
His eyes fall on Guy and he is surprised he hasn’t dressed for the occasion and has only shown up in his normal attire. He is leaning against the table, as far away as possible from the noble on his right and has his head turned in total disrespect as he stares mindlessly at the Sheriff’s vacant seat. His whole stance practically screams that he does not wish to be there and he takes pleasure in his discomfort. He took a man’s life for that position, serves him right for learning the grass isn’t always greener on the other side.

He must have a heavy tread or Guy simply saw movement in his peripheral vision because his head soon turns in his direction and he practically jumps from his seat and stands at attention. His actions cause confusion to the other nobles who follow suit unknowingly and he wants to laugh at the toffs who used to bully both he and Guy now standing to attention like he was landed gentry.

Many eyes turn to him in wonder and he can see the confusion, disdain and indifference and possibly one or two heated looks which was marred by their blatant dislike of him. Most of these cretins had terrorised him as a child and here they now stand at attention for him with his fiancé terrorising them, it was beautifully poetic.

He walks towards his seat before Guy turns to the noble beside him and hisses a very audible ‘move’ at him which sees the man hesitate for only a moment before he takes his seat beside Sir Edward and he is forced to sit beside Guy. The others have taken their seats once more when he reaches Guy and Guy takes his hand in his and they sit down together awaiting the Sheriff.

“I didn’t think you would come,” Guy whispers to him so low no other could hear. “You look gorgeous... the things I want to do to you, right here on the Sheriff’s table.” The Sheriff chooses that moment to grace them with his presence and no one stands as they hadn’t before as he bounds down the stairs as happy as can be.

Vaisey attempts to share a look with Guy before he takes his seat but Guy is too busy whispering in his ear telling him in great detail what exactly he would like to do to him. He expects the Sheriff to reprimand him but no such thing happens and Guy continues to whisper to him while the Sheriff speaks but what he says he cannot be sure as Guy has his attention. He’s quite surprised by the honesty in Guy’s confessions as he speaks freely about how he is feeling, how he makes him feel and his need for him. He is flattered by the praise and is stunned that Guy thinks so highly of him like he was someone worthwhile. There was only one other person in his life who made him feel worthy of love and that was his father and since his passing he has felt hollow and worthless ever since.

Hearing Guy’s words, listening to his genuine praise he could almost feel the hole in his heart mending. It was stupid to consider Guy’s love a burden when it was all he could ever want. For too long he had walked alone, missing half of his soul and thinking he deserved it because he was a babe at his mother’s breast when Malcolm gave Bonchurch to his father. There was no place for him, too good for the village children but not good enough for noble children. Then he walked around the lake and a dark haired boy turned to look at him expecting to see an enemy and instead found a friend. Finally there was a place for him, for them both and he did deserve to be loved, they both did.

He looks up and finds Sir Edward regarding him with a look of disgust and his mood immediately sours as he is judged by a so called friend. Guy continues to whisper unaware of what he has seen and it only serves to increase his anger. How dare they interfere with what he and Guy had? It was no business of theirs and they were hurting no one except each other. Why couldn’t they just be left alone? They did no harm by the lake, none and yet selfish cruel bastards like Longthorn saw fit to tear them apart thinking they were lesser and for too long he believed it.

Not anymore.
The Sheriff has stopped speaking and no one speaks so there must be no new matters arising so the council is called to an end. He gets up and pulls Guy along with him but in his haste a rather fat noble tarries in front of him, blocking his path with his bulk.

“Move!” He hisses like Guy did before and the man turns to gaze down at him in disapproval but he glares right back and pushes his fat belly and storms passed still clutching Guy’s hand. The fat noble says nothing which was sensible either he saw the storm in his eyes or Guy put the fear of God in him, either way they were both to be feared in that moment.

He leads Guy along the corridor and up the stairwell and not a word is said between them. Guy may have misconstrued the situation thinking his words had stirred him and he was desperate to return to his own room. He is unsure as he has not even spared a look at Guy too enraged to do anything other than return to his room. The polite thing to do would have been to leave Guy behind while he rages and breaks things but he was tired of mindless self-righteous bigots constantly separating them so he would simply have an audience while he rages and breaks things.

“Can you bloody believe the nerve of that man?” He erupts the moment they arrive in his room and Guy simply stares at him bewildered. “How dare they judge me? Us?” He continues his tangent while Guy takes a seat on his bed while he shouts to him rather than at him. “Why can’t they just leave us alone? Why can’t we be happy, why must they ruin everything?” Guy simply listens far too confused to comprehend the maelstrom of his mind. “They are always trying to take you away from me, and I won’t let them.” He paces, desperate to destroy something though there was nothing in his room to break. “I will not be shamed for loving you! I will not tolerate…” he pauses as Guy takes a startled intake of breath and he looks down fearing he stepped on his foot while pacing.

When he realises no such situation occurred he looks up wondering why Guy looks so stunned. “Do you?” Guy asks timidly, looking up through his lashes afraid of his reply. He has no idea why he looks so exposed and vulnerable and he stares at him in confusion.

He must have said something while he raged speaking his thoughts without a filter. He tries to recall what he had said, clearly something damning though he was not speaking falsely but directly from the heart. His own eyes widen in shock when he realises what it was he had said ‘I will not be shamed for loving you’ the confession he was going to make on day five.

“I do,” he finally replies deliberately using those words with the connotation of marriage. He was forced to show his hand too soon but the words had left his lips now and he could not refute them. “I love you,” he reaffirms so there can be no mistake.

He was not sure how Guy would react but he certainly did not expect him to sit still as white as a sheet clutching his stomach as though he had taken a knife to him and left him for dead. “Hey no, what’s wrong?” He asks worriedly and approaches Guy resting a hand against his cheek. He looks dreadfully ill and it was not the reaction he was hoping for.

“I’m fine,” he reassures him but he certainly doesn’t look it. “Say it again,” he encourages looking up into his eyes with a small smile which he returns.

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“You’re mine,” he sounds terribly possessive but he does not care as he is speaking the truth. “You’ve always been mine and I’ve always been yours.” He kisses him then to quiet his possessive ravings but nothing but the truth had left his lips.
How long they kiss he cannot be sure but his jaw hurts and he finds himself sat on Guy’s lap with his hands in his hair holding him against him. The line between captive and captor has been blurred beyond recognition but the balance of power has always shifted between them unaltering like the ocean tide.

Reluctantly he ends the kiss and sits back and enjoys the way Guy’s eyes remained closed as though he was deeply enjoying their kiss. When his eyes do open he catches him staring and he notices there is some colour in his cheeks and his skin is no longer ashen.

“I could kiss you for days,” Guy confesses and he believes him. He leans forward as if to prove himself but he leans back preventing the kiss and instead moves his hands to Guy’s jacket and begins undoing the buckles. When he is finished he pushes it off Guy’s shoulders and Guy removes it from there and tosses it carelessly onto the floor while his hands move to his jacket.

“No,” he says, stilling Guy’s hands and then he climbs from his lap. “Today is about you; lay down on your back on the centre of the bed.” Guy eyes him warily; still unconvinced he can be trusted. He cannot fault him for his suspicion after the things they have done to each other. He is also unaware of the king’s demise and has no reason to believe his good behaviour was genuine, which it is certainly not. He has been backed into a corner and Guy is his only salvation and his curse, as he has always been.

Cautiously Guy climbs onto the bed and lies on his back and he can see how tense he is readying for a fight. He’s not stupid enough to fight him, he has tried that before and it didn’t end well. He climbs onto the bed and crawls over Guy, knees either side of his hips and hands placed just above his shoulders not touching him at all. He enjoys the way Guy looks up at him searchingly so desperate to believe his actions are true and not a ruse like they were on his birthday.

He leans down and presses his lips against Guy’s and they share a kiss unlike any they have shared before. There is no rush or a battle for dominance, it was not lustful as most of their kisses were desperate and devouring instead it was a meeting of equals exploring each other mouths as though it was unchartered territory. He had kissed Friedrich in this way, or to be truthful Friedrich had kissed him but he had returned it. No wonder Guy had looked so furious and became jealous when all their interactions were frenzied romps while a slow kiss seemed far more intimate.

He ends the kiss and presses kisses along Guy’s stubbly jaw and down his neck. He had noticed Guy liked to kiss his neck and watching him turn his head exposing the pale column he could see the appeal. The movement screamed of surrender and submission, the action reminded him of two dogs fighting and when one weakened it would expose its neck to end the fight. He wonders then if Guy is calling an end to their fight and if he is, why? It was unlike him to lay down and unnecessary as he had the upper hand and could continue to beat him into submission. However love was never mentioned before, at least not from his lips and this could be Guy’s way of maintaining his affection. Guy had been deprived of love so of course he would cling desperately to what he had and try to nurture it so that it would never leave.

He wants to bite the creamy skin, or mark him in some way laying a physical claim as he was still bitter about all the women Guy had been with. Guy had apologised multiple times and gave him several legitimate excuses for his actions but it remained a sore point between them. He simply wants to mark his territory but the Sheriff would have his hide if he marked his precious boy for all to see proving the Master at Arms could be injured.

Instead he turns his attention to the junction between Guy’s neck and shoulder and presses his lips against the delicate skin and begins to suck, hard. Though he is mindful of his teeth Guy hisses at the contact and his body arches under him while his hand finds its way into his hair combing through the
short strands. Guy’s reaction makes him continue longer than he intended to but he finally pulls away and kisses over the as yet invisible mark and continues his journey downward. He presses his lips over Guy’s covered chest and takes a moment to listen to the pleasing sound of the steady drum of his heartbeat before moving on. Once down to his abdomen he pushes the undershirt up to his chest and uses his tongue to lick a path from navel to the waistband of his leather trousers and back up. Guy’s hand remains in his hair massaging his scalp rather than guiding his head so he continues undeterred and adds his tongue to his kisses tasting the clean hot skin. Guy’s skin was always hot to the touch as though it was a scalding reminder that he lay with the devil and he was damned for it.

Considering he was already damned he reaches for the button on Guy’s trousers with his right hand while his left still held his undershirt up and he surprises himself by opening it one handed. Guy makes a noise of approval but otherwise remains pliant beneath him so he returns his mouth to his tight abdominals licking over the ridges of toned muscles slightly jealous but incredibly turned on by the Master at Arms physique. He moves his mouth to his navel once more and playfully flicks his tongue inside while Guy’s hand tightens in his hair and becomes demanding pushing his head down where he wanted it most.

He looks up, caught in Guy’s gaze and knocks the man’s hand from his hair. “No,” he admonishes with a shake of his head. The pleasure was Guy’s but the control was his and he refused to relinquish it. He kneels up and deliberately sits down on Guy’s crotch feeling the other man’s arousal straining against the leather beneath him and he rolls his hips enjoying the strangled sound Guy makes. He moves both hands to Guy’s shirt once more and begins pulling it up and Guy extends his arms above his head obediently while he pulls it higher up his chest and over his head. Once Guy’s head is through he leaves the shirt around his upper arms immobilising them. Guy attempts to sit up in question but a quick shove puts him back down on the mattress. “Stay,” he warns emboldened by the shift of power heavily in his favour.

He feels his cock throb in his trousers as he looks down on Guy restrained and at his mercy. It is a heady experience and he means to enjoy it as his hands caress Guy’s pectorals as his thumbs rub over his nipples making them harden. There’s a slight colouring to Guy’s cheeks and judging from the pressure and insistence nudging against his ass it seemed he was not the only one aroused by Guy being restrained.

A million thoughts play out in his head at once as he thinks of the roles they could play with this new development. He grinds against Guy’s cock as he thinks about turning the tables on the once Dungeon Master and tying him to a post and then torturing him with his tongue. He would strip him of his shirt and tie his hands behind his back around the post and watch him sweat from the burning torches and from the fear and excitement. He could imagine his pale toned body glistening in the orange glow of the torches and his blue eyes pleading. He would strike then, when he was exposed and vulnerable and he would tear him apart and fill in the cracks with filthy promises and the suggestion of love.

“You’re gorgeous,” he confesses lost in his own fantasy. He leans forward to taste his lips once more but his eyes are drawn to the rise and fall of his chest and the beating of his heart. He kisses over his heart instead and imagines his name tattooed there. It is a lovely thought and he carries on his kisses pressing them down his chest once more, moving from his seated position to travel lower.

He pulls Guy’s trousers down low on his hips enough to free his cock and licks a path from navel to cock uninterrupted. The last time he tried to do this they were interrupted by the Sheriff and the time before that he felt out of control lost in the moment and he’s quite sure he wasn’t very good. Guy hadn’t voiced any complaints but back then they were pawing at each other like inexperienced randy teens and he would like to think they were passed that now considering how many times they had been together.
He presses kisses at the base of the shaft and then runs his tongue up along the underside to the tip collecting a drop of pre-come on his tongue. He swallows quickly to avoid making a face and souring the mood and returns his lips to the head once more doing no more than running his wet lips against the smooth flesh. He can feel Guy’s legs tense against his legs as he is knelt between them but otherwise Guy remains still.

He’s impressed and as a reward he closes his lips around the tip of his cock and gently sucks while his right hand wraps around the base of his cock. Teasingly he flicks his tongue against the slit and watches Guy’s hips rise off the mattress and he quickly moves away and crawls up his body covering his mouth with his own. He thrusts his tongue into Guy’s open mouth as punishment so he could taste himself but Guy surprises him by sucking on his tongue and moaning unashamedly. He returns the devouring kiss while his hands cover Guy’s and their fingers lock. He gets diverted from his path as their hands are joined as well as their mouths and he is simply overwhelmed. His hips move on their own accord and his cock confined in his leather trousers rubs against Guy’s stiff prick wetting his crotch with a mix of his saliva and Guy’s essence.

He sucks on Guy’s lower lip and opens his eyes and finds Guy staring right back with his pupils dilated from lust. His features seemed softened something that he hadn’t seen for a very long time and he realises in that moment that the fight is truly over and it terrifies him. If there was no fight then there was no entrapment and no coercion and no excuse for his desire. He releases his lip and simply looks at him and notices how relaxed he seemed under him when in truth he needn’t be there. Guy could easily overpower him but he was allowing him this. He trusted him, as he trusted him by the lake not to push him in, as he trusted him with his friendship and as he trusted in his unflinching loyalty even after he treated him like an ignorant tospit. Guy’s faith in him was astounding and his conviction was only strengthened by his love. It is a daunting realisation knowing that the one his soul has been crying out for is lying beneath him staring up at him reluctant to blink should he miss a slight nuance of his face.

“I love you,” he sounds surprised as he says it as though it had only been words before easy to say but difficult to mean. Guy smiles and his heart actually aches with the knowledge that he had hurt him needlessly for months. That he had said such horrible things about his name, land and especially his father as there was a period of time when they would trade father insults. “I’m going to marry you,” he’s not sure who he is talking to as he states the obvious but one of Guy’s fingers rub against his engagement ring while their hands remain clasped. “I love you,” he breathes against Guy’s lips as though it was a whispered promise and joins their mouths once more.

When they do part for breath he releases hold of Guy’s hands and moves down his body once more. His cock is still hard and red flushed with blood unwavering even during their brief interlude. He licks at it, wetting his length as though it was a prelude to intercourse. Why he then presses his cheek against Guy’s cock he does not know, the act should be considered filthy and demeaning but he watches Guy’s heaving chest and the penetrative gaze of his eyes and he continues pressing kisses against the shaft. Guy’s eyes do not leave his face the entire time as he strains his neck to watch him as if it would pain him to miss a moment. He enjoys having such an avid audience as it emboldens him and he seductively licks his lips and watches Guy’s tongue slide over his bottom lip making it glisten enticingly. He wishes to kiss him once more as the taste of his lips was all that he could want but the cock before him demanded attention and he enclosed his lips over the head and slowly took him into his mouth, swallowing around his member as a burst of pre-come coated his tongue.

He watches Guy’s head finally fall back as his lips part to emit breathy moans as he takes him further into his mouth. Guy’s hand can no longer direct his actions as they did the first time he tried this and he takes his time taking as much as he can into his mouth and then pulling back before it got too much only to swallow him down once more. He builds a rhythm of his own mindful of his teeth as he bobs his head letting Guy fuck his mouth. The control he has is maddening as he considers
lowering Guy’s trousers and thrusting two fingers inside him just to watch the Master at Arms come undone and fuck himself shamelessly as he sucked his cock. He should be ashamed of himself how dirty his mind had gotten when he originally blushed over a kiss. Yet his thoughts always turn to the gutter when he thinks of Guy, and what he would like to do to him or what he would like done to him.

Guy is a writhing mess beneath him lacking the control he fought so hard to maintain because of him. It is a sweet victory, and he means to revel in it as he brings this tryst to an end as his jaw was beginning to hurt. He pulls back and a hard suck on the head of his cock has Guy’s hip arching shoveing his cock further into his mouth due to the oversight of not holding him down and his come hits the back of his throat and he tries to swallow without coughing. His throat feels raw after swallowing his hot seed but he keeps his mouth on him breathing through his nose as he tastes and swallows every drop and sucks him through his orgasm until his cock wilts against his tongue.

He removes his mouth and wipes it with the back of his hand before crawling up Guy’s body and they share a kiss once more. He has a filthy idea of sharing his seed between them in the future because though he was not fond of the taste Guy had sucked on his tongue as though it was nectar and he might like it. There are no words shared between them just chaste kisses as Guy regains his breath and he enjoys the way his dark hair sticks to his forehead making him look debauched.

“Gisborne the next time you just...oh right, should have known.” They both turn their heads to find the Sheriff stood in the open doorway hands behind his back shaking his head in disapproval. “Oh don’t mind me; I’m just the sheriff, I only pay you to work for me but no, no, as you were.” Vaisey snaps cantankerously and attempts to stomp off but the soft shoes on his feet ruin the effect.

“I best see what he wants,” Guy sighs clearly annoyed. He looks down at him as he is still stretched out arms tied above his head and flaccid penis hung out of his leathers.

“The Sheriff has seen you naked,” he squawks indignantly, and pulls the shirt from Guy’s arms freeing him.

“It is of no consequence, I have seen him naked many times.”

“What? Why?”

“He bathes in front of me.”

“Why are you even in the room when he bathes?” He asks without thinking. “No, do not tell me, I do not wish to know, if we speak further I’ll begin to picture him naked.” He sits back and passes Guy’s shirt to him as he sits up.

“He likes to be patted dry.”

“Oh God, stop it,” he exclaims covering his eyes.

“Pat, pat, pat,” Guy teases patting him with his shirt.

“Ugh, why do I love you?” He does not mean to say that and it scares him how easily the words pass his lips.

“Because I’m pretty?” Guy asks sarcastically and pulls his shirt on. He stands up and pulls his trousers back up, tucking his cock in once more and buttons up his trousers. There is colour to his cheeks and his hair is damp and his face sweaty but he could claim he was sparring in the courtyard.

“That must be it,” he returns in kind and gives a startled yelp as Guy pushes him back on the bed and
climbs on top of him. “Ah ah, daddy wants you, you can’t keep him waiting.”

“True, perhaps he wishes for me to scrub his back.” He grimaces in disgust and Guy laughs. “Dinner tonight?” He needlessly asks and he shamelessly reaches between Guy’s legs and squeezes.

“I think I can handle a second course.” His lips are immediately seized and he moves a hand to the back of Guy’s head clutching the damp strands and holding him against him.

“Gisborne!” Vaisey’s scream echoes from the stairwell and they part like scolded children. Guy climbs from the bed and picks up his jacket on his way to the door.

“Guy!” He calls and Guy turns with a dark eyebrow raised in query. “I love you.” The smile he is met with is simply beatific.

“I love you,” he returns and makes to walk back to him.

“Gisborne!” Vaisey shouts again stopping Guy in his tracks. Sending an apologetic smile Guy then leaves his room and he listens to Vaisey whinge at him as they walk down the stairs together.

Chapter End Notes

If I slack again (hopefully I won’t) then I've written a one-shot Honey, Are You Looking For Some Trouble Tonight? and hopefully that should tide you over
Chapter 24

It was difficult to tell if yesterday could be deemed as a success as confessions were made too soon and he had hoped to calm the sexual tension between them and build a rapport. Unfortunately he ran into difficulty when it came to keeping his hands to himself and when Guy returned to his room to share a meal they had both pretended it was the food he had come for. They went through the motions greeting each other amicably and walking towards the table with space between them and taking their seats.

The moment food touched his lips a foot brushed his leg and he looked up only to find Guy with his head down carving meat and he assumed he had accidentally knocked him. He continued to eat or would have had Guy’s foot not deliberately ran up the back of his calf while the man was showing no signs of acknowledgement disowning his actions. He had considered kicking him as Guy’s actions were not dissimilar to children having foot fights however once his foot travelled higher and pushed his knees apart he realised this was no child’s play. He had shifted in his seat and when his eyes returned to Guy he had the man’s full attention as he practically stared into his soul with a filthy grin. He must have coloured immediately and longed to drop his head to hide his face but he was caught in Guy’s gaze.

When Guy had kicked his boot off he had no idea and only became aware of the fact when his bootless foot moved up his thigh. He had tried to act indifferent and continue with his meal and he thought he made a good show of it as he smiled politely at Guy, raised an eyebrow to acknowledge the game he was playing and drank his drink. He thought it was all very well played until Guy’s foot made it to his crotch and pressed against his straining cock. From that moment he was no longer hungry or to be more apt he hungered for something else, and he could pretend no more. His meal was ignored, as Guy’s meal was also as he toyed with him smirking perversely at him and he could only endure. He would have reciprocated but he imagined he was too uncoordinated and a foot slip at the wrong moment would be lights out for a night of passion.

After the first moan he was unable to stifle he immediately stood from his seat and dragged Guy from his, pulling him towards the bed. They had stripped each other in record time and as he took Guy into his mouth once more the shy brunette entered to remove their plates and excused herself quickly looking as though she may faint. He really should learn to close the door but the room had been his prison and the open door gave him comfort.

The plates remained where they were as he and Guy kissed and touched each other all night. There was no penetration as he hadn’t meant for there to be. They were still taking things slowly after all but even so they were as reckless and as passionate as each other. Guy never left his room that night and fell asleep on his stomach head turned facing him. They had shared a bed before but that was before they had had sex and since then Guy was unsure of his welcome and would leave. He quite liked watching Guy sleep as his features were relaxed and he was free of all his burdens. As he slept he could actually see the boy he once knew, he could see the real Guy of Gisborne, the one that truly owned his heart. It hurt to know he could only see him while Guy slept but it was a comfort to know that deep down he was still there.

When he awoke he found himself laid horizontally across Guy’s back with no idea how he got there. Guy was amused by it having woken and finding himself trapped and instead of waking him he had laid his head on the pillow and fallen back asleep. That was what he had told him when he was awoken for the second time when he climbed off him. They had actually talked for a while and he told Guy of his plight of having no money and no clothes. He wasn’t looking for a handout but the abundance of leather in his wardrobe, which consisted of two outfits, was driving him mad. It was
too constricting and he felt it revealed too much. Leather was Guy’s thing and he looked to die for but he did not feel the same. He felt plain and worse now that he was by Guy’s side hidden in his shadow.

He did not speak of his insecurities only of his monetary crisis and Guy had promised to talk to the Sheriff to discuss his father’s financial situation and had left soon after. Upon his return he claimed Roy had given Sir Edward money for safe keeping and he was given a bag of gold but the story did not ring true. He knew his inheritance was lost in the fire, undoubtedly pillaged by the villagers and the bag he was subsequently holding was a part of Guy’s substantial fortune he was forever bragging about. He took the red bag anyway and tried to reason with himself that he was not selling his soul. Guy was responsible for his lack of clothing and fortune due to starting the fire and they were to be wed so he was entitled to Guy’s money and Guy was unfortunately entitled to his land.

Work called Guy from his side, and he dressed and left his room so the maids could clean it. He was just in time for breakfast in the mess hall and he had chosen an empty table at the back of the room and was quite surprised when some guards came and sat with him when there were plenty of vacant tables. He assumed they had no idea about the stabbing incident in Clun as they involved him in their conversations and as mad as it sounds he was surprised that they were not callous savage animals just men who work to earn coins to feed their families.

When Guy entered the mess hall for rotation his eyes fell on him and he seemed surprised that he was there and he smiled before he remembered his surroundings and immediately glowered as he carried out his task with as much menace as he could muster. The guards he had come for leapt to attention, leaving their food behind as they left the hall and Guy turned casting him one last smile before he followed behind them.

The men at his table immediately came to life when Guy had gone, making silly noises and nudging him good-naturedly. He was surprised by their banter and playfulness goading him without the maliciousness he was used to. Their acceptance of him was remarkable and he was quite sure they would behave amicably with Guy if they were not so terrified of him.

Work eventually called them away and he left the mess hall in pursuit of a cloak and once again encountered Guy walking in the opposite direction. Guy had smiled and then turned his head, as if to ignore him and he behaved the same acting indifferent until they passed each other discreetly touching hands as though their relationship was a discreet affair.

It became a game and he was convinced Guy was following him as he kept passing him in the market while he bought material and pre-made clothes. He had lost sight of him some time ago and he continued to shop and it was while he was eyeing up some material he noticed Guy walking towards the castle gate talking to a man by his side. He must feel his eyes on him because Guy turns as though called and their eyes meet until a horse and cart interrupt their little competition and he eyes the fabric once more while Guy continues his trek towards the castle.

He buys the green fabric intending on having a seamstress make a cloak for him and while he waits a man catches his eye though he cannot fathom why. The woman whistles while she cuts the fabric and he walks around the stall eyeing the balding town’s person behaving oddly. The man looks agitated and wild-eyed and others are discreetly watching him knowing full well he was up to no good. The woman is still whistling when the man gathers his courage and marches into the street towards a fresh pile of horse muck from the horse that had just passed. The man bends down and grabs a handful of the steaming muck and flings it with all his might. He looks towards the target of the man’s rage and to his horror he watches the muck hit Guy on the back.

A rage unlike any he had felt before overcomes him and before he can even comprehend his own
actions he is beside the man shaking him roughly by the shoulders before he knees him in the groin. The man howls in pain and he releases him so he may drop to his knees clutching his crotch and he swings at him, smashing his fist into the man’s nose and watches blood spurt from it. He hits him again, catching him in the eye and again on the cheek so livid by the man’s actions. He is crazed by bloodlust and he continues punching the man until he drops fully to the ground and he takes to kicking him instead. In his rage Nottingham falls away and he can hear nothing but the pounding of his heart and the roar of flames and he’s back in Gisborne trapped in his mother’s arms watching Longthorn terrorise Guy and Isabella. The man at his feet is no better than Longthorn and he refuses to allow anyone to come between him and Guy again. If he had to kill to keep him, so be it.

Strong arms encircle his waist and he feels himself lifted and pulled away and he struggles uselessly. “Get off me!” He demands to his assailant whilst glaring at the bloody mess on the ground.

“Calm yourself,” Guy whispers in his ear and he immediately relaxes in his embrace not realising Guy was the one to restrain him. They stand that way for a few minutes, his back to Guy’s chest while his frantic heart slows as his rage is spent. “I would have put him in the stocks,” Guy says amused and he hopes he was lying. Guy would have killed him; surely, he needed to believe that because if Guy would have simply put him in the stocks then he was the monster. “Guards!” Guy calls and two come running. “Evict this piece of filth from Nottingham and see to it that he never returns or worse shall befall him.” The guards grab an arm each and roughly lift the man up not even allowing him to get to his feet as they drag him to the gates of Nottingham.

“Are you hurt?” Guy asks looking over his right hand and for the first time he notices his knuckles are bloody and there’s a cut on one of his fingers that looks as though it was caused by a tooth as he had punched the man in the mouth. As his adrenaline simmers the stinging pain in his hand becomes noticeable but not intolerable.

“I’ll live,” he replies with a shrug as the shame of his actions assaults him. He had behaved irrationally and though the man certainly deserved a smack the extent of the atrocities done to him were unwarranted.

“Come back to the castle with me,” Guy orders holding out his hand. He is a trembling mess and takes it and allows Guy to lead him away, stopping briefly to collect the fabric and Guy pays the woman as his hands are bloody and he is still in shock.

Once through the castle gates Guy releases his hand and passes the cloth to a guard with instructions to place it with his other bought items. Then he walks over to a pail of water and wets the back of his dark hair that has grown to his shoulders and throws more over his shoulder down his back washing the stink off him.

He walks over and takes Guy’s hand. “Come,” he says with a tug on Guy’s hand to lead him up the steps into the castle. “You need a bath.”

“I am fine; this is not the first time an incident like this has occurred though perhaps it may be the last.” He says with a smile but he cannot join in the merriment as he had beaten a man half to death.

“This has happened before?”

“It happens,” Guy says with a shrug.

“Bath, now.” There is hardly any authority in his tone but Guy eyes him warily before he does as he is told pulling him along behind him.

There is always a filled bath by the fire on the third floor bathing room and he does not know why
but he supposes it saves time and the water remains warm due to the close proximity to the flames. Guy shuts and locks the door and immediately begins to undress, dropping his clothes carelessly to the floor. He acts the maid, picking up after him, setting the jacket aside from his other clothes as that was struck by the muck and needed cleaning. Whilst he is distracted Guy climbs into the tub and fully submerges himself before breaking through the surface and pushing his hair from his face.

His hands go to the buckles of his own vest and he pulls them loose and shrugs it off while toeing his boots off. He walks over to the second empty tub and drapes his vest over the side and pulls his undershirt off over his head and sets it down. He can feel Guy’s eyes on his back as he unbuckles and unbuttons his leather trousers and pushes them down and kicks them off and bends to pull his socks off.

“Tease,” Guy whispers heatedly and flicks water at him. He turns around and approaches Guy’s tub much to the man’s confusion. “What are you doing?”

“Having a bath,” he replies sarcastically and climbs into Guy’s tub. There is room for them both if they sat either side but he does not want that and lies on the top of Guy, chest to chest. There is a long silence between them as he rests his head upon Guy’s chest, ear pressed against his beating heart.

“What are you doing?” Guy finally asks as his curiosity got the better of him.

“Longthorn,” he replies simply.

“That parasite is dead; I drowned him in our lake.” His eyes widen at the confession not that he was surprised Guy had killed Longthorn, that much was obvious. It is the ease in which he confesses that has him startled and he lifts his head. Guy raises his right arm to run his fingers through his hair but all he sees is the tattoo and the scar that ran through it. He hated him for what that mark and scar meant and yet he loved him for the reason why he did what he did.

He covers the tattoo by gripping Guy’s forearm and Guy sighs, annoyed. “I have committed crimes,” Guy confesses knowing why he was covering that awful blemish. “Heinous crimes,” he continues sounding unapologetic. “By taking you in holy wedlock I will wash away those crimes, your pure heart will cleanse mine.”

“I am not your redemption.”

“I never said you were, you are my reward. Everything I have done has been for us, for this moment. Our souls were bonded when we were children and I have moved heaven and earth to have you by my side. I am not sorry for what I have done, I do not seek redemption.”

“I do not know why you hold me in such high regard,” he responds self-deprecatively.

“I do not doubt you, you mistake what I say. I know you love me and I love you but I do not know why you love me.”

“I do not have the words to speak my heart but here,” Guy takes a hold of his hand and places it over his heart. “For as long as it still beats know that it is yours and beats solely for you and long after it stops my soul will wait for yours.”

He looks down at his hand that appeared tanned against Guy’s alabaster skin. “I would see my name
“tattooed here,” he says running his fingertips over the warm skin.

“Then I will see it done.”

“Truly?” He asks, surprised.

“If it is what you wish. I have seen the disgust on your face when you see my tattoo; I would have another and welcome a more appreciative gaze. Consider it my wedding gift to you.”

“And what do you ask for in return?”

“You have already given me what I desire, your heart and soon your hand in marriage.” For once he does not have the words to reply and instead he presses a chaste kiss against Guy’s lips and settles his head onto his chest once more.

“Perhaps later we could go to the lake?” He asks hopefully.

“To skim stones?” Guy asks with a laugh and then presses a kiss to the top of his head. “Yes, but let’s stay here a little while longer.” He nods in agreement and Guy settles back against the tub with his eyes closed. There is something comforting lying naked with a lover, without clothes it feels that not only are their bodies exposed but so are their souls. There are no secrets or facades simply the bare truth and the truth was exhilarating as well as terrifying, that he loved Guy as passionately and as obsessively as Guy loved him.
Chapter 25

The Sheriff’s personal seamstress was not his first choice when choosing who should make his cloak but Guy had insisted. He had feared what would happen to the beautiful material he had passed over remembering that awful cloak of Guy’s but his worry was for nothing. The cloak was as he desired; long reaching to his knees with a sizable hood and a shiny buckle at the throat. It blended nicely with his off white tunic and brown cotton trousers and he was beginning to feel like himself again.

He had to show Guy though he could not fathom why only that the need was there. Besides he had no friends within the castle and his father used to make him show off his new clothes treating him no better than a child but he had loved the attention. His father is gone now and he still feels the aching loss everyday but Guy has proven himself to be a balm for his broken heart and he does not feel the loss so terribly when he is in his presence.

Guy had spent the night in his bed once again although nothing happened and when he had awoken he found they could not be further from each other if they had tried. They had planned to break their fast in the mess hall but Guy suddenly became cagey and claimed pressing matters must see him from his side. He didn’t like it when he behaved secretively but he could not tell him to stay and so he let him go and had not seen him since.

He used to think Guy spotting was an easy task when one only had to look for crying children and terrified adults but when the man did not want to be found it was rather tricky. He was neither in the courtyard nor the tavern not that he had ventured inside but simply looked through the window. Trying to find Guy in Nottingham would be like searching for a needle in a haystack and though he would have taken the challenge he needn’t have to as a guard from yesterday waved at him and told him Guy was not about town but within the castle.

Still finding someone within the castle who potentially did not want to be found was its own dilemma. Nottingham castle was a very sizable building, a structurally sound penis extension if ever he saw one. He had never really noticed how impressive and so very needless it was until his hunt began though to say hunt suggests it was more than it truly was was. If Guy was not in the dungeon, with the Sheriff or in his own room he would call the whole thing off. He only wanted to show him his cloak after all; it was not so terribly important that it could not wait.

Guy was not in the dungeon and the majority of the cells were empty and then his eyes fell on the cell where his father had died and he could not be out of there fast enough. It was an error going down to the dungeons and he clearly hadn’t been thinking. He can’t stand the thought of his father dying down there frightened for his wellbeing and trapped. Winchester deserved to die a thousand deaths for the part he played in his father’s demise, and though he knows he should not hang on to his hatred he cannot simply let go. For his crimes he cannot forgive Winchester and he cannot forget and he understands Guy better than he ever had before. Hate was quite motivating when focused and coupled with vengeance and it could be misconstrued for ruthless ambition. Guy had plenty of time to stew in his hate and focus his anger while his own hatred was more misplaced anger and sadness. Winchester was dead; he had succumbed to the injury in his belly by his knife stabbed into him by Guy’s hand. He had had his vengeance and it remained a hollow victory, the Winchester name would discontinue but once he pledges himself to Guy so would the a-Dale name.

He tries to distance himself from such thoughts and walks towards the Great Hall and pokes his head through the open door. He can see Vaisey scribbling away at his table with a pile of sealed parchments to his left and he has no doubt about what the Sheriff is writing clearly informing his cohorts of the King’s demise. This was the fifth day, on the morrow Guy would be informed and his
fate would be sealed though to be fair his fate was sealed the moment he accepted the invitation to celebrate the King’s birthday at Locksley Manor.

Seeing as Guy is not standing behind the Sheriff like the menacing shadow he portrays he climbs up the stairs and turns off at the seventh level. Guy’s room is the third door and as he approaches he can see the door is ajar suggesting he was in luck and Guy was in fact in his room or he was about to startle some cleaning maids.

He knocks on the door while pushing it open further. “Hello?” He calls out to not spook the staff should they be there. It was needless as he steps inside and finds Guy sat on his bed looking at an object in his hand. Despite the noise he was making Guy startles and shoves the item into his jacket pocket and looks up at him. “What’s that then?” He teases knowing full well that it was his wedding ring.

“Nothing that concerns you,” Guy says stubbornly confirming his suspicion. Guy stands from the bed and walks towards him slowly and eyes him like a predator. “I seem to have found you in my bedroom again, Allan-a-Dale or should I say the Nightwatchman?” He tries not to shiver at the tone of his voice or the look in his eyes and he had never realised before that Guy had never asked where the costume had come from.

“I came only to show you my new cloak.” Now he's actually said it he feels a bit silly but he turns around showing off the forest green cloak and Guy watches and nods appreciatively and he’s not entirely sure his pleasure is solely for the cloak.

“Nice,” Guy says simply and it takes him back to a time when he had said the same to Guy. He could have died from mortification by accidentally giving away his little crush and yet now he stands engaged to him. “Although there is one thing,” Guy says and reaches for the buckle at his neck, pulling the leather strap through and releasing his cloak so it falls to the ground. “There, thought so,” he says triumphantly and he looks up at him in question. “It looks better on my bedroom floor,” Guy clarifies with a smirk and he can’t help but laugh.

“You’re lucky I love you,” he says to distract him and reaches for his pocket.

“No,” Guy reprimands grabbing his wrist and then pulls him forward into a biting kiss. He returns the kiss in the same fashion biting Guy’s lower lip as Guy presses his wandering hand between his legs and he feels his cock stir with interest as Guy begins to walk backwards leading him towards the bed.

“It seems I need to throw cold water over the pair of you.” They break apart and turn to find the Sheriff standing unimpressed in the doorway. “Gisborne don’t you have work to do? And as for you,” the Sheriff turns towards him and then pauses and eventually shrugs. “Do whatever it is that you do.” There’s a long silence while none of them do anything and the Sheriff finally huffs in annoyance. “Now!” The Sheriff leaves and while Guy is distracted he tries to go for the ring again but he is pushed back and Guy puts distance between them.

“Let me see.”

“There is nothing to see; now I must be off. Can you be trusted not to rifle through my things?”

“I thought to go to the market now I know the seamstress isn’t beyond sense.”

“Very well,” Guy says and lifts his cloak from the floor. He throws it at him rather than to him and the material momentarily covers his face. He wrestles with the material and when he can see again Guy has gone leaving him alone in his bedroom. He keeps his word and does not rifle through Guy’s
things as there was little point as he had wanted to see the ring and Guy had taken it with him. The room is the same as always and he can already tell what is there especially on the top shelf, a quill an inkwell, a book and a stone. He tests himself and looks up and sure enough the items are still there, and the small grey flat stone has been moved once again and placed before the inkwell.

He leaves the room and goes to the market though his heart is not in it as his mind has not strayed from the ring. He caught sight of gold in the glimpse that he had but no more than that and he does not know why he can think of little else. He had worn his engagement ring with little to no fanfare and it hadn’t played on his mind so much. Perhaps it was the finality of the ring but his fate was sealed long ago and though it was unfair there was little he could do about it.

He looks down at his left hand and stares at the silver Celtic ring reminiscent of a stolen necklace. Women wear wedding rings as a sign that they are taken and owned, a pretty slave collar around their finger rather than around their neck. He did not so much mind the mark of ownership as anyone with half a brain could see he belonged to Guy body and soul and no ring was needed to reveal that truth.

He supposes that it is because he is once again playing the woman, and people were convinced that the only thing between his legs of worth was Guy. It shouldn’t matter what people thought as he was never thought highly of but the thought of the ring is maddening. It was only a ring but he had seen the way Guy was looking at it proudly and he wanted to feel that. He had no qualms wearing a wedding ring even as a man but if he had to wear one then so should Guy. Guy had more cause than most to wear a ring to reveal him off limits to handsy tavern wenches and any other woman in pursuit of social standing. Guy was the one with loose morals that needed leashing not him.

It is decided within the space of a heartbeat that he would have a wedding ring made for Guy. The Master at Arms regularly spoke of the equality between them so he would have him prove himself and his word. He reaches for his bag of money he received yesterday but as he fears his purse is substantially lightened due to his over indulgence the day before. It seemed wrong to ask Guy for more coin to buy him a gift as he was well aware Guy had spun him a story and the money he had spent and what little remained was Guy’s fortune. Though how was he to come into money in such a short amount of time was beyond him. No job he could think of paid that well as he fully intended to buy Guy a gold ring like the one he caught a glimpse of and he highly doubted Guy would allow him to work. He was to be Guy’s kept pet to hang pretty baubles on, no self respecting braggart would allow their spouse to work as it would set tongues wagging and Guy was the worst braggart he had ever known.

Laughter interrupts his thoughts and he looks across the square to the Black Horse tavern. Its reputation exceeded that of The Trip however that was not saying much. There are benches outside and at one two men sit facing one another while laughing into their cups. He can feel his lips curl in distaste as he recognises Lord Steven and Lord Robert, friends by all accounts, half brothers if one were to believe the rumours and he did because Steven’s father was such a cad. They have not seen him and are far too invested in their conversation to even consider that an old nemesis stood only metres away. To be fair they probably no longer recognize the child they used to torment and bully, casting aspersions on his mother and pulling roughly at his clothes. Steven was the first boy to bloody his nose when he fought back with words and cast aspersions on his parentage. It is silly to desire vengeance years after the fact but his heart is dark and he fears his soul is no better and he longs for justice in this lawless place.

Lifting his hood he makes his way over devising his plan as he goes. He could bump into Steven, knock him and make him spill his beer, or simply approach their table and knock their heads together as hard as he can. He could even stage a fight, tear at his new clothing and call for Guy and claim he was attacked and then they would surely pay however the last time he was attacked his foes had their
necks stretched the next day and though he longed for revenge he did not want blood.

No, his revenge had to be simple, something to hurt them but not injure and should greatly benefit him. He knows instantly what he must do and he turns and waves to no one in particular and walks backwards knocking into Steven’s shoulder and he stumbles and snatches the money tied to Steven’s money belt before righting himself.

“I am so sorry,” he feigns remorse and places a gentle hand on Steven’s broad shoulder. The dumb brute stills at his touch and looks up at him without a hint of recognition in his muddy brown eyes.

“The fault was mine,” Steven offers magnanimously with a wink and a smile that revealed yellowed teeth. He smiles in return, dazzling him with a grin and beguiling him with a touch focusing his attention so he was unaware of the crime committed. He takes his leave before more can be said and he can feel both men’s eyes on his retreating back and he turns a corner to be rid of their unwanted attention.

The stolen purse feels heavy in his pocket weighted with guilt or gold he could not be sure but he hoped for gold. He wants desperately to count his stolen riches and bask in his victory but he did not want to be found out. In truth he wanted to do it again as swiping coins in daylight was thrilling and he enjoyed the rush of adrenaline and the pounding of his heart and simply being alive in the moment.

Nottingham is rife with possible targets and though his actions were not honourable they were certainly deserved. He would rob only from the rich and bullies at that, those that had been mean to him with words, looks or fists and as sad as it is there were plenty of those. There was not a noble in Nottingham that hadn’t said something nasty to him and their hate increased tenfold when the Gisborne’s were chased out and their land became a cornfield. How they had crowed in victory the rotten swine’s and took to tormenting him saying he would be soon to follow. They didn’t understand that he longed to follow and be with his friend once more and away from their constant hate but he was a ten year old boy and there was nothing he could do.

He shakes his head as if to rid himself of such thoughts. He does not wish to remember the heat of the fire, the screams and the chaos and that bastard Longthorn. If only Guy would have approached him then they could have drowned Longthorn together. He pauses, worried how dark his thoughts have turned and he realises he was not the man he once was. Guy thought of him as a pure hearted virgin while he thought of Guy as a misunderstood shy boy and neither of them could see how dark and twisted they had become and the problem had only exacerbated with their confession of love.

He walks into a passing noble to distract him from his thoughts and easily pockets the man’s coin bag. “Terribly sorry,” he apologises and the man looks irate but his temper simmers as he casts him a smile. He was fully aware that people found him attractive, as most of the abusive comments he received in later years often involved the word pretty. It was what had inspired their campaign of hate against him, as they desired the undesirable so he was not above using his looks to fill his pockets.

He continues on noticing with great satisfaction that his pockets practically chime with the sound of coins. It is a beautiful melody and one he is not overly accustomed to since his father would pass him no more coin than necessary for fear he would be robbed, that and for the simple fact that he did not have much money to wear a coin bag so gamely.

As beautiful a sound it is he longs for more even without counting his already ill-gotten gains. He enjoys the rush of lifting a purse but he is not so foolish to strike again so soon and in the same area as he has no wish to give himself away. He considers squirreling away what he has already stolen but there is no place in Nottingham that he trusts and his secret hiding place in Sherwood Forest is
too far away and he hadn’t used it in some years. He ought to go back and see if he had left anything as it would be nice to own something from his past having lost all in the fire.

He carries on until he is halfway across town and spies his next target, Lord James, a bully that had not only stolen his silver coin but tried to steal a kiss too until he stopped himself, repulsed by his own actions. He walks into him and pulls the bag from his belt and apologises for his clumsiness and for a moment he is quite sure he has been recognized as James holds tightly to his biceps and looks him in the eye. Eventually he shakes his head, and his straw coloured hair falls in front of his green eyes as he releases him and passes by without a word of acknowledgement.

He’s not far from the castle and his pockets are weighted with gold so he makes his way back eager to count his stolen loot. His rare good fortune makes him reckless and though he means to return he can’t help himself and robs another noble on the way. He pockets the man’s gold and passes him by unnoticed but unbeknownst to him he had been seen, and a gloved hand reaches out grabbing his wrist and pulls him behind a hung off-white sheet.

“What the devil?” He hisses knocking the stranger’s hand from his wrist and stares at the reddened skin.

“What the hell do you think you are doing?” Guy hisses and he finally looks up uncertain why he hadn’t known it was him before.

“Being accosted in the street apparently,” he answers back smartly and pointedly glances at his abused wrist.

“Do not use that tone of voice with me, I know what you are.”

“And what am I?” He challenges.

“A thief!”

“Do not pretend that you did not know,” he answers back remembering a similar argument.

“I didn’t.”

“Please, don’t insult me.” Guy looks positively murderous and he cannot understand why. “How short a memory you must have when you cannot recall a certain necklace,” he holds up his left hand revealing the ring that was inspired by the necklace. “And not forgetting,” he continues and steps forward pressing his index finger against the heavy leather over Guy’s chest. “I stole your heart,” he adds a lascivious wink but Guy is unmoved by his hopeless flirtation.

“Get back to the castle,” Guy practically snarls without a hint of desire in his words. He may as well bare his teeth for how ferocious he looks and he cannot understand his animosity when he had thought their fight was truly over.

He does not say a word and takes his leave and tells himself he is not listening to Guy’s orders he was simply returning to the castle regardless. Guy follows uncomfortably close behind him as though he does not trust him not to flee the city. He puts up with him as there was little else to do and he can feel his angry gaze burning a hole through his back but he will not turn to confront him. The moment they step through the castle gate Guy signals a guard to lower the portcullis and his wrist is seized once more.

“What is the meaning of this?” He demands and tries to shake his grip once more but Guy simply holds him tighter. Without warning Guy reaches into his pocket and pulls out three of the stolen money bags and tosses them mindlessly behind him. “Give those back, I need those,” he insists.
noticing some guards eye the spilled coins.

“To leave me,” Guy snaps. “No amount of coin will see you from my side. There is no where you can run, I will find you.” He relaxes realising what has stirred Guy’s ire though Guy’s grip remains painful.

“Release me, you misconstrue my actions.”

“Why did you steal? If you were without money I have plenty as I have told you and your father left…”

“Spare me your lies,” he interrupts Guy’s tirade. “We both know my fortune was lost and the money given to me yesterday was your own. For what I need I cannot use your money.” His confession falls on deaf ears as Guy shakes him angrily.

“So you do mean to leave me.”

“You are hurting me and you are not listening.”

“Why would I listen to your lies, viper?”

“Says you, leather-clad, fork-tongued liesmith!” Guy shakes him again and he loses his footing and falls knocking the back of his head on the stone step.

“Are you hurt?” Guy asks suddenly stricken and releases his wrist. Truth be told his fall would have been a lot worse had Guy not been holding on to him but he won’t reveal that truth. He knows an opportunity when he sees one and considering this is the fifth day he cannot afford to argue with Guy. He pockets the three bags of coins and rights himself and gives Guy his best baleful look.

“You would see me dead, and you wonder why I plan my escape!” It isn’t true but he turns and runs up the steps and into the castle. Guy gives chase as he knew he would as he was far too passionate and compulsive to think things through and he would simply react. How Guy manages to run in leather is beyond him but he can hear him gaining more ground than he would like and the slap of his sword was something he hadn’t considered. Their relationship worked best when weapons were not involved as they were cutting with their words coupled with swords throats would undoubtedly be cut.

He runs up the spiral uneven steps glad to gain more ground as even though Guy’s legs are longer the steps were too hard to judge taking more than two at a time. The gold weighs him down more than he thought it might but he continues on and finally turns off at his level and enters his room. He had secured a key from one of the servants and he takes it from the draw and stands behind the open door.

As predicted Guy enters the room and unable to locate him he walks further inside. He shuts the door and leans against it, smirking as Guy turns around with narrowed eyes.

“How gullible,” he teases and lets Guy watch as he locks the door and takes the key from the lock.

“Give me that key,” Guy says lacking authority perhaps knowing what he meant by his actions.

“If you want it,” he taunts like Guy had done to him. “Then come and get it,” he drops the key down his trousers and immediately feels it fall down his right leg and into his boot and hopes Guy did not notice.

“You mean to keep me here?” Guy asks with a wink and he nods.
“Get on the bed,” he orders and sees the dawning realisation in Guy’s eyes. What was done cannot be undone but it can be rectified. That day should have never happened; their first time should have not been forced and turned into something ugly. Their love was beautiful and their first time should have been by the lake but there were so many contributing factors to that awful day and they were both behaving terribly.

“Excuse me?” Guy says, using his words from long ago almost as if that day played on his mind as much as it played on his.

“You heard me,” he replies. “Get on that bed before I throw you on it.” Guy reluctantly walks over to the bed and sits down on the edge like he did but he does not utter the protests he once did. He cannot fault him as they were trying to rectify that day not exacerbate existing problems between them. “Take your clothes off.”

“I won’t,” Guy speaks his first protest but does not say it fearfully but playfully.

“You behave as if I have given you a choice.” He could say more as Guy had but they were words that he could not bear repeating.

“You are going to let me out of this room right now,” Guy says the words as though they are rehearsed lines in a play and he forgets his stage directions. He should have stood from the bed in protest but instead he had remained seated.

“Am I?” he asks pulling at the buckle of his cloak and lets it drop to the floor where it thuds with bags of stolen coins. “Take your clothes off before I tear them off.” Unlike the first time this played out Guy kicks off his boots and pulls open his jacket while he removes his shirt. They had only undressed as much as necessary that day cheapening the experience and allowing a wall to come between them that had taken so long to come down.

They continue to undress in silence and he watches Guy stow away his sword beneath the bed which was for the best. He feels faintly ridiculous stood before Guy naked and he knows he must act before he loses his nerve. He steps forward encouraged by the interested swelling between Guy’s thighs. “I knew you would come around,” he practically breathes the words in a low moan and steps in between Guy’s parted legs. “I’ll make this good for you,” he promises and then leans down with his lips a breath away from Guy’s left ear. “I’ll make you come,” he turns his head and presses a kiss to the corner of Guy’s mouth before moving away and retrieving a bottle from his draw.

He tosses it onto the bed and keeps his distance. “Prepare yourself,” he orders and Guy raises an eyebrow misunderstanding his intention. He looks pointedly towards the bottle and to Guy’s stiff cock that has failed to lose interest which was good to know. Thankfully Guy understands realising that though verbally their positions have changed sexually they have not. He could wait, he was not about to pounce on Guy the moment the opportunity presented itself, that was not what today was about. Today was about righting a wrong and clearly a wrong they had both thought about considering Guy was quoting verbatim as was he.

Guy picks up the bottle and uncorks it and spills oil onto his fingers. He leans back and wraps his long pale fingers around his cock and begins to stroke leisurely while he watches him through his lashes. He had once wondered if Guy’s broadsword was overcompensating or bragging and as he had already found out it was the latter. Typically Guy was bigger than him in everything and he would have felt inadequate if not for the way Guy observed him with heavy lidded eyes and wet his lips that had explored his entire body.

“Good,” he compliments a little too breathlessly for his liking. “Now get me ready,” he orders and steps forward. His hips are immediately seized and Guy pulls him forward and his cock is practically
swallowed by his hot hungry mouth. His knees weaken and he stumbles forward and remains standing solely by Guy’s strength holding him.

He hadn’t meant for that but he is hardly going to stop him and he grips Guy’s raven hair that is getting quite long. He wonders if he would cut it soon and he dearly hoped not as he loved grabbing a handful of his hair and pulling him against him. As much as he enjoys Guy’s mouth on him he will not last much longer and so he steps back, removing his cock from Guy’s mouth and watches Guy lick his lips lasciviously.

He turns around fearing he would succumb to Guy’s seduction if faced with him a moment longer but Guy seems unconcerned and remains playful and takes the opportunity to feel him. He should be ashamed of himself from the sounds he makes as Guy gropes him with his large hands squeezing and parting the globes of his ass exposing his hidden opening. He does not mind and is vaguely amused until Guy pauses in his actions leaving his hole exposed and he feels ridiculous. He attempts to look over his shoulder but freezes when he feels a tongue lick over his opening. He shivers and his heart pounds in his chest as Guy sets his mind to the task and licks insistently until his tongue enters him and a strangled cry is torn from his throat. It feels as though he has been doused in pitch and set alight as his nerve endings send sparks of pleasure up his spine and the blood in his veins feels on fire. He tries to focus and keep his hips still but his mind swims, as though he was drunk on pleasure and he pushes back as a finger enters him. It is dirty and incredibly hot and he cannot fathom how he remains standing as a second finger presses into him alongside Guy’s tongue. He grabs the base of his cock to stop himself from ejaculating and embarrassing himself by behaving so wantonly and he assumes Guy caught his actions as he sits back and removes his fingers.

He turns around, red in the face with his chest heaving while Guy has his head tilted down but looks up through his lashes timidly. “Was that...was that good?” He asks unsure, possibly fearful that he had behaved too bold.

He steps forward, between Guy’s parted thighs and moves his lips to his ear. “You’ll find out when I do it to you,” he promises and steals a kiss before turning around again. He means to sit down on Guy’s lap and ride his cock but Guy’s hands on his hips prevent him.

“Stop,” his heart plummets as he fears Guy wishes to go no further. “Not like this, I want to see your face.” The admission startles him until he remembers he is baring his scarred back to Guy, the man responsible for the hideous deformations. He turns around again surprised he has not become dizzy from all his spinning and climbs onto Guy’s lap resting his knees either side of Guy’s thighs.

Guy’s hand on his hip guides him down while his other hand holds his cock and he feels the pressure against his opening. His muscles give way and Guy’s cock penetrates him in one fluid motion unlike their first time. He settles on Guy’s lap fully impaled and wraps his arms around Guy’s neck and presses a kiss against his mouth. This is what their first time should have been like, no race to orgasm or empty threats just the union of two bodies of two people in love.

Guy’s hand strokes down his back and he leans in for a kiss and though he is aware of where his tongue was recently he kisses back ardently. He never wanted this moment to end as he felt loved and safe in Guy’s arms. He had only felt safe with Guy once before when Harold decided to ruin his life and Guy had tried so desperately to save him even sacrificing his own safety and position and then he eventually did save him. Even though they rode back to Nottingham together too soon the saint became a sinner and their relationship was damaged almost beyond repair.

Since then they had been intimate but never like this, not that he could remember since he had to drown his inhibitions just to lay with Guy. He had fragmented memories of some of the things they had done together but nothing profound had happened. Guy breaks the kiss and simply looks at him
as though he has never seen his face before.

“I love you,” Guy says meaningfully, staring into his eyes and he realises this is the first time he had said it without prompting. “Will you marry me?”

“I’m sorry,” he says moving one hand to Guy’s chin and turns his face left and then right. “I seem to be in the wrong lap but you look a lot like my fiancé it’s uncanny.”

“Don’t tease,” Guy says and slaps his hand away. “Will you?”

“Will I what?” He asks confused.

“Marry me.”

“Not being funny but have you had a knock on the head?” Guy does not reply but his expression is set in disapproval. “We’re engaged to be married, you announced it on the Sheriff’s birthday, and I wear your ring, any of this sound familiar to you?”

“No,” his jaw drops in surprise. “No, yes I know all that but I never asked you, I told you so now I am asking from the bottom of my heart will you marry me?” He assumes it is a trick but even Guy’s acting wasn’t that good, his question was genuine and the choice was his.

He wants to cry because as honest as Guy is being there is no choice; if Guy let him leave then the Sheriff would see him returned or dead for his defiance. Perhaps it was a blessing knowing the Sheriff’s intentions because as much as he loved Guy and he did with all his heart he did not want to marry him. He had no desire to lose his name and his land and he wanted children, he wanted a son he would name Roy. He hadn’t given much thought to the wife but he would be a kind dutiful husband and though his heart would belong to someone else he would try his best to make her happy. Those dreams were gone now, they had died with the King and he wonders why Guy would ask. As far as he knew the King was alive and well and there was no threat of death hanging over his head so giving him a choice seemed strange as he could be faced with rejection. He does not look fearful though, in fact he looks confident and self-assured and so he assumes his question was only asked because he was safe in the knowledge that he loved him.

“Yes,” he replies and is immediately pulled into a kiss.

For how long they kiss he cannot be certain but it feels like hours and his legs begin to cramp from kneeling so long. He shifts uncomfortably on Guy’s lap and moans unexpectedly as his movements cause Guy’s cock to brush against his prostate. Guy breaks the kiss and smirks before thrusting upwards hitting that spot once more.

“Are you okay?”

“My legs are cramping.”

“You should have said I’ll happily put you on your back.” With little effort Guy stands while holding him in his arms and he almost forgets just how strong he was. “Wrap your legs around me,” he does as requested and Guy sits back down and pulls him into a kiss. They rock their hips steadily as their mouths remained locked and their fingers tangle in each other’s hair. They are so close in the moment and connected as one that he barely notices when he orgasms as it was an extension of their actions rather than the cause for it. Guy spills his seed inside him moments later and fulfils his promise of putting him onto his back.

He lay on the mattress exhausted and Guy joins him pulling the covers over them both and rests his head on his chest. “I’m sorry,” Guy whispers and presses his lips over his heart.
“What’s gotten into you?” He asks with a laugh and runs his fingers through Guy’s dark locks.

“I forced you.” The confession leaves him momentarily speechless as Guy rarely answered for his crimes choosing instead to deflect the blame and wash his hands of all wrong doings. He looks down but Guy will not meet his gaze and instead seems to find comfort in confessing to his heart. “I was lost, I was angry; I couldn’t imagine a world without you so I sent Tuck away. I meant only for you to see reason but then we quarrelled and you implied I was a rapist and I wasn’t. I knew you wanted me as I had felt your desire before but you were afraid of your feelings for me, each time you acted on them you would become cold and distant. So I thought if I gave you incentive like I did that night in your bedroom you would be free of your doubts and you could blame the events on me as by then you had painted me as a monster. You begged me to stop but I didn’t listen because I thought you were just nervous and then you stopped fighting me and I thought you had accepted me. I hadn’t realised I had bullied you into sleeping with me, not until you claimed I raped you and even then I thought it was only regret speaking. I couldn’t see what I had done and that day played over and over in my mind and if I could take it back I would.”

Guy still has not made eye contact and he is unsure how to respond. “I forgive you,” he finally replies and places a kiss on top of Guy’s head. The Master at Arms’ shoulders immediately slump from being knotted with tension as if he expected him to kick up a fuss and he most definitely hears a sigh of relief. He drops his head back onto the pillow and for the first time in a long time he allows himself to smile.

A noise awakens him hours later and he nudges Guy as he remains asleep with his head cushioned on his chest. “Wake up,” he nudges him again and Guy grumbles sleepily. “Do you hear that?”

“Hear what?” The noise sounds again.

“That,” he insists but Guy isn’t listening and hasn’t even the decency to open his eyes.

“Milord, dinner.” A voice sounds through the door and he realised he had heard the maid knocking.

“One moment,” he shoves Guy off him and gets out of the bed and pulls on a long undershirt belatedly realising it was Guy’s.

“Door’s locked,” Guy mutters rolling into the space on the bed he had just vacated.

“What? Where’s the key? Oh shi...” he trips over Guy’s discarded boots and looks up when he can hear Guy sniggering. “Learn to clean up after yourself,” he admonishes.

“Is my gaoler mad because he has lost the key?”

“I’m mad because your damn boots...boots it’s in my boot.” He gets up and finds his right boot, neatly placed beside his folded clothes and lifts it and shakes the key from it. He goes over to the door and unlocks it and allows the two maids to enter with their meals. They keep their eyes down at all costs looking sheepish and set up their meals before quickly leaving. The candles have burnt down rather low but he supposes it is no hardship changing them himself.

He goes over to the table to see what is for dinner when arms circle his waist and pull him against a naked body and a stiff prick. “You’re insatiable.”

“How did you mean for me to react when you wear my shirt and your thighs are damp with my seed?”
“Aren’t you hungry?”

“Not for food,” Guy answers quickly and places biting kisses down his neck. He stares at the table longingly knowing that would be a second meal he would go without due to Guy’s sexual appetite. Guy must sense his resignation as he lifts him into his arms and carries him to the bed but as gallant as his actions were he soon drops him unceremoniously onto the mattress.

Guy joins him on the bed and he moves his hands to the hem of the shirt to pull it off but Guy’s hands cover his own stilling his actions. “No, leave it on.” He does as he’s asked and lies down and Guy lies down beside him prompting him to turn on his side and face the unlocked but closed door. He feels Guy raise the shirt from behind so it rests on his lower back exposing his posterior before Guy penetrates him with one deep thrust leaving him breathless. “I want to die making love to you,” Guy confesses and he almost chokes without the breath to laugh.

“I’m sure you meant that to sound romantic, but please don’t.” He says when he finally recovers and continues to laugh until Guy rocks against him hitting his prostate with each deep thrust. He rests his head on the crook of Guy’s left elbow while his left hand reaches for Guy’s right and he holds it over his pounding heart while his right hand reaches back squeezing Guy’s ass and pulling him tighter against him.

“I love you,” Guy whispers hotly against his ear and he turns his head and immediately his lips are covered by Guy’s. He returns the kiss stroking his tongue against Guy’s as they share the same breath while he pushes back against Guy crying out in pleasure as he sinks deeper inside of it.

It’s too enclosed wrapped in Guy’s arms, impaled on his cock and sharing the same breath as their hearts beat in sync. It’s not so much suffocation more a perfect fit as Guy’s body curls around his own and they slot together as though they were made for each other.

“I love you,” he says easily as Guy sucks a mark onto his neck and his hips keep their pounding rhythm mercilessly assaulting his prostate. Guy’s lips find his once more and to his surprise Guy reaches completion first, spilling his seed inside him a second time and dirtying the sheets below. He rides out his orgasm with stuttered thrusts but the warm release inside of him is his undoing and he orgasms without a single touch to his cock and lays breathless in Guy’s arms.

“So dinner?” Guy asks without pulling out of him.

“After I’ve slept for a year,” he mutters in reply relaxed and drowsy in Guy’s arms.

“Good night then,” Guy teases and presses a kiss to his cheek. He means to reply but his eyes are so heavy and he succumbs to sleep.

“Allan?” His name is called and his shoulder is nudged. “Allan! Wake up!”

“Five more minutes,” he mumbles curling into the warm blankets.

“Wake up!” Something splashes over his face and he sits up startled staring at a smirking Guy of Gisborne.

“That better have been water,” he warns wiping the non-smelling liquid from his eyes.

“I have news, the king is dead!” Guy crows victoriously and he so desperately wants to slap the misguided fool across the face. He wishes Guy would think before he opens his mouth but apparently he is asking for too much.
“Yay,” he replies deadpan and turns away from Guy and buries himself in the covers.

“Don’t be upset,” Guy climbs on the bed and hugs him around his cocoon. “We can be married now and once you are my husband you will no longer stay in the castle and you’ll come home with me.”

“To Bonchurch?”

“No, to Gisborne,” Guy corrects. The news leaves him confused and he was glad for the blankets covering his face because Gisborne was a cornfield. “I wish you wouldn’t hide from me, I love you, Husband.”

“I love you too,” he replies. “Husband,” the word sounds strange on his tongue but Guy is satisfied and rests beside him with his arms still wrapped around him.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The carriage lurched to the right almost unseating him and he looked through the sheer white linen of the curtains to an apologetic guard walking alongside him though it was not his fault. He had six guards in total as well as the coachman though it was not for his safety as he well knew; it was for the simple fact that Guy did not trust him to show.

Almost a year had passed since Guy informed him of the death of the king and during that time he had travelled no further than the gates of Nottingham. Clearly after everything he was not trusted enough and though he assured Guy there was nowhere that he could go his words fell on deaf ears. He was still a prisoner only his cell was widened and up until two months ago he was the Earl of Bonchurch and continued to occupy his seat on the council growing increasingly wary of the looks cast his way each month.

It was commonplace for him to be looked upon with distaste and open hostility but the looks he received were not the same. There was genuine sadness from Lord Edward, confusion from some others and general unease from the rest. He had no idea what had inspired their confusion until Guy finally took him aside and told him he no longer held a seat on the council. When asked why he was told that he was no longer Earl of Bonchurch and when he asked why once more he was told there no longer was land by that name but a cornfield. The same had happened to Guy himself, as proud as he was with his family name, with repossessed land he could not hold a seat on the council and had only claimed one by murdering a man and taking his title.

He understood the significance of Bonchurch being naught but a cornfield as Gisborne, or what was formerly Gisborne was also naught but a cornfield. He understood the relevance but Guy did not have to shame him to make him understand his own hardship. Clearly Guy had wanted to prove that they were alike by having lost their homes to a fire Guy had started and having their land and title taken. It was unnecessary and incredibly cruel as circumstances didn’t necessitate a bond because had that been true England would be united by the Crusade and the sickness and greed would have never had a chance to take root and fester.

In his heart he knows Guy had not meant to shame him but he was a thoughtless fool at the best of times and he was like a dog with a bone when an idea formed in his delusional mind. It was not enough for him to be the other half of his soul and to own his heart, Guy needed a physical claim as words were cheap and the actions of nobles were duplicitous. To parallel their lives he thought to make a statement and in a manner of speaking he did, but like all of Guy’s best intentions it was misguided and so very wrong.

Though his seat on the council was gone forever Guy promised him a new one, as joint Earl of Huntingdon once he pledges his troth. It saddens him that Guy felt the need to use incentives to sway his decision and that he cannot be trusted to ride the short distance from Nottingham to Gisborne, formally known as Locksley. Guy swears his father would be proud of him owning not only his former land but all the former land of Locksley and renaming it. He had never known Sir Roger but he had heard stories from his father and he was told Roger was a simple man with simple needs. When he had valiantly saved Lord Robert of Locksley he did it out of the kindness of his heart not for self-gain and when he was awarded land he refused but Lord Robert had insisted. He cannot imagine that man would be proud of Guy, only a man like the Sheriff would applaud such over ambitious deviant behaviour.
He had thought the changing of the village name would stir the ire of the people but since the king’s death and the crowning of King John poverty and ill will towards nobility was a thing of the past. It was all so terribly clever overtaxing the poor while the king was away and claiming it was the king’s decree for monies needed for the crusade painting him as a war-mongering puppet of Rome with little to no regard for his own people. Whereas King John was painted as a saint by pulling out of a war they had no business being in and bringing husbands and fathers home to their families. Taxes were cut but not abolished and for once it was a time of peace and plenty for the people of England.

He hadn’t truly known what would happen under the new regime should it come to pass and he was quite pleasantly surprised. He had seen the Sheriff’s behaviour towards the people of Clun and the outlaws in the woods and he had believed should their coup be successful darkness would spread through the land and the rich would get richer living off the spoils of the lower classes who would then perish come winter. Luckily none of that came to pass, as King John desired the love of the people like a child starved of affection. He had seen it in his eyes when King John came to Nottingham with all pomp and ceremony and the people cheered and threw flowers like he was the Second Coming. Had they only known what a cowardly snake he was, a kinslayer and kingslayer powdered and pampered like some rich noble’s paramour. It turned his stomach having to bend the knee to the sanctimonious man-child and he can remember only too well all of the eyes on him as he knelt beside Guy having been introduced as his fiancé. He thought for a moment that the traitor king would call him pretty from the way he was looking at him and his nervousness increased tenfold when he eyed Guy similarly. He kissed the king’s ring quickly whilst keeping his eyes down while Guy did no such thing and took the king’s hand in his and kissed his ring reverently while looking into the king’s eyes. He wanted to slap him because undoubtedly the big idiot had no idea what he was doing. He understood that Guy was showing his thanks for the opportunity to wed his childhood sweetheart but to anyone else, including the king it would seem he was offering himself and by default offering him too. Thankfully no summons to the king’s bedchamber came but he slapped Guy anyway for being a thoughtless prat.

Naturally with seemingly everything Guy misconstrued his anger and assumed he thought he was trying to play away. There was no convincing him otherwise so he let him sulk and wander off into town because a mardy Guy of Gisborne was not fun to be around. When he had finally returned late at night and entered their bedroom, formerly Guy’s bedroom in the castle which he was moved into after the news of the king’s death, Guy apologised once again. He waved off his apology but then Guy had begun to hastily strip and he was a simple man with simple needs so if Guy wanted to apologise with sex then he was not about to stop him. However he soon found he was mistaken as Guy wasn’t stripping for that reason and once his jacket and undershirt came off he saw the white bandage over his heart and froze. Moments later Guy removed it and there written in cursive was his name and to his shame he had almost cried and there were certainly noticeable tears in his eyes. When he had asked for the tattoo he expected only Allan to be written but Allan could have been anyone and since it was a wedding gift he thought Guy might have Allan of Gisborne to commemorate their marriage. Instead he found Allan a-Dale and he was speechless as it showed that Guy loved him for who he was and acceptance was all that he truly wanted and he knew one day he would return the gesture.

“Almost there milord,” Peter informs him wearing full regalia only his long-sleeved undershirt was black and yellow the house colours of Gisborne. He had befriended Peter, John, the two Matthews’, David and Nathaniel in the mess hall one morning when Guy had left his side and they had sat with him without any prompting. Since that day whenever they were in the mess hall together they would sit together and talk and it was nice, as he had never had so many friends before. They had told him that they liked Guy but had no idea how to approach him for fear he would bite their heads off or run them through so on occasion he would bring Guy with him to show he was not the monster he liked to portray. They got along well enough but were too cautious around Guy and their banter was not
so much playful but guarded. Guy did not mind and to prove there was no ill will he gave them the duty of escorting him to Gisborne to be wed. It was quite the honour and showed a great amount of trust because there was talk about his cold feet and entrusting friends of his to escort him to a place he didn’t necessarily want to be was a risk. Or perhaps for once Guy was using his brain and knew he was unlikely to misbehave for fear of his friends’ safety and he would not dare risk their lives for the sake of his own happiness.

He smiles uneasily at Peter and rubs his hand over the red leather above his heart. The skin is still tender and he can only hope he had not bled through the bandage as he wanted a surprise for Guy when they went to their marriageable bed. For most newlyweds the consummation of marriage was the highlight of the night but he and Guy had forgone customs of courtship and revelled in their insatiable appetites for sex so the night would not be overly special and so he had Guy’s name tattooed over his heart to alleviate the problem.

In the distance he can hear children screaming happily and he takes a deep breath suddenly feeling very hot. He fans his face with his hand and takes another deep breath noticing the clear blue sky and the sun shining glinting off the polished armour of his guards. The Gisborne flag is tied to each spike of the carriage blowing in the breeze and he wonders what Guy might be wearing.

He had no say in the wedding plans, his only duty was to dress himself and climb into the carriage as the rest was taken care of. From the rumours that he had heard Guy was like a man possessed making demands and telling the people exactly what he wanted. He had even been dubbed the ‘bride from hell’ which was later revised to ‘spouse from hell’ for fear of his wrath should he get wind of what they were saying. He wished he could have been there but Guy had taken his leave suddenly adhering to the code of courtship and for the last seven days remained in Gisborne while he remained in his spacious cage.

He shouldn’t be angry as it gave him an opportunity to collect the ring he had made for Guy. It had taken some doing retrieving his stolen money bags from Guy but thankfully when his pretty words failed him his mouth did not and after several instances of that Guy finally relinquished the bags. He found he had quite the loot and not only enough to buy Guy a ring but he could also afford new wedding attire. So whilst Guy was away he had a red leather doublet made with a high collar and golden buttons down the front leaving enough space for his throat to be exposed. He had considered red leather trousers but it was far too scarlet letter for his liking and instead he opted for black leather and treated himself to brand new black leather riding boots.

The carriage turns and they enter Gisborne and he clutches his throat fearing his air passage is blocked as he cannot breathe. He drops forward with his head between his knees and struggles to breathe normally.

“Milord?” Peter questions startled but he cannot answer. “Stop the carriage! Allan? Are you well?” His breathing is ragged and he could not speak if he tried. “Calm yourself,” Peter soothes, climbing into the still carriage and rubbing his back. “If this is how you are imagine how your spouse from hell will be behaving. Calm yourself, take deep breaths.” He listens to the sound of Peter’s voice and manages to breathe steadily again. “Good now enough of this, don’t know about you but I wanna see how Guy is.” He nods and Peter leaves the carriage and the coachman rides on. He does wish to see Guy and he truly hopes that he is not as panicked as he is as fighting for breath in the open air was a horrible struggle no one should have to endure.

As they near the church people are heading towards there in droves and there is a genuine pleasant atmosphere of merriment and good will. The very air is alive with the sound of laughter and the smell of pork roasting over an open fire. He notices some children, big bellied and merry, chasing after his carriage and he casts them a smile and waves. He turns around and watches the villagers of Gisborne
work together, hanging canopies of black and yellow over long tables filled with food. Children help with the decorations and table settings and some vibrantly clad minstrels tune their instruments.

None of that matters when his eyes fall on Guy pacing restlessly before the church. He’s too far away to see him clearly but the tall black-clad figure could be no other. As if he could feel his eyes on him Guy stops pacing and looks in his direction and he knows he had heard the sound of his soul calling to its other half. He feels his throat closing up again and forces himself not to clutch his throat in panic but take deep steady breaths focusing on the curtain before him.

The carriage stops and Peter looks at him with a grin. “It’s show time,” he calls merrily and his escort depart to eye the banquet and help drape the last of the canopies. He gathers his courage and takes one final deep breath before leaving the carriage and finds Guy stood before him tense like a coiled spring ready to explode with nervous excitement.

“I overlooked the decorations,” Guy speaks suddenly and waves his arm in the general direction of the hog roast. “And in the church, I hope it pleases you.”

“It does,” he replies simply.

“I hope I please you,” Guy says earnestly and damn him for doing so constantly twisting the knife and not so much pulling on his heartstrings but rather tearing at them. Had it been a reference to sex he could have teased but he knows it was not and he would not sully the moment with lewd banter.

“You should not be here,” he says instead and watches Guy’s features darken and he realises he should have made lewd implications instead.

“Who should be here?” Guy snaps jealously. He rarely left the man’s bed and yet Guy assumed he wished to marry another? His insecurity was unwarranted and unfounded.

“You should be inside the church waiting for me,” he corrects.

“Oh, forgive me; I thought we could enter together.” The news is a relief as he had resigned himself to play the role of the bride but would have to walk down the aisle alone without his father by his side. Their wedding day was sad in regards to both of their lack of families, though he had urged Guy to invite Isabella. Guy had eventually succumbed to his nagging but Isabella’s reply had been a dead mouse in a box with the word ‘die’ furiously scribbled on a torn piece of parchment so there was still bad blood between them.

Something by Guy’s leg catches his eye, at first he thought it was his long sleeved supple leather surcoat billowing in the wind but on closer inspection he can see the surcoat is form-fitting and taken in at the sides by three silver buckles either side running from rib to hip maximising the angles of his body and his thin waist. He looks again after noticing the red undershirt which contrasted beautifully with his red doublet and sees new black leather trousers and his fancy spurred boots he wore only the once when he first took his seat on the council. He had very nearly thrown up on them after he had been whipped, so they were possibly not the best choice of footwear considering their history.

The surcoat itself is unmoving as the leather was too heavy reaching to his ankles that the slight breeze had no realistic chance of causing the movement he saw. Guy looks at him wondering what has his attention and then seems to remember himself and turns around pulling a dark-haired child from behind his legs. The child is wearing a yellow and black tunic with a black leather jerkin over the top with the Gisborne crest over the breast, leather trousers and a pair of spurred boots like Guy wore. Had his attire not given him away the raven hair, pale skin and blue eyes would have as there was no question of the boy’s parentage.
He leans down and wears his best approachable smile. “Hello Seth.”

“Hello,” the child replies and clings to Guy’s leg.

“This was why I have not been by your side,” Guy explains ruffling Seth’s hair reminding him of a younger Guy by the lake.

He rights himself and shrugs. “It is of no matter,” he replies with false bravado and Guy holds out his hand to him.

“Shall we?” He offers and his heart pounds in his chest.

“One moment, could you wait by the door for me?” Guy hesitates but takes Seth’s hand instead and turns to walk towards the church but suddenly stops and turns back.

“Allan...I have dreamed of this day,” Guy says honestly and clearly wishes to say more but he cannot find the words to speak his heart.

“Go,” his response is dismissive and cruel but his life as he had known it was about to end and he had no time for niceties. Guy’s features darken again like the approach of the storm and he eyes the many guards scattered around making sure he could not escape before he lifts Seth into his arms and walks over to the church.

He releases the breath he was holding convinced Guy would not let him have this much needed moment and he looks beyond the church to where the graveyard was. In his mind’s eye he could picture his father’s grave and he mentally voiced his apology for being the lesser son and losing not only Bonchurch but his name as well. He was sorry for not adhering to his father’s last wish and he apologised for his selfish heart that had betrayed him at every turn. He could only ask for forgiveness and understanding and in the next life he would answer for his crimes of the flesh and the weakness of his heart.

After he is finished he finds himself incapable to move as fear keeps him rooted to the spot. He looks over to the church and sees Guy waiting patiently for him with Seth nowhere in sight and he fears his heart would give up like his father’s had the way it pounds furiously in his chest. His terrified heart focuses his attention on his tattoo and he had not sat for an hour and endured a ceaseless sting like an angry bee just to fall at the last hurdle. He was here now and he could not run as he liked the length of his neck as it was with his head attached and he knew his destiny should he flee.

Finally the invisible vines that held his legs dissolve and he walks over to Guy and watches the man’s smile widen at his approach. He holds out his arm to him like he did on the day of the Sheriff’s birthday and he holds the crook of his elbow and begins to walk down the archway to the church. The archway is new undoubtedly constructed for the wedding and made by several saplings with a canopy of thick leaves overhead with red berries tied at the corners.

“This is nice,” he says pausing to test the structure of the arch and finds it flimsy which was unfortunate because it would look beautiful in the autumn. Guy tugs on his arm greeting him with a patient smile but there was knowledge in his eyes and he was well aware he was hesitating.

They resume their walk and he’s quite surprised to find all the seats within the church have been taken. He was not well liked and the last he knew of it neither was Guy but money had a way of swaying people’s favour and he had been away from Gisborne for almost a year so perhaps during that time Guy’s behaviour had changed.

He doesn’t know why he is so surprised considering no one kicked up a fuss when Locksley was
renamed and who knows what lies Guy could have spread to justify his ill-behaviour? He could have easily blamed his actions on King Richard and regrettably the murdered king was considered a foul beast and the people would believe him.

The church is not overly large and can sit fifty people easily whilst having seventy at capacity and considering the Gisborne guards the church is almost at housing capacity. He looks along at the people his side and notices Rebecca, Kate, Maggie and Matthew and the row behind them sits Megan and beside her is her daughter Eleri clutching her husband’s hand. It’s not so much the handholding that has his attention but the silver necklace around her neck and he almost stops to show Guy but decides to inform him later as Guy’s attention is on his front row.

Front row was meant for family so he had every reason to believe Guy was looking at the Sheriff, as it was said the Sheriff had been present at his first marriage to Meg. He continues to look at the guests his side and notices Dan Scarlet and beside him his youngest son Luke but Will is absent and the seat beside Luke is taken so he had chosen not to attend. He wonders if he is ill because if he were to name one friend from his former home he would have said Will, as Will used to come around and show off what he had made. Why he chose to show him he could not be sure but it was nice to hear his father call his name from the bottom of the stairs and tell him he had been called for.

The walk to the altar is short and he wonders who would sit on his front row as he can see it is full with all five chairs taken. He is unsure of the three men nearest the wall and the fourth was undoubtedly Lord Edward and his breath catches in his throat as he stares at the back of a dark haired lady in an off-shoulder red dress. If her position did not give her away the curls in her hair would and his hand clutching Guy’s elbow shakes as he stares at the back of Lady Marian.

He does not wish to walk any further as he cannot face her knowing what he knows. How must this look to her? He had assured her of Guy’s love and now he walks down the aisle with him himself, she must think him a home-wrecking, spouse-stealing liesmith. Guy tugs his arm again and he can’t very well dig his heels in, he must face her and marry the man that destroyed her dreams in front of her.

The moment comes when he is to pass her and she turns looking both pale and beautiful and there is a smile on her lips, small and genuine and he feels sick. She shouldn’t be here she should be at the convent but he remembers she was only to be gone for a year and a lot of time has passed since then. She must think him an awful friend having not visited nor written as he had promised to do and now he is to marry a man she was content to settle with, no wonder he didn’t have any friends.

He tries to smile back and hopes it did not appear like a painful grimace as this was supposed to be a happy day. To Marian he was marrying his childhood sweetheart, who was a perfectly decent man and there was no threat of death hanging over his head.

He passes her and prays she did not see the truth in his eyes as he approaches the altar and kneels on the cushioned step before the priest. Guy kneels beside him leaving a gap between them and the white haired priest begins the ceremony in Latin clutching a bible against his chest as though it was both comfort and a shield.

The gathered sit at the request of the priest and he feels dizzy and far too hot in such an enclosed space. He tries desperately to keep his composure and not arouse Guy’s suspicion that he does not wish to be there but by his earlier antics Guy is well aware and will marry him regardless. If anything they were suited for each other with their selfish hearts but it was a poor consolation.

His breath catches in his throat and for a moment he fears he will be unable to breathe and will simply pass out from lack of oxygen. He turns instead and looks at Seth standing beside Guy holding a cushion with the gold ring on and looking as self-important as a five year old boy could. Guy had
undoubtedly told him the importance of his position as ring-bearer as the child seemed to be taking his role quite seriously. He really was the spitting image of his father when he was younger though Guy had been fifteen when they had met clinging on to the last vestige of childhood before becoming a man.

He must get lost in his thoughts because Guy has to nudge him with his elbow and they both stand and face the priest while he asks if anyone objected. If they valued their lives no one should and he hoped Marian had not perceived he was under duress and intervenes on his behalf because he would not stand to see her hurt. Thankfully no one objects and they turn and face each other and Guy seems perfectly calm while he is sure he is red in the face. Seth comes to stand between them holding the cushion up as high as he can and he takes the opportunity to take the ring from his pocket and places it onto the cushion. Guy looks at the ring and then to him with a smile and he was glad of the response as he had worried how Guy might react but it seems his claims of equality were not false.

Guy collects the ring and holds his left hand and for the first time he actually sees it. He had only caught a glimpse of it before and since he was moved to Guy’s bedroom the ring was then taken to the former Locksley Manor too far away from his spacious prison. He had thought it was a simple chunky gold band like the one he had made but he finds a cut rectangular sapphire offsetting the gold and his offering suddenly shames him.

“Do you, Allan-a-Dale, take Lord Guy Crispin of Gisborne to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward until death do you part?” Two words and this was all over, the heartache, the sorrow the complete insanity all came down to this. Two words. Say them wrong and the penalty was death but to say them right, what then? Guy had promised him his freedom upon their marriage and he had no fear of being barefoot and pregnant so he could go back to the life he once had, with Guy replacing his father as the dominant male in his life. There is a weighted silence in the church and he realises he has tarried too long as he looks up and sees Guy staring desperately at him. He wonders then if Guy knows of the Sheriff’s plan to see him from this earth should he decline and for a horrifying moment he thinks he does as Guy casts a nervous look at the Sheriff. If he had to die then he would prefer Guy to do the deed himself but not today.

“I do.” The tension disperses as Guy slips the ring on his finger and he marvels at it. He liked pretty shiny things and he feels completely outdone as he lifts the simple chunky gold band with ‘I love thee’ inscribed on the inside and takes Guy’s left hand.

“Do you, Lord Guy Crispin of Gisborne, take Allan-a-Dale to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward until death do you part?”

“I do,” Guy says instantly and he puts the ring on his finger. He had taken the measurement by tying a piece of string around his finger while he slept so he would never find out what he was up to.

“By the power vested in me by God and man, I now pronounce you husband and husband. You may now seal your unity with a kiss.” They hadn’t talked about this, they hadn’t talked about anything to do with the wedding and a kiss between them was never simply a kiss. He hoped Guy was on his best behaviour as he raised up on his tiptoes and pressed his lips to Guy’s and quickly parted before the gathered viewed more than they bargained for and they turn to face their guests.

“I present to you Lord Allan and Guy of Gisborne, Earls of Huntingdon.” The guests stand and applaud while he is struck dumb from the introduction, believing he would be lesser than Guy and take only his name and not share his title of Earl.

Guy takes his hand and they leave the church and have fresh petals and leaves thrown over them by folks that were unable to obtain a seat. It certainly beat having horse muck thrown at them he’d give them that. Their guests follow them out congratulating them and heading towards the tables laden
with food which was surely the only reason why they have truly attended.

Sheriff Vaisey exits the church accompanied by a tall blonde haired blue eyed woman who clings to his arm happy to be in his presence. Vaisey himself is grinning broadly with his hand over the woman’s hand clutching his elbow.

“Well then congratulations are in order, Guy if I could have a moment of your time?” Guy looks to him for confirmation and he nods. “Don’t worry I’ll return him and I don’t want you two running off too soon to consummate your marriage as I have prepared a song and it’s a right little ditty too.” He tries not to audibly moan as he thought Vaisey was simply being his obnoxious self when he said he would sing at their wedding but apparently not.

Guy takes his leave of him and he stands receiving congratulations on his own and finds Marian is the last to leave the church. Lord Edward casts him a tight smile before leaving Marian’s side and she approaches cautiously as though aware he was spooked and would flee at the drop of a hat.

“Congratulations?” Marian offers questioningly and they walk towards the pond away from prying eyes and ears.

“I’m sorry I didn’t w...”

“I received your letters...” they both speak at once and he pauses, confused. “I am sorry I could not make it to your father’s funeral, by the time I received your letter it was already too late. He was a good man, well liked and much missed.”

“My letters?” He questions dumbly.

“I have kept them all; sometimes they were the only things keeping me sane in the deafening silence in the convent.”

“Sisterhood is not your calling then?” He jokes, though he is still confused over the letters as he hadn’t sent any.

“Alas no,” Marian says with a smile. “I have found my peace there, I am happy now.” He believes her from the healthy glow of her skin and her rosy cheeks and easy smiles she is as she was before her heart was rendered in two.

“I am sorry for...” he waves his hand in Guy’s direction unsure how to word his apology.

“You were honest in your letters and I had bid you to find the other half of your soul how then can I fault your actions?” He would certainly like to read these letters as he had a suspicion Guy had written them. “Though I must confess to some confusion,” Marian whispers and his heart sinks. “My father would also write to me and your events greatly differed.”

“How so?” His asks trying for aloof and hoping he did not sound scared.

“Guy had you flogged? Guy burnt down your house? Why did you not say such in your letters?”

“The path of true love never did run smooth,” he jokes, floundering. “I did not wish to upset you.”

“There is more,” Marian insists with blue eyes that know too much and red lips that say too little. “Your uncle...”

“He’s not my uncle!” He snaps bitterly, startling Marian with his ill-constrained anger. “Forgive me; there is bad blood between me and that cretin.”
“A mere year has passed and I find you so changed. I will ask this only once, did you marry Guy on your own free will?” His eyes widen in shock at the question but he should not be so surprised, Marian had always understood him in ways other people couldn’t and her father had informed her of events Guy or whoever had written the letters had not. He had also hesitated to say ‘I do’ in front of her and his hesitation now will only be more cause for concern for her. He looks over at Guy still talking with the Sheriff but now with Seth in his arms resting against his hip as the Sheriff passes him a roll of parchment.

“I love him,” he says honestly and then looks back to Marian. “I love him, I do, and I always have. I just feared losing my name, that’s all.” She had promised not to ask him again and he truly hopes she keeps her word as he would surely buckle under an interrogation.

“Daddy!” A child calls in the distance while he suffers Marian’s scrutiny. “Daddy! Daddy!” The voice draws nearer and before he knows it Seth has launched himself at him, clutching his leg tightly. “Daddy!” Seth cheers and hugs his leg and he sees Marian’s smile falter for a moment before she blinks away her sadness and is all smiles once more.

“Sorry,” Guy apologises, jogging over to them. “Lady Marian,” he greets impersonally as he did on the day of the king’s birthday. “I’m afraid I told Seth who you now are and he was overcome with excitement.” He looks down at the child clutching his leg staring up at him starry-eyed.

“I’ll take my leave, congratulations once again,” Marian curtseys and departs without a backward glance.

“Now tell him your news,” Guy says encouragingly to Seth who releases his leg and suddenly becomes shy. “Don’t be shy,” Guy says gently but Seth hides behind Guy’s leg anyway. “Go on, tell Daddy your name.” He has no idea what is going on but he finds himself staring at Seth who is peaking out from behind Guy’s leg.

“Seth Roy of Gisborne,” he feels as though he has been sucker punched and tears sting his eyes and he wills them away. He crouches down and opens his arms and Seth’s shyness is forgotten as he runs into them hugging him tightly and he lifts him.

“My father’s name was Roy, he would have loved you.” He presses a kiss to the side of Seth’s head as he rests his head on his shoulder and he sways lulling the child surprised and slightly ashamed by how overcome with emotion he is.

“It is official,” Guy says removing a piece of parchment from his pocket, the same one Vaisey had passed to him earlier. He unrolls it and reveals the amended name as his arms are full. “I know you wanted a son and this was the best that I could do.”

“Thank you.” It wasn’t the only reason he wanted a son as Guy well knew but he was trying to please him and make him happy. The minstrels begin to play and he looks over surprised to see Vaisey dancing with the long haired blonde. “I did not know the Sheriff was married.”

“Married?” Guy questions and turns looking at the pair behaving like children and then turns back. “That is his sister.”

“The Sheriff has a sister?” He asked shocked as Vaisey had kept that quiet.

“Vaisey had many enemies; it would not do to have them know his greatest weakness. Davina was in London raising Seth.” It is suddenly made clear why Seth was never mentioned because to do so would be to expose the Sheriff’s sister.
Guy takes Seth from him and holds him in his own arms. “But you don’t have to go back to London now we have Daddy, do you?” Seth shakes his head and Guy puts him down. “Go play with auntie Davina,” Seth runs off and Guy grasps his elbow and walks him further to the edge of the pond. “I like my ring,” he speaks honestly.

“It pales in comparison to mine. It is truly beautiful, Guy, thank you.”

“I chose a sapphire because of your eyes and its resemblance to water to remind you of the lake, which reminds me.” He pauses to route through his pocket and then holds out his hand and resting in his palm is the grey flat stone he had seen in Guy’s room at the castle and was startled by its absence when he moved in permanently.

“I have longed to question you about that stone.”

“The day of the fire, I had done something stupid. I went to the leper’s colony in the woods to confront my father. I had seen Malcolm all over my mother and I was so angry and I said such awful things to my father hoping for a reaction. I wanted him to fight for his family and he wouldn’t. So I went to find solace by the lake and there you were waiting for me, telling me you thought I would not come. We skimmed stones as we always did and it was my turn to throw when your mother called you inside for dinner. I pocketed the stone and we promised to meet early the next day but that was not to be. I had lost everything in the fire and as we fled Longthorn’s henchmen I felt something in my pocket and found this stone. I made a promise there and then that I would come back to Nottingham and reclaim my land and when my goal was accomplished we would go to the lake as promised and I would throw this stone.” The story leaves him amazed that such a small object could have such a deep meaning. “I would like to throw it now, together.”

They are not near the lake but the pond is sizable so he nods his consent. Guy steps behind him taking his left hand in his and presses the stone into his right hand. They have been in this position before early on in their courtship if it could be deemed that but like much of their past it hadn’t ended well. Guy holds his wrist and guides his arm and he releases the stone and watches it bounce across the surface five times before sinking to the bottom.

He turns his head and shares a kiss with Guy before staring at the ripples of the water. Surely the five skims was a sign that they were meant to be together, as they complimented each other and were better together. A loud splash catches both his and Guy’s attention and they turn to see Seth standing beside them smiling widely before throwing another rock into the water.

He clutches Guy’s left hand tighter realising his worry was for nothing as by saying two simple words he had a family again. A husband who worshipped the ground he walked on and a son who had a name to honour his father. He knew in his heart that he had done the right thing, he had chosen the right words and that he was going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

This story was inspired by the quote; “For darkness restores what light cannot repair” by Joseph Brodsky.

I should have written this in 2009 so to say I procrastinated would be an understatement. However with over a thousand hits, kudos and comments (which I thank you for) there seems to be life in this old rare-pair ship yet and I will definitely be back but for now FreDragon calls.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!