

# **FUTILE FANTASY CREATIONS**

## ***SILLY SHORTS***

### **THE FAILING FIVE**

Failure was not something the owners of Highshaw Military Academy were used to. This most elite of establishments had been churning out soldiers for the Weskerland Army for over fifty years, and in all that time it had never seen a single failing student. Until now. Throughout its long history of success, students, both male and female would sign up, work themselves past the point of exhaustion then graduate with flying colours. Every year, another two hundred soldiers were produced in order to bolster the ranks of this fine nation's army. Failing to get a one hundred percent passing rate from any group of recruits had always been unthinkable. Alas, that proud record was now at an end.

Unsurprisingly, with the academy's record now in tatters, an inquest into how it all went so wrong had begun. Recruitment methods, training regimes, academy equipment and even examination standards were suddenly under scrutiny. As were the failing students themselves. The higher-ups weren't about to rest until they'd been given an explanation. And the explanation had better be a good one. There wasn't just one or two failures; there were five. To have gone through so many decades with zero failures, to suddenly have such a high number suggested something was very wrong indeed and the owners needed to know what. Immediately! As such, those working in the academy were in no doubt whatsoever that heads would most definitely roll.

Eager to make sure his own head was not on the chopping block, the current academy head, Headmaster Tilstone was particularly busy at this time. Searching for a scapegoat, he was out to punish anyone he could pass the blame onto. The five failing students were very much among those in his crosshairs. Eager to punish them all severely in a bid to convince the owners that he had everything covered, he'd called them to his office. Not about to upset this most impatient of men even more than they already had, the five students in question had come running.

Having been lined up in front of Headmaster Tilstone's desk, the five students stood to attention staring straight ahead. The headmaster wasn't yet present, but this came as absolutely no surprise to any of them. He was well known for waiting outside his office just so he could make a dramatic entrance once those who were due to be disciplined had arrived. Today would be no exception. Within a minute of them lining up before the desk in their formal academy uniforms, the headmaster burst into the room then bellowed over his shoulder.

HEADMASTER: Hold my calls and cancel my appointments for the next hour, Miss Falbury!!! I need to get to the bottom of this!!!

(He then streamed past where the tutor who'd gathered the students was standing and thundered his way to the desk. Upon arriving he threw his backside down on his chair and sneered at the students demandingly.)

HEADMASTER: Well???

(The assembled students didn't even flinch. They simply continued to stare dead ahead, almost too afraid to breathe. Not about to take complete inaction as an answer, however, the headmaster sat forwards and looked to his subordinate, a physical education tutor named Master Cray.)

HEADMASTER: Did I whisper just now, Master Cray?

CRAY: Absolutely not, sir; no.

HEADMASTER: I see. Maybe these five buffoons are deaf.

CRAY: Maybe, sir.

HEADMASTER: I...

CRAY: Or maybe they were hoping you'd elaborate a little.

(The headmaster gave him a belittling glance.)

HEADMASTER: Excuse me?

CRAY: I'm just saying, sir. The word "well" by itself isn't really a question anyone can reply *to*, is it?

(The headmaster gave him an embittered frown then sat back.)

HEADMASTER: I see. Let's go a bit deeper then, shall we?

(He then glanced along the line of students.)

HEADMASTER: Names and Departments please, from left to right.

(The student at the far left of the line replied instantly.)

EDDIE: Cadet Eddie Chalmers, Infantry department.

(The process then continued along the line.)

HARRY: Cadet Harry Atmore, Logistics department.

AMY: Cadet Amy Savaro, Infantry department.

LUCY: Cadet Lucy White, Transport department.

(The one on the far right then spoke in a well-educated tone.)

GERALD: Cadet Gerald Mortimer, Strategy department.

(The headmaster nodded then sat forward again.)

HEADMASTER: And what do you all have in common?

(An uncomfortable silence ensued.)

HEADMASTER: I said what do you all have in common???

(A series of embarrassed mumbles followed.)

EDDIE: Didn't do to well.

HARRY: Kinda failed.

AMY: Wasn't our fault.

GERALD: It was unfortunately really.

LUCY: Didn't go to plan.

(The headmaster just stared through them.)

HEADMASTER: Didn't go to plan? *Kind of* failed? Wasn't your fault??? Are you lot fucking serious? You were a fucking disaster! A shambles!!! We'd never had a single failing student since the day the academy was formed; not one. And then you five screw-ups...

(He shook his head then sat back again.)

HEADMASTER: Just tell me this. Why? Fucking... why???

(Eddie looked along then line then grimaced at the headmaster.)

EDDIE: Two of us had food-poisoning and were off for a few months, sir.

HARRY: And sluggish for a few months after that.

HEADMASTER: And that's your excuse, is it?

HARRY: It's a reason, sir; not an excuse.

HEADMASTER: Is that so?

EDDIE: Well... the department of health certainly seemed to think so when they indicted the academy for feeding students rotten food.

HEADMASTER: Oh, so it's the academy's fault now, is it?

HARRY: Well, yeah; according to the lawsuit, it is.

HEADMASTER: Pathetic! And what sort of excuse are the rest of you going to make?  
(Amy furrowed her brow.)

AMY: Excuse??? You know damned well why Lucy and I failed! The only question is, how did so many other girls *pass*???

LUCY: Um... Amy, let's not antagonise...

AMY: I'm not antagonising anyone!

HEADMASTER: I'll be the judge of that! And yes; yes, you are.  
(He rolled his eyes.)

HEADMASTER: Your absence and subsequent trauma were not the academy's fault!

AMY: I'm sorry, sir, but the judge disagreed somewhat, didn't he?

HEADMASTER: He didn't have all the facts!

AMY: Yes, but only because most of the girls were too frightened to come forward!

HEADMASTER: Now you listen to me, young lady...

AMY: No; you listen to me! The civil suit *is* pending and you're a named respondent!  
(The headmaster growled.)

HEADMASTER: I can't believe I'm hearing this!!! You're supposed to be adults!  
Adults! You're all twenty years old! You're responsible for your own actions!!! You can't go blaming all your failings on this academy, just because we fed you rotten food and made some of you violently ill. And it's hardly our fault one of the tutors turned out to be violent sex offender who tried to kill you, either.

AMY: Yes, it is!

HEADMASTER: Nonsense! You must have led him on somehow. Well in future, try dressing less provocatively!!!

AMY: We were wearing the bloody uniforms you *told* us to wear!

HEADMASTER: Right... well... yes, but... nobody told either of you to flaunt to your sizeable chests like that, did they? Do those blazers really need to be that tight?

AMY: This is how your tailor fitted them!!!

HEADMASTER: Enough!!!

(He growled.)

HEADMASTER: I don't like your tone!!!

(He shook his head.)

HEADMASTER: Nobody else seemed to have a problem with the catering or the randy tutor!

EDDIE: Gary Furlong died!

AMY: As did Kerry Hampshire and Jade Woodstock!

HEADMASTER: Yes, well, it's a shame the rest of you didn't; you wouldn't have been able to fail and bring shame on the academy then.

(The tutor winced.)

CRAY: Um sir... that's going a little too far, I think.

HEADMASTER: Fuck off, you. I don't pay you to think!

(He then glowered at the upper class lad at the right of the row.)

HEADMASTER: Well? What's your excuse? Nobody tried to poison, rape or strangle *you*. Why did *you* fail?

GERALD: Well...

HEADMASTER: And don't try to blame it on the contaminated water supply, *that* case is still pending!

GERALD: I wasn't going to.

(He sighed in defeat.)

GERALD: I just fell asleep during the final exam.

HEADMASTER: Which one?

GERALD: All three.

(He turned bright red.)

GERALD: Exam conditions make me sleepy.

HEADMASTER: I see. You're shit! A shit cadet!

(He ruffled his neck and sat forwards.)

HEADMASTER: You're *all* shit cadets! And you're all going to be punished severely.

(He then looked to Master Cray.)

HEADMASTER: You're giving another lecture about army life at the college across town this afternoon, are you not?

CRAY: Yes, sir.

HEADMASTER: And how are you getting there?

CRAY: I'll be running the fives miles, sir. I always do.

HEADMASTER: Excellent!

(He nodded.)

HEADMASTER: These five idiots will be running with you.

CRAY: Sir!

HEADMASTER: Then they can run back with you afterwards!

(All five students sighed.)

HEADMASTER: What? You don't like that punishment?

EDDIE: No, sir.

HEADMASTER: Then it must be a good one. Though, if you ask me, it sounds a little too easy to me.

(He beamed.)

HEADMASTER: I know. You'll do the run in your full formal uniforms.

(Everyone winced in despair.)

AMY: But, sir, that's not fair. How do you expect us to run in these skirts?

(She gestured down at her below the knee, tight, pencil skirt.)

HEADMASTER: You'll find a way.

AMY: Wow. No. That's really not fair. The boys don't have to run in these.

HEADMASTER: Oh, here we go. Little miss feminist rages again.

AMY: I'm not a feminist, sir. I'm just saying it's unfair. Not only are these skirts impossible to run in, it's a million degrees outside today and these uniforms are really stuffy. *Especially* with a bra on.

(The headmaster raised a thoughtful eyebrow.)

HEADMASTER: Hmm... I bet it's a bit sweaty with long hair too.

AMY: We can put our hair up; that's not the issue. The issue is...

HEADMASTER: No, no. It's decided! You'll keep your hair down too. The more uncomfortable you are, the better.

AMY: But that's not fair. The boy's don't...

HEADMASTER: Enough!!! Do as I say or fuck off to the brig!

(Defeated, Amy could only hang her head. The brig was a hideous place and no student in their right mind would ever risk being sent there.)

HEADMASTER: That's better!

(He then looked to Master Cray again.)

HEADMASTER: Go, Cray. And take them with you. Oh, and go by the quartermaster on your way out of the academy. He'll have further instructions for you there.

CRAY: You're going to make them all wear thick coats, aren't you?

HEADMASTER: Don't question me! Just make sure they wear whatever they're given. Understood?

(Master Cray sighed.)

CRAY: Yes, sir.

(He then gestured to the door and the students all skulked through it.)

HEADMASTER: That's right. Piss off. Trying to blame your failures on me! My shortcuts and cutbacks saved this academy a fortune, I tell you. How dare you try to blame it all on me?

(He ruffled his neck indignantly.)

HEADMASTER: You're worse than that bloody judge!

(He watched them all head away despondently then nodded to himself.)

HEADMASTER: Right. Let's get this show on the road.

(He then called through the door.)

HEADMASTER: Miss Falbury! Get the quartermaster on the phone.

(With that, he tapped his fingers together menacing and allowed himself a devilish smirk.)

HEADMASTER: I'll bloody show them!

---

Some thirty minutes later, the five disgraced students found themselves standing outside the quartermaster's store. Eddie, Harry and Gerald all looked absolutely mortified. Amy and Lucy, on the other hand, were laughing so much, they'd had to cling onto one another to stop themselves collapsing. Having escorted these five unfortunates, Master Cray was standing before them, wearing shorts and a vest, warming up for the run ahead. He'd ordered the students to do the same. The girls couldn't do it for laughing. The boys, on the other hand, couldn't do it for a very different reason. Since leaving the quartermaster's store, they'd very much lost their motivation; not to mention the will to live. Hoping he could inspire them a little, Master Cray glanced to where they were cringing and whimpering then offered them some advice.

CRAY: Come on, ladies; look lively.

EDDIE: That's not funny!

GERALD: This is humiliating!

HARRY: I wish I'd died from the food poisoning now!

CRAY: Don't be defeatist, lad. It's not that bad.

HARRY: Not that bad???

CRAY: Yes, you all look beautiful.

(He then turned away and burst out laughing. Far from seeing the funny side, Eddie threw his hands to his hips.)

EDDIE: How can you...

HARRY: Hands, mate; hands!

EDDIE: What?

HARRY: Take them off your hips!

EDDIE: Right. Good point.

(He then shook his fists instead.)

EDDIE: How can you laugh? This is tantamount to a cruel and unusual punishment. As outlawed by... the law... and stuff.

(Amy giggled.)

AMY: Well put.

(Eddie glowered at her.)

EDDIE: You can stop fucking laughing an' all. This is all your bloody fault!

AMY: How?

LUCY: How is it *her* fault?

(Eddie snarled.)

EDDIE: How is it her fault??? Wah, it's not fair, you said! The boys don't have to wear skirts! And bras are really sweaty!

AMY: They are!

EDDIE: Well we know that now, don't we???

(He gestured to Gerald and Harry.)

EDDIE: To even things up, he's made us dress the same!!!

LUCY: Nonsense!

(Eddie gestured down at his skirt then snarled at her.)

EDDIE: How is it nonsense?

LUCY: Our bras aren't inflatable!

(Lucy and Amy then fell about laughing again. Watching them do it, Eddie could only sigh then look to Harry.)

EDDIE: A skirt, girls shoes, an inflatable bra and a synthetic wig. And we're expected to go out like this. Running five miles across the city no less.

HARRY: And back again.

EDDIE: Just because little miss whinge bag over there decided it wasn't fair.

(Gerald sighed.)

GERALD: Actually, I have a feeling he'd have done something nasty, no matter what. Her whining just gave him the idea.

HARRY: Maybe.

EDDIE: What I want to know is, why did the quartermaster have women's wigs? And inflatable bras, come to that?

(Master Cray smiled.)

CRAY: Because you're not the first people the headmaster's humiliated this way.

EDDIE: Really?

CRAY: Really. You are the first he's ordered to go outside like it though.

(He smiled.)

CRAY: Normally that punishment is reserved for male cadets caught trying to sneak into the girl's dorms. It's to remind them they're not girls and don't belong there.

HARRY: He's a wanker.

CRAY: You don't need to sell me on that, lad.

(He then looked to the girls.)

CRAY: Seriously, you need to start warming up. It's hot today and this run will take a lot out of you. If you don't limber up, it's going to get very painful, very quickly.

LUCY: Right. Okay.

(Lucy and Amy then proceeded to stretch. Amy did so with an uncomfortable grimace on her face.)

AMY: I know it's important to stretch and everything; but that doesn't explain how we're meant to run in *these* skirts.

CRAY: Good point, young lady. Why not ask these three cross-dressers over here?

EDDIE: Excuse me???

(He then furrowed his brow at Amy.)

EDDIE: Do you ever stop giggling?

AMY: Rarely.

LUCY: When she's asleep, mostly.

(Eddie shook his head.)

EDDIE: Fucking cross-dressers indeed.

CRAY: Just stretch, will you?

HARRY: But, sir...

CRAY: Do it!

(He rolled his eyes.)

CRAY: Look, the punishment has been decided. This is happening, whether you like it or not, okay? So use your noggin, son. Stretch and make sure your joints can handle the pummelling they're about to get.

(He shrugged.)

CRAY: I mean, fair warning; if you cramp up and have to stop, we'll have to leave you behind. On your own. In the city. Dressed like that!

(At once, the three boys all gasped then proceeded to stretch as best as they could.)

EDDIE: I can barely bend my legs!

AMY: Lift the skirt to your midriff then, dipshit.

EDDIE: Dipshit? Hey!

AMY: What? I'd have thought that was obvious.

EDDIE: Yeah... well... it wasn't.

AMY: Stretching is a piece of piss; it's the running part that's gonna suck.

EDDIE: Ha! Now who's the dipshit? We can just keep them hoisted around our midriffs for the run as well.

CRAY: No, you can't.

EDDIE: What?

HARRY: Why not?

CRAY: Regulation 17: Subsection 34.

GERALD: Snacks aren't permitted in the swimming pool?

CRAY: That's Regulation 34: Subsection 17.

(He rolled his eyes.)

CRAY: Regulation 17: Subsection 34 states that when off-base in uniform, formal skirts must be worn below the knee.

GERALD: Yeah, but...

CRAY: That's non-negotiable!

LUCY: Non-negotiable!

AMY: Yup. Suck it up, trannies!

(Lucy and Amy then fell about laughing again.)

EDDIE: I hate them two.

(He then looked to Master Cray again.)

EDDIE: There's no regulation about wigs though, right?

CRAY: What do you mean?

EDDIE: If there's no regulation, we can take them off once we leave.

HARRY: No, we fucking can't.

CRAY: He's right. You can't. The headmaster was adamant about that.

HARRY: I don't care what the headmaster said. If the skirt is fucking mandatory, the wig's staying. I want to look as much like a bird as possible, to avoid a beating.

CRAY: I see... ambitious.

(He then looked to Gerald.)

CRAY: Although, I reckon *you* could pass.

GERALD: Eh...

CRAY: A little bit of eyeliner maybe and nobody would even know.

(Harry and Eddie shared a smirk.)

HARRY: He does that air about him, doesn't he?

EDDIE: Oh, definitely.

GERALD: Oh, I see. I'm well-groomed, therefore I must be a bit fruity. Very funny.

EDDIE: Sorry, mate. You know how, it is. Mock the posh bloke.

GERALD: Yes... sadly I do.

CRAY: Anyway, unless you lads want to stop and put make-up on, we'll get going in a minute.

EDDIE: Not funny.

CRAY: Wasn't kidding. It might aid your disguise.

EDDIE: That's a no!

HARRY: A massive no!

CRAY: Fine. Your loss.

(He smiled.)

CRAY: And try not to worry, boys.

(He then nodded to Amy and Lucy.)

CRAY: If these two can pass for girls, anyone can.

(In that moment, Amy and Lucy's giggling died stone dead, replaced by some male chuckling; mostly from Cray himself.)

CRAY: Priceless.

---



Once Master Cray was satisfied that his five students had sufficiently warmed up, he stood tall then issued the command that the boys had been dreading. Move out! Not about to disobey and get in any deeper trouble than they already were, they instantly obliged; albeit with terror in their eyes. In this moment, the three cringing boys were convinced that running through the city, dressed in women's clothes, would be the most humiliating moment of their lives. As they marched past the recreation ground en route to the gates, however, they quickly realised they were wrong. Almost everyone they knew was gathered there and they were not subtle with their mocking. All of a sudden, getting out of the academy and into the city, away from the derision of their peers, couldn't happen soon enough.

Bearing witness to the boy's suffering from close up, Cray, Lucy and Amy could barely keep a straight face. To them, the ribbing the boy's were experiencing was hilarious. As were their cringing demeanours. The unfortunate trio were being baited remorselessly to the point where they could only look away, wincing and whimpering; their faces burning red with embarrassment. This barrage of mocking seemed to have no end to it.

MALE CADET 01: Come on, boys; get your tits out!!!

MALE CADET 02: Hey, Eddie!!! Eddie!!! Are you wearing a lace thong under there, mate?

MALE CADET 03: Did you brush each other's hair before you set out?

MALE CADET 04: More to the point, did you shave each other's minges?

MALE CADET 05: Hey! Harriet! Come on, girl; gives us a wave!

MALE CADET 01: You too, Geraldine!

MALE CADET 03: Ed... um... what's the feminine of...

MALE CADET 02: Edie.

MALE CADET 03: That's it! Hey, Edie; get back in the kitchen where you belong!

(Another of them then started a chant.)

MALE CADET 02: Edie, bake us a cake! Edie, Edie bake us a cake!

(The others then joined in.)

ALL: Edie, bake us a cake! Edie, Edie bake us a cake!!!

(As the chant continued, Eddie snarled.)

EDDIE: Why have they singled *me* out all of a sudden?

HARRY: Because you're popular!

EDDIE: I don't *feel* very fucking popular!

CRAY: Because you're not anymore.

HARRY: But he *was*; that's why they're loving his downfall so much.

GERALD: Interesting. If that's where being popular gets you; thank god nobody likes me.

LUCY: You mean they didn't like you *before*, Gerald.

GERALD: What?

LUCY: Having seen you dressed like that, I wouldn't be at all surprised if someone takes a shine to you now.

AMY: Right? They're all mocking, but I'll bet *at least* one of them is secretly aroused.

(Master Cray rolled his eyes.)

CRAY: Stop that, ladies; like they're not suffering enough.

(Lucy and Amy shared another giggle then focussed again on the incoming abuse.)

MALE CADET 06: That's it, girls; work those hips!

MALE CADET 07: Not you, Geraldine! You were already feminine enough *before* you got changed!

MALE CADET 08: He's right! You be you, Geraldine!

MALE CADET 02: Yeah, as they only feminine looking one of the five, you've earned that right!

(In that moment, the entire mocking crowd fell about laughing. Also in that moment, Amy and Lucy *stopped* doing so.)

AMY: I fail to see how that's funny.

LUCY: Me too. We're hot, damn it!

AMY: The hottest girls in our year!

LUCY: Right? That perverted teacher wouldn't have sought us out for special treatment otherwise.

(Amy growled.)

AMY: Let's not talk about that.

LUCY: Right.

CRAY: Chin up, girls. The walk of shame is almost over.

(He smirked.)

CRAY: You too, Amy and Lucy.

LUCY: Not funny!

(And so the abuse resumed.)

MALE CADET 03: Eddie! Edie, sorry!!! You forgot your handbag!

(Starting to get extremely fed up with it, Eddie snarled at him.)

MALE CADET 04: Fucking hell; what's eating her???

MALE CADET 03: Time of the month I reckon!

MALE CADET 02: Lend him a tampon, Harry!

(Eddie shook his head.)

EDDIE: I'm gonna go over there in a minute and...

CRAY: Get some phone numbers?

EDDIE: No!

(He snarled.)

EDDIE: Not funny!

CRAY: I disagree.

(He nodded.)

CRAY: Look, just pay them no heed; we're almost past them now.

GERALD: Thank fuck for that. This is unpleasant.

CRAY: Oh, this is just the beginning.

GERALD: What?

CRAY: You're never going to hear the end of this.

EDDIE: Fuck. They're gonna be giving us shit until the end of time.

CRAY: No, just the end of this month. Unlike you five, they'll be graduating.

(He grimaced.)

CRAY: But yes, this month won't be pleasant. I'd stick together if I were you. The bullying will be rife.

GERALD: Shit.

(Just then, a brief moment of respite was upon them. They'd passed the recreation ground and were no longer in sight of their peers. It was a moment that Eddie, Harry and Gerald all marked with a sigh of relief.)

EDDIE: Thank fuck. That was horrible.

GERALD: And it went on forever.

HARRY: Yeah...

(He puffed out.)

HARRY: It sucked, but I kinda got off lightly compared to you two.

EDDIE: Lucky cunt.

GERALD: I envy you.

AMY: Drama queens. That was fun.

LUCY: Until they abused *us*.

AMY: Yeah, but apart from that... classic.

(She then proceeded to giggle.)

EDDIE: Seriously. Do you ever stop giggling?

AMY: Nope.

(Eddie looked to Harry.)

EDDIE: I used to fancy her.

HARRY: Yeah?

EDDIE: I don't anymore.

AMY: Good. You're a knob.

CRAY: Enough of that, you lot. Just enjoy your moment of peace while it lasts.

(The five students then fell silent. Eddie and Amy just glowed at each other.)

CRAY: And what a lovely moment it was.

HARRY: What?

CRAY: Begin!!!

(He then started to jog to the academy gates. The students just watched him go, gulping with dread. Five miles was a long run even at the best of times, but on a hot day in warm clothes with extra humiliation nailed on, it was going to be miserable. Caring very little for that fact, Cray raised his voice.)

CRAY: I said begin!!!

EDDIE: Fuck.

(With that, the five of them raced up behind him. The misery run had commenced.)

---

As the party of five students and their master exited the academy, none of them were in any doubt that a world of mocking was going to come Eddie, Harry and Gerald's way. What they hadn't been expecting, however, was for it to begin so soon, and to be so remorseless. With every step, another passer-by would stop, stare then fall about laughing. Right from the very moment they'd entered the city streets, it had been like charging down an avenue lined with baiting hyenas. Unable to bear it, Eddie soon found the humiliation too much to handle. He knew he'd be in deep trouble if he yelled at the public, so he snarled at the tutor instead. He had to say something and he had to say it right away, before he exploded with rage.

EDDIE: How could you let this happen, sir?

CRAY: Excuse me?

EDDIE: How you could you let this happen? Why did you agree to this? This is humiliating.

CRAY: Of course it is. You failed the course. You must have known there'd be repercussions and you must have known they'd be severe.

EDDIE: Yeah, but humiliation?

CRAY: Like I said, severe.

(Harry shook his head.)

HARRY: Okay, say that's true. Say we did know there'd be humiliation as a result of failure. Let's pretend that was a given from the start. Don't you think there were extenuating circumstances?

CRAY: I do, yes; but I don't make the decisions, do I?

EDDIE: No, you just carry them out.

(He furrowed his brow.)

EDDIE: And you're happy to do that despite knowing we shouldn't be facing any kind of punishment whatsoever!

HARRY: Yeah. It's a miracle we didn't fail by a larger margin.

EDDIE: Right? We were on our second week when half the year fell ill.

LUCY: Dark times. I was vomiting for a week.

AMY: Same.

EDDIE: Oh, boohoo.

(He pointed between himself and Harry bitterly.)

EDDIE: Us two cunts were in a coma for months!

AMY: Weak metabolisms.

LUCY: Right? Not very manly are they?

AMY: Hence the skirts.

EDDIE: Piss off, you!

AMY: Charming.

(The girls then giggled together, much to Eddie's annoyance.)

EDDIE: Always fucking giggling.

(He then looked to Cray again.)

EDDIE: As I was saying. We were in a coma for months. As a result, we needed several weeks of physio to get our fucking joints working again. All in all, we missed four months. The term only lasts ten! And two of them are taken up by holidays!

(He shook his head.)

EDDIE: If it wasn't for the giggling gargoyle over there, I'd have been the laughing stock of the infantry department.

AMY: Hey!

EDDIE: What? You came dead last!

AMY: Even so, I am *not* a gargoyle; I'm gorgeous.

GERALD: Well, I certainly would.

AMY: Shut up, you.

(She ruffled her neck.)

AMY: You don't know what it was like, trapped in that pervert's cellar.

LUCY: Never knowing when he was coming to help himself next.

AMY: Or kill us!

LUCY: We were traumatised.

AMY: Were? I *still* can't face going in basements.

LUCY: And that's where our classrooms are!

AMY: Yeah. So forgive me if I struggled to keep up. Being terrified all the time doesn't exact help a girl's concentration.

EDDIE: Nor does being in a fucking coma!

AMY: Oh, whatever!

(She sneered.)

AMY: Knob!

EDDIE: Suck it!

AMY: You suck it!

EDDIE: No, you fucking suck it!

HARRY: We can *all* suck it!!!

(Everyone gave him a sideways glance.)

HARRY: That came out wrong.

CRAY: I hope so, lad.

HARRY: I meant to say we've all had it tough, so none of us could have expected to pass. It's not a contest. We should all have been given a second chance.

LUCY: Right... I agree.

CRAY: Well, that may be true for four of you.

(He then looked to the rapidly shrinking Gerald.)

CRAY: One of you, however...

GERALD: Like I could help falling asleep!

HARRY: Actually, mate; that sounds like something you *could* have helped.

EDDIE: Yeah. Not falling asleep is easy.

AMY: We're all doing it now, in fact.

GERALD: Oh, leave me alone. You wouldn't understand.

EDDIE: Try us.

(Gerald looked to them uneasily for a moment then sighed.)

GERALD: Pressure.

LUCY: What?

GERALD: To succeed.

(He shook his head.)

GERALD: Being from a well-to-do, long established family with close ties to the military I was very much expected to excel. So I tried. Before each exam, I spent the entire night revising. I mean swotting away with everything I had.

(Amy smirked.)

AMY: And as a result, you fell asleep during every exam.

GERALD: Yes.

(Amy then proceeded to giggle, much to Eddie's annoyance.)

EDDIE: She never stops.

(He then snarled at Cray again.)

EDDIE: Anyway, I think I've proved me point. Four of us shouldn't be here. Failing wasn't our fault and we don't deserve this kind of humiliation.

CRAY: Indeed. I agree.

EDDIE: Then why agree to be part of it???

CRAY: Simple. If *I* hadn't agree to take you, somebody else would. And believe me, there's some right sadistic bastards in the staff room who'd have revelled in your misery. Made it worse, actually. By getting *me* to oversee this punishment, you got off lightly, believe me.

(Eddie looked to him emptily for a moment then sighed.)

EDDIE: Fine.

(He then clenched his fists.)

EDDIE: But I reserve the right to complain. We look like right cunts. Being made to run a gauntlet of chuckling morons like this is fucking irritating. It's like being in a corridor full of people like Amy!

AMY: Smart and sexy?

EDDIE: No, the very opposite!

AMY: Ouch!

LUCY: He's really grumpy.

HARRY: Of course, he is. We're being laughed at by the masses. Not to mention insulted. And look at us!

(He sneered.)

HARRY: And how the fuck is anyone meant to run in these skirts??? Anything longer than half my normal stride, and I knee the material and almost fall over.

EDDIE: It's like trying to run with your knees tied together!

GERALD: Exactly!

AMY: Oh like that problem is exclusive to you three.

HARRY: I never said it *was* exclusive to us three!

(He whimpered.)

HARRY: The threats of getting a beating for cross-dressing, however, *they are*!

---

As the next ten minutes passed, the torture the three boys were enduring steadily worsened. At first, people had stopped to mock then gone about their day. Now, however, people had decided to chase them down the road, hurling insults and throwing stones. It had gone beyond humiliation and was now becoming dangerous. Very much at risk of being hit by a missile aimed for one of the boys, Lucy was not happy.

LUCY: I don't like this, Amy. I think we need to be tactical about this.

AMY: Tactical?

LUCY: Tactical.

(Amy gave her a condescending glance.)

AMY: Care to elaborate, Lucy?

LUCY: What? Oh, yeah.

(She fanned her face.)

LUCY: Sorry, the heat is getting the better of me.

AMY: And you have a tactic to combat that, do you? If so, I'm all ears.

LUCY: Not to combat the heat, no. The heat *is* nasty, but right now it's the *least* of our worries.

AMY: Then...

LUCY: I'm just thinking we should run ahead for the sake of our own safety.

AMY: Yeah?

(She nodded.)

AMY: I love it. Sooner or later one of them stones might hit us and...

LUCY: Exactly.

AMY: Right.

(She smiled.)

AMY: Let's do that then; let's jog on ahead.

LUCY: Um...

AMY: What?

LUCY: Actually, let's not.

AMY: Why not? It was actually a damned good idea.

LUCY: Yeah, but... I just think it'll be better if the person at the front knows where we're going.

AMY: We *do* know where we're going. That college on the other side of the city.

LUCY: It'll also help if the person at the front knows how to get there.

AMY: Right... shit... you've got me there.

LUCY: Besides, there are three colleges on that side of the city and we don't know which one we're heading to.

AMY: Crap it. Running on ahead is definitely a no-no then.

LUCY: Unfortunately.

(Amy beamed.)

AMY: There's nothing to stop us hanging back though, is there?

CRAY: Vetoed!

AMY: I stand corrected.

LUCY: But, sir, why can't we just lag a bit? We're cannon fodder right now.

CRAY: And I sympathise, I really do. But if you think I want to be seen charging through the city with nothing but three weirdos dressed in women's clothing, you can think again.

(He ruffled his neck.)

CRAY: I'm running next to you two for a reason. I know it's obvious you're all together, but as long as I stick with the actual ladies rather than the chaps who just wish they were ladies, it's nowhere near as embarrassing.

EDDIE: The three chaps who *wish* they were ladies???

HARRY: You fucking...

CRAY: Easy now, lad.

HARRY: Out of order.

GERALD: Like anyone would wish *this* nightmare on themselves.

EDDIE: Exactly.

GERALD: I look and feel like a tit, my legs are aching from running weirdly because of this stupid bloody skirt and I'm sweating like a bastard. Not to mention the fact we keep having to dodge stones every five seconds. If I was going to wish for anything, I'd wish this fucking day was over.

HARRY: Right? I was joking when I said I wish I'd died from the food poisoning, but now I'm starting to wish I actually *had*.

EDDIE: So am I!

HARRY: Fuck you!

EDDIE: No, I mean I wish *I'd* died too.

HARRY: Oh. Sorry. Thought you meant me.

EDDIE: Of course not. God forbid. If *you'd* died, them throw stoning cunts would have one less idiot to aim out.

(Harry furrowed his brow.)

HARRY: Well in that case, I'm honoured to have survived, just to help take your flak.

EDDIE: Sharing is caring, mate.

HARRY: Yeah? Well where I come from sharing is punching *you* in the face.

(Eddie was most incensed.)

EDDIE: Oh, yeah? Wanna try it???

CRAY: Enough of that, you daft fuckers. You're in this together. Empathise and lean on one another. Don't declare war on each other, that's just dim.

EDDIE: Right. Sorry. I'm frustrated, that's all.

GERALD: Hot and bothered too, I'd wager.

EDDIE: Very.

(He looked to Amy.)

EDDIE: What the fuck are these uniforms made of exactly?

AMY: How the hell should I know?

EDDIE: Girls know about that sort of thing!

HARRY: You learn about that sort of thing at school, I thought.

AMY: No, we don't! Not always.

GERALD: And you didn't learn about it at the academy either, I suspect.

AMY: Of course not, you silly sod. We're not here to make dresses. I'm in the infantry department learning to fire guns with that moron.

(She pointed at Eddie.)

AMY: That's more Lucy's kind of thing.

LUCY: No, it isn't! I'm in the transport department. Learning to fix cars! I know about as much about materials as *you* do.

AMY: So you didn't learn about them at school either?

LUCY: Nope. We didn't have a home economics department. I'd have liked to though.

AMY: Of course, you're the queen of girly things; that would have been right up your alley.

(She shrugged.)

AMY: That kind of thing never did interest *me* though. Despite being immensely sexy, I'm just not that girly, to be honest.

(Eddie scoffed sarcastically.)

EDDIE: Yeah, right! Not that girly?

AMY: Fuck off, you. I'm not!

EDDIE: Bullshit! Remember the first assault course we had to tackle?

AMY: Shut up!

HARRY: Wait. What happened?

AMY: I said shut up!

EDDIE: Yeah... like I'm gonna.

(He chuckled.)

EDDIE: She ran up to the first cargo net, screamed then fell into it. She got stuck and started crying.



AMY: It was distressing!!!

EDDIE: Maybe so, but you didn't do much better when you fired a gun for the first time either, did you?

AMY: I got better!

EDDIE: Well, you *had* to really, didn't you? You couldn't scream then hop in circles, crying that you don't like it *every* time you fire one.

(Amy growled.)

AMY: I made a bad start; that's all. Yes, I used to be a bit soft, but I've made the adjustment. And I improved immensely after that.

EDDIE: Yet still came bottom of the class.

AMY: I got kidnapped and locked in a basement!!!

(She snarled.)

AMY: Stop baiting me, you dickhead. I might have a feminine side, but I could still kick the crap out of you.

EDDIE: Oh, dream on!

CRAY: Stop that!

(He furrowed his brow.)

CRAY: It's like babysitting a herd of baby idiots.

LUCY: They're just stressed out, hot and irritable, sir. This is torture. We're gonna dehydrate at this rate.

CRAY: No, we won't. I'll be stopping for water at the half way point.

EDDIE: Half way? That's miles away.

CRAY: Then get a fucking...

(He ducked a stone then resumed.)

CRAY: Move on!

GERALD: We're going as fast as we can, sir. These skirts...

CRAY: No, seriously, hurry up. The chaps that threw that last stone look like they mean business.

(At once, they all shot a glance in the direction from which the stone had been thrown. Sure enough, a dozen thugs were either swearing at them, gesticulating or gathering more stones to throw.)

AMY: Uh-oh!

LUCY: Permission to fall back, sir?

CRAY: Denied!

AMY: You bastard!

CRAY: Hey!

(He sneered.)

CRAY: I was going to say you two can run on the other side of me and use me as a shield, but after that outburst, I'm tempted to make *you* shield *me*!

AMY: Sorry, sir; I get cranky when I'm feeling... um... cranky.

CRAY: Yes, well... I'll crank *you* in a minute, madam.

AMY: I charge extra for that, sir.

CRAY: What?

(He then looked to where Amy was giggling to herself.)

CRAY: Right...

EDDIE: Fuck sake. She's even giggling *now*! Just when we're about to get...

HARRY: Incoming!!!

EDDIE: What?

(A dozen stones then rained down from the sky. One hit Lucy on the foot, another hit Amy on the shoulder. Gerald got pelted in the thigh and another came down squarely on Eddie's head.)

EDDIE: Ouch!!! Which one of you fuckers threw that???

CRAY: Eddie!!!

EDDIE: What?

CRAY: That!!!

(He then pointed to where the thugs were charging towards them.)

THUG 01: We fucking did! Wanna make something of it, do ya?

THUG 02: Fucking queers, giving us lip? I aint having that!

THUG 03: Let's break their faces!

GERALD: Nice going, Edward!

EDDIE: It's Eddie!

(He then beamed with delight.)

EDDIE: And yes, it was!

(With that, he charged towards the thugs with his fists aloft.)

EDDIE: Even dressed like a poof, I can have this lot!

(He then flew backwards by his collar.)

CRAY: Not on my watch, sunshine. This is *my* speciality!

(Master Cray then raced into the thugs, taking two down with a roundhouse kick as soon as he got there. As the others converged on him, he then set about despatching them with a series of deft blows. His vast knowledge of hand to hand combat and his skill in utilising that knowledge had very much come to the fore. The thugs couldn't even land a blow. Like a whirlwind, he simply took them down, one after the other with deathly accurate kicks and punches. As a result, within thirty seconds, three of them had run away and the others were all unconscious on the ground. Delighted with his work, he then stood tall and nodded to himself. Watching on agape, his five students could barely believe their eyes.)

HARRY: Did he...

GERALD: Like a machine.

AMY: That was hot.

LUCY: So, so hot.

EDDIE: He bashed them up like they were fucking toddlers or something.

GERALD: Battered them all black and blue.

AMY: And barely broke a sweat doing it.

LUCY: So, so hot.

(She grimaced at Amy.)

LUCY: I'm all aroused now.

AMY: I can see that.

LUCY: What?

(She then shrieked and covered her chest with her arms.)

LUCY: Don't look at me.

AMY: I was joking. That jacket is like two inches thick, nobody's going to see your pert nipples.

LUCY: Stop saying things!

(Amy could only giggle. Watching her do so, Eddie shook his head then looked to where Master Cray was dusting himself down.)

EDDIE: I think we learned something there, guys.

HARRY: Yeah. Don't mess with Master Cray.

EDDIE: Two things then. We also learned the difference between a cadet and a real soldier.

(Lucy exhaled.)

LUCY: And I learned the difference between a boy and a man.

AMY: Put your tongue in, Lucy.

LUCY: Stop it, Amy!

(She then turned away and blushed. As Amy giggled to herself yet again, Eddie, Harry and Gerald watched Master Cray approaching them and nodded to him.)

EDDIE: That was brilliant, sir.

HARRY: Like a one-man army.

GERALD: It was incredible.

(Master Cray smirked arrogantly.)

CRAY: Thanks, chaps, but it was nothing really. I was just using the skills the army taught me.

EDDIE: I want to learn that too.

HARRY: Same here.

CRAY: Oh, you definitely should. Especially you, Eddie.

EDDIE: Me?

CRAY: Yes. Learn to fight properly, lad.

(He rolled his eyes.)

CRAY: The way you charged off towards them with your arms down, it was clear you had no strategy in mind whatsoever. You were just going to club them and hope for the best.

EDDIE: Yeah, that's how I fight.

CRAY: And what idiot taught you to do that?

EDDIE: I learned it the academy. The one where *you* teach!

CRAY: I see. Your teacher is an idiot.

EDDIE: Well, I'm certainly not going to argue with that.

CRAY: Good. Don't. Or the next person I hit will be you.

(Eddie reeled back.)

EDDIE: I didn't mean any offence.

CRAY: Yes, I know. Sorry. That was uncalled for. I'm a bit fired up, you see.

(Lucy fiddled with her hair adoringly.)

LUCY: You don't need to apologise to *us*, sir.

AMY: Wow.

LUCY: Shut up.

CRAY: Quite. Let's *all* shut up. Let's shut up and run.

(He then proceeded to jog away. With a shrug, the others then followed on, glancing back at the throng of unconscious thugs.)

HARRY: Suddenly, I feel a hell of a lot more confident about finishing this run alive.

GERALD: Right? Being dressed like a girl isn't so bad when he's around.

EDDIE: Yes, it is!

HARRY: It's just *safer* when he's around.

(They then puffed out in awe and continued on.)

---

As the party from the academy continuing onwards, still being mocked and pilloried by the townsfolk, sinking morale rapidly became a problem. Although they'd initially been buoyed by the idea of having Cray's strength for protection, that boost had very quickly waned. Sweltering in their thick uniforms, bras, and in some cases, wigs, they were teetering on the brink of exhaustion. Not sure how much further she could go on for, Lucy's shoulders slumped.

LUCY: I don't care. I'm gonna give up. This is too much. The headmaster can punish me as much as he likes. I can't do it anymore.

CRAY: That would be a mistake, young lady.

LUCY: Would it though?

CRAY: Yes! Challenging the headmaster to punish you as much as he likes is not a wise move. You may not have noticed this, but he's not a very nice man. He's barely even human in fact.

(He nodded to the three exhausted boys.)

CRAY: He knew these lads would get attacked if they went out dressed like that, yet he did it anyway. And not because a beating was a risk he was willing to take, but because it was something he *wanted* to happen.

LUCY: Yeah, but...

CRAY: But nothing. That man is evil, I tell you. If he finds out that you quit, he'll stop at nothing to torture you over it.

(He grimaced.)

CRAY: For example, he knows you girls have a fear of basements thanks to... that event... so I wouldn't be at all surprised if he moved your accommodation into one.

LUCY: He wouldn't!

AMY: He fucking would.

EDDIE: In a heartbeat.

HARRY: Giggling while he does it.

GERALD: Then he'd masturbate furiously at the thrill of his evil deed afterwards.

(Everyone gave him a sideways glance.)

GERALD: What? He might. I mean...

(He shrugged.)

GERALD: He seems like the type.

CRAY: That's a type, is it?

GERALD: Yes. Twisted.

CRAY: Hmm...

(He cringed.)

CRAY: It troubles me that your mind went there.

GERALD: Why does it? That's exactly what my uncle was like. He got off on treating people badly. He was a sadist. That's how he ended up travelling the world for three years.

EDDIE: What?

AMY: Huh?

GERALD: That's what titled families claim when their relative is actually in prison.

CRAY: Ah. I've heard of that, actually.

(He then looked to Lucy.)

CRAY: Just hang in there, Lucy. The punishment really isn't worth the risk.

LUCY: But I'm burning up. I'm uncomfortable, I can barely breathe and I'm a giant ball of sweat.

AMY: Same!

HARRY: Yup.

EDDIE: I'm dying.

GERALD: Literally! If we don't get some water down us, we're screwed.

CRAY: Chaps, just hang in there, will you?

(He nodded.)

CRAY: There's a quiet square just down the end of this road with a shop on it. You'll be less exposed there and I can buy you all some water.

AMY: Water! I really, really want that.

HARRY: It's going to taste like angels are pouring it from heaven.

EDDIE: I can't wait. This is too much. This really sucks. I'm humiliated, I'm burning up and I can barely feel my legs anymore. This is hell!

(He then mused to himself.)

EDDIE: That said, a dehydrated Amy doesn't giggle, so maybe this isn't so bad after all.

AMY: Shut your face, you.

(She pouted.)

AMY: So what if I giggle a lot? My sense of humour has got me through a lot of nasty shit. Really dark, horrid, mortifying events. Like being trapped in a basement with a psychopath, my mother dying and having to share a classroom with you!

EDDIE: Oh, fuck off. Studying alongside me was your one pleasure in life.

AMY: Piss off. Lucy is my one pleasure in life.

LUCY: Rephrase!

AMY: My friends are my one pleasure in life.

LUCY: Much better.

GERALD: Knew each other before today, did you?

HARRY: They used to be lovers.

AMY: Fuck off, did we!

(She sneered.)

AMY: We knew each other from being trapped in a basement together. That kind of thing bonds you to people.

EDDIE: By the genitals.

AMY: Do you want a slap?

EDDIE: Do you?

AMY: You wouldn't dare!

EDDIE: Oh, wouldn't I?

(Amy shrugged matter-of-factly.)

AMY: No, actually. Cray would slap you silly.

CRAY: No, I wouldn't.

EDDIE: Ha!

CRAY: I'd punch his lights out. Nobody hits women on my watch.

EDDIE: Shit.

(He scoffed.)

EDDIE: Not that I'd hit a woman anyway.

AMY: Then why suggest that you might?

EDDIE: Because you're really fucking annoying!

AMY: Pot, kettle, black.

EDDIE: *You're* black!!!

AMY: Eh?

EDDIE: I mean...

GERALD: She's not black, Eddie. She's just nicely tanned.

EDDIE: I know that!

(He ruffled his neck.)

EDDIE: I'm not an idiot.

AMY: Since when?

EDDIE: Since... all the time.

LUCY: Right...

EDDIE: I was actually top of our class until I got ill. As you well fucking know, Amy.

AMY: Well... I suppose... but...

EDDIE: I'd have pissed that class if I hadn't been poisoned... and lost all the time giving evidence in court. My sniping was first class and I was turning into something of a martial arts master.

CRAY: No, you weren't.

EDDIE: Sir...

CRAY: You made a good start, that I'll hand you, but you were hardly a master. In fact, other kids who missed just as much time as you ended up way better.

EDDIE: No. I aint having that. I was getting really good.

CRAY: No. Like I said, you were improving. Others, however, improved faster.

EDDIE: I...

CRAY: And while we're on the subject, achieving a yellow belt does not make you a martial arts master. Especially when most of the others in the class had made it to green or blue.

(Amy giggled.)

AMY: What a twat!

CRAY: *You're* still a white belt!

AMY: I was away a lot!!!

(Now it was Eddie's turn to giggle.)

EDDIE: Still a white belt. What a numpty.

AMY: Piss off.

EDDIE: I was ahead of you in the sniper rankings an' all.

AMY: Oh, whatever. That doesn't alter the fact that you're an idiot!

EDDIE: No, I aint! Harry can tell you...

HARRY: I'm not lying for you, mate.

EDDIE: Excuse me?

HARRY: Sorry, mate, but some of the crap you spouted when we were stuck in adjacent hospital beds for all that time was beyond ridiculous.

EDDIE: Like what?

HARRY: Like when the nurse asked if you'd had a bowel movement and you told her no, but you'd like her to arrange one; preferably to a private room or a bed near the window.

(Silence ensued, but for the sound of Amy giggling.)

EDDIE: Mate...

HARRY: Yeah?

EDDIE: We can't all be geniuses like you.

CRAY: Well, from the sound of things, *you* certainly can't.

EDDIE: And nor can a lot of people.

(He ruffled his neck.)

EDDIE: But that doesn't make me an idiot. Unless you compare me to Harry here, but that's hardly fair, is it? He's the smartest bloke at the academy.

GERALD: So I hear.

(Harry just smirked.)

HARRY: I'm the smartest bloke at *any* academy.

CRAY: And modest with it.

HARRY: Modesty is for idiots.

AMY: Really? Obviously, Eddie didn't get the memo.

EDDIE: Oh, fuck off. Trollop.

AMY: Moron!

EDDIE: Bitch!

AMY: Just be gone, knob end.

EDDIE: Fine!

AMY: Fine.

(Lucy looked between them then grimaced.)

LUCY: Anyway... as I was saying...

CRAY: It's not far now, Lucy. Just hang in there. Like I said, you can have some water once we reach the end of this road.

LUCY: Great. This long, painful road with no end in sight.

CRAY: The end is in sight. Maybe you forgot your glasses.

LUCY: I don't wear glasses. But I am having trouble seeing.

CRAY: That'll be the dehydration. Let's get a move on, shall we? The sooner we get there, the sooner you can get some water down your necks.

LUCY: Fine, but if I die in the meantime, it's all your fault.

CRAY: Right...

(They then struggled onwards with their heads down, gasping for air and praying for the end of the road to come. As such, silence descended and their minds became entirely focussed on the prize. Water.)

EDDIE: Water. Not long now.

HARRY: Just focus on the water.

AMY: It's not far now. It's not far now.

LUCY: I need it. I want it.

GERALD: Um... so, yeah, I still have a white belt too.

CRAY: Why? You're in the strategy division. You lot don't even *do* martial arts.

GERALD: And that's *why* it's still white.  
CRAY: But why did they *give* you a belt?  
GERALD: I don't know, do I? I was just as baffled as you are.  
CRAY: I see...  
(He shook his head.)  
CRAY: That academy gets more and more messed up by the week.

---

Some five minutes later, Amy, Eddie, Lucy, Harry and Gerald staggered into a quiet town square just behind Master Cray. Overjoyed that they'd arrived, they instantly made a beeline for a long, concrete step which had been installed for use as a seat. Gasping for air as they stumbled towards it, they didn't even notice Master Cray race into the shop at the side of the square. Right now, they just needed to take the weight off of their feet and try to cool down a little. The shade in the square would most definitely help with that. First to arrive, Eddie practically fell onto the seat then laid there on his side. Stumbling along behind him, the others at least took a moment to turn around before sitting down. They then proceeded to slouch and gasp for air.

AMY: Dying!

LUCY: I'm way past that. I've *already* died!

EDDIE: Right? And who knew dying would be *this* horrid?

GERALD: You joke, but I'm actually fearing the worst here! This is no mere punishment. The headmaster is actually trying to kill us all.

AMY: I reckon you could be right.

LUCY: And his ploy's working. I'm done for.

EDDIE: Right? And we're barely halfway through yet.

GERALD: I know.

(Gerald could only groan in defeat at this point.)

GERALD: This run is never going to end, is it?

(Harry shrugged.)

HARRY: Actually, it will. It'll end when we get back.

GERALD: What?

HARRY: Just saying. It will end.

GERALD: I know that, you cock. I was using hyperbole!

HARRY: Right... yeah; sorry.

GERALD: Good. You *be* sorry! Correcting me like I was serious; whatever next?

AMY: Calm down, Gerald!

GERALD: No! That was really annoying!

AMY: Even so...

(Harry scratched his head nervously.)

HARRY: No, no... actually, he's right to be miffed. I really need to stop doing that. I correct people's hyperbole all the time and I seem to lose more friends that way.

(Eddie sat up a bit and smirked.)

EDDIE: You actually *made* a friend by doing that *once* though, remember? Me.

HARRY: That's true.

(Eddie looked to Amy and Lucy.)



EDDIE: On opening day, when we were waiting to get into the assembly hall, I said the queue went on forever. He corrected me. So I hit him.

HARRY: So it hit him back.

EDDIE: And now we're mates.

(Amy and Lucy shared an unimpressed glance.)

AMY: Boys are stupid.

LUCY: Like that's news.

EDDIE: Do you mind?

GERALD: Wait! Guys?

(He grimaced.)

GERALD: Where did Master thingy-bob go?

LUCY: Master Cray.

(Gerald furrowed his brow.)

GERALD: I didn't ask what his bloody name was; I asked where he went!

HARRY: In the shop, I hope.

AMY: Right? He did say he would.

EDDIE: I hope he remembers to buy water.

AMY: Why wouldn't he? That's specifically what he went in there for.

EDDIE: Yeah, but he might buy something else and forget!

AMY: Like what? Twenty cigarettes and a box of matches? He's a health freak!

EDDIE: Fruit then! Shops sell a lot of different things, you dumb bitch; it could be anything.

HARRY: Actually, mate, "anything" is a bit of a stretch.

GERALD: He did it again!

HARRY: Shit. I did, didn't I?

EDDIE: Knob.

HARRY: Fair shout.

AMY: Eddie?

EDDIE: What?

AMY: Apologise for calling me a dumb bitch, or so help me, I'll kick you right in the bollocks.

EDDIE: Piss off. Stop *being* a dumb bitch and I won't have to call you one.

HARRY: You didn't *have* to...

(He then hung his head.)

HARRY: Ignore me.

EDDIE: I will.

HARRY: Thanks.

AMY: You're skating on thin ice, Eddie. I hate you.

EDDIE: Oh, boo-fucking-hoo.

AMY: Twat!

EDDIE: Bitch!

GERALD: Oh, put a sock in it, will you? Not literally, Harry.

HARRY: Touché.

GERALD: Let's just sit quietly and get our breath back while we wait for the water.

EDDIE: Unless he forgets to...

AMY: He won't!

EDDIE: You don't know...

LUCY: Guys!!! Please. Enough.

(Accepting her plea, Amy and Eddie just snarled at one another then made themselves comfortable.)

LUCY: Thank you.

GERALD: Peace at last.

(For the next minute or so, they then sat quietly as they caught their breath. Being in the shade at last was indeed a blessed relief. Finally starting to feel a little cooler, Lucy eventually broke their silence with a smile.)

LUCY: I'm not burning up anymore, that helps.

AMY: Yeah. A bit.

(She pouted.)

AMY: I'm still a skanky, sweaty mess.

EDDIE: Pretty much full-time.

AMY: Fuck off, you.

(She shook her head.)

AMY: I can't believe I used to be attracted to you.

EDDIE: Yeah, well, I was just as misguided. At one time, I'd have been happy to do you.

AMY: And I'd have been happy to let you, but boy has *that* ship sailed!

EDDIE: Yes, it has. And thank fuck I wasn't on it.

HARRY: Seriously? Can you two just stop bickering? This nightmare is hellish enough without that.

LUCY: Hear, hear.

EDDIE: Whatever. *She* started it.

AMY: No.

(She then pointed at Eddie and started to giggle.)

AMY: *She* started it.

EDDIE: Right, yeah, very mature.

AMY: What? Did I say something wrong?

EDDIE: Yes! I'm all man, me! She indeed.

AMY: My bad. The skirt, long hair and massive boobies threw me for a minute.

EDDIE: Just shut your face.

(He ruffled his neck.)

EDDIE: Doubting my masculinity. Not on!

HARRY: Yeah! If you want to doubt anyone's masculinity, doubt Gerald's.

GERALD: Excuse me???

HARRY: Mate, uncross your legs.

GERALD: Oh... right.

(He then adopted a more manly position and looked away, burning red.)

HARRY: Thank you.

LUCY: Right... so... where's...

(Just then, Master Cray emerged from the shop with six one litre bottles of water in his arms. At once, the five students all started to drool. Right now, those bottles looked like manna from heaven.)

GERALD: Liquid...

HARRY: That looks so good.

AMY: Need. Want. Must have.

EDDIE: I'm gonna go to town on one of those bad boys.

(As he approached them, Master Cray grimaced.)

CRAY: What's with those weird faces? You'd better be lusting over the water. I don't like being drooled at by boys in skirts.

HARRY: Don't flatter yourself, sir.

CRAY: Right. As long as we're clear.

EDDIE: Bloody right we are.

CRAY: Good, good.

(He then handed everyone a bottle each and took a seat. Without a word, Amy, Eddie, Harry and Gerald immediately yanked off the lids then availed themselves of the much needed thirst quencher. Lucy on the other hand, exhaled lovingly at her bottle then fluttered her eyelashes at Master Cray.)

LUCY: First you save us from thugs, now you save our lives.

CRAY: Well... you know... drink up.

(Lucy exhaled once again.)

LUCY: I will.

(She then took a small sip before smiling at Master Cray.)

LUCY: So... tell us about yourself. Like... I don't know. Are you married?

CRAY: Actually, no. I'm gay!

LUCY: What???

CRAY: I'm joking. I'm happily married, yes.

EDDIE: To a woman, right?

CRAY: Yes!

(He rolled his eyes then looked to Lucy.)

CRAY: So the answer to your follow up question is no.

LUCY: Aw.

CRAY: But that's enough about me. Let's hear about you five. Starting with why you're sitting with your legs crossed, Gerald!

GERALD: What? Oh, shit.

(He uncrossed his legs again then palmed his forehead.)

EDDIE: Seriously, Gerald? Again?

GERALD: I can't help it. That's how I was raised. To look refined. Crossing my legs was part of that. Deportment lessons, you see?

HARRY: Yeah, well, when you're dressed like a girl, you look anything but distinguished when you cross your legs.

CRAY: You look like you're comfortable doing it!

GERALD: Well, I can assure you I'm not!

AMY: Really? Are you sure?

GERALD: Yes!

AMY: There's not just a small part of you that likes the way the material feels against your thighs?

GERALD: Stop that, Amy; it's not funny.

(Clearly begging to differ, Amy chuckled into her hand.)

GERALD: Stupid girl.

CRAY: Right, well, anyway... raised in a posh household, were you?

(Gerald puffed out.)

GERALD: I was, yes. My father is Lord Cuthbert Mortimer of Featherbrook .

CRAY: Any relation to *General* Mortimer of the royal infantry?

GERALD: Actually, my father *is* General Mortimer of the royal infantry.

(He sighed.)

GERALD: Our family have a long-standing military tradition dating back two hundred years. My great, great, great-grandfather fought at the Battle of Winter Down, for pity's sake. And by fought, I mean sat in a tent a few miles away from the action and supervised. And by supervised, I mean he drunk cognac all day and messed about with his chums. You know, a typical higher-up.

EDDIE: Never fought anything in his life because he didn't want to get his hereditary medals dirty.

GERALD: Exactly.

(He sighed.)

GERALD: Every generation of our family has followed that same military route. Promoted due to family connections; enjoying all the kudos while seeing none of the action. And my family wanted the same for me. So they sent me to an academy. The plan was for me to pass with flying colours, finish my basic training then make my way up the military ladder until I too was drinking cognac and playing cards all day.

CRAY: Blimey. I bet they were livid when they heard you'd failed the academy.

GERALD: I haven't told them yet. But, yes, they will be. And they're bound to think I did it deliberately, because I told them right from the off that I don't even want to join the sodding army.

(Everyone shared an uneasy glance.)

AMY: Why sign up then?

EDDIE: Yeah, you should have put your foot down and refused, mate.

GERALD: I did. I told them categorically, I wasn't doing it.

(He winced.)

GERALD: The beating that followed was brutal, to say the least. I'm still having flashbacks.

CRAY: Your father gave you a thrashing, did he?

GERALD: No, he pulled her off of me.

CRAY: Her?

GERALD: My grandmother!

(Everyone had to turn away at this point to hide their amusement.)

CRAY: Your grandmother?

GERALD: Yes. I...

(His brow then furrowed over.)

GERALD: What are you lot giggling about? Have you ever met my grandmother?

HARRY: No, and I don't think I'd want to.

AMY: Right?

(She smiled.)

AMY: So was it *just* your grandmother or did your little sister join in too?

HARRY: Ably assisted by the girls from the nearby junior school?

GERALD: Oh, very funny!

(He ruffled his neck.)

GERALD: My grandmother won the international martial arts championship six years running, and spent twelve years teaching the marines how to fight! She's the last person anyone would want a pasting from.

EDDIE: Holy shit.

LUCY: She sounds awful.

(She whimpered.)

LUCY: No offence.

GERALD: None taken. She is. So, yeah; that's my story. I didn't want to join, but I didn't want to fail either. And I *wouldn't* have failed if I'd managed to stay awake. But nobody's going to believe that, are they?

CRAY: You're gonna get another beating when they find out, aren't you?

GERALD: Bet on it.

(He hung his head.)

GERALD: I'll survive this nightmare run, only to get back to the academy and find my grandmother's there. Then I'll get beaten to death! The future isn't very bright for me; it really isn't.

(Amy and Lucy gave him sympathetic smiles.)

AMY: Hey, don't worry. It might work out.

LUCY: Yeah, with any luck they'll merely disown you.

AMY: Right? That'll spare you a beating, at least.

(He grimaced.)

AMY: Unless she gives you a beating *then* disowns you.

GERALD: Can you just stop talking, please?

AMY: We're trying to cheer you up.

(Eddie and Harry gave her an astonished glance.)

HARRY: Seriously?

AMY: What?

EDDIE: If that's you being kind, I'd hate to get on your bad side.

(Amy just snarled at him.)

AMY: Too late, shit breath.

CRAY: Right, yes, anyway... before we head off again, what about the rest of you?

EDDIE: What about us?

CRAY: I just wondered about your backgrounds.

EDDIE: Right.

(He shrugged.)

EDDIE: There's not much to say really. I'm a farmer's son from East Walston. I just signed up to get out of farming.

AMY: I signed up just to get out of the toxic environment I grew up in. My parents are monsters.

CRAY: Abusive, were they?

AMY: Worse. Vegans.

(Everyone winced.)

EDDIE: Shit. Sorry to hear that.

LUCY: Nobody deserves that.

HARRY: You poor cow.

AMY: Yeah, it totally sucked.

(She then burst into tears.)

AMY: We had rice and beans for dinner everyday.

CRAY: That's abuse!!!

(As Amy continued to sob, warmly consoled by Lucy, and surprisingly Eddie, Master Cray shook his head disdainfully.)

CRAY: Terrible. Look, someone else say something. Anything to take her mind of the torment.

(Lucy smiled.)

LUCY: Okay. Well... I joined the academy because Sophie, my best friend from school, wanted to join the army, but didn't want to sign up by herself. So we agreed to sign up together. We filled out the forms together and everything.

CRAY: Sophie? There's a Sophie?

(Lucy's brow furrowed deeply at this point.)

LUCY: No, there isn't. Yes, we filled out the forms together and everything, but unlike her, I posted mine!

EDDIE: Damn.

LUCY: She swears blind that hers must have got lost in the post. Yeah, right. She changed her sodding mind and here I am! I'll kick her in the face next time I see her. If it wasn't for her, I'd never have been trapped in the basement with a psycho!

CRAY: Right, well... that's not going to cheer Amy up, is it? What about you, Harry?

HARRY: What about me?

CRAY: Why did you decide to join a military academy.

(Harry scratched his head nervously.)

HARRY: Yeah... the thing is, sir... never make life changing decisions when you're drunk.

CRAY: What?

HARRY: Well, I passed all my exams, so that afternoon a few of us went out to the celebrate in the college bar. Unfortunately, there was a job fair on that day in the main hall. The army were recruiting.

(He winced.)

HARRY: I don't even remember going there. And I certainly don't remember signing up. The first I knew about it was when the acceptance letter arrived two weeks later.

(Just then, the sound of Amy's giggling rose into the air.)

AMY: Please say that's not true.

HARRY: I wish I could.

AMY: No. There's no way. You made that up just to make me chuckle.

HARRY: I really didn't.

AMY: So it's true? You joined the army by accident?

HARRY: Pretty much, yeah.

(Amy then burst out laughing.)

AMY: Oh, my god; what a wally.

HARRY: Easy!

AMY: I mean who does that???

HARRY: I was drunk!

(He ruffled his neck.)

HARRY: If anything it's the recruiter's fault for not stopping me. If I was so blotto I can't even remember it, I must have been slurring my speech and all sorts. How could he not notice I was drunk?

CRAY: Oh, he'd have noticed, Harry. He just wouldn't have cared. Recruiters get paid by the number of signatures.

HARRY: Cunts.

CRAY: Correct.

(He then puffed out.)

CRAY: So *none of you* actually had any ambition to become a soldier because you liked the idea as a vocation. Eddie just wanted to get out of farming, Amy wanted to move out of her parent's house, Lucy was screwed over by a friend, Harry joined by accident and Gerald was forced to join under threat of punishment beatings. That's interesting.

EDDIE: Interesting is one way of putting it. I'd say it was a massive mistake in my case.

CRAY: Oh?

EDDIE: Yeah. If I'd known what a cunt the headmaster was, I'd have stuck with farming.

AMY: And I'd have stayed at home eating... no, I wouldn't. I'd have joined the navy instead.

EDDIE: Hmm... good point. I forgot about the navy. I wish I'd done that now.

HARRY: Right? I wish *I'd* done that too.

LUCY: Same. I'd rather be anywhere that horrible headmaster isn't!

GERALD: Agreed!

CRAY: Then that makes six of us.

(At once, all eyes turned his way.)

EDDIE: What?

AMY: You?

(Cray furrowed his brow.)

CRAY: Yes! Do you think I *enjoy* working for an academy's that's run by a complete nincompoop?

(He shook his head.)

CRAY: Honestly, that headmaster is a bell end of the highest order.

EDDIE: Yeah, we'd actually spotted that, sir.

LUCY: I was kinda hard not to.

CRAY: Oh, believe me, what you've seen and suffered is only the tip of the iceberg.

(The five students shared an uneasy grimace as their embittered tutor continued.)

CRAY: This academy was the finest in all the land, then *he* came. The moment he walked through the door last year, the place started to fall apart. The first thing he did was sack half the maintenance team. Then he went to town on the food quality.

Whatever he could do to save a penny or too, he did it. Ruthlessly. Including firing well-paid, experienced staff and replacing them with whoever was willing to the job for the lowest fee. That's how he ended up hiring the psychopath that took you girl's hostage. No fucking reference checks. They were cheap, so they got the gig. You name it, he slashed the budget for it!

(He growled.)

CRAY: I could have understood it if the place was in financial difficulties, but it wasn't!

AMY: Then why did he do it?

EDDIE: Yeah, why turn it from an award winning institution into... whatever it is now?

CRAY: To line his own pockets.

(He looked to his students and sighed emptyily.)

CRAY: And for that reason alone. The academy is going to shit, purely so he can increase profits, because he, himself, is a fucking shareholder and he's *hoping* to get a healthy premium. Cunt!

(Harry bit his lip.)

HARRY: That's makes no sense though. Now we've failed, the academy has lost it's legend. It's prestige is damaged. That's going to damage the academy's income surely.

CRAY: Of course it will. Why do you think the headmaster hates you all so much? He's not making you do this in the hope you'll learn something. This is part of his revenge for potentially damaging his cash cow. And I can assure you, it won't end with this run.

(The students all hung their heads in dismay. Hearing such a thing had deflated them immensely. Caring very little for that fact, however, Cray jumped to his feet then nodded.)

CRAY: Anyway, that's enough delaying. Let's get back on the road.

AMY: I don't want to!

LUCY: Ever!

GERALD: I've only just finished my water.

CRAY: Then you're good to go.

(With that, he proceeded to jog away.)

CRAY: If you're not with me by the time I count to ten, I'll wallop the lot of you.

(Horried by that prospect, the five students all gasped then raced up behind him.)

CRAY: Excellent. Nice work, ladies.

(He then chuckled to himself as he led them back onto the main road. In his wake, Harry, Eddie and Gerald could only glower bitterly.)

HARRY: Wanker!

---

Having downed a litre of water each, the resumption of their run across the city had started reasonably well. Hydrated and rested, their bodies felt a lot lighter and a lot stronger. It didn't take long, however, for the howls of derision from the public to return in all their glory. As a result, it wasn't long before their enthusiasm waned once again and a deflated feeling began to set in. This demotivated feeling then led to one of disillusionment and all their aches and pains returned with a vengeance.

Well aware that being in such a demeaning situation would deflate them in such a way, Master Cray was doing everything he could to gee them all up. He knew better than anybody that a lack of enthusiasm for a task could lead to physical exhaustion. Forcing the body to do something that the mind had no desire to do, after all, was nigh on impossible. If he could only get their heads straight, this gargantuan chore would become a million times easier and they might just get through it. As such, as the next hour passed, he continually hammered home they point that the right mindset was the key.

CRAY: You can do this, people. You're not as exhausted as you think you are. It's purely psychological; you know that right?



(Eddie puffed out as he staggered forth in the heat.)

EDDIE: So you keep saying.

CRAY: And I'll keep saying it until you get the message. Right now, if you could just hold your heads up high and tell yourselves you can get this done, you'd find it a lot easier.

HARRY: And how are we meant to do that?

CRAY: By saying fuck you, headmaster! He sent you out here knowing you'd be humiliated. He sent you out here to turn you into what you are now; deflated and broken shells of your former selves. And you've let him do it!

(He nodded.)

CRAY: You should be powering forth now, allowing all that mocking to simply wash over you. You should have your eyes on the prize! That prize being getting back to the academy with this nightmare behind you; knowing that the headmaster didn't beat you.

(Amy whimpered.)

AMY: Oh, god. Getting back is gonna suck.

LUCY: Right? He'll probably make us do something else even more demeaning as soon as we walk in the door.

HARRY: Actually, for Eddie, Gerald and me there's gonna be nothing *more* demeaning than merely getting back. The lads are gonna have a field day. We're gonna be Edie, Geraldine and Harriet forever, you know that right?

CRAY: Seriously? It's like everything I said went in one ear and out of the other.

EDDIE: That's because it was bollocks.

CRAY: Oh, was it now?

EDDIE: Yes! We're not just deflated and embarrassed because of the uniform, we're also burning to death under a red hot sun.

GERALD: Yeah! It's okay for you, Master Cray, you're in a vest and shorts. We're wearing fucking bras and blouses underneath what I'm pretty sure is some kind of woollen jacket. And a skirt made of the same thick material!

HARRY: I'm a ball of sweat under this uniform.

EDDIE: It doesn't help that the skirt is so tight we can barely bend our knees.

AMY: Yeah! There's a reason we don't wear skirts this long and tight on physical exercises!

CRAY: I know that, but even so, what I said remains true. You could get through this with ease if you'd just accept the situation and power on through with a view to sticking it to the headmaster. The right mindset in this situation is absolutely crucial.

HARRY: But...

CRAY: But nothing! You're training to be soldiers, for pity's sake. Once you're in the army, you'll encounter far worse situations than this!

(Harry scoffed.)

HARRY: Yeah, right. Like what? Go on, name *one*!

CRAY: People shooting at you!

HARRY: Right...

AMY: I think he won that round, Harry.

HARRY: Yeah...

CRAY: See? In that situation you soon learn to get on and do whatever needs to be done to get through it. And that requires the right mindset. Don't get deflated. Adopt a determined snarl and fight your way through it.

(Amy, Lucy, Harry, Eddie and Gerald shared a series of glances.)

AMY: You know... I would *like* to stick it to the headmaster.

GERALD: Well... I think we all would.

HARRY: I'm just not sure I have the energy left to do it.

EDDIE: And that's the problem.

CRAY: Look, just think on it. Focus on that for a while; not letting the headmaster beat you.

EDDIE: I guess we...

(Just then, a somewhat inebriated young fellow in a tracksuit proceeded to run alongside them all.)

DRUNK: Alright, girls; heading somewhere nice?

(He then staggered away before veering back again.)

DRUNK: Sorry about that, the ground moved.

CRAY: Bugger off, you.

DRUNK: Why? You're following them, why can't I?

CRAY: I'm not following...

DRUNK: Hush, you. I want to talk to the girls.

(He then looked straight at Eddie.)

DRUNK: How's it going, babe?

EDDIE: Babe???

(The drunk gasped.)

DRUNK: Oh, fuck me; you've got a seriously deep voice!

(He beamed.)

DRUNK: That's sexy.

EDDIE: Mate...

DRUNK: Happy to.

CRAY: Listen, idiot...

DRUNK: Shut it, you're cramping my style!

(He hiccuped then looked to Eddie again.)

DRUNK: Fancy going for a drink, girl?

EDDIE: No, I f...

DRUNK: Bearing in mind that I do have other options here.

(He hiccuped.)

DRUNK: I just asked you first because you're the best looking one.

EDDIE: Excuse me???

DRUNK: What? You are!

(He then slung a drunken arm in Lucy's direction.)

DRUNK: That one looks like a fucking boy.

LUCY: Hey!!!

(She snarled.)

LUCY: Stop giggling, Amy!

EDDIE: Seconded!

AMY: I can't. I want to, but...

DRUNK: Hey! Put a sock in it, you. I reckon I'm in here!

(He winked at Eddie.)

DRUNK: You've got seriously awesome tits, you have.

(With that, he flopped to the floor unconscious, courtesy of Eddie's left hook.)

EDDIE: Tosser!

(He then looked to where Amy was giggling with tears streaming down her face then sighed in defeat.)

EDDIE: Like I weren't embarrassed enough!

AMY: Oh, come of it. Why would you be embarrassed? If anything you should be flattered. He said you're a *pretty* girl.

EDDIE: I know he did.

(He snarled.)

EDDIE: Which is something nobody's ever said to you, I'd wager. Fucking bitch.

CRAY: Hey! That's enough, Eddie!

EDDIE: But...

CRAY: I mean it! Stop.

(He smirked.)

CRAY: That's no way for a lady to behave.

EDDIE: You... hey!

(As Eddie proceed to seethe, deeply angered both by Cray's comment and Amy's giggly reaction to it, Lucy grimaced then glanced to her side.)

LUCY: Um... guys?

HARRY: Yeah?

LUCY: Why did he say I look like a boy? I'm the girliest one here.

AMY: Besides Eddie.

EDDIE: Fuck off!

LUCY: I mean... why would he say that?

GERALD: He was drunk.

LUCY: Even so. I'm quite obviously a girl!

AMY: A bit like Ed...

EDDIE: I'm gonna knock *you* out in a minute an' all!

AMY: Like you could!

LUCY: He could. You're very weak.

AMY: Lucy! Why would you *say* that?

(Lucy snarled.)

LUCY: Because you laughed when that idiot said I look like a boy!

(Amy grimaced.)

AMY: Right... my bad.

HARRY: Seriously, guys, that was the last straw. As funny as it was to see Eddie get hit on by a bloke, I'm getting fucked off now.

GERALD: Same here. I mean, next time it might be one of us.

EDDIE: It could be any of us. Except Amy. Nobody's gonna mistake *her* for a girl.

AMY: *You* clearly think I'm a girl; that's why you said "her". Moron.

EDDIE: Sorry, I meant "it".

AMY: Such a child.

LUCY: Never mind squabbling, let's just hurry up and get there, shall we? God only knows what the next drunk might say or do. I just want to get this over with.

GERALD: Hear, hear. Well said, Amy.

LUCY: I'm Lucy!

GERALD: Shit. Well said anyway; whoever you are!

LUCY: Lucy! I literally just said... oh, forget it.

HARRY: Yes, well, never mind squabbling, let's just focus on the run. The sooner this nonsense is over, the better.

(They then continued on in silence, picking up the pace slightly. Finally, they felt motivated. Master Cray's attempts to psych them up had failed miserably, but somehow they'd got there by themselves. Pondering that thought in his head, as they continued onwards, Master Cray could only smile.)

CRAY: Yup. That'll do nicely.

---

With a renewed determination to get their punishment over and done with as soon as possible, the five cadet's attitude changed dramatically. Look extremely focussed, they remained closely behind Master Cray as he bounded forth down the city's longest street. The taunts kept coming, only now they flatly refused to acknowledge them. And despite sweltering in the summer heat, they offered no more complaints. They just wanted to complete their task and every step covered brought them that little bit closer. Delighted to see it, Master Cray glanced to his side then smiled.)

CRAY: That's the way, people. See? What did I tell you? It's a piece of piss with the right mindset.

AMY: Hardly!

CRAY: Well, okay, maybe not a piece of piss, but you have to admit, it is far easier.

HARRY: Maybe.

CRAY: Maybe?

HARRY: Yeah. It's no less frustrating or annoying though.

EDDIE: And no amount of determination or positive thinking is going to make running about dressed like a woman any less humiliating.

LUCY: It's not making me any less sweaty either.

AMY: Right? These uniforms are just gonna slide off when we're done.

CRAY: A moment I'm sure you're looking forward to.

GERALD: Obviously.

CRAY: Then keep focussing and the moment will come. And soon.

EDDIE: Define soon.

(Cray smiled.)

CRAY: Actually, chaps; you're halfway there already.

LUCY: Only halfway???

GERALD: You mean we've got to do the same amount again just to get to the college then turn around and come back again???

CRAY: No, you cock. We're here. This is the college; the halfway point.

GERALD: Right. I thought you meant halfway to the college.

CRAY: I didn't!

(He pointed ahead of himself.)

CRAY: There's the sign, look.

(As one, his five cadets all glanced ahead and drew a sigh of relief.)

AMY: At last!

LUCY: We don't have to turn about and go back straight away, do we?

HARRY: Yeah, I need a rest!

CRAY: Of course not, you silly sods. I'm here to do a talk. I'll be gone for about an hour. In the meantime you can grab a drink and a light snack, if you like. Maybe take a nap, just make sure you're here when I come back out an hour from now.

(Amy pointed to some benches beneath a blanket of trees, just inside the college entrance.)

AMY: I'm gonna go over there. And I defy anyone to try to move me.

CRAY: Fair enough.

HARRY: I'll go there an' all. There's some bushes next to those benches, I'll hide in there.

CRAY: Hide?

HARRY: I'm dressed like a bird!!!

CRAY: Right, yes... hiding is probably wise then.

EDDIE: Then count me in.

GERALD: And me.

LUCY: I'm gonna konk out on a bench with Amy.

AMY: Awesome. We can show these boys how *real* girls take a nap.

CRAY: You mean they're *not* real girls???

EDDIE: Fuck off!

CRAY: Excuse me???

EDDIE: Um... I meant... fuck off, sir.

CRAY: Much better.

(He then checked his watch.)

CRAY: Actually, I'm a few minutes early, so I'll take a break with you for a bit.

AMY: Just don't steal my bench!

LUCY: Or mine!

CRAY: Right...

(The party of six then headed into the college grounds and made a beeline for the rest area. Upon arrival, Lucy and Amy instantly dived at a pair of benches and laid face down on them, gasping for air. Eddie, Harry and Gerald, on the other hand, availed themselves of a concrete seat, hidden among the bushes. For his part, Master Cray simply placed his hands on his hips as he tried to regain his breath.)

CRAY: Excellent work, everyone. Your misery is halfway to completion.

(He nodded.)

CRAY: In the meantime, just rest up as best you can. Oh, and if you need water or snacks there's a row of shops to the right as you come out of the gate.

EDDIE: All in good time.

HARRY: Well, you say that, I could use a decent feed right now.

EDDIE: So could I, but like I said, all in good time.

(He ruffled his neck.)

EDDIE: My legs aren't quite ready to function yet, mate.

AMY: Mine have died!

LUCY: Same!

CRAY: Yes, well...

(Suddenly, there was a loud explosion sound and a plume of smoke rose up from somewhere out in the city.)

EDDIE: What in the hell was that?

LUCY: That was loud!

CRAY: It sounded like...

(Just then, a series of further explosions rung out, followed by the sound of gunfire.)

AMY: What the fuck!!!

CRAY: Get in those bushes, you lot!

EDDIE: What?

CRAY: You heard me!

HARRY: Yeah, you fucking heard him!

(Eddie then watched as Amy, Harry, Lucy and Gerald all vanished into the bushes.)

EDDIE: I...

CRAY: Go and join them!

(Cray then yanked a gun from his shorts.)

EDDIE: Where did you pull that from?

CRAY: Don't make me crack the obvious joke; I've got work to do.

(With that, he hurried away towards the college gates.)

EDDIE: Right. Nope. That can't be a good sign.

(He then charged into the bushes where the others were huddled together.)

EDDIE: Cray's got a gun!

LUCY: Really?

(She looked enlightened.)

LUCY: So that's what the bulge was.

(She bit her lip.)

LUCY: Well that's disappointing.

EDDIE: Look, never mind your filthy fantasies, what the hell's going on? What's all that shooting all about?

GERALD: Not to mention the explosions! I mean, that's bad, right?

EDDIE: What do *you* think, you thick cunt.

GERALD: Hey!

EDDIE: Sorry.

(He furrowed his brow.)

EDDIE: It was just a really dumb thing to say. Clearly the city's under attack.

AMY: By who?

HARRY: You mean *whom*.

AMY: Do you want a slap???

(Harry hung his head.)

HARRY: No, but I can see why you'd ask me that.

AMY: Well? Who'd attack the city? And why???

HARRY: I don't know, do I?

AMY: Then shut up and let someone else answer.

(Lucy whimpered.)

LUCY: It must be Farzarian troops. From Farzaria.  
HARRY: Fuck; they're the worst *kind* of Farzarian troops.  
(Lucy glowered at him, forcing him to sink backwards.)  
HARRY: I'll be quiet, I think.  
LUCY: Yeah, you do that!  
AMY: Hold on; what do you mean? Farzarian troops?  
EDDIE: She means troops from Farzaria obviously.  
AMY: But what's a Farzaria?  
(Eddie blinked at her nonchalantly.)  
EDDIE: Don't adjust your ears, everyone; she really is that thick.  
LUCY: It's the nation next door, Amy.  
AMY: Right. Never heard of it.  
EDDIE: Like I said...  
AMY: Fuck off, you. Geography isn't my thing, okay?  
EDDIE: And clearly, nor is current affairs. Or paying attention.  
AMY: Don't make me slap you!  
GERALD: We recently broke all diplomatic ties with them, Amy. They're supporting an insurgence in a small foreign nation; whereas our government is supporting the current regime. There's been quite the hoo-ha about it in the news recently.  
AMY: I never watch it.  
EDDIE: Evidently.  
HARRY: Which to be fair to Amy makes her *uninformed*, whereas those of us who *do* watch it are *misinformed*. So I don't know what to think.  
AMY: Right. Now, I'm lost.  
GERALD: It's not difficult, Amy. Our government has fallen out with the government of the country next door and it looks like they're attacking us.  
AMY: I see.  
(She pouted.)  
AMY: Well that's not very nice.  
GERALD: Well... no.  
EDDIE: Question is, what are we gonna do about it?  
HARRY: Absolutely fuck all.  
EDDIE: Mate...  
HARRY: We're gonna wait here for Master Cray to come back. Like he told us to.  
We're not soldiers.  
GERALD: So we'll leave the fighting to those who are.  
HARRY: And Master Cray.  
EDDIE: A former soldier.  
HARRY: Yeah.  
(Eddie furrowed his brow.)  
EDDIE: I don't like it. Sounds lazy.  
LUCY: No. *Not* being shot at sounds wise.  
AMY: It's certainly *my* preferred outcome.  
EDDIE: Yeah, but if these foreign cunts are shooting up our city, surely it's our duty as military academy cadets to do something about it.  
HARRY: Is it fuck? Military academy students are just college kids with a silly uniform.

(He gestured down himself.)

HARRY: Extremely silly in our case.

GERALD: He's right. We're not even *close* to being soldiers.

EDDIE: I know that, it's just... military academy! Surely that means...

HARRY: I know what you're saying, mate, but look at that military academy. They almost killed us with food poisoning.

LUCY: And almost killed Amy and I by hiring a murderous psychopath as a teacher.

HARRY: That too. It's not a good academy, and it's done fuck all for us. Unless you include making us dress up like tarts just to humiliate us. So why should we do anything for it?

EDDIE: I don't want to do anything for *the academy*. I want to do something to stop these fucking invaders. I wanna do it for Weskerland; our fine nation! And not just because we're soldiers in training. I'd feel the same if I was farming student.

GERALD: Because you'd do anything to get out of farming?

EDDIE: No, because as a citizen of this country, I want to protect it.

AMY: That's so noble.

EDDIE: Thank you.

AMY: Off you pop then. Try not to *not* get shot.

EDDIE: Amy...

AMY: Are you still here? I thought you were going to shoot off and save the nation.

EDDIE: Listen, you; I'm getting a little bit sick and tired of...

(Just then, Master Cray slid amongst them, having appeared from one of the bushes.)

AMY: What the hell???

GERALD: You scared the crap out of me then!

HARRY: Right? I almost had a heart attack.

(Cray gritted his teeth.)

CRAY: Sorry about that. Been shot.

(He then pointed to where his leg was pouring with blood.)

LUCY: Oh, my fucking god.

EDDIE: Holy shit.

CRAY: Yes, well, never mind that.

(He then reached in his pocket and pulled out a key.)

CRAY: I need you five to do something. It's a big ask, but there's no other way.

HARRY: You want us to remove the bullet?

CRAY: No, it was a through and through; I'm fine on that score.

(He snarled.)

CRAY: I can't run though and I'm losing a lot blood, so I need to get to the infirmary inside the college.

EDDIE: And you want us to help you? Consider it done.

CRAY: No, you cock.

(He then threw him the key.)

CRAY: I need you five to take that key to the headmaster.

(Everyone just stared straight through him.)

CRAY: It's the key to the academy armoury and they're going to need it.

LUCY: And you want us to take it there?

EDDIE: While the city is being blown up and bullets are flying???



CRAY: Yes! Getting that key back there is imperative!

HARRY: Why? They must have another key, surely!

(Cray furrowed his brow.)

CRAY: Officially there are two. I have one and the headmaster has one.

EDDIE: Then...

CRAY: Only, the last four times we've needed to go in there, the headmaster has sent for me. He's got *me* to open it! He won't admit it, but he's quite obviously lost his.

EDDIE: And not replaced it?

CRAY: That'd mean reporting it and making himself look bad, so you can imagine how keen he'd be to do *that*!

(He sighed.)

CRAY: Nope. That's the only key and you have to get it back to the academy as soon as possible! For the sake of our national security! The full-time soldiers based at the academy are going to need those weapons.

(Eddie nodded sternly.)

EDDIE: In that case, you can count me in!

HARRY: Right!

(He nodded.)

HARRY: Good luck, Eddie.

GERALD: We'll be thinking of you.

AMY: He's so brave.

LUCY: Yup. God speed, Eddie.

EDDIE: Eh? Just me?

CRAY: All of you need to go!

LUCY: No, thanks.

GERALD: I'm okay here, if it's all the same to you.

CRAY: Well, you *could* just stay here, hiding in a bush, I suppose.

AMY: Works for me.

CRAY: You look ridiculously suspicious hiding here, so the enemy *will* shoot you as soon as they find you, but okay.

(Amy, Harry, Lucy and Gerald all whimpered.)

AMY: Suddenly, I don't want to stay here anymore.

CRAY: Good choice.

(He winced with pain.)

CRAY: Get out of those uniforms. Find some civilian clothing somehow then get going.

HARRY: But, bullets...

GERALD: Fuck the bullets. I'm in. He had me at getting out of these uniforms.

CRAY: Good. Just get changed then head across town. Behave like ordinary students fleeing the guns and there's a good chance you won't get attacked.

AMY: How good a chance?

CRAY: Fifty-fifty.

AMY: Then there's also a good chance we'll be shot to shit!

(Eddie nodded.)

EDDIE: On the contrary, we'll be fine if we use the backstreets.

LUCY: And what are you basing that on?

EDDIE: Guessing.

LUCY: Well, I'm convinced.

(She then palmed her forehead.)

LUCY: Why does the world hate me?

CRAY: Yes, well, we can discuss that another time. You have your mission now, so I'm gonna go before I bleed to death.

(He then threw a pair of bank notes on the grass.)

CRAY: For any expenses you might incur.

(With that, he upped and staggered away towards the college. Watching him go, Harry sucked his teeth.)

HARRY: Are we seriously going to do this?

(Having already stripped down to their underpants, Eddie and Gerald nodded.)

EDDIE: Yup.

GERALD: And I feel good about it too.

(He grimaced.)

GERALD: But that could just be because I'm out of that bra and skirt.

(Lucy and Amy grimaced at one another.)

AMY: I don't fancy charging across town in just my bra and thong.

LUCY: Why not? It wouldn't be the first time you've done it.

AMY: What? Oh, yeah.

(She chuckled.)

AMY: That was such a fun night.

LUCY: It was epic.

(They then giggled together.)

EDDIE: Are you seriously gonna sit there giggling like numpties at a time like this?

AMY: Yes. Why?

EDDIE: Because you're a...

LUCY: Wait, wait, wait.

(She mused to herself.)

LUCY: You know what? I've had an idea.

HARRY: Go on.

LUCY: We need to buy clothes, right? Well there's a boutique just over the road.

EDDIE: Yeah, well, we can see that. The trouble is, there might be soldiers on that road.

LUCY: I know. So either Amy or myself will have to cut our skirt down to look like a miniskirt then swan over there.

AMY: Without our military jacket, right?

LUCY: Obviously. Just blouse and short skirt, like a student.

(She nodded.)

LUCY: Whoever goes can buy clothes for all five of us, then we can head back posing as ordinary students.

(Eddie mused to himself.)

EDDIE: That might work.

HARRY: Yeah... it's not bad.

GERALD: Unless they're just randomly shooting people on sight, in which case it's a terrible idea.

EDDIE: Yeah, but that's a risk I'm happy to let Amy take.

AMY: Excuse me???

EDDIE: Well... you're annoying.

AMY: And you're a twat. Besides, who said *I* was going?

LUCY: Well, I'm more of a planner than a doer.

(Amy glowered at her coldly.)

AMY: Seriously?

LUCY: Um... yes?

(Eddie rolled his eyes.)

EDDIE: Look... just, wait there.

(With that, he crawled through the bushes then peered out of them and into the city.

Having watched briefly, he then crawled back.)

HARRY: What was that all about?

EDDIE: It was a scouting mission.

GERALD: A what?

EDDIE: I had a quick look.

(He nodded.)

EDDIE: There's an enemy soldier out there, yes, but there's like a dozen perplexed civilians just standing around. He's not shooting random people.

LUCY: And you're sure, are you?

EDDIE: Yes.

LUCY: Cool. In that case...

(She smiled at Amy.)

LUCY: Let's get trimming your skirt.

AMY: Again! Why me?

LUCY: Well, *I* can't go. I'm your friend and you *wouldn't want* to see *me* get hurt.

AMY: But *you* don't mind seeing *me* get hurt?

LUCY: What can I tell you, Amy? You're obviously a better person than *I* am.

(Amy just shook her head at her coldly.)

AMY: Lucy?

LUCY: Yes?

AMY: You're a terrible human being.

(She then sighed in defeat.)

AMY: Fine. I'll go. Just make sure you don't cut me when you cut my skirt down.

EDDIE: That's the spirit.

AMY: Oh, fuck you.

(She sneered.)

AMY: I just have to run over there and buy clothes, right?

HARRY: Yeah.

AMY: For all five of us?

LUCY: Yes.

AMY: Five shiny new dresses coming up.

GERALD: No. Don't do *that*, Amy.

EDDIE: It'd be a waste of time for one, we wouldn't wear them.

HARRY: Mission failed.

AMY: Like I care.

EDDIE: Well, you should. Cray said the academy *needs* those weapons from the armoury. To protect itself, obviously. That means we need to get the key back there or people we care about might get killed.

(Amy looked through him anxiously.)

AMY: It's genuinely that serious, isn't it?

HARRY: Yes!

LUCY: As the explosions and gunfire suggest.

AMY: Fine.

(She then nodded sternly and gathered the bank notes from the grass.)

AMY: Leave it to me.

---

A few minutes later, with her skirt crudely cut short by a pocket knife, Amy minced from the gates of the college en route to the boutique opposite. In keeping with Gerald's suggestions, she walked slowly and calmly to give off a casual aura. Unfortunately, the expression on her face made quite the mockery of her attempts to look cool, calm and collected. Terrified of being accosted or shot, sweat was pouring down her forehead and she couldn't stop whimpering. There was an armed Farzarian soldier some twenty feet away and she could only pray that he ignored her. Unfortunately for her, it was not to be. While she was still some fifteen feet shy of making it to the boutique, the soldier suddenly raced up to her and called out.

SOLDIER: You there!!!

(Amy screeched then became entirely rigid with fear. Stopping dead, she just stared dead ahead of herself in terror. Approaching her, the soldier couldn't help but grin.)

SOLDIER: That's the best impression of a plank of wood I've ever seen.

(Amy slowly cranked her neck towards him.)

AMY: Guns...

SOLDIER: Guns?

AMY: They make me nervous.

(The soldier gave a stunted laugh then hung his rifle over his shoulder.)

SOLDIER: Better?

AMY: Mildly.

(She whimpered.)

AMY: You're not going to arrest me, are you?

SOLDIER: I might.

(He nodded knowingly.)

SOLDIER: On a charge of being outrageously sexy in a built up area.

AMY: Right...

(Amy then lowered her guard and turned to face him.)

AMY: You're hitting on me? At a time like this?

SOLDIER: Actually, this is the best time. Pretty much the *only* time I get to hit on women. I'm usually confined to barracks with hundreds of other men. I daren't hit on *them*; they'd shoot me.

AMY: Maybe you need to work on your chat up lines then. I'm sure with the right approach...

SOLDIER: Don't even joke about that.

AMY: Right...

SOLDIER: So... what do you reckon? Could a girl like you go for a guy like me?

AMY: A guy like you?

SOLDIER: Yes.

AMY: A short guy with a weird squint and...

SOLDIER: A soldier!

AMY: Oh.

(She shrugged.)

AMY: Sure. I like soldiers.

SOLDIER: Good to know.

AMY: Preferably ones that *aren't* invading my country.

SOLDIER: Well, that's understandable, I suppose.

(He nodded.)

SOLDIER: Not that *I'm* invading your country, per se. I was just told to stand here and shoot anyone who tries to resist.

AMY: Resist what?

SOLDIER: I have no fucking idea.

(He grimaced.)

SOLDIER: To be honest, it all felt a bit rushed. One minute I was playing table tennis in the recreation room, and the next thing I knew I was in a transport to the Weskerland border. I don't even know why we're here.

(He shrugged.)

SOLDIER: I just do as I'm told and try not to get shot.

AMY: I see.

SOLDIER: Anyway, back to the point. Do you think you could go for a guy like me.

And by *like* me, I mean me. And by that I mean, how about you and I find a bush and get busy?

(Amy grimaced. She didn't want to offend an armed enemy soldier, so decided to let him down gently. To that end, she shrugged then smiled apologetically.)

AMY: Well, I'm sure most women would. You're very sexy and everything, the trouble is, I'm a lesbian, you see? So...

SOLDIER: You're a what?

AMY: A lesbian. I like to munch the rug. Yum. Tasty rug.

SOLDIER: I see.

(He then sneered coldly.)

SOLDIER: In my country we kill homosexuals on sight. You're an abomination.

(Amy gasped then quickly rethought her excuse.)

AMY: I'm kidding, I'm kidding. It just didn't want to tell you the truth.

SOLDIER: Which is?

AMY: Um... I'm...

(She blushed.)

AMY: It's my time of the month.

SOLDIER: I see...

(He shrugged.)

SOLDIER: Anal it is then!

AMY: I have irritable bowel syndrome!

SOLDIER: What?

(He shuddered.)

SOLDIER: That's disgusting. Nobody's shitting all over *my* knob! Go away!

AMY: Right. Sorry.

(She then hurried into the boutique, drawing a deep sigh of relief. Once inside, she glanced back to see if the guard was watching then smiled.)

AMY: That got rid of him. Now to get down to business.

(With that, she yanked a sheet of paper from her pocket with Lucy, Gerald, Harry and Eddie's sizes on it.)

AMY: I'll start with the boys.

(She then headed off towards the men's section.)

---

Some twenty minutes later, having made her way back past the soldier she'd appalled, Amy headed into the college then hurried back to the bushes in which her colleagues were hiding. Upon arrival, she threw her shopping bag down then plopped to the ground.

AMY: That was terrifying. A soldier accosted me.

HARRY: We know. We watched you from the bushes.

EDDIE: And unfortunately for you, we also listened.

LUCY: Yeah, you listened, but clearly you didn't understand

(She looked to Amy.)

LUCY: They've convinced themselves you're a lesbian with IBS.

GERALD: She said it herself, Lucy!

AMY: I was coming up with ways to stop him hitting on me!

LUCY: Which I thought was bloody obvious!

EDDIE: Oh, come off it, Lucy. Be honest. You just don't want to face that fact that your best mate is a growler-chomping diarrhoea machine.

AMY: Fuck off, Eddie. I like men. Not boys like *you*, but men. And I've never pooped in my entire life!

(She swiftly received four disbelieving glances.)

AMY: Right. Well... obviously I've pooped. I mean... that's normal, right? Everyone does it. I'm just saying... I don't do it excessively... and I can control it.

(She flapped.)

AMY: I don't have to explain myself to you lot. Just get changed, for fuck sake.

HARRY: Happy to.

(He then offered her a kind smile.)

HARRY: Just know that we're here for you, Amy. Your choice of lifestyle is absolutely fine by us.

LUCY: She's not a fucking lesbo!

HARRY: Okay, okay. Fine. I get it. She's not ready to come out yet. But if she changes her mind and wants to come clean...

AMY: Just put your fucking clothes on!

HARRY: Right...

(He then leant towards Eddie.)

HARRY: Feisty lot, these lesbians, mate.

EDDIE: Oh, I know.

(He then sat there giggling as Gerald delved into Amy's shopping bag.)

GERALD: Let's get get changed, chaps; before Amy has a meltdown.

AMY: Yes. Do!

---

Some five minutes later, having changed into their new clothing in the bushes, Amy and Lucy emerged looking somewhat delighted with their cute, new dresses. Sharing an affirming nod they then joined Eddie, Harry and Gerald. Having also changed, they were crouching down in readiness to begin their trek across the battle-ravaged city. Despite having been the keenest one to undertake the mission, however, Eddie wanted to get something off his chest before they set out. Snarling bitterly, as soon as Amy joined them, he let her know exactly what he was thinking.

EDDIE: Do you think you're funny, Amy?

AMY: Honestly? Yes. Why?

EDDIE: Why? Why???

(He gestured down himself.)

EDDIE: Bright pink shorts and a vest with Boy Toy printed on it???

AMY: What's wrong with that?

EDDIE: What's wrong???

AMY: Yeah!

EDDIE: What's fucking wrong???

AMY: Yes! They're so you!

EDDIE: You...

(He growled.)

EDDIE: And you know damn well that Farzarians kill gay people!

AMY: Stop being gay then!

EDDIE: I...

(He growled with rage.)

EDDIE: I didn't even start!!!

AMY: Then you'll be fine.

EDDIE: How? I'm wearing a vest that suggests I'm a plaything for other blokes!!!

AMY: Oh. Is that wrong then?

EDDIE: Amy...

(With that, he yanked the vest over his head then threw it at her.)

EDDIE: Go and buy something else.

AMY: Shan't! And don't throw your gay vests at me!

EDDIE: I'm not joking here, Amy. Go and...

(Amy then produced a yellow vest from her handbag and threw it at him.)

AMY: Psych!

EDDIE: What?

(Eddie looked at the vest then furrowed his brow.)

EDDIE: Why didn't you just give me this one in the first place?

AMY: What fun would that have been?

(As Eddie looked through her in disgust, Amy slipped the other vest in her bag then beamed.)

AMY: I'll hang onto that. It sends out just the right message for when I'm clubbing.

LUCY: That'll come down to your knees.

AMY: So I'll add a belt. Then I'll have a dress with Boy Toy on it. It's called advertising.

(She then looked to Eddie.)

AMY: Happy now?

EDDIE: No. These shorts still make me look gay.

AMY: So does your haircut, but I didn't hear you complaining before.

GERALD: He was wearing a woman's wig before.

AMY: Because he's so manly.

EDDIE: For fuck sake... Amy, you're really pissing me off now.

(Amy gasped in fake horror.)

AMY: Oh, no. How terrible. That was never my intention. No, way. Nope. Not at all.

HARRY: Any fucking way, if you two are done flirting, can we go now?

AMY: Flirting???

EDDIE: Flirting??? She's a cunt!

AMY: And you're a bell end!

HARRY: Which is great an' all, but like I said, can we go? You can be just as much as a cunt and a bell end on the move, surely.

EDDIE: Fine. Let's!

(With that, he upped then paced towards the exit to the college with an embittered frown on his face. Watching him go, Lucy winced.)

LUCY: He's not a happy sausage.

GERALD: No. No, he's not.

HARRY: Perhaps you went a bit too far there, Amy.

AMY: And I'm okay with it.

(She smiled warmly.)

AMY: Shall we?

(She then headed off after Eddie. The others simply shrugged then hurried after her.)

---

Having regrouped outside the college gates, the party of five from the academy proceeded to head away. The return leg of their journey had begun. It was already quite clear, however, that it wouldn't be smooth sailing. Down the main street ahead, they could see smoke billowing out of buildings and gunshots could be heard in the distance. Well aware that by taking this route they'd be walking into the thick of the fighting, they very swiftly diverted into a side street. There was, unfortunately, one small drawback with taking an alternative route as Harry was quick to highlight.

HARRY: So nobody knows where this road leads to then?

LUCY: None of us have been here before, have we? The clubbing district is over the other side of the city and that's as far as I've ever strayed from the academy.

AMY: Same.

GERALD: I've not even been that far.



EDDIE: Yes, but none of that matters. As long as we head in the right *general* direction, we'll get there eventually.

HARRY: Well, here's hoping.

LUCY: Oh, goody. Relying on sense of direction, are we?

AMY: That's me out the equation then.

LUCY: Right?

HARRY: Relax, my sense of direction's pretty excellent.

EDDIE: I'm no slouch either when it comes to that either.

GERALD: Then you two can decide the route.

AMY: And take the blame when it all goes tits up.

EDDIE: And accept the credit when it doesn't.

AMY: We'll see.

EDDIE: Amy? Just do us all a solid and shut up, will you?

AMY: No, I'm good.

EDDIE: Twat.

(He then looked to Harry.)

EDDIE: We're gonna have to break into a run in a minute. Walking's no good. They need that key as soon as possible.

HARRY: I feared you'd say that.

EDDIE: Feared? Why?

HARRY: Because I hate it when someone makes sensible suggestions that I can't logically counter.

LUCY: Wow. Really?

HARRY: No. I just don't want to run.

(He then shrugged.)

HARRY: But still, what other option is there?

AMY: *Not* running. I like that one, actually.

EDDIE: Then we'll leave you behind.

(With that, he proceeded to jog ahead. With a sigh and a resigned shrug, Harry, Lucy and Gerald then hurried after him. Left behind, Amy furrowed her brow then snarled to herself.)

AMY: Stupid academy; making me do things.

(She then raced after them, eager to catch them up.)

AMY: Wait for me!!!

EDDIE: Bollocks!

HARRY: Mate...

EDDIE: What? She's like twenty feet behind. If she can't catch us up from that little distance away, what hope is there?

GERALD: He's right.

LUCY: Even so, there was no need to be rude like that.

EDDIE: Yes, there was.

(He ruffled his neck.)

EDDIE: She's a cunt.

(A few moments later when Amy finally latched onto the back of their group, she sneered then glowered at the back of Eddie's head.)

AMY: Tosser.

GERALD: Why? Because I have wealthy parents? Like that's *my* fault!

AMY: I was referring to Eddie.

HARRY: Seriously, Gerald?

GERALD: Sorry. I get called a rich tosser *a lot* at the academy and I got all paranoid for a minute there.

(He shook his head.)

GERALD: It seems they resent me getting a head-start in life. Well, I'm sorry, but as unfair as that may *be*, I didn't *ask* for it. It's not like I was born to wealthy parents just to spite *them*. And I've never tried to use it to gain an advantage, so why they think it's okay to pick on me for it, I...

LUCY: Calm down, rich bloke. Nobody *here* is sweating you.

GERALD: Right. Sorry.

LUCY: It's fine.

GERALD: Don't call me rich bloke.

LUCY: Whatever.

GERALD: Thank you.

(Just then, Eddie glanced over his shoulder to address them.)

EDDIE: So, this road runs parallel to the main street, but as you can see, it ends soon. So we'll have to turn left. Turning right would only take us into where the shooting and stuff is.

HARRY: Well, duh.

EDDIE: Don't be a knob, mate.

HARRY: It's a fair request.

EDDIE: Thank you.

(He nodded.)

EDDIE: As long as we remember to keep heading in this general direction, despite all the turns we might have to take, we should be fine.

LUCY: Understood.

AMY: Was it?

LUCY: Well *I* understood it.

AMY: I didn't. We could end up literally *anywhere*.

HARRY: No, we couldn't. We wouldn't end up at the top of Mount Sullidare for a start. That's ten thousand miles away.

AMY: Don't be facetious! You knew what I meant!

HARRY: I did, yes, but being facetious is what I do.

AMY: You...

HARRY: But to address what you *meant*, as opposed to what you actually *said*... yes, we don't know where exactly *where* we'll end up. But we will be on the right side of the city.

GERALD: Hopefully having avoided all the fighting.

LUCY: And hopefully somewhere near the academy.

AMY: Really? That's a lot of being hopeful.

HARRY: Yeah, but the route we actually *know* means running through all the shooting and explosions!

AMY: We're not doing that!

EDDIE: And that's why we're trying to run *around* it! Now, put a sock in it.

(He growled.)

EDDIE: So annoying.

AMY: Cock!

EDDIE: Bitch!

AMY: Wanker!

HARRY: Stop it!

(He rolled his eyes.)

HARRY: Grow up the pair of you.

LUCY: Or we'll turn this mission around and send you both to bed early!

(Eight bewildered eyes were then upon her.)

LUCY: Right... sounded funny in my head.

AMY: Then you should have left it there, where it was happy.

LUCY: Yeah...

(Just then, a group of three Weskerland soldiers stepped in their path from a side alley. Their first instinct was simply to jog around them, unfortunately, the soldiers were having none of it.)

SOLDIER 01: Stop right there!

(Looking somewhat uneasy, the five students all came to an abrupt halt.)

SOLDIER 01: Make I ask where you're all heading in such a hurry?

AMY: Um... nowhere.

(The soldier instantly became deeply suspicious.)

SOLDIER 01: What do you mean, *nowhere*?

AMY: Well... I don't know.

(Eddie rolled his eyes.)

EDDIE: What are you acting all guilty for, dumb arse? They're on our side!

SOLDIER 01: I asked you a question!

EDDIE: And I shall answer it. We're heading back to Highshaw Military Academy.

SOLDIER 02: And what business do you have there?

EDDIE: We're students.

(The soldiers gave each other concerned glances.)

SOLDIER 01: Hmm...

SOLDIER 02: What do you think?

SOLDIER 03: We need to check.

SOLDIER 01: Agreed.

(He nodded.)

SOLDIER 01: We *were* just going to warn you to stay out of the centre of the city, because as you can hear, there's something of a fracas going on. Because your friend acted so suspiciously, however, I'm going to need you to confirm your stories, please.

EDDIE: You tit, Amy.

AMY: It wasn't *my* fault; people with guns make me nervous.

SOLDIER 01: ID's, please!

(Harry smiled then pulled out his wallet.)

HARRY: There you go, mate.

(He handed him his ID. Following a brief check, the soldier then handed it back to him.)

SOLDIER 01: Good lad. Next!

(Lucy, Eddie and Gerald then took turns in handing their ID's over, before having them returned. The soldier then looked to the rapidly shrinking Amy.)

SOLDIER 01: ID, please!

AMY: Um... about that...

SOLDIER 01: You don't have one, do you?

AMY: I must have left it at the academy.

SOLDIER 02: How convenient!

AMY: Hardly.

(She whimpered.)

AMY: I really need it right now, because you're all giving me really suspicious glances.

SOLDIER 02: There's a good reason for that!

AMY: There is?

SOLDIER 03: Yes. We're really suspicious of you!

AMY: But, but... can't my friends confirm who I am?

SOLDIER 01: I don't know. Can they?

LUCY: I can. We've been friends for a while now.

SOLDIER 02: And the rest of you?

(Eddie smirked.)

EDDIE: I've never seen her before in all my life.

AMY: You liar!

EDDIE: What? I haven't! Not until today. And I'd have remembered if I'd seen you before.

(He glanced away innocently.)

EDDIE: You're kind of exotic looking. Like a Farzarian.

AMY: You cunt!

(She whimpered at the soldiers.)

AMY: The others can tell you who I am!

(Gerald scratched his head.)

GERALD: Um... actually, I'd never seen you before today either.

AMY: Bastard!

GERALD: But, I hadn't!

HARRY: *I've* seen her around. I think.

SOLDIER 03: You think?

HARRY: Yeah, there's definitely a girl who looks like her at our academy, put it that way.

LUCY: Look, this is insane. She's with us. She's my best friend and I can assure you, she's not a bloody Farzarian.

(The three soldiers gave Amy further distrusting glances then gathered to confer.)

SOLDIER 01: What do you think?

SOLDIER 02: I think the fact that only one of them can positively identify her is a bit suspicious.

SOLDIER 03: And she was *already* suspicious before we even asked them anything. Look at her, she's all shifty.

SOLDIER 02: Plus, she really does look like a Farzarian.

AMY: I *can* hear you, you know!

SOLDIER 02: We know.

SOLDIER 03: I reckon she's a spy!

AMY: A spy???

SOLDIER 01: Good points, lads; good points, one and all. But the other girl says she can confirm her identity. Why would she do that?

SOLDIER 03: Misplaced loyalty, because she doesn't *know* that her friend is a spy.

AMY: I'm not a spy!

EDDIE: Aren't you though? You look like a Farzarian and have no ID. Even *I'm* suspicious.

(He nodded.)

EDDIE: You should arrest her just in case.

SOLDIER 01: Don't worry; we're going to!

SOLDIER 02: Come here, you!

(As the soldier drew his handcuffs from his pocket, Amy shrieked then stepped backwards.)

AMY: But, but, but...

(Just then, an excited expression swept onto her brow.)

AMY: Wait! I've got it.

(She then delved into her cleavage and pulled out a lanyard with her ID card on it.)

AMY: I forgot I put it round my neck.

(With a furrowed brow, the first soldier checked her ID then glowered towards where Eddie was creeping away.)

SOLDIER 01: Why did you tell us you'd never seen her before???

(Eddie stopped and gulped.)

EDDIE: Um... I hadn't?

AMY: He's lying. We're in the same fucking department, for a start!

EDDIE: But I hadn't!

GERALD: Nor had I to be fair.

AMY: No, but Eddie fucking had. He *knows* me!

SOLDIER 01: Explain, lad!!!

(Eddie sighed in defeat.)

EDDIE: Fine, the truth is...

AMY: *He's* a spy!!!

EDDIE: Am I fuck! I just hoped you'd arrest her to spare my lugholes from her incessant giggling.

AMY: *Too* mean!!!

EDDIE: No. Not mean *enough*. You're really fucking annoying!

AMY: You are so going to pay for that, you bastard.

(The soldiers looked to one another then rolled their eyes.)

SOLDIER 01: Look, I don't care. I've had enough of young people for one day. Just be on your way.

SOLDIER 02: And stay out of the city centre.

SOLDIER 03: Oh, and Eddie, is it?

EDDIE: Um... yeah?

SOLDIER 03: That wasn't cool!

SOLDIER 01: Not even slightly cool.

(They then headed back into the alley.)

SOLDIER 02: It was kinda funny though.

SOLDIER 01: Well, yeah, I mean as pranks go...

(As the three of them vanished, Amy, Lucy, Harry and Gerald all glowered at Eddie.)

LUCY: Why would you do such a thing?

HARRY: Yeah. Mate, getting her arrested for spying is taking it *too* far!

AMY: Way too fucking far!

GERALD: Poor form, Eddie.

EDDIE: Look, it was a joke, okay? I wanted to get rid of her and what funnier way is there than getting her arrested?

AMY: How is that funny? They shoot spies, you cunt!

EDDIE: Nah. They'd have just taken you away and kept you in a cell for a bit, until the academy could confirm who you are.

HARRY: Or, like Amy just pointed out, they might have just shot her for spying!

EDDIE: Don't be ridiculous!

GERALD: We're not! They might *well* have done that! My father's a bugger for shooting first then asking questions later.

(Eddie winced.)

EDDIE: What... do you really think they might have done that?

AMY: Yes!

EDDIE: I see.

(He grimaced.)

EDDIE: That's not good, is it?

LUCY: You think?

EDDIE: Yeah...

(He then nodded positively.)

EDDIE: Still, what's done is done. She *didn't* get shot, so we're good to go.

(He then turned and resumed running back to the academy. Not about to let him dismiss his behaviour so easily, however, the other raced after him. Amy very quickly raced to his side.)

AMY: You know what, Eddie...

EDDIE: Oh, goody. *You're* here.

AMY: You really are a despicable, low down exhibition of human pond scum. A gargantuan cunt of epic proportions. You're a depravity so foul, a *dog* wouldn't shit on you. A living, breathing example of excrement moulded into an ugly human form. A complete...

EDDIE: Hey! Steady on! Don't you think that's a bit excessive???

AMY: You tried to have me killed!!!

EDDIE: I did nothing of the sort! I really thought you'd just end up in custody for a bit, that's all!

AMY: That's all??? You say it like it's nothing!

EDDIE: No, I say it like I thought it'd be funny!

AMY: How is that funny?

EDDIE: It was a prank!

(He rolled his eyes.)

EDDIE: Seriously. There's no way I'd have done it if I thought your life was in danger. That's ridiculous. I just assumed they'd keep you in a cell until they could confirm your identity with the academy, that's all.

(Harry then piped up from behind.)

HARRY: They probably *would* have done that.

EDDIE: See?

HARRY: But only after they'd tortured her for a few hours!

GERALD: He's right. Suspected spies get tortured all the time. Or just shot in cold blood; one of the two.

EDDIE: How is that helping me???

HARRY: We're not *trying* to help you!

LUCY: You did a despicable thing!

(Eddie groaned in defeat.)

EDDIE: Fine... look... Amy?

AMY: What? Cunt!

EDDIE: I'm sorry, okay? I didn't think. I really was meant to be a joke; a harmless prank. Like the time I got my mate, Chas, arrested for loitering.

HARRY: You did what???

LUCY: He's a complete bastard!

EDDIE: It was a prank!

GERALD: Did you friend think so?

EDDIE: Yes!

(He ruffled his neck.)

EDDIE: At least he saw the funny side eventually. I think. I don't know; he stopped speaking to me after that, but still... I didn't mean to endanger your life, Amy.

AMY: Well you did!

EDDIE: And I apologise.

AMY: Don't even bother. I don't forgive people until I've got my revenge!

LUCY: Really? So when you said you'd forgiven me for dragging you along to that extra self-defence class that we got abducted in...

AMY: That's different! That was the teacher's fault, not yours.

(She then glowered at Eddie.)

AMY: What this cunt did, however, was deliberate and personal.

(She growled.)

AMY: You're going down, fuck face!

(Eddie grimaced.)

EDDIE: You're positively livid, aren't you?

AMY: Like a hungry fucking bear!!!

EDDIE: And just as hairy.

AMY: Do you want a punch in the face???

(At this point, Harry ran between them and interceded.)

HARRY: Right, from hereon, this is how it's gonna be. Stay away from each other. Amy?

AMY: What???

HARRY: Run with Lucy; go on.

AMY: You... but... oh, fine.

(She then dropped back. Satisfied she was out of the way, Harry then nodded to Eddie.)

HARRY: As you for you, you cunt...

EDDIE: Mate!

HARRY: No, you fucking listen! From now on, you're banned from playing any kind of prank.

GERALD: Hear, hear!

LUCY: Absolutely!

EDDIE: Guys...

HARRY: No! If your idea of a jolly jape is having someone thrown in jail, then you're a twat, mate. That shit isn't funny and we want no part in it, okay?

EDDIE: But you usually like my pranks. Like when I put superglue on the monkey bars and that weird kid with a big nose got stuck there all afternoon.

HARRY: Then spent several days in hospital with a torn rotator cuff!

EDDIE: What?

HARRY: He dangled there for four hours until the fire brigade cut through the bars to get him down. He then had to sit there in his hospital bed screaming in pain, while they surgically removed the metal bar from his hands! He's scarred for life!!!

(Eddie winced.)

EDDIE: I didn't know that.

HARRY: Yeah... well, now you do. Dickhead!

EDDIE: Hey! You were just as amused as I was when he first got stuck.

HARRY: Because I thought he'd come unstuck after a few seconds. After a solid minute though, once he started screaming in distress, however, I realise you'd gone way too far.

Superglue, mate!!! Fucking superglue!!!

EDDIE: Yeah...

(He cringed.)

EDDIE: Maybe I should give the pranks a rest in future, eh?

HARRY: And the penny finally drops.

LUCY: You're a bad person, Eddie!

AMY: A complete and utter shit-cunt!

EDDIE: Easy! I just wanted to create some fun memories, you know? Things we'd all laugh about in the future. Like anecdotes at a dinner party. Surreal, fun moments, we'd never forget. I never intended for anyone to get hurt.

AMY: Just arrested and tortured.

GERALD: Not to mention sexually assaulted.

LUCY: What?

GERALD: These things happen in jail.

AMY: Holy fuck. They do, don't they? That might have happened to me!!! Again!!!

Eddie, you...

EDDIE: I said I'm sorry, didn't I?

LUCY: You did, but now I'm starting to wonder. Did you *tell* that perverted teacher to abduct us, just for poops and giggles?

EDDIE: Of course, not!

LUCY: Are you sure? Only it sounds like something you'd enjoy.

EDDIE: I did nothing of the sort!

(He ruffled his neck.)



EDDIE: Me and Harry were already in a coma from food poisoning when that happened.  
HARRY: It's Harry and I!  
EDDIE: Hey, you said you weren't going to be pedantic like that anymore.  
HARRY: Yeah, but I'm going to make an exception for you, Eddie. You've fucking disgraced yourself, mate.  
(Eddie looked to him blankly for a moment then groaned in defeat.)  
EDDIE: Yeah... I know.  
(He looked to Amy and forced a nervous smile.)  
EDDIE: What I did there was unforgivable.  
AMY: I know!!!  
EDDIE: I apologise profusely, Amy. I was out of order. Forgive me?  
AMY: No! You literally just admitted it was *unforgivable*! What part of your own statement confused you?  
EDDIE: Right...  
(He sucked his teeth.)  
EDDIE: You're angry.  
LUCY: Of course she's fucking angry!  
EDDIE: Yeah...  
(He sighed then mumbled under his breath.)  
EDDIE: She's probably on her monthlies.  
AMY: No, I'm fucking not!!!  
EDDIE: You heard that???  
HARRY: Stone the fucking crows, mate.  
AMY: Of course, I fucking heard it.  
GERALD: Blimey. I have no words right now. You're really quite the bell end, Eddie.  
EDDIE: Ease off, posh bloke. I didn't mean to offend her; she wasn't meant to hear me.  
LUCY: And that makes it okay???  
EDDIE: Well...  
AMY: Oh, my fucking god. He's...  
LUCY: He really is!  
AMY: Right?  
(Eddie cringed.)  
EDDIE: I made things worse there, didn't I?  
AMY: Yes!!!  
EDDIE: Bugger.  
(He sucked his teeth.)  
EDDIE: I think I'll run quietly now and keep my thoughts to myself.  
LUCY: Yeah; you fucking do that!  
EDDIE: Right.  
(The party then raced onwards through the side streets in silence. Eddie did so whilst burning red with embarrassment. To say he'd disgraced himself would be quite the understatement. It was a feeling of shame, he'd never forget; especially with the scornful glower of his four academy mates fixed in his direction. For him, this was a most uncomfortable afternoon.)

---

Some fifty minutes later, having raced the length of a good many side streets, Eddie raced around a corner then glanced back to see if his fellow students were still nearby. Sure enough, four pairs of angry eyes soon appeared in his wake. Satisfied they were still with him, he allowed himself a reaffirming nod then raced onwards. He hadn't spoken a word in quite some time. Despite baiting from behind in the form of Amy telling everyone how much she despised him, Eddie managed to keep his emotions in check and stay focussed on the mission. His silence would soon come to an end, however, when Harry raised an interesting point.

HARRY: Um... guys? I just realised something.

LUCY: What?

HARRY: We're fucking idiots.

GERALD: Well... I didn't want to say anything, but...

HARRY: I didn't mean generally!

(He frowned.)

HARRY: And fuck you, posh bloke.

GERALD: Charming.

HARRY: I mean just now... them soldiers who stopped us...

AMY: What about them?

HARRY: Why the fuck didn't we tell them our mission?

(A deathly silence ensued.)

LUCY: Yeah... that was...

AMY: That was fucking dim!

HARRY: And then some.

(He groaned.)

HARRY: They were on *our* side. Our own fucking army! They might have taken the key back to the academy for us, for fuck sake. Or given us an armed escort! Getting that key home could well be an important part of this city's war effort. They'd have helped us out for certain.

(Finding Harry's realisation too frustrating for words, Eddie furrowed his brow then glanced over his shoulder.)

EDDIE: We fucked up there. Seriously.

AMY: Shut up, you!

EDDIE: Don't be like that; I was just saying.

LUCY: That really was a screw-up.

HARRY: It was. Telling them our mission was fucking obvious. Why didn't we think of it at the time though?

(All eyes then slowly descended on Eddie.)

EDDIE: Oh, boy...

AMY: Because that prick was so busy playing his hilarious prank, we ended up spending our time exonerating me rather than focussing on our task!

HARRY: You twat, Eddie!

EDDIE: Oh, come off it! Guys, you're going too far now!

GERALD: Cry, bitch!

EDDIE: Excuse me?

GERALD: I don't know.

LUCY: I do. Going too far? Like we're bullying you or something?

EDDIE: Yes!

GERALD: Like I said, cry, bitch.

(He beamed.)

GERALD: It made more sense that time.

HARRY: Yes, well, never mind that. Eddie, nobody's bullying you, you cunt. We're just pointing out what a dickhead you are.

LUCY: Not only might your fucking lousy prank have got Amy arrested, tortured, raped then killed, but it made us forget all about why we were running past those soldiers in the first place.

AMY: Yeah! If you hadn't been such a twat, when they asked us where we were going, we'd have told them about the key!

GERALD: Our mission would be complete now and lives might well have been saved!

EDDIE: Bullshit! I'm not having that, Amy! When they asked us where we're going, you said, "nowhere" and started sweated profusely like you had something to hide!

AMY: Well...

EDDIE: That's the only reason I played the prank, because when given the chance to tell them about the key, you acted like you'd been caught stealing or something. So don't give me that shit!

(He ruffled his neck then proceeded to run backwards so he could see them all better.)

EDDIE: Yes, what I did afterwards, elaborating like I did and pretending I'd never seen you...

LUCY: And saying she looks like a Farzarian!

EDDIE: Yeah, all that shit was uncool. Fine. I admit that. But don't blame me for the fact we all forgot to tell them about our mission because when the chance came along, *you* blew it; not me!

(Harry sighed.)

HARRY: He's right, I suppose.

AMY: Whatever!

EDDIE: Thank you!

(He then turned to face the way he was running and screeched in terror.)

EDDIE: Fuck!

(Straining with everything he had, he just managed to stop himself running with his toes literally inches away from the edge of a river bank.)

EDDIE: Phew. That was *too* fucking...

(A shrill cry of rage then rose up from behind him as Amy zoomed in like a speeding train and barged him forth. Powerless do anything about it, Eddie's arms and legs flailed wildly in the air as he hurtled towards the water.)

EDDIE: You bitch!!!

AMY: Drown, you cunt!!!

(A somewhat spectacular splash then ensued as Eddie slammed through the surface of the river.)

AMY: How do you like me now, arse face???

(Very much of the opinion that Eddie had had it coming, Lucy, Harry and Gerald were beside themselves with laughter. Amy on the other hand was sneering at the water, almost willing Eddie not to resurface.)

AMY: And *stay* under, you...

(Much to her disappointment, Eddie then break through the water and flapped around in desperation as he tried to find his feet.)

AMY: Fuck!!!

EDDIE: You stupid fucking whore!!!

(He then managed to steady himself and stood there growling at her with the water right up to his midriff.)

EDDIE: What the fuck did you do that for?

AMY: What? I thought you *liked* pranks!

EDDIE: Pranks???

AMY: Yeah, you know, near death experiences! That's just a prank to you, isn't it?

(Harry then stepped to Amy's side.)

HARRY: You've got to admit, mate, as far as payback goes, that wasn't bad.

EDDIE: I could have drowned!

AMY: And what a shame that would have been!

(Eddie shook his head.)

EDDIE: Stupid bint.

(He then proceeded to wade back to the water's edge.)

EDDIE: Harry?

HARRY: Yes, mate?

EDDIE: Get that giggling fuckwit out of my way, because if it's still there when I get out of here, it'll be her turn for a swim.

AMY: Bring it on, shit-head!

(Harry sucked his teeth.)

HARRY: Right... yeah... let's not go down that road, eh?

(He looked to Amy.)

HARRY: Let's just step aside and let him...

AMY: No! As soon as he's halfway up the bank, I'm gonna push him back in!

LUCY: Amy, no. We've got a mission to finish. Let's just focus on that, yeah?

AMY: Fuck the mission. And fuck the academy. In fact, fuck Weskerland. Farzaria can do what it likes. *This* is my war and *that's* my enemy!

(She pointed to Eddie.)

HARRY: Right...

(He then looked to Eddie.)

HARRY: Well, look on the bright side, mate. At least she's not giggling anymore.

AMY: What's to giggle about? He tried to kill me!

LUCY: And you just tried to drown him, so that kind of makes you even really.

EDDIE: And besides, I didn't try to *kill* you! Like I've explained a million times, I just thought they'd sling you in a cell for a bit!

AMY: Yeah, so you keep saying.

EDDIE: Whereas you *did* try to kill me!

AMY: Actually, I was going for humiliation. The fact you *might* have drowned was just a welcome bonus. That ended in disappointment. Because you didn't!

(Lucy rolled her eyes.)

LUCY: Right. I'm taking charge now.

(She then strutted up to Amy.)

LUCY: Move, missy!

AMY: No!

LUCY: Move or so help me, I'll tell everyone what happened on your birthday!

(Amy whimpered.)

AMY: You wouldn't!!!

LUCY: Try me!

(Amy could only shrink then sheepishly stepped aside.)

AMY: You're mean.

LUCY: Thank you.

(She nodded then glowered at Eddie.)

LUCY: Now get out of the water.

(Midway through wading back, Eddie furrowed his brow at her.)

EDDIE: What does it look like I'm fucking doing???

LUCY: Do it quicker!

(Harry and Gerald shared an uncomfortable grimace then looked to where Lucy was scowling at Eddie.)

LUCY: Shift! Come on!

EDDIE: Stop nagging!

(A few moments later, once Eddie had made his way back up the river bank, Lucy folded her arms then proceeded to lecture them both.)

LUCY: You two are being really silly right now! And by silly, I mean fucking ridiculous. You're acting like a pair of retarded delinquents! Grow up, for pity's sake!

(She looked to Eddie.)

LUCY: What you did to Amy was despicable. Really nasty! Shame on you. Yes, I know you didn't mean to endanger her life, but the fact you *did* mean to get her arrested is abhorrent enough! Disgraceful behaviour!

(She then looked to Amy.)

LUCY: Yes, he did a terrible, terrible thing, but throwing him in the river? Okay, I can see why you'd be tempted; you were angry after all, but I could see it in your eyes that you really hoped he'd drown for a minute there, didn't you?

AMY: I...

LUCY: It's pathetic, you two! You're supposed to be friends. Friends don't do cunty things to each other. Stop it. Let it go and move on!!!

(She then nodded sternly.)

LUCY: Now what have you got to say for yourselves?

AMY: He started it!

EDDIE: She's annoying!!!

(Lucy glanced between them briefly then threw her hands up in defeat, before walking away, mumbling sarcastically.)

LUCY: Right, yeah, that's exactly what I was getting at.

(Watching her, Gerald shook his head then took up the mantle in her stead.)

GERALD: What Lucy's saying is, grow the fuck up. Stop being dicks and let's just complete our mission, because right now you two are an embarrassment.

(He pointed to his chest.)

GERALD: As a perceived posh bloke, I have no friends whatsoever. When it comes to the social side of academy life, I'm the least popular person there. Bottom of the pile, so

to speak. An absolute nobody. And yet, right now, even *I'm* embarrassed to be seen out with you. Let that sink in for a minute then perhaps we can get moving again. (Finally realising that their behaviour was very much alienating them both from their peers, Amy and Eddie shuffled their feet uncomfortable.)

EDDIE: Right... let's just...

AMY: Yeah...

EDDIE: Sorry I almost got you tortured and killed.

AMY: Sorry I wanted you to drown.

EDDIE: You do giggle too much though.

AMY: And you're a twat.

LUCY: Nope! Stop! You were doing well a second ago, so let's leave it there and move on.

HARRY: Agreed! Starting with figuring out how to cross this river!

GERALD: I see.

(He twiddled his fingers.)

GERALD: And we need to cross it, do we?

HARRY: Yeah. The academy is south of the river, everyone knows that.

LUCY: Then we'll have to find a bridge.

HARRY: Yeah... I only know one bridge and it's in the city centre.

GERALD: Where the fighting is.

LUCY: Yes, but surely it can't be the *only* one, can it?

(Amy averted her gaze from Eddie then forced a smile.)

AMY: Seems unlikely.

LUCY: Then let's find another.

(Gerald sucked his teeth.)

GERALD: That could take a while.

LUCY: So?

GERALD: So we're on a mission. We can't afford to take a detour for a few hours; lives are depending on us.

(Eddie groaned in defeat.)

EDDIE: Posh bloke is right.

GERALD: Don't call me that!

EDDIE: Right. Sorry.

(He then shrugged.)

EDDIE: We could walk down the river bank for quite some time and still not find a crossing.

AMY: Then what do you suggest, cunt face?

LUCY: Amy!

AMY: I mean what do you suggest? Wanker.

LUCY: Wow.

EDDIE: What I suggest, you nauseating harpy, is that we cross here.

(He shrugged.)

EDDIE: It's not that deep after all.

HARRY: As you found out.

EDDIE: Yeah.

HARRY: Head first.

EDDIE: Shut up.  
(He then rolled his eyes.)  
EDDIE: What do you reckon?  
GERALD: Crossing here? That would save us a lot of time.  
AMY: But we'd be soaked for the rest of the run.  
HARRY: Yeah, to be honest in this heat that could well be a blessing.  
LUCY: That's a good point, actually.  
(They then stood there in a line and stared down at the river.)  
AMY: We're actually going to do this, aren't we?  
HARRY: Yes. Yes, we are.  
(Amy groaned in defeat.)  
AMY: Great!

---

Having made the decision to wade across the river, the next question asked was who'd be going first. Eddie didn't hesitate. Already wet, he simply edged down the river back and stepped into the shallows again. Despite the temptation swelling inside of her, Amy managed to hold back from pushing him again; mostly because Harry and Lucy were poised and ready to restrain her. As a result, Eddie was able to step out in the water unhindered before turning and glancing back at his four academy mates.

EDDIE: Who's next?  
(Harry nodded.)  
HARRY: That would be me!  
LUCY: Wow. You're keen.  
HARRY: Not really. I just need to be down there so I can restrain Eddie should he decide to sabotage Amy when *she* makes her way down.  
EDDIE: Oh, like I'm incapable of self-control!  
HARRY: You are, mate. You are!  
(Harry then jumped onto the down slope and promptly fell flat on his back.)  
HARRY: Ow!!!  
GERALD: Impressive.  
(Unsurprisingly, Amy and Lucy instantly proceeded to giggle together.)  
EDDIE: You cock.  
HARRY: Yeah, alright. Like *you* 've never lost your footing.  
(He then sprung to his feet, majestically. Having forgotten he was on a slope however, he instantly lost his balance then tumbled face first into the river. Naturally, he did so to a soundtrack of howls of derision.)  
LUCY: What a wally!  
AMY: Right?  
GERALD: Even *I*'m embarrassed and I make a tit of myself all the time.  
(Seconds later, as Harry righted himself, he found Eddie shaking his head at him despairingly.)  
HARRY: Don't! Not a fucking word.  
EDDIE: Like I *need* words.  
HARRY: Oh, like you can say anything, mate. You *already* fell in.

EDDIE: I was pushed, mate. Yours was a fuckwittery of your *own* making.

HARRY: Whatever.

(He then glanced up at where the girls were giggling at him.)

HARRY: Next?

(Amy waved him away.)

AMY: I'm not done giggling yet.

HARRY: Someone else then!

GERALD: That'd be me.

(With that, he stepped up to the edge manfully, then nodded sternly.)

GERALD: I don't care if I look like a cock; it can't be any worse than you *falling* in.

(He then about turned and crawled down backwards on his hands on knees.)

EDDIE: What the hell? I've seen it all now.

GERALD: I'm being cautious!

HARRY: You look ridiculous.

GERALD: I look safety conscious!

(Moments later, he stepped into the water then turned and nodded at Eddie.)

GERALD: That may have looked weird, but we achieved the same outcome.

EDDIE: Fair enough.

(He then furrowed his brow at Amy and Lucy.)

EDDIE: Are you coming or what?

LUCY: Right. I reckon that's my cue.

AMY: Are you sure?

LUCY: Well one of us has to. Why not me?

AMY: True.

(She sighed.)

AMY: Our dresses are gonna get wet.

LUCY: I know. Still... they'll dry quickly enough, hopefully.

(She then made her way gingerly to the edge and gulped.)

LUCY: Can someone be ready to catch me if I fall?

HARRY: Happy to.

(He then headed back to the edge of the bank.)

HARRY: Just take your time, okay.

LUCY: Right...

(With that, she proceeded to carefully make her descent. Trembling all over, her fear of falling couldn't have been more evident. As such, she was taking pigeon steps and whimpering with every single one of them. Watching her, Eddie sucked his teeth then glanced at Gerald.)

EDDIE: Could she be any more girly right now?

GERALD: I doubt it. She simply exudes femininity that one.

(He nodded.)

GERALD: It's cute.

EDDIE: I guess.

(Just then, Amy cried out from the top of the bank.)

AMY: Geronimo!!!

(With that, she leapt over Lucy's head then folded her legs beneath her.)

AMY: Cannonball!!!



EDDIE: What is she...

(His eyes bulged in terror.)

EDDIE: Bitch!!!

(He then turned away and closed his eyes as Amy plummeted into the water right next to him.)

EDDIE: What the fuck did you do that for?

GERALD: To splash *you*, obviously.

(He grimaced.)

GERALD: That one does *not* exude femininity.

(Still gingerly making her way down the bank, Lucy whimpered.)

LUCY: Is she okay?

(Amy then splashed up through the surface again.)

AMY: Did I get him?

(She then screamed as Eddie dunked her under again.)

EDDIE: Yes!!!

(Having released her, Amy resurfaced, flicked the hair from her face then slapped him across the cheek.)

AMY: Wanker!!!

EDDIE: Less of that, you knob end!!!

GERALD: Oh, great, they're back at it again.

AMY: Try that again and I'll kick you right in the nuts.

EDDIE: If you even think about doing that, I'll boot you in the minge first. And my feet are much bigger than yours!!!

AMY: Just piss off. Fucking dunking me; what sort of cunt are you?

EDDIE: You splashed me!!!

GERALD: Aw, diddums.

EDDIE: What?

GERALD: Nothing.

EDDIE: Right...

(He ruffled his neck.)

EDDIE: Doing a cannonball on me. Fuck off!

AMY: Oh, whatever.

(She then proceeded to stomp her way across the river. Still only half way down the bank, Lucy whimpered at her.)

LUCY: Don't leave me, Amy!!!

HARRY: *I'm* still here, Lucy. You'll be fine.

LUCY: Well... okay.

(Having barely made it four feet, Amy turned then sighed to herself.)

AMY: Fuck it. I'll wait.

(She then watched on wearing an amused grin and Lucy continued to inch her way down the bank with a look of horror in her eyes.)

LUCY: I don't like this!

HARRY: You'll be fine; just keep going.

LUCY: And you'll definitely catch me, right?

HARRY: If you fall; yes!

LUCY: Are you sure?

HARRY: Lucy...

(He sighed.)

HARRY: Do you want me come up and there and get you?

LUCY: No!

(She pouted.)

LUCY: Yes!

HARRY: Right.

LUCY: No.

(She blushed.)

LUCY: Hold my hands.

(Harry rolled his eyes.)

HARRY: Fine.

(With that, he stepped back up the bank then arrived before her. Having done so, he reached for her hands then smiled.)

HARRY: I'm here.

LUCY: Good.

(She then took his hands and allowed him to slowly lead her down the bank. With Harry right there in front of her, she'd calmed down immensely. Upon setting foot in the river, however, her calmness swiftly evaporated.)

LUCY: It's cold!!!

HARRY: It's not *that* bad, Lucy.

LUCY: Yes, it is! It's okay for you; I've got bare legs!

HARRY: So have I. Shorts, remember?

LUCY: Yes, and your shorts are *over* your legs!

(She grabbed the bottom of her dress which had floated up and rested on the top of the water.)

LUCY: See?

(She whimpered.)

LUCY: Cold water on my gibles.

HARRY: What? Are you not wearing any...

LUCY: They're wafer thin!

HARRY: Right...

(He then turned around and nodded to Eddie.)

HARRY: Lead the way.

EDDIE: Righto.

AMY: I'll do it. I am the furthest out, after all.

HARRY: Actually, Amy; Eddie should do it.

AMY: What? Why???

EDDIE: Simple logic, Amy. The tallest one has to go first, so he can ascertain the depth.

AMY: What? That's a thing, is it?

EDDIE: Yes!

AMY: Since when?

EDDIE: Since when? Did you learn nothing at the academy?

AMY: Oh, I'm sorry. Maybe I was too busy being locked in a basement to pay attention that week. My bad.

(Eddie grimaced.)

EDDIE: Yeah... fair point...

(He then started to head towards her.)

AMY: You stay the fuck away from me.

EDDIE: Move then. I'm crossing the river.

AMY: Fine.

(She then edged sideways, eyeing him suspiciously.)

AMY: If you push me over, so help me, I'll hit you with my shoe.

EDDIE: I'm not going to!

(He then rolled his eyes and waded past her. Anxious to see just how deep it was, the others watched on wearing hopeful grimaces. As long as the water didn't reach the top of Eddie's shoulders, they'd be okay to cross there.)

LUCY: It's getting deeper.

GERALD: Yup. Either that or Eddie's shrinking.

LUCY: No, it's definitely getting deeper.

GERALD: Right... I wasn't serious about that, you know?

(Lucy gave him a sideways glance.)

LUCY: And you thought I was?

(They then looked on as Eddie edged forwards. The water was now quite high up his chest.)

GERALD: How's it looking, Eddie?

(Eddie glanced over his shoulder at him.)

EDDIE: What sort of question was that?

GERALD: I...

EDDIE: How's what looking?

GERALD: Your chances of getting across, obviously!

EDDIE: I don't fucking know, do I? You can see just as well I can, mate. At this *point*, it's this *deep*; that's all I can really tell you.

GERALD: Yeah, but do you reckon it'll get any deeper or...

EDDIE: How the fuck should I know? I can't see the bottom, can I?

(He rolled his eyes.)

EDDIE: Fucking posh blokes; always with the dumb questions.

HARRY: If it helps, mate, you're about half way across.

EDDIE: I can see that, Harry.

(He rolled his eyes. Upon taking his next step, however, he seemed to submerge a few more inches.)

EDDIE: Shit. It got deeper.

(He stopped and bit his lip.)

EDDIE: Guys?

HARRY: Yeah?

EDDIE: Fuck this; I'm going for it.

(He then proceeded to hurry across as fast as he could. As he did so, the water came up to his neck and he found himself tipping his head back to make sure he could breathe.)

EDDIE: Pretty deep!

HARRY: Hmm...

LUCY: Yikes.

EDDIE: It's alright though. Wait, wait, wait...

(He then strode forth, beaming with delight as the river became shallower again.)  
EDDIE: We're good to go, guys. It's only the few feet in the middle that are a problem.  
HARRY: Cool.  
GERALD: Okay...  
LUCY: Um...  
AMY: Nope!  
HARRY: Nope?  
AMY: You heard! He's a foot taller than me and it came up to his fucking neck. I'd drown.  
HARRY: Not if you swim that bit!  
AMY: Right...  
(She sighed.)  
AMY: I guess.  
(Harry then nodded sternly.)  
HARRY: Right. I'll go next.  
LUCY: Can I come?  
HARRY: What?  
LUCY: Can I come with you?  
HARRY: Sure.  
LUCY: Like, on your back or something.  
HARRY: On my back?  
LUCY: Yes! I'm a short arse like Amy.  
(She twiddled her fingers.)  
LUCY: And I can't swim.  
HARRY: I see.  
(He nodded.)  
HARRY: That'd be a problem then.  
LUCY: Exactly.  
HARRY: Fine. Hop on then.  
LUCY: Phew. Thanks, Harry.  
HARRY: Anything for a fine lady like yourself.  
LUCY: Right...  
(With that, she clambered onto his back then clung on for dear life.)  
LUCY: Ready.  
HARRY: Righto. Hold on tight then. But not too tight. In other words, don't panic and strangle me when we get to the deep bit.  
LUCY: Why would I?  
HARRY: Because that's what girls do.  
LUCY: I see.  
(She nodded.)  
LUCY: Duly noted.  
HARRY: Here we go then.  
(He then proceeded to wade towards the middle with Lucy on his back. Looking less than confident, all she could do was gulp and hope he could get across safely.)  
HARRY: Okay, here it is; the deep bit.  
LUCY: Shit.

HARRY: Remember not to strangle me!

LUCY: I won't!

HARRY: Won't remember or won't strangle me?

LUCY: Just go!

(Harry allowed himself a smirk then continued onwards. Moments later, he found himself stepping into the deepest part, and had to tip his head back to breathe. As he did so, however, Lucy clung onto his neck in terror.)

LUCY: Don't lean back; I'll fall!!!

(Harry had to choke out his words at this point.)

HARRY: You're crushing my larynx!!!

LUCY: Hurry up!!!

HARRY: You're strangling me!!!

(Eddie furrowed his brow.)

EDDIE: Get a move on then, before you die of asphyxiation.

HARRY: Point!

(He then hurried further across until the water became less shallow then dipped his head.

Reacting to his move, Lucy loosened her grip then drew a sigh or relief.)

LUCY: You made it!

HARRY: No, thanks to you!

LUCY: What did I do???

HARRY: You started strangling me!

LUCY: No, I didn't.

HARRY: You did!

(He shook his head.)

HARRY: My whole life flashed before my eyes.

LUCY: And how was it?

HARRY: Too much drama and not enough sex!

(They chuckled together then Harry headed to the other side of the river and set her down.)

HARRY: Next!

LUCY: Next!

EDDIE: Next!

(Gerald nodded.)

GERALD: Allow me!

AMY: Go nuts.

GERALD: Thank you.

(With that, he hurried out to the middle, keeping his head raised just to be safe. Upon reaching the deep part, however, he took a deep breath then proceeded to doggie paddle across. Watching as his arms and legs flapped around, Eddie couldn't help but grin.)

EDDIE: Seriously? Doggie paddle?

GERALD: Shut up, you.

EDDIE: Impressive, mate.

(He looked to Harry.)

EDDIE: Doggie paddle, look. All part of his ridiculously expensive education, I expect!

HARRY: Well schools for posh blokes do tend to have all the best sports facilities.

GERALD: Actually, my school didn't *have* a pool!

(Safely over the deepest part, Gerald then allowed his legs to drop.)

GERALD: We had a rowing lake.

(He ruffled his neck.)

GERALD: Filled with algae. Only a moron would swim in that.

EDDIE: Or doggie paddle.

GERALD: Oh, grow up, man. I made it, didn't I?

EDDIE: Yes; yes you did.

HARRY: Therefore... next!

LUCY: Next!

EDDIE: Next!

GERALD: Next!

(Staring back at them from the shallows on the other side, Amy whimpered.)

AMY: Right... so... me, huh?

LUCY: You can do it, babes?

AMY: Uh-huh. Yup. I can.

(She then nodded sternly.)

AMY: But I don't want to hold you up or anything, so you guys go ahead and I'll catch you up.

(She received many an empty glance.)

EDDIE: Amy?

AMY: What???

EDDIE: You can't swim, can you?

AMY: Um...

HARRY: Meaning you're stuck there unless someone comes back for you.

AMY: No!

(She ruffled her neck.)

AMY: I'll be fine.

(And with that, she waded out into deeper water then nodded sternly.)

AMY: Easy peasy!

(She then pushed herself forwards to start swimming. Sadly, as impressive as her push off had been, when she started to perform her front crawl, it was plain to see that swimming definitely wasn't her forte. Rather than propelling herself forwards, she was pretty much thrashing about, advancing with all the grace and speed of the average snail.)

LUCY: That's... different.

GERALD: It's better than I could do.

EDDIE: Is it though? At least you had forward momentum.

GERALD: So has she. Kind of.

HARRY: Almost.

EDDIE: Hmm...

(Just then, Amy completely lost her stroke and proceeded to thrash about with terror in her eyes. She was literally flailing like a mad thing just to stay afloat.)

AMY: Shit!!! It's all gone wrong, Lucy!!!

EDDIE: Fuck!

LUCY: Amy!!!

(Not about to waste a second, Eddie then raced into the deep and swiftly swam over to her.)

HARRY: Hurry!!!

LUCY: Grab her!!!

EDDIE: You think?

(With that, he reached out and grabbed Amy around the torso. Rather than allowing him to drag her to safety, however, she immediately threw a hissy fit.)

AMY: Fuck off, cunt! Get off me!

EDDIE: I'm trying to save you!!!

AMY: Well, don't!

EDDIE: You'll drown if I don't!!!

AMY: Good! I'd rather drown than be rescued by a cunt like you!

EDDIE: Amy!!!

AMY: Get off!!!

(She then attempted to wallop him.)

EDDIE: Stop it, you mad bitch!!!

AMY: Let me go then!!!

EDDIE: Fine!

(He snarled.)

EDDIE: As soon as you're safe.

(He then proceeded to swim backwards using only his feet, with Amy screaming and lashing out in his arms.)

EDDIE: Will you stop that???

AMY: No! Let me go!!!

EDDIE: No!

AMY: I'm warning you!!!

EDDIE: Fine then.

(He then released her from his grasp, bringing forth much in the way of panic.)

AMY: You bastard!!!

(Upon releasing she was past the deep part, and that her feet easily touched the river bed, she then drew a sigh of relief.)

AMY: Right...

EDDIE: Daft cunt.

(He then headed to the river bank. As he did so, Amy snarled at him.)

AMY: Who do you think you are, wanker? Nobody asked you to rescue me!

LUCY: Amy...

AMY: Arsehole. I'm not having it.

(She then proceeded to wade back towards the deep, much to Lucy's anger.)

LUCY: Amy!!! Fucking stop!!!

(Upon hearing her friend bellow like that, Amy froze.)

LUCY: Stop being a moron and get your arse over here!

(Amy slowly turned to face her with a hard-done-by pout on her lips.)

AMY: You're not my mum!

LUCY: Just get over here.

AMY: Fine.

(She ruffled her neck.)

AMY: But only because you asked me nicely.

LUCY: No, I didn't.

AMY: And let it be noted, Eddie's an arse wipe and I resent being rescued by him.

EDDIE: We get it!

AMY: Good! Don't forget it.

(She then made her way to the river bank, hiding her face from the unimpressed gazes of her academy mates.)

AMY: Um... let's just get going, shall we?

HARRY: Agreed.

(With that, they all made their way up the river bank then stared down the thin, side street ahead of them. With bushes and brambles blocking the river bank either side of the them, it was literally the only route they could take.)

HARRY: So... at least we know the road we're taking.

EDDIE: Uh-huh.

LUCY: Dry off first or dry on the run?

EDDIE: I think we've wasted enough time as it is.

HARRY: Unfortunately, he's right. We have.

GERALD: Then our run back to hell resumes here.

AMY: Aw.

(With that, they all proceeded to jog onwards, hoping against hope that they'd find the academy as soon as possible.)

---

Resuming their run in soaking wet clothes was an especially unpleasant experience for the five young cadets. Their clothes were sticking to their skin and it made every action feel awkward. The boys' shorts felt like they were made of lead. Worst still, the bottom of Lucy's dress kept slapping her thighs, making her cringe. It was like her legs were being repeatedly slapped with a soggy sponge. Amy, however, had a far different problem. Wearing a tighter dress, she didn't have the slapping issue; she had an altogether far more embarrassing one.

AMY: Lucy?

LUCY: What?

AMY: Be honest with me.

LUCY: Okay. You can be kinda petty sometimes and...

AMY: Not about my personalty! And hey!

LUCY: Right... sorry.

AMY: I'm talking about my dress. Be honest.

(She grimaced.)

AMY: It's entirely see-through right now, isn't it?

LUCY: Well...

(She offered her a warm smile.)

LUCY: It is, yes.

AMY: Shit, fuck, bollocks...

LUCY: Calm down, Amy. What are you worried about? You have a nice body and thankfully, you remembered to wear a matching set today. Plus, black is so you. You look really sexy actually.

AMY: I...



(A conceited expression then crossed her brow.)

AMY: That's a good point, actually. Thank you.

(She then hurried among the boys.)

AMY: Hot girl, coming through.

EDDIE: You'd better let her pass then, Amy.

AMY: Fuck you.

EDDIE: Oh, go and...

(His jaw then fell open as soon as he caught sight of Amy's rear.)

EDDIE: Black... thong...

AMY: G-string, actually.

HARRY: Nice!

GERALD: Daddy like. And daddy has superb taste.

(Just then, Lucy bundled through them.)

LUCY: Run with *me*, Amy!

AMY: Sure. I just wanted to position myself where my arse would be appreciated.

LUCY: Right...

EDDIE: Then appreciation it shall have!

(He then looked to Harry.)

EDDIE: I tell you what, she may have a gob the size of a small planet and the talent to annoy at international level, but it has to be said, she's got a nice body.

GERALD: *Nice* doesn't even begin to cover it.

HARRY: She's as sexy as hell, mate. I still prefer Lucy though.

(He then turned bright red and looked away.)

HARRY: Not that I fancy her or anything.

AMY: Yeah, right.

HARRY: What?

EDDIE: Mate, that was virtually a full and frank confession. You fancy her; big time!

HARRY: Says who?

GERALD: You! When you randomly blurted out that you don't fancy her or anything, despite the fact nobody suggested you did.

HARRY: I...

(He sneered.)

HARRY: Fuck off, posh bloke.

EDDIE: He's gone bright red.

HARRY: You can fuck off an' all.

(Amy giggled.)

AMY: I think we've found you a date, Lucy.

LUCY: Stop it. I'm really embarrassed right now. Just...

(Suddenly, a voice yelled out to them from a mere ten feet ahead.)

SOLDIER: Stop!!!

(Much to their horror, an angry looking Farzarian soldier, armed with a machine gun was blocking their path. Unsurprisingly, they ground to an instant halt.)

SOLDIER: Thank you!

(He snarled.)

SOLDIER: None shall pass!

EDDIE: But...

LUCY: You heard him!

EDDIE: Lucy...

LUCY: Fuck off, you. When a man with a big machine gun tells me to do something, I fucking listen.

SOLDIER: You are wise. This road is closed. Now go back the way you came! Now!!!  
(With a flinch they then about turned and raced back up the road.)

EDDIE: I can't believe we're fleeing.

HARRY: Machine gun, mate. Anything *but* fleeing would be fucking stupid.

EDDIE: Well... yeah...

(He sucked his teeth.)

EDDIE: The trouble is though, this road leads back to the fucking river. And if you recall, the other parts of the bank we're so overgrown, we couldn't even *see* any routes but this one.

(Amy whimpered.)

AMY: You mean we have to go back across the river?

LUCY: I don't wanna!!!

GERALD: This is a disaster.

HARRY: Yeah... I mean, this has fucked everything big time.

(Eddie mused to himself.)

EDDIE: It has. I mean, we might have to double back on ourselves several times before we end up heading in the right direction again.

GERALD: Yes, but what choice do we have?

(Eddie grimaced.)

EDDIE: Very little, I fear.

(A short while later, having arrived back at the river, the five students stared down into it then released a simultaneous sigh. Not keen on the idea of going back in there, then they glanced back down the side street again. Even less enamoured by the idea of being shot at, they then released another sigh.)

HARRY: You know what? Fuck it. I give up.

LUCY: Same!

AMY: Motion carried.

GERALD: No complaints from me.

(Eddie looked to them then sighed.)

EDDIE: Then it's pretty much unanimous.

(He then glanced down the side street again. A few seconds later, however, a thoughtful expression crossed his brow. An idea had come to him and he was eager to mull it over in his head. Unfortunately, he then proceeded to mull it over out loud instead.)

EDDIE: Rooftops. If I can... hmm.

HARRY: Rooftops?

(Eddie looked to him in astonishment.)

EDDIE: What?

HARRY: You're thinking about going over the rooftops?

EDDIE: How the fuck do you know that?

HARRY: You literally just said rooftops!

EDDIE: I did?

(He grimaced.)

EDDIE: I didn't realise I'd said it out loud. For a minute there, I thought you were some kind of weird psychic...

GERALD: Never mind that, Eddie; are you seriously suggesting we cross over the rooftops?

EDDIE: I wasn't *suggesting* it, no. I was pondering the idea.

AMY: Right... well, for the record, I'm not doing that.

LUCY: Me either.

GERALD: Nope.

EDDIE: Why not? It might be really easy.

HARRY: Yes, but it might be really... what's the word? Fatal.

(Eddie gave him a condescending glance.)

EDDIE: Yes, but we won't know if it's doable until we try, will we?

AMY: And who is this royal "we" of which you speak?

(Eddie looked to them emptily.)

EDDIE: Me and...

GERALD: Nope.

LUCY: Nuh-huh.

HARRY: I'm out.

AMY: Full house.

EDDIE: Seriously? You're not even gonna try?

HARRY: Mate, if you get up there with ease, then reach the bottom of the road and get down again with the same amount of ease, then yes. Happy to give it a go.

GERALD: But if you get up there, fall off then die; we're not going to copy you.

(Eddie shook a disappointed head.)

EDDIE: So I'm on my own then?

LUCY: Yup.

AMY: Pretty much for the rest of your life, I except.

EDDIE: Shut up, you.

(He ruffled his neck indignantly.)

EDDIE: Fine. I'll give it a go then. You lot can cower here like, if you like.

AMY: We like.

EDDIE: Good. I'm glad you're happy.

AMY: Me too. Now hurry up and fall off the roof.

EDDIE: I'm not *going* to fall off the...

(He then took a calming breath before strutting away.)

EDDIE: Weak sauce, you lot. Weak sauce.

(With that, he disappeared into the back yard of the end building.)

GERALD: So? What do we reckon?

LUCY: He'll come back in a minute, having failed to climb up there.

HARRY: Either that or ten minutes from now, we'll be scraping him off the pavement.

AMY: As much as I'd love your theory to come to fruition, Harry, I have to say I'm with Lucy on this one. He's not even going to make it onto the roof in the first place.

(They then glanced in the direction Eddie had left in, fully expecting him to reappear any moment now. Much to their astonishment, however, after only thirty seconds, he appeared on the roof, staring down at them.)

HARRY: How did you manage that?

EDDIE: There's a flight of stairs and a ladder.

LUCY: So it's easy then?

(Eddie shrugged.)

EDDIE: I guess we'll find out in a minute. If you see me waving from the other end of the street, you know I pissed it.

(He then headed off across the roof. In this moment, he was delighted with himself. Everyone had mocked his idea as if it was a non-starter and yet here he was, crossing from rooftop to rooftop with no absolutely hindrance whatsoever.)

EDDIE: This is a piece of piss.

(He glanced back at the five rooftops he'd crossed with an approving nod.)

EDDIE: I can't believe they dismissed the idea so willingly; it's barely even a...

(His heart then sunk and he could only mumble the rest of his sentence.)

EDDIE: Challenge...

(He hung his head.)

EDDIE: Shit.

(Before him, the rooftop dropped down to a lower one. The lower one was sloped.

Staring at it through nervous eyes, he couldn't help but shudder.)

EDDIE: If I jump down there and slip...

(He sighed.)

EDDIE: But then again, if I fail and go back again, I'll have listen to Amy mocking me.

(He nodded sternly.)

EDDIE: Nope. Fuck that. I'd rather fall off and die than listen to her giggling again.

(With that, he stepped up to the edge then glanced down at the sloped roof below.)

EDDIE: Hmm... if I can just jump down there without slipping, I should be fine. I just need to take it nice and easy.

(He glanced further down the rooftops.)

EDDIE: Once I'm past this bit, the rest should be a walk in the park. Fuck it; I'm doing it.

(He then took a deep breath to calm himself before sinking down into a crouched position.)

EDDIE: Okay... here we go then. Let's get this shit done.

(With that, he jumped down to the sloped roof below. As soon as his feet hit the angled slate, however, they went from underneath him and he tumbled towards the guttering.)

EDDIE: Fuck, shit, bollocks, not good.

(He then tumbled off the roof. Too scared to even scream, he stared in horror at the shop awning that he was hurtling towards and closed his eyes.)

EDDIE: Please break my fall, please break my fall.

(Seconds later, he thudded into the canopy. The awning had indeed broken his fall.

Unfortunately, it had been fitted so tightly, it then propelled him towards the houses opposite as if he'd just bounced on the world's springiest trampoline. All he could do was whimper in distress as he flew over the Farzarian soldier's head then shot through the open window of the house opposite.)

EDDIE: I'm not happy!

(To his consummate relief, he then crashed down on top of a bed. Somehow, he'd had the softest landing imaginable. If he thought he was out of trouble, however, he was very

much mistaken. The fourteen year old girl who'd been sitting on the bed at the time was far from overjoyed by his appearance. In fact, she screamed the house down.)

LISA: Dad!!! Dad!!! A weirdo appeared!!!

(Eddie swiftly sat up.)

EDDIE: It's not what you think!!!

LISA: Dad!!!

(Just then, the door burst open and a six foot, six inch, mountain of a man thundered inside.)

DAD: Big mistake, chummy!!!

(Eddie quickly leapt to his feet.)

EDDIE: It wasn't me!!!

DAD: What???

EDDIE: I mean it's not how it looks!!!

DAD: Is that so? Then why don't you tell me all about it while I'm breaking your legs???

(He then raced towards him. With a shriek, Eddie dived off the bed then raced around it. Unsurprisingly, the giant of a man gave chase.)

DAD: I'm gonna break your face, sonny boy!!!

EDDIE: I can explain!!!

DAD: And I can kill and maim! We all have our skills, lad; now prepare to witness mine!!!

EDDIE: It's a misunderstanding. I tripped and fell in through the window, that's all!

DAD: You fell in through the window???

We're on the upstairs floor, you cunt!!!

EDDIE: Yeah, but I was...

DAD: Just come here and die, will you?

LISA: That's it, dad; murder him good and proper!

DAD: Oh, I will, love. Nobody messes with one of *my* daughters!!!

(Having been chased over the bed and across the edge of the room three times, Eddie could only whimper.)

EDDIE: You don't care what I say, do you?

DAD: Nope!

EDDIE: You're gonna kill me regardless, aren't you?

DAD: Correct!

EDDIE: Shit.

(He then snarled venomously.)

EDDIE: I'm not hanging around for that!!!

(He then dived back out the window again. Delighted to be out of immediate danger, he drew a deep sigh of relief.)

EDDIE: Thank fuck.

(Alas, that was the only relief he was going to get for the time being. As if fate was mocking him from on high, a split second later, he thudded into the awning again and was propelled back towards the house. Having flown through the window next to the one he'd just exited from, he crash-landed on a bed, then furrowed his brow.)

EDDIE: Well, this just gets better and better.

(Sure enough, this time, *two* girls were in the room. Two twelve year olds.

Unsurprisingly, as soon as they saw him, they *both* started screaming for their dad.)

EDDIE: Aw, fuck!

(Just then, the door crashed open and their dad raced into the room. It may have been a different room, but alas, it was the same dad.)

DAD: You!!! Like my eldest wasn't bad enough, now you're after my twins!!!

(He then charged at Eddie and the whole routine commenced once again. Racing across the bed and around the edge of the room, he was being promised a gruesome death.)

EDDIE: Mate, if you'd just listen, there's a perfectly innocent explanation!

DAD: Yeah, you were walking down the road, tripped then fell twenty feet upwards into my daughter's bed!!!

EDDIE: I wasn't walking down the road! I was on the roof!

DAD: You were stalking them???

EDDIE: No! Where the fuck are you getting that from?

DAD: From my list of a hundred reasons to kill you!!!

(Eddie could only gulp.)

EDDIE: Nope! I didn't sign up to get maimed by an angry parent! I'm out of here!!!

(He then charged onto the bed before diving out of the window once more.)

EDDIE: Ha!

(He then screeched.)

EDDIE: Mistake!!!

(Sure enough, he was falling straight towards the Farzarian soldier on guard duty.)

EDDIE: Not good!!!

(Flinching at the sight of a young man tumbling towards him, the soldier gasped then attempted to raise his gun. Reacting far too slowly, however, he barely managed it to get it over his shoulder before Eddie thudded into him with a tremendous force, snapping the soldier's neck. Such was the power of the impact, the break could heard from way down the end of the street. Delighted to have had yet another soft landing, Eddie quickly jumped to his feet then clenched a triumphant fist.)

EDDIE: I'm alive!!!

(The girl's dad, however, disagreed somewhat. Red with rage, he charged out of the front door then proceeded to stamp his way over to Eddie.)

DAD: On the contrary, sunshine; you're dead!

(Eddie gulped then quickly ducked down and grabbed the soldier's gun.)

EDDIE: Am I?

DAD: You...

(Staring at the gun, the dad gulped then offered him a cheesy grin.)

DAD: You know what... seeing as I'm in a good mood...

(He then sprinted indoors and slammed the door behind him. Eddie had never been so relieved.)

EDDIE: Thank fuck for that.

(With that, he wiped the sweat from his brow before glancing down at the dead soldier.)

EDDIE: Actually, that couldn't have worked out better.

(He then called to where Harry, Lucy, Gerald and Amy were standing at the end of the street, watching him in bewilderment.)

EDDIE: It's clear, guys!

(He beamed arrogantly.)

EDDIE: Thanks to me, we can resume our journey!

(As his four fellow cadets shared a series of baffled shrugs then proceeded to head towards him, Eddie couldn't help but smile.)

EDDIE: Yup. That was some damned good soldiering.

---

Having rejoined Eddie, the group of cadets swiftly headed onwards to the end of the street before any *other* foreign invaders could appear. Having just killed one of them and taken possession of his gun, sticking around could be fatal, after all. As such, they made themselves scarce immediately, opting to dart across another road then race into the large public park opposite.

They'd given the smug looking Eddie sideways glances all the way there. Delighted to have achieved something helpful to their mission, he hadn't said a word about it; opting instead to act cool. He felt very much like a hero right now, and genuinely believed his four academy mates saw him the same way. As such, he'd remained silent, allowing them to quietly bask in the glow of his greatness. His four peers, however, were silent for a very different reason. Awe didn't even enter into the equation. Having seen Eddie bounce off an awning twice, fall on a soldier then threaten an angry civilian with a gun, they were simply bewildered. Unsurprisingly, they had questions.

Having entered a park which was heavily littered with benches, Amy decided it was time he *answered* those questions. As such, she took a seat and insisted everyone should join her in taking a break. She received nothing by way of an argument. Without hesitation, everyone sat down then they all glanced up at Eddie.

EDDIE: What? Saw that, did you?

(He smirked arrogantly.)

EDDIE: Just your average hero in action; nothing to get excited about.

AMY: Hero, huh?

EDDIE: Yup. Came across an enemy soldier; skilfully took him down. The very definition of a hero.

HARRY: Well... even so, mate; we've got questions.

EDDIE: Questions? What for? You saw what happened with your own two eyes.

Whilst on the roof, I spotted an opportunity to do my country a solid, and I took it.

LUCY: So... that was all planned, was it?

EDDIE: Yup. I realised I had the chance to take him from above, so I put a plan into action.

(He beamed arrogantly.)

EDDIE: With no concerns for my own safety, whatsoever, I fearlessly leapt from the rooftop I was *on* to the rooftop opposite. I then stealthily made my way inside the building and headed down to the appropriate floor. Having cleverly made my way inside the building, I then headed to window above the enemy soldier and did what needed to be done. I didn't even hesitate. You saw me. I pounced like a wildcat. And the rest is history.

AMY: Right...

EDDIE: Yup, I did great work today and you can all be proud of me.

HARRY: Well, yeah, I mean we'd love to, mate, but unfortunately for you we saw literally everything.  
(Eddie gulped.)  
EDDIE: You did?  
AMY: You fell off the rooftop!  
GERALD: And bounced off the awning, straight through someone's window.  
LUCY: Before leaping out of the window then rebounding into the one next to it.  
HARRY: Culminating in you jumping out of the window again.  
EDDIE: Onto the enemy!  
AMY: Who'd you'd clearly forgotten was there!  
EDDIE: No, I...  
GERALD: You looked as startled as he did!  
HARRY: You're just lucky he was slow in pointing his weapon.  
AMY: And after your lucky landing, the house owner came out to tear you a new one, then ran back indoors when he saw you holding that gun.  
(Eddie glowered at them coldly.)  
EDDIE: You're making me out to be some kind of clumsy buffoon.  
GERALD: Well you did fall off the roof.  
HARRY: And bounce through some poor girl's window.  
EDDIE: How do you know there were...  
AMY: We could hear them screaming.  
EDDIE: Shit.  
(He flinched.)  
EDDIE: I mean, that's bollocks. You've made up your own version of events entirely.  
LUCY: Well someone has, that's for certain. And seeing as we all *saw* you fall then bounce off an awning, not once, but twice, I think it's safe to say that person is *you*.  
(Eddie glowered at her coldly then ruffled his neck.)  
EDDIE: I thought you said you had questions. These aren't questions, these are scandalous *accusations*.  
HARRY: We haven't even got round to the questions yet, mate.  
GERALD: But seeing as you brought it up. How did you end up falling off the roof in the first place?  
AMY: And that homeowner was those girls' father, wasn't he?  
LUCY: Meaning you landed in their bedrooms, right?  
HARRY: And you dived out of the window because the dad was chasing you, yeah?  
EDDIE: One question at a time!!!  
(He ruffled his neck.)  
EDDIE: Firstly, I didn't *fall* off the roof, I jumped, like a hero.  
HARRY: You were tumbling sideways *before* you started to fall, mate; we saw it.  
GERALD: You went over on your side, cursing like a champion.  
AMY: And the chances of an awning being so strong it deflected you away was astronomical. Ninety nine percent of the time, you'd have simply fallen through it. Only an idiot would try to use one as a trampoline.  
LUCY: In that sense, he kind of fits the profile.  
AMY: Good point.  
(She furrowed her brow.)



AMY: The hero profile, on the other hand, I think not.

(Eddie gave them all an exasperated glance.)

EDDIE: Are you seriously trying to suggest that I fell off the roof like a clumsy twat then had a lucky bounce through the open window of a girl's bedroom? Only to dive out again having been chased by angry father, just to rebound back into his even *younger* twin daughters' room? Then, having been chased again, dived out of the window, only for an enemy soldier to break my fall, saving my life and leaving me with a gun to scare away the angry father in the process? Is that what you're suggesting?

HARRY: Actually, you *added* a few details there. *Three* daughters, was it?

EDDIE: Well...

HARRY: But yes. In answer to your questions, other than minor details with the daughters that we weren't privy to, that's exactly what we're suggesting.

LUCY: Because it's what we literally witnessed with our our two eyes.

AMY: Yup. We saw the whole thing. Whoops, down you fell; boing... into a window. Out you then came and, boing... back in you went. Then out you came *again*, looking horrified, and thud; you landed on the soldier.

GERALD: Then the dad came out. We were standing at the end of street watching the whole thing unfold.

(Eddie sneered then glanced away.)

EDDIE: Well... yeah... I guess *some* of those elements were true.

AMY: Some?

EDDIE: Shut up!

(He shook his fist.)

EDDIE: Why couldn't you just have formed a circle and chatted among yourselves like normal people? What did you have to *watch* me for?

(He sighed.)

EDDIE: I thought you hadn't seen it. I'd have looked well heroic if you'd just paid me no heed like a normal people, but no. Had to watch me, didn't you?

AMY: Of course, we did. We wanted to see if you'd make it to the end of the street or not.

GERALD: And you didn't.

LUCY: You fell off the roof like a clumsy buffoon.

EDDIE: You...

(Defeated, he hung his head in shame. Two seconds later, however, he suddenly started to chuckle.)

EDDIE: Fine. Yeah... I'll own it.

(He shook his head as he continued to giggle.)

EDDIE: It was a fucking nightmare. I thought I was done for; several times!

(Harry couldn't help but grin.)

HARRY: So did we.

LUCY: We couldn't believe your luck when you bounced through that open window.

AMY: Then dived back out again, only to rebound through another one.

GERALD: Like a highly accomplished clown.

(They all sat there laughing about it for a moment then Eddie sat back and shook his head.)

EDDIE: You know the real tragedy?

AMY: Yes. You survived.

EDDIE: Piss off!

(He rolled his eyes.)

EDDIE: The real tragedy is, getting across would have been every bit the piece of piss I suggested it would. There was just this one sloped roof to cross. And I would have made it if I'd climbed down to it sensibly, but no. I jumped down, the slate gave way and down I went. Defeated by my own impatience.

(Lucy gave him a sympathetic smile.)

LUCY: Don't be embarrassed.

(She then mused to herself.)

LUCY: On second thoughts, do. *Do* be embarrassed. I mean, there's no disguising it, is there? That was complete and utterly tomfoolery.

AMY: Yup, dimwitted buffoonery of the highest order.

(Harry held out his palms.)

HARRY: Come on, girls; give the bloke a break. Yes, he tried to do something cool and came unstuck due to his own hare-brained ineptitude, but at least he had a go.

LUCY: Right. We should make allowances, I guess. For his effort.

AMY: And his intellectual shortcomings.

GERALD: Definitely.

EDDIE: You know what? You fuckers aren't funny!

AMY: Aw, bless him; he thought we were joking.

EDDIE: Amy!

AMY: Yes, fuckwit?

EDDIE: You...

(He then started to laugh again.)

EDDIE: Fuck it. Mock away. I earned it.

(His jaw then dropped as they proceeded to do so with extra vim and gusto.)

HARRY: Seriously, mate, you looked like a right knob.

LUCY: Flying through the air with your arms and legs flailing everywhere!

AMY: And the look on his face!

GERALD: That was a picture, that was!

HARRY: Right? Like a man condemned.

AMY: Priceless. He was flying about like a human pinball.

LUCY: The funniest part is, despite the fact we saw the whole thing, afterwards he started strutting about like a peacock, pretending it was intentional!

(They then fell about laughing.)

AMY: What a bell end!

HARRY: Right? Who did he think he was kidding?

GERALD: I know. How dumb does he think we are?

LUCY: Seriously, that was the icing on the cake, that was.

(She then mocked his voice as she recited what he'd said.)

LUCY: Just your average hero in action; nothing to get excited about.

(As everyone sat there crying with laughter, Eddie folded his arms and scowled.)

EDDIE: Wankers!

(He then climbed to his feet.)

EDDIE: Fuck this; we've got a mission to complete. Let's go.

AMY: We'll go when we're done laughing.

HARRY: So you might as well get comfortable, mate.

(As they continued to laugh, Eddie sat down then allowed himself a chuckle of his own.)

EDDIE: Fuck it. Take your time. I could use the break actually.

(He then proceeded to laugh out loud.)

EDDIE: I've never been so scared in all my life. First I thought I was tumbling to my death from that rooftop, then when I bounced off the awning, I thought I was about to fly through a pane of glass. I didn't know the window was open. And to survive that, only to incur the wrath of the biggest fucking bodybuilder I've ever seen... twice... fuck me. Then to top it all off, I finally escaped only to think I was about to be shot by that soldier. I could have died several times. What a cunt!

(By now, they were all in fits of hysterics. It was safe to say that their trek would not be resuming for a good few minutes yet.)

---

Some fifteen minutes after their laughing hysterically needs had been taken care of, the five intrepid cadets headed away on their journey once again. Eddie had been told to ditch the gun. At first he was reluctant, but after having it pointed out to him that it was a Farzarian weapon, therefore he might well get shot by his own side, he soon relented. And so, he disabled it then left it under the bench before going on his way.

Rather than simply heading in what they hoped was the right general direction, this time the focus of their run had altered slightly. Having travelled a fair distance, they were now on the lookout for signs that their academy might be nearby. It could be a familiar landmark, or maybe even a road sign. Anything to point them in the right direction. Harry was confident of finding *one* particular landmark without any difficulty whatsoever. Lucy, on the other hand, wasn't so sure.

LUCY: I don't know about that, Harry.

HARRY: No?

LUCY: It could be obscured.

HARRY: I doubt it, Lucy; you can *see* the academy clock-tower from miles away.

LUCY: I know that, but until we're somewhere more open, all we're gonna see is the houses right in front of us.

(She shrugged.)

LUCY: And the area around the academy is so densely populated, we might not see it until we're virtually upon it.

HARRY: I know what you're saying, but sooner or later, there's bound to be a gap in the houses, and if we're nearby, we'll see it.

GERALD: Unless we've walked so far to the left of it, it's completely out of eye-range.

AMY: Why would be to the left of it?

GERALD: Because we kept turning left. The area where all the trouble kicked off was to the right of where we started; so we've been going left to avoid it. Every time we've needed to turn.

EDDIE: We have, haven't we?

(He shrugged.)

EDDIE: Nah, it should be fine. I mean, we haven't gone *that* far left, surely.

GERALD: Oh, I don't know. We've taken a hell of a lot of turns. All left!

HARRY: Not *all* left. After every left, we took a right.

GERALD: Which means we've gone diagonally left! Lots of straight lines with several left turns involved.

HARRY: I know that, mate; I was teasing. I'm not an idiot.

AMY: Wait. You've confused me.

HARRY: See? There's your idiot.

AMY: Fuck off you.

(She ruffled her neck.)

AMY: A left followed by right means...

(She counted on her fingers.)

AMY: Nope.

HARRY: Think. A straight line. Now turn left. Then turn right. Back on the straight line again, albeit to the left a bit. We've done that since we set out.

GERALD: As I said.

HARRY: Yes, but I was explaining it to Amy.

AMY: But is Amy grateful? No. I'll just take your word for it.

HARRY: Wow.

AMY: Don't wow me, fuck face. Karma is feeling a bit feisty today, so if you piss me off, don't be surprised if she bites you.

EDDIE: Eh? Karma?

AMY: Yes. Karma.

(She ruffled her neck.)

AMY: You tried to get me killed for spying earlier and what's happened since? You've ended up looking like a twat. Several times. First when I threw you in the river, then several times over when you decided to play the hero.

(She glowered at Harry.)

AMY: You've been warned.

HARRY: Right...

LUCY: I'm sure he didn't mean any disrespect, Amy.

AMY: Yeah, right; stick up for your boyfriend.

LUCY: Boyfriend?

HARRY: Boyfriend?

(They then glanced at one another briefly before turning bright red.)

AMY: That told them.

(She looked to Eddie.)

AMY: So what's *your* take? Do *you* think we've gone too far left?

EDDIE: I couldn't even begin to guess.

AMY: Shit. Then nobody knows for sure?

GERALD: Not for sure, no, but I suspect so.

AMY: Bugger.

(She sighed.)

AMY: We're gonna get horribly lost, aren't we?

EDDIE: I hope not.

AMY: Hope? What good is that?

EDDIE: Not a lot.

(They then giggled together.)

HARRY: Blimey, they're being civil.

AMY: Of course. I'm not feeling that vengeful anymore.

(She beamed.)

AMY: Karma whooped his arse *for* me.

HARRY: Right...

AMY: Anyway, more to the point, what are we gonna do now?

EDDIE: Start taking a few right turns, I guess.

HARRY: Is that wise?

GERALD: Absolutely.

HARRY: And what makes you so sure?

GERALD: Well...

(They then arrived at the end of the road they'd just headed down and he pointed to his left.)

GERALD: That! *That* makes me so sure!

(Standing there at the roadside, they all grimaced uncomfortably. To the left of them was a country lane leading out of the city.)

GERALD: We've gone so far left, we're almost in the countryside.

HARRY: Fuck.

LUCY: Hmm...

(She sighed.)

LUCY: Yup. Too far left.

AMY: Way too far!

EDDIE: Yup.

(He shrugged.)

EDDIE: Right turns now, yeah?

HARRY: Lead the way, mate.

EDDIE: Will do.

(They then proceeded to cross the road. They only got halfway across, however, when a cacophony of animal noises roses up from their left. As one, they all shot a glance towards the country lane then screeched in terror. A stampede of goats was heading straight for them.)

GERALD: Panic!!!

(Needing no such promoting to do such a thing, Eddie, Harry, Amy and Lucy immediately released a series of panicked screams then scattered in all directions. Gerald himself, however, remained rooted to the spot in terror.)

GERALD: Panic!!! Run away!!!

(And still he remained. Having scrambled up a lamppost, Amy yelled at him desperately.)

AMY: Move, you silly fucker!!!

(She then winced as the inevitable happened. The goat at the head of the stampede violently butted him high into the air.)

GERALD: Ow!!!

(Dangling from the top of a nearby wall, Eddie sucked his teeth.)

EDDIE: That looked painful.

(He then winced as Gerald came back down into the middle of the herd, only to butted back upwards again.)

GERALD: Why???

EDDIE: Because you didn't...

(His eyes then bulged in terror. Gerald was hurtling straight towards him.)

EDDIE: Not good; not good...

(With that, he desperately tried to scramble sideways. Alas, he was far too slow.

Seconds later, Gerald crashed into him, managing to secure his own hold on the wall.

Eddie, however, fell to the ground and was immediately trampled.)

GERALD: Sorry! Sorry about that!

(Watching from the safety of a nearby doorway, Harry and Lucy shared an uncomfortable grimace. Within moments, however, their expressions straightened out and they sighed longingly at one another.)

HARRY: I'm going to ask you out when this is over.

LUCY: And I'm going to say yes.

(They then proceeded to kiss passionately. A helpful contribution, it was not. Glaring at them from her perch upon the lamppost, Amy was far from impressed.)

AMY: Really??? That's how you're going to help your friend, Harry?

(Much to her annoyance, Harry was way too involved with Lucy to even hear her.)

AMY: I'll do it myself then, shall I?

(With that, she leapt from the lamppost, onto the rump of a goat, then raced across their backs, leaping majestically across two at a time. Having made it to the other side of the road, she then leapt onto the wall that Gerald was clinging onto.)

AMY: Right!!!

(Eager to save her stricken colleague, she then spun around, just into time to see the last of the herd rush past her.)

AMY: Oh...

(She then jumped down and slowly stepped towards where Eddie was laying on the ground, curled up in a ball.)

AMY: So... that looked... ouch.

(Still clinging to the wall, Gerald grimaced.)

GERALD: Is he okay? I daren't look.

AMY: Well.... I'm willing to say he's been better.

GERALD: Meaning?

AMY: Just drop down, you soft sod.

GERALD: Right...

(He then let go off the wall and plopped down to the ground. Upon sighting Eddie, groaning in agony upon the cobbles, he sucked his teeth.)

GERALD: Crikey. I really am sorry about that, old chap. Rotten luck, I'm afraid.

(At this point, Eddie finally managed to move slightly. Just enough to glance up at Amy then speak in a weary, broken voice.)

EDDIE: Amy?

AMY: Yes?

EDDIE: This karma thing you mentioned... is it likely to stick around for a while? Only I might as well just jump off a cliff is this is what my life's gonna be like.

(Amy sighed then knelt on one knee, close to his head.)

AMY: It seems to have gone beyond mere karma now, Eddie. Clearly someone up there really doesn't like you.

EDDIE: Yeah?

(He spat out a tooth then coughed.)

EDDIE: Oh, I dunno. Life's not all bad. I've got an excellent view up your dress from here.

AMY: I know.

(She smiled.)

AMY: I figured you could use something to smile about right now, so I positioned myself accordingly.

(Eddie forced a smile.)

EDDIE: You're a good friend, Amy; I'm sorry I nearly got you shot for spying.

AMY: Forget it, Ed. Water under the bridge.

(Her brow then furrowed over.)

AMY: Besides, I figured you could use a friend after your so-called *mate* over there decided to leave you for dead and make out with Lucy rather than helping you.

GERALD: Quite. Bloody poor form, that. Terrible.

(Eddie sat up slightly.)

EDDIE: Yeah? So was knocking me off the wall so you could steal my safe spot.

GERALD: That was an accident!

EDDIE: Posh twat.

(He snarled.)

EDDIE: Don't go anywhere, you. As soon as I regain my bearings, I'm gonna get up and beat you into the middle of next month.

GERALD: Shit.

AMY: And I'll slap Lucy for distracting Harry with her feminine wiles when she should have been egging him on to help you.

GERALD: Not that he could.

AMY: He didn't try!

(She rolled her eyes.)

AMY: They haven't even bothered to see if you're okay!

(Sure enough, Harry and Lucy were still embroiled in their romantic clinch.)

EDDIE: Hopefully karma will see that and come for *him* next, because I've had my fill, thank you.

(Just then, a farmer came racing up to them from the country lane.)

FARMER: Sorry about that! My goats got away from me. Is anyone hurt?

EDDIE: Yes!

FARMER: Bugger.

(He then shrugged.)

FARMER: Fuck it. You can't *prove* they were *my* goats.

(He then raced away again in pursuit of his herd.)

AMY: Eddie?

EDDIE: Yeah?

AMY: That blokes a cunt.

EDDIE: Yes. Yes, he is.

(With that, he staggered to his feet and rubbed his eyes.)

AMY: Careful.

EDDIE: It's fine. Don't worry about me.

(He nodded sternly.)

EDDIE: Right, Gerald, it's time for that sound thrashing I promised you.

(Gerald stepped back and whimpered.)

GERALD: But it was an accident, Eddie!

EDDIE: I don't care; now stand still and stop swaying, so I can pummel you.

GERALD: Swaying?

AMY: He's not swaying.

EDDIE: Yes, he is, he's wobbling all over the place.

AMY: Oh, boy. I think you've got double vision, Eddie.

EDDIE: No, I haven't. He's just wobbling about. And so are you, come to think of it.

(He flinched.)

EDDIE: And why is Harry kissing that wobbly girl?

AMY: I think you need to sit down again.

(Eddie gulped.)

EDDIE: I think you might be right. It looks like the academy has *two* clock towers right now.

GERALD: No, it doesn't.

AMY: It just has...

(She then froze in time before slowly glancing upwards.)

AMY: Academy clock tower?

EDDIE: Over there, look.

(Much to Amy and Gerald's astonishment, sure enough, the academy clock tower was now in sight. Situated further down the road and slightly to the right of their location, it made quite the glorious sight.)

GERALD: I can't put into words how happy I am to see that!

(Amy smirked.)

AMY: How do you think Eddie feels? *He* can see it twice.

EDDIE: Meaning I'm twice as happy?

AMY: Sure. Why not?

(She grimaced.)

AMY: Concussion?

GERALD: No doubt about it.

AMY: Bugger.

(She looked to Eddie.)

AMY: Are you fit to continue?

EDDIE: Wait. I need to batter the posh bloke first.

AMY: You're in no fit state to do that, right now, Eddie.

EDDIE: I'm not?

AMY: No.

EDDIE: Shit. I'll batter him when we get back then.

AMY: Good idea.

GERALD: Great...

(Eddie took another deep breath then rubbed his eyes again.)

EDDIE: Wait. That's better. You're not wobbling anymore.



GERALD: Uh-oh.

EDDIE: Oh, relax. Your beating can wait. We've got a mission to get on with.

(He then strutted off down the road.)

EDDIE: Are you coming, Harry?

(Amy giggled.)

AMY: Doubtful; they're only kissing at the moment.

(Eddie glanced back and smiled at her warmly.)

EDDIE: I love your giggle, Amy; it's really cute.

AMY: Right...

(She sighed.)

AMY: Yup; definitely concussion.

GERALD: No doubt about it.

(As the two of them headed off after Eddie, Amy took a quick detour and cuffed Lucy around the head.)

AMY: Boys can wait, sappy tits; we're leaving.

LUCY: What?

AMY: Come on!!!

(Harry looked most perplexed.)

HARRY: Leaving?

(He then felt his lip before lowering his hand and glancing at his palm.)

HARRY: Blood? You bit me.

LUCY: Sorry. Amy clouted me.

HARRY: Really? Want me to deck her for you?

LUCY: No! Of course not.

(She rolled her eyes then took his hand.)

LUCY: Come on, let's catch them up.

(They then charged off after Amy, Gerald and Eddie.)

AMY: Not far now.

EDDIE: Thank fuck. I can't *wait* to get back there; I'm done for.

GERALD: Right... well... I *was* looking forward to getting back, but if all I'm gonna get is a beating, I might as well take my time.

AMY: Chill, posh bloke, he has concussion; there's a fair chance he'll forget.

EDDIE: No, there isn't!

AMY: Right...

(She then looked to Gerald and mouthed "he will". Hoping she was right, Gerald offered her a grateful smile. Just then, Harry and Lucy arrived among them.)

HARRY: What's going on? Eddie's limping a bit.

AMY: Such an attentive friend.

(She furrowed her brow.)

AMY: He got trampled by goats. You saw it, remember? Then opted to make out rather than helping him.

HARRY: I did?

(He wracked his brains then gasped.)

HARRY: Fuck! I did!!! Sorry, mate!

EDDIE: Fuck off with that shit; I'm fine, Harry.

HARRY: But still...

EDDIE: I'm fine; seriously. Forget about it. I'm just glad you've finally found someone.

HARRY: Well... thanks. Are you sure you're okay though?

EDDIE: Yes. Better than okay, actually; we're almost back at the academy.

LUCY: Are we?

AMY: Yes! And you'd have known that if you'd been paying attention rather than trying to brush Harry's teeth with your tongue.

LUCY: Right...

(She looked to Eddie.)

LUCY: Sorry, I distracted your friend, Eddie. Are you alright?

EDDIE: Yes! I'm perfectly fine. I wish people would stop asking me that! I'm fighting fit.

(He nodded sternly.)

EDDIE: In fact, I'll show you.

(He then started to jog.)

EDDIE: See?

(Moments later, however, he veered sideways and staggered into a bush, falling flat on his face in the process.)

HARRY: Right... well I'm convinced.

LUCY: Right?

AMY: Yup. Sold!

GERALD: Hmm... maybe we should take five or something. You know, so he can recover.

AMY: Agreed.

(They then assembled around the bush and looked to where Eddie was sitting there, wearing a glum expression.)

EDDIE: Guys... do you mind if we...

AMY: We've already decided to.

EDDIE: Cool.

(He then flopped onto his back.)

---

While allowing Eddie the time he needed to recuperate, Amy, Lucy, Harry and Gerald sat by the side of the road and conversed. Amy had a million questions for Harry and Lucy about their fledgling relationship and Gerald had a million questions about how serious Eddie was about pummelling him later. They definitely weren't lacking for topics. As such, the five minutes they'd decided upon very soon became twenty. And the break may even have lasted longer, had Eddie not sat up and interrupted them. Feeling slightly better, he climbed to his feet then stepped behind them and spoke up.

EDDIE: You ready to move, guys?

(Amy glanced up at him.)

AMY: Are *you*?

HARRY: Yeah, that's the real question here, mate.

EDDIE: Right. Well, yes; I am.

(He glanced down the road.)

EDDIE: I just want to get this over with.

LUCY: We all do.

EDDIE: Then are you okay to run?

AMY: Again; are *you*?

EDDIE: I am.

GERALD: Let's do that then.

(He nodded.)

GERALD: I'm glad you're feeling better.

EDDIE: Thanks. You're still getting a pummelling though.

GERALD: Shit.

(Harry climbed to his feet.)

HARRY: Ready when you are.

(The others then climbed to their feet as well.)

EDDIE: Let's go then.

(With that, he raced off down the road. Without even the merest of pauses, the others followed suit.)

AMY: Just remember, if you feel woozy, we can stop.

EDDIE: Gotcha. Thanks.

AMY: Just thinking of the team.

(She winced.)

AMY: I actually thought you might be dead for a moment. That was a lot of hooves to get trampled on by.

EDDIE: I know, right?

(He beamed arrogantly.)

EDDIE: Good thing I'm a man of steal, really.

(Amy rolled her eyes.)

AMY: Yes... you're very manly.

LUCY: Just like Harry.

HARRY: He wishes. He's half the man, I am.

EDDIE: Mate...

HARRY: Just saying what Amy and Lucy were thinking, mate.

EDDIE: You...

AMY: *I* wasn't thinking that.

LUCY: I was!

EDDIE: You're biased.

(He rolled his eyes.)

EDDIE: Doubting my manliness; behave.

LUCY: I wasn't. If I was going to doubt *anybody's* manliness, it'd be Ger...

(She then fell silent and hung her head. Miffed by the ensuing giggling, Gerald raised a displeased eyebrow.)

GERALD: Did I hear that right?

HARRY: Lucy thinks you're a poof.

LUCY: No, I don't!

GERALD: Good! Don't.

LUCY: I didn't! I was just gonna comment on how comfortable you seemed in ladies clothing earlier; that's all.

GERALD: Comfortable???

LUCY: Um...

AMY: She means in comparison to Eddie and Harry.

GERALD: You...

AMY: The *real* men.

GERALD: Do you mind???

AMY: Chill! I'm joking.

LUCY: And I didn't mean that at all. It's just that you like crossing your legs and you're sort of...

(She winced.)

LUCY: Why don't I just shut up before I say something *too* dumb?

GERALD: Thank you, I'd appreciate that.

EDDIE: I wouldn't. I want to know what she was gonna say.

HARRY: Same here. He likes crossing his legs and he's sort of *what*?

LUCY: Nothing!

AMY: Effeminate.

GERALD: Effeminate???

AMY: Yeah. Typical posh bloke, really. About as rugged and manly as a fluffy, pink towel.

GERALD: I'm nothing like a fluffy, pink towel. Just because I don't conduct myself like a chest-beating caveman, doesn't make me any less of a man, thank you.

LUCY: Well...

AMY: He's kidding himself there.

GERALD: Excuse me? No, I'm bloody not. I'm just as manly as the next man...

AMY: Unless the next man is actually manly.

GERALD: Shut up, you. As I was saying, I'm as manly as the next man; *every* other man!

AMY: But mostly the gay ones.

GERALD: Gay???

(He shook his fist at her.)

GERALD: There's nothing gay about me! The fact I chose to trade-in eating bananas and swinging through the trees for learning to read and conducting myself with dignity and decorum, doesn't detract from my manliness one bit.

AMY: Because you had none to detract from in the first place.

GERALD: Amy...

(Amy and Lucy shared a cheeky giggle.)

AMY: He's so easy to bait.

LUCY: Right?

GERALD: I see. Picking on the posh bloke, were you?

AMY: Pretty much. No offence.

LUCY: She's only playing.

GERALD: I see. Fair enough.

(He ruffled his neck.)

GERALD: Though in future I'd be grateful if you did your playing in the middle of a busy motorway, thank you.

AMY: Ouch.

LUCY: He's mean.

AMY: He is.

LUCY: Posh people are like that.

AMY: Because they look down on us.

LUCY: They do.

AMY: Delusions of grandeur, you see? They think they're better than us.

LUCY: Sad but true. We're just unwashed peasants to him.

AMY: Terrible.

LUCY: Mortifying.

(They then proceeded to giggle again, forcing a grin onto Gerald's lips.)

GERALD: You two are truly terrible people.

EDDIE: Nah, they're alright.

(He grimaced.)

EDDIE: Their giggling's really annoying though.

AMY: Ooh. Looks like he's on the mend.

HARRY: Welcome back, Eddie.

EDDIE: Right...

(He shrugged.)

EDDIE: So, anyway...

(At this point, they all became acutely aware of gunfire from nearby. At once, they came to a crashing halt then glanced to one another urgently.)

EDDIE: Is that...

HARRY: Coming from the academy?

EDDIE: Don't finish my sentences, mate; that makes us appear gayer than posh bloke over there.

GERALD: Do you mind?

AMY: Shut up, Gerald, this is important.

GERALD: So is my reputation as a man.

LUCY: In that case, I have bad news...

GERALD: You...

EDDIE: Shut it! Look, if that shooting is coming from the academy, we're screwed.

We're not getting in there with enemy soldier's shooting at the front gate.

LUCY: Because we're not going to be dumb enough to try.

EDDIE: Exactly.

HARRY: So we'll need to find another way in.

AMY: Yes, but mostly we need to find the academy first.

EDDIE: We did! It's at the end of this road. The clock tower makes it stand out somewhat.

AMY: I know that, you gibbon. I'm not saying we don't know where the academy *is*.

I'm saying we don't know where the *shooting* is in relation to *it*.

HARRY: Meaning we need to get to this corner, take a sneaky glance towards the academy then work out what to do from there.

LUCY: Agreed.

(She nodded.)

LUCY: Good luck.

HARRY: What?

LUCY: I'll wait here.

EDDIE: We're all going.

LUCY: Nope. Guns.

HARRY: Babe, you won't be in any danger. We're just gonna run to this corner then Eddie's gonna peer around it, okay?

EDDIE: What??? Me???

HARRY: Yeah. Is that a problem?

GERALD: With the luck he's been having? I'd say so. He's bound to get shot in the face.

AMY: Nobody's getting shot in the face!

(She giggled.)

AMY: Except Lucy, if she plays her cards right.

(She then gave Lucy a knowing wink before quickly realising her joke had very much gone the way of a lead balloon.)

AMY: Right...

HARRY: Anyway, if Amy's done telling infantile jokes...

AMY: Never!

HARRY: I said if Amy's done...

AMY: Oh, fine.

HARRY: Thank you.

(He nodded.)

HARRY: Off you go then, Eddie.

EDDIE: Mate!

(He gave an exasperated sigh then threw his hands up in defeat.)

EDDIE: Fine. I'll go.

(With that, he raced away to the corner of the road. Once there, he thrust his back against the wall then glanced to where his comrades were jogging up behind him.)

EDDIE: Thanks for joining me.

(Fearful of what might be around the corner, Lucy whimpered.)

LUCY: I wish I could say it was a pleasure.

AMY: If it's pleasure you want, Harry's...

HARRY: Stop that, Amy.

AMY: I...

HARRY: It wasn't gonna be any better or less obvious than the last one, so don't bother.

AMY: Whatever.

(She looked to Harry.)

AMY: Your boyfriend's a dick.

LUCY: At least I've got one.

(Amy gasped and clutched a hand to her chest.)

AMY: Mean!

(She then started to giggle.)

AMY: This is why we're friends.

LUCY: Right? And because we spent several weeks chained together in a basement.

AMY: That too.

EDDIE: Well that's great. You two have a nice chat. In fact, let's all wait here until you've finished your menstruation anonymous meeting, shall we? We can get on with the mission later.

HARRY: Mate, they're not stopping you from peering around the corner.

EDDIE: No, but once I've done it, I'd like to report what I've seen without having to listen to these two comparing knickers and sharing tales of their favourite flowers first.

LUCY: Comparing knickers? Don't be ridiculous.

AMY: Yeah! We did that yesterday!

LUCY: Yeah.

(She flinched.)

LUCY: What?

AMY: Don't worry about it.

(She rolled her eyes.)

AMY: Go on then, Eddie.

EDDIE: Right. Thank you.

(He then turned to face the corner.)

EDDIE: I can't believe I'm doing this.

(With that, he peered out from around the corner then quickly withdrew his head again.)

EDDIE: Shit.

HARRY: Mate, what was that? You looked for about a second.

(Eddie grimaced.)

EDDIE: Which was more than enough.

(Set on edge by Eddie's obvious discomfort, silence rapidly ensued.)

EDDIE: It wasn't pretty.

AMY: What wasn't?

EDDIE: There's a dozen of our blokes behind blocks and pillars firing back at...

(He grimaced.)

EDDIE: I didn't see how many soldier's the other lot have got, but put it this way, there was a lot more bullets firing *into* than academy than firing out.

HARRY: So the place is under siege?

LUCY: But at least our lot are firing back, right? That means they must have got the armoury door open.

EDDIE: Actually, Lucy, I've got that feeling that if that was the case, there'd be more than a dozen of our lot.

AMY: I hate to say it, but I reckon you're right.

EDDIE: Those dozen or so guns must have been out already.

HARRY: Agreed.

AMY: They really need that key.

HARRY: Shit.

(He sighed.)

HARRY: We're going to have find a way to get there in somehow, aren't we?

(Gerald frowned sarcastically.)

GERALD: Yes... what a great idea. Let's break into a compound that our enemy are currently shooting at. What could possibly go wrong?

EDDIE: Then what do *you* suggest we do?

GERALD: I suggest we *refrain* for breaking into somewhere that's currently being besieged by bullets. Call me old fashioned, but I've always considered it the done thing to run *away* from an erupting volcano rather than attempting to bathe in it.

EDDIE: Mate, they're being shot at. The least we can do is get inside and open the armoury door, so they can have some guns to fire back with.

GERALD: They already have some.

HARRY: Not enough!

(He rolled his eyes.)

HARRY: We have to get it there.

EDDIE: Agreed.

GERALD: And put *ourselves* in harm's way? For what? We all hate this academy!

HARRY: Not to the point where we'd sit back and laugh while everyone gets shot by an invading army.

GERALD: I never said we should sit back and laugh. I just feel it'd be wise to... I dunno... go somewhere that *isn't* being shot at.

LUCY: And that, Gerald, is why I questioned your manliness.

AMY: Yup. Even *I* think we should break in.

GERALD: You would.

(He sneered then mumbled under his breath.)

GERALD: Fucking tomboy.

AMY: Excuse me???

LUCY: She's not a tomboy. Far from it. She's wearing more make up than I am.

AMY: My hair's nicer too.

LUCY: Fuck off, you.

AMY: Ouch.

LUCY: The point is, Gerald... um... you suck.

GERALD: Right...

LUCY: What I'm saying is, us four are willing to go. And Amy and I are girls. So just how unmanly do you want to be?

AMY: You big poof.

GERALD: Poof???

(Gerald gaped at her in horror for a moment then hung his head.)

GERALD: I didn't say I *wouldn't* go. I just think it's a fucking stupid thing to do.

EDDIE: Sneaking into a compound in order to help our nation defend itself isn't a stupid thing to do?

GERALD: It is when that compound is being shot to shit by the enemy.

(He sighed.)

GERALD: But, fine... let's do it anyway.

HARRY: Agreed.

GERALD: I mean, it's not like I was enjoying life anyway. If anything, our inevitable deaths from this foolish undertaking will be a blessing.

EDDIE: Stop whining.

(He turned slightly so he could see them all.)

EDDIE: So how are we gonna do this?

HARRY: In style.

EDDIE: Oh? You have an idea?

HARRY: No, I was just acting supremely confident in a bid to impress Lucy.

LUCY: Sadly, Lucy wasn't fooled.

HARRY: Fuck.



EDDIE: Well, that's great an' all, but I asked a serious question. How are we gonna do this?

AMY: Well.

EDDIE: Seriously? You too?

AMY: Let me finish!

(She rolled her eyes.)

AMY: As I was saying... well...

(She glanced to Eddie briefly then continued.)

AMY: Seeing as we need to break into a compound that was strategically designed to *stop* people from breaking in, I reckon we need a plan.

(Four unimpressed glances came her way.)

HARRY: That's your plan is it?

EDDIE: Your plan is to make a plan?

AMY: Yes! Why? Am I wrong?

(Lucy sighed.)

LUCY: Oh, Amy... it's a good thing you're gorgeous.

AMY: Hey!

(She ruffled her neck.)

AMY: *You* come up with something then, smart arse.

LUCY: Me?

AMY: Yes; you.

(She then raised an eyebrow at her demandingly.)

AMY: Well?

LUCY: Right...

(She shrugged.)

LUCY: Well, seeing as the first obstacle between us and the academy is the possibility of being seen by the enemy, I reckon we should sneak down the road then go in the woods *behind* the academy. Then we'll need to scale the twelve foot tall wall. So, I suggest a human pyramid. Eddie and Harry at the bottom as they're the biggest and strongest, then the next two strongest, Amy and...

GERALD: You'd better say Gerald!

LUCY: Gerald, on top of them.

GERALD: Thank you.

LUCY: Then I can scale the lot of you and climb onto the wall. Once I'm up there, I can figure out a way to get you guys over too. What do you think?

(Amy was livid.)

AMY: What do I think??? You were supposed to say something dumb!

LUCY: Sorry.

HARRY: Instead, you shined like a diamond.

GERALD: Kiss arse.

EDDIE: Nice thinking, Lucy.

(He nodded.)

EDDIE: Okay, let's do this. Stick to the wall and sidle away from the where the shooting is. The stealthier we are, the less likely they are to see us.

HARRY: Or we could just walk. You know, rather than acting suspiciously and drawing attention to ourselves.

EDDIE: Right...

(He glowered at him then sneered at Lucy.)

EDDIE: You two smart arses were made for each other.

LUCY: Like we're going to apologise for being intelligent.

HARRY: You tell him, babe.

LUCY: I just did.

HARRY: And it was awesome.

LUCY: Come on, you.

(She then took his hand and the two of them strutted onto the path and headed away from the shooting at the main academy entrance. They looked just like any other young couple, thus arousing no suspicion whatsoever. Approving of their approach, Amy, Eddie and Gerald shared a nod then casually strutted after them. Their attempts to look innocent, however, were somewhat hampered by the fact that the three of them thought it'd be a good idea to whistle innocently as they did so. Mercifully, nobody heard them over the sound of the gunfire. As a result, just a minute later, they were able to make their way into the woodland behind the academy, and out of sight of any soldiers. Delighted with the outcome, they all stepped up to the wall then gave one another affirming nods.)

EDDIE: Perfect. Nobody suspected a thing.

LUCY: It was your innocent whistling that did it.

HARRY: Right? Very stealthy.

(They shared a roll of the eyes then Harry looked to Eddie.)

HARRY: Okay, mate; let's get this shit done.

EDDIE: Agreed.

(He then stood there looking uncertain.)

HARRY: We're the base of the pyramid, mate; we need to stand closer to the wall.

EDDIE: Oh, right. Gotcha.

(Harry and Eddie then stepped up to the wall and turned to face them.)

EDDIE: Up you go.

GERALD: Wait! Shouldn't you two be facing the wall?

EDDIE: No.

GERALD: Oh...

HARRY: Why would we *face* the wall? We need to use our hands to help you lot get up.

GERALD: Right...

(Harry shook his head then glanced to Eddie.)

HARRY: He's in the strategy department.

EDDIE: Astonishing, isn't it?

HARRY: We're not winning this war, are we?

GERALD: Oh, grow up.

(He nodded.)

GERALD: So who am I climbing?

EDDIE: Him!

HARRY: Him!

GERALD: Just decide, will you?

AMY: You can climb Harry, Gerald. I should climb Eddie.

GERALD: Fair enough.

AMY: Sorry, but at some point, whoever I climb is gonna get a glimpse up my dress, and I reckon Lucy would be much happier if it wasn't her boyfriend staring at my knickers.

LUCY: Plus, if you were to climb Eddie, Gerald, he might be tempted to drop you on purpose. You know, after what happened with the goats.

GERALD: Fine. It makes no difference to me; I just wanted to know who I'm supposed to climb.

AMY: And now you know.

(With that, she ran at Eddie, leapt onto his midriff and clung on with her thighs. With the minimum of fuss, she then allowed him to lift her by her backside, until she could get her knee on his shoulder. She then stood up and leant against the wall.)

AMY: Piece of piss.

GERALD: Nice.

(He nodded.)

GERALD: Here we go then.

(With that, he charged at Harry then leapt at his midriff. In a display of world class buffoonery, he then bounced off him and landed flat on his back.)

GERALD: Shit. That clamping his waist with your thighs thing is trickier than it looks. (Holding cupped hands in front of himself, Harry gave him an unimpressed glance.)

HARRY: And that's why I'm standing like this, in order to give you a boost with my hands, mate.

GERALD: Oh. Right. Bugger. Didn't see that.

(He then sheepishly allowed Harry to boost him upwards.)

HARRY: And for future reference, Gerald, blokes don't *let* other blokes climb up them the way Amy did. I thought that'd be a given.

GERALD: I'm new to this!

(A few moments later, once he'd struggled into place, Lucy bit her lip then looked to Harry.)

LUCY: You boost me, then I'll scale Gerald.

HARRY: Gotcha.

LUCY: Gerald, lean on Amy for support!

GERALD: Right.

LUCY: Eddie?

(There was no reply.)

LUCY: Eddie, can you stop staring up Amy's dress and pay attention.

EDDIE: I can do both.

AMY: Enjoy it while you can, Eddie; drink it in. I'm gonna wallop you when this over.

EDDIE: Why? It's a compliment! You have an awesome arse and that thongs fits you well.

AMY: Both true, but still; make sure I can take the weight if Gerald leans on me.

EDDIE: I've got you, don't worry.

AMY: Cool. Go, Lucy.

LUCY: Right...

(She nodded.)

LUCY: All those years doing gymnastics, don't fail me now.

(She then raced up to Harry and instantly received a powerful boost that saw her grabbing onto Gerald's shoulders in an instant.)

GERALD: Heavy!!!

LUCY: Stand strong!!!

(Fearing that Gerald might buckle, Amy helped him share the weight and Eddie grabbed Amy's legs to further support her.)

LUCY: Got me?

GERALD: For now.

LUCY: Okay. Hold still!

(With that, she clambered up him then pulled herself onto the top of the wall.)

LUCY: I'm up!

(Harry clenched a triumphant fist.)

HARRY: Yes!!!

(He exhaled.)

HARRY: She used to do gymnastics, I didn't know that; the sex is gonna be amazing.

EDDIE: Mate...

HARRY: Right. Yeah... the mission.

(He then called up to Lucy.)

HARRY: Is there anything you can use to help *us* get over?

LUCY: I'm looking...

(Her face then lit up.)

LUCY: There's a ladder! Perfect.

(She beamed.)

LUCY: I'll jump down and get it.

(With that, she leapt the twelve feet down to the other side, landed in a roll then jumped again.)

LUCY: God, I'm good at that.

(She then hurried over to the ladder and dragged it back to the wall. Having done so, however, she then hit upon a snag.)

LUCY: Fuck. How do I get it over there?

(Having pondered her dilemma for all of two seconds, she then shrugged.)

LUCY: Meh, it's worth a go.

(With that, she stood the ladder up, grabbed the bottom rung then proceeded to lift it above her head. With a girly shriek she then pushed it upwards as hard as she could.

Having done so, she then sprinted away in a whimpering panic.)

LUCY: Piss off; don't fall on me!

(As she turned around again, however, she was both shocked and delighted to see the ladder was nowhere in sight.)

LUCY: I did it! I did! I only went and did it.

(She then proceeded to bounce on the spot and clap her hands in front of her face in the girliest manner possible.)

LUCY: Yay!

(Overjoyed at her unexpected success, she then folded her arms proudly and stared atop the wall, waiting for her first academy-mate to scale the ladder and join her. Much to her discomfort, however, for a good minute or so there was no sign of them.)

LUCY: Um... hello?

(She whimpered.)

LUCY: Maybe they got captured. Oh, no... Harry...

(Just as she feared the worst, however, the ladder slammed into the top of the wall and she could hear footsteps scaling it from the other side.)

LUCY: Phew.

(Moments later, Amy poked her head over the wall.)

AMY: We'll be with you in a sec, babes. Don't go anywhere, okay?

LUCY: Wait! What's the hold up?

AMY: We're trying to revive Eddie.

LUCY: What???

AMY: Yeah... you should have shouted before you threw the ladder over really. It landed on his head.

(She glanced down at her side.)

AMY: He's out cold. Oh, wait... movement.

(She nodded then winked at Lucy.)

AMY: I'll be back in a minute.

(As Amy vanished out of sight, Lucy bit her lip then sighed.)

LUCY: Karma really is having a field day with that guy.

(She then glanced up, just in time to see Amy reappear.)

AMY: Come to think of it, there's no point in my going back down again, is there?

LUCY: Not really, no.

AMY: I'll come and join you then.

(With that, she scaled the top of the ladder, scrambled onto the wall then allowed her legs to dangle.)

AMY: How far is it?

LUCY: Not far.

AMY: That's a unit of measurement now, is it?

LUCY: No... I mean, it's about a metre.

AMY: Oh, is that all?

(Amy then let go of the wall.)

LUCY: Yeah, just a metre or two.

AMY: Two???

(She then thudded to the ground before tumbling backwards and landing in a heap.)

LUCY: Eek! Are you okay, babes?

(Amy glanced up at her, wearing miffed expression.)

AMY: Seriously? A metre you said!

LUCY: You didn't let me finish. I said a metre or *two*.

AMY: Yeah, well...

(She shook her head.)

AMY: A metre or two? How can you not know the difference? Two metres, obviously, is twice as long as a metre!!! It's a very easy distinction to make.

LUCY: I'm bad at judging distance, okay?

(She twiddled her fingertips around one another.)

LUCY: I mean, I said a metre, but I wasn't sure, so I clarified with a metre or two. It wasn't my fault you'd already let go.

AMY: Yes it was. I only let go because *you* said it was a metre! I'd have stayed up there otherwise.

(Lucy gave her a condescending glance.)

LUCY: Stayed up there?

AMY: Yes!

LUCY: Like, all night? Dangling by your fingertips?

AMY: If I had to! Two metres, Lucy!

(She pouted.)

AMY: Now my elbows hurt.

LUCY: You landed on your arse!

AMY: And grazed my elbow!

(She then struggled to her feet.)

AMY: Be more precise next time.

LUCY: Fine. Sorry, I misled you.

AMY: It's fine.

LUCY: No, it's not. I ruined your plans to dangle there by your fingertips for the evening. I feel awful now.

(Amy shot her a cold glance for a moment then the two of them proceeded to giggle together.)

AMY: You're terrible.

LUCY: So is your acting. Hurt your elbow indeed.

(Amy lifted her arms and showed Lucy her badly scuffed and grazed elbow.)

AMY: Ahem.

LUCY: Oh, shit. I feel awful now.

(She then stepped close to hug her, only to have to jump back as Gerald tumbled from the wall and rolled in between them.)

LUCY: Careful, you idiot!

AMY: Right?

(She shook her head.)

AMY: No manners, these posh blokes.

(They then shared a warm hug. Watching them do so from where he'd landed with something of a thud, Gerald furrowed his brow.)

GERALD: Oh, I'm sorry. Did my terrifying plummet from the top of a giant wall, ruin your hug moment? I do apologise. What a thoughtless cunt I am. I tell you what, I'll just go and drown myself in the nearest river, shall I?

LUCY: Yes, please.

AMY: If you would.

GERALD: Right...

(He snarled.)

GERALD: I hate girls, I really do.

LUCY: See? Told you he was gay.

(As the two of them giggled together, Gerald slowly climbed to his feet, shaking a disdainful head.)

GERALD: I'm starting to see Eddie's point now. Your giggling is fucking annoying.

(Just then, Harry appeared atop the wall. With a snarl, he threw one of his legs over the other side to straddle it then looked back down at the ladder.)

HARRY: Are you sure you want to do this?

(He listened to Eddie's reply then grimaced.)

HARRY: Okay... well... take your time.

(He looked to Lucy.)

HARRY: He's seriously not well right now, but he insists on seeing this thing through to the end.

LUCY: Really? Is it that bad?

HARRY: A metal ladder bounced off his head, babe; of course it's that bad.

(He then glanced over the wall once more.)

HARRY: You're doing well, Eddie. Just a little further and... down he slides.

(He sighed.)

HARRY: Shit.

(He then nodded sternly.)

HARRY: Mate, let's face it, your day is done. We'll go on and hand over the key then send a paramedic out for you, yeah?

(He flinched.)

HARRY: Uh-oh, he's having another go. Mate, that's too fast!!!

(His jaw then dropped as Eddie sprinted up the ladder before flopping onto the top of the wall.)

EDDIE: Done!!!

(He then lay there gasping for breath.)

HARRY: Mate, this is madness; you've got to get down again now and you're in no fit state to jump.

EDDIE: Fuck off, you. I'm finishing this even if it kills me!

HARRY: Which it seriously might.

EDDIE: No it won't!

AMY: He's right; it won't! There's no need to jump at all. Just pull the ladder over this side, Harry!

HARRY: What?

(He then looked enlightened.)

HARRY: Oh, yeah. Good point.

(To nobody's surprise, Amy and Lucy then giggled together.)

AMY: Boys are dim!

LUCY: Right?

HARRY: Less of that!

(He then flexed his neck muscles before pulling at the ladder and yanking it back over the wall. Moments later, once he had it set in position, he then nodded at Eddie.)

HARRY: After you, mate.

EDDIE: What?

HARRY: Go down the ladder.

EDDIE: Oh. Right.

(He then reached out for the ladder, missed it and fell off the wall. At once, the others winced then turned away as he splatted into the ground.)

HARRY: Mate!

AMY: Eddie!

LUCY: Oh, my god!

GERALD: Not good! Not good.

(He whimpered then turned to look at Eddie's motionless body.)

GERALD: I think it's safe to assume he's dead, right?

AMY: Don't say that!

HARRY: Yeah! Not cool, Gerald!

(He cringed.)

HARRY: Though probably not inaccurate either!

LUCY: You mean he *is* dead?

(Just then, a furious looking Eddie jumped to his feet.)

EDDIE: Am I fuck!!! I said I'd see this thing to the end and I fucking well meant it.

(He then staggered away towards a tall fence, topped with barbed wire that constituted the final hurdle.)

EDDIE: Bring it on, fence!!!

(Cringing, Harry leapt down from the wall then joined the others in rushing after him.)

AMY: Eddie, come on, you should rest.

EDDIE: No! This fence is our last obstacle, right?

LUCY: Well, yeah, but...

EDDIE: Then I'll rest once I've conquered it. Now stop pestering me!!!

(His academy mates could only cringe with discomfort at this point. Eddie's fly-away hair and oddly deranged eyes bore all the hallmarks of a lunatic. It didn't take a genius to figure out that a mix of frustration at his bad luck and the resulting concussion had sent him over the edge.)

EDDIE: Just try and stop me, fence face!!!

(With that, he charged at the fence then leapt at it in a bid to scale it. Lacking the strength to gain any upward momentum, however, he ended up merely clinging to it and growling.)

AMY: Eddie, you don't have to...

EDDIE: I'm doing it, woman!!! Now be quiet!

HARRY: Mate!

EDDIE: Shut up! Stop distracting me; I'm doing this whether you like it or not.

GERALD: But there's no need...

EDDIE: There is! I'm a man! With pride; that's the need! I can't quit now!

LUCY: But, Eddie...

EDDIE: Shut it! I'm not listening!

(As he continued to cling there like a needy koala bear, his four academy mates all glanced to one another uneasily.)

HARRY: There's no reasoning with him.

AMY: Yeah...

(She nodded.)

AMY: Then I'll get his attention the old-fashioned way.

LUCY: You mean...

AMY: Yes!

(She nodded.)

AMY: I don't normally go to such extremes unless I'm very drunk, but if I don't do something he could get seriously hurt.

HARRY: He already is.

LUCY: Don't be a pedant!

HARRY: Right...

AMY: Anyway, I'm going in.



(With that, she lifted her dress to reveal her bra then headed towards the stretch of fence to the right of where Eddie was clinging.)

AMY: Hey, Eddie, look at my boobs!

(At once, Eddie stopped snarling at glanced to his side.)

EDDIE: Oh...

(He then watched on, almost hypnotised as she climbed through a hole in the fence then stepped in front of him.)

AMY: There's a hole in the fence.

EDDIE: Boobs.

AMY: Right...

(She then pulled her dress back over herself. No sooner had she done so, Eddie then fell off the fence. Mercifully, Harry was there to steady him.)

HARRY: You alright?

EDDIE: What?

HARRY: You alright?

(Eddie grimaced.)

EDDIE: Yeah... there's a hole in the fence.

LUCY: We know. We tried to tell you that, but...

GERALD: You were too manly, so Amy had to bring you to your senses.

(Eddie mused to himself.)

EDDIE: Too manly, eh? *Sounds* like me.

(He then skulked away and clambered through the hole. The others rapidly followed suit, not knowing whether to snigger at his behaviour or grimace with concern about the state of his health. Once they'd assembled on the other side, Eddie took a deep breath then glanced towards the academy.)

EDDIE: So...

HARRY: Let's head straight to the armoury.

LUCY: Sounds logical.

GERALD: But what if nobody's there? We need to tell someone we've got the key.

AMY: Well, with any luck someone *will* be there.

LUCY: Yup.

(She nodded.)

LUCY: Let's go, guys.

(They then headed away together, keeping a sharp eye on where Eddie was stumbling and swaying his way forth. It was evident to one and all that the sooner he got to rest, the better.)

---

Having crossed a deserted sports field then headed inside the main academy building, the five returning students took a swift right turn then paced towards the armoury corridor. Normally, at a time like this, speed would have been of the essence. Unfortunately, this would have meant leaving Eddie behind. He could barely walk in a straight line; running, therefore, was unthinkable. And he had the key. Amy had suggested giving Harry the key and allowing him to run ahead with it, but Eddie was having none of it. Having been in possession of the key the entire time, he wasn't about to surrender it now.

Nothing was going to stop him getting to the armoury with the key still on his person; thus completing the mission alongside his team. Having suffered greatly along the way, he felt he owed himself that much; to be there at the end. Nobody was going to tell him otherwise.

HARRY: Mate, someone else running ahead doesn't mean you've failed.

EDDIE: Fucking does. Anyone not there when we hand over that key might as well not bother finishing. That's not gonna be me! Not after the day *I've* had. I'm finishing this thing with everyone else.

(He then staggered sideways into the wall before righting himself again and staggering onwards.)

AMY: Seriously, Eddie?

EDDIE: What?

AMY: At least me and Harry prop you up or something.

EDDIE: No! I'm getting there under my own steam.

(He snarled.)

EDDIE: Karma needs to understand something. It can beat me up all it fucking likes; it's not winning this one. I'm getting there alive even if it kills me.

(Lucy grimaced.)

LUCY: That'll be the concussion talking.

EDDIE: I mean it. I'm getting there unaided and under my own steam even if it kills me.

LUCY: Yeah, that makes more sense.

(She then watched Eddie drop to one knee before snarling and struggling to his feet.)

AMY: Fuck sake, Eddie, you're dead on your feet there.

EDDIE: Bollocks. I'm not done yet, Amy; not a chance.

GERALD: Hmm...

(He sucked his teeth.)

GERALD: He could be doing himself no end of damage by insisting on carrying on.

HARRY: Yeah... we should do something really.

GERALD: Indeed.

AMY: Like what?

GERALD: Well, we need to stop him, right?

LUCY: And?

GERALD: Maybe it'd be kindest to simply knock him out.

(Unsurprisingly, Harry, Amy and Lucy were outraged.)

AMY: Are you insane???

LUCY: What kind of a monster are you???

GERALD: What? What did I say?

LUCY: Knock him out???

HARRY: Nice one, Gerald. Just what our concussed colleague needs; another blow to the head.

GERALD: Right... good point.

HARRY: Halfwit.

GERALD: You suggest something then.

HARRY: Well there's not a lot of point now, is there? We're almost there.

EDDIE: So close.

GERALD: Good point.

(Harry looked to where Eddie was staggering forth, wide-eyed and gasping for breath.)

HARRY: Just another twenty metres or so, mate.

EDDIE: Chicken food, Henry. I'll cover them fifty hectares in no time.

(He then swayed into the wall again, before staggering onwards, leaning up against it.)

EDDIE: Why is wall on the skew?

LUCY: Cripes. He's barely even with it.

HARRY: Yeah... he called me Henry.

LUCY: And said chicken food instead of chicken feed.

AMY: And god only knows how the twenty metres became fifty hectares.

EDDIE: Amy?

AMY: Yes?

EDDIE: This wall's an idiot.

AMY: Right...

EDDIE: You're an idiot too. Sexy though. I kinda fancy you.

AMY: Oh. Well...

(Eddie sighed.)

EDDIE: She's alright that Amy. Shame about the gob on it.

AMY: Is that so?

(She nodded then raised her fist.)

AMY: Fuck it; I'm knocking him out.

LUCY: Amy; no!

(Amy slowly lowered her fist again.)

AMY: I wasn't serious, Lucy.

LUCY: No?

AMY: No.

LUCY: No?

AMY: Well... maybe a little.

GERALD: You're such a thug!

AMY: Who?

GERALD: You, Amy!

EDDIE: Yeah... Amy's lovely.

(He then staggered to the opposing wall before propping himself up and saluting a light switch.)

EDDIE: Ma'am.

(He rubbed his eyes then performed a double take.)

EDDIE: Oh, wait... it's a heating knob thing.

LUCY: It's for the lights.

(Eddie scoffed then staggered onwards.)

EDDIE: You can't heat the building with lights, Dave; what are you on?

LUCY: Dave??? Dave??? Now *I* want to knock him out!

HARRY: Just calm down, babe; we're here.

(Sure enough, they were just about to reach the entrance to the room where the armoury was located. Getting Eddie to go in, however, still needed work.)

HARRY: Eddie!

EDDIE: Don't try to stop me again, mate. I'm getting sick of sick. Stick. It!

LUCY: And more delirious by the second.

EDDIE: Bullshit.

HARRY: I wasn't trying to stop you, Eddie; we've arrived. Turn left, mate.

EDDIE: Left?

HARRY: The armoury is on the left.

EDDIE: Gotcha.

(He then turned right and staggered up to the wall.)

EDDIE: They've painted the door.

LUCY: That's a wall!!!

HARRY: You went right, not left!

EDDIE: Well make your mind up.

(He then about turned and strained his eyes to look at the others. Able to make out what looked like eight blurry figures heading through a door opposite, he then staggered after them.)

EDDIE: Where did those other students come from? They'd better not try to take the credit.

(With his vision so blurred he could barely see ten feet in front of him by now, he then attempted to make his way through the door. Alas, seeing four reverberating door frames didn't make it an easy task. As such, he crept forwards slowly with his eyes squinting and a hand out, trying not to get hit by the swaying wood.)

EDDIE: What's with this wobbly door?

(Clueless to the fact that Eddie was struggling to even get into the room, Amy, Lucy, Gerald and Harry had long since gone inside. They hadn't made it far, however, before having to stop and salute. Two regular soldiers were standing at attention by the wall while the headmaster and the academy owner stood before the armoury door, having a blazing argument.)

OWNER: What sort of institution are you running here???

HEADMASTER: What can I tell you, Lord Asquith? Master Cray has a lot to answer for. First he lost his *own* key and now he's lost mine.

OWNER: Why wasn't another one made when the first was lost then?

HEADMASTER: Well... he must have lost them both today.

OWNER: Do you really expect me to believe that???

HEADMASTER: Um...

OWNER: You're a clown! A complete idiot! This isn't just an academy, it's a military installation with an armoury. And armoury we can't get into, despite being in the middle of an invasion, because you lost the fucking key!

HEADMASTER: And I'll tell Master Cray that as soon as I see him!

OWNER: You...

(Just then, a roar went up to their side. At once, they glanced aside, just in time to see, Eddie burst through his friends then stagger towards them with the key in his hand.)

EDDIE: He's your chucking fee!

HEADMASTER: A-ha, it's been found.

EDDIE: Move, bozo!

HEADMASTER: Excuse me???

OWNER: He said move, you cunt. Let him open the door.

HEADMASTER: Right... yes, sir.

(He sneered then stepped back as Eddie paced up to the lock.)

EDDIE: I'll jiffy this open in just a mermaid.

HEADMASTER: What?

LUCY: He's delirious, sir.

AMY: Concussion.

OWNER: Oh, my...

EDDIE: Ha! Got the bugger!

(Having unlocked the door, he then grabbed the handle to the heavy, sliding door and yanked on it with all his might. At once, the door slid sideways and access to the armoury was achieved. Having used all his energy to pull the door open, however, Eddie was now exhausted. Physically *and* mentally. As a result, it never occurred to him to let go of the door and allow it to slide by itself. Instead, he clung onto the handle and made no effort to stop it pulling him across the floor. Seconds later, when the door stopped under its own momentum, he then let go and laid there flat on his back, staring at the ceiling.)

EDDIE: Can I die now?

(His words, however, were lost under the sound of trained soldiers racing into the room to collect their weapons. Having been waiting in the room opposite, as soon as they heard the metal door opening, they'd come running. The academy would now be far better placed to defend itself. Delighted by that fact, the owner looked to Eddie then nodded.)

OWNER: Sterling job, that man. Where did you find it?

HEADMASTER: What do you mean, where did I find it? He applied like everyone else.

OWNER: Silence, cunt chops; I was talking to the person who *didn't* lose the key. Well, lad?

(Unsurprisingly, he didn't get an answer.)

OWNER: Is he ignoring me?

LUCY: It's the concussion, sir.

HARRY: He might well have passed out.

OWNER: I see. Then maybe *you* know. Where did he find the key?

(The headmaster growled at him.)

HEADMASTER: Careful how you answer that, sunshine!

HARRY: Don't worry, headmaster; I'd never drop you in it.

HEADMASTER: Good. Not there's anything to drop me in; I'm not the idiot who lost the key. That was Master Cray.

HARRY: Master Cray was definitely involved, yes.

HEADMASTER: See!

(Harry then looked to the owner.)

HARRY: Master Cray was shot by Farzarian invaders while we were on an exercise across the other side of the city and needed urgent medical treatment, so he handed us the key and asked us to bring it back. And we did, despite the city being under attack we made it.

OWNER: Outstanding!

HARRY: Yes, but what choice did we have? It's the only key; the headmaster lost his months ago.

HEADMASTER: Why, you...

HARRY: What? I'm just making my report to our superior, sir.

(He smirked.)

HARRY: An *honest* report.

HEADMASTER: You little...

HARRY: That's the situation, sir. Every time the armoury needs to be opened Master Cray has to come and do it. This time would have been no different, but unfortunately Master Cray took a bullet, so it was down to us five students to race through the city, risking our safety to save the nation. From the headmaster here.

OWNER: Superb!

HARRY: Thank you, sir.

(The owner then snarled at the rapidly shrinking headmaster.)

OWNER: You're a disgrace! A joke! A buffoon! A waste of time, space, breath and energy. The crusty, stale semen stuck on an amoeba's bell end; that's you!!!

HEADMASTER: Steady on!

OWNER: No, I won't steady on! You only took over last year and since then we've had nothing but trouble. The place is falling apart. And that's the last of my worries.

Lawsuits, failing students for the first time ever and now this; war broke out and you'd locked the regular unit we keep here out of the sodding armoury!!! You're fucking useless!!!

(The headmaster whimpered for a moment then suddenly looked enthused.)

HEADMASTER: Useless? Am I though???

OWNER: Yes!!!

HEADMASTER: That was rhetorical!

OWNER: But the answer was factual.

HEADMASTER: But, was it? I'm far from useless. I'm so good at teaching these kids, even our five failures managed to complete a mission!

OWNER: Failures?

HEADMASTER: Yes, sir.

(He beamed.)

HEADMASTER: That's how amazing I am. These five successfully passed a dangerous mission; bringing us the key across a war torn city; riddled with bullets. And they did it in style.

OWNER: *They* did, yes, but what's this about those five failures?

(The headmaster ruffled his neck arrogantly then gestured to the students before him.)

HEADMASTER: Well, sir; these *are* the five failures.

(The owner was understandably astonished.)

OWNER: They are? These are the failures?

HEADMASTER: Yes, sir.

OWNER: Yet they completed a difficult mission like that?

(He grimaced then looked to the students in question.)

OWNER: How on earth did such excellent students fail?

HARRY: Eddie and I were away for a few months in hospital with food poisoning, sir.

OWNER: So you're the ones.

AMY: And Lucy and I were trapped in a basement by a murderous, perverted tutor.

OWNER: That was you two, was it?

(He looked to Gerald.)

OWNER: And how did *you* fail?

(Gerald scratched his head nervously.)

GERALD: Um... I... well... I kinda...

(He winced.)

GERALD: I fell asleep in the exams, sir.

OWNER: And nobody woke you?

GERALD: No, the only adjudicator fell asleep too.

OWNER: Who was that?

GERALD: The headmaster.

(The owner was outraged.)

OWNER: You slept through the exams? You're supposed to be the overseer! If *you* fell asleep who was stopping the other students from cheating???

(The headmaster whimpered fearfully.)

HEADMASTER: Well... I... um... I... trust them?

OWNER: Oh, well that's great, that is.

HEADMASTER: Um... thank you?

OWNER: Shut it!

(He growled.)

OWNER: You fell asleep! Good god, man!

(He sighed.)

OWNER: Nope; there's no getting around it. Because there was no adjudicator, those who passed might well have cheated to do so. So for all we know, they might be unsuitable; failures. Unfit for service. I can't risk sending such kids to the army; especially not now! They'll all have to do the exam again.

HEADMASTER: Sir.

OWNER: Because of you.

(He snarled.)

OWNER: It's *all* because of you!!! We've got a bunch of graduates who may well have failed, passing because you're shit at your job. And on the flip side, we have five failures who might well have *passed* if it wasn't for you.

(The headmaster's bottom lip warbled.)

HEADMASTER: That's a bit harsh! How were the food poisoning and psychotic teacher incidents *my* fault???

OWNER: You personally oversaw slashing the food budget! You got rid of the good quality, healthy options and replaced it with inedible crap from god knows where. Half of it was expired!!!

HEADMASTER: Half?

OWNER: I saw the report!

HEADMASTER: Oh.

OWNER: And it was *you* who skipped reference checks to employ the teachers asking for the lowest remuneration!!! That's how we ended up employing a psychotic pervert!!!

HEADMASTER: I just wanted to cut back on wastage, that's all!

OWNER: No, you fucking didn't! Do you think I don't *know* about the shares you bought in this place?

HEADMASTER: Um...

OWNER: You wanted to make a massive profit and cash in on the shareholder payouts!

HEADMASTER: Well...

OWNER: Which makes you a complete cunt!

(He shrugged.)

OWNER: Not to mention an idiot. This place will never make a profit. Those who invest in this academy, don't do it for a return; they do it because they want our army to have the best men. And women!

(He looked to Amy and Lucy.)

OWNER: Sorry, ladies.

AMY: It's fine.

LUCY: Please, carry on; we're enjoying this.

OWNER: Happy to. As I was saying, there's no profit to be had from having shares in this place, you tit. We make massive losses every year; deliberately! Our budget is set to make sure our cadets are well-fed, well-looked after and well-trained; the best of the best. *You* were appointed to make sure that happened! *That* was your remit! Instead, you cut everything back and tried to keep some of the budget for yourself in the form of a fucking shareholder payout.

(The headmaster scratched his neck nervously.)

HEADMASTER: I just wanted a return on my investment, that's all.

OWNER: And like I said, that was never going to happen. Even if you did manage to miraculously finagle a profit, we'd have just put that profit into improving the base, you cock! There'll never *be* a shareholder payout; we don't even have a facility for it! It's never even crossed anyone's mind! Then you came along.

HEADMASTER: Um...

(He whimpered.)

HEADMASTER: I'm in trouble, aren't I?

(The owner sighed then glanced to the ground by the headmaster's feet.)

OWNER: I won't lie to you; you're about to be fired!

HEADMASTER: You can't fire me!!! I have tenure!!!

(The owner then drew his pistol and shot him.)

OWNER: I was talking to my gun.

(As the headmaster's lifeless body hit the ground, Amy, Lucy, Harry and Gerald all stared at the owner in horror. Eddie, however, remained motionless on the ground.

Giving them a sideways glance, the owner noted their horrified expressions then smiled.)

OWNER: I'll deal with you heroes in a moment.

(He then called to one of the guards by the wall.)

OWNER: Guards!

(The two guards hurried over.)

GUARD 01: Sir?

OWNER: Chuck the headmaster's body onto the battlefield by the gates, so it looks like the Farzarian army shot him, would you? It'll save on paperwork.

GUARD 02: Sir!

OWNER: And face him with his back to the fighting, so it looks like he was shot running away. I'll be buggered if I'm giving *him* a posthumous medal for bravery.

GUARD 01: Sir!

(The two guards then dragged his body away. Having watched them do so, the owner then looked to the disturbed faces of the cadets before him.)

OWNER: What?



LUCY: You shot him.  
OWNER: And?  
AMY: And it was awesome.  
OWNER: Well, *I* certainly enjoyed it. Still, you saw nothing, okay?  
GERALD: Sir!  
HARRY: Sir!  
AMY: Absolutely!  
LUCY: Sir.  
OWNER: Excellent.  
(He then glanced at where Eddie was spark out behind him.)  
OWNER: He clearly didn't see anything either, so that's good.  
(He nodded.)  
OWNER: Anyway, nothing happened here, so let's discuss your mission instead. You!  
(He pointed to Harry.)  
HARRY: Sir?  
OWNER: Speak to me! Briefly.  
HARRY: About what, sir?  
OWNER: I just need to know exactly how you ended up on a mission in the first place without any needless waffling in between.  
HARRY: Sir! The headmaster punished us by making us run across the city with Master Cray dressed as women. We got to the other end, war broke out and Master Cray was wounded, so he entrusted the key to us and we ran back.  
OWNER: Despite the fact that it's chaos out there?  
HARRY: Yes, sir. We had to get creative, including taking out a Farzarian soldier who blocked our path. Eddie did that, to be precise.  
OWNER: Excellent. Well done, team.  
(He nodded.)  
OWNER: Now get your friend there to the infirmary then find a safe place to hide. When all this shooting is over, we can talk more then, okay? Dismiss!  
(At once, they all saluted the owner then watched as he strutted away.)  
OWNER: Fucking treasonous cunt of a headmaster; wasting my money! Who gave that shit head the job? I'll be having words with that recruitment team. I just hope we got the armoury door open in time.  
(As he disappeared from sight, the four cadets lowered their salutes then drew a series of relieved sighs.)  
GERALD: Thank fuck that's over. I'm gonna take a nap.  
HARRY: No, you're not. We need to get Eddie to the infirmary.  
(They all glanced at their motionless friend and grimaced.)  
AMY: And soon.

---

### *THREE DAYS LATER*

The pub outside the academy was normally quite busy on a weekday lunchtime. Cadets, soldiers and teachers alike would often head over there for something to eat and a quick

beverage. On this particular day, however, the place was virtually empty. Having seen off the initial Farzarian invasion, the troops stationed at the academy had gone to the border to guard against another attack. The nation's defences had been trebled and the army were on high alert. A state of war now existed between the two countries and a second battle seemed highly likely. The cadets and the staff that often frequented the pub, however, were absent for a very different reason. The cadets were confined to the academy in readiness to retake their final exam. The teachers, of course, were duty bound to oversee their studies and weren't permitted to leave either. The owners were taking no chances with their success rate whatsoever. The only cadets not confined to barracks were Eddie, Amy, Lucy, Harry and Gerald. Having completed a mission already, they'd been given a passing grade on practical merit. Having once been the only five failures in their year, they were now the only one's who'd passed.

Having succeeded in their mission and been rewarded with a medal of honour and a passing grade, Lucy, Harry and Gerald couldn't have been happier. The tag of failure had worn heavy around their necks and they weren't sorry to be rid of it. Amy and Eddie, on the other hand, were mortified. Since sitting down at their table, they'd both stared at each other in horror and hadn't said a word. This made Gerald in particular, extremely uncomfortable.

GERALD: They're not being very fair here, you know? This is a momentous day for me and they're ruining it. We should be celebrating.

(Lucy sucked her teeth.)

LUCY: Yeah... I don't see them doing that.

HARRY: I'm not surprised. Why would *they* celebrate.

GERALD: Why? Because not only did we all pass, but we all won a medal of honour for pity's sake. This is a joyous occasion. We came here to pass our training and join a unit. Well, we've done that now; with a medal to boot. What's not to be delighted about?

LUCY: The joining a unit part.

GERALD: I don't follow. That's the goal for *any* cadet, surely! To join a unit.

Objective achieved.

HARRY: Objective achieved in some style, yes. They succeeded; which would be great normally. But for those two...

LUCY: War just broke out and they're in the infantry department.

HARRY: They're shipping off to the frontline tomorrow.

GERALD: Oh...

(He sucked his teeth.)

GERALD: Well that sucks.

LUCY: You think?

GERALD: No, I mean it *really* sucks. Two days ago they were failures and weren't going anywhere. To rectify that only to be sent straight to the frontline... ouch.

HARRY: Yeah... I reckon they wish they hadn't bothered now.

LUCY: Right? I bet Eddie wishes he'd lost that sodding key.

(Eddie slowly turned to face her.)

EDDIE: Why couldn't it have just fallen out of my pocket while I was being trampled by goats?

LUCY: See?

(Amy then hung her head and sighed.)

AMY: I'm gonna get shot in my gorgeous face, aren't I?

EDDIE: And I'll be there getting shot with you.

(He then allowed himself a rueful smile.)

EDDIE: Still, at least it'll put an end to all your giggling.

AMY: Not if you get shot first. I'll *die* giggling.

(They then glowered at each other coldly.)

HARRY: And they're back.

LUCY: Pretending to hate each other.

GERALD: Pretending?

LUCY: Yeah. Ask them where they were last night.

(Harry then made a circle with his thumb and forefinger, before poking a finger from his other hand through it.)

GERALD: Um... threading a needle?

HARRY: No. You did not just say that!

GERALD: Then...

(At last he looked enlightened.)

GERALD: Oh! They were shagging.

(Amy and Eddie glowered at him.)

EDDIE: It was angry sex!

AMY: Because he's annoying.

GERALD: Right...

(He then sat back and exhaled.)

GERALD: What a great day. My father was so chuffed that I passed this course, he was nice to me for ten whole minutes. Good times. Now when I ship out to join the strategy unit in a few days, I'll do so with my father's approval. I've never had that before.

(He nodded.)

GERALD: I'm looking forward to it.

HARRY: Yeah? I'm not dreading my posting either.

(He beamed.)

HARRY: The logistics division and the transport section are in the same building, so I'll get to see Lucy all the time.

LUCY: Yup. Every day, hopefully.

(They then shared a loving hug.)

HARRY: Gerald's right. This is a great day.

LUCY: Yes; yes, it is.

(The weight of Eddie and Amy's cold glances then caused them to look away.)

EDDIE: Great day, my arse.

AMY: Yeah! We're gonna be murdered by Farzarians!

EDDIE: Which sucks.

AMY: Big time. I survived an ordeal in a basement with a murderous pervert just to get shot in the face a few months later.

EDDIE: And I recovered from severe, *almost* fatal food-poisoning just so I could headbutt an *extremely* fatal bullet. Where's the justice, Amy?

AMY: There is no justice!

EDDIE: Exactly!

(He sneered.)

EDDIE: I'm glad you three are happy though.

AMY: Oh, definitely. Please, buy some champagne; have a little dance, perhaps. Push the boat out. Why not? Don't let our imminent deaths spoil your joy, will you?

EDDIE: You tell them, Amy.

AMY: I am!

(Harry rolled his eyes.)

HARRY: Guys, please. We sympathise; we do. What's happened to you is rotten luck, it really is.

LUCY: Heartbreaking, actually. I don't want anything to happen to you, Amy.

(She glowered at Eddie.)

LUCY: Protect her at all costs. Even if you have to jump in front of a bullet.

EDDIE: Right... I won't be doing that.

AMY: You cunt!

EDDIE: Why? Would you do it for me?

AMY: Um... good point.

(She shrugged.)

AMY: As you were.

EDDIE: I was finished.

GERALD: Then perhaps we can get on and order some food.

(He beamed.)

GERALD: This is a fantastic day and we need to celebrate in style.

(With that, he raised his hand at the waiter to beckon him over. Watching him do so, the other four shared a series of glances.)

HARRY: He's not great at reading a room, is he?

EDDIE: Nope.

AMY: No people skills whatsoever.

LUCY: The strategy department are going to wonder what they've been sent.

AMY: Then spend the next few months strategising ways to get rid of him.

(Amy and Lucy then proceeded to giggle together. Watching them, Eddie groaned in defeat.)

EDDIE: I've graduated the academy. I'm finally gonna leave... but the giggling that's dogged my ears for twelve long months is bloody coming with me.

(He then shrugged it off.)

EDDIE: Oh, well. Suddenly, getting shot doesn't seem so bad. Gerald!

GERALD: Yes?

EDDIE: Order me the biggest steak they've got.

GERALD: Order it yourself.

EDDIE: Right...

THE END

GERALD – After six months in the strategy unit, Gerald was transferred to the entertainment department and put in charge of painting the stage sets. Having planned a raid on a Farzarian installation that turned out to be phone box, they'd decided that

maybe strategy was not for him. His father never spoke to him again. Nor did his mother. Because she was dead.

HARRY – After several successful missions were carried out on the back of Harry's logistical know-how, he was very quickly promoted to sergeant. A military success story, he was promoted three more times in his five years of service. To celebrate his first promotion, he asked Lucy to marry him. She said no.

LUCY – Blessed with all the mechanical skill of a fluffy kitten, Lucy was transferred from the transport section to the logistics division within three days of joining her unit. Under her boyfriend's stewardship, she eventually made it to the rank of corporal. On that day, Harry asked her to marry him a second time. She said no again. So he sent her to the brig. As practical jokes go, it wasn't the cleverest he'd ever pulled. Mercifully, she forgave him eventually and accepted his third proposal on the day they were both discharged.

EDDIE – Upon arrival with the infantry division, Eddie and Amy were put through extra training, in order to perfect shooting and gun management. After three months, they were then sent to the frontline, fully expecting their fear of getting shot in the face to be realised. Mercifully, however, the war ended an hour before they arrived. To celebrate, their unit had a lavish dinner at the mess, during which Amy accidentally shot Eddie in the face with a champagne cork. He was in a coma for three weeks and ended up being discharged on medical grounds.

AMY – Having been dishonourably discharged for shooting Eddie in the face with a champagne cork, Amy got a job at a fashion boutique in Gerald's home-town. It was the happiest time of her life, but her guilt over putting Eddie in a coma weighed heavy. It was a guilt that soon vanished, however, when Eddie put himself through a business management course purely in order to become her new boss and make her suffer. Suffice to say, she soon stopped giggling. In the end, their thirst for making each other miserable became all consuming. They got married two years later with a view to making one another miserable forever. It didn't work. They had so much fun they ended up falling in love and teaming up. Gerald didn't stand a chance.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. THE STORYLINE AND CHARACTERS ARE A CREATION OF THE ARTIST. THE ARTIST RESERVES THE RIGHT TO EVERYTHING WITHIN.

THE FUTILE GESTURE FILES: PART THREE – ACADEMY GROUP U IS PURELY FICTIONAL. ANY SIMILARITY BETWEEN CHARACTERS AND INCIDENTS IN REAL LIFE ARE PURELY CO-INCIDENTAL.

© 2023 FUTILE FANTASY CREATIONS.