

FUTILE FANTASY CREATIONS

SILLY SHORTS

THE BARON

Fear was not an emotion 35 year-old Alan Turner was easily struck by. He'd faced his own mortality several times during his military service. He'd also accrued quite the collection of serious injuries in his time. Such events had turned him from a boy to a man and the prospect of getting hurt rarely fazed him. His current predicament, however, was one such rare situation where terror had returned to his heart and filled his eyes with foreboding. As the horse-drawn cart he was standing in the back of, hurtled forth along a dusty track, he looked towards the driver then gulped. With an uncomfortable grimace on his face, he then raised his voice and called out to him over the sound of the wooden wheels, crunching forth on the dirt.

ALAN: You've gotta be fucking kidding me, haven't you?

(The driver glanced over his shoulder briefly then yelled back.)

DRIVER: No, mate. I just bloody told you. There's some horrible bastard creature out here in the sticks that loves scoffing down the wildlife. Including horses. There's no way I'm stopping to let you off here, mate. Not happening. You can either jump or come to the next town with me!

(Alan growled.)

ALAN: I wish you'd bloody told me that earlier.

DRIVER: It didn't seem important.

ALAN: Didn't seem important? You offered to give me a lift to the Wilson homestead. You never once mentioned I'd have to jump off the cart while you whizz straight past it!

DRIVER: Wasn't it obvious?

ALAN: Why would it be obvious?

DRIVER: I just bloody told you. There's a creature!

(Alan shook his head.)

ALAN: Fuck.

(Staring through troubled eyes as the trees and bushes blurred past, his heart felt extremely heavy.)

ALAN: This is gonna hurt.

DRIVER: What is?

ALAN: Jumping!!!

DRIVER: Yeah, probably. You'll bounce a few times, I expect. Probably hit a tree. There's bound to be a few broken bones.

ALAN: Then slow the fuck down, at least.

DRIVER: And have my horse devoured by the beast? Not on your Nellie, mate.

(Alan sighed under his breath.)

ALAN: Fuck.

DRIVER: Here we are, mate. The Wilson homestead is down that dirt road on the left, just up ahead. If you're jumping, go now.

ALAN: I don't have much choice, do I?

DRIVER: Yes, you do. You can come to the next town with me. It's only five miles.

ALAN: Then I'd have to walk back five miles.

DRIVER: Oh, I wouldn't do that, mate. Not with that nasty creature about.

ALAN: Right. Then I'll jump.

DRIVER: Okay. It's your funeral.

ALAN: Funeral?

DRIVER: Not literally.

ALAN: Right...

DRIVER: *Probably* not, anyway.

ALAN: What?

DRIVER: Nothing!

(With a shake of the head, Alan then grabbed his bag, before starting to bounce on his heels in readiness to jump.)

ALAN: Hey, driver!

DRIVER: Yeah?

ALAN: Thanks for the lift.

DRIVER: You're welcome.

(Alan then nodded to himself and closed his eyes. His military training had taught him quite the important lesson. When faced with a difficult task, the only way to overcome it, was to attack it head on. Heeding this lesson, he growled as if to swallow his terror then threw his bag over the side of the cart. Resolved to getting the task over with, he then leapt off after it.)

ALAN: Soft landing, please!!!

(Moments later, he thudded into the long turf on the side of the road, before bouncing and rolling over several times. With each thud into the ground, he let out a loud exasperated cry.)

ALAN: Ow! Fuck! Ouch! Bloody ground!

(He then slammed into a tree trunk and came to a halt. Slightly winded, he gasped for breath then slowly sat up and shook his head to clear his blurred vision.)

ALAN: That sucked.

(Having taken a moment to regain his composure he then flexed his fingers and stretched his legs out. Delighted to have no breakages, he then afforded himself a smile.)

ALAN: Nice.

(With that, he climbed to his feet and scooped up his bag. Having done so, however, he noticed the cart he'd been travelling in, slowly pull to the side of the road. Much to his annoyance, the driver then brought it to a halt and climbed down from it, looking more than a little bewildered.)

DRIVER: What the fuck did you do that for?

(With a deeply furrowed brow, Alan strode up to him.)

ALAN: I thought you said you couldn't stop in case your horse gets eaten by a beast!

DRIVER: I was yanking your chain, mate.

ALAN: What???

DRIVER: I was joking. You know, pulling your leg.

(Alan growled under his breath then counted to ten.)

DRIVER: Seriously, mate. You're a nutter. You could have done yourself serious damage jumping over the side like that.

ALAN: You told me I had to!!!

DRIVER: Yeah, as a joke.

(He shook his head.)

DRIVER: What *were* you thinking?

ALAN: I...

DRIVER: You must have a death wish or something.

ALAN: Listen, you...

DRIVER: Why on earth would you pull such a crazy stunt???

ALAN: Because...

DRIVER: Seriously, what in the world possessed you to do such a thing???

ALAN: Mate...

DRIVER: You could have been seriously hurt.

(He shook his head.)

DRIVER: Honestly. What *were* you thinking?

(Alan growled and raised his voice, determined not to be interrupted again.)

ALAN: Well, I *was* thinking I had to jump. Do you wanna know what I'm thinking *now*?

Here's a clue, it involves hurting *you*!

(The driver leant back defensively.)

DRIVER: Easy, mate. Is that the thanks I get for giving you a lift?

ALAN: No, that's the wallop you get for making me jump.

DRIVER: I didn't make you do anything of the sort!

ALAN: You told me you weren't gonna bloody stop!!!

DRIVER: Well, yeah, but...

ALAN: But nothing. How the hell was I supposed to know you were joking???

(The driver grimaced.)

DRIVER: I see. You make a good point.

(The driver then bit his lip.)

DRIVER: In my defence, I didn't think you'd do it. I planned to stop right next to your turn off. In fact, I have, look.

ALAN: Yeah, but...

(Beginning to realise it was merely a joke that went too far and that the driver had no ill-intentions, Alan sighed then pushed away his rage.)

ALAN: Right. Okay. Fine. Well, fair enough. I appreciate the lift, mate.

(He then reached in his pocket for his coin purse.)

ALAN: Let me give you a little something for your trouble.

DRIVER: Not a chance. I don't want your money, mate.

ALAN: I insist.

DRIVER: And I absolutely refuse.

(He nodded.)

DRIVER: Giving you a lift was the least I could do. Anything to help a former military man.

ALAN: Oh. Well, that's... wait. How do you know I'm a former military man?

DRIVER: You have that way about you, mate.

(He smiled.)

DRIVER: You boys risked life and limb for us during the war, so the least I can do is help you out with a lift. Consider it me doing my bit for the war effort. Albeit belatedly.

(Alan looked most impressed.)

ALAN: Okay. Thank you.

DRIVER: It's my pleasure.

ALAN: Oh, and...

(He afforded himself a slight chuckle.)

ALAN: Nice one, by the way. That tale about the killer beast; I fell for it hook, line and sinker.

DRIVER: Right. Yeah. I apologise for that. Although, having said that, I wasn't entirely making it up.

ALAN: No?

DRIVER: No. Some weird creature *has* been devouring the wildlife out here in the countryside for a few months. It only comes out at night though.

ALAN: Really?

DRIVER: Yeah. It's been a real problem for farmers and livestock owners.

ALAN: Damn. I'd better not wander at night then.

DRIVER: That'd be wise, my friend.

(He then nodded to the nearby, dirt side-road.)

DRIVER: So, how do you know the Wilson's?

ALAN: We served together in the war.

DRIVER: Oh, right. Nice fella. Steve, is it?

ALAN: That's right.

DRIVER: I've done jobs for him in the past. There's a low lying meadow on his property, down by the river. Every time the river overflows, it dumps a shit load of fish on his land. I help him get them to market. The fishmongers there pay him a pretty penny.

(He smirked.)

DRIVER: He must be the only bloke in the whole area who actually looks forward to a flood.

ALAN: I'll bet.

(They chuckled together then Alan held out his hand.)

ALAN: Anyway, I'll be off now. It's been a pleasure.

(The driver shook his hand and nodded.)

DRIVER: Likewise.

(They then shared a respectful nod before parting ways. Without looking back, Alan threw his pack onto his shoulder then headed off down the side road. As he did so, he heard the cartwheels start to grind as the driver headed on his way.)

ALAN: What a nice chap. A complete arsehole, but a thoroughly lovely bloke.

(He then strode onwards taking in the scenery. This part of the world was indeed scenic. The hillsides rose gently and the abundance of trees were spread out perfectly, allowing unobstructed panoramic views of nature in all her glory. This landscape was entirely green and brown. The grass was lush, the trees were in fine health and birdsong filled the air. Surveying it all with a smile, Alan could most definitely understand why the Wilson family had settled here. Away from all the hustle and bustle of the towns and cities, a quiet life seemed guaranteed in such an idyllic spot. Allowing those thoughts to run through his head, Alan strode onwards, looking forward to reaching his destination and being reunited with his good friend.)

Having walked the solid mile to the end of the thin, dirt track, marvelling at the tranquillity of his environment, Alan emerged in front of a large, stone house. Instinctively, he knew he was in the right place. The building seemed to have his good friend's personality stamped all over it. The brickwork was in pristine condition, the windows sparkled and the roof didn't have a single slate out of place. Evidently, this house was maintained by someone who took great pride in his work. Every detail was perfect; even the spacing between the small, wooden plant pots that ran along the front of the house. Pausing to glance at it, Alan smirked then recalled something his friend had once said when they were stationed together. Grinning, he then mumbled it out loud.)

ALAN: If a job's worth doing, do it now and do it right. If you fuck it up, your rations are going in the dog!

(He then laughed out loud.)

ALAN: Our unit didn't even have a dog.

(He then strode to the front door and hammered upon it enthusiastically. This latest memory had further increased his excitement about finally being reunited with his friend. Waiting patiently, he placed his hands behind his back and smiled, when, moments later, the door cranked open. Before he could make a single utterance, however, a woman in her mid-thirties, dressed in an ankle length skirt, growled at him from the doorway.)

ELISE: We're not buying anything, now sod off.

ALAN: I'm not selling anything.

ELISE: Even so, you can sod off anyway. I'm busy.

ALAN: I've come to see, Steve.

(Elise glanced him up and down suspiciously.)

ELISE: Does he owe you money?

ALAN: No.

ELISE: I see.

(Her face then lit up.)

ELISE: Do *you* owe *him* money?

ALAN: No.

ELISE: Bugger.

(She furrowed her brow.)

ELISE: Who the bloody hell are you then? And what do you want?

ALAN: I...

ELISE: Bloody coming round here, hammering on the door then not saying anything. Whatever next?

ALAN: It's a social call. I served with Steve in the war.

(In that moment, Elise's hostile demeanour evaporated into thin air.)

ELISE: Why didn't you say so then?

ALAN: I didn't get chance.

ELISE: Nonsense.

(She then stepped back from the door.)

ELISE: Please. Come in.

ALAN: Thank you.

(With that, Alan stepped inside the house then stood in the hallway, allowing Elise to close the door behind him.)

ELISE: Have you come far?

ALAN: Yes, actually. A good hundred miles.

ELISE: Oh, my. Rough trip, I hope.

ALAN: What? You hope?

ELISE: Well, yeah. I'd hate to think you look like that on a daily basis. You're a mess. You look like you jumped off a moving cart or something.

ALAN: Actually...

ELISE: Not that anyone would be stupid enough to do such a thing.

ALAN: Right. I agree.

(He smiled.)

ALAN: It has been quite a rough trip, actually. And you're right, I'm not normally this poorly turned out.

ELISE: Well, that's a weight off my mind. I'd hate to think I'd let a vagrant into my house.

ALAN: I look that bad?

ELISE: I was referring to the smell.

(As Alan stood there speechless, Elise gestured down the hallway.)

ELISE: Come into the kitchen for a moment. You look like you could use some tea.

ALAN: Why, thank you.

ELISE: Also, the ventilation's better in there. If we stay here in the hallway much longer, I might never get rid of the stench.

ALAN: Right. Well... I apologise. Like I said, rough trip.

ELISE: Clearly.

(With that, they headed through to the large stone kitchen, at the heart of which, sat an impressive oak table and chairs.)

ALAN: What a lovely kitchen.

ELISE: Thank you. Please, take a seat. You're in luck, there's already some tea in the pot.

ALAN: Ah, superb. I timed my arrival perfectly then.

ELISE: Not really, it's probably cold by now.

ALAN: I see.

ELISE: Still, a cup of tea is a cup of tea, even if it's cold. And you've only got yourself to blame for that. If you hadn't stood on the doorstep nattering like a senile old lady, it might still have been warm.

ALAN: I did no such...

ELISE: Are you going to sit down or aren't you?

ALAN: Right. Good point.

(He then pulled up a chair and allowed himself to take the weight off his feet.)

ALAN: Ah, that's better.

ELISE: What is?

ALAN: Sitting. It's better than standing.

ELISE: Well, you won't get an argument from me on that one.

(With that, she took a seat then proceeded to pour out a cup of tea.)

ELISE: So, you're Steve's old army chum, are you?

ALAN: That's right. We served together at Capsway Ridge for eighteen months, right at the end of the war.

ELISE: I see. That's nice.

(She then slid him a freshly poured, barely lukewarm cup of tea.)

ELISE: Drink up. It's probably stewed by now as well as cold.

ALAN: Makes no difference to me. I'm parched.

ELISE: You look it. And when did you last have a good meal?

ALAN: Excuse me?

ELISE: Have you been unwell?

(She gasped.)

ELISE: Are you dying? Is that why you're travelling the country, meeting old friends?

Saying your farewells?

ALAN: No, not at all. Why would you even think that?

ELISE: Well, you don't exactly look *overfed*.

ALAN: I'm *not* overfed. I eat the perfect amount, that's why I'm such good shape.

ELISE: A stick is a shape, is it?

ALAN: I... what?

ELISE: Look, never mind that. This is just a social call, is it?

ALAN: Yeah. I had some down time and figured I'd use it to visit an old friend, that's all.

ELISE: I see.

(She smiled.)

ELISE: Well, I'm glad. I think Steve misses the army sometimes, you know?

ALAN: Yeah?

ELISE: Yeah. Well, he definitely misses the camaraderie. The bond between brothers, you know?

(She sighed.)

ELISE: That said, he told me his best friend there was a turnip, so I have to wonder if he made *any* real friends at all.

ALAN: Oh, he did. Very much so. In fact, the turnip in question is me.

ELISE: You're a turnip?

ALAN: It was a nickname. My name's Alan Turner, you see? With an hour of arriving, Turner became Turnip and I was saddled with it for the rest of my career.

(Elise chuckled.)

ELISE: Love it.

ALAN: That's how things are in the army. Nobody's known by their actual name. As soon as you arrive as a fresh faced recruit, the rest of the unit find something about you to mock and it ends up sticking forever.

ELISE: Oh? That's news to me. What was Steve's nickname then?

ALAN: Stir fry.

ELISE: Stir fry? Why on earth?

(Alan smiled.)

ALAN: Well, the first thing you do when arriving with a new unit is introduce yourself in front of everyone. Apparently, he was so nervous, he stuttered. Stir-Steve. Stir-Steve then became Stir fry and that was it.

(Elise giggled devilishly.)

ELISE: Thanks for telling me that. I'll tease him with it later.

(Grinning, Alan then picked up his tea and took a sip. With a shudder and a cringe, he then put the cup down again and faked a smile.)

ALAN: Lovely.

ELISE: Liar!

ALAN: Guilty. So, is he here?

ELISE: Who?

ALAN: Steve!

ELISE: Oh, right. No, not at the minute.

(She sneered.)

ELISE: He's out fishing right now.

ALAN: Really? He always hated fishing.

ELISE: It's not by choice. Some kind of nasty wild beast attacked and devoured all our livestock last night. And I *mean* devoured. Six chickens and a sheep. There was nothing left but bones, wool and feathers. I've never seen anything like it.

ALAN: Shit. Sounds like it was *more* than one then.

ELISE: Apparently not. Farmer Hampton down the road saw it when it attacked his flock last week. It's one *big* bastard. All dog-like, he said. Furry and ferocious.

(She sighed.)

ELISE: It's been a real problem around here lately.

ALAN: That's awful.

ELISE: It is. So, anyway, Steve's off fishing down by the river, so we can eat tonight.

ALAN: Right. Gotcha.

ELISE: Fucking thing smashed our livestock enclosure to smithereens, it did. Rendered it nothing more than a few nails and splinters. I tell you, whatever that creature is, it's bloody ferocious.

ALAN: Sounds it.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: Look, is there anything I can do to help?

ELISE: Like what?

ALAN: I dunno. Maybe I can help rebuild the enclosure.

(Elise scoffed.)

ELISE: Have you forgotten who I married?

ALAN: Good point. Knowing him, he probably rebuilt it then went to market to restock it before breakfast.

ELISE: Rebuilt it, yes. Well, kind of. He's made a chicken coop up in the attic. It should be safe from attack up there. We'll restock it tomorrow when the market in town opens.

ALAN: Oh, okay.

(Elise nodded then climbed from her chair.)

ELISE: Anyway, I can't waste time talking to you. I've got things to do. Why don't you head down to the river and reunite yourself with that husband of mine. Then later on, providing he's caught anything, you can join us for dinner.

ALAN: Oh, thank you. That'd be lovely.

ELISE: Think nothing of it. Just do us a favour while you're at the river. Scrub up a little.

ALAN: Right...

ELISE: Actually, scrub up a lot. Fish smell bad enough as it is, without you aiding their cause.

ALAN: They have a cause, do they?

ELISE: Yeah, to stink up my kitchen. Now, go on. Get going. Go out of the back door here and follow the thin pathway. It's not far.

ALAN: Okay then. Will do.

(He then climbed from his seat.)

ALAN: It was lovely to finally meet you, Elise.

ELISE: You know my name?

ALAN: Steve talked about you a lot.

ELISE: Nicely I hope.

ALAN: I refuse to answer that on the grounds that it may incriminate me.

(They then shared an amused chuckle before Elise pointed to the door.)

ELISE: Go on, bugger off. Don't come back without fish. Or my husband come to that.

ALAN: Yes, ma'am.

(He then headed for the backdoor.)

ALAN: See you shortly.

ELISE: I'll look forward to it. Just don't forget to...

ALAN: Scrub up! I know.

(He then strode out of the door, leaving Elise to chuckle to herself.)

ELISE: Fun.

As he headed for the thin, dirt pathway that Elise had enlightened him to, Alan couldn't help but smile. Elise was exactly as Steve had described her. Forthright but amusingly flaky with it. She didn't mean any malice in anything she said, but she didn't sugar coat her words either. She'd say exactly what she was thinking, caring very little for whether she was right or wrong. Most people would have subtly suggested that he take a bath after his long trip, but she'd told him straight that he stunk to high heaven. It was an honesty that he found endearing. She didn't put on airs; *and* was fun to be around, just as Steve had always claimed. He had no doubt that her opinionated ways could also be maddening, but seeing as he didn't have to live with her, he was fine with it.

Mulling over just how well Steve had described his delightful other half, Alan allowed himself a smile. It was a smile that soon widened. As he headed onwards down the thin pathway, with thick bushes on either side, the river came into view. Any minute now, he'd be reunited with the greatest friend he'd ever made. A friend he'd charged into battle with and faced much in the way of adversity alongside. The hardship they'd faced together during those difficult times had seen them forge a bond stronger than any other he'd ever experienced. To him, Steve was more of a brother than his own biological male siblings. Seeing him again was going to be a wonderful moment and he knew it. With this in mind, he quickly picked up the pace. As a result, within moments, he found himself emerging by the side of a fast flowing river. Taking a quick glance at it, he then looked to his right and his face lit up. There he was. His good friend; sitting on a tree stump trying to untangle his fishing line, swearing like a trooper as he did so. Highly amused by the sight, he stepped towards him, grinning from ear to ear.

ALAN: You're a piss poor fisherman, Sergeant Wilson, you always bloody were.

(In that moment, Steve glanced up with astonishment etched on his brow.)

STEVE: Alan???

ALAN: The very same.

(He then offered up a salute. With delight in his eyes, Steve threw down the fishing line then returned the salute before marching up to him excitedly.)

STEVE: Fucking hell, mate; it's so good to see you.

ALAN: Likewise, mate.

(They then shared an excited yet manly hug, before stepping back and beaming with joy at one another.)

STEVE: Mate. I'm lost for words.

ALAN: Same here. It's just... fantastic to see you.

STEVE: Ditto, mate; ditto.

(He then held up his palms.)

STEVE: Although right now we look like a couple of silly, overexcited schoolgirls.

What say we sit down?

ALAN: Sounds like a plan.

STEVE: Right?

(With that, they headed for a nearby fallen log then placed their backsides down. Not about to waste a further second Alan then held out his palms.)

ALAN: So, how have you been, mate? How's life been treating you?

STEVE: Pretty well, actually. A lot's happened since I last saw you.

ALAN: Yeah?

STEVE: Yeah. For a start, my daughter, Emma's all grown up and living at University now. She was just a littlun when I came home eight years ago. That all seemed to happen in the blinking of an eye. A baby one minute, a woman the next. Then gone.

ALAN: Time flies, mate.

STEVE: It does. Especially when you're as busy as *I* always seem to be.

ALAN: Yeah?

STEVE: Yeah. I mean apart from helping to raise my daughter and keep everyone fed, maintaining this place takes up a *lot* of my time. And I *mean* a lot. Plus I do a lot of fencing.

(Alan looked most impressed.)

ALAN: Yeah? Makes sense. You always were an adept swordsman.

STEVE: No. Not that kind of fencing, mate. I build fences for a living.

ALAN: Oh, right.

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: Well, don't I feel a tit?

STEVE: I'd expect so, yeah. So what about you? What are you up to these days?

ALAN: I run a pub. Own it, actually.

STEVE: Yeah? Result. How did that come about?

ALAN: Well, I stayed in the army for another three years after the war. Then I got news my uncle had died and left me everything, including his massive house. Well, I couldn't afford to maintain a place that size, so I turned it into a boozer.

STEVE: Ah, nice.

(He then flinched.)

STEVE: Wait. You stayed on in the army? You? The lovesick turnip? The bloke who couldn't wait to get home and propose to his girlfriend? Kerry, was it? You were counting down the days until you'd finished your service.

(Alan shrugged.)

ALAN: What can I tell you, mate. Things changed.

STEVE: Don't tell me she turned you down, mate.

ALAN: She never got the chance to.

(He shook his head.)

ALAN: Remember that wanker we served with, Harry Brooks?

STEVE: Babbling Brooks? Of course I do. Seemed like a decent enough fella.

ALAN: Well, he weren't. If you recall, his service was up a year before mine.

STEVE: That's right.

ALAN: Well, seeing as he lived near me, I asked him to pop in on Kerry and tell her I was thinking of her. Just to reassure her, you know?

STEVE: Okay...

ALAN: He didn't do that though, did he? He told her I got killed in battle, then set about comforting her. When I finally got back to the city a year later, I was greeted with the tragic tale of how my heartbroken girlfriend sought solace in Brook's arms then the two of them left town together. No fucker knows where they went either. She's out there somewhere thinking I died, and that wanker Brooks is banging her with a big smile on his face.

(Steve puffed out uncomfortably.)

STEVE: Wow. What a cunt. You'll rip his head off if you ever find him, won't you?

ALAN: Fucking right, I will. I looked for him for several months, vowing bloody revenge but nobody even knew which general direction they went in.

STEVE: Shit. What a complete bastard.

ALAN: Yeah.

(He shrugged.)

ALAN: That's all in the past now though, mate. I've moved on. The pub's thriving and I've got plenty of staff, so I figured I'd take a week off and visit my old mate.

STEVE: And your old mate is fucking delighted about that, mate.

(He grimaced.)

STEVE: Although, I have to ask, why now? What made you suddenly decide to come over here after all this time?

ALAN: What, a bloke can't simply decide to visit his mates?

STEVE: Alan. Mate. Come on. We both know there's more to it than that.

(Alan nodded.)

ALAN: Yeah, fine. No flies on you, is there?

STEVE: None. But there's several on you; you might want to take a dip in the river in a minute.

ALAN: Don't you start.

STEVE: So come on, why now?

ALAN: I'm fucking bored, mate. Back in the army, things were tough, but we had a right fucking laugh. Now, I'm surrounded by drunk wankers and whores. I'd kill for an intelligent conversation, I really would.

STEVE: And you came to me for that?

ALAN: Ambitious, I know.

(Steve chuckled.)

STEVE: Harsh, Alan; Harsh. That's no way to speak to a sergeant.

ALAN: *I* was a sergeant when I left, so that one doesn't carry any weight anymore.

STEVE: Bigger.

(They shared a brief laugh then exchanged smiles.)

ALAN: It's fucking good to see you, Steve.

STEVE: It's great to see you too, mate. And you're not the only one, by the way. I've missed the laughs from our army days an' all. They were good times.

ALAN: Great times.

STEVE: Awful though.

ALAN: Fucking horrendous.

STEVE: But great times.

ALAN: The best.

STEVE: Right. Now let's continue this conversation with me fishing and you bathing upstream a little bit. You smell awful.

ALAN: Is it that bad?

STEVE: Mate, you've got a cow-pat splatted into your thigh.

ALAN: What?

(He glanced down in horror then furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: Oh, for fuck sake. If I see that bloke with the cart again, I'm gonna strangle him.

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: It's a good thing I packed a spare pair, just in case.

STEVE: Yeah? Then do us a favour.

ALAN: What?

STEVE: Put them on!

(He then headed back to his fishing line, leaving Alan cringing in his wake.)

ALAN: How fucking embarrassing.

STEVE: Nah, what's a cow-pat between friends?

ALAN: Well...

STEVE: So where are you staying?

ALAN: Actually, I haven't...

STEVE: Good. That's settled then. You can stay here for a few nights. I'll ask Elise to make up the spare room. She'll call me every name under the sun and put six sugars in my tea purely out of spite, but once she calms down she'll be happy to do it.

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: I'm joking, Al. She's a nutter, yes, but ultimately she's as sound as they come, mate.

ALAN: Good to know.

STEVE: Now wash that shit off yourself!

ALAN: Right...

That evening, having enjoyed a hearty meal of fish and potatoes, served in a rich sauce created by Elise's skilled hands, Alan, Steve and Elise retired to the living room of the homestead. Seated on a series of easy chairs before a glorious log fire, they were sipping

at cognac as they reminisced about old times. For Elise, it was quite the eye-opener. Steve had always kept her in the dark about the hardships he'd faced during the war, and hearing about them now was showing that period of their lives in a whole new light. It had been no picnic to hold the fort at home and raise their daughter alone, but she was now beginning to realise that she'd definitely got the better deal. Listening as the two friends conversed, she couldn't help but be enthralled by it.

STEVE: It was bizarre, Al. That tactic of theirs was moronic.

ALAN: I know, mate. They didn't have enough men to just throw away lives like that.

STEVE: And even if they had; who'd fucking think *that* was a good idea?

ALAN: Their king, I guess.

STEVE: Yeah, but could you imagine passing those orders on? There's no way *I* could look a hundred men in the eye and tell them to go out get murdered like that.

ALAN: I'm as perplexed by it as you are, Steve.

ELISE: Wait. What? He sent a hundred men to get murdered? And they went???

ALAN: Yeah. They didn't have much choice. The penalty for disobeying orders in *any* army is death. So you might as well carry out suicidal orders and hope you get lucky.

ELISE: I see.

(She bit her lip.)

ELISE: So what were these orders?

STEVE: They sent half their men to loiter in the woods near our camp.

ELISE: They?

STEVE: The enemy unit nearby.

ALAN: We were two miles apart.

STEVE: Yeah. They sent half their men over to loiter nearby, knowing we'd all come out and attack them. And we had more men than them in the first place. It was three onto one. We fucking slaughtered them.

ELISE: Why would they do that???

STEVE: So another dozen or so of their men could sneak up to our compound and set fire to it.

ALAN: Little did they know, we had another hundred men still inside it; defending it.

STEVE: They managed to set fire to one wall and a toilet before *they* were killed too.

ALAN: And even those were only charred.

(Elise was dumbfounded.)

ELISE: But... why?

STEVE: I'm guessing they figured that if they destroyed our compound they'd halt our advance.

ALAN: They didn't.

STEVE: They accelerated it. We launched a counter attack that night.

ALAN: They didn't stand a chance. They only had half a unit left and we'd only lost two men in the melee in the woods.

STEVE: Wiped out they were.

ALAN: And the territory was gained. A six month stalemate wiped out in one moronic movement.

STEVE: They'd have been better off doing nothing.

ALAN: Not that we minded them committing suicide like that. We all got medals for that advance.

(He smirked.)

ALAN: Their leader should have got the medal really. Those tactics won us the ground.

STEVE: And ultimately the war. They had a smaller army than ours, but kept doing dumb, suicidal shit like that.

ALAN: Our camps rarely caught fire to the point of burning down.

STEVE: I don't remember hearing a single case of it, actually.

ELISE: Right. And that won you the war, did it?

STEVE: Yup. It was like this, you see? As you know, that war was a dispute between our two nations regarding the border. They insisted the border was the River Twix.

ALAN: Which it isn't.

STEVE: Right? It's always been the River Marr. So they *crossed* the Marr and tried to take the land between the two rivers.

ALAN: Our land!

ELISE: Okay...

STEVE: Anyway, largely due to their suicidal tactics, we ended up driving them *back* to the River Marr. Now we just needed them to fuck off and cross back over it. So we sent five thousand men for one final push.

ALAN: They got wind of it and sent all of their remaining two thousand men.

ELISE: How? How did they get wind of it?

ALAN: We made sure they did.

ELISE: What?

STEVE: It was all part of the plan, as I'll explain in a minute.

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: Anyway, like I said, they had two thousand men left. They should have had a lot more than that, but they'd sacrificed thousands to pursue their moronic tactic of burning down our camps.

ELISE: Right. So you routed them then?

STEVE: Nope.

ALAN: They surrendered.

ELISE: Oh?

STEVE: You see... and this is a *proper* tactic... we tipped them off about our final push, knowing their king would send everyone to the frontline.

ALAN: Leaving the capital undefended.

STEVE: So another five hundred men marched into the capital unopposed. They killed the king and forced his son to surrender.

ALAN: They faced no resistance *whatsoever*.

STEVE: They got cheered actually.

ALAN: Turns out their people hated the king just as much as we did.

STEVE: And that was that. Victory was ours.

ELISE: That's amazing.

ALAN: Yeah, it was a weird war when you think...

ELISE: Meh, forget that. *That's* not amazing. You two are amazing!

ALAN: What?

ELISE: You finish each other's sentence like a pair of starry-eyed lovers.

(Alan and Steve scowled at her.)

STEVE: Excuse me?

ALAN: Seriously?

ELISE: Oh, don't be coy. It's clear you're fond of one another.

(She then winked at her husband.)

ELISE: Do you want me to make myself scarce so you can share some alone time?

(Steve looked to Alan and sighed.)

STEVE: See what I have to put up with?

ELISE: My kindness?

STEVE: Yeah, right.

(Alan grinned.)

ALAN: She's fun.

ELISE: What?

ALAN: You're fun.

ELISE: Oh. You think I'm a clown, do you? There to entertain you?

(Alan grimaced.)

ALAN: I...

STEVE: She's winding you up, mate. All part of what she mistakenly calls her charm.

ELISE: Mistakenly?

STEVE: Mistakenly, erroneous, wrongly; pick one.

ELISE: Steve...

(She then glowered at Alan.)

ELISE: Can you put your glass on a coaster, please.

ALAN: Oh, I...

(He then glanced at the small table where his cognac was sitting and furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: Wait a minute. Where did it go?

(He sighed.)

ALAN: It was there a minute ago.

(He then climbed off the seat and got down on his hands and knees.)

ALAN: It must have fallen off the table. Hang on.

(As he glanced around for the coaster, he then heard giggling from his hosts.)

STEVE: For fuck sake, woman. Give him the coaster back.

ELISE: Spoilsport!

(A coaster then landed by Alan's hand.)

ALAN: Huh? What?

STEVE: She swiped it when she came in, mate. While you were taking a sip.

ALAN: She did? I didn't even notice. Why would...

STEVE: Because she's a cunt. It's what she does.

ELISE: Charming.

STEVE: Well, you are. I've been with this woman for years, Al, and I tell you what, I've never been bored.

ALAN: No?

STEVE: Nope. I've been wound up, frustrated and emasculated, but never fucking bored.

(Alan climbed to his feet then took a seat, placing his coaster down under his tumbler as he did so.)

ALAN: I'm gonna have to watch her, aren't I?

STEVE: Like a hawk.

(Alan grinned then went to pick up his glass before pausing with an uneasy expression on his face.)

ALAN: This cognac is safe, right? You didn't slip a laxative in there, did you?

STEVE: Mate, she's a cunt; not an asshole.

ELISE: What he said. I enjoy a joke; not being vindictive and nasty.

STEVE: Unless someone pisses her off, of course.

ELISE: Well, yeah; all bets are off then.

ALAN: I see.

(He chuckled.)

ALAN: Then I'll behave.

STEVE: Wise man.

(Suddenly, the front window smashed to smithereens before them. In a blur of fur and teeth, what looked like a giant wolf had crashed its head straight through the glass and was now clinging onto the window surround with its front claws. Having leapt at the window in a failed bid to get inside and attack them, it was now scrambling to complete the move. Terrified by the occurrence, Elise shrieked then charged to the back of the room and gaped in horror. Steve and Alan on the other hand, raced to where Steve's collection of swords were housed.)

STEVE: Let's do this!

ALAN: Does it matter *which* sword I grab? I don't want to chip a priceless antique!

STEVE: Nope. Just grab the biggest fucker you can wield.

(As Steve raced away with a blade to take on the giant creature, Alan reached for a blade of his own.)

ALAN: This'll do.

ELISE: Not that one!

ALAN: What? But Steve said...

(He then went to hurry it back, only for Elise to bark at him.)

ELISE: I was joking!

ALAN: Really? At a time like this???

(Elise could only shrug.)

ELISE: Well... we don't get company that often.

ALAN: Wow.

(With that, he raced to the window to join Steve in lashing out at the snarling beast. Desperate to get inside, it was clambering on the shale in the front yard to gain momentum and make a leap through the window. Mercifully, *because* of the shale, it couldn't gather the traction it needed. Its back legs kept slipping backwards. This gave Alan and Steve plenty of time to lash at its giant paws as they clutched the window surround.)

ALAN: Those paws are the size of my head!

STEVE: I know, mate. My chickens didn't stand a fucking chance!

(Slashing repeatedly at its paws, time and time again, Alan snarled.)

ALAN: Are this cunt's paws made from cast iron???

STEVE: Nah, mate; you're just weak!

ALAN: Like you're doing any better!

STEVE: I gave up on that! I'm going for the eyes now, mate!

ALAN: Then you're a lousy fucking shot!

(Watching as the two of them battled aggressively but fruitlessly against the giant fiend, Elise rolled her eyes.)

ELISE: Amateurs.

(She then strode out of the door. Moments later, she returned holding a birch broom.

Much to her disdain, they still hadn't made any progress.)

ALAN: Seriously, mate! The paws! Why are you trying to hit a moving target instead?

STEVE: Because I've seen what a complete bollocks *you're* making of hitting its paws. There's no point in *two of us* making cunts of ourselves.

ALAN: Steve...

STEVE: Clearly it's paws are rock hard, mate; that's why I'm going for it's eyes! Now stop bitching and let me get on with it.

(Elise could only shake her head.)

ELISE: Yeah, you carry on doing that, mighty warriors. *I'll* get rid of it, shall I?

(With that, she strode up to the fire, causally placed the birches into the flames then pulled them out again. Satisfied they were suitably ablaze, she then stepped to the window and jabbed the beast in the face with them.)

STEVE: What are you doing?

ALAN: Yeah! If two swords can't even damage it, what fucking use is a broom gonna be?

STEVE: It's a bloody good thing women aren't allowed in the army, mate.

ALAN: Right? Can you imagine? Feather dusters at dawn.

STEVE: Brilliant, isn't it? A fucking broom. Seriously?

(Just then, the beast reared up and screeched. With its face and surrounding hair now aflame, courtesy of Elise's broom, it was extremely distressed. As such, it abandoned its grip on the window surround then retreated to the front yard, where it proceeded to run around in panicked circles.)

ALAN: Yes! I finally got it to let go!

STEVE: Nice work, Al!

ELISE: What???

STEVE: Now let's get out there and finish this thing.

ALAN: Agreed!

(They then charged for the door.)

STEVE: You stay here, Elise! Fighting is man's work!

(As they vanished from sight, Elise stood there agape; astounded by their lack of acknowledgement.)

ELISE: Of all the bloody nerve.

(She then allowed the broom to lower and shook her head.)

ELISE: I've never been so insulted in all my life.

(At this point, she noticed she'd allowed the burning broom head to touch the rug beneath her armchairs.)

ELISE: Eek!

(Sure enough, the rug had very quickly set ablaze.)

ELISE: Not good. Not good!!!

(In something of a panic she then glanced around in dismay, before making a beeline for the table next to Alan's chair. She then grabbed his glass of cognac and lobbed in onto the flames.)

ELISE: Mistake!!!

(Sure enough, the fire doubled in size and rapidly engulfed half of the rug.)

ELISE: Steve!!!

(Realising he was somewhat busy, she whimpered in dismay.)

ELISE: I really shouldn't have done that.

(Outside in the meantime, Alan and Steve were attempting to slay the marauding beast with their blades. Driven crazy by the fact its head was on fire, however, it wouldn't keep still and allow them a chance for a clear strike. Standing at opposing ends of the growling, circling creature, all they could do was lash out and hope to land a lucky, fatal blow.)

STEVE: For fuck sake, mate; this thing's mental.

ALAN: So would you be if your face was on fire.

STEVE: Yeah, but my face *isn't* on fire!

ALAN: What's that got to do with...

(He then took another fruitless swing at the beast before sighing in despair.)

ALAN: It's made of fucking cast iron and won't stand still!

STEVE: That's because it's face is on fire.

ALAN: I fucking know that!

(He growled.)

ALAN: What are we gonna do about it???

STEVE: Well, we could chuck water on it, but I don't really want to do that!

ALAN: Why not?

STEVE: Then its face *wouldn't* be on fire.

ALAN: Steve...

STEVE: That's the only thing distracting it. The only thing stopping it from attacking one of us!

ALAN: Yeah, but it's also the only thing making it run in circles like that; preventing us from getting a telling strike.

STEVE: Then what do you suggest?

ALAN: Water!!! You cock!

STEVE: We've discussed this, Alan!

(Just then, the beast came to a standstill and snarled at Alan.)

ALAN: Okay, we're in business!

STEVE: Yup!

ALAN: Steve?

STEVE: Yeah?

ALAN: I don't like being in business, mate. Have you seen the size of this thing's teeth?

STEVE: Forget its teeth, mate. You're about to see a lot further down its throat than that!

ALAN: What???

(Steve then rampaged forth towards the beast's hind legs. Seconds later, it reared up and screeched in agony. With its eyes bulging and its mouth fixed as wide open as it'd go, the creature looked like it had discovered a world of pain all to itself.)

STEVE: See?

ALAN: I do see! What did you do?

STEVE: The unthinkable!

(They then watched as the creature fell to the ground; its life entirely expunged.)

ALAN: You killed it.

STEVE: I did, yes.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: Now I'm going to throw this sword away, because having been where *its* just been, there's no way I'm letting back in my house.

ALAN: You mean...

STEVE: Yup.

ALAN: Right up the...

STEVE: *All* the way up, mate.

ALAN: Fuck.

(He shuddered then puffed out in awe.)

ALAN: Still, that would do it.

STEVE: It *did* do it.

ALAN: Yes, yes it did.

(They stood there nodding silently for a moment, taking in what had happened, when a thudding sound rose up from the direction of the house. At once, they both turned and glanced towards the smashed living room window. Like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, Elise was standing just inside the window, whistling innocently.)

ALAN: Um... Steve?

STEVE: Yeah?

ALAN: What's she doing?

STEVE: Whistling innocently, mate.

ALAN: Right...

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: Why is she...

STEVE: Well, I can't say for sure, Al, but I'm pretty sure it has something to do with my priceless rug.

ALAN: The one that's now in the front yard?

STEVE: On fire; yes.

ALAN: Right.

(They then turned to face the giant beast's corpse.)

ALAN: So, what *is* that thing?

STEVE: Looks like a wolf of some sort.

ALAN: Yeah, but look at it. It's huge.

STEVE: I'll say it is.

ALAN: Freak of nature, you reckon?

STEVE: Something like that.

(He nodded then glanced to Alan.)

STEVE: All I know is, I'm fucking glad it's dead. And so will everyone else in his valley be. That cunt's been causing havoc for quite some time now.

ALAN: I heard.

(Steve then looked to the beast again.)

STEVE: The fire on its head's going out.

ALAN: So I see.

STEVE: Which is good news for me. That pelt is gonna be worth a few quid. And there's enough meat there to keep us fed for weeks.

ALAN: So it's a win then.

STEVE: Not really. Replacing that fucking window is gonna cost me a packet.

ALAN: Good point.

(Just then, a somewhat dapper looking gent raced towards them from the trees adjacent to the driveway. Wearing a horrified expression, he charged up to the beast's torso then held his head in his hands.)

CHARLES: What have you done?

STEVE: Who the fuck are you? And more to the point; what does it fucking look like?

ALAN: Yeah, it's not exactly hard to figure out. It's laying there dead with his sword up its arse; what do you *think* he did?

CHARLES: Oh, my. Oh, no. Lord Wimbleford isn't going to like this.

ALAN: Who?

STEVE: He's the local aristocrat. Nice bloke, but dumb as fuck.

CHARLES: Have some respect!

(He ruffled his neck.)

CHARLES: He *is* a nice bloke, yes. But he's not going to be very happy when he finds out what you did to his Boreas-Wolf!

STEVE: Boreas-Wolf?

CHARLES: His rare, exotic pet. Imported from overseas!

STEVE: What??? He kept that fucking thing as a pet?

CHARLES: Yes!

(He ruffled his neck.)

CHARLES: Which was fine at first. It was a lot smaller back then. Then it grew up. Grew feral. And escaped. Then killed everything in its path during a campaign of terror lasting several months.

STEVE: And it cost local people like me a fortune in livestock and chicken coops!

CHARLES: That too. Nasty business.

(He nodded.)

CHARLES: But still. It *was* his pet and you murdered it. Sorry, but I'm going to have to arrest you.

(Steve sneered then stepped up close to him.)

STEVE: Try it!

ALAN: Hang on, hang on. There's no need for violence, mate.

STEVE: I disagree!

(Charles gulped.)

CHARLES: I agree with the other fella.

STEVE: Is that so?

ALAN: Look. Mate. What charge are you arresting him on?

STEVE: Wishful thinking.

CHARLES: Um, no. It's the charge of... I don't know... patricide?

ALAN: Killing his father?

CHARLES: Oh. Maybe not then. Um... Pet! Pet... reside.

ALAN: That's not a thing!

(Charles's face then lit up.)

CHARLES: Animal abuse!

STEVE: You wanna see some abuse, do you? *I'll* show you some fucking abuse, if you like.

ALAN: Steve, mate; ease off.

(He looked to Charles.)

ALAN: The only crime here was committed by your boss. Lord Whip-a-doddle.

CHARLES: Wimbelford!

ALAN: Yeah, him. Keeping a dangerous pet is a crime, you know that, right?

CHARLES: Um, well...

ALAN: Making him liable for damages.

CHARLES: Damages?

ALAN: Yes. Everything that pet of his destroyed, he's liable for.

(Charles ruffled his neck.)

CHARLES: That's absurd. Lords are above the law.

ALAN: No. Lords are just as subservient to it as anyone else.

CHARLES: That's...

(He grimaced.)

CHARLES: True, actually.

ALAN: So here's what we'll do.

(He nodded to Steve.)

ALAN: He won't kick your head in...

STEVE: We'll see about that.

ALAN: I said, you *won't* kick his head in. And in return, he'll return to this lord of his and tell him his pet monster fell in the river and drowned. And that'll put a nice end to the saga.

STEVE: Apart from the small matter of compensation!

CHARLES: Compensation???

STEVE: Yes!

ALAN: You won't get compensation, mate. If it went to court, he'd deny all knowledge of the creature, so you'd be wasting your money.

CHARLES: He's right, you know. That's exactly what his lordship would do.

ALAN: See? So the best way to end this is to draw a line under it, like I suggested.

STEVE: Right. I just want to hit him once though.

ALAN: Steve!

STEVE: Oh, fine.

ALAN: Well, posh bloke? Do we have a deal?

(Charles ruffled his neck.)

CHARLES: Your terms are acceptable, I suppose. Just don't hit me.

STEVE: Fine. But I'm keeping the creature.

CHARLES: Fine.

STEVE: Fine.

CHARLES: Good.

STEVE: Yes. Yes, it is. Now fuck off.

CHARLES: Fine!

(Alan rolled his eyes.)

ALAN: Wait a sec.

CHARLES: Oh, what now?

ALAN: Were you loitering in the trees all the while that thing was attacking the house?

CHARLES: I was, yes. I'm charged with catching it, you see? So I was going to wait for it to come back this way then...

(He then felt silent.)

ALAN: Then what?

CHARLES: Um... actually, I hadn't thought that far ahead.

STEVE: Seriously? Do you even have a weapon?

CHARLES: Well... no.

ALAN: So you just followed it, unarmed, and hoped it didn't eat you.

(Charles grimaced.)

CHARLES: I've never really thought about it before...

ALAN: You did, didn't you? You just looked for it with no plan for what to do if you found it.

(Charles furrowed his brow.)

CHARLES: I'm new to this kind of thing, okay? I'm the chef. Why he asked *me* to do it, I'll never know!

ALAN: I see.

STEVE: What a knob.

CHARLES: Do you mind?

ALAN: Look. Mate. Just go. Tell your boss the cunt drowned then go back to being a chef. Okay?

CHARLES: Right.

(He nodded.)

CHARLES: Now that I can do.

(He then headed away, sneering back at Steve.)

CHARLES: Uncouth slob.

STEVE: Right. That's it. I'm gonna chin him.

CHARLES: No!!!

(He then scarpered for all he was worth.)

STEVE: Yeah, that's right! You fucking run.

(He shook his head.)

STEVE: Fuck him!

(He then glanced to Alan.)

STEVE: Alan?

ALAN: That's me.

STEVE: I need your help with something, mate.

ALAN: What's that?

STEVE: I need to skin that beast and slice it up for meat. But I also need to board up the living room window.

ALAN: And you want me to help?

STEVE: Yeah. I want you to board up the window while I do the butchering.

ALAN: We can't do both together?

STEVE: No. See, I want to get both jobs done as soon as possible. They need to get done tonight, so we can make an early start in the morning.

ALAN: Why? What's happening in the morning?

STEVE: We're going to town, selling that pelt, seeing the glazer and replacing my chickens.
ALAN: Fair enough. Got any wood?
(Steve smirked devilishly.)
STEVE: Have *I* got wood? You've seen my wife, mate. Getting wood is not an issue for me.
ALAN: Really? Beauty really *is* in the eye of the beholder, isn't it?
STEVE: You cheeky twat.
(He started to laugh.)
STEVE: I'm telling her you said that.
ALAN: Fuck!
(They shared a brief chuckle then Steve nodded.)
STEVE: Anyway, I'll show you where that wood is, then we can set to work.
ALAN: Lead the way.

The following morning, Alan found himself standing in the front yard, basking in the low, morning sunshine while he waited for Steve. Steve had prepared his horse and cart, loaded up the Boreas-Wolf's sizeable pelt and was now saying farewell to his beloved wife in the doorway. Unfortunately for him, their farewell was taking far longer than expected. Elise had much to say.
ELISE: And don't forget this time!
STEVE: Elise, please, for the umpteenth time I'm not going to forget the chickens.
ELISE: You said that last time!
STEVE: And I didn't forget them then either!
(He ruffled his neck.)
STEVE: You're thinking of the time before that.
ELISE: You forgot them last time too!
STEVE: I didn't *forget* them, Elise!
(He grimaced.)
STEVE: I just forgot to close the baskets properly and they escaped.
ELISE: Then make sure you close them properly this time!
STEVE: Of course, I will! Do you think I *enjoyed* charging across the fucking countryside, trying to catch the buggers again?
ELISE: I do, yes!
STEVE: Well...
(He smirked.)
STEVE: You're right, it was kinda fun actually, but I'd never do it on purpose.
ELISE: Fine. Good. Make sure you don't.
STEVE: Yes, ma'am.
ELISE: And hurry back.
STEVE: I will.
ELISE: It's dark in there with the window boarded up.
STEVE: I know that!
(He furrowed his brow sarcastically.)
STEVE: It's a shame we don't have a kitchen you can go in in the meantime.

ELISE: And what am I meant to do in there, Steven? I can't cook anything until you bring them bloody chickens back.

STEVE: Which I could do a lot sooner if you'd stop nagging and let me go.

ELISE: Fine. Go then!

STEVE: Thank you.

ELISE: And stay out of the pub!

STEVE: The pub? When have I ever...

ELISE: Seriously?

STEVE: It was one time!

ELISE: Yes, but now you've got your mate with you. I know what you're like. If he suggests going in the pub you'll fold like a crap poker hand.

(She then glanced around him and furrowed her brow at Alan.)

ELISE: No going to the pub!

ALAN: Right...

(He rolled his eyes.)

ALAN: There's only one thing worse than being married; that's being around your *best mate's* wife. You get the same amount of nagging he does, but none of the sex.

ELISE: You're never gonna get any sex with that face anyway.

ALAN: Ouch!

ELISE: Now go. Get a move on. And be quick about it.

STEVE: Right. I'll see you when we...

ELISE: Go on. What are you waiting for?

STEVE: For...

ELISE: Seriously, why are you still here?

STEVE: Because you were nagging me narrow for ten minutes!

ELISE: And you wanted to stick around for that? A smart man would have left ages ago.

(Steve gave her a cold glance then started to chuckle. As did Elise.)

STEVE: Never change, love.

ELISE: Why would I?

STEVE: Right?

(They then shared a farewell kiss before Steve about turned and headed for the cart.)

STEVE: Okay then, mate; let's get this show on the road.

ELISE: Have fun, boys. Don't hurry back on my account.

(At once, Steve stopped and turned back to glower at her. Having done so, he saw her close the front door, giggling to herself heartily.)

ALAN: Mate.

STEVE: What?

ALAN: She's a nutter.

STEVE: Uh-huh.

(He then paced towards the cart again.)

STEVE: It's a good thing she's pretty, really.

ALAN: Is she?

STEVE: Yeah, she's... fuck off, you. I'm telling her you said *that* an' all.

ALAN: Fuck.

(A few minutes later, having finally got their journey underway, Steve guided his horse around a slight bend in the road, then sat back and exhaled. The early morning sun in this

most scenic of settings made for the perfect, relaxing ambience. The journey into town was especially picturesque and it was one he enjoyed making. Sitting at his side, Alan shared his sense of enjoyment. He didn't allow himself to revel in it for too long, however, before a question popped into his head.)

ALAN: Hey, Steve?

STEVE: Yes, mate.

ALAN: This horse and cart... I've got questions.

STEVE: Oh?

ALAN: If you've got *your own* horse and cart, how come you pay another bloke to help you get your fish to market?

STEVE: You know about that?

ALAN: Yeah; the bloke you hire gave me a ride yesterday.

STEVE: Gotcha.

(He beamed.)

STEVE: Well, to put it simply, mate; there can be a lot of fish!

ALAN: Two carts worth?

STEVE: At least. Sometimes, we've had to make two trips.

(Alan was astonished.)

ALAN: Fuck off. Flooding dumps *four carts worth* of fish on your land???

STEVE: Sometimes, yeah. See, after the heaviest of rains, the water cascades off the hills and down that river at a rate of knots. And my land is on a bend in the river. When the water's cascading that fast, of course, it overflows onto my land rather than following the river's natural course. The banks are so low, there's nothing to hold it back, see? So every fish upstream gets washed onto my land.

ALAN: I see.

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: Your house must flood a lot.

STEVE: Nope. It's built on a mound, mate. My ancestors weren't stupid. Nor did they lack for fish in their diet.

ALAN: No, I'll bet.

STEVE: So, yeah. That's why I hire someone to help. Not only that, but gathering that many fish by myself would be hard work.

ALAN: Can't Elise help?

STEVE: She does. She charges around like a mad thing, chasing birds away. It's a free banquet for them, mate.

ALAN: Gotcha.

STEVE: I call her my beautiful scarecrow.

ALAN: That sounds like a really bad idea.

STEVE: It is. It really is. I say it every time and end up with a black eye every time, but you know how it is.

ALAN: Has to be done.

STEVE: Exactly.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: So there you go, question answered.

ALAN: Well... one of them. I said questions. Plural.

STEVE: Oh. Go on then.

ALAN: I was just wondering.

(He gestured to the large animal pelt in the back of the cart.)

ALAN: That bloke who gave me a lift yesterday said that giant bastard wolf attacked horses. How come it didn't attack yours? It killed your sheep and your chickens, after all.

STEVE: It couldn't get to *my* horse, mate.

ALAN: Oh?

STEVE: We had some horse thefts around here a few years back. Stables getting raided in the night. So I converted our back room into a stable and fitted a steel door. No fucker's getting through that. Thieves don't even know it's a stable and even *that* savage cunt...

(He gestured to the animal pelt.)

STEVE: ... isn't getting through bricks, mortar and steel.

ALAN: Oh. Cool. Good thinking.

STEVE: Thank you. So is there anything else you want to know?

ALAN: No, I'm done.

STEVE: Are you sure? You've started the grilling now so you might as well finish, mate. Come on, what do you want to know? Elise's bra size? What my horse had for breakfast? How about my favourite type of tree?

ALAN: Steve...

STEVE: Yes?

ALAN: Elise is a bad influence on you, mate.

(Steve chuckled.)

STEVE: So I've been told.

ALAN: Like husband, like wife.

STEVE: Well...

ALAN: The only difference between you is that *she* wears the trousers.

(Steve was horrified.)

STEVE: You fucking what?

ALAN: Don't go to the pub when we get there, Steve; you're not allowed.

STEVE: Alan...

(Alan then made a whipping noise.)

ALAN: The boss has spoken!

STEVE: Listen, you...

(He then allowed himself a smirk.)

STEVE: I see. Looks like Elise is a bad influence on you too.

ALAN: Yeah...

STEVE: And you've only known her a day. How weak-minded are you?

ALAN: Not very. She's must be using some kind of witchcraft.

STEVE: Actually, you're not the first person to have suggested that.

ALAN: No, I don't suppose I am.

(They then shared a devilish giggle.)

STEVE: Anyway, right, once we get to town, do yourself a favour. Don't look anyone in the eyes.

ALAN: Oh. That sort of town, is it? Everyone looking for a fight.

(He sucked his teeth.)

ALAN: It didn't seem like that when I passed through it yesterday.
STEVE: It isn't. You just took a wild swing and missed. You shouldn't look anyone in the eye because market day brings out the salesmen. As soon as you make eye contact, that's it. They're onto you. Only tourists look them in the eye, you see, and they see tourists as an easy sale waiting to happen.
ALAN: Right...
(He cringed.)
ALAN: I hate that.
STEVE: Who doesn't?
ALAN: The whores that get in my pub can spot a tourist a mile off and they do the same. They're all over them like a putrid, septic rash.
STEVE: I see.
(He winced.)
STEVE: Your pub sounds classy.
ALAN: It isn't!
(He shrugged.)
ALAN: Actually, that's not true. It's alright, actually. I mean, it's kind of normal for a town centre pub.
STEVE: My idea of hell.
ALAN: Mine too, but it pays the bills.
STEVE: And that my friend, is all that matters in the end.
ALAN: Pretty much.
STEVE: Anyway, until we get to town, mate, chill out and enjoy the views. Appreciate them while you can. The market can be chaotic, so make the most of the moment.
ALAN: Mate, if you're telling me to sit here quietly and relax like some kind of lazy freeloader... then who am I to argue?
STEVE: You're nobody.
ALAN: Mate...
STEVE: You never were.
ALAN: Steve...
STEVE: And you never will be.
ALAN: Steve!
STEVE: Yes, mate?
ALAN: Fuck off.

A short while later, when their horse and carriage rolled onto the cobbled streets of the town, Steve couldn't help but notice how struck Alan was with the architecture. Since passing through the gates, he'd barely averted his gaze from the stone buildings with their thick timber frameworks and thatched roofs. Such was his fascination with them, he barely removed his eyes from them right up until the cart came to a halt outside the fur trader's shop. In that moment, he finally averted his gaze then glanced towards Steve.
ALAN: We're here, are we?
STEVE: No, mate. We're about five miles back down the road; you're imagining this.
ALAN: Right. I mean, we've arrived at the fur trader, have we?
STEVE: No *again*. We've stopped because the horse got struck by lightning and died.

ALAN: I see.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: You're a twat.

STEVE: Thank you.

(Alan then jumped down from the cart.)

ALAN: Need a hand shifting that pelt?

STEVE: Not yet. He can come out and take a look first. Just do us a favour and keep an eye on it while I go and get him.

ALAN: Now that I can do.

STEVE: And whatever you do, don't involve yourself in any haggling. I've been trading with this fella for years, and I know what I'm doing.

ALAN: I know the rules, mate. Never interfere with another man's haggle.

STEVE: Good, good. I'll be back in a minute then.

ALAN: Righto.

STEVE: Seriously though, keep an eye on it. I don't want some thieving bastard helping himself because you're staring into space; mesmerised by the architecture again.

ALAN: Architecture? What architecture?

STEVE: What architecture? Are you blind?

ALAN: No. If I *was* I'd find these common and unexciting buildings mesmerising.

STEVE: You did! You couldn't keep your eyes off them a minute ago.

ALAN: That's bollocks.

STEVE: Mate, you were staring up at the rooftops with a dopey, fascinated looked on your face.

ALAN: Fascinated? Hardly. This town is as unspectacular as they come. I was only staring up there to avoid eye contact with market traders, like you advised.

(Steve looked enlightened.)

STEVE: Ah... gotcha.

ALAN: Thank you.

STEVE: You needn't have bothered though.

(He nodded down the road.)

STEVE: The market's further on, mate. You were just snubbing the good people who'd assembled to welcome us to town.

ALAN: I was?

STEVE: No, but if anyone had done that, you'd have looked pretty fucking rude, don't you think?

ALAN: Steve...

(Just then, a tall gentleman stepped from the front door of the fur trader's shop, wearing a leather apron and clutching a tape measure in his right hand. With a friendly smile on his face, he stepped straight up to Steve then proceeded to shake his hand.)

FRANK: How you doing, Steve?

STEVE: Not bad, mate; you?

FRANK: Yeah... you know... can't complain. How's the lovely wife?

ALAN: He has two wives?

STEVE: Alan...

(Frank chuckled.)

FRANK: Friend of yours?

STEVE: He used to be.

(He grinned.)

STEVE: This is my old army buddy, Alan.

FRANK: The turnip?

ALAN: Seriously?

STEVE: What? That was your name at the time; so that's your name in my war stories.

ALAN: Fair enough.

STEVE: Anyway...

ALAN: I see how it is, Stir Fry.

(Frank chuckled.)

FRANK: Stir Fry? Was that his name?

ALAN: Yup!

STEVE: You're a cunt, Al.

ALAN: I learned from the best, Sergeant Wilson.

STEVE: Touché.

FRANK: Stir Fry and Turnip, eh? I'm getting hungry.

ALAN: What was *your* nickname in the war then?

FRANK: What makes you think I served?

ALAN: The regimental badge on your collar.

FRANK: Fuck.

STEVE: So what *was* your name then?

FRANK: That's a secret I'll be taking to my grave with me.

STEVE: Not if we can help it. Frank Woods...

ALAN: Woods, huh?

(Steve and Alan mused for a moment then glanced up.)

STEVE: Tree Boy?

ALAN: Tree Stump?

STEVE: Stumpy!

ALAN: Yeah; stumpy. Definitely Stumpy!

FRANK: Not even close.

(He grinned.)

FRANK: Thank fuck. That's far worse than the nickname I actually had.

(He nodded.)

FRANK: Anyway, what can I do for you, mate?

STEVE: Incorrect. It's about what I can do for you.

FRANK: You say that every time.

STEVE: And?

FRANK: And it's neither clever nor cute; stop it.

STEVE: Right. Anyway...

(He then nodded towards the back of his cart with his head.)

STEVE: Feast your eyes on that. And don't make an exhibition of it.

FRANK: Of course not.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FRANK: Who do you think I am?

(He then peered into the back of the cart and gasped.)

FRANK: Holy fuck!

STEVE: Don't make an exhibition of it, I said.
FRANK: Right. Sorry.
(He then leaned forwards.)
FRANK: That's a Boreas-Wolf's pelt.
STEVE: Correct.
FRANK: How the fuck did you get hold of that?
STEVE: Let's just say I happened across it.
ALAN: While it was attacking his house.
FRANK: What?
STEVE: You heard the man.
FRANK: So that's the little fucker that's been causing all the misery down in the valley, is it?
STEVE: Yup.
FRANK: Wow.
(He grimaced.)
FRANK: How the fuck did it get there though? They're not even native to this country!
STEVE: Wimbledford imported it as a pet.
FRANK: Oh.
(He winced.)
FRANK: Importing dangerous animals is illegal.
STEVE: Of course it is; everyone knows that.
ALAN: We didn't. We only found out this morning when Elise told us.
STEVE: Well...
FRANK: Keeping one is against the law an' all.
STEVE: We know.
ALAN: Yeah, that we did know.
STEVE: We also know that trading the pelts is perfectly legal.
(He beamed.)
STEVE: And that they're highly sought after.
ALAN: In other words, valuable.
(Frank grimaced at him.)
FRANK: My bank balance is about to take a massive hit, isn't it?
STEVE: It is, yes. A temporary one, mind you.
ALAN: You'll make your money back five fold.
STEVE: He fucking won't. If I find out he underpaid me by *that* much, I'll introduce my sword to his man parts.
FRANK: Easy, Steve. You know I'm a fair man.
(He then stepped up close to him.)
FRANK: How's this? All the nines, mate. Nine hundred and ninety nine.
STEVE: As a down payment?
FRANK: No, as a tax requirement. Anything over that needs to be declared and we'd both get screwed.
ALAN: Sounds to me like he's getting screwed anyway.
FRANK: That's why the tax receipt of nine hundred and ninety nine is going to differ from the cash sum.
STEVE: I'm listening. How much are we talking?

FRANK: I'll give you twelve hundred all told.

STEVE: As a down payment?

FRANK: Will you shut up about down payments? Twelve hundred is a fair price. Ask your mate there.

ALAN: I don't get involved in another man's haggling.

STEVE: Thank you.

ALAN: Other than to say you'll have to do better than that.

FRANK: Shit.

(He bit his lip.)

FRANK: Fifteen hundred, mate. That's as high as I can go.

STEVE: Hmm...

(He looked to Alan.)

STEVE: What do you think?

ALAN: I think getting involved in another man's haggling would be a mistake.

STEVE: Not when they're asking for your advice!

ALAN: Yeah? What if my advice turns out to be shit?

STEVE: Then I'll come to your house and murder you in the night.

ALAN: And that's why I'm staying out of it.

STEVE: Right. Cheers, Turnip; you've been invaluable.

ALAN: Any time.

(Steve looked to Frank.)

STEVE: Fifteen hundred?

FRANK: Best I can do.

STEVE: Call it *sixteen* hundred and you've got a deal.

FRANK: Done.

STEVE: So fifteen *wasn't* the best you could do.

FRANK: Well...

STEVE: You lied to me.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: Okay, here's how it's gonna go. I'll take the sixteen, but if I find out later you've made thousands and thousands in profit from it, I'm gonna be back for my cut. With my sword!

FRANK: Mate, if I do that well from it, I'll happily cough up.

STEVE: Good. Make sure you do.

FRANK: I'm a man of my word.

STEVE: Great. So am I. And my sword is very sharp.

FRANK: I'm sure it is. Now give me a hand getting this shifted inside, will you? Then you can have your cash. And the dodgy receipt to go with it.

STEVE: Sounds good to me.

(He glanced to Alan.)

STEVE: Give us a hand getting the fucker inside will you?

(Much to his annoyance, however, Alan was glancing away with an embittered expression on his face.)

STEVE: Al! Hey! Turnip! Give us a fucking hand, will you?

(Alan just growled.)

ALAN: I'll be back in a minute!

(He then marched away across the thoroughfare.)

FRANK: What's with him?

STEVE: I've got no idea, mate.

FRANK: Hmm...

STEVE: Anyway, let's get this thing shifted.

FRANK: Let's.

(They then proceeded to unload the heavy pelt from the back of the cart. As they did so, Steve couldn't help but smile. The fee for the pelt would cover the cost of a new window and the chickens he needed with a hefty amount to spare. So far, it had been a very productive morning.)

A short way down the road at this time, Alan was storming forth with his eyes fixed on the tavern in front of him. Outside said tavern, a man roughly his own age was supping at an ale while having his way through a plate of chicken legs. Alan could barely contain his disdain. This was a man he despised with every fibre of his being. And yet, he wasn't exactly sad to see him. In fact, he'd waited for this moment for a very long time. Snarling, he stepped up to the bench where the man was seated then sneered down at him.

ALAN: Well as I live and breath. If it isn't Harry Brooks!

(Somewhat stunned to hear his name, the man glanced up at him.)

HARRY: You know me?

ALAN: Do I *know* you???

(Harry then looked enlightened.)

HARRY: Well, fuck me. It's Alan the turnip Turner!

(He climbed to his feet then held out his palms.)

HARRY: Great to see you, mate. How you been?

ALAN: Single! You?

HARRY: Single?

(A deep sense of foreboding then washed over him.)

HARRY: Right...

(He grimaced.)

HARRY: This is about Cherry, isn't it?

ALAN: Cherry? Who the fuck is Cherry???

(By now, Harry was decidedly flustered.)

HARRY: I don't know.

(He then looked enlightened.)

HARRY: Kerry!

ALAN: Yes! Fucking Kerry.

HARRY: Yeah...

(He shrugged innocently.)

HARRY: See... what happened was... I went to see her like you asked me to, but... she wasn't in.

ALAN: What sort of cunt do you take me for, Brooks? I know *exactly* what happened!

HARRY: You do?

ALAN: Yes! You broke the news of my tragic death to her then treated yourself!

Feasted on her grieving for your own ends!

(Harry shuffled his feet nervously.)

HARRY: Yeah, about that...

ALAN: You ruined my life!!! And now you can't even remember her name!

HARRY: I can!

ALAN: You called her Cherry!

HARRY: I got her confused!

ALAN: Confused???

(He flinched.)

ALAN: Who with? How many other bloke's girlfriends did you try to nobble?

HARRY: Just two or three.

ALAN: Are you fucking kidding me?

HARRY: What? It was never intentional, mate. That's just what happens... you know... when you send a fellow soldier who hasn't had any action for several years because of the war, to go and see a woman who's *also* gone without for a long time. It's a powder keg, mate. A chemical reaction waiting to happen.

(He sighed.)

HARRY: And I was weak. And well... they were easy.

ALAN: Yeah? You know what else is gonna be easy?

HARRY: Beating my head in?

ALAN: Bingo!

(Harry whimpered.)

HARRY: Don't be like that, mate. If you look at it logically, I did you a favour.

ALAN: A favour???

HARRY: Yeah...

(He shrugged.)

HARRY: I mean, if she was willing to jump into bed with *me* so easily, clearly she wasn't the marrying kind.

ALAN: She thought I was dead!

HARRY: I can't help that, can I?

ALAN: You were the one who *told* her I died!!!

HARRY: Oh, yeah. Shit.

(He scratched his head nervously.)

HARRY: That probably wasn't clever.

ALAN: You think? It was fatal, mate. A massive mistake!

HARRY: Oh, come on, Al. It takes two to tango. Where's her share of the blame? We both ran off; not just me!

ALAN: She only ran off with *you* because you told her I was dead. I've heard the whole story from friends and neighbours, you cunt. She mourned for me and you comforted her. Then once you'd gained her confidence, you got her to leave town with you. Too many harsh memories there for her, you told her. She'd be better off starting anew.

HARRY: Well... yeah. Grieving is tough.

ALAN: Then why make her go through it in the first place???

HARRY: Well... she was really pretty.

ALAN: I'm going to destroy you now. I'm not just going to beat you; I'm going to obliterate you right down to the bare bones then feed the remains to the local dogs.

HARRY: What? That's a bit harsh!

ALAN: Harsh? You ruined my life!

(He growled.)

ALAN: First I'm going to destroy you then I'm going to find her. And once I tell her what you did, she won't even be sad you're gone. The only cunt mourning you will be your mother!

HARRY: She's dead.

ALAN: Something you're about to have in common! Now before I tear you limb from limb, where is she?

HARRY: Well...

ALAN: Tell me where she is and I might kill you a little quicker!

HARRY: Um...

(He grimaced.)

HARRY: That's the thing, you see? She's not with me anymore.

ALAN: What? Came to her senses and left you, did she?

HARRY: No. She's not with me because she was *taken* from me. Abducted!

ALAN: What???

HARRY: Against her will!

ALAN: Well, obviously! It wouldn't be abduction otherwise.

HARRY: Right...

(He sighed.)

HARRY: Wanker. She was beautiful and he was a noble, so he decided therefore that he had to have her, regardless of *her* opinion on the matter. Bastard!

ALAN: Who the fuck are you referring to exactly?

HARRY: Baron Darkley.

ALAN: Who?

HARRY: Baron Darkley. An aristocrat with his own personal army. He took her away; abducted her on the thoroughfare. Then his men attacked me.

(He ruffled his neck.)

HARRY: I was lucky to escape with my life.

ALAN: Yeah, well; that particular bit of luck is just about to run out. But first, where the hell can I find this Baron bloke?

(Harry shook his head.)

HARRY: It's best you don't know.

ALAN: Excuse me?

HARRY: If I tell you where she is, you'll try to rescue to her.

ALAN: Fucking right I will!

HARRY: Suicide! Suicide, mate! Didn't you hear me? He's got his own personal army!

ALAN: I couldn't give a fuck. I have to try!

HARRY: You'll die!

ALAN: What do you care? You're about to die too.

HARRY: Alan...

ALAN: Now where can I find this Baron, for fuck sake?

(Harry sighed.)

HARRY: In the town of Owsley; about a hundred miles north of here.

ALAN: Thank you.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: Now take your pick! Death by savage beating or shall I make it simple and use my sword?

HARRY: Don't be insane, Al. If you kill me, you'll be slung in jail.

ALAN: A small price to pay.

HARRY: Is it? If you're in jail, who's going to commit suicide by failing to rescue Cherry from Baron Darkley!

ALAN: It's Kerry!!!

(He sneered.)

ALAN: And I won't be committing suicide.

(He then grimaced.)

ALAN: Though you do make a good point. Killing you and being slung in jail would be detrimental to my mission.

HARRY: Exactly.

ALAN: Fair enough. I'll go and rescue Kerry then *come back* and kill you.

HARRY: I'll look forward to it.

ALAN: You do that!

(He then punched him in the face, knocking him out cold.)

ALAN: Cunt.

(With that, he spun around and headed back towards where he'd left Steve.)

ALAN: That Baron is gonna bleed.

A short while later, having finally found Steve emerging from the glazer's workshop, Alan headed straight up to him and informed of his need to go and rescue Kerry from her captor. Having filled him in on every small detail, he then made an urgent request for directions. He was eager to get going without a moment's delay. Steve's answer therefore was wholly dissatisfying.

STEVE: I'll draw you a map once we get back to my place.

ALAN: What? Are you kidding me? I'm not going back to your place. I've got a woman to rescue!

STEVE: For fuck sake, Al; listen to me. Don't just go off half-cocked. To pull that off you're going to need a plan.

ALAN: I've got one. Go there, rescue Kerry then leave. Maybe kill a few people in the process.

STEVE: That's not a plan, mate; that's a goal.

ALAN: Actually, it's a plan.

STEVE: Okay, but it's not a strategy and you're going to need one.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: And that's where I come in. Now let's just grab some chickens then head back to mine, okay? Then I can tell you what I've got in mind.

ALAN: I need to go *now*, Steve!

STEVE: No. You need to go *soon*! And *I* need to come with you!

(He ruffled his neck.)

STEVE: Which is why we need to go back to my house first! I need you to convince Elise to let me go.

ALAN: You pussy.

STEVE: Excuse me?

ALAN: I thought those were wrinkles on your forehead, but it's actually Elise's thumbprint, isn't it?

STEVE: Less of that, you cheeky cunt. A marriage is a partnership, mate. Big decisions such as whether I go away and help you rescue a damsel in distress need to be decided together.

(He ruffled his neck.)

STEVE: You'd have known that if you were married, but *your* intended fucked off with another bloke.

ALAN: You cunt!

STEVE: What? You need to understand these things, mate. If you successfully rescue Kerry and end up putting a ring on her finger, the days of you doing whatever you please are over. It aint worth the earache.

ALAN: I'll be fine, mate. I'll let her *clean* my trousers, but I'm gonna be the one wearing them.

STEVE: Yeah... that's what *all* single men think.

(He sighed.)

STEVE: I know *I* did. Unfortunately, like all men, I completely overlooked that mystical, mind-control device she keeps in her knickers.

ALAN: Weak sauce, mate. Weak!

STEVE: Is it fuck.

(He furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: You know what, mate? I'm anxious to get going now. The sooner we rescue her and get you two swanning off down the aisle, the better. I'm looking forward to the day you come to me, trembling with embarrassment as you concede I was right.

ALAN: Never gonna happen.

STEVE: We'll see.

ALAN: You will, yes.

STEVE: Like that, is it?

ALAN: Yup.

STEVE: Fine. Let's grab them chickens then get going. The glazer's heading out now, an' all. As soon as he's done fixing my window, we'll set off.

ALAN: Fine. I've waited years to find her, so I guess another few hours won't hurt.

STEVE: Exactly. And a short wait is a small price to pay to have someone fighting at your side, rather than charging in by yourself.

ALAN: Sure.

(He then glanced away innocently.)

ALAN: If Elise lets you out to play.

STEVE: Mate...

(Alan then made a whipping sound.)

STEVE: Yeah, right; enjoy it while you can, you dateless wonder. Just remember, those words will come back to haunt you.

ALAN: Nope.

STEVE: Now, come on.

(They then headed back to where Steve had left his cart. Alan did so with a determined expression on his face. Kerry was the love of his life and knowing she'd been taken

against her will was extremely distressing. There was no way he could rest until he'd saved her. Being reunited with her in a romantic sense was very much a secondary ambition. Right now, he just needed to make sure she was safe.)

One hour later, back at the Wilson homestead, Steve was busy securing the chickens in the loft, while Elise stood in the living room watching the glazer work. The subject of Alan's quest to rescue to his former girlfriend had yet to be raised. Anxious for that to happen as soon as Steve was free, Alan found himself pacing up and down impatiently in the front yard. To him, every minute they waited was a delay too long.

Well aware that something was bothering her husband's friend, Elise watched him pace back and forth outside then looked to the glazer.

ELISE: Why's he pacing up and down like that?

(The glazer looked to her blankly.)

RODNEY: Who?

ELISE: What do you mean, who? Him!

(She pointed out of the window.)

ELISE: The only person we can see!

RODNEY: Oh.

(He shrugged.)

RODNEY: I dunno. I'm trying to focus on my work.

ELISE: Good. Make sure you do. Don't put the window in back to front.

RODNEY: There is no back to front, miss. It's a plain sheet of glass.

ELISE: I see.

(She ruffled her neck.)

ELISE: Cocky little shit, aren't you?

RODNEY: I...

(Just then, Steve strode in from the loft and stepped up to her side.)

STEVE: How's he getting on?

ELISE: His pacing is coming on nicely.

STEVE: Not him, the glazer.

RODNEY: Wouldn't it have been easier just to ask *me* that?

STEVE: He's a cocky little shit, isn't he?

RODNEY: I was only saying...

STEVE: Well don't. Focus on the task.

RODNEY: I am!

ELISE: He's not. He keeps stopping to talk to us.

RODNEY: That's because you keep talking to me.

STEVE: Well pardon us for breathing.

(Elise leaned towards her husband.)

ELISE: He's a bit precious, I think.

STEVE: Looks like it.

RODNEY: I'm nothing of the sort. I just...

(At this point, Rodney's boss appeared on the other side of the window.)

STAN: You sorted out that frame yet, lad?

RODNEY: Just sanding the last part now, boss.

STAN: Good, good.

(He looked through the gap towards Steve.)

STAN: This is my nephew. He's a bit cocky and a little precious sometimes, but he's good at what he does.

RODNEY: What? I'm neither of those things!

STAN: See?

ELISE: We'd already noticed it.

RODNEY: Wow.

(Just then, Alan stepped to Stan's side and looked inside the house.)

ALAN: You secured the chickens yet, mate?

STEVE: Just this minute finished it.

ALAN: Then it's time to get down to business.

(He looked to Elise.)

ALAN: I need to go on a trip. Today.

ELISE: Oh. I see.

(She looked to Steve.)

ELISE: Was our hospitality not good enough for him then?

STEVE: Actually, Elise...

ELISE: That's a bit rude, if you ask me. He turned up here smelling of cow shit, but despite that, we let him use our bathtub, fed him and gave him a bed for the night. And yet *he's* got the nerve to criticise *my* hostess skills? I've never been so insulted.

STEVE: You're not being insulted *now* either. Something came up, love.

ELISE: Oh?

ALAN: I just found out my former girlfriend's been kidnapped.

ELISE: Really?

ALAN: Yeah. So I'm gonna go and save her.

(Elise sucked her teeth.)

ELISE: Hmm... that's stalker territory.

ALAN: What?

ELISE: It'd be different if it was your *current* girlfriend, but to chase an ex like that... that's creepy.

STEVE: Hardly! She's someone he cares deeply for and she's been taken against her will.

ALAN: Exactly.

ELISE: Then tell the authorities. Let them save her. She's not going to appreciate it if *you* do it. Like I said, that's stalker territory.

ALAN: No, you don't understand...

ELISE: No, you're the one who doesn't understand. She's not going to want your help. It'll feel like you've been obsessing over her since the day she dumped you.

ALAN: She didn't dump me!

ELISE: *You* dumped *her*? Blimey. What was wrong with her then? With your face, you should be grateful for *any* female interest.

ALAN: Are you fucking kidding me?

STEVE: There's always an element of that with her, mate; you just don't know.

ELISE: Look, all I'm saying is, if *I'd* been kidnapped and an ex tried to save me, I'd feel like I was being passed from one obsessed stalker to another.

STEVE: Elise? Darling? Woman I adore?

ELISE: You're about to patronise me now, aren't you?

STEVE: I...

ELISE: Then you're going to regret it, aren't you?

STEVE: I'm going to do no such thing.

(He ruffled his neck.)

STEVE: I'm just going to ask you politely to hear what Alan has to say before you comment any further.

ELISE: Excuse me? Are you saying I'm a bad listener?

STEVE: I wouldn't dare.

ELISE: Fair enough. As long as you know where you stand.

(She then looked to Alan.)

ELISE: You may speak.

ALAN: How very generous.

ELISE: Do you want a slap?

ALAN: Right...

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: No, thanks.

ELISE: Then speak.

ALAN: Right. The thing is...

(At this point, Stan and Rodney raised the new sheet of glass into the window frame.

Stuck on the other side of it, Alan's words were instantly muffled.)

STEVE: Useless.

(He then pointed towards the front door.)

STEVE: Come inside, mate!

(Alan gave him a thumbs up then paced towards the door. Moments later, he stepped inside the living room then resumed his speech, before Elise could interrupt again.)

ALAN: As I was saying, the former girlfriend in question was the woman I once planned to marry. The love of my life, so to speak. I didn't dump her and she didn't dump me. We'd probably still be together now, but she was wrongly informed that I'd been killed in the war and left town. I hadn't seen nor heard about her since. Until today. She's been kidnapped by a Baron Darkley fella. So I'm going to travel north and rescue her.

(He then nodded sternly.)

ALAN: And that's the situation.

STEVE: Rescuing a damsel in distress. It's a noble cause, my friend. Good luck. We'll be thinking of you.

ALAN: Thank you. Wait...

STEVE: What?

ALAN: I thought you were going to come with me!

STEVE: Don't be absurd. I'm a family man now, mate. As much as I'd love to go, that wouldn't be fair on Elise.

(He then nodded towards Elise and made some gestures with his mouth. Clearly he wanted Alan to ask her.)

ALAN: Oh. I see. It's like that. Fair enough.

(He then smiled.)

ALAN: Elise, Steve was wondering if he could borrow his testicles for a moment. Then he might be able to find the courage to ask you if he can join me.

(Steve shrunk on the spot.)

STEVE: You cunt.

ELISE: Wow.

STEVE: I know, right?

ELISE: What can I say?

(She nodded.)

ELISE: Nope. The day he said I do, he signed his testicles over to me and their custodianship is non-negotiable.

STEVE: I'm standing right here.

ELISE: He can, however, join you on your trip.

STEVE: I can?

ELISE: Yes!

STEVE: And you don't mind?

ELISE: Why would I? I'm coming with you.

ALAN: Wait, what?

ELISE: Well, I'm not gonna sit here by myself while you two have all the fun, am I?

Emma's moved out now and I'd be bored rigid.

STEVE: But who's going to look after the house?

ELISE: Why would anyone *need* to look after the house? It's a house! It's not going to trip and hurt itself in the bath, Steven.

STEVE: No, but who'd do the cooking and...

ELISE: Nobody would need to if there's nobody here!

STEVE: Good point.

(He mused to himself for a moment then glanced up.)

STEVE: Okay. Just promise me that if there's any trouble you won't get involved.

ELISE: Darling, as you well know, if there's any trouble, it'll probably be my big mouth that caused it.

STEVE: I'm just saying, promise me you'll be careful.

ELISE: That I can do.

(She nodded.)

ELISE: So when are we leaving?

ALAN: As soon as possible.

ELISE: Then you'd better make sure those chickens have enough food for while we're away.

STEVE: I'll do it now.

ELISE: Good idea.

(She watched Steve head away then beamed.)

ELISE: Fun. It's been a while since we had a nice trip out somewhere.

ALAN: Nice? There'll be swordplay and violence involved I expect.

ELISE: Just like our honeymoon.

ALAN: What?

ELISE: Long story.

ALAN: I see.

ELISE: Anyway, let's get prepared!

(She nodded.)

ELISE: Glazers?

(Stan yelled through the window.)

STAN: What?

ELISE: Glaze that window!

(She then headed away.)

ELISE: While I pack some food and supplies.

(As she headed out of the room the two glazers looked to one another then shook their heads.)

STAN: Glaze that window? What did she think we were fucking doing?

RODNEY: I have no fucking idea, Stan.

Within the hour, once Elise had given the glazers her approval on a job well done, Steve, Alan and Elise set out for the township of Owsley. Travelling in a horse-drawn cart, they were optimistic about completing the journey in good time. Leading his horse forth in the driver's seat, Steve was extremely calm. Having made herself comfortable in the cart, Elise was also very much relaxed. Sitting at Steve's side, however, Alan looked more than a little tense; not to mention uncomfortable. Glancing at his two travelling companions, he bit his lip then shook his head. Something about this arrangement didn't sit right with him and he simply couldn't keep it to himself. As such, he sighed for the umpteenth time then leant closer to Steve and spoke quietly.

ALAN: Mate, this just doesn't feel right to me.

(Steve gave him a sideways glance.)

STEVE: What doesn't?

ALAN: This. This set up.

STEVE: Mate, you're gonna have to be a bit more specific than that.

ALAN: We're going into battle, mate.

STEVE: Battle?

ALAN: Yeah!

STEVE: Nah. We're heading off for a fight, mate. Not a battle. That's ridiculous.

ALAN: Is it? Apparently this Baron Darkley fella has his own personal army.

STEVE: Well... yeah. Okay. Maybe it *will* be a battle then. Maybe!

ALAN: Thank you.

STEVE: So what? We've gone into battle before.

ALAN: Yeah, but not with this set up.

STEVE: Again, mate; what fucking set up?

ALAN: This!

(He furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: We'd normally head off on horseback or on foot. Just the combatants and their weapons, gallantly heading off to fight the good fight.

STEVE: And how is this any different?

ALAN: How is it any different??? Apart from the fact we're riding on a fucking horse-drawn cart, like a pair of bloody coal merchants, you've brought your wife.

STEVE: Yeah, well...

ALAN: And she's packed cushions! And blankets! Not to mention a bloody picnic basket.

STEVE: So?

ALAN: So, it's not very manly, is it? We're meant to be heading off into battle to rescue the a damsel in distress, but it feels more like we're off to the coast for a day of fun and frolics by the seaside.

(Steve gave him the most belittling glance.)

STEVE: Turnip; mate... we're just travelling to Owsley in comfort, that's all. It's not like we're gonna find the Baron's mansion then charge in there wielding throw pillows and a box of sandwiches. We'll leave all the luxuries behind before we charge in there, obviously.

ALAN: I know that, it's just...

(He sighed with frustration.)

ALAN: I want that feeling. That raw feeling of aggression we used to get when battle was imminent. Sitting here on a cushioned seat, listening to your missus hum a happy tune while she's doing her knitting isn't helping.

STEVE: Twat.

ALAN: What?

STEVE: Once we get there and we find that Baron's dwelling, those feelings will come soon enough. For now, just fucking relax.

ALAN: Right...

(He shook his head.)

ALAN: I know I probably *should* relax, mate, but I can't. Knowing Kerry's out there somewhere, held against her will, is driving me potty.

STEVE: No, mate, it's you're overenthusiasm that's driving you potty.

ALAN: Overenthusiasm?

STEVE: Yeah. The battle *isn't* imminent, mate. We've got to get there yet. At no point during the war did we get overexcited ahead of time, so don't bloody do it now.

ALAN: Well...

(He sighed.)

ALAN: I'll try. It won't be easy though, Steve; I'm stressed.

(Just then, Elise's voice rose up from behind him.)

ELISE: Stressed?

ALAN: Yes!

ELISE: I see. I know what you need. Here.

(She then slapped a cushion into his midriff.)

ELISE: There you go?

(Alan glanced at the cushion then gave her a sideways glance.)

ALAN: What am I meant to do with...

ELISE: Cuddle it. It'll make you feel better in no time.

(Alan could only growl to himself.)

ALAN: I'm stressed because this journey doesn't feel manly enough, so she gives me a fucking cushion to hug.

ELISE: What? Did you say something?

ALAN: No.

(He sighed.)

ALAN: Thanks for the cushion.

ELISE: You're welcome. Hug it then!

ALAN: Yeah, right...

(With a sigh, he then squeezed the cushion tightly to himself just to appease her. Much to his bewilderment, however, he found it somewhat relaxing; even reassuring.)

ALAN: Shit!

ELISE: What?

ALAN: That actually helps.

(Elise smiled.)

ELISE: I figured it might. You seem like the type. I can tell, you see? Steve wouldn't be seen dead hugging a cushion; he's way too manly, but I had a feeling about you.

ALAN: Elise...

ELISE: Poof.

(Alan could only throw her an aghast expression.)

ALAN: You...

(He then spotted Steve trying not to laugh in the corner of his eye.)

ALAN: Right... anyway...

(He shook his head and tried to change the subject.)

ALAN: This town we're heading to. Owsley. Anything I might need to know?

STEVE: Yeah; stop hugging that cushion before we get there. They hate sissies in that neck of the woods.

(Alan then had to sit there and listen to Steve and Elise as they fell about laughing.)

ALAN: Cunts. Pair of cunts.

ELISE: That's what you get for whining about my inclusion.

STEVE: Right?

(He then mocked Alan's voice.)

STEVE: Steve, Steve; I don't feel very manly. Your wife's here and she brought cushions and a picnic basket. Wah!!!

ALAN: You...

(He then burst out laughing.)

ALAN: You two are complete cunts, do you know that?

ELISE: It has been said, yes.

STEVE: By pretty much everyone we've ever met.

ALAN: I'm not surprised.

(He chuckled some more.)

ALAN: You're a good pair of cunts though. All that mocking has relaxed me no end.

ELISE: Good. Now give me my cushion back.

ALAN: Fine.

(He then dumped the cushion in her lap.)

ELISE: Thank you.

ALAN: Still, all jokes aside, this Owsley place. Anything I ought to know?

(Steve glanced his way.)

STEVE: It's just an ordinary small town as far as I remember, mate.

ELISE: Unspectacular in every way. It does have a nice tea shop though, if I recall.

STEVE: One of the best, they say.

ALAN: Well, that's great an' all, but what about this Baron's place?

ELISE: I don't know anything about that.

STEVE: Me either. I've never heard of him and I can't honestly say I've ever noticed a manor house there either.

ELISE: Right? Not that we go there very often.

STEVE: Rarely, in fact. Like twice in all the time we've been married.

ELISE: Which feels like a really, really long time.

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: Time drags when you're miserable.

(Alan chuckled.)

ALAN: I see.

STEVE: Kiss my arse, Elise; you struck gold when you married me. You bagged yourself a good one.

ELISE: Oh, yeah?

STEVE: Yeah. You punched well above your weight.

ELISE: I'll punch *you* in a minute.

STEVE: Then I shall retract my statement unconditionally.

(As they shared a chuckle, Alan rolled his eyes then tried to get back to the point.)

ALAN: So, you don't know the first thing about this Baron then? Neither of you?

(Steve looked to him and shrugged.)

STEVE: I've never heard of him, mate.

ELISE: Me either. It's pretty obvious that he's as evil as it gets though.

(Steve glanced over his shoulder at her.)

STEVE: What are you basing that on exactly?

ALAN: He abducted my woman!

ELISE: What Alan said, but that's only part of it.

STEVE: Then?

ELISE: Well... with a name like Baron Darkley, he's *bound* to be evil. It stands to reason.

(Steve grinned.)

STEVE: Yeah? What reason is that?

ELISE: Logic!

STEVE: Right...

(Elise furrowed her brow.)

ELISE: Is there something you'd like to say, Steven?

STEVE: No, love. Not at all. If you say he's evil just because his name *sounds* a bit edgy, who am I to argue?

ELISE: Nobody!

STEVE: Well...

ELISE: A tiny, insignificant nobody.

STEVE: Do you mind?

ELISE: Yes. Now shut up before I hit you with my broom.

(Alan laughed then glanced back into the cart.)

ALAN: Yeah, right. Like you brought...

(His face then dropped.)

ALAN: You did. You actually did. You brought a broom.

ELISE: And?

ALAN: Why? Why would you bring... I mean... why?

ELISE: Because you never know when it might come in handy.

ALAN: For what???

ELISE: Well, for one, hitting you two if you keep giving me gyp!

(Alan grimaced.)

ALAN: Okay, but... why else?

(Elise gave him a condescending glance.)

ELISE: Seriously? I literally just told you, you *never know* when it might come in handy. You don't bloody listen.

ALAN: I do, it's just... you're talking nonsense!

STEVE: Disengage, Al. You're treading a very dangerous path right now.

ELISE: Listen to your friend.

ALAN: Right...

(He then sat and faced the front of the carriage.)

ALAN: So anyway...

(He then felt a tremendous thud on the back of his head.)

ALAN: Ouch!!!

(Sitting there holding her broom, Elise nodded defiantly.)

ELISE: And there's plenty more where that came from. Talking nonsense indeed; whatever next?

ALAN: Seriously?

(He looked to Steve.)

ALAN: Your wife's a nutter.

(Steve laughed.)

STEVE: She's great, isn't she?

ALAN: No!

ELISE: Do you want another one?

ALAN: Fine! Fine... you're great.

ELISE: Aw, you're too kind.

(She then put her broom down and resumed knitting.)

ALAN: That hurt my head.

STEVE: I've been there, mate.

(He grinned.)

STEVE: Nowadays I pick my battles wisely. From a distance.

ALAN: I'll bet.

(He shook his head then sighed.)

ALAN: So anyway, this route we're taking. Quick, is it?

STEVE: It is actually. No steep hills or fords to cross; it's actually pretty easy.

ALAN: Good to know.

STEVE: Of course, it's not the route a lesser man would choose.

ALAN: Oh?

STEVE: Yeah. We'll be heading through the Catskill Valley, which some people consider too dangerous.

ALAN: How come?

STEVE: Because there's been a few robberies down there over the years.

ALAN: I see.

STEVE: Yeah. So some people opt to take the much longer route over the hill. If you're a bit feeble, it's much safer, I guess. That won't be an issue for two trained killers such as ourselves though.

(Alan nodded.)

ALAN: Yup. Any robber trying his luck against two veteran soldiers is just asking to be killed.

STEVE: Exactly.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: I mean what have these robbers actually got? A sword and a threatening tone of voice; that's all.

ALAN: Whereas we've got swords *and* the skills to back them up. Not to mention a killer instinct.

STEVE: Precisely. And that makes all the difference. The skills, I mean. Any cunt can *hold* a sword; knowing how to swing one on the other hand, that's a different matter.

ALAN: It's what separates the men from the boys.

STEVE: The soldiers from the weaklings.

ALAN: The hard men from the wannabes.

(Elise rolled her eyes.)

ELISE: Yeah, right, you're both very manly, I'm sure.

STEVE: We are!

ALAN: Very much so.

ELISE: And I'm happy for you. Catskill Valley should be a doddle then. I'm more interested in what's on the other side.

STEVE: A straight drive to Owsley; *you* know that.

ELISE: I know I know that. I just want to know how long it'll take. Will we need to stop at an inn overnight?

STEVE: I'm not actually sure, love. It's been so long, I can't even remember how long it took last time.

ELISE: Right...

(She shrugged.)

ELISE: It doesn't matter. If we need an overnight stop, that's fine. If we don't and we get there early, that's fine too. I'll just wait in a coffee shop while you two go off and get killed by the baron.

ALAN: Killed?

STEVE: Why would you...

(They heard her giggling from behind them.)

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: Oh, relax. I wouldn't have let you go if I thought you'd be putting your life in danger.

STEVE: *Let* me go? I'm a grown man!

ELISE: And?

(Steve went to reply then sighed in defeat.)

STEVE: And I'm very grateful for your kind gesture.

(Alan could only shake his head at him.)

ALAN: Mate! Really?

STEVE: Shut up!

(He ruffled his neck.)

STEVE: Like I said before, once we've rescued Kerry and you put a ring on her finger, then we can discuss who wears the trousers in a relationship, okay?

ALAN: And you'll find it'll still be me.

ELISE: Aw. Poor, deluded Alan.

STEVE: Right?

(They then sat there giggling, much to Alan's disdain.)

ALAN: Wow.

One hour later, as their horse headed into Catskill Valley, Alan nestled his backside against his seat then sighed with discomfort. Getting something of a sore backside, he grimaced then looked to Steve. Having been unwaveringly calm since they'd set out, his good friend seemed to have suddenly been set on edge by something. Curious as to find out what, Alan bit his lip.)

ALAN: You alright there, Steve?

STEVE: What?

ALAN: You seem on edge all of a sudden.

STEVE: On edge? Nah, it's not that, mate.

(He nodded ahead.)

STEVE: This is the Catskill Valley. It pays to be wide awake and paying attention down here.

ALAN: So... on edge then?

STEVE: I'm not on edge, mate. I'm just keeping my eyes peeled.

ALAN: Fair enough.

STEVE: If anything, you're the one of edge. Look at you, shuffling around in your seat.

ALAN: I can't help that, mate; this seat is uncomfortable.

(In that moment, Elise thrust a cushion into his midriff again.)

ALAN: What are you doing?

ELISE: What does it look like?

ALAN: I'm not so uncomfortable that I need to hug a cushion to feel better.

(Steve and Elise glanced to one another.)

ELISE: Is he really that dim?

STEVE: He has his moments.

ELISE: So I see.

(She furrowed her brow.)

ELISE: It's a cushion, you idiot! For sitting on. The primary function of a bloody cushion.

ALAN: Oh.... I thought...

(He then turned bright red and slid the cushion beneath himself.)

ALAN: Thank you.

ELISE: You're welcome.

(She then rolled her eyes.)

ELISE: Dumb arse.

(Suddenly, an angry cry rose up from behind them. At once, they all threw glances over their shoulders to where a masked man on a horse was galloping up from the rear.

Whipping the horse frantically, he was desperate to catch up to them. Furrowing his brow as he watched the horseman approach, Steve snarled coldly.)

STEVE: That didn't take long, did it?

(He snarled.)

STEVE: Deal with it, Alan.

ALAN: He's coming to *your* side, mate.

STEVE: Yes, but I'm driving; you're gonna have to deal with him.

ALAN: Right. Fair enough. One dead highwayman, coming right up.

(He then reached in the back of the cart for his sword, before clambering to his feet.

With the cart hurtling forth on the uneven ground, however, standing wasn't easy.)

ALAN: Can you slow down a bit, mate?

STEVE: Are you fucking serious? No, I can't.

ALAN: Steve...

STEVE: Rule one of the road, Al; you don't slow down for a highwayman!

(Alan cringed.)

ALAN: Fuck. You're right.

(He then nodded determinedly.)

ALAN: Okay. Leave it to me.

(He then tried to advance but stopped immediately.)

ALAN: Can you at least sit forward a bit? I need to be on *that* side!

STEVE: Sit forward a bit? If I did that, I'd be sitting on the floor.

ALAN: Sit on the floor then!

STEVE: If I do that, I won't be able to see where I'm steering, you cock.

ALAN: Well can you at least make *some* effort to let me through???

(Sitting in the back, Elise furrowed her brow.)

ELISE: While you two silly fuckers are bugging about, that robber's getting closer and closer!

STEVE: We're not bugging about!

ALAN: We're not doing anything! I can't until this cunt shifts out of my way!

STEVE: And where exactly would you like me to go, numb-nuts?

ALAN: Just...

STEVE: I can't just fold myself up like a cardboard box and slot myself in the footwell!

ALAN: Nobody expects you to. Just lean forward or something so I can climb behind you.

STEVE: Fine!

(With that, Steve leaned as far forward as he could then furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: Happy?

ALAN: Can't you go any further?

STEVE: I'd fall off the front if I did.

ALAN: Fine; then it'll have to do.

(With that, he slung his foot over Steve's back until it was resting on the seat the other side of him.)

ALAN: Okay, here goes!

(He then attempted to push himself upwards and step across, behind Steve's back.

Unfortunately, with the rocking of the carriage, as soon as his back leg left the ground, he immediately lost all sense of balance.)

ALAN: Not good!!!

(With that, he tumbled face first into the back of the cart.)

ALAN: Ouch!!!

STEVE: Mate, what did you do that for? He's pulling alongside.

ALAN: I know!

(With that, he jumped to his feet then snarled.)

ALAN: Okay, it's time to... where's my sword?

(He then glanced about himself in a panic.)

ALAN: It fell out of my hand!!!

(Watching him through entirely unimpressed eyes, Elise could only shake her head.)

ELISE: Useless. The pair of you.

(With that, she turned to face the highwayman then lunged at him with her broom.)

ELISE: Bugger off!

(Struck right in the midriff with the bristled end of the broom, the highwayman yelped out in distress then tumbled off the side of his horse.)

ELISE: And don't come back!

(She then looked to where Alan was staring back at her agog.)

ELISE: What?

ALAN: Um... nothing.

(He then gathered his sword and sheepishly headed back to the front. Having not seen what happened, Steve glanced back at the highwayman's horse coming to a standstill then drew a sigh of relief.)

STEVE: That's the stuff. Nice work, Al.

ALAN: Um...

STEVE: You alright, Elise?

(Elise furrowed her brow sarcastically.)

ELISE: I'm fine!

(She rolled her eyes.)

ELISE: Luckily I had you two here to save me.

STEVE: Think nothing of it, love.

ELISE: I do! Don't you worry about that.

(Having made it back to his seat, Alan sat down sheepishly then winced.)

ALAN: Mate...

STEVE: Good work, Al. Jumping in the back was a good idea.

ALAN: I didn't jump. I fell. And I while I was standing there like a twat, your missus knocked him off his horse with her broom.

STEVE: Oh.

(He winced.)

STEVE: Mate?

ALAN: Yeah?

STEVE: You're never gonna hear the last of that.

ALAN: I know.

(Sure enough, a somewhat smug looking Elise then called out to him from the rear.)

ELISE: Oh, Alan?

(Alan gulped.)

ALAN: Yeah?

ELISE: Remember when you asked me what a broom might come in handy for?
ALAN: What can I tell you, Elise? I'm embarrassed.
ELISE: Oh, don't be silly. You shouldn't be embarrassed, love. Not when you could be be ashamed, crestfallen and humiliated. Merely being embarrassed seems a tad understated if you ask me.
ALAN: Elise...
ELISE: I'm just saying. Own your ineptitude, Alan. Like Steve has.
STEVE: What? Why are you bringing me into this?
ELISE: Because jumping in the back here to fend off that robber was so fucking obvious it was practically hitting you with hammers and singing festival songs at you! And yet neither of you figured it out!
ALAN: I *did* get in the back!
ELISE: You *fell* in! Face first! And lost your sword!
(She rolled her eyes.)
ELISE: I'm starting to think we should turn back now, because if that's the level of ineptitude you two are likely to display in battle, this Baron Darkley fella's gonna have a field day with you!
(She then rolled her eyes and resumed knitting. As she did so, Steve and Alan simply stared forward at the road, turning redder and redder by the second.)
ALAN: Mate?
STEVE: I don't want to talk about it.
ALAN: Right...

A short while later, some way down the road, Steve started to feel somewhat on edge once again. The cart had become somewhat uncomfortable in the last few minutes. The ride was much bumpier and the cart seemed to jolt from time to time. The road, however, was smoother at this point than anywhere else on the journey so far. Hoping he was imagining things, he bit his lip then glanced at Alan.
STEVE: Is it it me, or does this cart feel...
ALAN: One of the wheels is loose!
(Steve furrowed his brow.)
STEVE: Fuck. I was hoping I'd imagined it.
ALAN: We're bouncing around like a coconut rolling down a hill, mate. You're definitely *not* imagining it.
STEVE: Shit.
(He then proceed to pull the cart to the side of the track.)
STEVE: If you'd noticed it, mate, why didn't you say something?
ALAN: Because it was bleeding obvious and I thought you'd notice it yourself.
STEVE: Yeah, well...
ALAN: Obviously, I was wrong. Clearly you have all the driving skills of a blind spinster's dildo.
(Steve just smirked at him.)
STEVE: That's what you said to the captain that time, isn't it?
ALAN: Yeah. He threw me out and made me walk the rest of the way. It was a fucking nightmare.

STEVE: Then you'd better pray I don't do the same.

ALAN: Why would you? I think you're an excellent driver, mate.

STEVE: Well, thank you for noticing.

(They then shared an amusing chuckle. Moments later, when the cart came to a halt, Steve grabbed a wrench from under the seat then leapt off the cart. Alan then climbed down from the other side. They then headed to the front right wheel and stood there staring at it.)

ALAN: So...

(He gave Steve a belittling glance.)

ALAN: Fitted it yourself, did you?

STEVE: No.

ALAN: Then you might want to sue the numpty who did. They did a seriously shit job.

(Elise then spoke up without averting her gaze from her knitting.)

ELISE: It was me.

(She glanced up at him coldly.)

ELISE: I await your lawsuit with interest.

(Alan grimaced with discomfort.)

ALAN: Right... um... when I said they did a shit job, what I actually meant was...

STEVE: Calm down, you tit. She didn't *really* fit it.

ALAN: Then why say...

(Elise chuckled.)

ELISE: I like listening to people squirm.

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: If you must know, Alan, the young lad I hired to help around the grounds fitted the wheel. Took them off and cleaned them.

(He grimaced.)

STEVE: Silly fucker broke one.

ALAN: And fitted this one back on really badly.

STEVE: Yeah.

(He furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: You won't be surprised to hear that I fired him on his second day.

ALAN: You let him have a second day?

STEVE: I don't know what I was thinking either.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: Anyway, mate, if you wouldn't mind shifting the weight to the other side for me, I'll get adjusting this wheel.

ALAN: Righto, mate.

STEVE: Elise?

ELISE: What?

STEVE: Can you just jump out of the cart for a minute, love. We needed to lessen the weight.

ELISE: No, I'm good.

(Alan and Steve looked to her emptily.)

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: Yes?

STEVE: Seriously, can you just jump out for a minute?

ELISE: I'm comfortable!!!

STEVE: I realise that, love, but...

ELISE: But what? You're supposed to be big, strong, military veterans. What difference does it make if I'm in here or not?

STEVE: We need to shift the weight, and you're...

ELISE: Careful now!

STEVE: What I'm saying is, to allow me to adjust the wheel, Alan needs to pull the cart to the left, taking all the weight off the right wheel. So the less weight in the back the better.

ELISE: He'll be fine. I don't weigh much anyway.

STEVE: I realise that, darling, but like I said, the less weight in the back, the better.

ELISE: Yes, but on the other hand...

STEVE: Oh, here we go.

ELISE: Leaving me where I am, sitting comfortably and minding my own business will greatly lessen the strain on your lugholes. If I'm forced to get up...

STEVE: Babe. Darling... love of my life...

ALAN: Forget it, Steve. It'll be fine.

STEVE: Really? You sure?

ALAN: Yeah. It's not ideal, but I have been keeping in shape.

STEVE: Right. Well, go for it then. Just don't let go once I've started adjusting. If you do...

ALAN: The wheel might buckle. I know.

STEVE: Fine.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: Let's get cracking then.

ALAN: Let's.

(With that, Alan headed to the other side of the cart, then pulled on the edge as hard as he could, tilting it slightly so Steve could set to work with his wrench.)

STEVE: Nice one, mate.

(He then knelt before the wheel, glancing up at Elise and mumbling under his breath as he did so.)

STEVE: Fucking obstacle.

ELISE: Did you say something, my love?

STEVE: No, dear.

ELISE: I didn't think so.

STEVE: Right...

(He then set about loosening the wheel, so he could put it back on properly.)

ALAN: How's it looking over there, mate!

STEVE: I've just started!

ALAN: Fuck! This is actually pretty heavy.

ELISE: Are you calling me fat?

ALAN: No. I wouldn't fucking dare, for a start.

ELISE: I like you. You're smart.

ALAN: Hardly. If I was, I'd have got Steve to shift the weight and changed the wheel myself. This is killing my arms!

STEVE: Hang in there, mate, it won't take long.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: It's not threadbare or anything, so it should...

(He then groaned with strain.)

STEVE: There!

ALAN: All done?

STEVE: Don't be ridiculous. I've just taken it off.

ALAN: Then put it back on!

STEVE: Really? You think? Should that be my next move? I didn't know.

ALAN: Just do it!

STEVE: I am!

(As Steve set about setting the wheel then tightening it again, Alan grimaced with the strain.)

ALAN: Mate!

STEVE: What?

ALAN: I'm not as young and fit as I used to be!

STEVE: Well, who is?

ELISE: Me!

(She giggled.)

ELISE: At least that's the fantasy.

(She smiled.)

ELISE: Are you boys done yet?

ALAN: Would I be standing here, going bright red with the strain, my veins popping out of my arms, if we were?

ELISE: Maybe. You're a very odd man.

STEVE: And it's on!

ALAN: Thank fuck.

(Alan then released his grip and looked to where Steve was climbing to his feet.)

STEVE: Fair play to the lad, he oiled the nuts well enough. Adjusting that was a piece of piss.

ALAN: Thank fuck for that. That was painful, mate.

ELISE: So it's done, is it?

STEVE: Yup.

ELISE: Cool. Let me see.

(She then jumped out of the carriage and glanced down at the wheel.)

ELISE: Lovely job.

(Having smiled down at the wheel for a few moments, she then raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

ELISE: Why are you two glaring at me like that?

STEVE: You got out of the cart!

ELISE: I'm aware of this, dear.

ALAN: Then why couldn't you have done it a minute ago? You'd have made my life a million times easier!

STEVE: And mine!

ELISE: I told you, I was comfortable!

ALAN: And you just happened to *stop* being comfortable as soon as I'd finished straining myself, did you?

ELISE: Yes. Which was unfortunate timing, I know, but still. No harm done.

ALAN: No harm done? My arms are numb and my back is on fire!

ELISE: Well, I fail to see how that's my fault.

ALAN: If you'd just got out sooner...

ELISE: I couldn't!

STEVE: Why not?

ELISE: I was comfortable! How many times?

(She rolled her eyes.)

ELISE: You don't listen, that's your problem.

(Suddenly, a loud cry rose up from behind them.)

ROBBER: Nobody move!!!

(Much to their dismay, the highwayman they'd earlier thwarted was standing five feet behind them with his sword pointed directly at them.)

ELISE: Nope!

(Elise then ducked behind her husband.)

ROBBER: I said nobody move!

ALAN: Too late; she moved.

ROBBER: Yes, well...

STEVE: Look, never mind that. What do you want?

ROBBER: What do you think I bloody want? I'm a highway robber!

STEVE: Mate...

ROBBER: Don't *mate* me! You fuckers have a lot to answer for. Now tell that woman to get where I can see her!

ALAN: I can't do that, I'm afraid.

STEVE: Yeah; that'd be a *huge* mistake.

ALAN: Right? Calling her *that woman* would not end well.

STEVE: For any of us.

ROBBER: Don't get funny with me! I'm not in the mood.

(He snarled.)

ROBBER: It took me forever to find my horse after that woman knocked me off. I limped after it for a good fifteen minutes, so forgive me for not finding your comedy routine entertaining.

(He sneered.)

ROBBER: Although, finding you stationary, so I could simply dismount and sneak up on you did bring me much joy.

(He then pointed his sword rigidly at Steve.)

ROBBER: Now tell that woman to get where I can see her, or I'll kill you where you stand.

STEVE: Go for it. I'd rather be killed than call her *that woman*. The consequences would be mortifying.

ROBBER: Then have it your way.

(Just then, Elise half stepped to Steve's side.)

ELISE: Fine. Now, you can see me. Nobody has to die.

ROBBER: I'll be the judge of that.

(He sneered.)

ROBBER: Now hand over your valuables if you want to live. And no funny business. I know you have at least one sword in there. Make a move for it and someone dies.

STEVE: Yeah...

ROBBER: And no, I don't mean me!

STEVE: Damn. He saw right through that.

ROBBER: Now hand over your vegetables!

ALAN: Valuables.

ROBBER: Them an' all.

(He ruffled his neck.)

ROBBER: I may still have concussion from the fall.

(He then thrust the sword in Alan's direction.)

ROBBER: You! Satisfy me!

ALAN: Sexually?

ROBBER: Give me your valuables!!!

(Alan sighed.)

ALAN: What's the plan, Steve?

STEVE: We don't have one, do we?

ALAN: Well...

STEVE: He's armed and we're not. We'll just have to comply.

ALAN: I hate that.

STEVE: Just do it, mate.

ROBBER: Listen to your friend!

(He then growled and wriggled his blade in Alan's direction.)

ROBBER: Hand it over!

ALAN: Fine!

(Just then, the handle of a broom flashed up from the end of the row where Elise was standing. Seconds later, it crashed into the robber's groin and he sunk to his knees in agony; dropping his sword in the process.)

STEVE: Elise, you're a fucking legend.

ELISE: A broom wielding goddess, some would say.

(Smirking, Alan then scooped up the robber's sword and threw it in the back of the cart.)

ALAN: That's him neutralised. Now what?

ELISE: Now I'm going to show this silly person what happens when you refer to me as *that woman*.

(She then bounded forth and jumped on the robber's head, before unleashing upon him what can only be described as unrestrained, assorted violence. At first, Alan and Steve looked on aghast, but very quickly turned to face in the opposite direction.)

ALAN: Mate.

STEVE: Yeah?

ALAN: You married a psychopath.

STEVE: Yeah, but she's a *pretty* psychopath and her cooking is first class.

ALAN: Well, I can't disagree with the cooking part.

STEVE: Hey!

(Alan just grinned then glanced over his shoulder.)

ALAN: Oh, fuck me!

(He then faced the other way again.)

ALAN: She's jumping on his nuts. Repeatedly.

STEVE: Sounds like something she'd do.

ELISE: *That woman* indeed! I'll give you *that woman*!

ROBBER: Spare me!

ELISE: Will I fuck!

(Steve puffed out.)

STEVE: Sweetheart? Darling?

ELISE: What?

STEVE: I think you've made your point now.

ELISE: Well... I suppose.

(She then relented her assault and walked past them to clamber into the back of the cart.

As she did so, Alan and Steve turned to face the robber. Bruised and battered upon the ground, all he could muster was a few stunted groans of agony.)

ALAN: We should kill him off really.

STEVE: It would be kinder.

ELISE: You leave him where he is. He's had all the kindness he's getting for one day.

ALAN: When?

ELISE: When I focussed on jumping on his nuts rather than his head.

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: I have a feeling he'd rather you'd jumped on his head, to be fair.

ELISE: I did. Twice.

(She ruffled her neck.)

ELISE: Then I switched my attention to his nuts. You know; just to make sure he stayed down.

ALAN: Yup. That would do it.

STEVE: Uh-huh.

ELISE: Right? Now, come on. We've got a journey to finish.

(Alan and Steve just shrugged at one another.)

ALAN: Let's go then.

STEVE: Indeed. Later, criminal.

ALAN: Get well soon.

(They then headed for the front of the cart, chuckling all the way. A few moments later, once Steve was at the reins and Alan was seated comfortably at his side, they set off again. All the while Elise glanced back at the wriggling ball of agony she'd created and allowed herself an ever-widening smile. Once they'd got a good distance away from him, however, she then turned and looked to Alan.)

ELISE: You know, Alan, I've been thinking over what you said.

ALAN: Oh?

ELISE: And, you know, you're right. There really isn't *any* situation when a broom might come in handy, is there? Not one.

ALAN: Elise...

ELISE: Unless of course you need to be rescued from a highway robber by your best friend's wife. Twice. But what are the odds of that?

(She then sat back and giggled to herself. Sitting there feeling quite the fool, Alan could only shake his head.)

ALAN: I'm not going to hear the end of that, am I?

STEVE: Nope. I told her not to hang the washing out once because it looked like it was about to rain. But she did it anyway. Then the sun came out. That was five years ago and she's *still* throwing at me at every opportunity.

ALAN: Really?

STEVE: Yup.

(Alan sucked his teeth.)

ALAN: Mate?

STEVE: Yeah?

ALAN: If this is what marriage is like, we might as well turn back. Suddenly rescuing Kerry doesn't seem to appealing.

(Steve scoffed.)

STEVE: Mate, you'll be fine. *You're* gonna wear the trousers in *your* love nest, remember? She wouldn't dare nag *you* or throw the past in *your* face. *You're* all man, you.

ALAN: Well, yeah... that's true of course.

STEVE: Is it fuck.

ALAN: It is!

(He ruffled his neck.)

ALAN: But just to be on the safe side, after we've rescued her, if she does turn out to be an almighty pain in my arse, I reserve the right to give her back to Baron Darkley afterwards.

(Steve just smirked at him.)

STEVE: Like she'd let you.

ALAN: It wouldn't be up to her. *I* wear the trousers, remember?

STEVE: Yeah. But she wields a vagina and I think you'll find that's a million times more powerful than a pair of fucking trousers.

ALAN: We'll see.

STEVE: We *will* see

ALAN: I *know* we will.

STEVE: You don't know any fucking thing, mate.

ELISE: Will you two pack it in? Some of us are trying to relax.

(Alan and Steve shared a stealthy grin.)

ELISE: Saving your arses every five minutes is tiring work.

(And lo, their grin was no more.)

A good while later, as the late afternoon wore on, Alan, Steve and Elise found themselves passing a sign which read "Chalbury 2 Miles". Thinking very little of it, the two men merely threw it a glance then forgot all about it. Elise, however, put her knitting down then mused to herself.)

ELISE: I wonder...

(Satisfied with her thoughts on the matter, she then looked to her husband.)

ELISE: Steve, darling?

STEVE: Yes, love?

ELISE: Do you think this Chalbury place has a nice hotel?

STEVE: A hotel?

ELISE: Yeah. It's a big building with guest rooms that people can stay in overnight.

(Steve rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: I know what a hotel is, Elise.

ELISE: Then...

STEVE: But it's way too early to think of stopping for the night. We've got a good few daylight hours left and I'd like to get as close to Owsley as we can before stopping.

(Elise smiled.)

ELISE: Well, that's fair.

(She then sat back again for all of two seconds before sitting forwards once more.)

ELISE: Steve?

STEVE: Yes, love?

ELISE: Do you think Chalbury has a nice tea shop?

(Steve's sighed in defeat then mumbled under his breath.)

STEVE: Oh, here we go.

(He then raised his voice to reply.)

STEVE: Why?

ELISE: So I can buy a cricket bat; why do you think?

STEVE: Because you want to stop for a cup of tea.

(Elise faked surprise.)

ELISE: Stop for a cup of tea? What a marvellous idea. Let's do that.

(Steve shook his head.)

STEVE: Every time we go somewhere...

ELISE: With any luck they'll have those nice cream buns that I like.

STEVE: Elise; babe...

ELISE: Yes, dear?

STEVE: I'm not stopping now, love. It's way too soon. We're on a mission for pity's sake.

ELISE: And?

STEVE: And like I said before, I'd like to get as close to Owsley as possible before we stop.

ELISE: I see.

STEVE: Sorry.

ELISE: Disappointing.

STEVE: Yeah, but...

ELISE: I'll just sit here by myself and reminiscence then.

(Steve sighed in defeat.)

STEVE: Yup, here we go.

ELISE: I'll reminisce about times gone by; back when you used to love me.

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: Good times. I was so happy back then. It truly moved my heart when you stood before the priest and swore to everyone in attendance that you'd spend the rest of your life trying to make me happy. Now you won't even let me have a cup of tea.

(Steve looked to Alan coldly.)

STEVE: You can't even begin to imagine how many times we've had *this* conversation.

ALAN: Every time you say no to her, is it?

STEVE: Without fail.

(He grinned.)

STEVE: Had I known she'd keep throwing it in my face, I'd have written my vows very differently.

(Staring to the sky, Elise then elaborated.)

ELISE: Yup. I do love my afternoon tea. It's my one pleasure in life. A humble life where I don't ask for much. All I need is a roof over my head and a cup of tea in the afternoon. And yet... the man who promised to make me happy for all eternity won't even allow me that much. I feel such a fool now. I married a liar.

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: Yes, liar?

STEVE: Is it really such a crime that I want to get a good distance away from home before we stop?

ELISE: Not at all.

STEVE: Then...

ELISE: The real crime here is the betrayal.

STEVE: Betrayal?

ELISE: Our vows were all a lie!

STEVE: Hardly!

ELISE: And besides, *you* enjoy afternoon tea too.

STEVE: I do, yes. And when I'm not too busy, I enjoy nothing more than joining you. But on this occasion, like so many others, I happen to be doing something.

ELISE: I see.

(She folded her arms indignantly.)

ELISE: Then forget I said anything.

STEVE: Right...

ELISE: Your *wants* supersede my *needs*, after all. I'm just a woman. I don't matter. If you *want* to pursue a pointless whim like riding through that town for nothing, that's way more important than my *needs*.

STEVE: Needs?

ELISE: Yes! I need a cup of tea.

STEVE: You don't need...

ELISE: You don't know what I need! You stopped loving me years ago. Probably ten minutes after you lied to the congregation about loving me forever.

(She sighed.)

ELISE: But I know my place. I'll keep my heartbreak to myself and be quiet.

ALAN: Quiet?

ELISE: Go. You carry on. In fact, let's go all the way to Owsley before we stop. Forget my needs.

(Her brow then furrowed.)

ELISE: And once we arrive, we can find a hotel and get two rooms. One for me and another one for you two.

(She then smiled the falsest of smiles.)

ELISE: Then you can start getting used to sleeping in a bed without *me* in it.

(Steve groaned.)

STEVE: And there it is; without fail.

ELISE: And there what is?

STEVE: The threat to withhold sex.

ELISE: I'm not withholding anything, I just don't want to do it with someone who quite clearly doesn't love me.

(Steve could only give a stunted laugh.)

STEVE: Elise?

ELISE: Yes, dear?

STEVE: Would you like to stop in the next town for a nice cup of tea?

ELISE: Why, I'd love to. What a wonderful suggestion. We should definitely do that.

STEVE: Agreed.

(Elise then sat back and smirked with amusement. Alan on the other hand could only look coldly into the side of his rapidly-shrinking friend's face.)

ALAN: Mate...

STEVE: Don't start, Al. I'm humiliated enough.

ALAN: No, see... I disagree. I don't think you can *be* humiliated *enough*. But I'm gonna give it a go.

STEVE: Mate, don't even bother.

(He furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: I should have just agreed to her request in the first place. I knew what was coming and I knew how it'd end, but for some reason I resisted, like I always do. I never win these battles.

ALAN: Of course not. Pussies *never* win battles. There's a reason they don't let wimps join the army, mate.

(Steve glowered at him.)

STEVE: You said you went flying off the side of a moving cart yesterday, didn't you?

ALAN: And?

STEVE: Do you want to fly off of this one an' all?

ALAN: Like you could shift me, you pussy.

STEVE: Hey!

(He then started to chuckle.)

STEVE: You're a cunt, mate.

ALAN: And you're a wimp.

STEVE: Fuck off.

(He ruffled his neck.)

STEVE: I'm anything but a wimp. I'm just your average married man, Al. Living at the mercy of my wife's vagina.

(He sighed.)

STEVE: Save me!

ALAN: Nope. You're on your own.

(Steve chuckled.)

STEVE: Backstabber.

(Alan grinned then made himself comfortable.)

ALAN: To be honest, mate, it's actually fun watching you two.

STEVE: Is it?

ALAN: Well... it's fun watching *her*, anyway. She's quite the character.

STEVE: Well, there's no denying that.

(Alan's brow then furrowed.)

ALAN: And like you said back when we changed the wheel. She's quite the obstacle. I want to get there as soon as possible.

STEVE: Well, I've got bad news for you there, mate.

ALAN: She's gonna want to stop at every tea shop we pass, isn't she?

STEVE: I won't lie. That's a real possibility.

ALAN: Fuck.

(He sat back and furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: I'm aching to get there as soon as possible, mate. I really am. Knowing Kerry is in that situation; scared and alone... that kills me.

STEVE: I know, mate, but you're going to have to remain calm.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: If we're lucky, and don't pass too many tea shops, we'll be in Owsley by the morning. You can take out your many years of frustration on Baron Darkley's face then.

ALAN: I'm looking forward to it, mate. I really am.

One hour later, Alan and Steve emerged from a quaint tea shop in the town of Chalbury. With an urgency in their step, they returned to the trough where they'd tied up the horse and cart then glanced back at the tea shop doors. Moments later, Elise backed out of the door, speaking loudly to the owner.)

ELISE: Just go easy on the cream next time. And try not to over-brew the tea. Other than that you're doing a fine job.

(Alan and Steve grinned at one another.)

ALAN: What's that all about, mate? That tea was fine.

STEVE: It happens everywhere we go, mate. She can't leave without giving the owner her critique then wonders why we get banished half the time.

ALAN: She's a nutter.

STEVE: Yup. A nutter who's very particular about how she has her tea. Cafe owners can't win.

(They shared an amused laugh then glanced to where Elise was approaching.)

ELISE: What are we waiting for, boys? Time's wasting; we're on a mission, remember?

(She then clambered into the back of the cart.)

ALAN: You cheeky...

STEVE: Let it go, mate.

(He sighed.)

STEVE: Just let it go.

(A few minutes, later, once they were back on the road, Elise fumbled in her bra for a key then used it to unlock a compartment in the cart. Having pulled out her knitting, she then sat back and exhaled.)

ELISE: You know what, boys? I needed that break. I feel much more relaxed now.

STEVE: Good, good.

(He then glanced to the sky.)

STEVE: Let's keep going then and in three hours or so, we can find a hotel for the night.

ALAN: That's if we haven't reached Owsley.

STEVE: Or even if we have.

ALAN: What?

STEVE: I'd rather not go charging into battle after a long day on the reins, mate. *I* need a rest too.

(Alan nodded.)

ALAN: Fair enough. You are getting old, after all.

STEVE: Less of that, sunshine. I'm not that much older than *you*.

ALAN: Nobody would ever guess that though; you look like my dad.

STEVE: Mate...

ALAN: And you move like my grandad.

STEVE: Right...

(He grinned.)

STEVE: It's a true pleasure helping you out like this, mate.

ALAN: Please. Call me son.

STEVE: Call you a cunt? Sure; I can do that.

(He laughed to himself then glanced over his shoulder.)

STEVE: Three more hours, love. Then we can have dinner, a couple of drinks and get ourselves a bed for the night.

ELISE: Perfect.

STEVE: Let's just not stop for tea again.

ELISE: Hmm... you're asking a lot there, my love.

STEVE: I'm really not, am I?

ELISE: We'll see.

(Steve then looked Alan.)

STEVE: If we can keep going without any further stops, I'd say we've done pretty well for one day.

ALAN: I concur.

(He smiled.)

ALAN: We've made good time, despite your lovely wife.

STEVE: I have a *lovely* wife? Where.

(Elise chuckled then slapped him on the back.)

ELISE: Enough of that, you.

(She then looked to Alan.)

ELISE: And what do you mean, *despite his lovely wife*? Cheeky twat. I took out a highwayman without us having to even slow down. That makes up for the time spend at the tea shop. Also, admit it, I've made this trip fun.

ALAN: For who?

(Elise chuckled.)

ELISE: Me, of course.

(She then looked to Steve.)

ELISE: We've had quite a few fun trips over the years, haven't we?

STEVE: God, yes.

ALAN: Travel about a lot, do you?

STEVE: I wouldn't say *a lot*, no.

ELISE: But we do like to go away for a few days here and there.

ALAN: Cool. You can't beat a good break from the norm.

ELISE: Exactly.

(She then started to chuckle.)

ELISE: I think the most fun we had was when we rented that cabin by the lake.

STEVE: Yes! That was brilliant.

ALAN: This story isn't about to get sexual, is it?

ELISE: Don't be a cock.

ALAN: Easy!

STEVE: No, mate; nothing sexual. Not that we'd tell you even if it was.

(He mused to himself.)

STEVE: No, this was a different kind of fun. A very different kind of fun.

ALAN: Oh?

ELISE: We went to...

(She threw out a dismissive wrist.)

ELISE: You tell him. You explain it way better than I do.

STEVE: Fair enough. We had a cabin by the lake, at the edge of the Kamini Forest.

Beautiful it was. Perfect for the three days of rest and relaxation *we* were looking for.

You know? Properly peaceful.

ELISE: Or so we thought.

STEVE: Yeah. See... there was this cunt...

ALAN: All good stories have one.

STEVE: Well yeah, but *this* was a cunt with bagpipes.

ALAN: Ouch. That's too much cunt for me.

STEVE: And for everyone else at the lake, mate.

(He shook his head.)

STEVE: His neighbours had been getting at him for making a racket, you see? They told him to fuck off and learn to play his bagpipes somewhere else; somewhere quiet where he wouldn't disturb anyone.

ELISE: So he came to the bloody lakeside and disturbed us.

STEVE: And then some. Honestly, Al, it was like living next door to a fucking slaughter house. Constant screeching, you know? It was driving us nuts.

(He shrugged.)

STEVE: And you can imagine how well this one took it.

(He nodded towards Elise.)

ELISE: This one did not take it well.

ALAN: I don't suppose you did.

STEVE: She really didn't. After tolerating the racket for an hour, she went outside to the jetty he was standing on, swiped his pipes from him then tossed them in the lake. He was not a happy man.

ALAN: I'll bet.

(Steve grinned.)

STEVE: He called her every name under the sun, so she pushed *him* in the lake as well.

ALAN: Serves him right.

ELISE: Exactly. That's what I said.

(She blushed.)

ELISE: Shame he couldn't swim, really.

STEVE: No, but the other holidaymakers managed to fish him out, so it wasn't the end of the world.

ALAN: Right...

(He then raised a distrusting eyebrow.)

ALAN: So the others fished him out, but not you?

STEVE: Nope. I pretended I didn't see it.

ALAN: Mate...

STEVE: What? Bagpipes, Al! Fucking bagpipes.

ALAN: Yeah... fair enough.

(He smirked.)

ALAN: So that's your fun memory, is it? Having a terrible time at the lake because of a noisy twat with bagpipes. You do lead a full and exciting life.

ELISE: He hasn't finished yet, you cheeky twat.

STEVE: Yeah, that's not even the half of it.

(He smirked.)

STEVE: Rather than accepting he'd been put in his place and opting to keep the noise to the minimum, for some reason, he decided it was war. No joke, mate, he went indoors, got a *second* set of pipes out then climbed onto the rock overlooking the cabins and started playing them, even louder than he had before.

ELISE: The entire place was enraged.

STEVE: Seriously, mate. There was about twenty other people there and we all gathered beneath the rock to shout at him. You know, demanding that he stopped.

ELISE: And he did. Briefly. But only long enough to tell us he was going to keep playing all night if he had to, and if we didn't like it we could all piss off home.

ALAN: Seriously? Didn't you say some of these people fished him from the lake; saved his life.

STEVE: Yeah, but while they were doing it *they* told him to keep the noise down an' all.

ELISE: He didn't like being told.

STEVE: No, he didn't. And the rest of us didn't like the idea of him standing up there all night making that racket.

ELISE: So we charged.

ALAN: Charged?

STEVE: Yup. All of us. Nine burly blokes, their wives and two teenage girls, all rampaged towards him with murder in our eyes.

ELISE: He fled, screaming like a little girl.

STEVE: Which was an oddly refreshing sound after listening to bagpipes.

ELISE: Right?

STEVE: So yeah, he fled into the woods with the rest of us, screaming blue murder.

ELISE: Refusing to give up until we smashed his bagpipes to smithereens.

STEVE: The manhunt was on.

ALAN: Manhunt? That's a bit dramatic, isn't it?

STEVE: It's really not, mate. The twenty of us became a team, hunting him down the next five hours.

ELISE: We only came back because it was getting dark.

ALAN: Damn.

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: Sounds to me like your break was ruined. How was that fun?

STEVE: The forest is really picturesque.

ELISE: And we got to meet lots of nice, like-minded people.

ALAN: Like-minded in the sense you all hate bagpipes?

ELISE: Pretty much.

STEVE: It was more than that though. Having banded together to hunt him down, we kind of formed a bond. A bond that lasted the entire time we were there.

ELISE: We spent every evening cooking meat outside and drinking our bodyweight in whisky together.

STEVE: You know, laughing and joking.

ELISE: Swapping stories and putting the world to rights.

STEVE: And keeping an eye out for a wild-man with bagpipes, of course.

ELISE: Fun!

STEVE: Great fun. Fond memories, mate.

ELISE: The best.

ALAN: Fair play. Sounds great.

(He bit his lip.)

ALAN: So... this piper...

ELISE: Luckily he didn't come back.

STEVE: Yeah. We reckon he walked home.

ELISE: Must have. It would have taken him ages though; there wasn't a house for a full fifty miles. *Two hundred* miles if he went in the wrong direction.

(Alan looked to her wearing a deeply troubled expression.)

ALAN: He *walked* home? *At least* fifty miles???

ELISE: Sure. Why not?

ALAN: Well... I mean it's possible. If you ask me though, it's more likely he got lost and succumbed to the elements. Either that or he fell off a cliff and died. Did nobody alert the authorities that a man had run into the woods and not come back? You know, as per the protocol?

STEVE: Of course not.

(He ruffled his neck.)

STEVE: If we'd done that, they might have brought him back.

ELISE: And brought his sodding bagpipes with him.

STEVE: No fucking thank you, matey.

ELISE: Right?

(Alan bit his lip.)

ALAN: You know for a fact he didn't walk home, don't you?

ELISE: Well...

STEVE: We know nothing. And that's exactly what we'll tell the authorities should they ever enquire.

ELISE: Exactly. What bagpipe player?

STEVE: Bagpipe player? I don't remember seeing one of those.

ELISE: Sorry, can't help you.

(Steve glanced over his shoulder briefly then smiled.)

STEVE: Good times, eh, love?

ELISE: The best.

(She then sat forward and proceeded to massage Steve's shoulders.)

ELISE: What about you, Al? Had any fun trips?

ALAN: A few. Nothing exciting like chasing a piper to his death, but I enjoyed them.

STEVE: Mate, he's death was his own fault.

ELISE: Not that he died. He walked home.

STEVE: Right. Yeah.

(He then glowered at Alan.)

STEVE: This isn't about us. Elise asked about your trips.

ALAN: Right... well... nothing too exciting to report. I usually just head for a quiet beach on the Warrenshire peninsula, put a tent up and do some walking.

ELISE: That sounds really, really dull.

ALAN: It's not. I cook on an open fire then enjoy the sunset with a decent quality bottle of whisky.

STEVE: Ah, see, now you're talking.

ELISE: Yup. Sunset and a good spirit.

STEVE: That's what it's all about.

ELISE: Fuck staying in a tent though.

ALAN: Not a fan, huh?

STEVE: Mate, I've suggested staying in a tent three times and she's vetoed it without discussion.

(He grinned.)

STEVE: Last time, she told me she'd veto my face with her fist if I ever suggested it again, so now we stay in cabins or hotels.

(Alan glanced at him sarcastically.)

ALAN: Married life sounds like a joy.

STEVE: It has its perks, mate.

(He exhaled.)

STEVE: This fine lady sure knows how to give a good massage.

ELISE: A throwback to my formative years working in a brothel.

ALAN: What?

(Steve and Elise both started to laugh.)

ELISE: He's so gullible.

STEVE: He really is.

(Suddenly, a loud yell rose up from behind them once again. At once, they all spun around, and much to their amazement, the same highwayman was trying his luck once again. Hardly able to believe what he was seeing, Steve raised an impressed eyebrow.)

STEVE: He's persistent, you've got to give him that.

ALAN: Yup. But a fool who doesn't know when he's beaten tends to find out the hard way.

(With that, he reached down and grabbed his sword, before starting to clamber into the cart with it. As he did so, the highwayman gained ever closer. Battered and bruised, his face was the picture of rage.)

ROBBER: You're going to pay for what you've done to me!!! And I mean dearly!!!
This outrage will not go unavenged!!!

(Calmly watching him from the cart, Elise rolled into her eyes then delved into her bag.)

ELISE: I've seen more intimidating kittens.

(She then yanked out an apple and threw it at him. Seconds later, it spammed him full in the face, causing him to scream then topple off his horse.)

ROBBER: You fucking...

(He then thudded into the dirt on his neck and fell deathly silent. Despite the carriage swaying and bouncing on the uneven ground, it was quite plain to see he was well and truly dead.)

ELISE: Sorted.

(She then returned to doing her knitting, humming a happy tune as she did so. Half in and half out of the cart still, Alan could only stare at her agape.)

ALAN: What did... where did you... and how?

(Elise glanced up at him.)

ELISE: What?

ALAN: You... where did you learn to throw things like that?

ELISE: Anger management classes.

ALAN: Oh.

(He flinched.)

ALAN: What???

ELISE: Berating me for having a temper; whatever next. Well, I showed her. Three apples, right in the face one after the other. And down she went!

ALAN: Huh?

ELISE: I failed the course, obviously, but at least I learned a new skill.

(Alan continued to stare at her agape for a few moments then Steve set his mind at ease.)

STEVE: She's pulling you leg, mate.

ALAN: Then where *did* she...

STEVE: She grew up on a farm.

ALAN: Oh, right.

(He then sat back down again.)

ALAN: Wait. Hang on. What part of farming involves throwing like that?

STEVE: Well, obviously...

(His face then turned entirely blank.)

STEVE: Actually, it never occurred to me to ask.

ALAN: Cock.

STEVE: I love you too.

(He glanced over his shoulder.)

STEVE: Where did you learn to throw like that, love?

ELISE: On the farm!

STEVE: Yeah, but why?

ELISE: I was bored.

(Steve mused to himself for a moment then looked to Alan.)

STEVE: I always assumed there was a *practical* reason for it. Oh, well.

ALAN: That's... a weird hobby.

(Elise glanced up at him.)

ELISE: No, it isn't. My sisters and I used to line up our dolls on the wall then try to knock them off with stones. It was great fun.

ALAN: Right...

(He then nodded to himself.)

ALAN: That *is* great fun, actually.

ELISE: You did it with your dolls too, did you?

ALAN: No!

(He rolled his eyes.)

ALAN: We used to pass the time like that in the army too. Throwing stones at old, dented rationing cans.

STEVE: Good times.

ALAN: None of us had an aim as good as yours though, Elise.

ELISE: Nor did either of my sisters. My dad said I had such a good aim, I could have gone professional.

ALAN: A professional stone-thrower?

ELISE: He was drunk when he said it.

ALAN: Right...

ELISE: It's a bloody useless skill, I know that.

ALAN: Well, not really. It put a stop to that highwayman, after all.

ELISE: Yeah...

(She smiled.)

ELISE: I guess it did.

(She then resumed her knitting.)

ELISE: Good thing too; you two useless buggers weren't gonna get it done.

(She then sat there giggling to herself, caring very little for the embittered glances coming her way.)

Three hours later, shortly after darkness had descended, the cart continued to roll through the countryside. In the front seat, Alan and Steve looked more than a little disgruntled. In the back, however, Elise was enjoying a peaceful nap. She'd opted to nap in light of the fact that they hadn't passed any towns for two hours. No towns, no tea shops. And it was this lack of civilisation that was bothering the two men in her company.

ALAN: And you're sure you haven't taken a wrong turn somewhere, are you?

STEVE: Do I look like a useless cunt to you, mate?

ALAN: You don't have to be a useless cunt to take a wrong turn, Steve.

STEVE: Well it certainly doesn't make you a useful one.

ALAN: Well...

STEVE: Trust me, we're on the right road.

ALAN: Right. If you're sure.

STEVE: I am!

ALAN: Then that's good enough for me.

(Steve sighed.)

STEVE: The lack of any towns or signposts is worrying though.

ALAN: Not really. If you *didn't* take a wrong turn, we're bound to come across somewhere sooner or later.

STEVE: Yeah, but how much later?

(He nodded towards the horse.)

STEVE: That poor girl must be getting thirsty by now.

ALAN: Yeah...

(He bit his lip.)

ALAN: We've got a decision to make then.

STEVE: Keep going and hope we find somewhere soon or stop and spend the night under the stars.

ALAN: Exactly.

STEVE: Well, to be honest, right now, I'm in favour of continuing on.

ALAN: Well, we kinda have to really. Can't stop here. There's no water for the horse.

STEVE: I know that, mate. I wasn't thinking about stopping here!

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: What I'm saying is, if we pass a river in the next five minutes or so, I'd rather give it a miss and keep on going.

ALAN: Right.

STEVE: Of course, the trouble with that is, we might not see another body of water for hours.

ALAN: It's a tough one.

STEVE: It is.

(He grimaced.)

STEVE: If we don't find water for the horse, she might die. And if we end up having to camp under the stars, *I* might die.

ALAN: Why would *you* die?

STEVE: Well...

(He nodded towards Elise.)

STEVE: She does not like the idea of sleeping in the open.

ALAN: Yeah, but we may have no choice.

STEVE: No, mate; you're not listening. When I say she doesn't like the idea of sleeping in the open, I mean she really, really *hates* the idea. She hates it more than camping!

(He shuddered.)

STEVE: It will not go down well.

ALAN: You worry too much.

STEVE: Do I? Have you ever been slapped incessantly by an enraged woman then chased down the street as she tries to batter you with her broom?

(Alan chuckled.)

ALAN: Not recently, no.

STEVE: I have. And like I said, there's a real chance I might die.

ALAN: Right...

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: Happens to you a lot does it?

STEVE: No, mate. Just the once.

(He grimaced.)

STEVE: When I took her on a surprise trip and expected her to sleep under the stars.

ALAN: I see.

STEVE: So, yeah, I definitely favour continuing on until we find a hotel, unless we absolutely have no choice but to stop.

ALAN: Gotcha.

(He then shrugged.)

ALAN: But you never know, sleeping out under the stars on a warm night like this might change her mind about it all. I mean, if we can find a quiet turn off next to a quaint looking lake or something, she might learn to love the outdoor life.

(In that moment, he suddenly felt a great sense of foreboding and a chill ran down his spine. With a gulp he then slowly twisted and glanced behind him. Elise was awake, sitting forward and glowering at him.)

ALAN: Um...

ELISE: Are you trying to sell my husband the idea of making me sleep outdoors?

ALAN: Um... no?

ELISE: Are you sure, because that's what it sounded like?

ALAN: I was just saying...

ELISE: Well don't!

(She furrowed her brow then hoisted the hem of her skirt from her ankles.)

ELISE: See these ankles? Do you?

ALAN: I... yes.

ELISE: They're like prime beef to a mosquito! The little blood-sucking bastards consider me a one-woman banquet. I only slept outside once and my ankles ending up looking like a sweaty teenager's face! Never again!

ALAN: Right. Well that's...

ELISE: That's what? Did you think I wear skirts this long because they're sexy?

ALAN: No!

ELISE: They're not. I look like I wrapped myself in an old curtain because I couldn't be bothered to get dressed properly. They're extremely *unsexy*. So *unsexy*, in fact, that if I was a man, I'd have left myself years ago for not making an effort.

ALAN: I think they look fine.

ELISE: Then you lie!

STEVE: Actually, Elise, I like them too.

ELISE: You do? What's wrong with you both? Are you blind?

ALAN: No!

ELISE: Gay?

ALAN: What?

ELISE: I look ridiculous. And I've looked ridiculous for years. Not because I want to, but because if I don't, mosquitoes will eat my ankles. So if you think I'm bloody well camping out tonight, you can think again!

STEVE: Babe...

ELISE: Don't babe me. Keep going and find a hotel.

ALAN: But if we can't?

ELISE: Then I'll wreak bloody vengeance on the pair of you. For every bite I get, you'll be getting a wallop from my broom!

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: Don't Elise me, Steven; you know how I feel about sleeping outdoors. If you'd known it was a risk, you should have told me and we could have stayed in that little town we had tea in!

STEVE: Yeah, but...

ELISE: No, buts. If you...

STEVE: Just bloody listen, will you?

ELISE: Excuse me?

STEVE: Look ahead, love. There's a town.

(Elise's eyes lit up.)

ELISE: There is? There is!

(She clenched her fists.)

ELISE: Thank the stars. I do hate having to chase you with my broom.

STEVE: It doesn't *look* like you hate it.

ELISE: I hide it well.

STEVE: Right...

ELISE: Find an inn, darling. There's bound to be one.

STEVE: Of course.

(Elise then glowered at Alan.)

ELISE: We'll only need one room though, seeing as your friend here wants to sleep under the stars.

ALAN: I didn't say I *wanted* to.

ELISE: Oh, that's right. You wanted *me* to! What did I ever do to you???

ALAN: Elise...

STEVE: Babe, relax. We'll get two rooms, have something to eat then relax with a whisky before bed, okay? As soon as we reach the town's hostelry.

ELISE: Are you sure he wants a room?

STEVE: I am, yes. And seeing as he's paying, I reckon it'd make sense to stop getting on his case.

ELISE: Oh.

(She then ruffled her neck.)

ELISE: Make sure it's a nice room.

(Alan chuckled.)

ALAN: Only the best for you, Elise.

ELISE: Good. Glad you agree.

(She then sat back, leaving Alan grinning to himself.)

ALAN: She's fun.

STEVE: Yet?

ALAN: Terrifying.

STEVE: Yup. That's my Elise.

(They then glanced forwards and smiled at the sight of an inn at the edge of town.)

ALAN: Well thank fuck for that.

STEVE: Yup. That's exactly what I was about to say.

Two hours later, having booked into the hotel and enjoyed an evening meal, Alan, Steve and Elise retired to the hotel lounge to enjoy a glass of whisky in front of the open fire. Seated in leather easy chairs, they couldn't have looked more relaxed. After what had been a long and tiring day, this was most definitely the perfect way to end their evening. Despite his calm exterior, however, Alan still felt somewhat uneasy. He wouldn't be able to relax properly until he knew the love of his life, Kerry, was safe. As such, he stared into the flames and sighed several times; unable to stop himself from fretting over it. As he did so, however, Steve spoke up from his side with a deeply furrowed brow.)

STEVE: Alan! Hey!

(Alan said nothing and continued to stare hypnotically into the fireplace.)

STEVE: Oi! Turnip!

(He then slapped his arm.)

STEVE: Alan!!!

(Alan flinched then threw a baffled glance in his direction.)

ALAN: What? What? What's wrong?

STEVE: Mate...

ALAN: Sorry, I was miles away.

STEVE: Clearly.

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: Elise was talking to you.

ALAN: Oh?

(He then looked to Elise.)

ALAN: Sorry, what were you saying?

(Elise stared straight through him.)

ELISE: What?

ALAN: You were saying?

ELISE: No, I wasn't. I don't know where Steve's getting that from.

STEVE: Elise!

ELISE: *I* never said a word. Steve just wanted you to stop daydreaming, probably.

(She furrowed her brow.)

ELISE: And I don't appreciate being used an excuse to make it happen.

STEVE: Seriously?

ELISE: Yes!

ALAN: Right... well... if nobody has anything to say, I'll go back to staring into space.

STEVE: Go nuts, mate.

(He glowered at Elise.)

STEVE: I won't be distracting you again; not on her account, don't worry.

(He shook his head.)

STEVE: Trying to make me look like a tit at every given opportunity. It's not on.

ELISE: I didn't.

(She then smiled at Alan.)

ELISE: Though seeing as you're lucid, Alan, there was one thing I wanted to ask you.

STEVE: Would it happen to be the same thing you asked him twice already, Elise?

ELISE: I have no idea what you mean.

(She then looked to Alan again.)

ELISE: I just wondered; what was this Kerry of yours like?

STEVE: And that's the third time she's asked you, mate. You ignored her twice, so I slapped you on the arm to make you snap out of it.

ELISE: Oh, Steven; why must you lie?

(Steve could only give a stifled laugh.)

STEVE: You drive me fucking bonkers, you do, woman.

(Elise grinned.)

ELISE: You love it.

(She then looked to Alan once more.)

ELISE: Well?

ALAN: What was Kerry like?

ELISE: Yeah!

ALAN: In what way?

ELISE: What do you mean, in what way? In any way. Just tell us about her.

ALAN: Oh.

(He shrugged.)

ALAN: She was nice.

(Silence then descended.)

ELISE: Right...

(She rolled her eyes.)

ELISE: I'm so glad we had this in-depth discussion.

ALAN: Well what do you want me to say?

ELISE: Something a bit more substantial than that. I'm letting my husband go into battle on her account tomorrow, so the least I deserve is some kind of insight as to why she's so important to you.

ALAN: Well...

STEVE: Hold on, hold on. Before you address that point, Alan...

(He glowered at Elise.)

STEVE: Letting me? You're *letting* me go into battle?

ELISE: Am I wrong?

STEVE: Yes! That's the second time you've said that and I'm not having it. I let it slide the first time, but now I'm taking a stand. You're not *letting* me go. Nothing could be further from the truth.

ELISE: I see.

(Elise smiled at Alan.)

ELISE: You're on your own tomorrow, Alan; apparently I'm not letting Steve go.

STEVE: I didn't mean it like that. I meant, saying you're *letting* me go is just wrong.

I'm going because, as the man of the house, I've made that decision. And as my wife, you're just going to have to accept it. I have free will and *I've* decided to go. You *letting me* go, doesn't even enter the equation.

(He nodded sternly.)

STEVE: So there.

(Elise sighed.)

ELISE: That's very rude of you, Steven. I'm all upset now. You never used to speak to me like that. This Alan person is clearly a bad influence.

ALAN: Eh?

ELISE: You're not to hang around with him in future. Tomorrow, we'll go straight home and he can go on and fight the baron by himself.

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: And that's my final word on it.

STEVE: No... Elise... you can't...

(He furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: We can't go home!

ELISE: Why not?

STEVE: Because I promised I'd go and fight the baron with Alan.

ELISE: Well, tough.

STEVE: Don't be like that, Elise!

ELISE: No? Why not? Give me one good reason why I should let you go.

STEVE: I already did!

ELISE: And what was that?

STEVE: Because we promised Alan we'd help him out!

(Elise scoffed.)

ELISE: And I should you *let you go* just because of that?

STEVE: Yes! It's the right thing to do.

ELISE: Fine!

(She beamed fiendishly.)

ELISE: If that's why you think I ought to *let you go* that's fine by me. I'll let you go.

STEVE: Thank...

(He then flinched in horror.)

STEVE: No... no... you're not *letting me*...

(He then groaned in defeat.)

STEVE: Fuck.

(Alan chuckled.)

ALAN: You walked right into that, mate.

STEVE: Yeah, yeah. For fuck sake. Well played, Elise.

ELISE: Of course.

(Alan laughed.)

ALAN: Brilliantly played, actually. You said she wasn't *letting you go* and two seconds later, you were begging her to *let you go*. Fucking priceless.

(He grinned.)

ALAN: You're such a knob.

STEVE: Fuck off, you. I'm not a knob; I'm just your typical married man. I live with a minion of the devil. You've got it all to come, sunshine. Once that ring's on Kerry's finger, she'll be doing the same evil shit to you.

ALAN: She won't.

STEVE: No? What makes you so sure?

(Alan smirked.)

ALAN: The fact I'm a man and not a pussy.

STEVE: Yeah... you're a prick.

ALAN: Yeah, and us pricks fuck pussies like you.

ELISE: Really? You want to fuck my husband? How gay are you?

ALAN: Steady on!

STEVE: No, *you* steady on. My arse is a one-way door, mate. Exit only! Shit can come out, but none shall pass! Bloody poof.

(Alan glowered at him for a moment then started to laugh.)

ALAN: I've missed talking bollocks with good people.

STEVE: Same!

ELISE: Thanks a bunch.

STEVE: I didn't mean you.

(He then rolled at his eyes at his giggling wife.)

STEVE: But you knew that.

ELISE: I did, yes.

(Elise then smiled warmly at Alan.)

ELISE: So? Are you going to tell us about Kerry or not? I want, nay, deserve to know what my husband will be fighting for.

(Alan nodded.)

ALAN: That's fair.

(He puffed out.)

ALAN: It's hard to know where to start really.

ELISE: Try the beginning.

ALAN: Oh. Okay.

(He smiled.)

ALAN: She had...

STEVE: Big knockers?

ELISE: Steve!

STEVE: What? I need to know.

ELISE: Why?

STEVE: Because if he thinks I'm going to all that effort to rescue some tart who's not even endowed, he can forget it. He'd soon get bored with having nothing to fondle and kick her to the curb, rendering all our effort a massive waste of time.

ELISE: Fair comment.

(As Steve and Elise shared a childish giggle, Alan shook his head.)

ALAN: For fuck sake, Steve.

STEVE: Just saying.

ALAN: Then relax, her rack was imperious.

ELISE: Not bigger than mine, I hope. If it *is* then he's not going. Quite frankly, I don't need the competition.

(Steve and Elise then giggled together again, forcing a furrow onto Alan's brow.)

ALAN: Seriously? You ask me what she's like, nay, *demand to know* what she's like then won't even bloody listen.

STEVE: Right. Yeah. Sorry, mate. We're all ears.

ELISE: Ears and boobs.

STEVE: Speak for yourself.

ELISE: I was.

STEVE: Right.

ELISE: You were saying, Alan?

(Alan gave a stifled laugh then began.)

ALAN: Fine. You asked why she's so important to me, right?

ELISE: I did, yes.

ALAN: Well, at the risk of you two mocking me, being with her was the happiest time of my life.

STEVE: Why would I mock that?

ALAN: Because you're an asshole.

(He grinned.)

ALAN: If you don't mind me saying.

(Steve shrugged.)

STEVE: Harsh, but I'll allow it.

ALAN: Thank you.

ELISE: So, why, Alan? What about her made you happy? Details, man; details.

(Alan shrugged.)

ALAN: I don't know. We just had a lot of fun together. We had a similar sense of humour, I guess.

(He bit his lip.)

ALAN: Actually, that's bollocks. If we had the same sense of humour we'd probably clash. It's far more honest to say, we appreciated *each other's* sense of humour. So, we laughed a lot. At silly things. You know, like lovers do.

(Steve and Elise just smiled at each other.)

STEVE: Uh-huh.

ELISE: Yup.

ALAN: So, yeah. That's why I've never forgotten her. I miss my best friend, I guess.

ELISE: Aw.

(She smiled.)

ELISE: So how did you meet?

ALAN: Well...

(He scratched his neck nervously.)

ALAN: I was out with a friend of mine, heading to the pub when she passed me with her mother. I'd never seen a beauty like it, so I kinda... lost myself a bit.

(He winced.)

ALAN: I mean... I didn't *mean* to say it out loud, but...

ELISE: Say what?

ALAN: Look at the body on that.

(Steve chuckled.)

STEVE: You old romantic you.

ALAN: I know. I was so fucking embarrassed. It worked though. Her mum was looking to marry her off, and didn't care who to, so set us up on a date.

(He chuckled.)

ALAN: She was *not* happy about that. She spent the first half hour of our date refusing to look at me, then the next half an hour telling me she doesn't care what her mother says, she's not gonna marry just anybody to appease her stupid family.

STEVE: Ouch.

ALAN: Yeah, it kinda sucked, but I actually felt sorry for her. Her mum was clearly a bit of a knob, so I sympathised with her.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: She accepted I was being sincere and by the end of the evening we were laughing a joking together.

(He shrugged.)

ALAN: And we were together right up until I was called to fight in the war.

(His brow furrowed over.)

ALAN: I told her we'd get married after my service was over. And I meant it. I'd given her a ring and everything.

STEVE: I know you meant it, mate. You could wait to get home.

ALAN: I couldn't. Being called up was a right kick in the cock. I pined for her for ages.

STEVE: Hence your nickname; the lovesick turnip.

ALAN: Yeah...

(He glowered at him.)

ALAN: Thanks for saddling me with that, by the way.

STEVE: Just doing my bit for the war effort, mate.

ALAN: Right...

(He then looked to Elise.)

ALAN: I don't know if Steve told you, but before my service ended, this complete cunt called Harry Brooks was shipping out. *His* service was over. So I asked him to deliver a message to Kerry for me. Just that I loved her and I'd be home next year to walk her down the aisle.

(His face turned red with rage.)

ALAN: He told her I was dead.

ELISE: Seriously?

ALAN: Yeah. And he took it upon himself to comfort her. The fucker won her over then left town with her and I never did find out where they went.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: Not until I ran into Harry earlier. Baron Darkley stole her from him at knife point. Now *I'm* coming to steal her back.

(Elise nodded.)

ELISE: So she's the love of your life then.

ALAN: Pretty much.

ELISE: Tragically torn away from you by a horrible bastard.

ALAN: Uh-huh.

ELISE: Then torn away from the horrible bastard by an even more horrible bastard.

ALAN: Yeah, that pretty much sums it up.

ELISE: I see.

(She looked to Steve.)

ELISE: Sounds like something worth fighting *for*.

STEVE: I reckon so, yeah.

ELISE: Then make sure you win that fight tomorrow, and make sure you win it well.

(She nodded.)

ELISE: Then you can bring Kerry back into the arms of her true love, where she belongs.

STEVE: Right.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: It's a noble cause. We have truth and justice on our side, Elise. You know what that means?

ELISE: Go on?

STEVE: Fuck all.

ELISE: Oh!

(She then glowered at her giggling husband.)

ELISE: Such a child.

(She looked to Alan.)

ELISE: I married this idiot.

ALAN: Well, neither of you made a good choice really, to be honest.

(He then sat there and chuckled into his whisky glass, ignoring the scowls he was receiving.)

ELISE: Steve?

STEVE: Yes, love?

ELISE: Your friend is a cunt.

STEVE: He knows.

(He then sat back and nodded.)

STEVE: Despite what I said about having justice on our side meaning fuck all, Elise, the fact this battle means a lot to Alan here, does give us a *bit* of a boost.

ELISE: Oh?

STEVE: Yeah. It's personal, you see? So there's no doubt he'll give it everything he's got. Anyone we come up against, on the other hand, will only be following orders. Just like in the war. Whereas *we* were fighting for the pride of our nation, they were only fighting because they'd been forced to. Fighting for a cause they didn't even believe in. You'd be surprised how much difference that makes on the battlefield.

(Elise nodded.)

ELISE: Good to know. That's eased my worries a bit at least.

STEVE: It gives me a lot of confidence too.

(He smiled.)

STEVE: Once we finally get to Owsley tomorrow, the nerves will probably jangle a bit, but right now I feel pretty confident.

ALAN: Same here, mate.

(He shrugged.)

ALAN: I just hope Owsley isn't far from here.

(Just then, a male resident of the hotel sauntered past behind them.)

RESIDENT: You're already in Owsley, you giant wazzock.

(Alan, Steve and Elise all gasped in his direction.)

STEVE: This is Owsley?

(The resident shrugged.)

RESIDENT: Aye, where did you think it was?

ELISE: We had no idea.

STEVE: Didn't see a road sign for this town.

RESIDENT: Well you wouldn't. The bastard blew down in that storm last week and Harold hasn't bothered fixing it yet.

(Alan bit his lip.)

ALAN: So we're here. We're already here.

RESIDENT: Aye.

ELISE: How lovely.

(She smiled.)

ELISE: Is there a nice tea shop in town?

RESIDENT: Aye, just opposite Baron Darkley's place, actually.

ALAN: Darkley!

(He then jumped to his feet and growled.)

ALAN: We're in town and so is that baron. You know what that means?

STEVE: Yup!

(He then jumped to his feet and looked firmly into Alan's eyes.)

STEVE: It means I'm going to bed, so we can set out fresh and alert, first thing in the morning!

ALAN: Exactly!

(He flinched.)

ALAN: No. Wait! The morning?

STEVE: Yes! I'm knackered, Al.

ALAN: Steve!

STEVE: The baron can wait!

ELISE: He's right.

ALAN: Fine!

(He growled.)

ALAN: Then I shall go on alone.

(He looked to the resident.)

ALAN: Where do I find this Baron Darkley's residence?

RESIDENT: Right...

(He then headed away chuckling to himself.)

RESIDENT: Like you could miss it.

ALAN: I see.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: Then, I'll just...

STEVE: Charge out there in the darkness, tired from a long day and get killed?

ALAN: No, I'll...

ELISE: Alan!

ALAN: What?

ELISE: Don't be a cock!

ALAN: Excuse me?

ELISE: Sleep first. Then have a hearty breakfast.

STEVE: The tried and trusted pre-battle ritual of anyone who *isn't* a complete bell end.

(Alan looked to him uneasily.)

ALAN: I know what you're saying, but I really want to...

STEVE: Only a bell end would charge into battle after downing a few shots of whisky an' all.

ALAN: Mate...

(He then sighed in frustration.)

ALAN: You're right, of course. Tosser.

STEVE: Thanks.

(He then sat back down again.)

ALAN: Tomorrow it is then.

STEVE: Good man.

ELISE: Yup.

(Steve then shrugged, sat forwards and looked to Elise.)

STEVE: Bed?

ELISE: *You're* a bed!

STEVE: What?

ELISE: Let me finish my drink first.

STEVE: Right...

(He then sat back again.)

STEVE: Alan, mate; keep as calm as you can tonight. Remember what we said during the war? Worrying about a battle and overthinking the outcome is self-defeating. You'll

just keep yourself awake. Satisfy yourself with knowing it won't be long before you see Kerry again and fall asleep thinking relaxing thoughts.

ALAN: I'll try, mate.

ELISE: Failing that, I could always knock you out with my broom. You'd definitely sleep then.

ALAN: Right...

(He then allowed himself an amused chuckle.)

ALAN: That's a kind offer, Elise, but I think I'll stick with Steve's method.

ELISE: Oh, well. Your loss.

(They shared a warm smile.)

ALAN: To the morrow.

(He then downed the rest of his whisky in one swig.)

The following morning, with a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast behind them, Alan, Steve and Elise emerged from their hotel and out in the streets of Owsley.

Stopping to glance up and down the road, Steve nodded to himself.

STEVE: Yup. It looks sod all like I remember it.

ELISE: Well it was a while ago, dear.

STEVE: True.

(He shrugged then looked to Alan.)

STEVE: Come on, let's go and bag you a fiancée.

(He then headed up the road.)

STEVE: I'm looking forward to you learning the harsh realities of married life.

ELISE: Nice. I'm standing right here.

STEVE: And you were probably thinking the same thing.

ELISE: That your friend deserves to suffer?

(She smiled then headed after him.)

ELISE: Absolutely.

(Left behind, Alan chuckled to himself then started to follow on.)

ALAN: Don't worry about me, you two; I'll be fine.

ELISE: Aw. He's so innocent.

ALAN: Right...

(As they continued on up the high street, Steve glanced from one side of the road to the other then bit his lip.)

STEVE: I hope it's not too far away. I mean, for all we know, Owsley might be quite a big town.

ALAN: I doubt it, mate. If it was, there'd have been more than one signpost for it.

STEVE: Maybe...

ELISE: No, he's right. It's definitely a small town. If it was a big place it'd have a council that employs people to do things like fix its signposts. This place has some bloke called Harold, according to that person at the hotel.

STEVE: Yeah... that's proper small town stuff, isn't it?

ALAN: Yup.

STEVE: In that case, this Baron Darkley's place shouldn't be too hard to find.

ALAN: Here's hoping.

(Elise then spoke up in an exciting voice.)

ELISE: There it is!

STEVE: You've found the baron's place?

ELISE: No, silly. Well, maybe. But more importantly, I've found the tea shop.

(She pointed to a shop a short distance down the road with a tea pot for a sign.)

ELISE: That's me sorted.

(She beamed.)

ELISE: Good luck, boys. Meet me in there when you're done.

(As she started to head away, Steve quickly grabbed her arm.)

STEVE: Wait a minute.

ELISE: What for?

STEVE: What for? I'm going into battle. Don't you at least want to see me off with a hug or something?

(Elise shrugged.)

ELISE: No, I'm good.

STEVE: Babe...

ELISE: Oh, stop making a fuss; you'll be fine.

(She then headed off down the road excitedly, leaving a somewhat miffed husband in her wake.)

STEVE: Right. So no hug for me then.

(Alan grimaced at him uncomfortably.)

ALAN: Yeah... she does love you, right?

STEVE: Of course, she does.

(He shrugged then turned to face Alan.)

STEVE: She just has no doubt whatsoever that I'll come back in one piece.

ALAN: Yeah?

STEVE: Yeah. She believes in me, you see? So me going into battle is no big deal, I guess. I've done it a million times and come back alive, after all, so why not this time? That's what *she*'s thinking.

ALAN: Yeah, but she does know there's been a lot of close calls over the years, right?

STEVE: Well... no, actually.

ALAN: No?

(Steve sucked his teeth then scratched the back of his head nervously.)

STEVE: Yeah... I may have *exaggerated* about my prowess on the battlefield a little bit, you see?

(Alan gave him a belittling glance.)

ALAN: Oh, yeah?

STEVE: Yeah...

ALAN: Such as?

(Steve grimaced at him uneasily.)

STEVE: Well... remember that time when we spotted an enemy spying post on top of that hill?

ALAN: That happened a few times.

STEVE: Yeah, but I'm talking about the time a dozen of us went up there to investigate, only to find there was only one enemy soldier occupying it.

(Alan looked enlightened.)

ALAN: I remember. Billy Lyons polished him off. Or Dandy as we used to call him.

STEVE: Yeah, that time.

(He winced.)

STEVE: Well, when I told Elise about that mission, I kind of gave her the details back to front.

ALAN: Back to front?

STEVE: Yeah. I let her think there was just me and ten of them.

ALAN: Wow. Seriously?

STEVE: Well, yeah.

(He shrugged.)

STEVE: Of course, I did. I mean, I didn't tell her much about my time in the army, but on the rare occasions when I *did* mention my heroics, she seemed to get a bit, you know... frisky.

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: So, from time to time, if I recalled a mission we undertook, I'd...

ALAN: Lie your arse off?

STEVE: I'd embellish it.

ALAN: By lying your arse off.

STEVE: Fine. Call it what you like, I don't care. It worked like a charm; every time.

Women find tales of their man in battle sexy. And I make no apology for exploiting that.

(He beamed.)

STEVE: This one time, she was in a bad mood after having a row with the neighbour, so I decided to cheer her up by telling her how I single-handedly faced down a cannon.

ALAN: And she believed you???

STEVE: Well, yeah. Because I made it *sound* believable. I told her I dodged two cannon balls while I charged then mowed down the three cunts operating it.

(He exhaled.)

STEVE: She forgot all about her row with the neighbour and came onto me. We ended up going for it, right there on the kitchen table.

ALAN: Blimey.

STEVE: Little Emma was mortified. In hindsight it would have been polite to wait for her to finish her dinner first, but she soon got the message and fled.

(Alan looked straight through him.)

ALAN: Please tell me you're joking.

STEVE: I can only wish I was, mate.

(He then shrugged.)

STEVE: But like I told her that evening. At least now she knows mummy and daddy love each other very much.

ALAN: Again, you're kidding, right?

(Steve just smiled at him solemnly.)

STEVE: Nope.

ALAN: Fuck sake, mate.

STEVE: Relax, mate. She was fine. Okay, it was a lot for a thirteen year old to take in, but after a month or so, she learned how to look us both in the eye again, and now she's over it.

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: And before you say it, the fact she chose to attend a university right over the other side of the country has nothing do with that incident. She's over it.

ALAN: I never said a word, mate.

STEVE: Right.

ALAN: There *are* no words at a time like this, you see? So, I'll just shake my head at you and move on.

(Steve watched him walk away then allowed himself a chuckle.)

STEVE: Git.

(He then followed on.)

STEVE: So, according to that local fella at the hotel, the Darkley place is opposite the tea shop.

ALAN: So he said, yeah.

(Heading towards the tea shop and glancing across the road, he sucked his teeth.)

ALAN: Either he was lying or the baron lives in a bush.

STEVE: What?

ALAN: There's nothing opposite the tea shop except two bushes.

STEVE: What the hell?

ALAN: Oh, wait.

(He then picked up the pace.)

ALAN: There's a road between the two bushes.

STEVE: A-ha.

(They then picked up the pace and hurried to the end of the road between the two bushes.

Once there, Steve glanced back at the tea shop then stared down the road ahead.)

STEVE: Well... this is definitely it.

ALAN: Yup. When that resident inferred that we couldn't miss it, he wasn't kidding, was he?

STEVE: He really wasn't.

(They then stared down the road in silent awe. The road was in fact a one hundred metre driveway, leading to a large, resplendent manor house.)

ALAN: So... this bloke's worth a fair bit.

STEVE: Meaning he can afford more than a few former soldiers to guard the place.

ALAN: Hmm...

(He nodded.)

ALAN: That's just as we suspected though.

STEVE: It's pretty much what Harry Brooks *told* you was the case, wasn't it?

ALAN: Yeah.

STEVE: So it changes nothing. We knew we were gonna be up against it before we set out.

ALAN: True.

(He looked to Steve.)

ALAN: This is gonna suck.

STEVE: Royally.

(Alan bit his lip then afforded himself a chuckle.)

ALAN: If only you *were* as tough as you made out in your stories for Elise.

STEVE: It would be nice wouldn't it? Sadly, I'm not.

ALAN: And I'm not as tough as I pretended to be in *my* stories either.

STEVE: Huh?

ALAN: What? You didn't think you were the *only* one who likes to embellish, did you?
(He chuckled.)

ALAN: The barmaids in my pub think I held off ten blokes with swords while their innocent hostages escaped.

STEVE: Innocent hostages? The enemy never took hostages.

ALAN: Yeah, but they didn't know that. And women love a good hero story, especially when it comes to rescuing an innocent family with several small children.

STEVE: Mate...

ALAN: Mate, nothing. That story got me laid several times.

STEVE: Then I guess you have no regrets.

ALAN: Only that I didn't tell it sooner.

(They laughed together then glanced up the road. In that moment, something switched. An air of seriousness suddenly washed over them and their brows furrowed. Fun time was over. Just like during their army days, the last jokes and crazy anecdotes had been passed and they were ready to focus on the task in hand. Psyched and ready, Alan ruffled his neck then glanced to Steve.)

ALAN: Ready?

STEVE: You fucking bet I am.

ALAN: Then let's get this shit done.

(With that, they charged down the road towards the manor then darted behind a tree. The road was lined with trees which they instinctively knew to use as cover as they made their approach.)

STEVE: Who's gonna lead?

ALAN: You're the senior.

STEVE: Then follow me.

ALAN: Okay.

(Steve then slid past the tree and darted to the next one with Alan close behind. Once there, he nodded then glanced over his shoulder.)

STEVE: So far, so good.

ALAN: Obviously, mate. We've advanced to the tune of one tree.

STEVE: And it went well.

(He then rolled his eyes before charging onwards to the next tree in the row. Seconds later, Alan arrived behind him.)

STEVE: We're doing great.

ALAN: Yes, but we'd be doing great quicker if we didn't keep stopping to hear your assessment.

STEVE: I'm being cautious.

ALAN: Steve, these trees are five feet apart. Let's *at least* make it three trees further down the avenue before we speak again.

STEVE: Right.

(He shrugged.)

STEVE: Suit yourself.

(He raced to the next tree before skimming past it to the next one. It was a process he then repeated once more. Alan was right on his heels all the way there. Upon arriving, Steve nodded then glanced behind him.)

STEVE: Happy now? That was three trees.

ALAN: Four if you include the one we started at.

STEVE: Yeah, but why would we?

ALAN: Well...

STEVE: Look, I don't want to hear it. Let's just keep going until we're at the last tree, then we can discuss it further.

ALAN: No more pointless progress updates? Blimey. What a delightful idea; I wish I'd thought of that.

STEVE: Mate...

ALAN: Are you going, or what?

(Steve furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: Fine.

(They then hurried onwards ducking low, skimming past all the trees until they arrived at the very last one in the row before the Baron's impressive abode.)

STEVE: Made it.

ALAN: I can see that, mate. I'm six inches behind your shoulder; looking straight at you.

STEVE: Right, well...

(He then gave a stifled laugh.)

STEVE: I forgot you were like that.

ALAN: Like what?

STEVE: Always giving the leader grief with sarcastic retorts.

ALAN: And why would I change? It was a habit that served me... badly, come to think of it.

STEVE: You got reprimanded *a lot*.

ALAN: Yeah. I lost my break privileges at least once a week.

STEVE: As self-defeating dipshits so often do.

(Alan chuckled.)

ALAN: I'd love to dispute that, but alas, the evidence suggests you might have a point.

STEVE: Yes, yes it does.

(He then stood tall and pressed himself against the tree.)

STEVE: So? What do you reckon?

ALAN: As poses it go, it's interesting, but...

STEVE: What do you reckon our next move should be, I mean!

(Grinning, Alan glanced around him then bit his lip.)

ALAN: That's worrying.

STEVE: What is it? Guards?

ALAN: No, mate. The house is purple.

STEVE: What?

ALAN: We couldn't see the upper levels from the bottom of the avenue, but now we're here... the top half of the house is painted purple.

STEVE: And how's that worrying?

ALAN: Well... purple, mate.

STEVE: What about it?

ALAN: Who lives in a purple house? An evil bastard, that's who.

(Steve glanced straight through him.)

STEVE: What logic at you basing that on?

ALAN: Well... it's an evil colour.

STEVE: Alan... mate...

ALAN: Gonna tell me, I'm wrong? This Baron fella kidnapped the love of my life. Now at the risk of sounding like a drama queen, I'd say that pretty much qualifies as an evil deed.

STEVE: I'm not disputing that, mate. I'm just saying, the colour of his fucking house has got fuck all to do with it! I'm sure there's a lot of loving, friendly and wholesome people in the world who also live in a purple house.

ALAN: I've never met one! And besides, where does he get the pigment to make purple paint?

STEVE: Beetroot, probably.

ALAN: Nah. Blood, mate.

STEVE: Blood???

ALAN: Yeah!

STEVE: Blood???

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: If he'd mixed blood into the paint, the paint would come out pink, you cock.

ALAN: Not necessarily.

(He then pointed to his cranium.)

ALAN: It depends on the colour of the paint he mixed it *with*!

(Steve had never looked so unimpressed in all his life.)

STEVE: Al?

ALAN: Yes?

STEVE: The colour he chose to paint the top level of his house has got fuck all bearing on our mission, and while we're at it, it more than likely has fuck all to do with his personality either.

ALAN: See? More than likely, you said. Can't rule it out though, can you?

STEVE: Alan!

ALAN: What?

STEVE: Let's just decide on our next move, shall we?

ALAN: Oh. Okay.

STEVE: What do you reckon? Sneak round the back of the house, maybe? Find a window, perhaps?

ALAN: Hmm... we could, but that might increase the chances of us being spotted.

STEVE: Yes, but we're gonna be spotted sooner or later; that's unavoidable.

ALAN: True.

(He then bit his lip.)

ALAN: Actually, mate, there might be a far easier way.

STEVE: Oh?

ALAN: We're out in the sticks here, Steve. The great green countryside, where everyone knows each other and crime just never happens.

STEVE: Well... okay... and what's your point?

ALAN: People in places like this don't lock their front doors.

(Steve looked at him for a moment, pondering his words, then grimaced.)

STEVE: It's not a bad theory, but *this* guy, this Baron Darkley is a criminal. Well, criminals tend to be paranoid about *other* criminals, don't they? So I bet this fella keeps his doors bolted at all times.

ALAN: Hmm... you might be right.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: But then again, you might be wrong.

STEVE: Well, I'm definitely one of the two, yes.

ALAN: I say we try the front door. If it's locked, what have we lost? We can just head around the back like you suggested.

STEVE: Sounds good to me.

(Alan crossed his fingers.)

ALAN: With any luck, the door will be open and we can wander right in.

STEVE: Yeah. I just hope he doesn't have a receptionist.

ALAN: In his house?

STEVE: What? It's not unheard of!

(Alan blinked at him nonchalantly.)

ALAN: Yes; yes, it is.

STEVE: Mate.

ALAN: No, Steve, no. That was ridiculous. And as punishment, I'm usurping your command.

STEVE: Mate...

ALAN: Come on, underling; we've got work to do.

STEVE: You cheeky...

(He then flinched at the sight of Alan racing towards the front door. With a furrowed brow, he then set off after him. Moments later, they arrived at the end of the stone expanse at the front of the house then stared at the front door, still a frustrating ten feet away.)

ALAN: Mate...

STEVE: Yeah?

ALAN: He's got a moat.

STEVE: I can see that, Alan.

ALAN: And that's not a door; it's a drawbridge.

STEVE: I can see *that* too.

ALAN: Yeah...

(He sucked his teeth.)

ALAN: I wish we could have seen it from the driveway, then we wouldn't have charged all the way over here.

STEVE: Yeah, well, never mind that. It looks like we haven't been spotted yet, so let's head around the back and see if there's an easy way to get in.

(He then nodded sternly and started to run, only to hear the mortifying chimes of a bell from behind him. At once, he spun around and glowered at Alan in dismay.)

STEVE: What are you doing???

ALAN: Ringing the bell.

STEVE: Why the hell would you...

ALAN: That sign says we're supposed to ring the bell and someone will come and attend to us.

(Steve held his palms out in disbelief.)

STEVE: You cock. We're meant to be sneaking in.

ALAN: Yeah, but the moat kinda put paid to that, didn't it?

STEVE: It might not have. There might have been another way!

ALAN: Yeah, but I've rung it now.

STEVE: Great. And what are you gonna say when they answer? Hi, we've come to rescue Kerry and murder anyone who tries to stop us. Can we come in?

ALAN: Mate...

STEVE: And what do you think they're gonna say to that? Of Course! Come in, sir. Please make yourself comfortable while I prepare our most bloodiest retaliation? Well?

(Alan blinked at him nonchalantly.)

ALAN: You've got no faith in me whatsoever, have you?

STEVE: Not now, I haven't; no! In fact, I can safely say that if I'd *known* you were just gonna ring the master criminal's doorbell and ask him to come out for a fight, I'd have stayed at home and left you to it.

ALAN: Steve! Just calm down, okay? I have a plan.

STEVE: Oh, do you now?

ALAN: Yes. Now watch and learn. I'm gonna blag my way in.

STEVE: Blag???

ALAN: Yes, now be quiet.

STEVE: Fine. It's too late to do anything else now, anyway; you rang the fucking doorbell. Twat.

ALAN: Easy, mate. I'll have us in there in no time, using nothing more than wit and charm.

STEVE: Right... god help us.

(As Steve anxiously watched on, a hatch suddenly opened just next to the drawbridge. Seconds later, a distinguished sounding gentleman poked his head out and addressed Alan.)

CHARLES: Can I help you, sir?

(Alan nodded confidently.)

ALAN: Yes. We've come to see the baron.

CHARLES: And what is it regarding, sir?

ALAN: Shit. Good question.

(He then flinched as an idea came to him.)

ALAN: A personal matter of the utmost importance.

(He then gave Steve a stealthy thumbs up and winked.)

STEVE: Don't wink at me, you cunt. This is a terrible idea.

CHARLES: I see, sir. And do you have an appointment?

ALAN: Um... yes?

(Steve could only hold his head in his hands at this point.)

CHARLES: Very well. One moment, sir. I'll just lower the drawbridge for you.

(Charles then vanished and closed the hatch behind him. Delighted by that fact, Alan clenched a triumphant fist.)

ALAN: We're in, mate. We're in.

STEVE: Are we? Are we though?

ALAN: You heard him. He's gonna lower the drawbridge.

STEVE: Yeah. And then a dozen burly security men are gonna come out, ask us some seriously uncomfortable questions then brutally murder the pair of us.

ALAN: Oh, shut up. You worry too much.

STEVE: Do I?

(Alan then gave him an uncomfortable glance.)

ALAN: That's not gonna happen, is it?

STEVE: No? We're talking about a dangerous villain. One so secretive he hides his world behind a moat. He aint just gonna let us wander in because you pretended we've got an appointment.

ALAN: He might.

STEVE: He won't!

ALAN: Yeah... come to think of it, it does seem unlikely.

(Just then, the drawbridge began to lower. At once, Steve and Alan grabbed the hilts of their swords and braced themselves.)

ALAN: You ready for this?

STEVE: Yup. And once I've seen *these* cunts off with my blade, I'm gonna attack *you* with it!

ALAN: Don't be like that, mate.

STEVE: Oh, shut up.

(Just then, the drawbridge hit the dirt and they both eased into a fighting position. Much to their amazement, however, nothing happened. The front door was now before them, but nobody had come out.)

ALAN: Um... now what?

STEVE: Well...

(He shrugged.)

STEVE: We go in, I guess.

ALAN: Okay.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: You lead.

STEVE: Me?

ALAN: You are the senior.

(Steve rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: Oh, for fuck sake. Come on.

(He then started to head for the door with Alan right behind him.)

STEVE: Just to be on the safe side, whatever you do, mate, don't take your hand off the handle of that sword.

ALAN: The handle's at hip height.

STEVE: So?

ALAN: So it'll look like I'm mincing around like a bloody teapot.

(Steve stopped, turned and glowered at him.)

STEVE: A teapot?

ALAN: Yeah. You know... a sissy.

STEVE: I know what a teapot refers to, mate. You'll only look like one of them if you dangle a limp wrist in the air at the same time. I wasn't asking you to do that.

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: Keep your other arm straight by your side.

ALAN: And walk with my hips? That's every bit as bad!

STEVE: Seriously? Mate. I just want you to be ready in case the door flies open and we get attacked. Is that really too much to ask?

ALAN: Right...

(He rolled his eyes.)

ALAN: "I want you to be ready just in case the door flies open and we get attacked", says the bloke who's turned his back on the door just to moan at me.

STEVE: You...

(He then groaned in frustration.)

STEVE: Just be ready to come out fighting.

ALAN: Fine. But I'll do it in a manly way.

STEVE: Whatever floats your boat, Al.

ALAN: Thank you. Now you do the same; starting with facing front.

STEVE: Turnip...

(He then rolled his eyes and turned to face the door again.)

STEVE: Let's just get this done.

ALAN: Agreed. No more needless delays just so you can turn your back on the enemy and whinge like a little girl.

(Steve chuckled then resumed heading for the door.)

STEVE: You're a cunt.

ALAN: Yeah, but what are you gonna do?

STEVE: Tell Kerry you have genital herpes.

ALAN: Mate, that's cold.

STEVE: Well shut up then.

ALAN: Fine. You win.

(They then shared a mutual grin as they slowly advanced onwards. Moments later, once he arrived at the door, Steve took a deep breath then reached for the handle.)

STEVE: Here we go then.

ALAN: Uh-huh.

(With that, Steve flung the door open and strode inside, reaching for the hilt of his sword as he did so. Almost immediately, however, he came to a complete standstill and Alan stepped to his side. To say they looked bewildered would be quite the understatement. They were in a large, grandiose hallway and there didn't appear to be another soul around.)

STEVE: What the...

ALAN: I know.

STEVE: Don't lower your guard, mate.

ALAN: I wasn't going to.

(Just then, a posh, male voice called out from a small hatch to their right.)

CHARLES: Welcome to Darkley Manor, gentlemen.

(Much to their astonishment, the gentleman they'd spoken to a moment earlier, Charles, was standing on the other side of the counter, smiling at them.)

ALAN: Okay... so this is different.

(Steve's face then lit up and he pointed to the sign above the hatch.)

STEVE: Reception.

ALAN: What?

STEVE: But then again, maybe I'm imagining things. Nobody would have a reception in their house, after all. That was what you said, wasn't it? Something like that.

ALAN: Nobody likes a smart arse, mate.

STEVE: Interesting take, considering what a smart arse you were being when you said it.

ALAN: Whatever. Let's just...

CHARLES: Gents? Hello!

STEVE: Oh. Right...

(He then spoke to Alan in a lowered voice.)

STEVE: I'll con him into letting us come in and take a look around.

ALAN: Well, that would be the logical thing to do, yes.

STEVE: Agreed.

(He then stepped up to the reception.)

STEVE: Morning.

CHARLES: Hello there. I'm Charles. And you are?

STEVE: Steve and Alan.

ALAN: Bob and Dave!

CHARLES: What?

ALAN: Just a sec.

(He then turned Steve around and whispered to him.)

ALAN: Why did you use our real names?

STEVE: I know, mate. Sorry. That was dumb of me.

ALAN: You think?

STEVE: Well, don't worry; I can fix this.

(He then turned to Charles.)

STEVE: As we were saying. I'm Steven Allen. And this is...

(He then winced with embarrassment.)

STEVE: Bobbin Dave.

CHARLES: Bobbin? His name is Bobbin?

STEVE: He's from overseas.

(Alan groaned under his breath.)

ALAN: I'm gonna kill you in a minute.

CHARLES: Okay. It's nice to meet you Steven; you too Bobbin.

STEVE: Likewise.

ALAN: Yeah.

CHARLES: Now, you told me you have an appointment, but unfortunately, I've checked the Baron's schedule and it appears he doesn't *have* any meetings scheduled for this morning.

STEVE: Shit.

ALAN: Um... clearly, there's been some kind of mistake.

CHARLES: Indeed.

(He nodded.)

CHARLES: I'll just go and see if his secretary can shed any light on the matter. If you wouldn't mind, gentlemen.

(He gestured to a sofa just across the hallway.)

CHARLES: Make yourselves comfortable and I'll return shortly.

(He then closed the hatch and headed away. Left behind in the spacious hallway, Alan and Steve shared a stealthy glance then leant closer to one another to converse in hushed voices.)

ALAN: While he's off chatting to that secretary, we should...

STEVE: Fuck off and find Kerry.

ALAN: Exactly.

STEVE: Let's go then.

ALAN: Look upstairs first?

STEVE: Makes sense. That's where the living accommodation is most likely to be, after all.

ALAN: I concur. Go.

STEVE: Gone.

(With that, they both rocketed away towards the grand staircase.)

At the tea shop opposite the manor house at this time, Elise was supping gingerly at a cup of tea while she checked her fingernails. All around her, customers from the village were staring at her agog. They didn't get many tourists in this neck of the woods and to them, this strange woman was very much an alien. Unfazed by their attention, however, Elise was willing to pay their staring no heed. Her nonchalance, however, didn't sit well with the mayor's wife. She didn't like the idea of outsiders coming into town at the best of times, but to see one so calm, almost making herself at home, incensed her greatly. As such, it wasn't long before she climbed from her seat, headed over to Elise then plonked herself across the table from her.

DAPHNE: You're not from around here, you're not.

(Elise glanced up at her and smiled.)

ELISE: Indeed.

DAPHNE: Who are you then? And what do you want?

(Elise glanced at her nails again.)

ELISE: I can't tell you that, I'm afraid. It's classified.

(Daphne stared straight through her.)

DAPHNE: Classified?

ELISE: Highly classified.

DAPHNE: *Highly* classified?

ELISE: Really? Poly want a cracker.

DAPHNE: Poly want a...

ELISE: Wow.

(Daphne furrowed her brow.)

DAPHNE: What do you mean, it's classified?

ELISE: It means I can't tell you that. It's a secret.

DAPHNE: Secret?

ELISE: Pieces of eight.

DAPHNE: Pieces of what?

ELISE: Close enough.

(She smiled.)

ELISE: Look, I can't say, so don't ask.

DAPHNE: Why can't you say?

ELISE: I can't say that either.

DAPHNE: Then what *can* you say?

ELISE: Morning.

DAPHNE: Right...

(She sat forward.)

DAPHNE: I reckon you're up to no good.

ELISE: Why? Was I drinking my tea too loudly?

DAPHNE: No?

ELISE: Did I eat my cake with my mouth open?

DAPHNE: No, but...

(She furrowed her brow.)

DAPHNE: We don't like strangers around here. They're never anything but trouble. I should report you to my husband.

ELISE: For drinking tea?

DAPHNE: For being so secretive.

(She nodded.)

DAPHNE: My husband's the mayor, don't you know? He won't stand for any of *your* nonsense.

ELISE: I see.

(At this point, Elise bit her lip then leant forward. The ice cold, wind-up merchant within had awakened.)

ELISE: Well, that's different. I didn't know you were the mayor's wife. *You*, I can tell.

DAPHNE: Tell what?

(Elise beckoned her closer. She could tell this woman was none too bright and she knew exactly how to deal with people like her.)

ELISE: Tell nobody...

DAPHNE: Tell nobody what?

(Elise then spoke to her in barely above a whisper.)

ELISE: I'm part of an advance party to check out security arrangements for next month's royal visit.

DAPHNE: What royal visit? There's no royal visit. I'm the mayor's wife and it's the first I've heard of it.

ELISE: He was sworn to secrecy.

DAPHNE: Secrecy?

ELISE: Pretty Polly.

DAPHNE: What?

ELISE: Secrecy.

(She nodded.)

ELISE: He could have told *you* though. As his wife, you'll be hosting the buffet.

(Completely taken in, simply by virtue of the fact that she *wanted* to believe it, Daphne's face lit up.)

DAPHNE: Really? Me? Tell me more.

ELISE: Okay, but don't tell a soul.

DAPHNE: Not even my husband?

ELISE: Not even him.

DAPHNE: But surely he already knows whatever you're going to tell me.

ELISE: Not the fine details, he doesn't.

DAPHNE: Ooh.

(She beamed.)

DAPHNE: What do I need to know?

(Elise glanced from side to side as if on the lookout for anyone prying then leant forwards.)

ELISE: The thing is, Owsley is receiving an award for its services during the war effort.

DAPHNE: Really? What services?

ELISE: Well...

(Daphne looked most perplexed.)

DAPHNE: Wait.

(Her brow then furrowed.)

DAPHNE: Hang on a minute! Nobody from Owsley even took part. In fact, this is mostly a town of conscious objectors.

(Having been caught in a lie like this, most people would have stuttered or flinched, but not Elise. An expert wind-up merchant, she simply keep on going; ever confident in her ability to get her tall tale back on track.)

ELISE: *Mostly*, yes, but not all.

DAPHNE: *Almost* all! Baron Darkley fought, but other that...

ELISE: Bingo.

DAPHNE: Really? We're receiving an award for the baron's efforts in the war?

ELISE: Exactly!

DAPHNE: But didn't he get injured in the first week then get sent home again?

ELISE: Yes. Yes, he did.

(She nodded.)

ELISE: He got injured in the line of duty, you see? So you're all being commended for his bravery.

DAPHNE: But I heard he got injured because he was drunk and fell down a well.

ELISE: You did?

DAPHNE: Yes.

ELISE: Ah, you see, that's what he *wanted* people to think. He didn't want them to know he got injured bravely holding back an advance by himself while waiting for back up to arrive.

DAPHNE: Really? Are you sure? Only...

ELISE: Of course, I'm sure. The queen told me herself.

(Entirely sucked in again, Daphne's face lit up.)

DAPHNE: The queen? You know the queen?

ELISE: Of course. She's my cousin.

DAPHNE: Then you're...

ELISE: Lady Elise Elegant, Duchess of Lovely.

DAPHNE: Duchess of Lovely? Really?

ELISE: Yes. Why?

DAPHNE: What an odd place name.

(She sighed.)

DAPHNE: But it sounds lovely.

ELISE: Hence the name.

(Daphne looked enlightened.)

DAPHNE: Right. That makes sense.

(Elise then leant forward again.)

ELISE: Now, I know what you're thinking. I'm not exactly dressed like a Duchess, am I?

DAPHNE: Hmm...

ELISE: And I arrived in a cart with two *slobby-looking* gentlemen.

DAPHNE: You did?

ELISE: I did, yes. You see, I'm travelling incognito. That's how secret this mission is. Top secret! The very top level.

DAPHNE: The *very* top?

ELISE: Higher.

DAPHNE: Ooh.

ELISE: So whatever I tell you from hereon must remain between us, okay?

DAPHNE: You have my word, your ladyship.

ELISE: Excellent.

(She then glanced from side to side.)

ELISE: Thing is, during the visit, they also plan to erect a statue of your husband in the village square.

(Daphne gasped.)

DAPHNE: They do? Why?

ELISE: Because this town is being rewarded and he's the mayor, obviously.

DAPHNE: But it's being rewarded for the *baron's* efforts in the war. Shouldn't it be a statue of him?

ELISE: He declined. He said if the town is being rewarded for its contribution to the war, the mayor should have the honour instead.

DAPHNE: But my husband wasn't the mayor during the war.

ELISE: Yes, but he *was* very supportive of it.

DAPHNE: No, he wasn't. He actively campaigned *against* the war.

ELISE: And that's *why* he's being rewarded.

DAPHNE: Oh.

(A blank expression the swept her brow.)

DAPHNE: What? That makes no sense.

ELISE: Some campaigned for the war, others against it. Both sides are being honoured, to mark this nations devotion to the concept of democracy.

DAPHNE: Democracy? He was arrested for his opinions.

ELISE: And as an apology he's now getting a commendation.

DAPHNE: Oh. Well that's wonderful.

ELISE: He might even get a knighthood.

DAPHNE: He might?

ELISE: But only if the king hears what a warm and friendly town this is.

(Daphne bit her lip and smiled.)

DAPHNE: Well, there's no worries on that score.

(She then tapped Elise's hand kindly.)

DAPHNE: Allow me to buy you another cup of tea.

ELISE: You want to buy me more tea and cake?

DAPHNE: I...

ELISE: How very kind. I'll try the chocolate muffin this time, please.

(She smiled.)

ELISE: And don't worry, when the king hears how nice you've been that knighthood will be a virtual certainty.

(Daphne nodded to herself.)

DAPHNE: Then it's worth every penny.

(With that, she turned and called out to the owner.)

DAPHNE: Two more teas and a chocolate muffin, please, Mary.

(She then nodded to Elise.)

DAPHNE: My treat.

(Elise could only offer her a warm smile.)

ELISE: Excellent.

DAPHNE: And if there's anything else you need, just let me know.

ELISE: You know, what? I think I just might.

(She then sat there giggling to herself on the inside while remaining entirely stoic on the surface. She was going to milk this gullible woman for everything she could get.)

At Baron Darkley's manor at this time, Steve and Alan were busy hunting the upper floor for Kerry. Having checked almost every room, however, they were starting to feel more a little perplexed. Something about this man's dwelling just didn't seem to fit. There'd been literally no sign of a single person. As they paced onwards down the corridor between rooms, Alan could only shake his head in frustration.)

ALAN: There's no fucker here.

STEVE: Doesn't make sense, does it?

ALAN: Not in the slightest. This man is supposed to have a virtual army. If that's the case, where the hell are they housed?

STEVE: Maybe there's a barracks somewhere.

ALAN: Not in the grounds. At least we couldn't see one from the windows.

STEVE: Maybe this is the baron's private quarters and the army quarters are downstairs.

ALAN: Well there's certain not up here.

STEVE: Well, we've still got two rooms to check yet.

ALAN: Probably more frilly guest rooms. There definitely aren't *soldiers* and hard men living in the rooms *we've* seen.

STEVE: Unless his army *like* their rooms painted pink.

ALAN: What are the odds of that though?

STEVE: I'd like to think nil.

(He grimaced.)

STEVE: But we did meet some, let's say... less than butch people in the army, mate.

ALAN: Yeah. In the cabaret corps. I very much doubt the baron's personal army is made up of flutists, singers and tap dancers.

STEVE: Though it'd make our job a hell of a lot easier if it was.

ALAN: Right?

(They shared an amused grin then approached another door. Without a pause, Alan then cranked it open and peered inside. He then closed it again.)

STEVE: Anything?

ALAN: An empty study.

STEVE: Oh.

(He shrugged.)

STEVE: Makes a refreshing change from another guest room, I suppose.

ALAN: Small mercies, mate.

(He then bit his lip.)

ALAN: This makes no sense. We were asked to wait in reception but buggered off. And yet, nobody sounded the alarm. At least not one *I* can hear. I don't hear anything, actually.

STEVE: Weird. You'd think that receptionist would have rallied the men to come and find us by now. He can't have done though. Blokes on the rampage looking for a fight don't go about things quietly.

ALAN: Exactly. If that was happening, we'd know about it.

(They shared a baffled shrug.)

ALAN: Let's just check this last room then fuck off downstairs.

STEVE: Agreed. That's gonna be where the action is, it seems.

(He then strode to the final door, yanked it open then closed it again.)

STEVE: Library.

ALAN: Figures.

STEVE: Uh-huh.

(He nodded sternly.)

STEVE: Okay, downstairs it is.

ALAN: Yup. Time for the battle to begin.

STEVE: Stealthy or...

ALAN: Let's just charge, mate. I'm done with creeping about.

STEVE: I'm not sad you said that, mate.

(He then nodded to a stairwell some five feet in front of them.)

STEVE: Let me guess. I'm going first.

ALAN: Like I'd give you the pleasure, mate.

(He then took off like a rocket towards the stairwell. With a grin, Steve raced after him.)

STEVE: I've missed a good scrap, mate.

ALAN: Me too.

STEVE: Then let's make this a battle to remember.

ALAN: Oh, it will be, mate. It fucking will be.

(Having bounded down the stairs, two at a time, they then charged forth down the ground floor corridor.)

ALAN: Where are you, you pussies???

STEVE: Come on, let's have at it!!!

ALAN: Where are you hiding, eh???

(He then cast open a door and scoffed.)

ALAN: Not in there!

STEVE: Well, they can't be far away, mate.

(They then raced on again.)

STEVE: Come and take your medicine, boys!!!

ALAN: A nice double dose of pain!!!

STEVE: Extra strong doses at that!!!

ALAN: Yeah!!!

(He then cast open the next door and froze like a statue. Racing along behind him, Steve then clattered into him and the pair of them went sprawling to the floor, just inside the room.)

STEVE: What did you stop for, you bell end?

(Slowly climbing to his feet again, Alan spoke in a baffled voice.)

ALAN: Shut up a minute.

STEVE: What?

(Steve then glanced up and raised a stunned eyebrow. A woman roughly their own age was staring back at them in bewilderment from the piano across the room.)

STEVE: Is that...

ALAN: Kerry.

STEVE: Yeah.

(Alan then stepped forwards slowly. As he did so, the woman jumped up and whimpered.)

KERRY: Who are you and what do you want?

(Steve climbed to his feet, chuckling to himself.)

STEVE: Apparently you weren't the most memorable boyfriend she ever had.

(Ignoring him, Alan held out his palms.)

ALAN: Kerry, it's me!

KERRY: Who's me?

ALAN: I am.

KERRY: What?

ALAN: It's me. Alan! Alan Turner.

(Kerry looked to him then jaw fell open.)

KERRY: But... but... you died.

ALAN: I didn't, babe. I'm alive and well, and...

STEVE: Yeah, well, never mind all that bollocks, mate. Now we've found her, let's just grab her and get out here.

KERRY: Grab me?

ALAN: Yeah. We've come to rescue you, babe.

KERRY: Rescue me?

STEVE: Yes. Now come on.

ALAN: I'll explain everything later.

KERRY: Rescue me from whom?

(She gasped.)

KERRY: Why? Is someone coming?

STEVE: Yeah. The baron and his entire army; so I'd like to get out of here, if you don't mind.

KERRY: The baron?

ALAN: Yeah, Baron Darkley!

(Kerry looked most perplexed.)

KERRY: My husband?

STEVE: Yes! Wait. What?

ALAN: Husband?

KERRY: Baron Darkley.

(Alan shook his head despairingly.)

ALAN: The evil swine forced her to marry him.

STEVE: Bastard!

ALAN: Don't worry, Kerry; you're free now. Come with us and you'll never have to see him again.

KERRY: But I love him!

ALAN: Yes, well, that's...

(He then froze to the spot again.)

ALAN: Sorry, what?

(Kerry whimpered.)

KERRY: You're not making any sense. How can you be here when you died in the war?

And *why* are you here? And why should I flee from the husband I love and cherish?

(Alan could only stare at her emptily at this moment. He had no idea what to say or what to think. Steve, however, was far more in tune with his emotions.)

STEVE: I'm gonna kill you, Alan! She's not been kidnapped at all!

ALAN: But...

(He then raised an enlightened eyebrow.)

ALAN: A-ha. I know what this is. She's been in captivity for so long, she's developed an attachment to her kidnapper.

KERRY: No, I haven't. What are you on about? *Who*'s been kidnapped?

STEVE: Alan, mate, when this is over, I'm quite literally going to murder you.

ALAN: Not now, Steve.

STEVE: First I'm going to pick up the heaviest object I can find then bludgeon you with it several times.

ALAN: Will you shut up? Clearly something's not quite right here.

STEVE: Then I'm going to sharpen my blade and stab you with it. Right in the face!

ALAN: Stop waffling!

(He nodded.)

ALAN: This is gonna be tricky, mate. Seeing as she's deluded herself that her kidnapper is the good guy, we're probably going to have to drag her out and hope her screaming doesn't alert too many guards.

STEVE: Nope. Needs to be done!

(He then slapped Alan around the face with all his might. At once, Alan bent sideways and yelped.)

ALAN: Ow!!!

STEVE: Wake up, you cock! She hasn't been kidnapped by anybody! Harry Brooks lied to you!

(Kerry snarled.)

KERRY: Harry Brooks???

STEVE: Yeah! Harry Brooks told *this* numpty that Baron Darkley kidnapped you, so we came to rescue you.

ALAN: So that's what we're gonna do!

STEVE: No, we're not! What's wrong with you? She doesn't need rescuing!

ALAN: That's her sympathy for the kidnapper talking.

KERRY: What fucking kidnapper?

(Just then, a dashing looking gentleman in regal finery stepped into the room from a side door. Upon spotting the two strangers, he then offered them a warm smile.)

DARKLEY: Ah. I didn't realise we had visitors. Nice to meet you. I'm Baron Darkley.
(Alan instantly drew his sword.)

ALAN: Then prepare you meet your maker!

DARKLEY: Oh, my!

(The baron then produced a sword of his own.)

DARKLEY: Stand behind me, darling. You'll be safe there.

KERRY: Yes, dear.

(She then hurried behind her husband.)

DARKLEY: So, I'll be fighting the *two* of you, will I?

ALAN: Yes!

STEVE: No!

ALAN: Mate!

STEVE: Put your fucking sword down.

ALAN: Yeah!

STEVE: Not him! You?

ALAN: Me???

STEVE: Yes!

ALAN: And let him kill me where I stand? Are you insane!

STEVE: Mate! He's not the bad guy!!!

ALAN: Then why did he draw his sword?

STEVE: Because you pulled yours then threatened to kill him.

(Alan then lowered his sword slightly and furrowed his brow at him.)

ALAN: Whose side are you on, mate?

(Steve took a deep breath to calm himself.)

STEVE: Listen to me, Al. Listen well. Kerry was never kidnapped.

ALAN: That's...

STEVE: Harry Brooks lied to you.

(The baron growled.)

DARKLEY: Harry Brooks? Is that who you work for? Prepare to die, fools!!!

STEVE: We don't work for Harry Brooks!!!

ALAN: Harry Brooks is a scumbag. As are you! Now let Kerry go!

DARKLEY: Let her go???

(He glanced over his shoulder and grimaced.)

DARKLEY: Let you go where?

KERRY: Your guess is as good as mine.

DARKLEY: I see.

(He then lowered his sword.)

DARKLEY: Would someone care to explain what's going on?

ALAN: Yes!

STEVE: I'll do it!!!

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: Alan here used to date, Kerry.

KERRY: That's true. But I thought he was dead.

STEVE: That's because Alan asked Harry Brooks to give you a message. A message of love. Instead, he told you Alan died then you ran away with him.

KERRY: I didn't run away with him!

(She ruffled her neck.)

KERRY: He acted like he was my friend and tried to console me.

DARKLEY: I know all this, darling.

KERRY: Yes, but clearly Alan doesn't.

DARKLEY: Oh. Carry on then, my love.

KERRY: He wanted to date me but I refused. I just wanted to be friends. He said he was fine with that. Then one day, he invited me to visit an elderly relative of his in the countryside. So I went along.

(She shook her fist.)

KERRY: There *was* no relative. Because I wasn't putting out, he'd decided to sell me instead. To sex traffickers!

DARKLEY: The bastard!

KERRY: Luckily, as they were dragging me away, Rupert appeared.

ALAN: Rupert?

STEVE: Who the fuck is Rupert?

DARKLEY: I am! Baron Rupert Darkley of Owsley!

KERRY: He heard my screams for help and came running.

DARKLEY: Wiped out all ten of the bastards with my trusty blade.

KERRY: He did. He was like a whirlwind. He's a swordsman like no other.

STEVE: Noted.

(He whimpered.)

STEVE: Put the fucking blade down, Alan.

ALAN: Never! They might be lying!

KERRY: We're not lying. He rescued me. Then he took me in and gave me food and shelter.

(The Baron and Kerry then stared adoringly into one another's eyes.)

KERRY: A short while later, we fell in love and got married.

DARKLEY: I'm the luckiest man alive!

KERRY: And *I'm* the luckiest woman.

(Alan growled.)

ALAN: Yeah? Well, *I'm*... starting to feel like this was all a massive mistake.

STEVE: *Starting* to? Really?

ALAN: Well...

(He then threw his sword on the floor and sunk to his knees.)

ALAN: Mate!

STEVE: Yes?

ALAN: Harry Brooks is a cunt!

STEVE: Yes, yes he is.

ALAN: A proper cunt!

STEVE: I know.

ALAN: He did it again! He fucked me over again!

STEVE: Yeah...

ALAN: First he steals Kerry away by telling her I died, now this. He's conned me into charging in to rescue her from her loving husband; whom from what I can tell is a bloody nice bloke.

STEVE: And an expert swordsman. He sent you here, in the hope you'd charge in like a maniac and get killed.

ALAN: Like I said; a proper cunt!

(He then climbed to his feet and bowed.)

ALAN: Kerry, Baron, forgive me invading your beautiful home. I'll just go and jump in the moat.

DARKLEY: I wouldn't bother. It's only two feet deep.

ALAN: I see. Then I'll find a lake. Just... thank you for not sending in your personal army to kill me.

DARKLEY: What personal army?

(Steve palmed his forehead.)

STEVE: You don't have one, do you?

DARKLEY: No. We only have two staff here. A receptionist-cum-butler and my secretary.

(Steve suddenly started to chuckle.)

STEVE: *Nothing* he said was true. Not a word of it.

(He then glowered at Alan.)

STEVE: Forget jumping in the lake, Turnip. Allow me to throw you off a cliff.

ALAN: Please. Be my guest!

KERRY: Wait.

(Kerry then stepped forward and smiled.)

KERRY: I have no idea what's happening right now, Alan. I just know, I'm not sad to see you're okay.

STEVE: I'll tell you what happened here. After you went missing from your home town with Harry, he looked for you. For years. There was no sign of you. Or Harry. Until yesterday in my home town when he bumped into the bastard.

KERRY: You did?

ALAN: I did.

(He sighed.)

ALAN: I *was* going to beat him to death, but he fed me a bullshit story that you'd been kidnapped by Baron Darkley. So I beat him up a bit then came running.

KERRY: To save me?

ALAN: Yeah.

DARKLEY: Blimey. I bet you feel a bit of a tit right now, don't you?

ALAN: Really? What gave it away?

DARKLEY: Right. Sorry, that wasn't classy.

ALAN: No, but it wasn't wrong either.

(He then looked to Kerry and smiled.)

ALAN: Still, it's not all bad. I wanted nothing more than to ensure your freedom and happiness.

KERRY: Two things I already had.

ALAN: I know, it's just... seeing it helps. Until five minutes ago, I thought you were in the clutches of an evil super villain.

DARKLEY: What evil super villain?

ALAN: You!

DARKLEY: I'm not an evil super villain.

ALAN: Well, I know that now, don't I?

(He groaned in defeat.)

ALAN: What a bell end.

STEVE: And then some. You're fucking walking home, mate.

DARKLEY: Well, before you go and do that, how about a spot of tea?

(Steve and Alan looked to him emptily.)

ALAN: What?

STEVE: Really? You'd invite us to join you for tea? We just broke into your house and tried to liberate your wife from her life of joy, love and happiness.

DARKLEY: Absolutely. Why not? You seem like decent chaps. You thought the lovely Kerry was in trouble, so you came to save her. I can't chastise you for that. It was noble of you. Misguided, yet noble. So, please. Let's have a spot of tea and cake together. For the sake of peace.

KERRY: Please, Alan. It'd be lovely to catch up.

(Steve nodded.)

STEVE: Sounds good to me. Thank you for your kindness. We accept.

ALAN: We do? Can't I just throw myself in the lake instead?

DARKLEY: Afterwards you can do what you like, old chap.

(He nodded.)

DARKLEY: But first, let's retire to the dining room.

ALAN: Yeah...

(He then hung his head.)

ALAN: Fine.

DARKLEY: Superb. Just try not to mistakenly rescue the butler when we get there.

(He then headed away giggling to himself with Kerry at his side. Left behind, Alan could only allow his shoulders to slump in defeat. The weight of Steve's icy stare was hard to bear.)

STEVE: You fucking...

ALAN: I know!

STEVE: Just... come on.

(They then headed away feeling more than a little foolish.)

Within the hour, Alan, Steve and Elise found themselves back on the road again. The trip home had begun. To this point, it had been quite the ordeal for Alan and Steve. As they'd headed away from where they'd parked the cart, Steve had taken it upon himself to explain everything to Elise. A full ten minutes later, she still hadn't stopped laughing. Tears rolled down both her cheeks and her sides ached from laughter. Defeated, all Alan and Steve could do was stare at the road, wearing miffed expressions. Her amusement would not be subsiding any time soon.

ELISE: For almost a decade, you longed to get your hands on Harry Brooks. Craved it! And when you did, you let him off with a light slap, just so you could go and make a cock of yourself in front of a nobleman. Who does that?

(Alan could only sigh as she continued unabated.)

ELISE: I wish I'd come with you now. I'd happily pay money to see a re-run of that.

Kerry's face must have been a picture!

(She wiped tears from her eyes.)

ELISE: We've come to rescue you! Who from?

(She then roared with laughter and laid down on her side.)

ELISE: Stop it. I'm aching all over.

(Alan shook his head.)

ALAN: How long is this likely to go on for, Steve?

STEVE: However long it takes to get home.

ALAN: Aw, crap.

ELISE: Seriously, you two. Have you never heard of a little thing called fact-checking?

STEVE: Babe...

ELISE: You could have innocently asked that local fella what the baron was like last night. He'd have told you he was a nice bloke with a loving wife and we could have all gone home. Sure, you'd have felt a bit silly for coming all this way, but nothing compared to this... this is on another level. You wait until I tell Emma about this.

STEVE: Do you have to?

ELISE: Absolutely.

(She chuckled some more.)

ELISE: Your mate found his arch nemesis. A man he'd had a yearning to hurt for years and years. Instead of making him pay, however, he let the horrible bugger sell him a ridiculous story then charged off into battle against some poor bugger who'd done absolutely nothing wrong. You couldn't make it up.

(Alan shook his head then glanced at Steve. Much to his annoyance, Steve had developed an amused smirk and was struggling not to laugh.)

ALAN: Don't *you* fucking start, mate.

STEVE: How can I not?

ALAN: Because you were there with me!

STEVE: I know. But I'm only guilty of being an *accessory* to fuckwittery.

ALAN: Mate...

(Steve then started to chuckle.)

STEVE: What a numpty.

ELISE: You'll have to invite him over more often, love; he's hilarious.

STEVE: You haven't heard the half of it, darling.

ELISE: Oh?

ALAN: For fuck sake.

STEVE: When Kerry explained that she and the baron were very much in love and that she'd never been kidnapped in the first place, this cunt...

(He gestured to Alan.)

STEVE: He insisted she was only saying that because she'd developed feelings for her captor.

(Elise laughed even harder.)

ELISE: Really?

STEVE: Yeah. Twice she explained it and the silly fucker *still* tried to rescue her.

ELISE: Oh, my god. What a complete moron.

(As she rolled around in hysterics, Alan shook his head then allowed himself a stifled laugh.)

ALAN: I actually did that, didn't I?

STEVE: Yes! You weren't having it, mate. You were gonna rescue her no matter *how* much she wanted you not to.

ELISE: Which would have made *you* her kidnapper.

(Alan held his head in his palm.)

ALAN: Where the hell did my mind go?

STEVE: You probably didn't want to face the reality, mate. Because the reality makes you look a right tit.

ALAN: Yeah, well, I think you're letting me off lightly there.

STEVE: I'm generous like that.

ALAN: Yeah...

(His brow then furrowed over.)

ALAN: First Harry Brooks stole the love of my life. Now he's sent me on a wild goose chase, at the end of which, I ended up looking like a right cunt. And *he's* bugged off with no more than a mild fucking headache, I'd wager.

STEVE: Uh-huh.

(He gave him a knowing glance.)

STEVE: I'm guessing you won't be so lenient next time you bump into him.

ALAN: Next time, mate... next time, I won't even bother to engage him. Next time I see that fucker, I'll draw my sword and turn him into a shit-cunt kebab. Then feed him to the pigs.

STEVE: You keep pigs?

ALAN: I'll buy some.

STEVE: And keep them where? You live in a pub.

ALAN: I'll rent a fucking sty if I have to, alright? Fuck sake, man.

STEVE: Calm down. I was only asking.

(Elise chuckled.)

ELISE: Sorry to laugh so much, Alan. I know you really wanted to be reunited with Kerry again. I'm gutted that it didn't work out for you.

(She then burst out laughing again.)

ELISE: The fact the rest of it worked out how it did, on the other hand, is the funniest thing I've ever heard. Thank you for letting me be a part of it.

(As she sat there crying with laughter, Alan winced.)

ALAN: It's literally going to be like this all the way home, isn't it? That genuinely wasn't an exaggeration, was it?

STEVE: Nope.

ALAN: Oh, goody.

ELISE: Honestly, boys, this was the best trip out ever. This morning, I convinced a mean woman that I was the queen's cousin and conned her into buying me four cups of tea and three cakes. We don't even have a royal family, for pity's sake. We live in a republic! Like that wasn't hilarious enough, we now have *this*. Alan Turner's comedy event of the century. I'm so glad I came.

ALAN: And I'm so glad my torment brings you so much joy.

STEVE: And I'm so glad I'm not you right now, Al.

ALAN: Yes, I suspect you are.

ELISE: Anyway, let's get a move on, shall we? We can't sit here laughing all day.

STEVE: Get a move on? We'll go as fast as the horse wants us to go, babe.

ELISE: What?

(She then glanced to the side of the cart.)

ELISE: How long have we been on the move?

STEVE: About twenty minutes.

ELISE: Really? I was so engrossed in your story and mocking you both, I didn't even realise.

STEVE: She's an observant bugger.

ELISE: Never mind being a cocky little bastard, Steven. Hurry up and get me home.

(She winced.)

ELISE: Before your friend here has another meltdown and tries to rescue *me*.

(She then sat there giggling into her hand. Utterly deflated by her ceaselessness, Alan could only slump in his seat.)

ALAN: It's gonna be a long trip, isn't it?

STEVE: You have no idea, Alan.

ALAN: Actually I think I do, mate.

(He then slumped in his seat even further. His humiliation, it seemed, was complete.

He'd barely had time to dwell, however, when Elise spoke up excitedly from the back again.)

ELISE: Did you see that?

(Steve winced.)

STEVE: Fuck.

ELISE: Well, did you?

STEVE: Yes, but I kind of wished you hadn't.

(Alan looked most bemused.)

ALAN: Wait. What's this?

ELISE: There's a town to the right.

(She beamed.)

ELISE: Take the next turning, Steven.

ALAN: There's a town? How come we didn't see a milestone for a town last night when we were *looking* for one then?

STEVE: It was dark.

ELISE: Blind idiots.

STEVE: I love you too, dear.

ELISE: Yes, well, never mind being sassy; just make sure you take that turning. I need a cup of tea.

(Steve groaned in defeat. He knew all too well by now that when she wanted to stop for tea there was absolutely no point in arguing with her.)

STEVE: Fine.

(Unfortunately, Alan knew no such thing.)

ALAN: How can you need a cup of tea already? Didn't you say you had four cups at that tea shop this morning? Not to mention the two you had with breakfast.

ELISE: I like tea!!!

STEVE: She does. She really does. This happens every time we go somewhere.
Stopping for tea at every sodding town along the way.

ALAN: Right... yeah... you said.

(An enlightened expression then crossed his brow.)

ALAN: Elise?

ELISE: No, I don't need rescuing.

(Steve burst out laughing.)

STEVE: Nice.

(Alan just glanced at her coldly.)

ALAN: I know you don't need *rescuing*. You need a pee, don't you?

ELISE: Excuse me?

ALAN: It's true, isn't it?

ELISE: Shut up!

ALAN: I knew it!

STEVE: Wait. What's this?

ALAN: The reason she wants to stop at every town on your trips is because she has a tea before she sets out then needs a pee. So you go to the nearest town with a tea shop to use their facilities. Of course, it'd be rude to just pee and go, so she has another tea while she's there, meaning she needs to pee again later! An endless cycle of drinking tea then needing to urinate.

(Elise's broom then thwacked into his head.)

ALAN: Ow!!!

ELISE: That was just the beginning, sunshine!

STEVE: Wait! Is that true, Elise?

ELISE: I don't have to explain myself to you!

STEVE: Actually, you do. We'd get where we need to go a lot faster if you didn't keep making us go to tea shops!

ELISE: Do *you* want a wallop an' all?

STEVE: No, I just want you to own up.

ELISE: I admit nothing!

ALAN: Nor does she deny it.

(He then felt the wrath of Elise's broom once again.)

ALAN: Ouch!!! Stop that!

ELISE: Stop being ridiculous then!

ALAN: I'm not. You made your feelings on exposing your skin to the elements quite clear yesterday. You hate being bitten. That's why you won't pee in a bush, isn't it? You make Steve go to tea shops instead.

STEVE: Meaning we end up in a never-ending loop of tea drinking and urinating!

ALAN: Exactly! Ouch!!!

STEVE: Stop hitting him with your... ouch!!!

ELISE: You two are really grating my last nerve right now.

STEVE: How? For pity's sake, babe, there's no shame in needing a pee.

ALAN: Even if you do have the bladder capacity of a ninety year old woman.

(He then received the wallop he'd earned.)

ALAN: Stop doing that!!!

ELISE: Cheeky twat.

(She ruffled her neck.)

ELISE: Okay, so there may be an element of truth in that, but you're forgetting the most important thing.

STEVE: What's that?

ELISE: Giving me grief over it is a fatal mistake!

STEVE: Who's giving you grief?

ELISE: You're ridiculous friend here compared me to a ninety year old.

ALAN: Ridiculous friend?

ELISE: Yes. You just attempted to rescue a perfectly happy woman from her doting husband! Idiot!

ALAN: I...

ELISE: Silence, silly person. As for you, Steve...

STEVE: Yes, dear?

ELISE: Make sure you take the next turning and never dare speak of my bladder again.

(Steve rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: Your wish is my command.

(Alan shook his head.)

ALAN: Mate, how you passed the medical to join the men's army with no testicles, I'll never know.

(He then received yet another blow from Elise's broom.)

ALAN: Do you mind?

ELISE: Oh, grow up. That was just a light one on the grounds that your comment amused me.

(She snarled.)

ELISE: One more mention of my bladder, however, and you'll feel the full force of the blunt end.

ALAN: Fine!

(He smirked.)

ALAN: Just calm down before you wet yourself.

(Steve could only shake his head at this point as Elise laid into his friend repeatedly with her broom.)

ALAN: Ouch!!! Hey!!! Ease off!!! Elise!!!

ELISE: No, I won't ease off. I haven't been this angry since the midwife called me Elsie!

STEVE: She felt the full wrath of the blunt end too!

ELISE: She did, yes. Luckily for her though, the rage induced my labour, so I had to stop hitting her and go and have a baby.

ALAN: Now go and have another! That hurts!

ELISE: It's meant to!

(She then stop hitting him and ruffled her neck.)

ELISE: I'm sorry you made me do that.

ALAN: Yeah? Well... so am I.

ELISE: Good.

(Her face then lit up and she became almost angelic.)

ELISE: Ooh, this is our turning, dear.

STEVE: I know, love.

(He then guided the carriage down a turning to their right.)

ALAN: I didn't see this *turn off* last night either.

STEVE: Like I said, mate; it was really dark.

ALAN: And the turning's very much overgrown.

STEVE: The perfect storm.

ELISE: It's not *that* overgrown. I bet you were so busy nattering, you simply didn't see it.

STEVE: Far from it. We were nattering, yes, but mostly about the fact we hadn't seen a turning.

ALAN: The conversation was very much on point.

ELISE: Yes, but your eyesight wasn't.

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: What? I'm just saying; anyone can *talk* a good game.

(Steve could only roll his eyes.)

STEVE: Right...

(They then continued on down the road to the soundtrack of Elise giggling to herself in the cart. Listening to her chuckle, Alan couldn't help but smirk. During the war, he'd asked Steve if he was worried that his wife might get bored while he was away fighting. Steve had informed him that his wife getting bored would never happen. She made her own fun. Having met her, he now understood what he'd meant.)

ALAN: Priceless.

STEVE: What is?

ALAN: Huh?

(He shook his head.)

ALAN: Nothing, I was just thinking out loud.

ELISE: Because when he thinks *inside* his head, the echo is unbearable.

(Steve and Elise then burst out laughing. All Alan could do was stare straight ahead. Well and truly caned, he had nothing to offer as a retort.)

ALAN: Hey.

STEVE: Chin up, mate; we're here.

(Sure enough, they'd arrived at the edge of the village.)

ALAN: Good, good. No tea, remember, Elise.

(Elise growled at him.)

ELISE: Excuse me?

ALAN: I'm just saying, we'll get home quicker that way.

ELISE: If I want tea, I'll bloody *have* tea!

STEVE: Or...

ELISE: Careful, Steven.

STEVE: I was just going to suggest skipping tea this time. Why don't we just have some cake, use the facilities then get back on the road again?

ELISE: How dare you?

STEVE: What? I'm thinking of *you*, babe! If you skip tea this time, you won't need to pee again so soon; that way you'll be a lot more comfortable on the ride back. Plus, we might just get home before daylight.

(Elise glowered at him distrustfully.)

ELISE: Thinking of me, are you?

STEVE: Absolutely.
(Elise ruffled her neck.)
ELISE: Fine. Just cake then.
STEVE: Right.
ELISE: But I want a chocolate one.
STEVE: Anything for your, my love.
ELISE: Anything?
STEVE: Except tea!
ELISE: Shit.
(She sighed.)
ELISE: Fine. It would be nice to get a little bit further without needing to pee again.
STEVE: Agreed.
ELISE: But remember, if *I* can't have tea nor can *you two*.
STEVE: Fair enough.
ALAN: What? Now, hang on a minute...
ELISE: Do you want to feel my broom again?
ALAN: What? No!
(He sighed.)
ALAN: Fine. Just cake. No tea.
STEVE: Yes, well, don't get too excited. We won't even be having that if this village doesn't have a tea shop.
ELISE: Now you're being silly. Of course they have a tea shop.
STEVE: What makes you so sure?
ELISE: Well... that building to our right is called "Ye Olde Tea Shop" for one.
STEVE: What?
(He glanced at the shop in question then flinched.)
STEVE: You've got the eyesight of an owl!
ELISE: No, I have the eyesight of an ordinary human. You two silly buggers, on the other hand, need glasses. You didn't even see that turn off last night!
ALAN: It was dark!
ELISE: A likely story.
ALAN: It was! It was night time, for pity's sake!
ELISE: Stop making excuses! And start making appointments at the optician.
ALAN: Right...
ELISE: Anyway, I've had my say. Let's get some cake.
(She then jumped off the side of the moving cart and tumbled into a bush outside the tea shop.)
ELISE: Steven!!!
(Steve rapidly pulled the cart to a halt then jumped down to race to her aid.)
STEVE: Elise? Are you okay?
ELISE: Do I *look* okay to you???
STEVE: Well... no...
(He then helped her to her feet and watched as she brushed herself down.)
STEVE: What the hell did you jump off for, Elise?
ELISE: I thought we'd stopped!
ALAN: And *we're* the ones who need glasses???

ELISE: Shut up, you!

STEVE: Are you okay, love?

ELISE: I'm fine! No thanks to you. Stop the bloody cart next time.

STEVE: What? You can hardly blame me for that!

ELISE: I can!

STEVE: Not successfully.

ELISE: Maybe not, but a girl's gotta try!

(They then stood there giggling together.)

ELISE: Seriously. What a wally. I really thought you'd stopped.

STEVE: I hadn't even slowed.

ELISE: Well, I know that now, don't I?

(She giggled.)

ELISE: That wasn't my finest hour, was it?

STEVE: Nope.

ELISE: And yet it's not the *dumbest* thing to happen today.

(She then looked at Alan and burst out laughing.)

ELISE: You tried to rescue a bewildered woman from her perfectly loving husband. Priceless.

(Alan could only shake his head.)

ALAN: Humiliating. That really does put this morning into perspective. She just jumped off a moving cart and fell in a bush, but I'm *still* the biggest idiot here.

STEVE: Yup. That pretty much says it all.

(The three of them shared an amused grin then turned to face the tea shop. Adorned with hanging baskets over its leaded windows, it looked decidedly quaint.)

STEVE: Well... it's a nice *looking* place.

ALAN: Yeah, looks like we've picked a winner here.

ELISE: Yup, and it's all thanks to me.

STEVE: What?

ELISE: I was the one who wanted to come here.

ALAN: She's right, mate. We owe it all to Elise and her uncontrollable urge to pee every five minutes.

(Elise growled at him.)

ELISE: We *came* here because I wanted tea!!!

ALAN: Because you want to pee. That's what I said.

ELISE: Tea!

(Alan grinned to himself.)

ALAN: Right. Gotcha.

ELISE: Twat.

STEVE: Anyway! Shall we?

(Alan beamed with fiendish delight.)

ALAN: Absolutely. Before Elise pees herself.

ELISE: Oh, you are so dead.

(She then raced to the cart and grabbed her broom.)

ALAN: Uh-oh!

(He then charged off down the road with a furious Elise in hot pursuit.)

ELISE: I'm gonna clobber you!!!

ALAN: It was a joke!!!

ELISE: So are you!!!

(Watching them go, Steve could only groan in defeat.)

STEVE: We'll never get home at this rate.

A short while later, Alan, Steve and Elise found themselves seated around a table inside the quaint village tea shop. Alan was sporting a painful bump on his forehead, courtesy of Elise's broom. Unsurprisingly, he wasn't very happy about it. Caring very little for his feelings, however, Elise ignored his complaints and went ahead and ordered three slices of triple chocolate fudge cake as soon as the waitress attended to them.

ELISE: Big slices, I mean. No skimping.

WAITRESS: Absolutely, madam. I'll give you our three biggest slices.

ELISE: Which means very little if *all* the slices are tiny.

WAITRESS: Um... they're not.

ELISE: We'll be the judges of that.

WAITRESS: Right...

(She smiled.)

WAITRESS: Would you like any tea or coffee to go with it?

ELISE: Nope.

ALAN: Actually, *I* would.

ELISE: Traitor!

ALAN: Elise...

ELISE: What?

STEVE: Actually.... I could use a cup too.

ELISE: Then *I'm* going to...

STEVE: Babe.

ELISE: What?

STEVE: You know you shouldn't.

(Elise looked to him angrily for a moment then sighed.)

ELISE: Fine. But if I get thirsty later, guess who's going to suffer.

STEVE: Me... I know.

(Elise ruffled her neck then looked to the waitress again.)

ELISE: Just two teas please. For these two.

WAITRESS: And for you, madam?

ELISE: Just the cake, I suppose.

WAITRESS: Very well. Thank you for your order.

(She then headed away, leaving a miffed Elise in her wake.)

ELISE: This is just wrong. Why should I suffer alone?

STEVE: Because *you're* the one who refuses to pee outside.

ALAN: And *you're* the one with a weak bladder.

ELISE: Did that beating teach you nothing???

(Alan reeled back.)

ALAN: Just saying...

ELISE: Well don't.

(She sighed.)

ELISE: Look, I know it's for my own good. I get that. I just... well, it doesn't seem fair.

STEVE: I understand that, babe. I know how you feel.

ELISE: No. You *don't* know. But you will, because I plan to complain about it all the way home.

STEVE: I'll look forward to it.

ELISE: Yeah. You do that.

(She then folded her arms and sat there scowling bitterly at the table cloth. All Alan and Steve could do was share an uncomfortable grimace then sit back silently. Any noise, after all, might just serve to poke the angry bear. It made for quite the unsavoury scene. Mercifully, the situation didn't last long. After a few minutes, the waitress delivered two cups of tea and three extremely large helpings of the most delicious cake that Elise had ever seen. In that moment, her mood transformed. Her eyes lit up as soon as she saw it. Anxious to devour it, as soon as the waitress left again, she picked up her spoon then beamed with delight.)

ELISE: Tuck in, boys. This is gonna be glorious!

(Before she could quite dig her spoon into the cake, however, she felt a tapping on her shoulder. Wearing a baffled expression, she turned to face the elderly woman at the next table.)

ELISE: What? I'm trying to eat my cake here!

MYRTLE: You haven't got any tea, dear.

(Elise looked to her blankly.)

ELISE: What?

MYRTLE: You haven't got any tea.

ELISE: Blimey. Your observation skills are second to none. Did you used to be a detective?

MYRTLE: Oh, no, dear. I used to be a seamstress.

ELISE: A seamstress who solved crimes in her spare time?

MYRTLE: No. You've got me confused with Beryl.

ELISE: Right...

MYRTLE: Anyway, you should do something about that. Clearly the waitress forget to bring yours over.

(Elise smiled.)

ELISE: It's fine. I decided not to *have* any tea. Now if you don't mind, I'd like to devour my cake.

(Myrtle stared through her in dismay.)

MYRTLE: This is a tea shop!

ELISE: Wow. You're like a machine. That's the second mystery you've sold in as many minutes.

MYRTLE: You're meant to drink tea in a tea shop. That's why it's called a tea shop. It isn't called a cake shop, dear. You need to order some tea. It's just not right otherwise. (Elise looked to her emptily for a moment then allowed herself a smirk. The wind-up merchant within had awakened once again.)

ELISE: Well, I would, but...

(She then leant close to the old lady and lowered her voice.)

ELISE: Do you know how that stuff's made?

MYRTLE: I do, dear. With tea leaves, boiled water and milk.

ELISE: Yeah, but do you know where *tea leaves* come from?

MYRTLE: The grow them in hot countries, don't they?

(Elise sucked her teeth.)

ELISE: Ah, see; that's what they *want* you to think.

MYRTLE: Who does?

ELISE: The tea company.

MYRTLE: Oh.

(She grimaced.)

MYRTLE: Where *do* tea leaves come from then?

(Elise sighed.)

ELISE: Just normal farms.

MYRTLE: They grow them on normal farms?

ELISE: Grow them?

(She shook her head.)

ELISE: They really have got *you* fooled, haven't they?

MYRTLE: Who has?

ELISE: The tea company.

MYRTLE: Oh.

ELISE: They don't *grow* them at all. They scrape them off the ground.

MYRTLE: Off the ground?

ELISE: Yeah.

(She glanced around stealthily again then leant even closer.)

ELISE: They're made from cowpats.

MYRTLE: Cowpats???

ELISE: Keep your voice down!

MYRTLE: Sorry.

ELISE: Trust me, I used to work for the tea company, so I know. They scrape up the stale cowpats, dry them out in front of a fire then scrape off the flakes with a potato peeler. Job done. Tea leaves.

MYRTLE: But the smell...

ELISE: They air them to get rid of the smell obviously.

MYRTLE: I see...

(She grimaced.)

MYRTLE: And that's how they're *really* made, is it? The honest truth?

ELISE: Absolutely. My role at the tea company was chief cowpat scraper! So I know what I'm talking about. And that's why I never touch the stuff.

MYRTLE: Right... and yet you'd let your husband drink it.

ELISE: Yeah... the poor thing loves tea, you see? He'd be mortified if he ever found out how its made though; so I haven't got the heart to tell him.

MYRTLE: I see. That's... horrifying.

(She then back and furrowed her brow angrily. Watching her stew, Elise grinned then tucked into her cake.)

ELISE: Fun.

STEVE: Fun?

ELISE: What? Oh... nothing.

STEVE: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: Were you on the wind up again?

ELISE: Don't be absurd.

STEVE: What were you two chatting about then?

ELISE: Tea.

STEVE: What *about* tea?

(Just then, the waitress stepped up to the side of Myrtle's table and smiled warmly.)

WAITRESS: Would you like more tea, Myrtle?

(Myrtle glared at her then stepped to her feet angrily.)

MYRTLE: No, I would not!!!

(She then slapped the waitress across the face.)

MYRTLE: You're disgusting!

(With that, she about turned and stormed out of the shop, leaving a sobbing waitress in her wake. Astonished at what they were seeing, Alan and Steve sat there agape for a few moments then glanced towards Elise. Steve's shoulder's immediately slumped. Her shoulders were bobbing up and down and tears of laughter were pouring down her face.)

STEVE: Oh, for fuck sake...

ALAN: What? What's going on?

STEVE: The same thing that *always* bloody goes on.

(He sighed.)

STEVE: There's a string of villages up and down the country with bewildered, mortified and perplexed old ladies in them. All of them were perfectly fine until they encountered Elise in a tea shop.

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: Fair enough, old ladies in tea shops tend to be nosey; interfering. Downright rude sometimes. But most people would simply tell them to mind their own business. Not my Elise...

(He shook his head.)

STEVE: She sucks them in, winds them up then leaves them traumatised.

ALAN: I see.

(He allowed himself a stifled chuckle.)

ALAN: She's not like other women, is she?

STEVE: Nope.

(Elise glanced up at him.)

ELISE: I'm...

(She then fell about laughing again.)

ELISE: Forget me; just chat among yourselves.

STEVE: For pity's sake, woman.

(He sighed.)

STEVE: Every bloody time.

(He shook his head then looked to Alan.)

STEVE: Anyway... what are *you* go do now, matey? Stay with us for a while or do you have to get going? I mean, you're welcome to stay at our place as long as you like, but...

(The table then jolted as a result of Elise kicking him in the shin.)

STEVE: I mean, you're welcome to stay at our place as long as *Elise* likes.

ALAN: Right.

(He smirked.)

ALAN: You know, mate...

STEVE: Yeah, yeah; just give it a rest. I *don't* want to borrow a pair of trousers and *no*, my testicles *aren't* in Elise's handbag. It's getting old now, mate.

ALAN: Nah. That's never getting old.

STEVE: Yeah? You keep on, and *you* won't be getting old either.

(Alan chuckled.)

ALAN: Touché.

STEVE: Anyway, I'll ask again. What are you plans?

ALAN: Actually...

(He nodded sternly then lowered his voice.)

ALAN: I'm gonna kill Harry Brooks.

(Steve replied in an equally quiet voice.)

STEVE: Kill him?

ALAN: It was an ambition before. A dream. Now I'm gonna make it my goal. And I won't go home until I've done it. My staff will probably drink the pub dry, but I don't fucking care. Harry Brooks has to die!

STEVE: That's a bit drastic, isn't it?

ALAN: Drastic? How is it drastic? He ruined my life!

(He ruffled his neck.)

ALAN: And what's more, he sent me to attack Baron Darkley for a reason. He knew the baron was a master swordsman and he fully expected me to die at his hand.

STEVE: Well, yeah, obviously.

ALAN: There you go then. It's *far* from drastic. He deprived me of the only woman I've ever loved then tricked me into attacking a bloke I didn't have a hope in hell of defeating. Ruined my life then tried to get me killed. I think focussing on the killing the bastard is a pretty *tame* reaction. Most people would torture the fucker first.

STEVE: Well...

ALAN: Not that I'm ruling it out.

STEVE: I see.

(He shrugged.)

STEVE: Well, if there's anything I can do to help...

(He swiftly pulled his shins back.)

STEVE: Don't hesitate to ask Elise.

ALAN: Right.

(He smiled.)

ALAN: That's very kind of her. She makes such a lovely couple.

STEVE: Mate...

ALAN: Oh, relax.

(He then leant forward and placed his elbow on the table, only for Elise to slap it away.)

ELISE: Manners! You're not in the army now, sunshine!

(Alan furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: I realise that, Elise.

(He smirked.)

ALAN: Steve didn't have to follow *half* as many orders when he was in the army.

(He then jolted from a kick under the table.)

ALAN: Ow! Seriously?

ELISE: Yup.

ALAN: Right...

(He then glanced to Steve and lowered his voice again.)

ALAN: So, yeah. We last saw Harry Brooks back in your hometown. I'll start my search there. Hopefully, he hasn't gone very far.

STEVE: He might not have gone *anywhere*.

(He shrugged.)

STEVE: Why would he? He thinks you ran off to attack Baron Darkley and die.

ALAN: Yeah...

(He mused outwardly.)

ALAN: That's a good point, actually. He might still be there.

STEVE: Which will make your hunt a hell of lot easier.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: Just don't kill him in public. Or let anyone know you're looking for him. Be stealthy about it. You don't want to do jail time on that cunt's account.

ALAN: Of course not.

(He nodded.)

ALAN: I'll locate him, wait until after dark then kill him when nobody's around.

STEVE: Right. Just make sure there really *is* nobody around.

ALAN: Of course.

(He bit his lip.)

ALAN: Then I'll just have to figure out how to dispose of his corpse.

STEVE: We've got an incinerator back at the house.

(He then jolted from another kick in the shins.)

STEVE: Ow.

(He furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: And if you ask her nicely, Elise might let you use it.

ELISE: Denied.

ALAN: Shit!

ELISE: Sorry. Murdering that fella is a *you* thing. Don't drag *us* into it. If you go to jail, you can go on your own.

ALAN: Right. Well, that's fair enough. I'll think of something else.

(An enlightened expression then crossed his brow. Delighted with his idea, he thumped the table excitedly then raised his voice.)

ALAN: Got it! I'll butcher him with a meat cleaver. That'll make his body ten times to easier to dispose off. I'll just have to bury little pieces of the bastard all over the countryside on my way back home!

(He snarled with fiendish delight.)

ALAN: Perfect! I'm coming for you, Harry Brooks.

ELISE: Well, that's great an all, but judging by their faces, I don't think the rest of the patrons in here really wanted to hear about that, Alan!

ALAN: What?

(He then glanced around and saw horrified expressions on the faces of all those around them.)

ALAN: Right... spoke too loud...

STEVE: And now everyone in this village knows you plan to kill Harry Brooks. Not the best way to keep yourself out of the frame for his murder, mate.

ALAN: Yeah...

(He then shrugged at the other patrons.)

ALAN: He sold my fiancée to sex traffickers!

(Everyone stared at him blankly for a moment then seemed to warm to him all at once.)

OLD MAN: You should chop his balls off, lad.

OLD WOMAN: Then drown him in the river.

WAITRESS: And if anyone from the police asks us about it, we'll pretend we didn't hear a thing!

(In that moment, every stranger in the tea shop cried out with agreement.)

OLD WOMAN: Yeah!!!

OLD MAN: Give him hell, son.

ALAN: Right.

(He smiled.)

ALAN: Thanks, everyone.

(He then looked to Steve and held out his palms.)

ALAN: Problem solved.

STEVE: Yeah... until the police come and they end up singing like canaries.

ALAN: What?

STEVE: People are always defiant towards the police until they're confronted by one.

ALAN: Yeah... good point.

STEVE: You just need to hope the police don't come here and ask anyone.

ALAN: Right.

(He shrugged.)

ALAN: And why would they? This place is miles away from...

STEVE: Don't say the name of the town!

ALAN: What? Why?

STEVE: Everyone's still listening.

(Sure enough, all eyes were still on them.)

ALAN: Ah.

STEVE: Enough now, mate. Stop giving these potential songbirds the details of the crime you're planning to commit.

ALAN: Yeah...

(He then resumed eating his cake; sheepishly.)

ALAN: Good idea.

(Watching him skulk over his plate, burning red with embarrassment, Elise shook her head.)

ELISE: Steve?

STEVE: Yeah?

ELISE: Your mate's a wally.

STEVE: I realise that, love. But I was bored and he was the only bloke in my unit with a dartboard, so I *had* to befriend him really.

ELISE: Right...

(Then sat there giggling, receiving much in the way of a disdainful glance from Alan.)

A short while later, having left the tea shop, Alan, Steve and Elise found themselves back on the main road. Their journey back to Steve's hometown had resumed. Rather full from demolishing a cake that was far too big for her stomach, Elise was slouching in the back with her eyes closed. Steve was concentrating on the road and Alan was keeping an eye out for danger. He was, however, a little distracted. Events as they'd left the coffee shop had left him somewhat bemused.

ALAN: Good luck with the murder, son. That's what he said.

STEVE: Yeah...

ALAN: And his missus told me to make sure I kill him good and proper. And that the whole village is rooting for me.

STEVE: I heard, mate.

ALAN: One of them even said I should come back and let him know how it went.

STEVE: I know.

ALAN: It was an odd send off.

STEVE: And far from ideal!

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: A master criminal, you are not. Fancy advertising it like that.

ALAN: It weren't intentional, mate!

STEVE: Wasn't it? You didn't even *attempt* to lower your voice. It was like you *wanted* the world to know.

ALAN: I...

STEVE: In fact, part of me thinks, you *do* want the world to know.

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: I'm half expecting you to find him, start stabbing him then yell out, "Look at me, everyone; I'm getting my murder on."

ALAN: Steve...

STEVE: I wouldn't even be surprised if you brought along a sketch artist to capture the moment. You could advertise it on the town bulletin board then.

ALAN: Now you're being...

STEVE: Maybe you could rename your pub the, "I Killed Harry Brooks Arms" as well!

ALAN: Obtuse!

STEVE: Just saying, mate. If you're planning to commit an illegal act, you don't fucking tell the word and his wife.

ALAN: I didn't!

(He ruffled his neck.)

ALAN: I just forgot where I was and spoke a little too loudly; that's all.

STEVE: Well don't. In fact, let's never discuss it in public again. You know what you plan to do now, so there's no need to say another word about it.

ALAN: Fair enough.

(Steve shook his head then gave Alan a sideways glance.)

STEVE: How's Elise doing?

(Alan glanced over his shoulder.)

ALAN: Asleep, I think.

ELISE: Am I bollocks.

ALAN: I stand corrected.

(He then looked to Steve.)

ALAN: Are we going down that dodgy bit of road later, mate? The one with the highway robbers on it? Only, I'd better grab my sword if we are.

STEVE: We're going back the same way we came, so yeah.

ALAN: I'll just grab it then.

STEVE: You didn't already have it?

ALAN: Obviously not.

(With that, he grabbed his sword from the back then rested in against his seat.)

ALAN: That's better.

(He then gave a stifled laugh.)

ALAN: That just reminded me of something. Who was that fella we were stationed with that forgot to bring his sword to the battle with him?

(Steve chuckled.)

STEVE: Oh, yeah. What was his name?

(He then looked enlightened.)

STEVE: Billy Groves! Shady.

ALAN: That's him. Shady Groves.

(He chuckled.)

ALAN: He was a laugh, to be fair. A fucking scatterbrain, but I liked him.

STEVE: Yeah, he was a top lad. There were a few like that. Good lads; terrible soldiers.

ALAN: Like Scabby.

STEVE: Scabby?

ALAN: Yeah, Mickey Cox.

STEVE: Ah, yeah. I remember.

(He grimaced.)

STEVE: He did *not* like his nickname.

ALAN: He really didn't. In fact, he ended up spending time in the brig because of it.

STEVE: Really? When?

(Alan gave him a sideways glance.)

ALAN: You don't remember?

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: Oh, wait; that was after you left.

STEVE: That would be why then.

ALAN: Yeah.

(They shared an amused grin.)

STEVE: So how did he end up in the brig?

ALAN: Well, after the war, we all got shipped off to Newton Grange barracks.

STEVE: Newton Grange? Aint that where the cannon unit is based?

ALAN: Yeah. The army in their infinite wisdom decided to merge the cannon unit with us, the real men; the infantry.

STEVE: Well that was just *asking* for trouble.

ALAN: And then some. There was tension from day one. They kept talking crap about the infantry being a bunch of unstable psychopaths. Of course, we reciprocated by pointing out that they're a bunch of sissies.

STEVE: Well they are. Anyone can hide behind a cannon. A real man picks up a sword and fights. Looks his enemy in the eye.

ALAN: Exactly.

(He furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: Their take on it was that only psychopaths like going into battle looking to chop people's limbs off.

STEVE: That's ridiculous.

ALAN: I know.

(He shook his head.)

ALAN: And we had to share a base with these cunts. Including the recreation room.

STEVE: That was never going to end well.

(Alan sighed.)

ALAN: You're telling me. On the third day, there was a massive fight over the dartboard.

STEVE: Yeah?

ALAN: Yeah. See, three of *our* lads, Scabby included, got there first and picked up the darts. Then three of theirs got there a split second later and grabbed the scoring chalk.

Both of them insisted they were there first.

STEVE: Sounds to me like *our boys* got there first.

ALAN: They did.

(He smirked.)

ALAN: At least when *I* tell the story they did.

STEVE: Right...

ALAN: Anyway, things got a bit heated. Voices were raised and threats were made, but to their credit, rather than fighting they decided to play for it. One game. Winner gets the dartboard for the night.

STEVE: Fair enough.

(He raised an enquiring eyebrow.)

STEVE: A mistake on their part though. If I recall, Scabby was army darts champion for three years running.

ALAN: Four, mate. He was a formidable darts player.

STEVE: Right.

(He nodded.)

STEVE: So, let me guess. Thanks to Scabby, our boys whooped their arses. They couldn't handle the humiliation, so they kicked off.

ALAN: Nope. The game didn't even get *started* in the end.

STEVE: Really?

ALAN: Yeah.

STEVE: So what happened then?

ALAN: I'm coming to that!

(He rolled his eyes.)

ALAN: As soon as they'd decided to play each other, the taunting started.

STEVE: Fair enough. You've got to have a bit of banter.

ALAN: Well, yeah, I mean banter's great an' all, but only if you're any good at it. Our lads weren't.

STEVE: Oh.

ALAN: When one of their blokes made some outlandish comment about giving our boys a thrashing, one of ours retorted by saying, "You haven't got a hope in hell of beating us, mate; we've got Scabby Cox."

(Steve started to chuckle.)

STEVE: Seriously?

ALAN: Straight up, mate. And as I'm sure you can imagine; the three twats from the cannon unit pounced on it. Wouldn't let it go. For several minutes they taunted our lads with comments about gonorrhoea and syphilis.

(He sucked his teeth.)

ALAN: Scabby weren't having it, mate. That was his name they were mocking.

STEVE: So, he came out fighting.

ALAN: Nope. Worse.

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: He was holding the darts, wasn't he?

(Steve winced.)

STEVE: He didn't!

ALAN: Oh, he did. One of their lads was carted off to the infirmary with three darts embedded in his torso and Scabby was carted off to the brig.

STEVE: Shit.

(He grimaced.)

STEVE: That really wouldn't have helped our boys shake their psychopath reputation.

ALAN: It really didn't, mate. Nor did the punch up five minutes later. The other cannon unit sissies in there started mouthing off about Scabby being a typical infantry psycho, so our lads laid into them with their fists.

STEVE: Blimey!

(He smirked.)

STEVE: *Our boys* won, I hope.

ALAN: Not really, no. The military *police* won, mate. They made eighty three arrests. We *would* have won though, obviously. I mean, they're cannon unit sissies, aren't they?

STEVE: Wimps.

ALAN: Exactly.

(He shrugged.)

ALAN: Anyway, the tension died down after that. Three days later, they moved us to another barracks a hundred miles away.

STEVE: One without sissies in it, I hope.

ALAN: Yeah. It was infantry only.

STEVE: A man's base.

ALAN: Exactly.

(Steve then started to chuckle.)

STEVE: Good old, Scabby. How long was in the brig for?

ALAN: I have no idea. When I left, over a year later, he was still in there.

STEVE: Ouch.

ALAN: Yeah.

(He shrugged.)

ALAN: Still, a small price to pay for the joy of turning a cannon unit sissy into a tea strainer.

STEVE: Yup. He lived there dream, mate.

(He smiled.)

STEVE: Those were the days, Al. You just don't meet characters like that anymore.

(Alan sighed.)

ALAN: You really don't. I mean, there's a lot to hate about army life, but the camaraderie was fucking special. That feeling that we're all in a shit situation together so we might as well make the most of it, really does bring out the best in people.

STEVE: Oh, absolutely. The witty ones become hilarious, the kind ones become saintlike and the strong ones become godly. You become the best version of yourself.

ALAN: Definitely.

(As they sat there nodding in agreement with themselves, an enquiring voice suddenly rose up from behind them.)

ELISE: And what did you two become?

(Steve and Alan shared an uncomfortable grimace.)

ELISE: Well?

STEVE: Um... what was that, love?

ELISE: I said, what did you two become. Hilarious, saintly or godlike?

STEVE: Um...

ALAN: Well...

ELISE: Only if what you're saying is true and being in the army makes you an extreme version of yourself, I can only imagine that Alan here became the uber-moron.

ALAN: Excuse me?

ELISE: Just saying. You turned up at our house covered in cow shit, then sent us off on a pointless trek across the countryside to rescue a happy housewife from her loving husband. If that's the *normal* you, I shudder to think what the extreme version was like.

ALAN: Hey! We never said being in the army made you an *extreme* version of yourself; we said it turned you into the *best* version of yourself.

ELISE: Right...

(She shrugged.)

ELISE: Meaning what exactly?

ALAN: Well... if you must know, it made me tougher. And a better humanitarian. I *liked* who I was in the army.

ELISE: Fair comment. What about you, Steve?

STEVE: Actually... to be honest... I have no idea how to answer that, love.

(Alan smiled.)

ALAN: Then allow me. Your work ethic was second to none, mate. If you devoted yourself to a task, it got done. And done well; in double fast time.

STEVE: Yeah?

ALAN: You were meticulous, mate. That's why you got promoted so quickly.

(Steve nodded acceptingly.)

STEVE: I'd say that's a fair assessment. Thanks, Alan.

ALAN: Any time, mate.

(Elise exhaled.)

ELISE: Aw.

STEVE: Oh, here we go.

ELISE: Your mate loves you, Steve.

STEVE: Elise...

ELISE: You're his hero.

ALAN: Excuse me?

ELISE: Go to him, Steve. Hold him like he longs to be held.

STEVE: Babe...

ELISE: What? I'm not judging. I appreciate love in all its forms.

(She then rolled her eyes and sat back.)

ELISE: And you two reckon *the cannon unit* were sissies? I've heard it all now.

(She then started giggling to herself. Unable to tune her out, all Alan and Steve could do was stare straight ahead, shaking their heads despairingly.)

With Elise in such a devilishly playful mood, Alan and Steve were quite rightly worried. Being subjected to her dark sense of humour all the way home would have been a nightmare. This journey would be long enough without being subjected to that. They needn't, however, have worried. Elise was so amused by her sissies quip, she literally giggled herself to sleep. Their relief was palpable.

Anxious not to wake her up and reanimate the monster within, for the next five hours Alan and Steve spoke in little above a whisper. They were, however, existing in constant fear that a bump in the road might shake her awake. As far as they were concerned, the longer she slept, the better. Her silence made life bearable.

Having managed to cover quite some distance without a single word of mockery or threats of broom-related violence, Alan soon found himself slumping in his seat slightly. The peace and quiet he was experiencing was extremely comforting and he could quite happily have taken a nap. Steve, however, was not about to allow him the luxury. Having spotted Alan resting his eyes, he furrowed his brow then nudged him the side; making sure to keep his voice down.

STEVE: Pay attention, you fuckwit.

(Alan sat up slightly and furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: Fuckwit?

STEVE: Yeah. You can't afford to take a nap now, mate. This is bandit country.

ALAN: Really? Already?

STEVE: Yeah. It's amazing how quickly you can reach places when you don't have to stop for tea every twenty fucking minutes.

ALAN: Well, yeah. Obviously.

(Steve gave a stifled laugh.)

STEVE: This trip has actually been something of a one-off, time wise, Al. We only stopped at one tea shop on the way there and we've only stopped at one on the way back. That *never* happens!

ALAN: No?

STEVE: No. This is a definite first, mate. I mean, there have been times...

(He shook his head.)

STEVE: It took us five hours to get to a town twenty miles away once. We stopped at every fucking village on the way. Every single fucking one. It was nauseating. I only

went out to buy a rear axle for the carriage, but by the time we got there the shop owner had fucked off home for the day.

(He sighed with frustration.)

STEVE: Travelling with that wife of mine can be like guiding a cart with only three wheels and a lame horse sometimes. It's quicker to bloody walk.

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: I mean, it's not always like that, but like I said, there have been times.

(He smiled.)

STEVE: Yeah, it's been a good trip this.

ALAN: Outcome aside.

STEVE: Well yeah, obviously. Objective wise, it was a complete disaster. You've made yourself look like a right twat. Time wise though, it's been excellent.

ALAN: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: You know, mate, it seems to make that you could have just said *time wise*. Did you really have to throw in the bit about me making a twat of myself?

STEVE: Absolutely.

ALAN: I see.

(He smirked.)

ALAN: You're a cunt, and I'm going to punish you for that later.

STEVE: Punish me?

ALAN: You'll see.

STEVE: Yeah, right.

(He scoffed.)

STEVE: Just keep an eye out for bandits, will you? And try to keep the empty threats to a minimum; good lad.

ALAN: It wasn't an empty threat.

STEVE: Oh, behave.

(Just then, a somewhat alarmed voice rose up from the back of the cart.)

ELISE: Bandit country??? Already??? How long was I asleep for?

STEVE: Welcome back, love.

ELISE: Right...

(She furrowed her brow.)

ELISE: What sort of answer was that?

STEVE: You were out for a good five hours.

ELISE: Blimey!

(Steve smirked knowingly.)

STEVE: You were probably still worn out from the world class seeing-to I gave you at the hotel last night.

ELISE: It's doubtful. I slept through *that* too.

(Alan instantly burst out laughing. Steve, however, did not.)

STEVE: No, you fucking didn't. You were on cloud nine throughout!

ELISE: Away with the faeries more like.

STEVE: Elise...

ALAN: Um, guys...

STEVE: You grabbed the headboard at one point and thanked your lucky stars that you married me!

ELISE: Right. Sounds to me like I wasn't the *only* one fast asleep and dreaming.

ALAN: Guys!

STEVE: Butt out, Al.

ELISE: Hey, you be nice to your dim-witted friend!

(Alan furrowed his brow.)

ALAN: I'll let that slide for now on the grounds that there's a bunch of bandits ahead! Maybe we should focus on that!

(They then stared down the road ahead. Sure enough, a group of four bedraggled thugs had gathered at the spot where Elise had killed the highwayman the day before.)

ELISE: Bugger.

ALAN: So what's the plan? Speed up and mow them down if they try to get in the way, or find another route?

STEVE: There *is* no other route and if we try to speed through them, they might just slash the horse's leg off with a blade.

ELISE: Well... what then?

(Steve sneered.)

STEVE: Pass me my sword.

ELISE: Excuse me?

(Steve groaned in frustration.)

STEVE: Please.

ELISE: That's better.

ALAN: Wow.

STEVE: Oh, pipe down, you.

(Elise then passed Steve his sword.)

STEVE: Thanks, love.

ELISE: Anything for you, my cherub.

(She then patted him lovingly on the shoulder.)

ELISE: Give them hell. If you attack them with anything like the ferocity you made love to me with last night, it'll be over in no time.

STEVE: Excuse me?

ELISE: Right. That sounded like an insult, didn't it?

STEVE: Yes!

ELISE: Sorry. It actually didn't *mean* to insult you that time. I was trying to say you rocked my world with your power last night, now use it to rock theirs!

(She flinched.)

ELISE: But in a very different way!

STEVE: Right...

(He then sneered coldly and stared at the four thugs. To say he was fired up would be quite the understatement.)

STEVE: Let's get this show on the road, Al.

ALAN: Absolutely.

STEVE: Right fucking now.

ALAN: Well; not right *now*, per se. As soon as we get there though!

STEVE: Right! Yeah! It'd be *nice* to get the show on road sooner, but we can't because we're over here.

ALAN: And they're over *there*.

(He ruffled his neck.)

ALAN: And we're not.

STEVE: Exactly. But when we *are* over there, mate...

ALAN: Oh, they're in for a *world* of trouble then, son.

STEVE: A world of blood and pain.

ALAN: *And* tears.

STEVE: *Rivers* of tears!

ALAN: Yeah.

(Sitting in the back, peering between them, Elise could only roll her eyes.)

ELISE: Are you two really having this conversation?

STEVE: It's fighting talk, love; you wouldn't understand.

ELISE: I see...

(She then sat back and reached for her knitting.)

ELISE: I'll continue making those socks then. Not now, because I'm over here and my knitting is over there. Once I've finished reaching for them though, they're in for a world of needlework.

(Steve gave her a sideways glance.)

STEVE: What?

ELISE: Housewife talk, love; you wouldn't understand.

STEVE: Right...

ALAN: Pay attention, mate. We're almost there.

(Sure enough, the horse and cart was rapidly rolling towards where the four thugs were standing over the body of the highwayman that Elise had killed.)

ALAN: What are the odds of them simply letting us pass?

STEVE: Nil!

ALAN: Yup. My thoughts entirely.

(Sure enough, as soon as the cart was upon them, the four thugs drew their swords and proceeded to flag them down.)

THIEF 01: Halt or the horse loses a leg!!!

ALAN: Yup; you called it, Steve.

STEVE: Uh-huh.

(With that, he called the horse to a halt. As soon as he'd done so, however, both Steve and Alan leapt to their feet, brandishing their blades.)

ALAN: Skilled veteran soldiers!

STEVE: Let us pass or suffer the consequences!

(Looking extremely hard-done-by, the thief who'd called them to a halt, furrowed his brow.)

THIEF 01: Easy, mate. I just wanted to ask you a question!

ALAN: No, you can't have our money!

STEVE: Or indeed, *any* of our things! In fact, you can fuck right off.

THIEF 01: I wasn't even going to ask that!

ALAN: No?

THIEF 01: No! We're looking for information. We're not going to rob *anybody*!

STEVE: Is that so?
THIEF 01: Yes!
(He ruffled his neck.)
THIEF 01: We've stopped about twenty carts today. And we didn't rob *any* of them!
THIEF 02: Yes, we did!
(Thief 01 glowered at him.)
THIEF 01: Shut up, Clive!
THIEF 02: Right...
(He snarled.)
THIEF 02: Sorry, Gavin!
THIEF 01: Hey! Don't give my name away!
THIEF 02: You gave *mine* away!!!
THIEF 01: When?
THIEF 02: You said "Shut up, Clive"!
THIEF 01: I did?
(He flinched.)
THIEF 01: Fuck. I did. Sorry, mate!
THIEF 02: Whatever. It's a bit late now, if you ask...
STEVE: Hey! If you're going to ask a question, fucking ask a question!
ALAN: Yeah. We'd like to get home today, if that's okay with you.
THIEF 01: What?
(He then looked enlightened.)
THIEF 01: Oh, yeah. The question.
(He furrowed his brow.)
THIEF 01: We've been stopping people to ask if they passed down this road yesterday and saw anything untoward.
STEVE: Such as?
THIEF 01: This...
(He then stepped to one side and pointed to the crumpled remains of the dead robber.)
THIEF 01: Our mate here was brutally slain and we want to know who did it. So, did you see anything?
STEVE: Yesterday?
THIEF 01: Yeah!
STEVE: No, mate. We weren't even here yesterday. We passed through here two days ago and didn't see another soul.
THIEF 01: I see.
(He sighed.)
THIEF 01: I guess you can't help then.
STEVE: Sorry!
THIEF 01: It's fine.
(Suddenly, all four thieves held their swords out in Steve's direction.)
THIEF 01: In that case, we'll just take your money then you can be on your way!
(Steve and Alan shared an unimpressed glance.)
STEVE: Well would you look at that?
ALAN: I know, mate. Astonishing. Who'd have seen that one coming?
STEVE: Right?

(He then rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: Look here, Gavin...

THIEF 01: How do you know my name???

STEVE: Wow. Seriously?

THIEF 01: What?

STEVE: You...

ALAN: Save it, mate. We're not dealing with the brains of the nation here; words are gonna be wasted. We might as well cut to the killing them part!

STEVE: Good point!

THIEF 01: Oh, you want to fight, do you?

THIEF 02: Big mistake, boys!

THIEF 01: Yeah! Bring it on!

ALAN: Fine!

(Just then, Elise's voice rose up from the back of the cart.)

ELISE: Are you lot bloody stupid or something?

THIEF 01: Why? What have you heard? Has my mother being talking again?

ELISE: What? No!

(She rolled her eyes.)

ELISE: You...

STEVE: Leave it, babe; let Alan and I deal with these cunts.

ELISE: But nobody has to deal with anybody. In fact, if you four thieves had half a brain between you, you wouldn't be wasting your time *here*.

(Thief 01 gave her a condescending glance.)

THIEF 01: Yeah; we'd have *proper* jobs. You really *have* been talking to my mother.

ELISE: That's not what I meant, dickhead!

(She furrowed her brow.)

ELISE: I mean, if you had a half a brain, you'd be off avenging your friend's death.

THIEF 02: How can we? We don't know who did it!

ELISE: Isn't it *obvious* who did it?

(Thief 01 looked to her sheepishly.)

THIEF 01: I don't know. I'm not good at spotting obvious things.

ELISE: Evidently!

(She rolled her eyes then pointed back down the road.)

ELISE: Idiots. Rather than pissing about here, you should be heading that way; seeking your revenge.

THIEF 01: On who?

(Elise nodded knowingly.)

ELISE: Who do you think? This is clearly the work of The Highway Avenger!

(The four thieves all looked to one another in bewilderment.)

THIEF 01: Who?

ELISE: The Highway Avenger! Scourge of highway robbers everywhere.

THIEF 01: Right...

(He grimaced.)

THIEF 01: That's a thing, is it?

ELISE: Yes. He's been patrolling the roads for months now, making it safe for travellers like ourselves. This is quite obviously his handiwork.

THIEF 02: How can you tell?

ELISE: Because your friend's dead.

THIEF 02: And that gives it away because...

ELISE: The Highway Avenger *makes* people like him dead.

STEVE: Elise, what the hell are you talking about?

ELISE: I'm talking about The Highway Avenger. Also known as Baron Darkley from Owsley!

THIEF 01: Baron Darkley?

ELISE: Yeah. From Owsley!

(She shrugged.)

ELISE: If you lot were serious about avenging your friend here, you'd be on your way to Owsley; not pissing about here, getting on my nerves.

(She glanced away nonchalantly.)

ELISE: Clearly you don't *care* about your friend very much, or you'd have left already!

(Thief 01 whimpered pitifully. His feelings were visibly hurt.)

THIEF 01: That's not fair! We *do* care!

THIEF 02: From the bottom of our hearts!

ELISE: Then why are you still here?

(She then punched the air with her fist and cried out.)

ELISE: To Owsley, men!!!

(Utterly sucked in, all four thieves then cried out in perfect harmony.)

THIEVES: To Owsley!!!

(With that, they raced away to where they'd left their horses, saddled up then set off down the road.)

THIEF 01: For Vengeance!!!

THIEF 02: Huzzah!!!

(As they galloped away, kicking up a trail of dust in their wake, Elise sat down then proceeded to chuckle.)

ELISE: Idiots!

(She smiled.)

ELISE: Take me home, boys.

(She then glanced up at where Steve and Alan were staring at her in bewilderment.)

ELISE: What?

STEVE: You sent them to Baron Darkley!

ALAN: Why would you *do* that? He's a really nice bloke!

ELISE: Apparently so, yes.

(She smirked.)

ELISE: He's also a master swordsman.

(She then picked up her knitting and resumed making Steve some new socks.)

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: Darkley's gonna chop their limbs off.

ALAN: Yeah... that's not going to end well for those four, is it?

STEVE: Nope.

(They then nodded thoughtfully.)

ALAN: Mate?

STEVE: Yeah?

ALAN: Your wife's an evil genius.

STEVE: Yeah... I get that a lot.

(Elise scoffed.)

ELISE: I'm hardly a genius. I just saved us the trouble of having to fight, by sending those four idiots off to commit suicide instead.

ALAN: Yeah... like I said. Evil genius.

STEVE: Some have even suggested witchcraft.

(Alan then started to chuckle.)

ALAN: Either way, that was brilliant.

STEVE: Right?

(He smiled.)

STEVE: Elise? You fucking rule.

ELISE: Yeah?

STEVE: Absolutely!

ALAN: Blimey, you've changed your tune, mate.

(He then made himself comfortable in his seat.)

ALAN: A minute ago, you said travelling with her was like being in a cart with only three wheels and a lame horse.

ELISE: Oh, did he now?

STEVE: You cunt!

ALAN: Yeah...

(He smirked.)

ALAN: Told you I was gonna punish you, didn't I?

STEVE: You...

(He then felt the full weight of Elise's broom crashing down on his head.)

STEVE: Ow!!! Elise!!!

ALAN: Serves you right, mate. That's what you get for...

(He then felt the full weight of her broom as well.)

ALAN: Ouch!!! What did you do that for???

ELISE: Nobody likes a tell tale!

ALAN: Right...

ELISE: Now explain your comment, Steven!

(Steve growled.)

STEVE: I'm gonna kill you, Alan!

ELISE: Hey! Talk to me!

STEVE: I...

(He sighed in defeat.)

STEVE: Fine. I just said that, sometimes, when we keep having to stop for tea... that... well... it was like travelling in a cart with three wheels and a lame horse. You know, because it takes a really long time to get anywhere.

ELISE: I see...

(She then started to chuckle.)

ELISE: That's true, actually. Sometimes it'd be quicker to walk!

STEVE: Thank you.

(Elise then whacked Alan with her broom again.)

ALAN: Ouch!!! Why???

ELISE: For shit stirring. His comment wasn't even inaccurate, but you made it sound like an insult.

ALAN: It was an insult!!!

ELISE: Do you want to get hit again???

(Alan flinched then stared at the road ahead.)

ALAN: Let's just carry on with our journey, shall we?

ELISE: Good idea.

(She nodded.)

ELISE: Steve?

STEVE: Yes, love?

ELISE: To the homestead!!!

STEVE: Right!

(With that, he set the horse in motion and their journey home resumed. Annoyed with Alan for dropping him in it, Steve glowered bitterly at the road for several miles; mumbling obscenities under his breath. Annoyed with Elise for punishing him over it, Alan did the same. Elise on the other hand, just sat there, innocently knitting with a highly amused grin on her face.)

Following something of an uneventful resumption of their journey, it wasn't long before the wheels of Steve's cart rolled back into his hometown. There was, however, very little acknowledgment of the fact. Still not in the best moods, Steve and Alan hadn't said a single word to one another since they'd set out again. Elise had also remained silent, on the grounds that she'd been focussing on getting her knitting finished. It had been an odd section of the journey to say the least. There'd been no communication whatsoever. Steve had just concentrated on road whilst silence reigned. It was a situation that lasted well into the centre of town until Elise's voice piped up excitedly from the rear of the carriage.

ELISE: And we're done!

(Steve and Alan shared an empty glance then Steve peered over his shoulder.)

STEVE: We're done?

ELISE: I've finished making your socks.

(She exhaled.)

ELISE: Some of my finest work, actually.

STEVE: You remembered to leave holes for me to put my feet in this time, did you?

(Elise furrowed her brow.)

ELISE: Seriously? You're gonna *keep* bringing that up, are you?

STEVE: Well...

ELISE: It happened once!

(She ruffled her neck.)

ELISE: I knitted the foot first... then forgot. And did it again at the other end.

STEVE: Creating the perfect v-shaped draft excluder.

ELISE: Steven...

STEVE: If only we had a v-shaped door.

ELISE: Oh, put a sock in it. Pun not intended.

(She nodded.)

ELISE: And besides; it was no great loss. I just cut the monstrosity in half and bingo. A pair of socks.

STEVE: And they were appreciated.

ELISE: Good. So will these be, I hope. Like I said; my finest work.

(She mused to herself.)

ELISE: By far. I might actually keep these for myself.

STEVE: What for? They'd never fit *you*. You have ridiculously tiny feet!

(Elise sighed.)

ELISE: That's true. It's just that I did a really good job with these. Giving them to *you* seems like a waste.

STEVE: Right...

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: Well, don't *I* feel loved.

(He glanced to Alan.)

STEVE: Can you believe she said that?

ALAN: Absolutely I can.

STEVE: Yeah...

(He sighed.)

STEVE: So can I.

ALAN: Hey, look on the bright side. At least she bothers to *make* you clothes. Nobody does that for *me*. Everything *I* own came from a bloody jumble sale.

ELISE: And it shows.

ALAN: Thank you.

STEVE: Al, mate, don't get me wrong. I'm grateful for what she makes; of course I am.

ELISE: Are you though?

STEVE: Of course.

(He then ruffled his neck.)

STEVE: Though, I have to say, it doesn't seem very fair that *I* get nothing but homemade stuff, while you buy all *your* clothes from the boutique in town. Professionally made.

ELISE: It's not about *fairness*, Steven. I just like to look nice!

ALAN: And as the man of the house, that's your prerogative, Elise.

STEVE: Hey!

ELISE: Man???

(She snarled.)

ELISE: Where's that broom?

ALAN: Hey, I'm not calling you a man. I'm just saying...

(He smirked.)

ALAN: Compared to Steve...

STEVE: I'm gonna stop you there, mate!

ELISE: And I'm going to stop looking for my broom, on the grounds that that comment tickled me.

STEVE: Yeah. It fucking would, wouldn't it?

(Just then, he spotted Frank the fur trader racing towards him. His face bore the look of a man who'd recently seen a ghost. Somewhat concerned by it, Steve yanked on the reins in a bid to slow the horse.)

STEVE: What's going on here, I wonder.

ALAN: That's the fur trader, isn't it?

STEVE: Yeah. He looks a bit startled. I hope there wasn't a problem with the pelt I flogged him.

(He then pulled the horse to a standstill and watched as Frank raced to the side of the cart.)

STEVE: You alright there, Frank, mate? Nothing wrong with that fur I sold you was there?

FRANK: No, mate. I was just checking to see if it was really you!

STEVE: What? Really me?

ALAN: What a weird thing to say. Has he been on the beer?

STEVE: Looks that way.

FRANK: I haven't been anywhere *near* the beer!

STEVE: Then...

FRANK: I heard you were dead!

STEVE: Dead?

ALAN: He doesn't *look* very dead.

ELISE: You're not dead are you, Steve? Only, if you died and neglected to tell me, there's going to hell to pay.

STEVE: No, no, love. I'm perfectly alive.

ALAN: Maybe you should check your pulse just to make sure.

STEVE: Good thinking.

(Frank furrowed his brow.)

FRANK: Yeah, that's all very witty an' all, mate, but this is no time for joking around. There's a rumour going around town that you, your wife and that mate of yours got killed.

ELISE: What???

STEVE: Who told you that???

FRANK: Darren at the pub!

(Steve, Alan and Elise all looked enlightened.)

STEVE: Right...

ALAN: Nowhere near the beer, he said.

ELISE: How many have you had?

FRANK: That was last night. I haven't been in the pub today.

STEVE: Really? Still pissed from last night?

ELISE: How drunk *were* you???

ALAN: And how drunk was that Darren fella?

FRANK: Can you shut up about drinking?

(He rolled his eyes.)

FRANK: Darren was just passing on what he'd heard from Harry Brooks.

ALAN: Harry Brooks???

(He then sat there and seethed.)

ALAN: Still in town, is he?

STEVE: Calm down, Al!

ELISE: And keep your plans to yourself, remember!

STEVE: Definitely.

(He then looked to Frank and smiled.)

STEVE: Look, mate. There's no need to fret. As you can see, we're all alive and in perfect health. It was just a bullshit rumour, put about by some horrible wanker.

FRANK: No, mate; you don't understand. There's *every* need for *you* to fret!

STEVE: What? Why?

FRANK: Harry Brooks told everyone that Baron Darkley killed you all.

STEVE: Well, he didn't.

ELISE: So no harm done. He was just saying it to get attention probably.

FRANK: On the contrary. He genuinely believes it!

ALAN: He does? Why?

FRANK: Well, I don't fucking know, do I? Nor does it matter. What matters is, he's taken full advantage of your deaths and moved into your house!

ELISE: What???

FRANK: Him and four of his mates!

STEVE: In our house???

FRANK: Yeah! They...

(He then watched on open-mouthed as Steve set the horse in motion and left him standing without a bye or leave.)

FRANK: Right... well it was nice chatting anyway. And you're welcome, by the way.

(He then rolled his eyes and headed back towards his shop.)

Having exited the town at full speed, somehow managing not to run anyone over, Alan, Steve and Elise were staring dead ahead, snarling furiously. Steve and Elise's house was their pride and joy. It meant the world to them. Knowing that an intruder was in there had enraged them beyond words. Alan shared their rage. He wanted to kill Harry Brooks so badly, it hurt. That man had ruined his life. Suffice to say, they wouldn't be slowing down until they'd got back to the house and set about making him pay.

STEVE: As long as there's breath left in that cunt's body, the world is a shittier place. I'm gonna gut him like a fish!

ALAN: Join the fucking queue!

ELISE: He's in our house, Steve! Our fucking house!

(She growled.)

ELISE: I knew this Brooks fella was a cunt from everything you've told me, but... our house!!! Nobody goes in our house uninvited and lives!!!

STEVE: Fucking right!!!

(He snarled.)

STEVE: You know what must have happened, don't you?

ALAN: Harry fucking Brooks happened!!!

STEVE: I mean specifically!

(He rolled his eyes.)

STEVE: He must have seen the three of us heading out to town and realised we were off to rescue Kerry.

ALAN: And assumed that Baron Darkley would kill us all.

STEVE: Exactly!

(He then roared with rage.)

STEVE: So stole my fucking house on the grounds that I wouldn't need it anymore!!!

(Elise snarled bitterly.)

ELISE: Cunt! I'm angry now, husband of mine.

STEVE: You aint the only one!

ELISE: That bastard is gonna feel the full force of my broom!!! And so are his friends!

(Steve sucked his teeth.)

STEVE: Actually, babe, *about* his friends. If they're Harry's mates, there's a fair chance they're all former soldiers.

ELISE: So?

STEVE: So maybe you should leave the fighting to Alan and I.

ELISE: No, I'm good; I'd rather we won.

STEVE: Hey!

ALAN: What's that supposed to mean???

ELISE: Well... I've never seen you two fight. You *talk* a good game, but every time danger reared its ugly head on this trip, *I* had to sort it out!

STEVE: That's bollocks!

ELISE: Is it? Who defeated the highway robber? And who got rid of his mates on the way back?

ALAN: Yeah, but...

ELISE: All you two did was invade Baron Darkley house; and even then you ended up leaving backwards, bowing apologetically.

(She ruffled her neck.)

ELISE: If that's the level you two are at, I fear you're gonna *need* me.

(She grimaced at Steve.)

ELISE: In fact, judging by what I've seen so far, I'm starting to think the war might have been over sooner, if *I'd* joined the army and *you'd* stayed home to raise Emma.

(Steve could barely believe what he was hearing.)

STEVE: Are you seriously gonna sit there and belittle my fighting skills, right on the verge of going into battle???

ELISE: Why not? You did it to me!

(She pouted.)

ELISE: Leave it to Alan and I, indeed. That was bloody rude!

ALAN: He was only trying to keep you safe. We're likely to be dealing with trained soldiers.

ELISE: Yeah! Trained by the same people who trained you two silly buggers. Trust me, you're gonna need me.

STEVE: Babe?

ELISE: Yeah?

(Steve gave her a suspicious glance.)

STEVE: Are you doing that thing where you rile me up, knowing I'll fight harder just to prove myself?

ELISE: No, I'm genuinely afraid you two might lose.

STEVE: Well don't be!

(He ruffled his neck bitterly.)

STEVE: Fucking cheek.

ALAN: Yeah...

(He then gave Elise a suspicious glance before looking to Steve again.)

ALAN: You're really psyched now, aren't you? Riled up!

STEVE: Yes!

ALAN: Hmm...

(He then looked to where Elise where smirking back at him.)

ALAN: It really *is* witchcraft!

ELISE: Nope. Just awesome leadership.

(She then ruffled Steve's hair.)

ELISE: Go get 'em, tiger.

STEVE: Stop that!!!

(He sneered.)

STEVE: Fucking patronising *me*. I'll show *you*!

ELISE: That's the plan.

STEVE: What?

ELISE: Nothing.

STEVE: Right...

(He snarled.)

STEVE: This is our turning, you two. Brace yourselves!!!

(With a shriek, Alan and Elise quickly grabbed the cart then held on tight as Steve guided the horse around the corner, forcing the cart to go up on two wheels.)

ELISE: Maniac!!!

STEVE: Damned right!!!

(As the cart zoomed forth towards the house, Alan tightened his grip on his blade then growled.)

ALAN: We'll take back your house and kill them all horribly. Especially Harry!!!

ELISE: That's the spirit!

ALAN: He's gonna pay for all the shit he's put me through!!!

STEVE: They all fucking are!!!

ELISE: Yeah!!!

(Moments later, when the cart arrived at the opening at the front of the house, Steve yanked hard on the reins to slow the horse. Before the cart had even properly stopped he then jumped down and charged towards his front door. Alan was hot on his heels. A far deal calmer, Elise waited until the cart had almost stopped then hopped from the back and ruffled her neck.)

ELISE: Okay, broom...

(She grabbed her broom from the cart then growled.)

ELISE: We've got a house to clean!

(She then hurried after Steve and Alan. Not about to stand around and wait for her, as soon as he reached the door, Steve snarled venomously then threw himself at it; shoulder first.)

STEVE: Let's go, Al!!!

(He then rebounded off the door again and landed in a heap on the gravel.)

ALAN: I'd love to, mate, but I think the door might be locked.

STEVE: I know that, you cock! Why do you think I tried to knock it down?

(Just then, Elise arrived at the door and yanked a door key from her bra.)

ELISE: Seriously, Steve?

(She rolled her eyes.)

ELISE: You installed a solid oak door specifically to *prevent* anyone from being able to knock it down!

(Steve scrambled to his feet with a furrowed brow.)

STEVE: Yeah! And it works!

ELISE: Right...

(With that, she unlocked the front door then cast it open.)

ELISE: Okay, boys; let's...

(She then watched on as Steve and Alan raced into the house with their blades aloft.)

ELISE: Yeah. That!

(And with a shrug, she raced into the house after them. Moments later, when she arrived in the living room, she found Alan trying to cut one man down with his sword while her husband battled with three others. Another man was standing back from the fight, shaking his head repeatedly. There'd been no pre-fight banter whatsoever. Steve and Alan had just raced into the room where all five intruders were and let loose with their swords. Unfortunately however, this was the room where Steve kept his collection of swords, so the intruders had had no trouble finding a weapon to fight back with.)

STEVE: A little help here, Alan, you cunt! It's three onto one here!

ALAN: And I'll join you just as soon I've separated this cunt's head from his neck!

(The intruder that Alan was fighting looked absolutely mortified.)

HARRY: Don't be like that, Al! We're old war buddies!

STEVE: Al! Three onto one, mate! Help me out!

ALAN: So this cunt can run away?

STEVE: Actually, I was thinking along the lines of you helping me out so I don't get fucking killed!

ALAN: That's a bit fucking selfish, isn't it?

STEVE: Selfish??? Three onto one, mate! Four if their mate ever joins in!

(At this point the abstaining intruder at the back stepped forward to make his feelings known.)

GROVES: Why would I do that? I want nothing to do with this charade, Steve! If I'd known it was *your* house Harry planned to steal, I'd never have come.

STEVE: You *know* me???

GROVES: Yes! It's me! Billy Groves!

STEVE: Shady???

GROVE: Yeah!

STEVE: Help me out then, mate! It's three onto one here!!!

GROVE: Right.

(With that, he grabbed a sword from Steve's collection then skewered one of Steve's assailants with it. Having watched the intruder's corpse hit the floor, he then shrugged dismissively.)

GROVE: Cowardly, I know, but then so is fighting three onto one.

(With that, he hurried to Steve's side and snarled determinedly.)

GROVE: Now there's three of *us* and three of *them*!

(Before he could quite take his sword to one of Steve's other opponents, however, Elise zoomed past him and laid into his intended target with her broom. With a shriek, the intruder staggered backwards, dropping his blade.)

MORRIS: Ouch!!! Hey!!! That fucking hurts!!!

(Astonished at what he was seeing, Groves rubbed his eyes then glanced to where Alan was trying to strike Harry down.)

GROVES: Are you seeing this, Turnip?

ALAN: I'm a bit busy here, mate!

GROVES: Oh...

(He then looked to where Steve was duelling another intruder before glancing to where Elise was battering the third.)

GROVES: Right...

(He smiled then raised his voice.)

GROVES: You must be Elise!

(Battering the intruder with her broom like a savage barbarian, Elise snarled.)

ELISE: Correct!

GROVES: I thought so.

(He then looked to Steve.)

GROVES: She's exactly as you described her, mate.

(He then shrugged before turning and heading for the door.)

GROVES: Anyway, it's three on three now, so I'll see myself out. Good luck, lads.

(Doing his utmost to strike down his opponent, Steve snarled then offered up his reply; blissfully unaware that Groves had already left.)

STEVE: I don't need luck, mate. This cunt is going down!

ALAN: And so is this cunt!

HARRY: Come of it, Al. We fought side by side for years; that has to count for something, surely!

ALAN: No, it fucking doesn't!

(Harry defended himself against a powerful cross-strike then whimpered fearfully.)

HARRY: How can it not? What did I do that was so bad?

ALAN: Seriously???

HARRY: Yes! I merely messed with you a little bit.

(He ruffled his neck indignantly.)

HARRY: So you're being a bit petty, if you ask me.

ALAN: Petty??? You ruined my life! Then you tried to get me murdered by Baron fucking Darkley!

STEVE: Then he stole my fucking house!

(He snarled.)

STEVE: Come to think of it, do you want to swap opponents, Al? *I* want to attack him an' all!

ALAN: Kill your *own* fucking opponent; this cunt is mine!

STEVE: Fine. I'll finish *this* cunt off then we can both fucking kill him!

ALAN: No! I fucking told you already, he's mine! Once you're done with *that* cunt, you can help Elise instead!

(Looking somewhat miffed, Steve's opponent then spoke up.)

ROGER: Um... I have a name, you know?

STEVE: Is it Cunt?

ROGER: No! And I resent you calling me that! This cunt; that cunt; my name's Roger!

STEVE: Roger the cunt?

ROGER: Stop that! You're hurting my feelings!

(He clenched his free fist.)

ROGER: It's bad enough you breaking into Harry's house and attacking me like this, but to call me vile names into the bargain? What kind of people are you???

STEVE: Harry's house? This is *my* fucking house!!!

ROGER: No, it isn't! You can't just charge into someone's property and decide you own it! Harry worked hard all his life to afford this place!

STEVE: What???

ROGER: Tell them, Harry!

(Harry defended from Alan's sword swing then cringed.)

HARRY: Yeah, about that, mate... I may have exaggerated...

ROGER: What?

HARRY: This is Steve's house. But in my defence, I moved in because I thought he was dead!

ROGER: Oh! I see.

(He then lowered his blade.)

ROGER: Then it's all just been a horrible misunderstanding, hasn't it? Let's go home.

(He then felt a searing pain. Steve had lunged and skewered his left shoulder with his blade.)

ROGER: Ow!!! You bastard! What did you do that for???

(He then raised his sword and came out fighting. Wearing a venomous snarl, he was laying into Steve with everything he had.)

ROGER: I was about to go home!!! I'd already admitted it'd all been a horrible mistake. So you fucking stabbed me!!! While I had my guard lowered, no less! I'm not having that!!!

STEVE: Easy, mate! I didn't notice you'd lowered your guard!!!

ROGER: My sword was at my side!!! I'd stopped fighting!!!

(Steve edged backwards as he defended from the violent sortie.)

STEVE: I didn't know!!!

(He furrowed his brow.)

STEVE: Now calm down. Lower the sword again and we can call it a day!

ROGER: I should cocoa, chummy! Like I'm gonna fall for that again! You're gonna feel pain!!!

(Still bravely defending against the rampaging Alan, Harry managed a smirk.)

HARRY: Ha! Now we're in business. Roger there is a superb swordsman when he's riled. Looks like I'm back in the game!!!

ROGER: I'm gonna kill you! Then I'm gonna kill your mate there! And your wife! You *deserve* to die! And I'm keeping this house! You're a wanker!!!

STEVE: Mate!!! It was an honest mistake!

HARRY: Give him hell, Roger!!!

(He sneered at Alan.)

HARRY: You're fucked now, mate. With Roger in full-on rage mode, you don't stand a chance. He's one in a million when he's pissed off!

(He grimaced.)

HARRY: Unlike Morris. He's fucking useless. He's being beaten to a pulp by a housewife with a broom!

ALAN: That doesn't make him useless by any means. Out of the lot of you, he's got the worst deal there, son. Trust me!

(Sure enough, the intruder in question, Morris was barely conscious. He was on his feet still, somehow, but he'd long since lost the ability to fight. And still, Elise continued to pile in on him.)

ELISE: *My fucking house!!! Mine!!!*

(She thrust the broom into his face then growled.)

ELISE: The teapot? Mine!

(She then bashed him across the head with it.)

ELISE: The curtains? Mine!!!

(She then slashed him across the face repeatedly from left to right then back again; citing an object in time with every swing.)

ELISE: The table, the chairs, the beds, the lamps, the bathtub, the cupboards...

(She then smacked him over the head again.)

ELISE: Mine!!!

(Much to her horror, the head of the broom then shot across the room, having smashed off on her opponent's head. Left holding just the handle, Elise was livid.)

ELISE: You broke my broom!!!

(She then set about battering him with the handle.)

ELISE: That was favourite one, you bastard!!!

(It was safe to say that Morris was in a world of hell right now. Elise had seen red and looked set to continue attacking him for quite some time. Elise, however, was not the only one who'd seen red. Affronted at being stabbed after lowering his guard, Roger was also in a fit of rage. As such, Steve was having a torrid time. Alan, however, would not be coming to his aid. He'd seen red from the minute he'd set eyes on Harry. Since that moment he'd only had one thought in mind; killing him horribly. As a result, the battle was extremely finely poised. Roger and Alan were well on top in their fights. Steve and Harry were desperately defending for their lives. The first breakthrough, therefore, would be decisive. Steve and Alan could only hope it wouldn't be Roger who made that breakthrough.)

On a road a short distance away, at this time, Steve and Elise's daughter, Emma was sitting in the passenger seat of a horse drawn cart. Her current boyfriend, Nico, was driving. This was Emma's first trip home since she'd left for university and she was more than a little apprehensive. Quick to spot her unease, Nico gave her an uncertain glance then stared at the road again.

NICO: You okay there, darling?

(Emma whimpered.)

EMMA: I don't know.

NICO: Right...

EMMA: I've never brought a boyfriend home before, you see? I'm worried about how my parents might react.

(Nico gulped.)

NICO: Yeah?

EMMA: Yeah.

NICO: Should I be worried?

EMMA: Honestly?

NICO: Yes.

(He cringed.)

NICO: It's no secret that dads always hate their daughter's boyfriends. I was expecting that. But if there's something more I need to know... I mean, he's not a psychopath, is he?

(Emma furrowed her brow.)

EMMA: What? No!

NICO: Well... that's something.

EMMA: I mean, he's probably not going to like you very much. Like you say, dads don't like their daughter's choice of boyfriend.

(She cringed.)

EMMA: But *he*'s the least of your worries.

NICO: Oh?

EMMA: My mum...

NICO: Your mum?

EMMA: She's... she's a little... how do I put this? She's different.

(Nico whimpered.)

NICO: She's gonna hate me, isn't she?

EMMA: I don't know. Probably not, actually. She might think you're perfect for me.

NICO: Then where's the problem?

EMMA: Well... she has a weird sense of humour.

NICO: What?

EMMA: She likes to prank people. There's a fair chance, she'll act all inappropriate and start asking you leading questions, just because she thinks it's funny to make people squirm.

(Nico looked to her nervously for a moment then forced a smile.)

NICO: It'll be fine.

EMMA: Will it?

NICO: Yeah. Now I know that, I can behave accordingly. When I find out it was a joke, I'll laugh along. You know, show her how easy going I am. I'll win her over that way.

EMMA: Really? You'd do that for me?

NICO: Of course. Look...

(He gave her a loving smile.)

NICO: It doesn't matter if you have an odd family. I love you. So if being with you means becoming *part* of an odd family then so be it. You're worth it, Emma.

EMMA: Aw...

(She smiled at him adoringly for a moment then faced the road again.)

EMMA: Still, just to be on the safe side, I reckon it'll be best if you wait outside for a moment. I'll go in by myself and say hello to my parents then call you in once I've warned them to behave.

NICO: Sure. If that's what you think is best.

EMMA: I do.

(She then sat back and took a deep breath.)

EMMA: Thanks for your understanding, Nico. You've set my mind at ease. I'm looking forward to getting there now.
(The two of them then shared a loving smile.)

Back at the house at this time, the battle was still in full flow. Steve was still defending for his life and Alan was still attacking Harry like a man possessed. Just beyond them, Elise was still battering Morris with a broom handle. How he hadn't passed out by now, nobody knew. Nor did they care. Right now, they all had bigger fish to fry. Swinging his sword from left to right, blocking a never ending sortie of sword swings, Steve's face bore a permanent, horrified expression.)

STEVE: This bloke's a nutter!!!

ROGER: Fucking stabbing me after I'd already lowered my blade!!! Out of order!!!

STEVE: I already explained that!!!

ROGER: Yes! Badly! Now I'm going to stab you back!!!

(He growled.)

ROGER: Right in that face!!!

STEVE: Mate!

ROGER: I'm not your mate!!!

(He snarled.)

ROGER: People like you are the reason we have treaties; conventions! Rules of engagement! A code of conduct in battle! To stop the likes of you from attacking unarmed men! Or stabbing your opponent while he's in the process of waving the white flag! Like you just did to me! You sir, are a war criminal!!!

STEVE: No, I'm not!!! It was an innocent mistake; how many times??? I didn't notice you'd lowered your weapon!!!

ROGER: Liar!!! The war crime courts are full of bastards like you, making that same ridiculous claim!!!

(He sneered at him coldly then spoke in a gormless voice.)

ROGER: I am be sorry, your honour. I didn't see him lower his sword.

(His voice then returned to normal.)

ROGER: Bullshit! If you didn't see his fucking sword, what the hell were you focussing on during the fight? His hat??? His fucking medals??? What? Like anyone's going to believe *that* load of old bollocks!!!

STEVE: I'm starting to think you might have trust issues, mate!!!

ROGER: Can you even act surprised??? You just fucking stabbed me!!!

STEVE: Right...

(As Steve continued to fend off his furious assailant, defending with every fibre of his being, Harry Brooks allowed himself a delighted laugh. He may have been in the same situation, defending desperately against Alan, but he was in no doubt whatsoever, that Roger would win his fight then come to his aid.)

HARRY: I could block you like this all day, Turnip!

ALAN: And you're gonna *have* to if you want to live, because I'm not stopping any time soon; that's for fucking certain!

HARRY: On the contrary, you'll be stopping any minute now. As soon as Roger breaks through and finishes off your mate there, you're done for. He'll come for you next. And

it's imminent! He's seen red now. Nobody can fend off old Roger for long once he's lost the plot like that.

(He beamed.)

HARRY: You're doomed, Alan! And that's the price you pay for not fighting fairly.

ALAN: Fighting fairly??? It was five against three at the start!

HARRY: And who's fault is that? *You're* the silly fuckers that chose to attack despite being outnumbered. The only ones in the wrong here, are you lot.

ALAN: How are *we* the ones in the wrong? You fuckers stole Steve's house!!!

HARRY: No, we didn't!

(He ruffled his neck.)

HARRY: We merely came in uninvited. You can't steal a house!

ALAN: You...

HARRY: Oh, save it.

(He smirked gleefully.)

HARRY: An outraged Roger is unstoppable. And I mean unstoppable. Once the red mist has descended, that's it. It curtains for anyone who gets in his way.

ALAN: Is that so?

HARRY: Absolutely! And having attacked him whilst he was in the process of lowering his blade, all bets are off. If *you* won't fight within the bounds of convention; nor will he! The gloves are off now, sonny boy. The rules no longer apply! He'll murder you by any means possible; fair or otherwise. What do you think of that?

(Alan glowered coldly into his eyes.)

ALAN: Actually...

(He then allowed himself a devilish smirk.)

ALAN: Knowing that makes me feel a bit better about what *I'm* about to do.

(With that, he spun around then plunged his sword deep into Roger's side. In extreme agony, Roger cried out desperately, then glanced to Alan with saddened eyes.)

ROGER: Mean.

(He then fell to his death upon the carpet.)

HARRY: Uh-oh.

(Wearing a furious snarl, Alan turned to face him then sneered.)

ALAN: And then there was one.

HARRY: Um... yes... so I see...

(He scoffed.)

HARRY: And you think you to fools can defeat me, do you?

ALAN: Without even breaking a sweat!

HARRY: Right...

(He then lobbed his sword across the room.)

HARRY: In that case I surrender!

ALAN: Surrender denied!!!

(Just as he went to raise his sword and strike him down, however, Steve stamped up to him angrily.)

STEVE: Dude! You stabbed him the back!

(Alan lowered his blade then swiftly corrected him.)

ALAN: I stabbed him in the side!

STEVE: Yeah! The *back* side!

ALAN: Excuse me?

STEVE: Don't be funny, Al! I'm not talking about his arse. You stabbed him in the side, but from behind him!!!

(He shook his head.)

STEVE: Right in the middle of my speech about how we always fight *fairly*!!!

ALAN: Yeah, but *he* wasn't going to fight fairly. He was going to take you down by any means possible!

STEVE: Says who?

ALAN: Babbling Brooks here...

STEVE: You cock!!!

(He gestured to where Harry Brooks was slowly creeping away.)

STEVE: That cunt wouldn't know the truth if it gave him a blow job.

ALAN: Well...

STEVE: And he's creeping away, mate; you might want to do something about that.

ALAN: What?

(He flinched then raced across the room and grabbed Harry by the throat.)

HARRY: Shit!

(He whimpered.)

HARRY: I demand a fair trial! Under the terms of whatever treaty applies to this situation; I demand to be processed justly!

(Alan stared into his eyes; coldly.)

ALAN: Works for me, mate. The convention for when someone breaks into your house, is that you can legally beat them to death.

HARRY: I see...

(His eyes then lit up.)

HARRY: But this isn't your house!

ALAN: Good point.

(He then glanced over his shoulder.)

ALAN: For the purposes of despatching *this* cunt, can I borrow your house for a minute, Steve?

STEVE: Of course.

ALAN: Excellent.

(He then beamed with fiendish delight.)

ALAN: *Now* it's my house!

(He then proceeded to beat him savagely. Releasing over a decade's worth of pent up rage, he battered Harry's face with all the aggression he could muster. He'd longed to give this man a pasting for a very long time and he was determined to make it count. In the first sixty seconds, he threw over thirty punches. Needless to say, Harry was barely conscious by now, but Alan kept on coming.)

ALAN: This is the lexicon of you, Harry! A is for Arsehole.

(He punched him in the face.)

ALAN: B is for bastard!!!

(He then head-butted him.)

ALAN: C is obvious!

(He punched him again.)

ALAN: D is for Dickhead.)

(This time, he followed his words up by kneeing him in the groin.)

ALAN: E, well that's for downright evil!

(He then punched him in the face again. Watching him, Steve gave a stifled laugh then glanced towards his beloved wife. At once, he flinched then hurried over to her side.)

STEVE: I reckon you can stop doing that now, love!

(Still battering the unfortunate intruder with her broken broom, Elise looked to him and sneered.)

ELISE: I'll be the judge of that, thank you, Steven!

(She then swung her broom again, only to swipe at nothing. In the brief moment she'd been distracted by looking at Steve, her opponent had finally succumbed to gravity.

Having died quite some time ago, his body crumpled to the floor, leaving her brandishing her broom at thin air.)

ELISE: Quitter!

STEVE: He's dead, babe!

ELISE: I stand by my statement.

(She then ruffled her neck indignantly.)

ELISE: Bloody invading my home; whatever next?

STEVE: I know, babe. They're cunts. All of them!

(He then offered her a loving smile.)

STEVE: But we dispatched them, darling. Took back what's ours.

ELISE: Damned right, we did.

(She then stepped up to her husband and smiled ruefully.)

ELISE: So that's how it feels to go to war.

STEVE: Well... kind of, yeah.

ELISE: I see.

(She exhaled.)

ELISE: That was exhilarating.

STEVE: Well...

ELISE: I feel tingly all over.

STEVE: Tingly?

ELISE: With excitement.

STEVE: You...

(A delighted expression then crossed his brow.)

STEVE: Oh. You mean...

ELISE: Take me, Steve. Right here; right now.

(She then whipped off her top and threw it on the floor.)

STEVE: Don't mind if I do.

(They then zoomed into one another's arms and proceeded to kiss passionately. Tearing their clothes off as they did so, they then fumbled their way to the sofa and proceeded to make merry with one another's bodies.)

ELISE: Make me squeal, baby!

STEVE: Oh, I intend to!

(Very much into one another, they kissed forcefully while freeing their genitalia, then instantly proceeded to make love, extremely violently.)

ELISE: Harder!!! Hammer me through the fucking sofa!!!

STEVE: The sofa? I'm gonna hammer you through the fucking floor, girl.

ELISE: Even better!!!

(In this moment, they were so into one another, the rest of the world simply fell away. Suffice to say, this was not the best time for their daughter Emma to skip through the living room doorway. Having been extremely excited to see her parents again, she'd planned to greet them with a warm hello as soon as she stepped inside the room. The words never materialised. Upon sighting events in the living room, her jaw simply dropped. Her parents were fornicating like rabbits on the sofa, while a man she'd never seen before was pummelling the living daylights out a stranger into the corner. The fact that the floor was also littered with dead bodies, did little to lift her spirits. Horrified by what she was seeing, her shoulders slumped then she about turned and headed back out of the door again. Shaking her head, she then strode across the cobbles to where her boyfriend was waiting in the horse and cart.)

EMMA: I knew this was a mistake!

(She then clambered back into the cart and sat down, not even bothering to look her bewildered boyfriend in the eyes.)

EMMA: Drive!

NICO: But...

EMMA: You can meet my parents some other... never.

NICO: Well... okay.

(He then set the cart in motion and headed back up the driveway. As he did so, Emma sat at his side and despaired ruefully.)

EMMA: Why can't they just be normal?

(She then groaned in defeat.)

Later that evening, Elise, Steve and Alan sat down to enjoy a quiet cognac in the living room. Steve and Alan had just come back inside from throwing the dead bodies in Steve's incinerator. Prior to that, they'd been helping Elise tidy up the house. It had been quite the chore. Harry and his friends had made an astonishing mess. The clean up had been exhausting. So much so, they'd had to settle for having cold chicken sandwiches for dinner. Elise simply didn't have the energy left to cook anything.

Utterly worn out, as soon as their backsides hit the seats, Elise, Steve and Alan all released sighs of relief. They then sat there, quietly staring at the walls as they gathered their thoughts. It had been a strange, exhausting day. Mulling over the day's events in her mind, Elise soon found herself grimacing.

ELISE: I beat a man to death with my broom today.

(Steve and Alan glanced in her direction.)

ELISE: Just... battered him until he stopped breathing.

STEVE: Then battered him some more.

ELISE: Yeah.

(She scratched her head.)

ELISE: That's not how I saw today going.

STEVE: No. I don't suppose it is.

(He then looked to Alan and shook his head.)

STEVE: You stabbed a man in the back today.

ALAN: In the side!

STEVE: Which is no less underhanded, mate.

ALAN: Yeah, but he'd have done the same to us.

(Steve looked through him then shook his head.)

STEVE: You haven't learned a thing, have you?

ALAN: What?

STEVE: You only had Harry's word for that!

ALAN: Mate...

STEVE: When are you gonna stop believing everything that cunt tells you?

ALAN: Well, considering we just chucked his corpse in your incinerator, today would be my guess.

STEVE: Right...

ALAN: And besides, that bloke I stabbed was on Harry's side. Part of Team Harry. And if you ask me, when one of the opposing team threatens underhanded tactics, it's fair to assume they're all singing from the same hymn sheet.

STEVE: That's your take, is it?

ALAN: Yes. Harry's team threatened to use dodgy tactics, so we were justified in using them ourselves.

STEVE: Mate...

ALAN: Besides, you started it when you stabbed that poor cunt after he lowered his sword.

STEVE: That was unintentional!

ALAN: Yeah. So you claim.

STEVE: Alan...

ALAN: Look, mate; the fact is, that bloke thought you'd used underhand tactics, so yeah. I've got no doubt that he'd have used them too. Whether what you did was unintentional or not, *he* was convinced you'd bent the rules. Therefore, there was nothing stopping him from bending the rules too, was there? So, I regret nothing, mate.

STEVE: Well... I suppose there's *something* in that... maybe.

(Elise scoffed.)

ELISE: Hark at you two.

STEVE: What?

ELISE: Rules? Fucking rules. Give it a rest.

STEVE: It's a military thing, babe.

ELISE: We're not in the bloody military. We're in my house. *My* house! As in, my house, my rules. And my rules are simple. If you break in, you die!

STEVE: Well...

ELISE: I couldn't care less if Alan here stabbed him in the side or not. You trespass at your own peril!

(Alan smiled.)

ALAN: Bloody right.

(Steve gave a sigh of concession.)

STEVE: Fine. I can't argue with any of that. I just feel bad because I spent ages convincing that fella that I always fight within the rules, then you stabbed him in the back.

ALAN: The side!

STEVE: Either way, mate, you made me look like a liar. That's why it's bothering me.

ELISE: Then you're being ridiculous. His actions helped us get our house back.

(She raised her glass in Alan's direction.)

ELISE: No regrets!

ALAN: None!

(Steve nodded.)

STEVE: Fair enough.

ELISE: I mean it, Alan. You were fantastic and I'm grateful for your efforts.

(She nodded.)

ELISE: That said, if you're ever over this way in the future, keep bloody going. Never come and visit *us* ever again.

ALAN: I... what?

ELISE: None of this nonsense would have happened if you weren't such a numpty. *You* brought Harry Brooks into our lives. You!

ALAN: Yeah...

(He grimaced.)

ALAN: Sorry about that.

ELISE: It's fine. Just remember, if you ever fancy visiting an old army buddy in the future, visit a different one. You're a bloody liability.

STEVE: Don't be like that, babe.

(He shrugged.)

STEVE: Yes, it's been an eventful visit, but I doubt anything similar is likely to happen in future.

ELISE: Not if he stays away.

STEVE: Babe...

ALAN: It's alright, mate. I get why she's wary.

ELISE: Wary? I'm bloody terrified! You're a bleeding nuisance. Nobody *ever* tried to murder us or steal our house before *you* turned up.

ALAN: Right...

(He then sat back and smiled.)

ALAN: I understand how you feel, Elise. And I respect it. But you know what? This was a good visit for me.

STEVE: You're kidding!

ELISE: How badly do they normally go then???

ALAN: No, I don't mean it was a good visit *by my standards*! I mean the outcome was perfect for me.

ELISE: Yeah?

STEVE: Starting a fight in someone else's house is the perfect outcome for you, is it?

ALAN: I didn't mean that!

(He smiled.)

ALAN: The fact the fight was in your house was horrible and I can't apologise enough for that. But I'm talking about the big picture.

STEVE: What big picture?

ALAN: Well...

(He nodded.)

ALAN: I had two major issues in my life, mate. Two shadows hanging over me, if you like. I wanted to know if Kerry was okay, and I wanted to beat Harry Brooks to death. I'll never have to worry about either of those things ever again.

STEVE: Fair enough. Yeah. That's a pretty awesome outcome, mate.

ELISE: It is. You can get on with the rest of your life now.

ALAN: Exactly.

ELISE: Far away from here.

ALAN: Right...

STEVE: And you never know, now you're not worrying about Kerry all the time, you might find yourself a woman to share your life with.

ALAN: No, thanks. I've had enough misery for one lifetime.

STEVE: Never say never, mate. Love might be just around the corner.

ALAN: Oh, behave. Like I haven't suffered enough.

ELISE: You haven't! Not nearly enough.

ALAN: What?

ELISE: I'm kidding.

(She beamed.)

ELISE: But if you *do* find a woman you want to spend the rest of your life with, let us know. We'll come and visit.

STEVE: Bloody right. Watching you squirm as you ask her if we can stay over is gonna be a magical moment for me.

ALAN: Never gonna happen!

ELISE: Oh, it will. Those trousers you wear with such pride will slide off your legs, glide across the floor then shimmy up *her* legs instead.

STEVE: And your bollocks will teleport into her handbag.

ELISE: Forever!

ALAN: No, chance. I'm not like you, Steve. I am and ever shall remain, the master of my own destiny.

ELISE: We'll see.

ALAN: Yes, we will.

(He then picked up his cognac.)

ALAN: Anyway, here's to a battle well fought.

ELISE: Agreed!

STEVE: Well, you *say* it was well fought. You were so bloody focussed on Harry, you left me facing three of them all by myself at the start, Alan.

ALAN: Yeah, in hindsight, that was pretty poor form.

STEVE: It was shit form!

(He then shrugged.)

STEVE: Still, we came through in the end.

ALAN: Yup.

(He then glanced away playfully.)

ALAN: Thanks to Elise and I.

STEVE: Excuse me?

ALAN: What? Shady groves killed one of the blokes you were fighting then fucked off home. Leaving you one on one with that Roger fella. I killed him for you then

despatched Harry, while Elise battered the other one to death. You didn't defeat any bloody body.

STEVE: Mate...

ELISE: No, no. He's right. *You* didn't kill anyone.

(She bit her lip then mused out loud.)

ELISE: Maybe I got all frisky with the wrong veteran afterwards.

STEVE: What???

(He then furrowed his brow at the sight of Elise and Alan giggling into their cognac glasses.)

STEVE: Oh, I see.

(He shook his head.)

STEVE: When are you fucking off home, Alan?

ALAN: Steve...

STEVE: What? It's a fair question. Bloody doubting my battle skills.

ALAN: I'd never do that, mate.

STEVE: You just fucking did.

ALAN: Only in jest, mate.

(He then shrugged his shoulders.)

ALAN: But in answer to your question; tomorrow, probably.

ELISE: No probably about it.

ALAN: Oh.

(He shrugged.)

ALAN: Tomorrow then.

STEVE: Right.

(He then raised his glass to him.)

STEVE: Well, it's been great to see you, matey.

ALAN: You too, Steve.

STEVE: Getting up to daft shit and talking bollocks, just like old times, has been a real pleasure, mate.

ALAN: It has. We'll definitely have to do it again some time.

ELISE: Not in my bloody house, you won't.

ALAN: Right...

(Steve shook his head.)

STEVE: Elise, I'd be remiss if I didn't remind you that this house has been in *my* family for over a hundred years.

ELISE: Yes. Then you married *me*. Now it's mine!

STEVE: Ours!

ELISE: Ambitious.

STEVE: Babe...

(He then started to laugh.)

STEVE: You're priceless.

ALAN: Right? She really is. If I *do* meet a woman and come close to tying the knot, I'll think of you, Elise... then wise up and throw her out.

STEVE: Like I should have done.

ALAN: Exactly.

(They shared a crafty giggle.)

STEVE: Anyway, Al; here's to us veterans. Brothers for life.

ALAN: Definitely.

(They then tapped their glasses together before sitting back to relax. They hadn't been relaxing long, however, before Elise's embittered voice rose above the silence.)

ELISE: You know I'm going to have to punish you for that, don't you, Steve?

STEVE: I do, dear; yes.

ELISE: As long as you do.

(She then sat back and relaxed in exactly the same way as her husband. Moments later, they all proceeded to giggle.)

ALAN: She's a nutter.

STEVE: Right?

(He smiled.)

STEVE: But I wouldn't change her for the world.

ALAN: Really?

ELISE: Shut up, you!

(They then chuckled some more before sitting back to rest their eyes. It had been a long few days and they were absolutely exhausted.)

ALAN: Good times.

STEVE: Yup.

ELISE: The best.

(She then fell asleep in her chair.)

THE END

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