

FUTILE FANTASY CREATIONS PRESENT...

SILLY SHORTS

THE WRONG SIDE OF THE LINE

Republic of Asparia. On the clifftop plateau above Shay beach, thousands of khaki-coloured military tents stood in their rows, slightly twitching in the mild summer night's breeze. Every single one of them was empty. Not a single soldier, medic, caterer or support worker was in need of their service at this time. Tonight, was celebration night! They, the Norland Army, had won the war! As such, every single person involved with the regiment had gathered on the adjacent, empty grassland to drink and sing joyous songs about their victory. The war had raged for seven long years and they'd made it out the other side alive. If anything was worth celebrating, it was this.

Among their number that evening was a man who'd quite literally prayed for this day to come since hostilities were declared all those years ago. Having had to sorrowfully perform thousands of burials in that time, Reverend Arthur Woodcut, aged 44, was by far the most relieved of them all. Unlike the soldiers, he didn't think of war cries as a call to prove one's masculinity. He considered them a final act of bravado from men condemned to die way before their time. For him, the end of the war was a joy beyond a joy; one he'd feared he might never see. As a result, he could barely contain his glee. Sitting upon a fallen tree, among of throng of boisterous soldiers, he supped some wine from a leather flask then exhaled with delight before glancing all around himself.

ARTHUR: Look at that. Just look at all the joy on their faces.

(He glanced to where a well-built man in his twenties was casually relaxing against the log, just to the side of his feet.)

ARTHUR: Dave! Look at them, Dave.

DAVE: What?

ARTHUR: Look at them!

DAVE: I am!

(He shrugged.)

DAVE: They're happy. So what?

ARTHUR: So what??? So what??? I'll *tell* you what. Each one of these men is precious. Created by his divine holiness. And tonight they've been spared. And look at their joy. It just goes to show you, doesn't it? All those cheers they made before going into battle weren't real. They weren't *really* happy about it. No, no. That was for show. This! Now this... is true happiness.

(He nodded.)

ARTHUR: Praise the lord!

DAVE: The lord? What would anyone want to praise *him* for?

ARTHUR: For ending this war and sparing these men!

DAVE: Right...

(He rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: Took his bloody time, didn't he?

ARTHUR: Excuse me?

DAVE: Seven years it took him. And how many men died in that time? Weren't they worth saving or something?

(Arthur furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: You're being ridiculous, man.

DAVE: Am I? It sounds like a perfectly fair question to me.

ARTHUR: Oh... what do you know anyway?

(He ruffled his neck indignantly.)

ARTHUR: Fact is, the war is over, god is great and this is a wonderful time.

DAVE: Yeah...

ARTHUR: Oh, cheer up, you miserable bastard.

DAVE: Excuse me?

ARTHUR: Sitting there with a sour look on your face. You're giving the clergy a bad name, and I won't stand for it.

(Dave couldn't help but smirk.)

DAVE: The clergy?

ARTHUR: You heard me.

DAVE: Yeah. I did. Um... Reverend?

ARTHUR: What?

DAVE: You know I don't work for you, don't you?

ARTHUR: Excuse me?

DAVE: I was hired by the army in my capacity as a professional grave digger.

ARTHUR: Yes, and sent to work for me.

DAVE: *With* you. Not for you. I'm a support worker, not a military man or a member of the clergy; I'm an independent. In other words, you're not my boss, mate.

ARTHUR: Oh, no? *I'm* the one who gives you the list of bodies to bury.

DAVE: You just pass it on to me, mate.

ARTHUR: Yes, from your employer. If I wasn't in charge of you, they wouldn't bother. They'd give it directly to you.

DAVE: They do it so we can liaise over when you're holding services, you idiot. I can't bury someone before the service or they'll go to hell. Not that hell is real, but that's what your lot have conned people into believing anyway.

ARTHUR: How dare you?

(He then sighed in defeat.)

ARTHUR: I'm not going to discuss this with you any further. Just cheer up, for pity's sake.

DAVE: Cheer up? Mate! I'm a fucking grave digger. A funeral specialist. As callous as it sounds, the end of the fucking war is not good news for me! It is, in fact, extremely bad for business.

ARTHUR: What? Am I hearing this? Are you really saying these words? Are you telling me the end of this barbaric conflict is a bad thing in your eyes???

DAVE: I said it was bad for business. I didn't say it was a bad thing.

ARTHUR: You truly are the worst. Who'd think such a thing at a time like this?

(He nodded.)

ARTHUR: I'm ignoring you now. I won't let you spoil the occasion for me. Not a chance.

(He then glanced away angrily. As he did so, Dave allowed himself an amused chuckle then looked the other way. Annoying the reverend was great fun and he'd revelled in doing so since the day he'd met him.)

DAVE: Priceless.

(Just then, a somewhat intoxicated soldier staggered towards them, holding his arms out excitedly and grinning from ear to ear.)

SOLDIER: Dave the grave!!! Rabbi!!!

DAVE: Dave the grave...

ARTHUR: Rabbi??? *I'm* a reverend!

SOLDIER: No, sir. On the contrary, you're *extremely* relevant!

ARTHUR: What?

(The soldier stepped before them and beamed with excitement.)

SOLDIER: Fucking heroes, you two are. Heroes!

DAVE: Hardly!

ARTHUR: You chaps are the heroes.

SOLDIER: Hey! Don't talk yourselves down, gents.

(He nodded sternly.)

SOLDIER: When my best mate fell in battle, I was mortified. Broken, I was. But you, rabbi...

ARTHUR: Reverend!

SOLDIER: I'm coming to that!

(He rolled his eyes.)

SOLDIER: You gave him a bloody good send off. A send off befitting of a man as great as he. And I appreciated that!

ARTHUR: And I appreciate you saying so.

SOLDIER: As for you, Dave the grave, I asked a lot of you there. He was seven feet tall, but when I asked you dig a longer hole so he could be laid out flat, you didn't hesitate.

DAVE: Well, no. I'm obliged to make the hole as...

SOLDIER: Point is, between you, you made the whole nasty business as hell of a lot easier. I'll never be able to thank you enough. But I'd like to try.

ARTHUR: Really, there's no need to...

DAVE: We take cash.

ARTHUR: Dave!!!

DAVE: I'm joking.

SOLDIER: Cash? Forget cash, son. I want to give you both something far more valuable.

(He then pulled a large bottle from his side-bag.)

SOLDIER: My old mum gave me this bottle of whisky the day we shipped out. She said I wasn't to open it until we'd secured victory. It's for me to toast our success with and thank those who made it possible.

(He nodded somewhat emotionally.)

SOLDIER: I'd like to pour *you two* a glass.

(Dave looked to Arthur.)

DAVE: Shall we?

ARTHUR: Absolutely. That's a truly noble gesture.

(They then held out their army issue tin cups.)

SOLDIER: Bless you both.

(He then poured them both a shot from his bottle.)

SOLDIER: I'm not giving this stuff away liberally, gents. I gave a shot to the soldier who saved me from certain death by weighing into the enemy just as he was about to strike me down. And I've poured some for that tasty medic who nursed me back to health afterwards. Okay, I also gave a shot to her young, sexy assistant because... well... cleavage. But other than those three, and of course you two, this bottle is not for sharing.

(He then stood tall and took a swig.)

SOLDIER: Yup. The rest is mine. Cheers!!!

(He then staggered away towards the edge of the field, from where the ocean was in plain sight below the clifftop.)

SOLDIER: Victory!!!

(Having watched him go, Arthur then looked to Dave.)

ARTHUR: Well? Shall we?

DAVE: We shall. Cheers!

ARTHUR: Cheers!

(With that, they tapped their mugs together and took a swig.)

DAVE: Fuck me, that's strong.

ARTHUR: Good lord, you're right. Blimey.

DAVE: Still, it's not every day victory is assured. I say we enjoy it.

ARTHUR: Quite right.

(They then tapped their mugs together again and resumed drinking.)

(The victory party upon the plateau would be one that the survivors would never forget. The relief, the joy, the excitement; a confluence of elements that had seen them singing, dancing and drinking gleefully until the early hours. Had the commissioned officers not started sending everyone back to their tents at two o'clock in the morning, the party well may have continued long past sunrise. This eventuality, simply couldn't be allowed to happen. Shay Beach, after all, was five hundred miles inside enemy territory. This victorious army, was the Norland National Army and under the terms of the surrender agreement, their regiment was set to ship out of Asparia the following day. As such a good night's sleep would be greatly advised.

Having spent the night in what was more like a coma than a deep slumber, The Reverend Arthur Woodcut opened his eyes on the new day with something of a struggle. As if his eyelids were made of lead, he struggled to raise them to beyond a squint then laid there with a baffled expression on his face. A few seconds, later, however, he screeched and sat up.)

ARTHUR: What the hell are you doing, man?

(Laying by his side, with his arm across the reverend's midriff, Dave groaned then mumbled in a barely lucid drawl.)

DAVE: Stop fucking nagging, Sharon.

ARTHUR: David!!!

(Dave flinched then opened his eyes.)

DAVE: Huh?

(He sat up in horror.)

DAVE: What the? What???

ARTHUR: I...

DAVE: What the fuck are you doing in my tent???

ARTHUR: This is my...

(He then gasped.)

ARTHUR: Why am I in your tent???

DAVE: I don't fucking know, mate!!!

ARTHUR: And why were you bloody cuddling me???

(Dave looked to him blankly then smirked.)

DAVE: Well... you're a very sexy man.

ARTHUR: Don't even joke about that, boy!

DAVE: Boy?

ARTHUR: Yes! Boy! You know as well as I do that homosexuals are condemned to an eternity of hell. What if god had heard you and got the wrong idea???

(Dave scoffed.)

DAVE: The wrong idea? You said he was infallible.

ARTHUR: He is! But even so... don't say gay things!

DAVE: Mate. Relax! You're not gay.

ARTHUR: I know I'm not!

DAVE: Then you've got nothing to worry about, have you?

ARTHUR: Well...

DAVE: And nor have gays, because that's bollocks.

ARTHUR: Bollocks? How dare you? It's not bollocks, it's the word of god.

DAVE: The man who created the world and everything in it?

ARTHUR: Yes!

DAVE: *Including* gays.

ARTHUR: You...

DAVE: I'm pretty sure the creator of all things gay, doesn't hate gays, mate. If he did, he wouldn't keep making them.

(Arthur seethed through his nose at him for a moment then snarled.)

ARTHUR: Right! I've had enough of you! Thank god the war's over and I'll never have to put up with you again!

(He then crawled over to the opening of the tent, mumbling under his breath.)

ARTHUR: Bloody non-believer. Why did they have to saddle me with such a Neanderthal?

DAVE: Bye then.

ARTHUR: Shut up, you.

(He then yanked open the front of the tent and crawled outside, before climbing to his feet. As he did so, Dave sat back and chuckled to himself.)

DAVE: Every time. He bites every time.

(As he sat there giggling to himself, however, he heard Arthur whimpering outside.)

ARTHUR: Um... Dave. We have a problem.

DAVE: What?

ARTHUR: They... I mean there's... you might want to come out here and see this for yourself.

(Dave rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: Fine!

(He then clambered towards then exit to the tent.)

DAVE: What's got you rattled this time? The flag didn't blow away again, did it? Only you really didn't need to make such a fuss about that, you know? It happens.

(He then passed through the tent and into the morning air, before climbing to his feet.)

DAVE: Well?

(He then performed a double take at the sight before him. Moments later, his jaw dropped.)

DAVE: Um...

ARTHUR: Dave?

DAVE: Yeah?

ARTHUR: Where is everyone?

(Much to their abject dismay, only four tents remained, including their own. Yesterday, there had been hundreds of them, but now the field was awash with litter and little sign of anything else. It was as if hundreds and hundreds of men had vanished overnight. Gazing at the old food packets, blowing across the deserted grass, the reverend could only whimper.)

ARTHUR: Seriously, Dave; where is everyone?

(Dave cringed.)

DAVE: They've fucked off.

ARTHUR: And left us behind? Don't be ridiculous, man.

DAVE: I'm not. Look! You can see it with your own two eyes, mate. Everyone's fucked off.

ARTHUR: But it doesn't make sense. I'm a man of the cloth; why would they want to abandon *me*? Me, of all people!

DAVE: Maybe they've met you.

ARTHUR: What?

DAVE: Just saying... I can understand the temptation.

ARTHUR: Oh, very amusing.

DAVE: Thank you.

ARTHUR: Amusing, but not very bright. They've abandoned you too, don't forget.

DAVE: Yeah...

(He sighed.)

DAVE: That's not good, is it?

ARTHUR: No, it's...

(He then performed a double take in the direction of the sea. Some sixty metres away, a dashing, uniformed soldier was standing on a clifftop verge, glancing at the ocean beyond.)

ARTHUR: A-ha. Look. We're not alone, after all.

DAVE: Huh?

(Dave glanced to the soldier in question then nodded.)

DAVE: Come on. Let's go and see what he knows.

(With that, they both paced away in the direction of the soldier.)

ARTHUR: When we get there, Dave, make sure you're polite.

DAVE: What's that supposed to mean?

ARTHUR: I'm just saying, that's all; make sure you're polite and respectful.

DAVE: Well, fucking obviously. What did you think I was going to do? Call him fish-face then pull his trousers down?

ARTHUR: No, but I can see you being crass and uncouth.

DAVE: Crass and uncouth?

ARTHUR: Yes! This is you...

(He then performed his best impression of a commoner from Dave's part of the world.)

ARTHUR: Oi, mate. Where the fuck is everyone?

DAVE: What's wrong with that???

ARTHUR: I'll tell you what's wrong with that. That fellow there is quite clearly a high-ranking officer.

DAVE: What makes you say that?

ARTHUR: He has stripes on his sleeve.

DAVE: So do *low*-ranking officers.

ARTHUR: Yes, but that fellow also has a sword.

(He nodded to where the soldier was leaning on the handle of a blade which he'd dug into the soil.)

ARTHUR: Only high-ranking folk wield swords.

DAVE: Really?

ARTHUR: Yes.

(He nodded.)

ARTHUR: Rather than sporting automatic rifles like the troops, they wield swords. It's a long standing military tradition.

DAVE: That's a thing, is it?

ARTHUR: Yes. My uncle Wilbur has a high-ranking officer. Everyone in the officer's mess had a sword at their side.

DAVE: That's a bit daft. Who takes a bloody sword to a gunfight?

ARTHUR: Nobody. High-ranking officers don't take part in the battles, do they? They stay behind and...

DAVE: Shit themselves.

ARTHUR: Orchestrate things. Therefore a gun is unnecessary. But in keeping with military tradition they keep swords upon them.

DAVE: What the fuck for? Swords are obsolete, mate. Have been for decades.

ARTHUR: Well... I suppose it's better than being unarmed.

DAVE: Right...

(He rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: So is carrying a gun.

ARTHUR: Look, I'm just telling you the tradition, okay? I never claimed it made sense.

DAVE: Fair comment. I guess it's symbolic then.

ARTHUR: I'd say so. The army does enjoy symbolism.

DAVE: Yeah...

ARTHUR: Anyway, be quiet. I'll do the talking. It's the only way we can be sure you won't offend the good fellow.

DAVE: You cheeky...

ARTHUR: Shush, you.

(With that, he stepped up to within fifteen feet of the soldier and raised his voice.)

ARTHUR: Excuse me, good sir. My colleague and I are at a loss. Could you please tell us where everybody went?

(Without even turning to look at him, the soldier simply raised his sword and pointed it to the right.)

ARTHUR: They went over there?

(The soldier then pushed the sword back and forth three times, as if he was using it to point at something.)

ARTHUR: So they went that way. Well...

DAVE: Actually, mate, I think he was pointed us to that sign.

ARTHUR: Sign? What sign?

(Dave rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: Wait there.

(With that, he strode away towards where a sheet of card had been nailed to a post.)

ARTHUR: What? Where are you go... oh... that sign.

DAVE: Yeah, this sign.

(Having reached the pillar, Dave read it through to himself then nodded and headed back towards Arthur.)

ARTHUR: Well? What does it say?

DAVE: Well...

(He winced.)

DAVE: You're not gonna like this...

ARTHUR: Just tell me.

DAVE: Fine.

(He stepped up to Arthur then puffed out.)

DAVE: It says, and I quote, "We tried to wake you shiftless bastards three times, but you didn't wake up, so we've left without you."

(Arthur just stared straight through him.)

ARTHUR: What does it really say?

DAVE: That *is* what it says!

ARTHUR: Poppycock. Nobody tried to wake me; that's nonsense!

DAVE: Fine. Go and see for yourself then.

ARTHUR: I will.

(He then stomped over to the sign, glowered back coldly at Dave as he did so.)

ARTHUR: Would it really hurt you to be serious for five minutes?

(He then stepped up to the sign and read it for himself.)

ARTHUR: Oh.

DAVE: See?

ARTHUR: Oh, dear.

DAVE: You owe me an apology.

ARTHUR: Quite.

(He scratched his neck uncomfortably then proceeded to return to Dave.)

ARTHUR: Sorry about that.

(He then stood tall.)

ARTHUR: I'm right though! It *is* poppycock. No bugger tried to wake me! Not one.

DAVE: They might have.

ARTHUR: They didn't!

DAVE: Mate, if they tried to wake you and failed, you wouldn't even know about it.

ARTHUR: But it makes no sense. I'm a light sleeper.

(Dave grimaced.)

DAVE: Yeah... so am I usually. It's hard to believe I slept through something this huge, but I must have. It's the only explanation.

ARTHUR: It's a crazy explanation. There's no way I slept through the cockerel crowing, the shipping out siren and the ensuing commotion. Not a hope in hell.

DAVE: Yet here we are.

ARTHUR: Nope. I'm not buying it. There has to be more to it than that.

(He then strode up to the soldier.)

ARTHUR: Excuse me, young man. Do you mind if I ask you something? Only I'm a little confused.

(At this point, the handsome young gentleman, aged 25, turned and glanced his way. Rather than speaking up in a well-to-do accent, however, he spoke in a dialect almost exactly the same as Dave's.)

FRANKIE: I think we're *all* a bit confused, mate.

ARTHUR: What?

FRANKIE: I went to bed last night, looking forward to sailing home this morning. Instead, I woke up just in time to see dozens of navy ships pissing off around the headland without me!

ARTHUR: Oh.

DAVE: So you're as confused as we are?

FRANKIE: I'm more pissed off than confused. In fact, confusion doesn't even enter into it. What's to be confused about? We slept in so they fucked off and left us behind.

ARTHUR: That doesn't sound like something our fine army would do.

FRANKIE: Bullshit, this is *exactly* the sort of stroke this army likes to pull.

(He shook his head.)

FRANKIE: Cunts.

DAVE: Massive cunts.

FRANKIE: Gargantuan, mate.

(He then sheathed his sword and headed towards Dave and Arthur with an outstretched hand.)

FRANKIE: Anyway... Frankie Harris; nice to meet you.

ARTHUR: Reverend Arthur Woodcut.

DAVE: Dave Grigger.

(Frankie looked enlightened.)

FRANKIE: I've heard of you!

ARTHUR: Yes, well, my sermons are...

FRANKIE: Not you. Him.

(Dave groaned.)

DAVE: Why am I not surprised?

FRANKIE: I thought someone was pulling my leg when they told me there was a bloke here called Dave Grigger the grave digger, yet here you are.

DAVE: Yeah... I'm real. Don't even bother making jokes about it though, because I can assure you I've heard them all before.

FRANKIE: A hundred times, I'll wager.

DAVE: At least.

ARTHUR: Yes, well, never mind that. What are we going to do, chaps? We're miles away from home and the army seem to have abandoned us.

(He sighed.)

ARTHUR: You'd think they'd want to take good care of an army cleric and a high-ranking officer such as yourself, but...

FRANKIE: High-ranking? Who's high-ranking?

ARTHUR: You, of course.

FRANKIE: I'm just a corporal, mate. Two rungs above private.

ARTHUR: But... you carry a sword.

(Frankie winced.)

FRANKIE: Yeah... that's a bit of a sore point really.

DAVE: Pun intended?

FRANKIE: Nope.

ARTHUR: Wait. What's a sore point?

FRANKIE: This sword...

(He sighed and his whole being seemed to deflate.)

FRANKIE: See... I used to carry a rifle like everyone else. Like a normal soldier. Then... something happened. Something unfortunate.

(He looked to Arthur imploringly.)

FRANKIE: I mean, nobody expects blackbirds, do they? It's not like you have to be permanently on your guard in case of an aerial sortie from mother nature. It's just not something you think about, is it?

ARTHUR: Well... what?

FRANKIE: I was just in the wrong place that's all. And so was the major's tent.

(He sighed.)

FRANKIE: Unfortunate.

ARTHUR: You've completely lost me, Freddie.

FRANKIE: Frankie.

(He sighed.)

FRANKIE: Look, never mind. It's water under the bridge now.

DAVE: Hold on, hold on. There's a story here and I want to hear it.

FRANKIE: You don't; trust me.

DAVE: Actually, I do. Although, I think I've got the gist already.

FRANKIE: Oh, I doubt it.

DAVE: Blackbirds.

FRANKIE: Bastard things.

DAVE: Am I right in thinking that you were holding your gun when a blackbird came down and attacked you.

(Frankie looked to him uneasily.)

FRANKIE: Not exactly, no. I'd just finished loading it, when a blackbird swooped down and stole my sandwich.

DAVE: So you shot at it!

FRANKIE: No.

(He ruffled his neck.)

FRANKIE: I swung my rifle at it, like a bat.

DAVE: And it went off and shot the major's tent.

FRANKIE: No. It went off and shot the flagpole.

DAVE: Eh?

FRANKIE: Then the flagpole fell on the major's tent.

DAVE: Right...

(Frankie shook his head.)

FRANKIE: Luckily, the major wasn't in.

ARTHUR: But you got punished anyway?

FRANKIE: Yeah. He really loved that dog, you see?

DAVE: That was you, was it? The one who killed his dog.

FRANKIE: You know about that?

DAVE: I had to dig its grave.

(Arthur furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: And I had to give it an orthodox funeral.

(Dave chuckled.)

DAVE: With a full choir and everything. It was hilarious.

ARTHUR: No, it was demeaning. A bloody high-end funeral for a Chihuahua. Even decorated soldiers don't get that.

DAVE: Still, the wake afterwards was pretty good. It'd been a while since I saw feast like that.

FRANKIE: He held a wake for it?

ARTHUR: A lavish one. It was embarrassing.

DAVE: But funny. That speech he made...

(He burst out laughing.)

DAVE: Quentin, my beloved pooch, if you're looking down on us now...

ARTHUR: His subordinates could barely keep a straight face.

DAVE: Priceless.

(He beamed.)

DAVE: Thanks for making that happen, Frankie. That was the highlight of my career.

FRANKIE: Well, I'm glad you enjoyed yourself. Because of that damned dog, he confiscated my gun and made me fight in the bloody frontline. With a fucking sword, no less.

ARTHUR: Oh, my...

FRANKIE: I think it's safe to say he wanted me go the same way as his dog.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: Luckily, I'm a regional fencing champion.

(He pointed to his chest.)

FRANKIE: I came second in the nationals. I know my way around a sword.

(He glanced skywards.)

FRANKIE: I even managed to use it to save this fella on the battle field. He was corned by two blokes with rifles. I mean, he was a goner. But I managed to get in there and kicked one over as I skewered his mate; then I put an end to the other one.

(Dave looked most impressed.)

DAVE: Nice one.

ARTHUR: Not that I approve of killing, but in that situation I can see why it was necessary. Good work.

FRANKIE: Thanks. Yeah, he was eternally grateful. He actually sought me out last night, just to give me a shot of this whisky he'd been saving for the end of the war.

(Dave and Arthur instantly shot a glance in one another's direction.)

FRANKIE: I don't remember much after that, to be honest. I drunk it down and the next thing I knew I was waking up to find the army had sailed off without me. That fucking major's doing, no doubt.

DAVE: Actually, mate, some guy gave us a shot of whisky last night too. He'd been saving it for victory day.

ARTHUR: A present from his mother.

FRANKIE: That's right.

DAVE: We conked out after that too.

ARTHUR: And like you, we woke up to find everyone had buggered off.

FRANKIE: Seriously?

DAVE: Yes. He was a tall bloke, kinda stocky...

ARTHUR: A scar on his nose.

FRANKIE: That's him.

DAVE: Wanker. What the fuck was in that whisky???

ARTHUR: I dread to think.

FRANKIE: So you reckon it was the whisky that did it?

DAVE: Yes!

FRANKIE: So it wasn't just a passing shot at me from the major?

ARTHUR: Definitely not. The major liked us.

(Dave spammed his forehead with his palm.)

DAVE: We gave his dog a splendid send off.

ARTHUR: A send off in keeping with the dog's firm orthodox beliefs, apparently.

FRANKIE: What a bell end.

DAVE: And then some.

(The three of them then stood there and shook their heads.)

ARTHUR: Anyway, back to the point. What now, men?

DAVE: Now we go home.

FRANKIE: And which way is that?

(Dave shrugged then pointed in the opposite direction to the sea.)

DAVE: Well, obviously, the border is that way.

ARTHUR: Are you sure?

DAVE: No, but if we go the other way we'll drown.

ARTHUR: Dave...

DAVE: Mate, look, there's no way of knowing the exact direction is there? All we know is, that we have to go inland.

ARTHUR: I suppose...

FRANKIE: And how far are we from the border?

DAVE: That I *do* know. A couple of weeks ago, I overheard a sergeant telling his men we're just over five hundred miles inside enemy territory.

FRANKIE: Fuck. That's gonna take forever.

DAVE: Then we'd better get going, hadn't we? Only, I'm pretty sure the army won't be coming back for us. We're on our own.

ARTHUR: We'll have to get a train or something. Or maybe some benevolent soul will give us a lift.

(Dave and Frankie both turned to face him.)

DAVE: Benevolent?

FRANKIE: Good luck.

DAVE: We've been at war with these cunts for seven years.

FRANKIE: I doubt there are many people left who haven't lost a loved one because of us.

DAVE: Or a Chihuahua.

FRANKIE: Not funny!

DAVE: Point being, we're five hundred miles inside a country full of bitter and potentially vengeful citizens. Not to mention the bands of rogue bandits we've been hearing about.

FRANKIE: Worse still, there's a faction out there who've refused to accept that the war's over.

DAVE: You heard about that too?

FRANKIE: Yeah. It was on the radio, shortly after the surrender announcement. The East Partisans. They've vowed to kill anyone from our country on sight between now and when hell freezes over.

DAVE: Right? So no, we won't be getting a lift any time soon.

FRANKIE: And I don't fancy getting murdered on a train either. We're gonna have to sneak home.

ARTHUR: Sneak? We can't sneak five hundred miles!!!

DAVE: Yeah... he has a point there.

FRANKIE: He does...

(He shrugged.)

FRANKIE: We're gonna have to steal a car or something.

ARTHUR: That's illegal!

FRANKIE: I know, but what else can we do?

ARTHUR: Stealing is a sin!

FRANKIE: And not stealing would be suicidal.

DAVE: I'm sure god will understand, Arthur.

ARTHUR: Don't bet on it. He makes rules for a reason.

DAVE: And we can discuss that later.

(He looked across at the virtually empty field that had been their home then nodded sternly.)

DAVE: For now, let's just get off this plateau.

FRANKIE: Agreed.

ARTHUR: Wait.

DAVE: Why?

ARTHUR: Before we go, we should check all these tents.

DAVE: For damp and woodworm?

ARTHUR: For people. There may be others who slept through the evacuation.

(He pointed to a tent.)

ARTHUR: The inhabitants of *that* tent, for example.

DAVE: That's mine.

(Arthur then pointed to another.)

ARTHUR: That one then.

FRANKIE: That's mine.

ARTHUR: The other two then! There are four altogether.

(He then gasped in horror.)

ARTHUR: My tent! Where's my tent???

DAVE: You didn't have one. You slept in the back of the chapel tent.

ARTHUR: Yes, and it's gone! All my stuff was in there!

DAVE: You don't *own* any stuff.

ARTHUR: I do. I have changes of underwear. And a spare suit! And a bible.

(Dave grimaced.)

DAVE: The army must have taken them with them.

ARTHUR: Well, obviously!

(He then hung his head in defeat.)

ARTHUR: The army stole my underpants. Of all the possible outcomes to my war, I just didn't see that coming.

(He pouted.)

ARTHUR: My socks are going to make it home before I do.

(Dave gave him a consoling pat on the back.)

DAVE: Cheer up, mate. Come on, let's go and check those other two tents for signs of intelligent life.

FRANKIE: Failing that; officers.

DAVE: *You're* an officer.

FRANKIE: Fuck.

(With that, they all headed away towards the nearest tent that hadn't been accounted for.)

(Having paced the short distance across the litter-strewn field to the tent they intended to investigate, Dave, Frankie and Arthur lined up before the entrance then shared a series of questioning glances.)

DAVE: You going in or what?

FRANKIE: Me?

DAVE: Yeah, you.

FRANKIE: I thought his holiness here wanted to do it.

ARTHUR: What? What on earth made you think that?

FRANKIE: It was your idea.

ARTHUR: No, it wasn't. Dave suggested it.

DAVE: Yes, therefore I've done *my* bit.

FRANKIE: What sort of logic...

DAVE: Mate, just pop your head in there, will you?

(Frankie grimaced.)

FRANKIE: I'd rather not, actually.

ARTHUR: Why? What are you afraid of?

FRANKIE: The same as you two.

(He ruffled his neck.)

FRANKIE: What if he's rattling one out?

ARTHUR: Rattling one out? What the hell's that meant to mean?

FRANKIE: Having a shuffle. Making merry with his monkey. Bashing his bishop; no offence.

ARTHUR: None taken. I'm not a bishop.

(He rolled his eyes.)

ARTHUR: And that's certainly not what *I'm* afraid of! I'm more worried that he'll think I'm an intruder and shoot me in the face. Never violate another man's tent! That was the first thing the army taught me.

FRANKIE: But you're okay for me to do it?

ARTHUR: Well... yes. You're a soldier. Getting shot is a risk you're *used* to taking.

FRANKIE: No. No, it isn't. Getting shot in the face by some bloke while he's having a wank, is definitely *not* what I signed up for.

ARTHUR: Why are you so convinced he's having a w... committing self abuse? The chances of that are infinitesimal.

DAVE: Yes, but as long as they're not nil, you can count me out.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: Good luck, Frankie.

(Frankie sighed and shook his head.)

FRANKIE: For fuck sake.

(With that, he got down on his hands and knees then crawled to the opening, before slipping it to one side. He then poked his head inside the tent, cringing as he did so. Watching him do it, Dave and Arthur shared a stealthy fist bump then glanced to where Frankie's rear was poking from the tent.)

DAVE: And that, Arthur, is why there are no tents in prison.

ARTHUR: You're disgusting.

DAVE: Thank you.

(Just then, Frankie crawled back out again then climbed to his feet.)

FRANKIE: Right...

DAVE: Was he? You know... bashing one out?

FRANKIE: Nope.

ARTHUR: It's empty, isn't it? No sign of life what so ever.

FRANKIE: That'd be a no and a yes.

DAVE: What?

FRANKIE: No, it's not empty. Yes... there's no sign of life.

ARTHUR: What are you talking about, man?

FRANKIE: He's dead!

DAVE: Dead?

FRANKIE: Yeah. Deceased. You're a grave digger; I'm sure you're familiar with it.

ARTHUR: Wait. Are you sure?

FRANKIE: See for yourself, mate.

ARTHUR: Right...

(Dave rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: Fuck sake.

(He then jumped down and crawled inside the tent.)

DAVE: Arthur?

ARTHUR: Yes?

DAVE: Remember when I dug an extra hole yesterday?

ARTHUR: What about it?

DAVE: Remember telling me it was a waste of time?

ARTHUR: Well...

DAVE: You were wrong. He's as dead as the major's Chihuahua.

ARTHUR: Bugger. Looks like we've got another ceremony to do before we leave.

(Dave's voice then rose from the tent again.)

DAVE: Hang on! I know this cunt.

ARTHUR: David! Show some respect for the dead!

DAVE: Right... yeah... I know this bloke. He's the cunt who...

ARTHUR: Dave!!!

DAVE: Oh, yeah. It's the bloke who gave us that dodgy whisky yesterday.

ARTHUR: Oh, my.

FRANKIE: I knew he looked familiar!

(At this point, Dave crawled backwards out of the tent, dragging the corpse with him. Frankie and Arthur watched him do so, removing their hats in the process. Moments later, once Dave had removed the corpse from the tent, they gathered around it, looking down sorrowfully.)

ARTHUR: How tragic. He survived the war, only to die in the night.

(Frankie nodded towards the dead man's hand.)

FRANKIE: With the offending bottle of booze in his hand.

DAVE: That'd be the cause of death then.

ARTHUR: I'd say so. One *glass* knocked us all out, if he drank the rest himself...

DAVE: He did *say* he was going to.

ARTHUR: Then he didn't stand a chance.

FRANKIE: Hmm...

(Frankie then knelt down and pulled the bottle from his hand.)

FRANKIE: I need to know what brand it was so I can avoid it in future.

DAVE: Good shout.

(Frankie stood back up and perused the label.)

FRANKIE: Etherum Spirit.

ARTHUR: Noted. Never again.

DAVE: Amen.

(Frankie sighed.)

FRANKIE: Look, let's just get him buried, shall we? We've got a long trip home soon and I want to get started.

ARTHUR: Agreed.

DAVE: I'll just grab the rest of his stuff, so we can bury it with him.

(With that, Dave dived inside the tent again then dragged out the dead soldier's bag.)

DAVE: Right then. You hold this, Arthur. Me and Frankie here will carry the corpse.

FRANKIE: Sounds fair.

(Dave then handed the bag to Arthur. As he did so, they heard the ting of a glass bottle from inside it. At once, Arthur peered into the bag then sighed ruefully.)

ARTHUR: There's a bottle of McNinja's Whisky in here. How tragic.

FRANKIE: Tragic? That's the best brand there is.

ARTHUR: I mean, it's tragic that he didn't drink that rather than the other bottle. Clearly, it was contaminated.

DAVE: And then some.

FRANKIE: Yeah... that is pretty tragic.

ARTHUR: Still, it could be worse. If his mother knew that the special bottle she gave him is what caused his demise, she'd be devastated.

DAVE: Yeah; now that *would* be tragic.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: Anyway, grab his legs, Frankie boy.

FRANKIE: Never call me Frankie boy.

DAVE: Understood. Just grab his legs.

FRANKIE: Fine.

(With that, the two of them stooped and lifted the corpse from the ground.)

FRANKIE: Fuck me, he's well heavy.

DAVE: Like a dead weight?

FRANKIE: Yeah, he's... I see your point.

(Dave chuckled.)

DAVE: Come on.

(With that, they proceeded to head across the grass towards where a series of military graves were situated. Straining with the weight, Frankie's face bore an extremely uncomfortable grimace. More than used to shifting such weights, on the other hand, Dave barely seemed bothered. For his part, Arthur simply followed on, pondering what he'd say about this man when they interred his body.)

ARTHUR: Dearly beloved... no, that won't work. You're not his beloved. Dear...

FRANKIE: You okay there?

ARTHUR: I'm fine, just let me think for a minute.

(Just then, the sound of a woman screeching angrily rose into the air from across the field. As one, the three men all shot a glance in the direction of the noise, just in time to see a young woman fly backwards from the other unaccounted for tent. Before the woman could even climb to her feet, a slightly older one then bundled outside after her, growling furiously.)

DAVE: Investigate?

FRANKIE: Investigate!

ARTHUR: Agreed!

(They then dropped the corpse and proceeded to walk over to where the slightly older woman, Nurse Kerry Waters, aged 24, was bellowing at the younger one.)

KERRY: And don't fucking come back! Sneaking in my tent in the middle of the fucking night; what's wrong with you???

(Her younger subordinate, the nursing assistant, 20 year-old Stacey West, clambered to her feet and whimpered.)

STACEY: I didn't mean to!

KERRY: Didn't mean to???

STACEY: It was an accident!

KERRY: An accident??? How the fuck does anyone *accidentally* climb in someone else's tent???

STACEY: I don't remember.

(She held her hands before herself and swayed nervously.)

STACEY: I think I had too much to drink.

KERRY: Yeah? Well...

(She then cringed with discomfort.)

KERRY: Wait a minute. I don't remember anything from last night either.

(She gasped.)

KERRY: What did you do???

STACEY: Me?

KERRY: Yes! You!

(She then shook her fists.)

KERRY: Fuck it. I don't want to know. I'm just gonna beat you black and blue and be done with it.

STACEY: But I didn't do anything!

KERRY: And I don't care. I've been aching to beat you anyway. Working with you for the last six months has been the chore from hell.

STACEY: Mean!

KERRY: Thank fuck we're going home today. Now come here and take your beating like the worthless twat you are.

STACEY: Kerry, that's not fair.

KERRY: Fair? You want fair, do you?

STACEY: Um... yes?

KERRY: Then...

(She then froze in horror and her jaw dropped. Having just noticed the emptiness of the field around her, her heart had sunk. Spying her motionless like this, Stacey bit her lip.)

STACEY: This would be a good time to sneak away.

(She winced.)

STACEY: *Without* announcing it to the world.

(Still mortified by her surroundings, Kerry whimpered then looked to Stacey.)

KERRY: Everyone's vanished!

STACEY: What?

(She then turned and glanced around.)

STACEY: What the hell???

KERRY: They've fucked off and left me here!

(She snarled wildly.)

KERRY: Because of *you*!!!

STACEY: Me!!!

KERRY: Yes. You're such a dumb, useless bimbo they decided to leave you behind. And they associate *me* with you; so I've been left behind as well.

(Stacey pouted.)

STACEY: You're being really horrible to me.

KERRY: Oh, I'm just getting started. Come here!!!

(She then noticed three men pacing towards her and stood up straight.)

KERRY: Reverend?

STACEY: What?

ARTHUR: Hello, Nurse.

STACEY: Oh.

(She beamed.)

STACEY: Yay, other people! Nicer ones, hopefully.

(With that, she hurried to where the three men were approaching then scurried behind them. Paying her no heed, they stopped short of reaching Kerry, at which point, the reverend continued the conversation.)

ARTHUR: I see you're in the same mess that we are.

KERRY: You have an idiot for an assistant too, do you?

(Arthur looked to Dave.)

ARTHUR: Well, he's not the smartest suit in the wardrobe, but...

DAVE: Hey! No! The answer to that was no, you horrible old git. Not only am I *not* an idiot, but I'm also not your fucking assistant. For the umpteenth time, I don't work *for* you in any shape or form. I dig the holes *the army* need me to dig; you just pass on the information.

ARTHUR: Because I'm your boss!

DAVE: No. At no point have I ever been assigned to work under you!

ARTHUR: Dave...

(Kerry grimaced.)

KERRY: There's no need to fight, boys; I was just being flippant. It was just a sly dig at the idiot I've had to work with.

STACEY: She means me. She doesn't like me.

KERRY: That's putting it mildly, she's a...

FRANKIE: Look, never mind squabbling, people; we've got a massive problem here.

(He gestured across the field.)

FRANKIE: As you can plainly see, the army have buggered off and left us all behind enemy lines. We've been abandoned in hostile territory, five hundred or so miles from home.

DAVE: Yeah. Perhaps we can focus on that.

(Kerry bit her lip.)

KERRY: So that's what happened, is it?

(She then whimpered.)

KERRY: Why would they do that? I'm the head of the medical apartment; an important member of this regiment.

(She then gasped.)

KERRY: It's because I'm a contractor, isn't it? They took all the soldiers home and abandoned the civilians!

FRANKIE: Not all the soldiers!

KERRY: Oh, then...

ARTHUR: Did you accept a cup of whisky from an overexcited soldier last night? One he was saving until the end of the war?

DAVE: They did, yes.

ARTHUR: Now, how would *you* know?

DAVE: He told us he'd given some to the two young, tasty nurses.

ARTHUR: Oh, right. He did, didn't he?

DAVE: One of them saved him, and the other one had awesome cleavage, so he gave her a glass an' all.

FRANKIE: He said that, did he?

DAVE: Yeah.

FRANKIE: He described her well.

(He smiled at Stacey.)

FRANKIE: Your breasts area fine example of nature's craftsmanship, young lady. Kudos.

STACEY: Thank you.

KERRY: Forget her oversized melons; this is serious. What does that guy with the whisky have to do with anything?

ARTHUR: We all had a cup.

DAVE: And we all woke up long after the army had shipped out.

FRANKIE: Leaving a message calling us shiftless bastards, so they've left us behind.

(Kerry looked to them with a crestfallen expression on her face.)

KERRY: So we have to make our own way home?

ARTHUR: That's about the shape of it, yes.

KERRY: I see.

(She then turned red with rage.)

KERRY: This is all your fault!!!

STACEY: How???

KERRY: Because you're a fucking jinx!!!

(She then charged at Stacey with his fists flailing. Scared witless, Stacey screamed then fled across the field. Before Kerry could chase her down, however, Dave caught her in his arms and battled to restrain her.)

DAVE: Calm down, will you???

KERRY: No! She's an idiot and she has to pay!!!

DAVE: For being an idiot?

KERRY: Yes!

(The reverend rolled his eyes.)

ARTHUR: Is she really worth dying for???

KERRY: No, but she'd definitely worth killing!

ARTHUR: A crime which carries with it a death sentence.

(Kerry suddenly stopped struggling and glowered at him.)

KERRY: How is that fair?

DAVE: In every conceivable way, pretty much.

KERRY: Yeah, right. What do you know?

(She sighed.)

KERRY: Fine. I'll try to calm down. Just... keep her away from me.

(With that, she stomped away towards the clifftop. Left behind, the three men shared baffled expressions.)

DAVE: I wonder what that's all about.

FRANKIE: Yeah... clearly the other one did *something* to piss her off.

ARTHUR: Indeed. That wasn't just anger; that was rage.

(They shared a series of agreeing nods then Dave turned away.)

DAVE: Come on, let's go and bury the dead cunt.
ARTHUR: Dave!!!
DAVE: Dead *bloke*!
(He then rolled his eyes and gestured for them to follow him.)

(Having carted the dead man's corpse over to the grave that Dave had dug the day before, they set his body down next to the hole then watched as the reverend headed to the other side. Stacey for her part, had gingerly crept after them, too nervous to interact with them, but eager to be close. Kerry was still seething at the clifftop, but she feared she could come back at any time and attack her. These three men might at the very least offer her some protection. And so, she watched on from fifteen feet away as the reverend cleared his throat then began his makeshift funeral ceremony.)

ARTHUR: Dearly... um... people in attendance, we've gathered here at this time to say a final, fond farewell to our good... um, ally and acquaintance... mister...

(A horrified expression the enveloped his brow.)

ARTHUR: Um...

(He whimpered.)

ARTHUR: Does anyone recall him mentioning a name?

DAVE: Nope.

FRANKIE: Not that I remember.

(He glanced towards Stacey.)

ARTHUR: What about you?

STACEY: What?

ARTHUR: Did you know this man's name?

STACEY: No.

ARTHUR: Bugger.

DAVE: Just refer to him as the deceased.

ARTHUR: That's a bit cold, don't you think?

DAVE: So is he. Has been for hours.

ARTHUR: Dave...

DAVE: Look, this can't be the first time you've buried an unidentified soldier, surely.

ARTHUR: Actually it is.

FRANKIE: Then just follow army protocol.

ARTHUR: And what's that?

FRANKIE: Refer to him as our fallen comrade.

(Arthur looked enlightened.)

ARTHUR: Now that I can do.

(He nodded.)

ARTHUR: Gathered acquaintances, we're here today to say a final, fond farewell to this man, our fallen comrade, whose name we never knew.

DAVE: Or did we?

FRANKIE: Yeah, he may have mentioned it and we forgot.

STACEY: He never mentioned it to me. He just stared at my chest and drooled.

ARTHUR: Yes, well, never mind that.

(He then resumed improvising.)

ARTHUR: None of us knew him very well; in fact, we barely knew him at all, but in what little time we did spend with him, he came over as a warm and happy soul. And his offer of a drink on his final night, demonstrated that he was also a kind man. Yes, that drink could well have killed us all, as it did him, but I don't think any of us believe that was his intention. And so, we forgive him.
(He nodded.)

ARTHUR: So now, as we commit his body to the earth, we ask that god takes custody of his soul and offers him his rightful place in heaven.

(He looked to Dave.)

ARTHUR: If you wouldn't mind.

DAVE: Certainly.

(With that, he kicked the corpse into the grave.)

DAVE: Sorted.

(Arthur was horrified.)

ARTHUR: What on earth are you doing? That was most undignified!!!

DAVE: Yeah, but what else *could* I do? We haven't got anything to lower him in with.

ARTHUR: Even so...

DAVE: Look, it was either that or climb down there and *pull* him in. And... in hindsight, that would have probably made more sense.

ARTHUR: It would certainly have been more civilised.

DAVE: Agreed. Still, it's done now.

ARTHUR: Idiot.

(He rolled his eyes.)

ARTHUR: Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, into god's hands your soul we entrust. Amen.

(He nodded to Dave.)

ARTHUR: You may now inter the body.

DAVE: Sweet.

(He then headed for the pile of earth to his side and retrieved his shovel from it.)

ARTHUR: If anyone would like to say a few words...

DAVE: Shit. The fucking head fell off.

ARTHUR: Not *those* kind of words; this is a funeral, you ape!

DAVE: Yeah, but I broke my fucking shovel.

ARTHUR: David!!!

(He then glanced up in bewilderment. At the back end of the grave, Stacey was sobbing her heart out.)

ARTHUR: What's wrong with you?

STACEY: Nothing. I'm just moved that's all. That was such a beautiful service.

(Frankie gave her a sarcastic glance.)

FRANKIE: Yeah, it was great. The reverend tripped over his words like a drunken poet then the deceased got booted, face down into his grave. And all that before the guy filling in the whole broke his shovel and swore like a cursed frontiersman. Just the send off he'd have hoped for.

(Stacey glanced at him suspiciously.)

STACEY: That was sarcasm, wasn't it?

FRANKIE: You spotted that, huh?

STACEY: I did, yes.

(She smiled.)

STACEY: But I don't care. I liked it. Even a service *that* shoddy was better than just leaving him out here. The fact you all cared enough to do something was nice. So forgive me if I felt moved.

(Frankie raised and impressed eyebrow.)

FRANKIE: Fair comment. You're dead right.

DAVE: Pun intended?

FRANKIE: Again, no, but I'm not sad it happened.

(He looked to Stacey again.)

FRANKIE: I hope my sarcasm didn't offend you, miss.

STACEY: It didn't. And please, call me Stacey.

FRANKIE: Will do. Nice to meet you, Stacey.

(Just then, Dave spoke up excitedly.)

DAVE: That's handy. I left my *spare* shovel here. I'll use that.

FRANKIE: I'll give you a hand, mate.

DAVE: Oh. Cheers.

(He threw him the broken shovel.)

DAVE: There you go.

FRANKIE: Gonna let me use the broken one, are you?

DAVE: Of course. Do I look like an idiot?

FRANKIE: Honestly?

DAVE: Careful, mate. Getting hit in the face with a shovel hurts, apparently.

FRANKIE: But not as much as getting hit with a sword, I'd wager.

DAVE: Touché. Now let's get this over and done with so we can think about heading home.

FRANKIE: Agreed.

(They then continued to shovel quietly, watched on by the silent reverend and an uneasy looking medical assistant.)

(Once the grave had been successfully filled in, Dave, Frankie, Arthur and Stacey headed off across the field to collect Kerry. Throughout the time they'd been away burying the deceased, she'd remained on the same spot, staring out at the ocean. Clearly, she had a lot on her mind. As they approached where the wind was blowing through her hair and billowing out her white coat, Dave was the first to call out to her.)

DAVE: Nurse!

(Wearing a solemn expression, Kerry slowly turned to face them. No sooner had she done so, however, Stacey slowed down then stepped behind Frankie, almost as if using him as a human shield.)

KERRY: Is it done?

ARTHUR: It is, yes. It wasn't the most dignified ceremony, but it was better than nothing.

KERRY: Then it's time, isn't it? Time to start heading for home.

DAVE: Yes, it is.

FRANKIE: The sooner the better.

(Kerry bit her lip.)

KERRY: It's going to suck, isn't it?

DAVE: Like a whore's lips trapped in a vacuum cleaner.

(Arthur winced.)

ARTHUR: You disgust me sometimes.

DAVE: Just telling it like it is, mate. This is going to the trip from hell. Five hundred miles across hostile territory. Territory where every resident is bitter at our nation. Territory that's rumoured to full of bandits roaming the countryside, for fuck sake. And let's not forget that faction that want to kill us all on sight. Nightmare!

FRANKIE: And that's without even mentioning some of the lawless towns we're going to have to pass through.

DAVE: Or the deadly wildlife.

FRANKIE: There's even been tales of witches in this part of the world.

DAVE: Which if you're under the age of eight is truly terrifying.

FRANKIE: Yeah... wait. You cheeky...

DAVE: Witches indeed.

FRANKIE: There's no smoke without fire, mate. Urban legends are always based on at least a modicum of truth.

DAVE: Frankie, mate, we'll be fine.

FRANKIE: Yeah, well, I'll be on the lookout for them, even if you won't.

DAVE: I definitely won't. Because it's bollocks.

FRANKIE: Dave...

KERRY: Guys!

(All eyes turned to Kerry.)

KERRY: Before we set out on this dangerous march, I need to know something.

ARTHUR: Oh?

KERRY: Are you ready to work as a team?

ARTHUR: Team?

KERRY: Yes. Getting through this will require teamwork. We can't just casually stroll across the country, only taking care of ourselves; we'll have to work together.

(Frankie nodded.)

FRANKIE: And we will, I'm sure.

DAVE: No doubt about it.

KERRY: Thank you.

(She nodded then looked to Frankie.)

KERRY: You'll be leading us, I assume. You are an officer, after all.

FRANKIE: I am, yes, but the war's over and you're all civilians, I can't *order* you to do anything.

KERRY: No, but I, for one, would feel a lot better about things if I knew we had a competent leader. Someone who knows how to maximise our strengths and also knows when to quit.

(Frankie shrugged.)

FRANKIE: I don't mind assuming the role, if that's what everyone wants, I guess.

ARTHUR: I'm okay with it.

DAVE: Doesn't bother me.

KERRY: Good.

(She stood tall.)

KERRY: That's a weight off my mind. I think we could make a pretty good team, what with our individual strengths.

(She looked to Arthur.)

KERRY: Reverend, as a holy man, people might think twice about attacking you. Your mere presence might just give us a pass. You'd also make a good diplomat.

ARTHUR: I would?

KERRY: Of course. Preaching god's divine forgiveness might just get us out a whole heap of trouble.

ARTHUR: Well, yes, that's true actually.

(Kerry then looked to Frankie.)

KERRY: Of course, if we *are* attacked we'll be glad we have a skilled swordsman with us.

FRANKIE: Not just skilled, Nurse; elite.

KERRY: Then you'll be a godsend.

(She then looked to Dave.)

KERRY: As will a guy your size. I mean, your sheer bulk alone will deter a large number of attacks. And that's exactly what we'll need.

DAVE: Fair point.

KERRY: And if anyone gets hurt, that's where I come in. I'm not just a nurse. I passed my nurse practitioners exam a month ago. I'll be able to register as a doctor one we get home. So, yeah, my presence is a must too.

(She then glanced out to sea and sighed.)

KERRY: Trouble is, despite all our individual merits, it's still going to be tough. Our skills will be tested to the fullest. Just to survive we'll all need to give one hundred percent. And even then we've got just enough about us to survive.

(She then looked away innocently.)

KERRY: I mean, there's absolutely no way we can carry someone. An unskilled buffoon, for example, might just get us all killed.

DAVE: Yeah, but we haven't got one of those.

KERRY: Haven't we?

(She then turned and glared at the whimpering Stacey.)

KERRY: Haven't we though?

STACEY: Mean!

FRANKIE: Wait. *She's* medically trained too. As such...

KERRY: Medically trained?

FRANKIE: Yeah, she's...

KERRY: Stacey, would you like to tell them how you ended up in this job, or shall I?

(Stacey twiddled her fingertips nervously.)

STACEY: I'd rather neither of us did.

KERRY: Then *I'll* do it.

STACEY: No! You always make it sound twice as bad as it was.

KERRY: Fine. Then the floor's yours.

(With all eyes on her, Stacey whimpered again then swayed her shoulders nervously.)

STACEY: It's not a floor, it's a field; stupid.

KERRY: Stacey...

STACEY: Fine!

(She sighed and hung her head before speaking out in a small, embarrassed voice.)

STACEY: I read the job description and it sounded like my old job. So I applied.

KERRY: Tell the whole story!

STACEY: I am!

(She pouted.)

STACEY: I didn't read the bit where it said who'd I'd be working for, so... so... I kind of signed up for the war by accident.

(Dave and Frankie both chuckled.)

DAVE: Now that's a mistake and a half.

FRANKIE: I'll say.

KERRY: Yes, but it's only half the story.

STACEY: Kerry...

KERRY: Shut it.

(She looked to Arthur.)

KERRY: The job description said they wanted someone to help relieve stress and bring comfort to the men in our care. Which, as she says, was just like her old job at a *hostess club*, where she'd...

(She then put her fist to her mouth to simulate a blowjob.)

ARTHUR: Right. I'm not sure I understand that gesture.

KERRY: She'd suck them off!

ARTHUR: Oh.

(He then looked greatly enlightened.)

ARTHUR: Oh!!!

STACEY: I hate you, Kerry.

KERRY: Suck it up, buttercup; I'm just getting started.

(She shook her head.)

KERRY: Do you how I know all this? Four weeks into the job, I went to check on a patient before the end of my shift and there she was. Her head bobbing back and forth in his lap. She thought that was her job!!!

STACEY: It was a genuine mistake!

KERRY: Your entire *being* is a genuine mistake!

(She gave an exasperated gasp.)

KERRY: I'll ask for clean gloves and she'll hand me a new face mask; she can't tell the fucking difference! I'll ask for a surgical clamp and she'll hand me the bulldog clip from her sodding clipboard. I'll ask her for bandages and she'll come back with sticking plasters.

STACEY: Not *every* time!

KERRY: Every time but *one*! And *that* time, you tripped and dropped them in the mud!

STACEY: I didn't mean to!

KERRY: Worst of all was the time I asked her to put pressure on an injured man's wound to stop the bleeding. I even showed her where to press down! I quickly ran to get the detergent to clean the wound and when I came back, she was holding his hand!

STACEY: I didn't want to get blood on my dress!

KERRY: That poor man didn't want to bleed to death either!

STACEY: He didn't!

KERRY: No thanks to you.

(She shook her head.)

KERRY: Anyway, that's the person we're dealing with, guys.

ARTHUR: A sinner!

KERRY: And an outrageous halfwit.

(She sucked her teeth.)

KERRY: Seriously, guys, as we already established it's going to require every single of us to have our wits about us if we're going to make it back to our own country alive. And every single one of us is going to have to use their individual skills when called upon. We can't afford to carry a passenger. And that's what she'll be. A passenger and a bloody liability. I mean it, if we want to survive this nightmare, we have to leave her behind.

STACEY: How can you say that? That's the meanest thing anyone has ever said to me!!!

ARTHUR: I agree.

STACEY: Thank you!

ARTHUR: Not you. Nurse...

KERRY: Waters. Kerry Waters.

ARTHUR: Quite. She's who I'm agreeing with.

STACEY: But...

ARTHUR: Trying to carry a fool could well be the death of us and that's only *half* the problem.

(He looked to Stacey coldly.)

ARTHUR: You, young lady, are a sinner. A shameless wretch. As a man of the cloth, I refuse to have any association with you. Why teaming up with the likes of *you* would ruin my reputation and that of the church.

(He nodded.)

ARTHUR: We should leave you behind!

STACEY: Mean!

ARTHUR: Don't blame me, blame yourself. This is the karma you invoked. God has forsaken you. Left you here to die as a punishment for your sins. Nobody else is to blame here, just you. Think about that for a moment.

(He folded his arms.)

ARTHUR: Just make sure you repent before the East Partisans come and burn you, or you'll end up burning in hell too.

(Tears welled in Stacey's eyes.)

STACEY: Fine. Go then! Leave me behind to die. I should've expected you'd do something like that. Nobody's *ever* wanted me around. Ever! It's been the same since before I can remember. All I've ever wanted is a little love, but no. Even my parents didn't love me.

ARTHUR: Nonsense. I'm sure they loved you once.

STACEY: When they heard I'd joined the war effort they threw a party in my honour.

ARTHUR: Well there you go then. They cared enough to give you a good send off.

STACEY: They arranged the party for *after* I'd left! To celebrate the fact!

ARTHUR: Oh.

(He shrugged.)

ARTHUR: Well, that's what you get for being a sinner. Now, enough of this nonsense. Let's get organised so we can head off.

STACEY: Fine! Go. Just abandon me and leave me to perish out here; cold, alone and defenceless. You do that. I don't care. Just go!

(She then burst into tears. Having remained silent until now, Frankie grimaced then turned to face her.)

FRANKIE: Are you done ranting, Stacey?

STACEY: Yes!

FRANKIE: Then grab your stuff. The five of us are shipping out.

ARTHUR: Five???

KERRY: *She's* not coming!

FRANKIE: Yes, she is.

ARTHUR: You listen to me, young man...

FRANKIE: No, mate; you listen to me!

(He ruffled his neck.)

FRANKIE: As a proud member of the Norland National Army, I'm duty bound to both serve *and* protect every member of my regiment. That's craved in stone; non-negotiable! And when I say my regiment, that includes my fellow soldiers, support staff and affiliates. All of them!

KERRY: But she's useless!

FRANKIE: And I couldn't give a fuck. She didn't screw up on purpose; I'm sure. I'm willing to bet she tried her very best, even if it wasn't good enough. Her aptitude is irrelevant. In the army, we stand by each other. It doesn't matter if you're a first class warrior or you tend to drop your weapon and piss you pants at the very first sign of danger. If you're part of my regiment; you'll get my full support!

(He nodded to Stacey.)

FRANKIE: You're coming with us.

(Stacey exhaled adoringly then burst into tears again.)

STACEY: Thank you.

ARTHUR: No, no, no. This is all wrong. You can't be serious, surely.

FRANKIE: I can, and I am!

ARTHUR: And what's your take on it, Dave?

(Dave shrugged.)

DAVE: Well, seeing as you asked, quite frankly, Arthur, I think you're a first class cunt!

ARTHUR: Excuse me???

DAVE: Sinner indeed.

ARTHUR: She is! I mean, just look at her! Look at that skirt! Could it be any shorter?

DAVE: I don't know; could it?

STACEY: I do have shorter ones.

DAVE: And that answers *that* question.

ARTHUR: David, that girl is a sinner. Leaving her here is what god would *want* us to do.

DAVE: Then he's a cunt an' all.

ARTHUR: How dare you???

DAVE: Yeah, she's sinned. So what? Who hasn't?

ARTHUR: Me!

DAVE: No? Let's take a look at that theory, shall we? First off, you said that consorting with the likes of her would tarnish your reputation. Pride! That's a sin, is it not?

ARTHUR: I wasn't being prideful!

DAVE: Oh, you were. You'd let her stay here alone and die rather than come with us because it'd make *you* look bad. That's the very definition of pride. And that's the lesser of your two sins for the day. You've judged her! And judged her harshly!

ARTHUR: I was just saying what god would be thinking!

DAVE: No, you weren't. You were judging her. And in your judgment, she deserves to be left here to die. I won't lie, I'm not impressed. For all you fucking know, that god of yours might want her to learn from this experience. This might be her test. And who knows, you might be being tested

too. God might be hoping you can show her some kind of forgiveness and guide her towards the light. But what do I know, eh?

ARTHUR: Bugger all; clearly.

(He nodded defiantly.)

ARTHUR: She's not coming and that's final.

FRANKIE: She is, because I won't leave without her.

DAVE: And I'm going to stick close to the expert swordsman.

FRANKIE: Have fun though, you two. As a reverend and a nurse, I'm sure you'll be fine. Unless you come across an atheist who *doesn't need* medical assistance, in which case, you'll be fucked.

(Kerry sighed in defeat.)

KERRY: Fine. We'll go together then. It was a long shot anyway. With any luck she'll die on the way home instead.

STACEY: That's just plain nasty!

KERRY: And I'm okay with it.

(Arthur shook his head.)

ARTHUR: Look... okay... fine. She can come with us, but on one condition. If she sins again, or her silliness almost gets us all killed, we'll ditch her on the roadside.

FRANKIE: Reverend?

ARTHUR: Yes!

FRANKIE: Your condition is, what's the word?

ARTHUR: Acceptable?

FRANKIE: Irrelevant! Now let's get our stuff together.

(He glanced around the field.)

FRANKIE: There's a cart over there we can tow; that might come in handy.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: Let's take two of the tents with us and whatever we can stow in our bags.

ARTHUR: My bag was taken by the army.

STACEY: And mine...

(She then gasped.)

STACEY: Was in my tent!!!

(She then charged off towards where her tent had been pitched.)

KERRY: Stupid cow. If they've taken her tent, they'll have taken her bag. Even if it *was* stuffed full of girly clothes.

FRANKIE: Actually, that's unlikely. They'd have ditched her bag outside the tent.

(He cringed.)

FRANKIE: They'll have snatched her underwear; there's little doubt about that. The rest of it should still be there though.

DAVE: Snatched her underwear?

FRANKIE: Souvenirs.

DAVE: To show their wives?

FRANKIE: Their mates.

DAVE: Right.

(Arthur nodded.)

ARTHUR: That's disgraceful.

(He then looked enlightened.)

ARTHUR: Wait! Maybe they didn't take my things after all. Maybe they left *my* bag too.

FRANKIE: Go and have a look.

ARTHUR: I will!

(He then hurried away. Left behind, Frankie nodded.)

FRANKIE: Sorry to overrule you just now, Kerry. It's just that...

KERRY: A good soldier never willingly leaves a comrade behind, I know.

DAVE: Ironical really, because the army did exactly that to us! Fucked off and left us here.

FRANKIE: What can I tell you, mate? Some people live by the code, the others are, well... the cunts in charge, unfortunately.

(They shared a series of disapproving head shakes then Frankie stood tall.)

FRANKIE: Let's pack away a couple of tents and load them in that cart, Dave. We've got a long trek ahead of us and we need to make a start.

DAVE: Now that, mate, that sounds like a plan.

(They then strutted away towards where Kerry's tent was luffing in the breeze.)

(Some fifteen minutes later, having packed up two tents and placed them in the small cart with their bags, the five abandoned souls stood together and glanced over the field one last time. This humble stretch of land upon the hilltop had been their base for the last year, and despite knowing they wouldn't miss it, they still couldn't help feeling some affection for it.)

ARTHUR: Well, this is a strange sensation.

DAVE: Uh-huh.

ARTHUR: I feel like I'm going to miss this place, despite knowing for a fact that I won't miss it one bit.

FRANKIE: Like leaving a home you hated, but had oddly got used to.

ARTHUR: Well, yeah, that's exactly what it is.

(Kerry grimaced.)

KERRY: I'm not feeling that. And not just because I spent the last six months putting up with that numpty...

(She nodded towards Stacey.)

KERRY: Longing to go home.

(She sighed.)

KERRY: This place is nothing but a field of gloom to me. So many people died right in front of me. People in my care.

DAVE: A bit shit at what you do then, are you?

KERRY: No, you cheeky bastard!

DAVE: Easy!

KERRY: I'm talking about people who came back with injuries so severe we couldn't save them, no matter what we tried. And believe me, we tried everything.

(She sighed.)

KERRY: It was hell.

(She forced a smile.)

KERRY: Although it did get a little easier in recent months, I have to say. I started sending that numpty there down to the beach everyday to collect healing shells for three hours.

FRANKIE: Healing shells? What are they?

KERRY: They don't exist. I just wanted her out of my way. She was more of a hindrance than an assistant.

STACEY: I knew it!

KERRY: No, you didn't. You actually thought healing shells were a thing.

STACEY: I had my suspicions though. You never seemed to use them!

KERRY: Whatever. The point is, war is horrible. So much pain and death, and for what? I mean, we won the war, but what does that really mean? What did we win?

ARTHUR: Bragging rights, pretty much.

FRANKIE: Actually, we won the right to define the border where it's supposed to be. They wanted to take the Corolla Peninsula, which has always been part of Norland. That's what the war was about and that's what we won.

DAVE: We're nowhere near the Corolla Peninsula though.

FRANKIE: Yeah... that's the shit part. War spreads. And here we are.

ARTHUR: Indeed.

(He furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: Here we are. Abandoned and in danger, five hundred miles from home. Without a change of underwear.

(He groaned.)

ARTHUR: I can't believe they took my bag.

(Stacey beamed.)

STACEY: Still, it's not all bad news; at least they didn't take mine. They didn't even steal my knickers first. Lucky.

DAVE: That *is* lucky. You can lend Arthur here a pair.

ARTHUR: Oh, do grow up. Like I'd wear women's underwear.

DAVE: Why not? You wear a dress sometimes.

ARTHUR: That's a cassock!

DAVE: *You're* a wazzock!

ARTHUR: I said cassock!

DAVE: And I said...

ARTHUR: David!!!

(Dave started to chuckle, much to Arthur's annoyance.)

ARTHUR: Once we get back to Norland, I'm terminating your employment with immediate effect.

DAVE: You don't employ me, mate.

ARTHUR: I... shut up, you.

(He then glanced across the field one last time.)

ARTHUR: A field of death. Tragic.

KERRY: It is.

(As the two of them reminisced sorrowfully, Frankie leant close to Dave and lowered his voice.)

FRANKIE: You know, mate; any time the shit hits the fan on this trek, it's down to you and me to save everyone.

DAVE: I know. We're basically carrying all three of them.

FRANKIE: Ah, good. So you know. I figured it was kinder to let the reverend and the nurse think they'd be asset than hit them with the reality, but as long as *you* know the deal, it's fine.

DAVE: Oh, I know it alright, mate. Don't worry.

(He shook his head.)

DAVE: It's gonna be a nightmare and you and I going to have to break a lot of faces to get through it alive.

FRANKIE: Exactly.

(He groaned then spoke at his normal volume.)

FRANKIE: And all because we accepted a glass of that stupid whisky. I won't be drinking that brand again.

DAVE: Etherum? Me either.

(Kerry then threw an astonished glance at them.)

KERRY: Etherum???

DAVE: Yeah.

KERRY: Is *that* what we drank???

ARTHUR: Yes; why?

KERRY: That's not whisky!

FRANKIE: I thought as much. Surely, the clue's in the name. It's a kind of rum.

KERRY: No, it isn't!

(She cringed.)

KERRY: It's a general anaesthetic in the form of a liqueur!

FRANKIE: What???

DAVE: Excuse me???

KERRY: You heard! They banned it four years ago because it wasn't safe. As a drink, it was easier to administer anaesthesia to people on the battle field, but too many of them weren't waking up again!

(For a few moments, silence reigned, until Arthur scratched his neck nervously.)

ARTHUR: Not waking up again sounds about right. The chap who gave it to us said the rest of the bottle was for him. He died in the night.

KERRY: I'm not surprised if he drank that much.

DAVE: What a pillock.

FRANKIE: Why did he even have it?

DAVE: His mum packed it for him, he said.

KERRY: She probably didn't realise it was deadly.

FRANKIE: What a twat.

(He shook his head.)

FRANKIE: If only he'd opened the good bottle of whisky he had, instead of that poison.

(Arthur mused to himself.)

ARTHUR: Actually, I bet his mum gave him that good bottle of whisky. I can't even begin to guess where he got the anaesthetic from, but I'd wager he got the two bottles mixed up.

KERRY: And it cost him his life.

DAVE: And left us five right in the shit.

(Everyone then fell silent for a moment as they thought things through.)

KERRY: What a horrible, horrible mistake to make. Confusing Etherum for whisky. Even dickhead here didn't screw up that badly.

STACEY: Hey!

KERRY: What? You didn't.

STACEY: Oh. Okay.

ARTHUR: Anyway, that's one mystery we'll *never* solve. Why he had an illegal anaesthetic, we'll never know; nor where he got it from. What we *do* know is, it's left us in something of a mess and if we don't start moving soon, we may never get out of it.

DAVE: Right! That sounds like our cue to leave.

FRANKIE: Works for me. Let's go.

DAVE: Sold.

(Dave then lifted the handles to the cart and proceeded to drag it behind him.)

ARTHUR: Are you going to be okay? Not heavy, is it?

DAVE: I'll be fine, mate. Yes, it's heavy, but then I'm as strong as an ox. Not a problem.

ARTHUR: Then our journey begins.

DAVE: It already had.

ARTHUR: Oh, shut up.

(Dave just chuckled and headed onwards, following Frankie's lead. Very much on the lookout for any vengeful local folk who might be lying in wait for them, Frankie was the very picture of professionalism. Although this was very much a rural setting and coming across a group of embittered yokels was unlikely, he wasn't going to take any chances. Arthur strode at his side. It wasn't that he was feeling brave; he just liked the idea of being at the leader's side. It gave him a much needed sense importance, and more importantly, security. Just behind them, Kerry and Stacey walked either side of the cart. For Kerry, this was a good place to sneer at her from. For Stacey, the cart made an excellent barrier between her and her angry co-worker.

As they began to descend down an incline towards the road back to civilisation, Dave allowed himself a moment to enjoy the view then glanced over his shoulder.)

DAVE: You alright back there, ladies?

STACEY: Yes, thank you.

KERRY: I'm fine.

DAVE: Good, good. I'm not sure I like the idea of you two being at the back though.

FRANKIE: No, nor do I.

(He looked to Arthur.)

FRANKIE: Can you walk behind the cart, please? Help keep an eye on the girls.

(Arthur was most put out.)

ARTHUR: Me? At the back? Like the tail on the donkey? Playing the role of the fat kid on school sport's day? The reject, sent where nobody can see him? I should cocoa.

(Frankie looked most unimpressed.)

FRANKIE: Are you going to be an obstacle, reverend?

ARTHUR: Absolutely not. Why would you even ask me that?

FRANKIE: We agreed to pull together. To work with one another in order to get through this. And you all volunteered me to lead. So, if you're not going to do as I ask, that *makes* you an obstacle.

ARTHUR: But... the rear. That's...

FRANKIE: A critical position in any military formation. An important role.

ARTHUR: Important?

FRANKIE: Strategically crucial!

(Arthur beamed.)

ARTHUR: Then I'm your man.

(With that, he trotted to the back, passing Kerry with a big smile on his face.)

ARTHUR: Don't worry, I've got your six.

KERRY: Um... thanks?

ARTHUR: No, no. I don't require kudos, young lady. Just doing my bit as a vital cog in the machine.

(Dave grinned to himself.)

DAVE: What a twat.

ARTHUR: I'm sorry, did you say something?

DAVE: Nothing important.

ARTHUR: Right.

DAVE: I just called you a twat.

ARTHUR: David...

(Just then, a group of five burly men charged from a bush next to the cart.)

ARTHUR: Panic!!! I mean help!!!

(At once, Dave and Frankie span around, just in time to see one of the men grab Stacey and put a razor sharp knife to her throat.)

THUG: Don't move!!!

FRANKIE: Shit!

DAVE: Fuck!

(Kerry tried to look mortified, but couldn't help allowing a smile to appear on her face. She couldn't have sounded more insincere if she'd tried.)

KERRY: Oh no. How awful. They've got Stacey. What a shame.

FRANKIE: What do you want, you cunts?

THUG: Your cart, obviously.

DAVE: Well that's not happening. Look, we'll do you a deal.

THUG: You're in no position to negotiate, pal.

DAVE: Oh, I dunno. It's a good deal. If you let her go and apologise, we'll let you live. Albeit with broken limbs.

THUG: No, mate, you'll do as you're fucking told or we'll hurt the girl. Badly!

(Stacey whimpered.)

STACEY: Please don't let them do that.

FRANKIE: You fucking...

THUG: Wait! Those are Norland accents!

(At once, the five thugs all snarled furiously.)

THUG: That changes everything! Rape her, boys!

(A cheer then went up and Stacey was unceremoniously thrown on the floor, where three of the men started to tear at her clothes.)

STACEY: Help!

FRANKIE: Hang in there, girl!

(With that, he yanked his blade from its sheath then came out fighting. With fists aloft, Dave immediately joined in. Arthur and Kerry on the other hand, gathered together on the far side of the cart and clung onto one another for dear life. The events unfolding before them were far from encouraging. Frankie had met his match with the first soldier, who was parrying his every blade strike. And the man Dave was fighting was very much his equal as well. This left Stacey at the hands of the three sneering rapists; unable to defend herself.)

STACEY: Please!!! Someone!!!

FRANKIE: Hang in there, girl; I'll get to you eventually.

DAVE: Whatever it takes!

STACEY: No!!! Stop it!!! Get off me!!!

FRANKIE: Fight them off as best you can, Stacey; we're coming.

THUG: You're not though, are you?

FRANKIE: I am! Just very slowly.

DAVE: I won't lie, Frankie; this is not an impressive start. This cunt won't go down either!

THUG: What did you expect? We're proud former members of the Asparia army! And you're gonna pay for what your nation did! Starting with that bitch! Rape her and rape her well, lads!!! (And still Dave and Frankie struggled. This was a disastrous start to their journey. They'd heard tales of how many Asparia soldiers had taken to living as bandits after leaving the army, and to be attacked so soon was a tragedy. These men were far from weak.)

FRANKIE: Just fucking die, will you???

THUG: No!

STACEY: Get off me!!!

(She then released a furious growl.)

STACEY: Fuck off!!!

(Suddenly, she emitted a bright white glow and bellowed. In that moment, the five assailants all took off into the air as if they'd been hit by a two hundred mile per hour wind. One of them flew over one hundred metres and slammed into a tree. In the blinking of an eye, they'd been cast away to their deaths by an inexplicable ethereal explosion, straight from Stacey's slender frame. Having been standing right there among them, yet not been even remotely affected, Dave and Frankie could only stare down at her agog. She was puffing and panting for breath; still emitting a white glow.)

DAVE: Um...

(In that moment, the glow exited Stacey's body and she glanced up at Frankie in bewilderment. Scratching his head as he stared back down at her, Frankie could only grimace.)

FRANKIE: Um... Stacey? We need to talk.

(Stacey just giggled nervously then passed out.)

It had been two whole hours since Stacey had blasted out a mystical force then passed out, and she hadn't opened her eyes since. The journey had therefore resumed with Frankie carrying her upon his back. Stranded in bandit country, there was no way he was going to let his party remain where they'd been attacked, just in case more thugs came. He'd decided it was safer to keep moving and hopefully get close to some kind of town by nightfall. The countryside, after all, was a dangerous place at this time.

Ever since the walk had resumed some one hour and fifty five minutes ago, neither the reverend or Kerry had spoken a single word. Both of them had strode forwards with what could only be described as horrified expressions on their faces. What they'd seen Stacey do had rocked them to

the core. Also deep in thought, Frankie had done very little talking other than to issue directions to Dave. Pulling the cart forth behind him, Dave had obliged accordingly. He'd then followed up Frankie's commands by trying to strike up a conversation. All he'd got in return however was a thoughtful "Mm". Getting somewhat fed up with the silence, he could only groan to himself.

DAVE: This fucking silence is driving me nuts.

(Frankie looked to him enquiringly.)

FRANKIE: Sorry, what?

(Delighted to have finally prompted a response, Dave glanced over his shoulder at him.)

DAVE: Are we going to talk about what happened back there, or what?

(Frankie shook his head.)

FRANKIE: I genuinely don't know what to say about that?

DAVE: I do! She lit up like a festival tree then blasted five massive blokes into orbit. That's not fucking normal.

FRANKIE: I know.

(Dave rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: Oh, you know, do you? Well, thank fuck. I was beginning to think I was the only one who noticed something amiss.

FRANKIE: Far from it. I've been trying to figure out what the fuck happened since we set out.

(He nodded to Arthur and Kerry.)

FRANKIE: And those two have been catatonic with fear since it happened.

DAVE: Yeah, well... I'm not surprised. They were really fucking horrible to her before we left.

Now they know she's got some kind of freaky magic powers, they're probably shitting themselves.

(Kerry looked to him and whimpered.)

DAVE: See? That confirms it.

KERRY: We should have left her behind. If she decides to get revenge on me for pointing out what a useless cunt she's always been, I'm done for.

FRANKIE: We're not leaving her behind!

(Arthur growled.)

FRANKIE: Something to say reverend?

ARTHUR: Yes!

FRANKIE: Then speak your mind.

ARTHUR: Very well, I will. Why the hell did you insist on bringing her with us?

FRANKIE: Because she's affiliated to the Norland Army; the same reason I insisted on you coming!

ARTHUR: *My* inclusion was never in doubt.

(Frankie sneered then spoke up under his breath.)

FRANKIE: That's what *you* think. All your whinging earlier was giving me a headache; I was more than tempted to fuck off without you.

ARTHUR: Sorry? What was that?

FRANKIE: Nothing. Don't worry about it.

ARTHUR: But I do. I worry a lot. That woman is quite clearly a minion of the devil.

DAVE: Steady on.

FRANKIE: The devil?

ARTHUR: You saw her! She blasted people into the air with a force beyond that of man! That's the devil's party piece!

DAVE: Or is it god's party piece?

ARTHUR: God? God???

DAVE: Yeah; you know, that all powerful sky fairy of yours.

ARTHUR: This is a serious matter, David! That girl cast the devil's magic! Why the hell would we keep her here with us?

DAVE: Arthur, mate... listen to me. She emitted a white light. Almost an angelic light. And in doing so she ended an attack by five evil-doers. That's hardly the act of a demon.

ARTHUR: Then it shows what you know!

DAVE: I does, yes; now let's hear what *you* know. I want to know why you're so sure she's evil. Her act was superhuman, sure; but how can you say killing five evil bastards makes *her* the bad guy?

ARTHUR: Because killing in all it's forms is evil.

FRANKIE: Then she's in good company. I've killed *dozens* of men since joining the army

DAVE: And the major's dog.

FRANKIE: Yeah! Not that you can call a Chihuahua a dog.

DAVE: True.

ARTHUR: That's different. As tragic as killing in wartime is, that's a human failing. What she did... what she did...

FRANKIE: Was successfully thwart an enemy attack.

ARTHUR: No. Well, yes, but... oh, shut up.

(He furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: Uneducated buffoons.

(Dave grinned.)

DAVE: That's how all conversations with him end. He gets the hump because he doesn't have a comeback.

FRANKIE: I've only known him for five minutes, and I can already confirm that's the case.

(He then looked across at his three lucid companions.)

FRANKIE: Look, guys, we don't know what happened back there. We can't ask her until she wakes up, but I for one, am willing to give her the benefit of any doubt. Kerry, Reverend, if she was the sort of person who'd strike you down for simply being cruel about her, she'd have done it this morning. So calm down, okay? When she wakes up, she can explain herself. Until then, let's keep an open mind.

DAVE: Agreed.

(Dave then glanced to where Stacey was hanging off Frankie's back, squinting at him with one eye. As soon as she saw him, however, she quickly closed it again.)

DAVE: Stacey, I saw that.

(Stacey said nothing.)

FRANKIE: Saw what?

DAVE: She's awake.

STACEY: No, I'm not!

FRANKIE: Oh, she's back.

STACEY: Shit.

FRANKIE: I'm putting you down now.

STACEY: But...

(Before she could protest any further, Frankie allowed her to slide down his back, onto her feet. They all then turned to face her; Kerry and Arthur wincing uncomfortably.)

FRANKIE: You okay?

STACEY: Um... yeah.

DAVE: More importantly, how much of that did you hear while you were pretending to be unconscious?

STACEY: I wasn't pretending!

DAVE: Stacey!

(Stacey whimpered.)

STACEY: Not at first anyway.

FRANKIE: How long have you been awake then?

(Stacey blushed.)

STACEY: About an hour.

ARTHUR: Oh, god; she heard everything.

KERRY: We're doomed.

(Stacey swung her shoulders nervously.)

STACEY: Why would *you* be doomed? *I'm* not going to do anything. Even if you two *were* arguing to leave me behind, I still wouldn't hurt anyone. I wouldn't know how.

DAVE: By blasting them asunder, like you did with those five blokes.

(Stacey cringed.)

STACEY: Yeah... I'm not entirely sure what happened there. *That's* never happened before.

ARTHUR: Then allow me to enlighten you.

(He thrust a pointing hand in her direction.)

ARTHUR: You've been possessed by the devil!

STACEY: I have???

(She whimpered.)

STACEY: Oh, poo. My mum said that would happen if I wasn't careful.

ARTHUR: Really? She did?

STACEY: It's all that slutting about I do, she said. The devil will take me, she told me.

DAVE: Stacey, you're not possessed by the devil!

STACEY: I'm not? But he said...

DAVE: He says that about everybody, love. He said it about *me* once when I snapped my shovel in a temper. He's ridiculously quick to go there.

FRANKIE: The fact is, we don't know what happened. It might be dark forces, but it might be light. Could be neither. It was a freak thing and if *you* don't understand it...

STACEY: I don't.

FRANKIE: Then nobody does.

(He then glowered at Arthur.)

FRANKIE: So stop fucking speculating.

(Arthur furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: Fine.

(He then folded his arms and sulked. Caring very little for his childish pouting, Dave lowered the cart then paced around and looked to Stacey.)

DAVE: I just need to know one thing.

STACEY: What's that?

DAVE: Did it feel good? I did, didn't it? Blowing those cunts into the trees.

(Stacey ruffled her neck.)

STACEY: It was a relief, yes. I was really scared. They were gonna rape me. And kill me!

DAVE: So you cast your magic.

STACEY: No.

(She shrugged nervously.)

STACEY: I didn't *cast* anything; it just happened.

DAVE: Without your forcing it?

STACEY: Yes. I already said. I don't know what happened. One minute I was in fear for my life, the next... I felt this energy... and... *that* happened.

FRANKIE: Interesting. So it's a power triggered by fear of death...

STACEY: And rape. Don't overlook that bit.

(She pouted.)

STACEY: I really didn't want them sticking their thingies in me.

(Kerry raised a sceptical eyebrow.)

KERRY: But I thought you *liked* men sticking their thingies in you. You did made a career out of it, after all.

STACEY: No, I didn't.

(She ruffled her neck indignantly.)

STACEY: Sure, I've done lots of other things, but only with my hands, face and bum. Nobody's *ever* parked their van in my lady garage. Not even once! I'm a virgin.

(In that moment, Kerry and Arthur both burst out laughing.)

KERRY: Yeah, right.

ARTHUR: Please. How gullible do you think we are?

STACEY: But, it's true.

ARTHUR: Poppycock. You're only saying that because you hope it'll get you out of going to hell.

STACEY: Am not.

ARTHUR: Oh, come off it. We weren't born yesterday.

(As Stacey pouted at him, angered by his mocking, Arthur elaborated.)

ARTHUR: You're a sexual creature. You've even made a career out of it. And look at you.

Strutting about in that tiny skirt, with your cleavage on display to anyone who fancies a peep. You have no inhibitions whatsoever. There's absolutely no way *you're* a virgin!

STACEY: Yes, I am!

ARTHUR: Nonsense. It's just not possible. There's no way a sexually driven young lady like you would be able to quell her wild desires. Very few people can, actually.

(He nodded sternly.)

ARTHUR: Why even *I* filled the old boots once or twice before I discovered my calling.

(As he stood there and nodded to himself, satisfied that he'd made his case and Stacey would now have to confess to lying, Dave stepped up to him and placed his hand on his shoulder.)

DAVE: Seriously, Arthur?

ARTHUR: What?

DAVE: You had sex out of wedlock?

ARTHUR: Well...

DAVE: We have a word for people like you.

FRANKIE: Yup. A sinner!

DAVE: Bingo! And he had the cheek to have a go at Stacey for throwing out a few mild favours.

STACEY: It was more than few to be fair. My mum says I've swallowed more semen than all the oceans put together.

FRANKIE: Yes, but unlike Arthur here, you've never had sex out of wedlock.

DAVE: Exactly. I think we should leave him behind. I mean, we're gonna need god on our side if we're to survive this trip, and having that sinner with us isn't going to help.

ARTHUR: Stop that, you! How is that funny?

FRANKIE: He's just throwing back the cruel jibes you threw at young Stacey here.

DAVE: Which is a bit rich considering the biggest sinner here is you!

ARTHUR: Me? How dare you? The two of us don't even compare! Yes, I had some moments back in my youth, but I've long since repented. Now I'm celibate!

FRANKIE: Yeah, and having met you, I have to wonder if it's by choice.

ARTHUR: It *is* by choice!!!

(He ruffled his neck.)

ARTHUR: God called me, so I put away my penis and haven't seen it since!

(Dave patted Arthur's belly.)

DAVE: Then this walk will do you the world of good.

ARTHUR: Why, you...

(Kerry then stepped forward to interrupt.)

KERRY: Look. Guys. Can you stop this now? Rather than discussing Stacey's power like you were meant to, you've moved on to childish taunting one another now. That's not going to help morale.

DAVE: Just having *that* sour old git in the party is what damages morale.

ARTHUR: Hey!

DAVE: It is. And that's not me trying to taunt you. You're strutting about deluding yourself that you're somehow holier than us, and you've treated Stacey like dirt. She deserves better. Just stop it. You too, Kerry.

KERRY: Me?

DAVE: Yes, you're the one who mentioned morale. Well, if it bothers you that much, at least try being civil.

(Kerry bit her lip.)

KERRY: Actually, you're right. I've been letting my anger get the better of me.

(She looked to Stacey.)

KERRY: Look, seeing as you're no longer my assistant and I don't have to stress about what mistake you'll make next... I'll... I'll try to let the past go and be kinder.

STACEY: Thanks, Kerry.

FRANKIE: Anything to add, Arthur?

(Arthur pouted.)

ARTHUR: I daren't. You young scallywags will only shout me down again.

FRANKIE: Not if you're civil.

ARTHUR: Fine. Whatever you say.

DAVE: Sweet. Let's move on then.

(He then glanced to Stacey.)

DAVE: Try not to worry about that weird magic you did, okay? Seeing as nobody knows what it was, there's no point in anybody stressing over it. It happened; it's done; we move on.

(He winked at her.)

DAVE: Just know this. Whatever it was, I thought it was awesome. Good on you, girl. You're alright, you are.

(Arthur growled under his breath.)

ARTHUR: Look at you. Kissing the magical girl's backside; whatever next?

(Dave glowered at him.)

DAVE: Why *wouldn't* I kiss her backside? For all we know, she might *well* be the devil incarnate like you suspect. There's no way I'm getting on the wrong side of *that*!

(Stacey then burst into tears.)

STACEY: Stop it! I'm not the devil. I'm just a normal girl with big boobs and a tiny brain. You horrible, horrible meany, you!

FRANKIE: Nice work, Dave. You're quite the charmer.

DAVE: I was joking!

(Stacey pouted at him.)

STACEY: You were?

DAVE: Yes! Mostly.

STACEY: Right...

DAVE: Look, the truth is, we don't *know* the source of your magic. We simply don't know if it was good or bad. But *you* seem like a good person.

KERRY: She is. That's what annoyed me the most. She's nice, but inordinately dim and completely useless. It was like telling off a fluffy kitten. And that just made me feel bad for telling her off, which in turn made me even angrier with her.

(She blushed.)

KERRY: Point being, before I went off on a tangent... she is nice, yes.

DAVE: And there you go. You seem nice and you've never done any of us any harm, so we should all just carry on home as if nothing happened.

FRANKIE: I agree.

(He shrugged matter-of-factly.)

FRANKIE: Because quite honestly, worrying about it is as futile as it gets.

DAVE: Then let's not bother doing it.

(With that, he headed back to the front of the cart.)

DAVE: Onward, Frankie?

FRANKIE: As soon as you're ready, mate.

DAVE: Lovely.

(And in that moment their journey resumed. Walking at Frankie's side, Stacey smiled; reassured by the kind words she'd heard. Kerry also seemed a lot calmer now she realised Stacey wasn't some kind of evil, magic-doing machine, likely to seek revenge on her at the first opportunity. The only one who felt any kind of sourness was Arthur. Being called a sinner had bitten deeply into his sense of superiority and he was in no mood to forgive it.)

ARTHUR: Young people... they're all complete and utter cunts! Forgive me, father for I have sinned. There's no excuse for that kind of language. No matter *how* accurate.

(After a further three hours of walking, eighty percent of the homeward bound party continued onwards with a determination in their step. The other twenty percent came in the shape of an exhausted reverend. The furthest he'd walked in the last few years was from the chapel tent to the graveyard, and his lack of fitness was beginning to show. Trudging forth at the rear, puffing and panting, he wasn't sure how much further he could go on. Not one to battle through his discomfort for the good of this team, it wasn't long before he couldn't keep his misery to himself any longer.)

ARTHUR: Is it lunch time yet? It must be. I'm hungry. And my feet hurt.

(He groaned.)

ARTHUR: We've been walking for days and I'm exhausted.

FRANKIE: Days? We've been walking for about five hours.

ARTHUR: Which is an obscene amount of time. I say we take a break.

DAVE: The leader says when take a break.

ARTHUR: Dave...

DAVE: You're not the leader.

ARTHUR: I never said I was.

(He pouted.)

ARTHUR: If *I* was the leader, I'd take the needs of my party into account. I wouldn't make them march on into the afternoon, long past the point of exhaustion.

(Frankie gave him a sideways glance.)

FRANKIE: If *you* were the leader, we'd all be dead. You'd have left Stacey behind and we'd have been killed by those thugs.

DAVE: They wouldn't have killed *me*. If he was the leader, I'd have refused to join the party.

ARTHUR: Why, you...

(He shook his fist.)

ARTHUR: All I did was ask if we could take a break. I'm not as young as you lot and my whole body is aching from top to bottom.

FRANKIE: Look, we'll rest soon, okay?

ARTHUR: And how soon is soon?

FRANKIE: Soon!

ARTHUR: Right...

KERRY: Soon. Soon is good. Soon works. I could use a break too.

FRANKIE: You could?

KERRY: Yeah. My feet are aching a bit; these shoes of mine weren't exactly designed for long walks.

(Stacey looked down at her own feet, nestled in six inch stiletto shoes then mused to herself.)

STACEY: Mine definitely weren't.

(Frankie nodded.)

FRANKIE: Fair enough. Pull the cart to the roadside, Dave. We're gonna take a break.

DAVE: Righto.

ARTHUR: Oh, I see. Like that, is it? When *I* ask if we can stop, all I get is bile and sarcasm thrown at me. When one of these two wants to stop, on the other hand, you down tools in an instant.

DAVE: Of course. These two are an asset to the party, so we need to look after them. You're just a sinner in silly sandals.

ARTHUR: I am not a sinner!

(He ruffled his neck.)

ARTHUR: And these are excellent sandals.

FRANKIE: Whatever you say, mate. Now shut up and take a load off your feet.

ARTHUR: Happy to.

(He then sat upon and grass and sighed miserably.)

ARTHUR: Blissfully happy to.

KERRY: Before I sit down, would anyone like a sausage roll?

FRANKIE: You have food?

KERRY: I nabbed some from the officer's mess last night before my shift.

FRANKIE: Excellent. I did the same thing.

DAVE: Well that helps.

KERRY: So? Anyone?

ARTHUR: Me first!

DAVE: Yes, please.

FRANKIE: Definitely; thank you.

(All eyes then turned to where Stacey was nervously scratching her neck.)

STACEY: Um... I... um...

KERRY: Do you want a sausage roll, Stacey?

STACEY: You're not going to say tough shit if I say yes, are you?

KERRY: Of course not.

STACEY: In that case, yes, please.

KERRY: Well hard luck!

STACEY: Kerry...

(Kerry chuckled.)

KERRY: I'm kidding, I'm kidding.

(She then handed everyone a sausage roll, making sure to serve Arthur last. His selfish call to be served first had irked her somewhat. With the food now served, she then took a seat on the grass among her travelling companions.)

KERRY: Would it be foolish of me to ask how far we've walked?

FRANKIE: Yes.

KERRY: Oh.

FRANKIE: We've probably done twelve to fifteen miles at a guess. Trouble is, we might be going in the wrong direction. So there's no point in deducting what we've walked so far from the grand total.

DAVE: We're not even sure what the grand total is going to be.

FRANKIE: Another good reason.

KERRY: Yup. And I get that. It's just... the further we are away from that damned base of ours, the better.

(Everyone glanced in her direction.)

KERRY: I've been thinking about that all the way here. I saw hundreds of people die in that field. And hundreds more came through with injuries that will debilitate them for life. I'm glad to be out of there, even if it means camping in bushes for a few weeks.

(She sighed.)

KERRY: It's been so hectic all the time, I've not really have to time to reflect on it until now. That place was hell.

FRANKIE: Yeah... that's war for you.

KERRY: Right? And I knew that when I signed up. Yet... when you get into the middle of the war-zone and all that death is destruction is happening... nothing can prepare you for that. This job truly was a hundred times worse than I could have expected.

STACEY: I can relate to that. It was absolutely nothing like what I thought I was signing up for.

(Everyone sniggered.)

DAVE: A nightclub job?

STACEY: Yes!

(She pouted.)

STACEY: I thought I'd be strutting about in a bra and thong, making men happy.

KERRY: You did strut about in a bra and thong, making men happy! That's *exactly* what you did!

Why do you think I kept shouting at you???

STACEY: Right... sorry.

KERRY: Don't worry about it. It's done now and we're on our way home. I'm just gonna focus on that for now. This might be shit, but at least the damn war's over.

(Just then, a powerful flatbed truck drove past with a group of seven men sitting in the back. Upon spying Kerry and Stacey, they all called out excitedly.)

MAN 01: Show us your tits, love!!!

MAN 02: Have a suckle on this!!!

(He then got his manhood out and swung it around, much to the amusement of his friends. Far from impressed by it, Dave furrowed his brow.)

DAVE: Fucking sling it, you cunts.

(In that moment, the truck came to a screeching halt on the road.)

DAVE: Whoops.

FRANKIE: Great. Nice one, Dave.

DAVE: Yeah... my mistake.

ARTHUR: Pillock.

(Stacey whimpered.)

STACEY: Not again.

DAVE: It'll be fine. Just stay behind me and Frankie.

(Sure enough, Dave and Frankie then stood forwards and the others crept behind them. Looking mean and menacing, the seven men from the back of the truck and the two who'd been in the front, were all stomping towards them.)

MAN 01: Was that a Norland accent, you cunts?

(Frankie looked to Dave urgently.)

FRANKIE: Tell him no in an Asparia accent.

DAVE: I can't do an Asparia accent.

FRANKIE: Shit. Nor can I.

(Just then, Stacey's nervous voice rose up from behind them.)

STACEY: Um... I can.

FRANKIE: You can?

STACEY: I'm really good at accents.

FRANKIE: In that case...

MAN 01: I asked you a question, you cunts. Was that a fucking Norland accent?

(Frankie went to reply, but Stacey tugged his arm and spoke in a lowered voice.)

STACEY: Leave it to me.

(She then peered around Frankie and spoke in what can only be described in a voice depicted that of a dim-witted pirate.)

STACEY: Arr. No it be not, says I. I are not be speaking like that. Arr.

(Slowly, the necks of her four travelling companions craned in her direction. At the same time, the men from the truck all lined up before them and stared at her in bewilderment.)

STACEY: Um... what are be mostly the problem? Arr.

FRANKIE: Are you serious?

(Stacey looked to him urgently and lowered her voice.)

STACEY: No. I'm putting on a voice like you asked me to; remember?

FRANKIE: I know that! How was *that* an Asparia accent?

STACEY: I...

(She scratched her head.)

STACEY: What?

DAVE: Stone the bleeding crows.

MAN 01: You are, aren't you? You're Norland scum!

FRANKIE: No.

MAN 02: You sound like Norland scum!

STACEY: We are be not though. Arr.

FRANKIE: Drop it, Stacey; the fake accent ship has sailed. Sunk even.

(He stood tall.)

FRANKIE: We're not Norland scum at all. We're victorious Norland war heroes! What are you gonna do about it?

DAVE: Way to defuse the situation, mate; nice one.

MAN 01: So you admit it. Norland scum. Right here in our patch.

MAN 02: Fucking jackpot.

MAN 03: What are we gonna do to them, lads?

MAN 04: String 'em up!

MAN 05: After beatings, of course.

(Arthur shrieked then raised his hand.)

ARTHUR: Not guilty!

MAN 01: What?

ARTHUR: I'm not a war hero. Far from it! I'm a man of god! I brokered peace all along. The war has nothing to do with me. I didn't even favour anyone. No, wait! That's a lie! I wanted you lot to win! Boo; down with Norland!

(He whimpered.)

ARTHUR: Please don't hurt me.

DAVE: You shocking coward!

ARTHUR: Silence, you!

MAN 01: No, no, your friend's right. That was embarrassing.

MAN 05: I heard that right, didn't I? He just disowned his country to save his skin.

MAN 02: He did; he actually did!

MAN 03: What a cunt!

MAN 02: We should kill him first!

ARTHUR: Now, steady on!

KERRY: No, Arthur, I'm sorry but even *I'm* disgusted. I treated the injured from both sides during the war, like a nurse is supposed to. I was neutral. I just wanted the war to end quickly and with as little bloodshed as possible on either side, but even *I* wouldn't disown my allegiances just to save my own arse.

MAN 02: No? Sounds like that's *exactly* what you're doing.

KERRY: Then let me set your mind at ease, shit face. Asparia is a nation full of cunts and I'm glad you lost! So suck it, wank bag! Norland rules!

DAVE: Outstanding!

FRANKIE: And just the cue I needed! For Norland!

(With that, he flashed forwards then lopped the arm off of the nearest assailant. Infuriated by his move, the other eight then waded in with their fist aloft. Dave instantly entered defensive mode, fending off punches while trying to stop the angry hoard from reaching Stacey, Kerry and Arthur.)

DAVE: You twat! Why didn't you warn me???

FRANKIE: Because when I asked earlier you said you were *always* ready!

DAVE: Like anyone has *ever* meant that literally!

(Not even bothering to respond to Dave's retort, Frankie skewered a second assailant before plunging his sword into a third. All Arthur, Stacey and Kerry could do was watch on and whimper in terror. Dave was taking quite the pounding in his desperation to hold these men at bay and they

weren't sure how long he could keep it up for. They needn't have worried, however. As soon as Frankie polished off a forth assailant with his blade, the men soon realised the futility of their efforts and turned to flee for the truck.)

MAN 01: Panic!!!

MAN 04: Runaway!!!

MAN 06: That big blokes made of cement and the other one's a fucking maniac!

MAN 02: He killed me brother!!!

MAN 04: You hated your brother!

MAN 02: I never said I wasn't grateful.

(As they charged for the truck, desperate to get away, Frankie rampaged after them.)

FRANKIE: Not so fast, you horrible fuckers!

MAN 02: He's right behind us!

FRANKIE: That's right, bitches!

(As his four allies watched on agape, Frankie charged onwards, causing the men to abandon any hope of getting in the truck. Instead, they bypassed it and sprinted off down the road. Cackling like a maniac, Frankie chased them a good fifty feet then slowed to a halt and grinned to himself.)

FRANKIE: That'll do.

(With that, he raced back to where his bewildered team were waiting.)

FRANKIE: Okay, everyone, listen up...

STACEY: You're a loony!

KERRY: A complete psycho.

ARTHUR: Satan in cheap clothing!

DAVE: Yeah... it's gotta be said, mate; you're a nutter.

(Frankie just chuckled to himself.)

FRANKIE: I'm not, mate. Trust me. I just did what needed to be done.

ARTHUR: Well... I suppose you did save the day, yes.

FRANKIE: I did, yes. But more importantly...

(He gestured down the road.)

FRANKIE: I just bagged us a vehicle.

(Dave gave an impressed nod.)

DAVE: Right... I see... nice one, Frankie.

FRANKIE: Thank you.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: Load the stuff onto the back, Dave. We're *driving* home.

DAVE: Love it.

(Dave then proceeded to empty the contents of the cart into the truck with a big smile on his face.)

DAVE: We'll be home in no time.

(As soon as Dave had finished loading up the back of the truck with their tents, the cart and their bags, he slammed it shut then looked to Frankie, declaring they were ready to leave. Frankie then chose the designated driver. He volunteered Dave to do it then promptly climbed into the back of the truck and instructed the two ladies to join him. Greatly relieved by this, the reverend then availed himself of the passenger seat. With a furrowed brow, Dave then set the truck in motion. Having done so, however, he could only sit there shaking his head disdainfully while he clutched the steering wheel.)

DAVE: I can't believe that bloke. Honestly. What a sly thing to do. The man's a cunt.

(Arthur nestled into his seat then smiled.)

ARTHUR: Opting to keep both young ladies for himself, you mean? I had a feeling he'd do that, actually.

DAVE: Well, yeah, so did I, but I wasn't talking about him.

ARTHUR: What?

DAVE: I was talking about you.

ARTHUR: Me???

DAVE: Yes, you! Disowning your nation; disowning your comrades. Have you no shame whatsoever?

ARTHUR: Um... well...

(He ruffled his neck.)

ARTHUR: I just figured I had to say something... you know... to protect all the good work I still have to do.

DAVE: What good work?

ARTHUR: Spreading the word of god, of course. My calling is important.

DAVE: Yeah, right. I bet if they'd been of a different religion, you'd have disowned god an' all.

(Arthur gasped.)

ARTHUR: I never would!

DAVE: You fucking would. In a heartbeat.

ARTHUR: Actually, sonny boy, that's something I'd *never* do.

(He ruffled his neck.)

ARTHUR: Unless the situation demanded it.

DAVE: Wow.

ARTHUR: Hey! Don't you judge me. *My* survival is for the greater good. If I die, who's going to do god's work, eh?

DAVE: That's actually your excuse, is it? You need to live for god's sake.

ARTHUR: Yes!

DAVE: The rest of us are expendable, but you need to live, because...

ARTHUR: I never said you lot were expendable.

DAVE: You kinda did, actually.

ARTHUR: When?

DAVE: When you told them that *you* didn't approve of war and *you* hoped Norland would lose. A team player would have said *we*!

ARTHUR: Um... that was implied.

DAVE: You...

ARTHUR: Besides, that Frankie fellow would only have corrected me if I'd said "we".

DAVE: And so would I! And so would Kerry.

ARTHUR: Yes, well, that's okay. If you *choose* to do that, so be it. Just don't drag *me* into it.

Unlike you lot, *I* need to live. *My* work is important.

DAVE: And there is it. The selfishness. The arrogance. The hubris. The pride.

(He shook his head.)

DAVE: I hope for your sake there is no god, mate, because you're going straight to hell.

ARTHUR: Poppycock. Listen you... in fact, don't bother. You don't know the first thing about it, so just... be quiet.

DAVE: Twat.

ARTHUR: If anyone's going to hell, it's Frankie. First he slaughters four men like a psychotic minion of the devil then avails himself of the back of the truck with two young ladies. Appalling behaviour.

DAVE: No, mate. That was wartime behaviour. I know you don't want to face this fact, but until we get home, the war isn't over for us. We're still in hostile territory. So he acted accordingly.

ARTHUR: He was maniacal!

DAVE: He was brilliant. He thinned the herd then made sure the others fled so we could secure this vehicle.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: Like a proper soldier should.

ARTHUR: Well, if you ask me...

DAVE: I never will. What *he* did was heroic and professional. What you did was so embarrassing, I'm amazed you've even got the audacity to look at me.

ARTHUR: I...

DAVE: And even *more* amazed you have the audacity to speak to me.

(Arthur just glowered at him.)

DAVE: That's better. Now stay silent, because I swear, mate, I'm one more conceited comment away from punching you through that window.

(In the back of the truck in the meantime, Frankie was seated on one of the sideways benches glancing at the road behind. Stacey was sitting on the floor by his feet. Kerry, was sitting forward on the bench seat opposite with her head in her hands, desperately trying to forget what she'd just seen. Tending to wounds was one thing, seeing them inflicted was quite another. Picking up on her discomfort, Frankie glanced at her briefly then looked away.)

FRANKIE: You okay there, Kerry?

(Kerry glanced up at him.)

KERRY: I'm fine.

STACEY: You don't look fine.

KERRY: I'm fine!!!

STACEY: But you're all pale and sickly looking.

KERRY: I said I'm fine, damn it. I should know, I'm a nurse.

STACEY: Right...

(She grimaced.)

STACEY: Not much of one if you think being pale and sickly means fine.

KERRY: Stacey!

(Stacey flinched.)

STACEY: I'll be quiet!

KERRY: Good!

(Frankie shook his head.)

FRANKIE: You're not fine at all, are you? What you saw has shaken you a bit.

KERRY: Well...

FRANKIE: It's okay to admit it, you know?

(Kerry sighed.)

KERRY: There was blood everywhere.

FRANKIE: Yes; yes there was. But it was their blood and not ours, so I'm fine with it.

KERRY: Yeah...

(She sighed.)

KERRY: I know what you're saying, but it was hard to see. I've devoted my life to fixing wounds and helping people recover from their ailments. So to see you inflict such wounds on people was... I don't know... hard to accept.

FRANKIE: It was them or us, Kerry.

KERRY: I know. That's *why* it's hard to accept.

(Frankie and Stacey shared a baffled glance.)

FRANKIE: Huh?

STACEY: What?

KERRY: I'm just saying... you brutalised those men, but it was justified. Getting my head around that is hard. I've always believed every broken bone, every cut and every graze was unnecessary. Well, I learned something today and it's an unpleasant truth to say the least. Sometimes killing and maiming is the right thing to do.

FRANKIE: It is, yes. Sometimes it's the *only* course of action. Those men would have beaten us all to death. Luckily I had my sword with me. Now the only ones suffering are the aggressors.

STACEY: Yay!

(As two sets of eyes came her way, she quickly hung her head.)

STACEY: Ignore me.

KERRY: Gladly.

(She forced a smile in Frankie's direction.)

KERRY: Seriously, you were brutal. You cut through them like butter.

FRANKIE: Thank you.

KERRY: How come you couldn't do that against those five bandits earlier though?

(Frankie grimaced.)

FRANKIE: Honestly?

KERRY: Please.

FRANKIE: That lot just now were unarmed. Earlier, they had a swordsman as good as me. It was a bloody stalemate.

(He puffed out.)

FRANKIE: If Stacey hadn't done her weird magic, that fight might well have been the death of us.

KERRY: I see.

(She grimaced.)

KERRY: Not likely to come across any *other* expert swordsmen you can't defeat are we?

FRANKIE: I..

(He then furrowed his brow.)

FRANKIE: Who said I *couldn't* defeat him?

KERRY: Well...

FRANKIE: I'd have overcome him *eventually*. It would have taken time, that's all.

KERRY: Right, well, I didn't mean to...

FRANKIE: I'm all man, me. I fight on until I get the victory. And believe me, victory is what I get. I'm a winner.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: I don't go down easily.

STACEY: I do!

KERRY: We're not talking about that, Stacey.

STACEY: Fuck...

FRANKIE: Doubting my skills; whatever next.

KERRY: I wasn't. I was just saying, I hope we don't come across too many... stalemates.

FRANKIE: Then let me set your mind at ease. Not many swordsmen can match me. Just a select few. We were unlucky, that's all.

KERRY: Good to know. Thank you for reassuring me.

FRANKIE: You're welcome.

KERRY: Sorry I dented your ego.

FRANKIE: That's quite alright. Wait...

(He furrowed his brow.)

FRANKIE: It's not about ego!

(Spotting Kerry chuckling, he shook his head then allowed himself a smile.)

FRANKIE: Why do I get the feeling there's a darkness to you? A sarcasm monster lurking within.

STACEY: Because she's really sarcastic. Everyone says so.

KERRY: Yeah...

STACEY: Doctor Warrington said she's a smart arse bitch and he's sick to death of her.

(Kerry performed a double take in her direction.)

KERRY: He said *that*? When?

STACEY: A few nights ago when he was talking to Doctor White.

KERRY: And what else did he say?

STACEY: Dunno. I didn't hear that much, he was holding my ears and thrusting his groin in my face, you see?

(Frankie and Kerry winced.)

KERRY: She paints such vivid images with her words.

FRANKIE: Too vivid.

STACEY: What?

(Kerry sighed.)

KERRY: Nothing.

(She shook her head.)

KERRY: Sucking off the doctors as well, were you?

(Stacey twiddled her fingers nervously.)

STACEY: Everyone has to earn a living, Kerry.

KERRY: I'm not judging, Stacey.

FRANKIE: We've got Arthur for that.

KERRY: Yeah...

(She grimaced.)

KERRY: What's his deal anyway? I thought holy men were nice, but when I wanted to leave Stacey behind, he was all for it. I thought he'd be *first* to object!

STACEY: That was really mean, Kerry. Leaving me behind to die... that's too cruel.

KERRY: I know. I do. I went too far.

(She smiled.)

KERRY: It's just that, I hate you so much I could scream. You've driven me bonkers for months. I mean really grated my last nerve. You made my job a hundred times harder than it should have been.

(She shrugged.)

KERRY: I was at my wits end with you, that's why I said what I said. I apologise.

STACEY: It's cool. Friends?

KERRY: Not a fucking chance.

STACEY: Right...

(Kerry looked to Frankie.)

KERRY: Anyway, the point is, I know her and hate the very ground she walks on; the reverend had never even met her before. And yet he agreed with me. He wanted to leave her to die. What's that all about?

FRANKIE: What can I tell you, Kerry?

KERRY: Just give me some sort of insight into what he was thinking.

FRANKIE: Well, as far as I can tell, he was thinking about himself. What's best for him. I mean, I don't really know him to be honest, but from what I've experienced so far, he strikes me as being a complete and utter self-serving cunt.

KERRY: I see. Well, that's...

(Suddenly, a gunshot echoed out and a pinging sound rung out from the back of the truck. At once, Stacey, Frankie and Kerry all shot horrified glances behind them.)

FRANKIE: Shit!!!

(Much to their horror, three cars were hurtling towards them. The passenger in each one was wielding a high powered rifle.)

FRANKIE: Dave!!!

(Dave yelled out from the cab.)

DAVE: I can see them!

FRANKIE: It's the surviving cunts from that fight just now!

DAVE: I gathered that, mate!!!

(He snarled then looked to Arthur.)

DAVE: This is gonna get...

(He then shook a disdainful head. Arthur had curled into a ball in the footwell.)

DAVE: Have you *no* shame whatsoever?

ARTHUR: Don't you judge me! Only god can do that!

DAVE: Yeah... and he's gonna have a field day!

(With that, he thrust his foot to the floor then glanced into his side mirror. From there, he could see that the three passengers in the back had ducked for cover and he was the only one directly in the firing line.)

DAVE: Shit. Down to me, is it?

(Well aware that the three cars were gaining, he then gave a nonchalant shrug.)

DAVE: Might as well enjoy myself then.

(With that, he thrust his head out of the window and yelled back at the chasing vehicles.)

DAVE: Bring it, you Asparian wankers!!!

(He gave a maniacal laugh then screamed and pulled his head back in as a bullet whistled past his ear.)

DAVE: Don't bring it that fucking close.

(He whimpered.)

DAVE: I lied to myself, Arthur; I'm not enjoying myself one bit!

ARTHUR: Then drive us out of here!!!

DAVE: Like I hadn't bloody thought of that!!!

(He then glanced in his rear view mirror. Much to his dismay, one of the cars was right behind them and the other two were manoeuvring to drive either side of him. Should they manage to pull alongside, he'd be a sitting duck. Well aware that he couldn't outpace them in this heavy vehicle, he sneered then grabbed the wheel tighter in his hands.)

DAVE: Hold onto your jockstrap, reverend; I'm about to make you feel extremely seasick!

ARTHUR: Don't drive into the sea!!!

DAVE: Like I was going to!

(He then proceeded to swing the steering wheel from side to side, causing the truck to veer from left to right. Not about to risk colliding with the much bigger truck, the cars on either side slowed immediately.)

DAVE: That helps!

ARTHUR: What does?

DAVE: What *I'm* doing!

ARTHUR: And what's that?

DAVE: Sit up and see for yourself, you lazy bastard.

ARTHUR: Just tell me!

DAVE: Have a look!

ARTHUR: Can't you just *tell* me what you're doing???

DAVE: No, I fucking can't! I'm a bit fucking busy right now, reverend. I can't save everyone's arses *and* give you a running commentary at the same fucking time!

ARTHUR: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: You swear a lot.

DAVE: Do I fuck!

(He then proceeded to veer from side to side again, desperate to stop the cars coming alongside. It was a manoeuvre that was working well to this point, so he decided to stick with it. The drivers in the cars were trying so hard to get alongside, but continually had to swerve or brake. This was giving the gunmen in the passenger's seats little opportunity to open fire. The tactic did, however, have something of a downside for the three people laying in the back. Tumbling back and forth was extremely disorientating, not to mention painful.)

KERRY: I hate this!!!

FRANKIE: I'm not exactly having a disco either, but it beats getting shot at!

KERRY: In what way???

FRANKIE: Well, for one, we're not riddled full of holes and bleeding to death!

KERRY: Right. That's quite the plus when you think about it.

(She then screamed and rolled to the other side of the truck again. Having failed to hold on, Frankie then rolled off after her.)

FRANKIE: Incoming!!!

(Sure enough, Kerry soon thudded into the side of the truck and Frankie promptly crashed into her.)

FRANKIE: Sorry!!!

(With a scream, Stacey then came tumbling after. Such was the speed of her roll, she hit Frankie's back then rolled up over him and fell face first in between him and Kerry.)

STACEY: Ow!!!

FRANKIE: You alright?

STACEY: I'm not happy!

FRANKIE: Well, no. Nobody's *happy* about this, but Dave's doing a great job.

STACEY: Is he???

FRANKIE: Yes! The truck's still moving and we've not been shot yet, so in that sense he's doing great!

(He grimaced.)

FRANKIE: The trouble is, there's no way he'll be able to keep this up all the way home. Sooner or later, they *will* get the better of him.

(He sucked his teeth.)

FRANKIE: We need a plan B.

KERRY: Such as?

FRANKIE: I don't know. Maybe we can...

(His eyes then bulged and he tumbled away across the truck again.)

FRANKIE: Hold that thought!

STACEY: Okay!

KERRY: Not again!!!

(Seconds later, Frankie thudded into the other side of the truck, followed by Stacey. Kerry then thudded into her.)

KERRY: Right... anyway... you were saying?

(With his face entirely engulfed by Stacey's ample cleavage, Frankie replied in a muffled, incoherent voice.)

STACEY: Can you just move back a tad, Kerry? My boobies have buried his face!

(Kerry immediately obliged, allowing Stacey to roll onto her front and free him from his mammary tomb.)

FRANKIE: Blimey. I was struggling to breathe in there.

STACEY: Sorry.

FRANKIE: No, no; don't apologise. It wasn't the worst place I've ever been.

(He then stared down at her chest again and beamed.)

FRANKIE: Far from it, in fact.

(He flinched.)

FRANKIE: Sorry about that. Where was I?

KERRY: Plan B.

FRANKIE: Right.

(He glanced across the truck bed.)

FRANKIE: Is there anything we can throw at them?

KERRY: We'd get shot if we even tried.

FRANKIE: Good point.

(He mused to himself.)

FRANKIE: Or maybe not. I mean, I'm sure they're not *that* quick on the trigger.

KERRY: What do you mean?

FRANKIE: I mean, if I manage to up and throw something, I'll probably be able to duck down again before they can aim and fire.

STACEY: He's right. Good thinking, Frankie.

KERRY: The trouble is, if we start bombarding them with things, they might just decide to open fire on the back of this track, riddle it with holes and kill us all stone dead.

STACEY: She's right. Good thinking, Kerry.

FRANKIE: Hmm... we can't risk that, can we?

STACEY: Nope.

KERRY: We're lucky they haven't done that already, to be honest. So let's not give them an incentive.

(Frankie mused to himself.)

FRANKIE: I wonder *why* they haven't. They could quite easily just hang back and pepper this truck with bullets from back there. We wouldn't stand a chance. So why aren't they?

KERRY: Maybe they're a bit thick.

(Stacey pouted.)

STACEY: Why did you look at me when you said that?

KERRY: Because you're a bit thick too.

STACEY: Right.

(She pouted.)

STACEY: I wish I hadn't asked now.

FRANKIE: Crap.

STACEY: What?

FRANKIE: They've only got one thing in mind. Stopping this vehicle.

KERRY: Well, duh.

FRANKIE: Don't be a twat, you.

KERRY: Sorry.

FRANKIE: They want to do that so they can drag us out at gunpoint then make us suffer in the most horrible way possible. Revenge for killing their friends. They've no interest in blasting us to shit from back there; they want us to suffer.

STACEY: Ouchies. That sounds unpleasant.

FRANKIE: It would be.

(Kerry whimpered.)

KERRY: Hopefully it won't come to that.

FRANKIE: Then we'd better pray Dave can do us a solid. We're powerless to help him from back here, so it's all down to him now.

STACEY: Really?

FRANKIE: Yup. One hundred percent.

(With that, Stacey yelled at the top of her voice.)

STACEY: Yay! Go, Dave!!!

(Kerry gave her a sideways glance.)

KERRY: What the hell was that?

STACEY: Encouragement. I was a cheerleader at school for a while.

(She sighed.)

STACEY: Not long though. I got kicked out, you see? I forgot you're supposed to let the kids at the top of the pyramid climb down before you wander off. There was much blood.

KERRY: Wow. You...

(She then shrieked as the process of rolling across the back of the truck began once again.)

KERRY: I'm getting sick of this!

STACEY: Me too!!!

FRANKIE: Hang in there, girls. With any luck Dave will shake them off eventually and this will all be over.

(Having thudded back into Stacey's boobs again, he then exhaled merrily.)

FRANKIE: But then again, what's the rush?

(At the steering wheel, at this time, Dave was starting to get more than a little angry. Like trying and failing to shake off three much faster cars wasn't frustrating enough, the reverend was still demanding a second by second update on proceedings. Not sure how much more of the infuriating holy man he could stand, he snarled then barked at him angrily.)

DAVE: Nothing's changed, you cock! When it does, I'll fucking tell you, okay? All I've got right now is swerving left and right to stop them coming alongside, that's all!!!

(Arthur furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: There's no need for that sort of attitude, young man, I only asked.

DAVE: You've been asking every three seconds.

ARTHUR: Because you won't tell me anything.

DAVE: There's nothing to tell!!!

(His face then lit up.)

DAVE: Wait! Scratch that last comment.

ARTHUR: What?

DAVE: There's a fork in the road ahead!

ARTHUR: Then go around it! A puncture is the last thing we need!

DAVE: Not a bloody kitchen fork, you idiot!

ARTHUR: Well, no; that'd be far too small; you wouldn't even see it. Clearly you meant a garden fork.

(Dave just shook his head.)

DAVE: I'm ignoring you now.

ARTHUR: So what's new?

DAVE: This is an opportunity and I need to focus on taking it!

ARTHUR: That's ignoring me, is it?

DAVE: Shut it!

(With that, he furrowed his brow then focussed hard on pulling off his manoeuvre.)

ARTHUR: What's happening now?

(Dave said nothing.)

ARTHUR: Dave? Hello?

(Again, his words were ignored.)

ARTHUR: I said, what's happening now? Hey!!!

(His words continued to fall on deaf ears. Dave was focussed solely on the making the fork in the road work to their advantage. The carriage split into left and right turns, either side of a concrete barrier. If he could make at least one of the cars take the wrong road, it'd be one less nightmare to deal with. Even if the car could simply turn around and catch them up again, any degree of temporary respite would be well worth having.)

DAVE: Okay, this is it.

ARTHUR: This is what?

DAVE: Go left, you twat.

ARTHUR: Me?

DAVE: Shut up, Arthur!

(He then sneered harder, as he continued to drive straight at the concrete block.)

DAVE: Go left, fuckers. Go fucking left.

(He then growled as the truck came to within a few feet of the barriers, before swiftly veering to the right to avoid it. Hoping his plan had worked, he then shot a glance into his rear view mirror.

Much to his delight, one of the cars hurtled into the concrete barrier, smashing the front to pieces.

As if that wasn't joyous enough, one of the cars had also fallen for his trap and taken the road to the left.)

DAVE: Result!!! Took two out in one go!!!

ARTHUR: You did???

DAVE: Yes, I fucking...

(He then clammed up and looked on ashen faced as the other road curled around some trees then rejoined the other one again.)

DAVE: What???

(He threw a hand up in frustration.)

DAVE: Both sides of the fork led straight back onto this fucking road again!!!

ARTHUR: Hmm...

(As the car sped from the fork and onto the road ahead of him, he could only gulp.)

DAVE: Arthur?

ARTHUR: I don't like the way you gulped just now. It's bad, isn't it?

DAVE: It used the other fork to overtake us.

ARTHUR: It's ahead of us now???

DAVE: Yeah, and he's...

(He then shrieked as the car broke hard in front of him.)

DAVE: Twat!!!

(Unable to break in time, he then smashed into the back of the car, sending it spinning wildly into the woodland on the side of the road and out of harm's way.)

ARTHUR: It's bad, isn't it? You can tell me. I won't cry any harder than I already am.

DAVE: Arthur?

ARTHUR: Yes?

DAVE: Two down, one to go.

ARTHUR: What?

DAVE: This fucking truck is several tonnes worth of battering ram. It knocked that car for six, mate.

ARTHUR: Ooh... well, that's a result.

(He beamed.)

ARTHUR: Now finish off the other one.

DAVE: Piece of piss!

(He then glanced in his rear view mirror and smirked.)

DAVE: Right up my arse, eh? Big mistake!

(He then slammed on the brakes and allowed the car to ram into the back of him. Seconds later, as he zoomed off again, he saw the battered car, stranded and broken in the middle of the road behind him.)

DAVE: Ha! Result! So long, suckers. That's the end of...

(He then ducked low and shrieked.)

DAVE: Spoke too soon!!!

(Sure enough, the passenger had leapt from the car and opened fire on the truck. All Dave could do was cry and panic as bullets thundered into it repeatedly.)

DAVE: Fuck! Shit! Cunt! Wanker!!! This is shit!!! Bollocks!!!

(Mercifully, the road soon came to a bend and he was able to zoom around it, away from the hail of bullets and out of immediate danger.)

DAVE: Phew.

(With that, he stuck his head of the window and yelled.)

DAVE: Are you guys okay back there?

KERRY: Frankie's been shot!

DAVE: Is he okay???

KERRY: It was just a graze, he's fine! Other than that, we've got loads of cuts and bruises.

DAVE: Okay. I'll stop when I'm satisfied we've got away from those idiots, so you can treat everyone.

KERRY: Okay!

DAVE: Hang in there, Frankie!!!

(He listened for a reply but none was forthcoming.)

DAVE: Frankie???

KERRY: He's can't talk; he's buried his head in Stacey's cleavage!

DAVE: What? Why?

KERRY: He says he likes it there!

STACEY: I didn't mind it at first, but I'm getting uncomfortable now!

(Seconds later, Frankie's voice rose up.)

FRANKIE: Don't worry about me; I'm fine!

KERRY: He's moved now!!!

DAVE: Right...

(He rolled his eyes then grinned at Arthur.)

DAVE: Frankie buried his head in...

(He then started to chuckle at the sight of Arthur wriggling around in the footwell.)

DAVE: What the hell are you doing?

ARTHUR: I'm stuck!

DAVE: Stuck?

ARTHUR: I'm *trying* to sit up again, but I can't move.

DAVE: Right...

(He then started to chuckle.)

DAVE: Priceless.

(He then drew another sigh of relief and proceeded to drum on the steering wheel as he guided the bullet-ridden vehicle further and further away from the scene of their woes.)

(Some three hours later, having deliberately taken his time in finding somewhere to pull over, Dave guided the truck into a field, under the umbrella of a thick woodland. He'd found somewhere far enough from the road for them not to be spotted, but close enough for them to be able to find their way out again. Satisfied with his choice, he nodded to himself then smiled to where Arthur was still trapped in the footwell.)

DAVE: This'll do nicely.

ARTHUR: Finally! I've been stuck down here for hours.

DAVE: I know. I had to listen to your constant whining, remember?

ARTHUR: No, you didn't. You could have pulled over and helped me out hours ago.

DAVE: There was nowhere to park!

ARTHUR: Nonsense! Of course there was.

DAVE: Prove it!

ARTHUR: How can I? I can't see a bloody thing from down here!

DAVE: Then you'll have to take my word for it.

(With that, he opened the door then paced around the back of the truck to where Frankie was helping Kerry down from the back.)

DAVE: How's your wound?

FRANKIE: Superficial. How's the reverend?

DAVE: Superficial.

FRANKIE: Right.

(Dave then flinched.)

DAVE: Where's Stella?

FRANKIE: Stacey!

DAVE: That's what I said.

KERRY: As soon as we stopped, she leapt over the side and ran into those trees.

(She pointed to a thicket to their right.)

FRANKIE: She really needed to go.

(He then plonked Kerry down on the ground and she also sprinted for the trees.)

DAVE: Looks like someone else really needs to go too.

FRANKIE: Either that or she's off to strangle Stacey.

DAVE: Right... should we be worried?

FRANKIE: Nope. You saw what happened to the last person who tried to kill her.

DAVE: Then should we be worried about Kerry?

FRANKIE: Nah, mate. I doubt she'd be dumb enough to attack her after what happened this morning.

(Dave shrugged.)

DAVE: Fair point. So, now what?

FRANKIE: Now we grab some liquid refreshment and...

(Just then, Arthur's voice rose up from the front.)

ARTHUR: Um... hello? I could use a little help here!

FRANKIE: What's the matter with him?

DAVE: I wouldn't worry about it, mate. You were saying?

FRANKIE: I was saying we should take liquid on board, have another snack and let Kerry tend to any wounds. Then we can get back on the road again.

DAVE: Cool. I'll leave Arthur in the car then.

ARTHUR: Hello? Someone? I'm kinda stuck here! Hello?

FRANKIE: Stuck?

DAVE: He's fine, mate. Leave him there!

ARTHUR: My joints are aching and I really need to pee!

(Dave sighed.)

DAVE: Shit. I'd better let him out then. Can't have pissing everywhere.

FRANKIE: *Let* him out?

DAVE: Yeah. He cowered in the footwell and got stuck. He's been there for hours.

FRANKIE: Really?

(His face lit up.)

FRANKIE: Now this I have to see.

(With that, he stomped around to the front passenger's side door then hoicked it opened.)

ARTHUR: There you are!!! Well, it's about time too! I've been stuck down here forever and it's bloody uncomfortable. I kept telling Dave to pull over, but would he listen? Would he hell.

Now...

(Frankie shuddered then slammed the door again.)

FRANKIE: He's fine!

ARTHUR: Hello???

FRANKIE: His whinging is giving me a headache.

ARTHUR: That's not funny, you know.

DAVE: Oh, it is!

(He sighed.)

DAVE: But we can't have you pissing all over the place.

(With that, he yanked open the door again and pulled Arthur out of the footwell. Delighted to be free, he stood tall then exhaled with delight.)

ARTHUR: Oh, thank the lord. That's better.

(He then glowered at Dave.)

ARTHUR: Let me out sooner next time!

DAVE: I couldn't. Like I keep telling you, there was literally nowhere to pull over.

FRANKIE: What? There were *hundreds* of places you could have stopped. In fact, I made five or six suggestions, but you just kept on going.

ARTHUR: I knew it!

DAVE: Arthur. Mate. I just wanted us to be safe. In that three hours, we've put a good hundred and fifty miles between ourselves and the cunts who attacked us and that was *always* my goal.

Forgive me for being devoted to that task, but I felt it was important.

ARTHUR: Yes, well...

DAVE: Plus, you being stuck down there, grouching and whining was fucking hilarious.

ARTHUR: How? How was *that* hilarious???

DAVE: In every conceivable way.

ARTHUR: Listen, you...

(Just then, Stacey hurried over to them with an urgent expression on her face.)

STACEY: Guys! Guys!!!

(Dave and Frankie looked to her determinedly.)

DAVE: Stacey!

FRANKIE: What? What is it?

STACEY: I'm back.

(She then stood there grinning with self-pride.)

FRANKIE: Okay...

DAVE: And?

STACEY: And I thought you ought to know.

DAVE: Know what?

STACEY: That I'm back, silly.

(She then minced away towards a fallen log, giggling to herself.)

DAVE: Right... you know... I can kind of understand why Kerry wants to strangle her now.

(He then shared an amused grin with Frankie and the two of them headed away towards the fallen log.)

ARTHUR: Excuse me! We're not finished yet! I need you to understand how awful your actions were! God is watching, you know? And he's not impressed.

DAVE: Oh, put in a sock in it, Arthur. God was probably pissing himself laughing.

ARTHUR: God does not piss himself!

FRANKIE: No? Then how do you explain rain?

ARTHUR: Precipitation!

(He rolled his eyes.)

ARTHUR: I can't believe I'm having to explain this to an adult, but what happens is...

FRANKIE: I know that, you cock; I was joking.

ARTHUR: Right...

(He growled.)

ARTHUR: Was the language really necessary?

FRANKIE: Yes!

ARTHUR: I see.

(He snarled.)

ARTHUR: Wanker.

(He then gasped in horror at himself.)

ARTHUR: Forgive me, father, for I have sinned...

(A short while later, once Kerry had returned from the thicket, she fetched her first aid kit from her bag then proceeded to treat everyone's wounds around the fallen log. She started with Frankie's bullet wound then helped Arthur removed a crick in his back. As soon as he heard the crack, he cursed so forcefully, he spent the next ten minutes praying for forgiveness. Kerry then moved on to tend to the cuts and bruises Stacey had sustained on her lower back from being thrown around in the truck.)

STACEY: Ouch!

KERRY: Calm down, you big baby.

STACEY: But it stings!

KERRY: Of course it does. I'm using white spirit to clean the wound.

STACEY: Oh.

(She whimpered.)

STACEY: It won't get me drunk, will it?

KERRY: Why? Are you scared you might lose the ability to form coherent and intelligent thoughts? If so, I really don't think *you* need to worry.

STACEY: I just don't want to be drunk, that's all.

(She then winced again.)

STACEY: Ouchies!!!

KERRY: Seriously?

STACEY: But it really stings.

(She then raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

STACEY: How come you only used half as much when you tended to Frankie's bullet wound?

KERRY: His wound needed less.

STACEY: Oh? But his wound was bigger.

KERRY: How do you know? You can't even see yours.

STACEY: Dave said so. Mine are just tiny cuts.

KERRY: I see.

(She then shrugged.)

KERRY: They're the ones that tend to get infected the most. So I have to be thorough.

STACEY: Oh, okay.

KERRY: Thank you.

(She then dug her nail into Stacey's skin, drawing blood.)

STACEY: Ow!

KERRY: Easy now; I'm on it.

(She then poured white spirit all over some cotton wool and rubbed it into the wound, grinning fiendishly as she did so.)

STACEY: Stings!!! Stings, stings, stings!!!

KERRY: Yes, but you'll thank me in the long run!

STACEY: But it really stings in the short run.

KERRY: Oh, well. There's not much I can do about that.

(Having seen her deliberately inflict the last cut, just to rub extra spirit on it, Frankie shook his head.)

FRANKIE: That's the last one, Stacey!

KERRY: No, there's at least ten more!

FRANKIE: No, there isn't!

KERRY: Which one of us is the nurse?

FRANKIE: Which one of us was designated leader?

KERRY: Shit.

(She sighed.)

KERRY: You've got me there.

(She then proceeded to pack away her first aid kit.)

KERRY: Still, it was fun while it lasted.

STACEY: Fun?

KERRY: Um... yeah... I like being a nurse.

STACEY: Oh.

FRANKIE: Wait. Do you want someone to tend to *your* cuts, Kerry?

KERRY: No, thanks.

STACEY: But you said it's important to...

(Kerry glanced from side to side, shiftily.)

KERRY: Um... none of *my* cuts are big enough to worry about.

(She then looked to Frankie.)

KERRY: The main thing is that we sorted out your bullet wound. That one really *was* in danger of becoming infected.

FRANKIE: And it's okay now, is it?

KERRY: Yup. You'll be fine.

STACEY: Will I be fine?

KERRY: Sadly, yes.

(She smiled.)

KERRY: If anything, I over-treated *you*.

STACEY: You did?

KERRY: All part of the service, Stacey.

STACEY: Wow. Thanks.

KERRY: Any time. Seriously. I mean it. Any little cut you get, just let me know and I'll smother that little bugger with so much white spirit, you'll scream like you're being crucified.

STACEY: Cool.

(She smiled.)

STACEY: You can actually be really nice sometimes; who knew?

KERRY: Uh-huh.

(She then went and sat down next to Dave, who instantly shook his head at her.)

DAVE: You're the devil, aren't you?

KERRY: Keep it between us.

DAVE: Right.

(They then shared a fiendish giggle.)

FRANKIE: Anyway, people. Here's the situation. On the way here, we passed a signpost for the township of Lucia. I happen to know for that's three hundred and fifty miles away from our border.

ARTHUR: What? That's oddly precise.

FRANKIE: My dad and I drove down there once before the war started, and he effed and blinded all the way down there.

ARTHUR: I see.

FRANKIE: Excellent. In future, see quietly.

ARTHUR: Excuse me?

KERRY: He said, shut up.

(She mumbled under her breath.)

KERRY: Bloody traitor.

ARTHUR: Traitor???

FRANKIE: Enough of that, you lot. We can discuss his treachery later.

ARTHUR: Why, you...

DAVE: Shut up, Arthur. Seriously! Nobody wants to listen to you.

ARTHUR: Yeah?

(He ruffled his neck.)

ARTHUR: Fine. Be like that. I don't care. God likes me.

(Frankie rolled his eyes then continued.)

FRANKIE: As I was saying, it's three hundred and fifty miles from our border, so we're going in the right direction. A fluke, yes, but a happy one. The only trouble is, Lucia is in the east of Asparia.

DAVE: Shit.

STACEY: What? Why is that bad?

FRANKIE: Because that's where the East Partisans are from. A splinter group that's vowed never to forgive the war...

DAVE: That they started!

FRANKIE: And to continue killing Norland folk on sight.

STACEY: Oh. I don't like the sound of that.

FRANKIE: Yes, well, try not to worry too much. As long as we keep our voices down, they won't hear our accents and maybe we can pass through unhindered. That's the hope anyway.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: The good news is, we're in a car.

DAVE: Truck.

FRANKIE: Whatever. Thanks to the car, we might just be able to drive back home without a hitch.

KERRY: Here's hoping.

FRANKIE: Indeed. But don't let your guard down, people. Trucks can break down. And that one's full of bullet holes, so I'd amaze if I didn't. Therefore, try to remember that if we *do* end up

on foot again at some point, for whatever reason, we may be called upon to use our specific skill sets again.

ARTHUR: Yes, well, don't worry about that, my friend. You know you can rely on me.

(He swiftly received four disapproving glances.)

ARTHUR: What? What's wrong? Why are you all looking at me like that?

DAVE: Why do you think?

ARTHUR: I have no idea. All I said is, I'll do my bit.

FRANKIE: Will you though?

ARTHUR: Absolutely! Why would you even doubt it?

(Frankie furrowed his brow.)

FRANKIE: Because, reverend, so far, the evidence contradicts that assertion!

ARTHUR: What assertion?

FRANKIE: That you'll do your bit!

(He shook his fist at him.)

FRANKIE: When called upon, Stacey saved our arses by doing her weird magic; I then saved us from a beating by using my sword skills against those thugs; the same thugs Dave then saved us from a second time with his heroic driving. And when it was over, Kerry did her bit by fixing up my wound; a wound that was likely to get infected. What have you done?

ARTHUR: Well... I... you know... I prayed for our success!

FRANKIE: In other words, nothing!

ARTHUR: Why, you...

FRANKIE: Seriously, what's the fucking point in you being here, reverend?

ARTHUR: Hey, that's unfair!

DAVE: Is it?

(He furrowed his brow.)

DAVE: After *you* questioned whether we should bring young Stacey here with us earlier, I think it's a very fair question. You assumed she'd be useless and therefore didn't want her in the team.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: Well it seems to me, *you're* the one surplus to requirements, not Stacey. You're the one being carried.

ARTHUR: Hardly!

FRANKIE: But you are! We've been attacked by two different groups, so far and at no point did you attempt *any* diplomacy whatsoever. Nor did you even *attempt* to influence a peaceful outcome in the name of god. The two things we assumed would be your forte. You did none of that! You just crapped your pants and whimpered like a little girl.

DAVE: That's when he wasn't siding with the enemy in the hope they'd let him off.

FRANKIE: Right? What the hell was that all about???

ARTHUR: Well... you know... I was trying to...

DAVE: Save your own arse!

ARTHUR: No!

DAVE: Bullshit.

FRANKIE: You've been a fucking passenger so far, reverend. An ungrateful one who'd happily disown his team and everything they stand for just to save himself.

DAVE: And that makes you a fucking liability.

FRANKIE: It does.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: We should leave him here.

ARTHUR: You wouldn't!

FRANKIE: Give me one reason why we shouldn't!

KERRY: Because he'd join the East Partisans just so they don't hurt him then sell us down the river.

ARTHUR: Seriously?

(He shook his head.)

ARTHUR: You all have such a dim view of me.

FRANKIE: We have a perfect view of you. Front row seats, in fact.

DAVE: And all we've seen is a shit show.

FRANKIE: That still might get worse. Kerry's probably right. If we left him behind and the East Partisans found him, he'd claim to be an *Asparian* holy man and tell them which way we went.

ARTHUR: I never would!

(A knowing expression the crossed his brow.)

ARTHUR: But just to be on the safe side, you should take me with you. Then I won't be able to.

DAVE: For fuck sake, Arthur.

ARTHUR: What? I'm just thinking of the team. If you take me with you, there's far slimmer chance of me betraying you. See? You'll all be *much* safer.

FRANKIE: Actually, there is another way. We can leave you here and make *sure* you won't betray us.

(He then drew his sword.)

FRANKIE: On your knees!

(Arthur and Kerry gasped.)

ARTHUR: You wouldn't!

FRANKIE: Actually, I would. As a proud servant of the Norland Army, I was tempted to do this the moment you disowned our nation. Down with Norland, indeed.

DAVE: Um... Frankie...

FRANKIE: Sorry, Dave. I know he's your mate and everything, but he could get us all killed.

DAVE: My mate? Fuck off! I was just gonna say, there's a deer behind you. If we bag that, we might eat well tonight.

FRANKIE: First things first, mate. This bloke has to be despatched.

ARTHUR: No; please! I beg you!

(He burst into tears.)

ARTHUR: I don't want to die!

FRANKIE: We know. The extremes you'd go to *stop* death happening are the issue.

ARTHUR: Please!!!

(Just then, Stacey dived on top of the reverend.)

STACEY: Stop being mean!!!

FRANKIE: Huh?

STACEY: Killing is wrong. It's a horrible thing to do. Even to a mean old man like him!

FRANKIE: Stacey!

STACEY: Don't do it! Please! Give him one more chance to prove he can be a good boy!

FRANKIE: Stacey... I wasn't really going to kill him.

(Arthur and Stacey sat up and looked to him with hope in their eyes.)

ARTHUR: Really?

STACEY: Is that the truth?

FRANKIE: Yeah.

(He smirked at Dave.)

FRANKIE: Me and Dave just wanted to frighten him straight, that's all. To let him know how it feels when you're betrayed by your own team.

DAVE: What? I had nothing to do with it.

FRANKIE: Yes, you did. We talked about it when...

(He then bit his lip.)

FRANKIE: Shit. I knew there was something I forgot to tell you.

(He then cringed.)

FRANKIE: So you had no idea. You thought I was for real and didn't try to stop me?

DAVE: Well...

FRANKIE: You encouraged me, in fact!

DAVE: Yeah... what can I tell you, mate? He's not really my cup of tea.

(Arthur growled.)

ARTHUR: Oh, you are so fired!

(Dave raised his voice.)

DAVE: I don't work for you!!!

(In that moment, the deer behind them sprinted away for dear life.)

DAVE: Oh, great. And now you've scared away our dinner.

ARTHUR: Me???

(Frankie forced a smile.)

FRANKIE: Anyway, lesson learned. Arthur, don't betray us again. And, um... be very nice to Stacey. You wanted to leave her behind initially, didn't you? And yet, when she thought you were going to die, she leapt in to save you.

ARTHUR: You mean that wasn't part of the act?

STACEY: I just want us all to get home safely.

FRANKIE: Not such a sinner after all, is she?

ARTHUR: Oh, she is. But... thank you. You're a good person.

STACEY: I agree.

FRANKIE: Excellent. And on that note, let's get back to the truck. We've a long afternoon ahead of us.

(He then headed back towards the truck. With a shrug, the others followed suit. Arthur did so with a sour expression on his face. Frankie's lesson had not gone down well.)

ARTHUR: I hate that bloke, I really do.

(Some thirty minutes later, with the journey once again underway, Dave manoeuvred the car around a sharp bend then furrowed his brow. Sitting at his side, Arthur spotted his annoyance but opted to remain silent. With the current climate of animosity around him, he felt it was better if he said nothing; therefore he couldn't talk his way into trouble. A few minutes later, however, when Dave decided to orate his concerns, Arthur's vow of silence was soon broken.)

DAVE: I'm have a bit of trouble steering this thing all of a sudden.

ARTHUR: What? But it's easy. You just turn that wheel, don't you?

DAVE: I'm not saying I've forgotten how to do it, you silly cunt. I'm saying it's not responding like it should.

ARTHUR: Yeah, alright, there's no need to bite my head off.

(Just then, Frankie's voice rose up from the back.)

FRANKIE: That rear axel's starting to grind, Dave!

(Dave yelled back.)

DAVE: Understood.

(He sighed.)

DAVE: Shit. That'll be the problem then. If the axel's bugged I'm *dragging* it round bends rather than coasting.

(Arthur bit his lip.)

ARTHUR: And that's bad... is it?

DAVE: Would I have commented if it wasn't?

ARTHUR: I don't know. Machinery and such really isn't my forte.

DAVE: Right. Well put it this way, we've got damage back there in the same part of the vehicle where most of the weight is. Our belongings. Therefore, the weak part is carrying a heavy burden.

(Arthur looked enlightened.)

ARTHUR: Which will only serve to weaken it further, right?

DAVE: Exactly.

(Arthur tapped his fingers together nervously.)

ARTHUR: So... how long have we got until... you know?

DAVE: How long is a piece of string?

ARTHUR: About six inches, usually, but what's that got to do with anything?

(Dave gave him a slow and deliberate sideways glance.)

DAVE: Six inches?

ARTHUR: That usually does the trick; why?

DAVE: What trick???

(He then shook his head.)

DAVE: I don't want to know.

ARTHUR: Fine. So how long will the truck hold out? And don't change the subject, this time.

DAVE: I didn't change...

(He then took a deep breath to calm himself.)

DAVE: I don't know, mate. Could be hours, could be minutes.

ARTHUR: Bugger.

DAVE: Yeah. This thing's living on borrowed time.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: But with any luck, it'll hold out until we can get to the nearest town.

(As if he'd poked fate with a stick and challenged it to do it's worst, a loud, snapping-sound then rose up from the rear of the vehicle. Almost instantaneously, the back wheels then caved in sideways. Brought to an abrupt halt, all Dave could do was turn the air blue with expletives.)

ARTHUR: That's not a good sign, is it?

DAVE: No, it fucking isn't!

(With that, he swung open the door then paced around to the back. Frankie had already leapt out to inspect the damage. Still, in the back, Stacey was flat on her back with Kerry's head firmly buried in her cleavage.)

STACEY: Um... Kerry?

(Kerry lifted her head then glanced to where Dave and Frankie were staring solemnly at the wheel arches.)

KERRY: Is it dead?

FRANKIE: Deader than a lippy Asparian soldier.

KERRY: Shit!

(She then buried her head in Stacey's cleavage again.)

KERRY: Wake me up when this nightmare's over!

STACEY: But, Kerry...

(Staring down at the damage, Frankie shook his head then glanced to Dave.)

FRANKIE: They don't make these things like they used to, mate.

DAVE: Nope.

(He shrugged.)

DAVE: To be fair to it, though; it wasn't designed to take the thrashing *we* gave it.

FRANKIE: True.

STACEY: Kerry? I want to get up.

DAVE: I shouldn't have made that last car ram the rear end. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but...

FRANKIE: No, it *was* a good idea. It ended their pursuit and stopped them shooting at us.

STACEY: Kerry?

DAVE: Good point.

(He sighed in frustration.)

DAVE: I just wanted it to survive a little longer, you know? To get us closer to a town or something.

FRANKIE: Somewhere we could find an alternative mode of transport?

DAVE: Yeah.

STACEY: I'm starting to feel uncomfortable now, Kerry.

FRANKIE: Oh, well. It just wasn't to be, I guess.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: Let's unload the stuff from the back, shall we? Looks like we're walking.

(A desperate cry then rose up from the front.)

ARTHUR: Why???

DAVE: Because we've got no choice, Arthur!

FRANKIE: Right. Out you get, ladies.

(Kerry finally lifted her head.)

KERRY: I just want five more minutes. Today sucks and I want to hide from it.

STACEY: Then find somewhere else.

(With that, she slid out from under Kerry then jumped over the side of the truck.)

STACEY: Yay! Freedom.

KERRY: Just when I starting to find you tolerable.

FRANKIE: Never mind that. Hop out so Dave and I can unload the cart.

KERRY: Fine.

(She then clambered to the side and gingerly poured herself down onto the ground.)

KERRY: Happy now?

DAVE: Ecstatic.

(Kerry watched as Dave and Frankie set about unloading the cart then sighed in despair.)

KERRY: We're never gonna get home, are we?

FRANKIE: Why do you say that?

KERRY: Even after acquiring a car, we've still ended up back on foot; miles away from home.

DAVE: There will be other vehicles, Kerry.

KERRY: Yeah? When?

DAVE: I don't...

(Just then, two small motorcycles rode past then pulled up outside a wooden hut about fifty metres down the road. Watching on, Frankie rose a thoughtful eyebrow.)

FRANKIE: Unless I'm very much mistaken, those are 50cc Samedi cycles.

DAVE: Samedi cycles?

FRANKIE: Yeah. They do about thirty miles per hour. A popular choice with hard-up youngsters.

DAVE: Thirty miles per hour? That's shite.

FRANKIE: Yeah, but it's quicker than walking.

DAVE: True, but how does that help us? There's five of us and only two bikes.

FRANKIE: Yeah...

(A devilish expression the crossed his brow.)

FRANKIE: Listen up, you lot, I've got an idea.

(A few minutes later, Frankie headed onwards down the road on one of the small motorcycles with Stacey on the back. Just behind him, Dave was following on the other one with Kerry clinging onto him for dear life. The cart had been attached to Dave's bike like a trailer. Mortified to be there, Arthur was sitting inside it, cuddling one of the tents.)

ARTHUR: This is humiliating!

DAVE: You're not kidding! Because I'm dragging this cart, I'm only getting ten miles per hour out of this thing!

FRANKIE: Yeah... that's a bit...

(Just then, the angered cries of the motorcycle's owners rose up from behind them. Having realised their motorbikes had been stolen, they'd jumped on push bikes and were now peddling after them. As were twenty of their cousins and brothers.)

DAVE: Shit! I'm never going to outpace them like this.

FRANKIE: Fuck.

(He then raised a knowing eyebrow.)

FRANKIE: Pass me a tent pole, Arthur. This is about to get interesting!

There was a well known phrase in Asparia that went as follows; when you offend one farm boy, you offend them all. Farm boys, a derogatory phrase referring to uneducated and inbred country dwellers, were therefore best avoided. Being from Norland, however, Frankie and his subordinates hadn't been privy to this warning. If they had been, they may well have thought twice about stealing the two small motorcycles. By doing so, they'd upset *two* farm boys; therefore had upset them all. Twice over! And these people were not known for their forgiving nature. They were, in fact, renowned all over Asparia for being vicious when crossed. It was a lesson they were now learning the hard way.

Since the pursuit had begun, the vile rhetoric that had been thrown their way by the furious farm boys had left them in little doubt that these infuriated young men meant business. Everything from threats of castration to disembowelment had been cast in their direction. Needless to say, Stacey, Kerry and especially Arthur were absolutely terrified. Somehow managing to keep his cool, Dave just sneered and continued to focus on steering his bike. Going ridiculously slowly with the cart attached to his bike there was nothing else he could do. Therefore, the job of the fending them off was entirely down to Frankie. With his bike capable of going at much greater speeds, he'd taken it upon himself to use the tent pole he'd been given to battle back the cyclists as they gained. So far, he'd managed to unseat two of them. Much to his annoyance, however, they'd got straight back on again; twice as angry and determined as they had been.

FRANKIE: This is ridiculous. Are you sure that's as fast as it'll go, Dave???

DAVE: Yes!!! I've got the throttle full on!!!

FRANKIE: And what gear are you in???

DAVE: What gear??? There's only one gear, you cock!!!

FRANKIE: Yeah, alright, there's no need to...

(He then lashed his tent pole into the face of an advancing farm boy, knocking him off the back of his bicycle.)

FRANKIE: Got the fucker!!!

ARTHUR: Then hurry up and get these two!!!

(Sure enough, two more were peddling determinedly towards the back of the cart.)

ARTHUR: Hurry!!!

FRANKIE: What do you mean, hurry??? I'm already here! Riding behind you!!!

(Stacey then cried out from where she was clinging to Frankie's torso.)

STACEY: And it's really scary!!!

FRANKIE: Yeah, you're kind of first in the firing line there, aren't you?

STACEY: Yes! And I don't like some of the things they're planning to do me!

FRANKIE: No, I don't suppose you...

(Just then, the two lead farm boys cycled up on either side of him.)

FRANKIE: Shit!!!

(With a venomous snarl, he then lashed out at one of them, managing to unseat him. The other, however, zipped past then kicked Arthur in the face.)

ARTHUR: Ow!!!

FRANKIE: Fuck. I'm coming!!!

(Kerry then yelped from where she was clinging onto Dave's torso.)

KERRY: There's two of them this side!!!

FRANKIE: Bollocks! This is not going to plan!!!

(He then sped the motorbike up and whizzed to the other side Dave, leaving Arthur at the mercy of the other farm boy's boot.)

ARTHUR: Ouch!!! Ow!!! He keeps kicking me!!!

FRANKIE: I'll get there as soon as I can!!!

ARTHUR: Can't you come here first???

FRANKIE: No! There's two this side.

(Having reached the side of Dave's ridiculously tiny motorbike, the two farm boys had instantly proceeded to kick out at Kerry. With a scream, she managed to lift her legs and dodge their boots, just in time before Frankie came to her rescue. With a snarl, he thrust his tent pole into one of their faces, then jabbed the midriff on the second. Both were instantly unseated.)

ARTHUR: Now come over here!!! Ow!!!

FRANKIE: On it!!!

(He then had to slow, so he could get back to the rear and advance again on the other side. Waiting for him to complete the manoeuvre, Arthur was distraught.)

ARTHUR: Ouch!!! The pain!!! Help!!! Save me, damn it!!!

FRANKIE: I'm coming!!!

(He then clonked the farm boy on the back of the head and knocked him out. Much to his delight, this one didn't get straight back up again.)

FRANKIE: Yes!!! One down!

(He winced.)

FRANKIE: A million to go.

(From up ahead, Dave was mortified by what he heard.)

DAVE: One down??? One???

FRANKIE: Yes! It's not easy to clobber people accurately with a fucking tent pole, mate!

DAVE: Then use your fucking sword!!!

(Having not thought of that, Frankie winced.)

FRANKIE: Yeah... that's...

(He nodded then yelled back to Dave.)

FRANKIE: I'm gonna use my sword!

DAVE: What a wonderful idea!

FRANKIE: I didn't want to be before because they're civilians, but seeing as they're so violent, I've changed my mind.

ARTHUR: Poppycock! You forgot!

DAVE: Obviously!

FRANKIE: I did no such thing!

(He then winced to himself and glanced over his shoulder.)

FRANKIE: Okay, here come a couple more. No... a pack. Shit.

STACEY: Don't let them kick me!

FRANKIE: I'll do what I can, darling! Just hang in there!

STACEY: Aw, gawd. This is gonna suck, isn't it?

FRANKIE: Yes. Yes, it is.

(He then lobbed his tent pole into the cart.)

ARTHUR: Ow!!!

FRANKIE: Sorry!

(With that, he drew his sword.)

FRANKIE: Okay... let's make some scumbags bleed, shall we?

STACEY: Yes, please.

FRANKIE: Right... that wasn't actually a question, love.

(He then eased off the throttle, allowing himself to slow a little, then proceeded to lash out with his sword as soon as he was among the farm boys.)

FRANKIE: Taste cold steel, wankers!!!

(Having slashed the torso of one to his right, he then threw his arm to the left and chopped into the hand of another. Both were felled and lay there screaming.)

FRANKIE: Now we're getting somewhere!!!

(At this point, he heard yelling from up ahead.)

ARTHUR: Why did you let this one get past??? Ow!!!

DAVE: Finish them off first, Frankie; it's only Arthur!

ARTHUR: You complete bastard! Ow!!!

(Lashing furiously from left to right, Frankie sneered.)

FRANKIE: Fuck. This is working well right now. I don't want to break from this to save that old bastard, but I guess I should.

STACEY: Please do, it's really scary back here. One of them almost grabbed...

(She then screamed out in distress.)

STACEY: Me!!!

(In that moment, Frankie's bike felt a whole lot lighter. The farm boys had dragged her off the bike and proceeded to swarm around here. Giving up the chase, it seemed they were satisfied to take out all their frustration on this one, poor girl.)

FRANKIE: I aint having that!!!

(With that, he pulled the bike to a halt then leapt off and charged towards where Stacey was screaming, with his blade aloft.)

FRANKIE: I'll save you, girl!!!

(Suddenly, a bright light emanated from Stacey's upper torso and an explosive wind shot out from her body, just like the one she'd created when swamped by assailants earlier. In that moment, the farm boys were blown into the sky and scattered far and wide. And just like previously, despite the fact he was standing right there, Frankie was wholly unaffected. All he could do was watch in bewilderment as their inbred assailants flew overhead, crashing into trees at break neck speed. Some off them even cleared the trees; such was the power of the force. Despite having seen it before, Frankie was no less astonished by the phenomenon this time. All he could do was stare down at where Stacey was catching her breath and bite his lip.)

FRANKIE: Um...

STACEY: It happened again.

FRANKIE: Yeah...

(He shook his head then paced over to her and pulled her to her feet.)

FRANKIE: Are you okay?

STACEY: I think so. I don't know. Will you carry me again if I pass out?

FRANKIE: It won't be easy. We're going by bike.

STACEY: Oh, yeah. We have bikes. I'll giving passing out a miss then.

FRANKIE: Stacey, if you need to pass out...

STACEY: I'm fine. You have a bike, so there's no point in me pretending to pass out, just so I don't have to walk, is there?

(Frankie then furrowed his brow.)

FRANKIE: Is that what you did last time? Faked it?

(Stacey twiddled her fingertips nervously.)

STACEY: Um... no?

FRANKIE: Stacey?

STACEY: I felt woozy that time. This time, I'm okay.

FRANKIE: Woozy. But you didn't really pass out?

STACEY: A lady never tells.

(Frankie couldn't help but chuckle.)

FRANKIE: You're a sly bugger.

(Stacey sighed.)

STACEY: That's what my mum used to call me. Sometimes. Mostly, she called me a whore, a disgrace and an embarrassment to the family, but sometimes she'd say I'm a sly bugger as well.

(She sighed longingly.)

STACEY: Happy memories make me homesick.

FRANKIE: Happy?

(Just then, Dave called out from up ahead where he'd pulled to the roadside.)

DAVE: Nice going, Stacey!

STACEY: What?

DAVE: Good work!

STACEY: Oh. Thanks!

DAVE: Now fucking get a move on, you idiots. These things are really slow, so we can't afford to piss about.

KERRY: Yeah!

ARTHUR: Actually, can we stop here and tend to my wounds, please?

KERRY: Nah; you'll live!

ARTHUR: But...

DAVE: Stop whining!

(As Arthur proceeded to protest about being harshly treated, Frankie and Stacey shared an amused grin then returned to their bike. Having climbed on board, Frankie then glanced to Stacey.)

FRANKIE: Ready?

STACEY: I'm not on yet.

FRANKIE: I know that. I was asking if you're ready to get on.

STACEY: I'm doing it now.

FRANKIE: I can see that, yes.

STACEY: I'm on!

FRANKIE: Let's get this show on the road then!

DAVE: About fucking time.

(And in that moment, their journey resumed. It did so with Arthur still protesting his treatment.)

ARTHUR: I know I may have blotted my copybook somewhat earlier, but do I really deserve to be treated like some kind of detestable ne'er-do-well?

DAVE: You disowned you country.

ARTHUR: Yes, well...

DAVE: And disowned *us*!

ARTHUR: I...

DAVE: To save *yourself*! And *only* yourself!

ARTHUR: And I've apologised for that!

DAVE: No, you haven't. You just whimpered and made excuses. There wasn't even the merest hint of an apology in there.

ARTHUR: The apology was implied!

DAVE: Wow.

ARTHUR: Anyway, don't change the subject. That horrible fellow on the bicycle was kicking the living daylights out of me just now. Repeatedly sticking the boot in like a nun with an unruly orphan.

DAVE: What???

ARTHUR: What can I tell you? Nuns are arseholes.

DAVE: Right...

ARTHUR: Point being, I was being battered and you told Frankie to ignore my cries of pain and keeping attacking elsewhere. It's only Arthur, you said! Only Arthur! Do I really deserve such disdain???

DAVE: Absolutely. Yes.

ARTHUR: Oh, I see. Like that, is it? I'm not impressed, Dave. Once the diocese hear about this you'll be booted out of the church forever.

DAVE: How many fucking times? I don't work for your fucking church!

ARTHUR: And you never will again!

DAVE: What do you mean *again*? I never have!

ARTHUR: The point is David, this lack of respect you're displaying is unforgivable. I made one misstep, that was all. One. And now you're treating like I'm lower than pond scum.

DAVE: Nonsense. I like pond scum; you're far lower on the ladder than that.

ARTHUR: See? Thank you for proving my point. You're treating me like dirt, you lot, and it's not on. I deserve better than that!

DAVE: No, Arthur; you don't. You *deserve* to be left behind. But we didn't do that. We decided to be kind and keep you along; despite our better judgment. And you've got Stacey to thank for that, by the way. Not that you ever will.

ARTHUR: Bloody right too.

DAVE: Yes, well, just remember this. We *didn't* abandon you like we should have. Instead we attached the cart to the back of my bike just so we could keep you with us. As a result, we've ended up going really slowly and that's why we got attacked by those cyclists in the first place. Because we kindly decided to let you tag along in the cart. Be grateful!

(Arthur glanced away nonchalantly.)

ARTHUR: Yes, well, I suppose...

(A furious expression then swept his brow.)

ARTHUR: Wait a minute! You didn't attach the cart for *my* sake! You attached the cart so you could pull the tent and bags along! It was nothing to do with keeping *me* in the team. In fact, you even said, quite reluctantly, I might add, that I can tag along with the tent *if* there's room!

(Dave sighed.)

DAVE: And sadly, there was.

ARTHUR: Why you...

(He shook his head.)

ARTHUR: Are you listening to this, Kerry?

(Kerry glanced over her shoulder at him.)

KERRY: Every word.

ARTHUR: Can you believe how obtuse he's being?

KERRY: You declared your loyalty to the nation of Asparia!

ARTHUR: Don't change the subject.

KERRY: That *is* the subject! I've heard every word Dave's said and I agree with it wholeheartedly. You're a terrible human being!

ARTHUR: Right...

(He sneered.)

ARTHUR: What would *you* know; you're just a woman.

KERRY: Excuse me?

ARTHUR: You heard. The good book quite clearly states that a woman should be meek and humble; she should know her place! So don't you *dare* talk down to me like that! Bloody sticking your oar in; whatever next? If I wanted your opinion, young lady, I'd bloody well ask for it.

KERRY: You *did* ask for it!

ARTHUR: I... oh, be quiet.

(He then looked to Frankie hoping he could find sympathy there. He very quickly realised he wouldn't. Upon spotting Stacey, clinging to Frankie's back, however, an enlightened expression crossed his brow. She was inordinately dim, and inordinately nice with it. As such, she'd be just the person he needed to give him the validation he desired.)

ARTHUR: I say! Stacey?

(Stacey glanced at him uneasily.)

ARTHUR: Would you say I'm a good person?

STACEY: No!

ARTHUR: See?

(He flinched.)

ARTHUR: Excuse me?

STACEY: You're horrid. Especially to me. And you disowned everyone. You're a very bad man.

ARTHUR: And you're an idiot!

STACEY: See?

(She sighed.)

STACEY: You actually make me wish I was mean enough to want to leave you behind.

ARTHUR: Why you despicable, trollop of a turncoat. Do you not *want* salvation?

STACEY: Salvation?

ARTHUR: Yes! Godly forgiveness. Because you won't bloody get it by being rude to a clergyman, that I can assure you.

STACEY: My grandmother says I don't need salvation. As long as I'm nice, god will love me.

ARTHUR: Then your grandmother is an idiot. God thinks you're a bloody disgrace and he's got a dustbin in hell especially reserved just for sinners like you. Especially ones who show no respect to a holy man such as myself. So I'll ask you again. Would you say I'm a good person?

STACEY: No! In fact, you're meaner than ever!

(Arthur shook his fist at her.)

ARTHUR: And you're *still* and idiot!

(He then hung his head and groaned.)

ARTHUR: Bastards. They're all out to get me.

(He then glanced to the heavens.)

ARTHUR: Forgive them father... for I bloody won't.

(He then folded his arms and sulked.)

An hour or so later, having travelled at a frustratingly low speed, the fleeing party past a signpost for the township of Riversdale. Arthur had done nothing but sulk and whine that he was uncomfortable the entire time. The others however, had tuned him out. Riding slowly as to stick at Dave's side, Frankie was deep in thought. Every new town they approached brought about new dangers. It also, however, brought about new opportunities. Pondering that fact, he looked to Dave and bit his lip.)

FRANKIE: Dave?

DAVE: Yes, mate?

FRANKIE: Riversdale.

DAVE: What about it?

FRANKIE: A change of transport is in order.

(Dave sighed.)

DAVE: I know, mate. And it's bound to end in chaos.

FRANKIE: Yeah, but it has to be done. We'll never get home at this rate.

DAVE: Yeah.

(He shrugged.)

DAVE: So what do you suggest we do?

(Frankie looked straight through him.)

FRANKIE: Steal a car, obviously. What do you think I was suggesting? Going to the hardware shop and buying the components we'll need to build our own plane?

DAVE: Easy. I didn't know, did I?

FRANKIE: Well, what else could I possibly have meant?

DAVE: Right. A car it is then.

STACEY: Um...

FRANKIE: What's wrong, Stacey?

STACEY: I liked the plane idea.

FRANKIE: I wasn't serious about that!

STACEY: You weren't? Aw.

KERRY: Wow. See what I had to work with??? People were screaming in pain, at serious risk of dying...

(She pointed at Stacey.)

KERRY: And that's what they gave me as an assistant!

DAVE: Ease off, Kerry; she can't help being dim.

KERRY: I know that. I just want you lot to understand what my life's been like since she turned up.

DAVE: We get it.

KERRY: Thank you.

(Stacey pouted at her.)

STACEY: You exaggerate, you do.

KERRY: Do I?

STACEY: Yes. I made a lot of patients very happy.

KERRY: Yes, but you were *supposed* to make them very healthy!

STACEY: Like I'd know how!

KERRY: By following simple instructions!!!

(She then took a deep breath to calm herself.)

KERRY: Nope. I'm not going to lose it *again*. Not over you. The war's over and you're no longer my problem.

STACEY: That's right! I'm Frankie's problem now!

FRANKIE: Eh???

STACEY: *You're* my boss now.

FRANKIE: Um...

STACEY: And you're much nicer than the old one. She was a right misery guts.

KERRY: Stacey!!!

STACEY: Sorry.

(Kerry just shook her head.)

KERRY: Idiot.

FRANKIE: Um... sorry to interrupt your deep, intellectual debate ladies, but Stacey, I just want to make something clear. I'm not your boss, darling. I'm just leading our mission to return home; that's all.

STACEY: Oh...

FRANKIE: If you want out you can leave at any time. I'm not going to order you around, love. We're all in this as equals; I'm just making the decisions.

STACEY: Oh. I don't get it.

(She whimpered.)

STACEY: Wait! Are you saying I'm fired?

FRANKIE: No. I don't employ you.

STACEY: Then who does?

FRANKIE: Nobody!

STACEY: So I *have* been fired!

(Kerry rolled her eyes.)

KERRY: Leave it to me, guys. Stacey, your contract was for wartime only, right?

STACEY: I don't know.

KERRY: It was. I read it on the terrible day you arrived and started to ruin my life.

STACEY: Oh. So are *you* my boss still?

(She whimpered.)

STACEY: Please say it isn't so!

KERRY: It isn't so!

STACEY: Yay!

KERRY: You have no boss. The war is over, therefore your employment is terminated. You have no boss. And no job. And no brain.

(Stacey whimpered.)

STACEY: No boss? You mean... I'm on my own? I don't do very well on my own.

FRANKIE: You're not on your own!

STACEY: But...

FRANKIE: I'll take care of you.

STACEY: You will?

(She beamed.)

STACEY: So I was right. You *are* my new boss.

FRANKIE: No...

DAVE: Yes, he is!

FRANKIE: Mate!

(Dave furrowed his brow at him.)

DAVE: She just needs reassurance, you cock.

FRANKIE: What?

DAVE: Clearly she feels safer if someone takes charge of her. Call it an insecurity, if you like. She wants to know someone's guiding her. Would it really hurt to give the assurance she's looking for?

(Frankie nodded, accepting his verdict without reservation.)

FRANKIE: Stacey?

STACEY: Yes?

FRANKIE: You're right. I'm your boss.

STACEY: Yay. That's a relief. So, when do I get paid?

FRANKIE: Paid???

(Stacey giggled.)

STACEY: Just kidding. I know it's not a real job with wages. Escaping from this silly country, I mean. It *is* a job though, right?

FRANKIE: Well...

DAVE: Yes! It is!

STACEY: Cool. I feel a lot more confident now.

(She then clung tighter to Frankie's back.)

STACEY: I can relax now.

(As she huddled into him, Frankie puffed out in awe.)

FRANKIE: Dave?

DAVE: Yeah?

FRANKIE: Her boob cushions are really therapeutic.

DAVE: Pervert.

FRANKIE: Jealous?

DAVE: Immensely so.

KERRY: None taken!

DAVE: Right...

(He then performed a double take towards a road sign.)

DAVE: Look at that!

KERRY: Don't change the subject. You insulted my...

DAVE: No, seriously! Look!

(He then pointed to the sign which Frankie proceeded to read out loud.)

FRANKIE: Riversdale Station. For trains to Norland!

STACEY: And someone scribbled something underneath.

FRANKIE: They did, yes. And it's very childish. If anyone is a nation full of cunts, it's...

DAVE: Never mind whinging. Do you think the trains still go there?

(Frankie bit his lip.)

FRANKIE: The declaration of surrender did say normal service between the two nations would resume immediately, so I don't see why not.

DAVE: Does that include trains though?

FRANKIE: Possibly.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: At the very least it'll take us much closer to the border.

DAVE: Yeah.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: Do we dare?

FRANKIE: What have we got to lose?

KERRY: A lot. We don't have any train fare. If we get arrested for fare dodging, we could end up in deep shit. The Asparia Police aren't going to give us an easy ride.

DAVE: Shit. Good point.

FRANKIE: Well... almost.

KERRY: Almost?

FRANKIE: The ticket inspector is more than likely going to be some old dude. Overpowering him will be a piece of piss.

DAVE: Hmm...

FRANKIE: I reckon it's worth the risk.

(He shrugged.)

FRANKIE: We'll only get to the border though. Even if the train does go all the way into Norland, we'll still have to get off before then.

DAVE: Why?

FRANKIE: We don't have passports with us.

KERRY: Shit.

DAVE: Bugger.

STACEY: Aw.

FRANKIE: I know, right. But still. It's a step in the right direction and we'd fools not to take it.

DAVE: He's right.

KERRY: Let's do that then.

FRANKIE: To the train station.

(A voice then rose up from behind them.)

ARTHUR: Did someone mention a train?

DAVE: Yes!

ARTHUR: Thank fuck for that. Sitting back here, cramped up in this tiny cart, my back is killing me. Passing forty is no picnic, I tell you. Everything aches, every hour of every fucking day.

DAVE: Blimey. It's a miracle you manage to remain so cheerful really.

ARTHUR: Indeed.

(Dave and Frankie shared an amused grin then Frankie nodded to another road sign.)

FRANKIE: Station; this way.

DAVE: Lovely.

A short while later, Dave and Frankie pulled into the station car park. As soon as they stopped, they both allowed their passenger to climb off then stood up. Having been squatting on such tiny bikes for such a long time, they both cringed and proceeded to stretch.

FRANKIE: Thank fuck for that. It's like squatting on a child's toilet.

DAVE: Right?

(He grimaced.)

DAVE: Not that I ever have.

FRANKIE: I did once. At my Nephew's infant school.

STACEY: Why were you...

FRANKIE: I gave his mum a lift to parent's evening and I really needed to go.

(Everyone looked enlightened.)

KERRY: Gotcha.

DAVE: Anyway, as soon as I can feel my legs again, we can make a move.

(At this point, Arthur's voice piped up from the cart.)

ARTHUR: Um... chaps? I appear to be stuck.

FRANKIE: Then unstick yourself, we're going in a sec.

ARTHUR: I can't. This tent has wedged me in.

(Dave rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: Hopeless.

(He then grabbed Arthur's arm and yanked him out of the cart. Having done so, he then started to gather everyone's bags together.)

ARTHUR: Thanks for yanking me out of there, David. That was hell.

(He also proceeded to stretch.)

ARTHUR: I'm entirely numb from the waist down.

FRANKIE: And the neck upwards.

ARTHUR: What? No! Don't be rude.

FRANKIE: It was a joke, your grouchiness.

ARTHUR: Right. Sorry. I'm in no mood for levity. Did I mention that I ache all over?

(Handing out everyone's bags, Dave rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: It did come up once or twice, yes.

KERRY: So...

(She took her bag from Dave then smiled.)

KERRY: Thank you.

DAVE: You're welcome.

KERRY: Guys?

FRANKIE: Hmm?

KERRY: How are we gonna do this?

FRANKIE: What do you mean?

KERRY: To get into the station, we'll need to get past the ticket office. How are we going to do that?

FRANKIE: I don't know, yet. We won't be able to do much until we've seen inside the place. So, let's just casually stroll in there and check the departure times. While we're doing that, we can scope the place out and decide what we're gonna do next.

DAVE: Works for me.

KERRY: Uh-huh.

FRANKIE: Let's go then.

(Having collected his bag from Dave, he then headed away, smiling back at Stacey.)

FRANKIE: Come on, you.

(As they headed away, Stacey blushed then played with her hair.)

STACEY: I like Frankie; he's nice.

(She then trotted off after them. Moments later, they paced into the station then headed for the list of train times on the wall. Dave instantly ran his finger down the list then glanced up at the station clock.)

DAVE: Five minutes; there's one in five minutes.

FRANKIE: Shit. That leaves us five minutes to figure out how to sneak past that guy.

(He then glanced to the window of the ticket office. The guy inside the kiosk was fast asleep.)

ARTHUR: I think that conundrum just solved itself, don't you?

FRANKIE: I'd say that was a fair assessment.

KERRY: Right. What are we waiting for then.

DAVE: Just don't make a racket climbing the barrier.

(All eyes instantly turned to Arthur.)

ARTHUR: Hey!

FRANKIE: Shush!!!

(He nodded to the ticket office.)

FRANKIE: Let him sleep.

ARTHUR: Right. Sorry.

DAVE: Let's go, you lot. Five minutes, remember?

KERRY: What *he* said.

(With that, she crept to the barrier, dropped her bag on the other side then poured herself over it. Dave straddled it straight afterwards then stood there looking to where Stacey was whimpering nervously.)

STACEY: My shoes weren't designed for...

FRANKIE: Leave it to me.

(He then hoisted her in his arms and lowered her over the barrier.)

STACEY: Thanks, Frankie.

FRANKIE: Anytime.

(He then looked to the cringing reverend.)

FRANKIE: So...

ARTHUR: Um... did I mention I'm not as young as I used to be?

FRANKIE: You... oh, for fuck sake.

(With that, he scooped Arthur up, just as he'd scooped up Stacey and grimaced with the strain as he deposited him over the barrier.)

ARTHUR: Don't drop me.

FRANKIE: You weigh a ton.

(Satisfied he was over, he then allowed Arthur to drop.)

ARTHUR: Aw, crap.

(He then thudded down on his backside.)

ARTHUR: Ouch! You did that on purpose!

(He was then gagged by Dave.)

DAVE: Shut up, you tit.

KERRY: Honestly, he's such a liability.

FRANKIE: And then some.

(With that, Frankie hopped the barrier then nodded.)

FRANKIE: You've all got your bags, right?

(Everyone nodded except the grouchy Arthur.)

ARTHUR: If only.

FRANKIE: Yes, well, never mind whining. Let's get over there where he can't see us.

KERRY: Plan.

(They then headed off down the platform.)

KERRY: This is platform one. Is that the right one?

DAVE: Yup. Platform one for trains to Norland, it said.

STACEY: Norland? That's where *we're* going.

(She nodded.)

STACEY: We should head to platform one.

ARTHUR: This *is* platform one!

STACEY: Already? Yay.

(Kerry sighed then looked to Dave.)

KERRY: She has a very short attention span.

DAVE: It had been noticed.

FRANKIE: Yes, but what she lacks for attention span, she more than makes up for in cleavage, so she's okay by me.

(He then shared a chuckle with Stacey, forcing an eye roll from the others.)

DAVE: Anyway, Frankie, I assume the plan now is to roll with the punches.

FRANKIE: And hope there are no *actual* punches, yes.

DAVE: Yeah, but that might not be possible if there's a ticket inspector. I mean we're gonna have to deal with him somehow.

KERRY: Hmm... sounds like violence is inevitable.

STACEY: Aw. Just be kind about it.

DAVE: Kind?

STACEY: Yeah.

DAVE: Kind violence?

STACEY: Yes, please.

DAVE: I'm not sure if even that's possible.

FRANKIE: Yeah, well, with any luck we can figure out a way to get him off our case without having to resort to violence at all.

DAVE: Sounds ambitious to me, but that would be preferable, yes.

FRANKIE: So, yeah... as far as any plans go, that's it now. We'll get on the train, hope things run smoothly then deal with them accordingly if they don't.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: We just need to make sure we get off the train at the station before the border crossing.

ARTHUR: And which station would that be?

(Everyone looked to Dave.)

DAVE: What?

FRANKIE: What station do we need to get off at?

DAVE: How the fuck should I know?

FRANKIE: *You* read the bloody timetable. It had all the stops written on it.

DAVE: Not that *I* noticed. And besides, *you* all read it as well.

KERRY: Actually, you ran your finger down it so we couldn't see it.

DAVE: I did?

ARTHUR: Yes.

DAVE: Right...

KERRY: So you have no idea when we need to get off?

DAVE: Not a fucking clue.

(Frankie mused to himself.)

FRANKIE: Maybe I should pop back and check.

KERRY: Don't. If that ticket office guy has woken up, you're gonna get us caught.

FRANKIE: Yes, but that might be a risk we have to...

(He then looked enlightened.)

FRANKIE: Actually, we'll be fine. We can just ask one of the other passengers which stop is the last one before Norland.

DAVE: Just don't ask them in a Norland accent.

FRANKIE: Of course not.

STACEY: Just let *me* ask them. I'll do my awesome Asparia accent again.

FRANKIE: Right...

DAVE: Let's *not* do that.

FRANKIE: Good idea, Dave.

DAVE: Thank you.

STACEY: Aw.

FRANKIE: It'll be fine. Nobody from Asparia would want to visit Norland right now anyway, so saying we want to get off before then won't arouse any suspicion whatsoever.

DAVE: As long as you get the accent right.

STACEY: Um...

DAVE: No, Stacey.

STACEY: Spoilsport.

FRANKIE: Anyway, that's the plan. Or as close to one as we're gonna get. Is everyone on board?

STACEY: On board?

FRANKIE: With the plan.

STACEY: Oh. Right.

(She chuckled.)

STACEY: I thought you meant on board the train. I was gonna say, it hasn't even come yet, silly.

FRANKIE: I had noticed that, yes.

(He threw her a smile then glanced to the others.)

FRANKIE: So?
DAVE: I'm on board.
KERRY: Yup. Me too.
ARTHUR: I suppose.
FRANKIE: Good. And just in time too.
(He nodded sternly.)
FRANKIE: Here comes our train.

A short while later, as the train pulled away from Riversdale Station, the five travellers sat themselves down then took a deep breath. Dave was by the window of a table seat with four berths, with Kerry at his side. Stacey was sat opposite Dave and Frankie was beside her. Arthur, therefore, had been relegated to the set of seats across the aisle. To absolutely nobody's astonishment, of course, he took it personally.

ARTHUR: Oh, I see. Once again, I'm the one who's being cast out.
KERRY: Cast out?
ARTHUR: Ostracised! Forced to sit alone. Left to fend for myself. Abandoned!
FRANKIE: Abandoned? You're literally a matter of inches away.
ARTHUR: Yes; on my own.
KERRY: That bothers you, does it?
ARTHUR: Yes!
DAVE: Why? Was there anyone specific you wanted to sit next to?
ARTHUR: No! Don't be ridiculous.
FRANKIE: Then what's the problem?
ARTHUR: I just don't like the way you seemed to naturally congregate as a four; leaving me in the wilderness.
KERRY: What wilderness? You're sitting just across the aisle from us, Arthur.
ARTHUR: I am, yes. Alone.
(Frankie rolled his eyes.)
FRANKIE: Fine. I'll come and sit with you, if you like.
(Arthur scoffed.)
ARTHUR: Don't do me any favours, will you?
FRANKIE: Fine. I won't then.
ARTHUR: And I don't want you to!
FRANKIE: Then stop complaining.
ARTHUR: Shan't. It's just like being back at school. Shunned by my classmates; going through life with nobody to talk to.
DAVE: Dude; we're talking to you right now!
ARTHUR: Only because you want me to shut up and stop complaining.
KERRY: We're just trying to understand *why* you're complaining!
ARTHUR: Then try paying attention. I already told you. I feel ostracised!
(He sighed.)
ARTHUR: Like I said, it's just like being back at school. I was always the odd one out then too; the kid nobody wanted to play with.
DAVE: Don't be ridiculous, Arthur; this is nothing like those days.
ARTHUR: Isn't it though?
DAVE: No. Now you're the adult nobody wants to play with.
ARTHUR: Why you...
(He shook his fist.)
ARTHUR: This is bullying!
DAVE: No, it isn't.

ARTHUR: Yes, it is. Psychological bullying!

KERRY: Hardly.

ARTHUR: Oh, but it is. And let me tell you, it's a spitefulness that won't do you any favours come judgment day. God does not like bullies. So there!

(Frankie rolled his eyes.)

FRANKIE: Spitefulness?

ARTHUR: Yes!

FRANKIE: Arthur, mate, nobody's making you feel left out because of spite. They're just not. The reason us four are drawn together is because we've been thinking as a team since we set out. If you feel ostracised, it's because we've picked up on the fact that you're not thinking of anyone but yourself. It's only natural to stick closer to people who you feel you can rely on. Well, I'm sorry, but after you disowned us back there, nobody feels that way about you.

DAVE: He's right, Arthur.

(He gestured to three people sharing his table.)

DAVE: These three feel like allies, whereas you... I'm pretty sure you'd stab us in the back without a second thought.

KERRY: You're just not a team player.

ARTHUR: Poppycock.

(He ruffled his neck.)

ARTHUR: I'll do my bit when the times comes; I just haven't had the chance yet.

DAVE: Mate, you've had plenty of opportunities to do your bit.

ARTHUR: Like when?

DAVE: Like on both occasions when we were got confronted by thugs. You could have tried to broker peace in the name of your god, but you didn't. The first time, you froze; and the second time you swore you allegiance to Asparia and left us to it.

(Arthur scratched behind his neck, nervously.)

ARTHUR: I panicked, that's all. I'm not used to conflict.

KERRY: Nor am I!

STACEY: Nor me.

FRANKIE: And they both handled it better than you.

ARTHUR: Well... that's... oh, shut up. I'm going to take a nap.

FRANKIE: Right...

(Just then, Dave glanced up and cringed.)

DAVE: Fuck. There's the ticket inspector.

FRANKIE: Shit. I was hoping violence could be avoided.

DAVE: Which, like I said, was ambitious.

FRANKIE: Yeah...

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: You knock him out and I'll find somewhere to stash him.

DAVE: Deal.

STACEY: Actually...

(All eyes turned to Stacey.)

STACEY: The ticket inspector is a man.

DAVE: We can see that.

STACEY: Well that's *my* department, isn't it?

FRANKIE: Hmm...

STACEY: If you want me to keep him busy, just say the word.

DAVE: Why? What have you got in mind?

KERRY: What do you *think* she's got in mind?

FRANKIE: Dave, that's embarrassing, mate.

DAVE: What?

STACEY: It's not rocket science, Dave.

(She nodded.)

STACEY: I'll suck his ding-a-ling then let him make merry on my bottom, all the way to the border.

(Dave stared straight ahead of himself.)

DAVE: Right... that's what you meant...

STACEY: Yup. It's kinda my thing, Dave. Stacey West; pleaser of men.

FRANKIE: How could you not have realised that's what she meant?

DAVE: Well, she's such a nice girl, I totally forgot she was a... what's the word?

KERRY: Moron?

STACEY: Hey!

DAVE: A giver of pleasure.

FRANKIE: Right...

(He bit his lip.)

FRANKIE: So that's the plan, is it? Let Stacey do her thing and...

(Just then, much to his alarm, the ticket inspector appeared among them.)

INSPECTOR: Ladies? Gents? May I see your tickets please?

DAVE: Fuck!

FRANKIE: Shit!

STACEY: Relax, guys. It's my time to shine!

ARTHUR: Wait, young lady. There's no need for that!

(He then climbed to his feet and smiled down at where the young inspector had a holy symbol hanging before his tie.)

ARTHUR: May you see our tickets, you say?

INSPECTOR: Yes, reverend.

ARTHUR: An interesting question, young man. Now allow me to ask you one.

(He then glanced into the man's eyes.)

ARTHUR: Do you have faith, my child?

INSPECTOR: Yes. Absolutely. Oh, very much so, reverend.

ARTHUR: Good.

(He then sat down again.)

ARTHUR: Then trust that I have a ticket.

(The inspector looked to him briefly then smiled.)

INSPECTOR: Yes, reverend. Thank you.

(He then looked to Dave, Frankie, Stacey and Kerry.)

INSPECTOR: May I see your tickets please?

(Arthur sighed.)

ARTHUR: Lost your faith already, have you?

INSPECTOR: What? No, sir; never.

ARTHUR: Then trust that my friends here also have tickets and move along.

INSPECTOR: Right... it's just...

ARTHUR: You're being tested right now, lad.

INSPECTOR: Tested?

ARTHUR: Yes. Now do you believe, or don't you?

(The Inspector bit his lip.)

INSPECTOR: Um... yes, you're right. I'm sorry, reverend.

ARTHUR: Don't be sorry. Just be faithful to the holy father. And trust in me.

INSPECTOR: Yes, reverend. Thank you.

(He then bowed and headed up the train. As he did so, the others looked to Arthur in bewilderment.)

ARTHUR: Not so useless now, am I?

(Dave puffed out.)

DAVE: Actually, that was pretty awesome.

FRANKIE: Yeah, credit where credit's due. You did an excellent job there.

STACEY: And saved my poor bum from a whole lot of chafing.

(Kerry winced.)

KERRY: You just say these things without any kind of shame or reservation, don't you?

STACEY: Of course, I do. Why would I be ashamed of who I am?

(She shook her head.)

STACEY: You sound just like my mother.

DAVE: Yeah, well, forget that.

(He nodded to the reverend.)

DAVE: Nice work, Arthur. We'll make a team player out of you yet.

FRANKIE: What *he* said. That was excellent.

ARTHUR: Why, thank you.

KERRY: One of us should sit with him. You know, just to show he's gone up in our estimation.

ARTHUR: No, no; you stay where you are.

(He then spread himself across the two seats and put his feet up on the two opposite.)

ARTHUR: We're fine where we are.

(As he made himself comfortable, Frankie looked to Dave in astonishment.)

FRANKIE: He's as happy as a clam to have all four seats to himself, and yet he made all that fuss.

DAVE: What can I tell you, mate?

(He groaned.)

DAVE: That's our Arthur. And I've been lumbered with him for years.

KERRY: I feel your pain.

(She looked to Stacey.)

KERRY: Working with a numpty sucks.

Just over an hour later, as the train hurtled through the scenic countryside, Stacey started to doze off in her seat. Struggling not to do the same, Dave was staring, bleary-eyed, out of the window. For her part, Kerry was watching the world go by as she daydreamed about what she'd do once they made it home. Frankie, was just sitting in his seat with an amused grin on his face. Arthur kept nodding off then sitting up with a start, mumbling incoherent words. To Frankie, it was great entertainment.

As Arthur nodded off then sat up wide-eyed for the umpteenth time, mouthing a psalm, Frankie couldn't help but chuckle out loud. Arthur then nodded off again, oblivious to his mirth. Dave and Kerry, however, both glanced at him in bewilderment.

FRANKIE: What?

KERRY: What are you chuckling at?

FRANKIE: Chuckling?

DAVE: Yeah. You chuckled.

FRANKIE: I suppose I did.

(He then chuckled again and nodded towards Arthur.)

FRANKIE: This bloke's great fun.

DAVE: Said nobody ever.

FRANKIE: No, he is. Watch.

(Dave and Kerry then glanced at Arthur, just in time to see him lift his head and mumble in a drowsy voice.)

ARTHUR: And god said... sod it.

(He then dozed off again. As he did so, Frankie, Dave and Kerry all giggled quietly together.)

FRANKIE: He's been doing that for ages.

KERRY: Priceless.

DAVE: Right?

(He then mused to himself.)

DAVE: Do you know what he reminds me of right now?

FRANKIE: What?

DAVE: The audience at his sermons. I made the damned fool mistake of attending one once. Just like him, everyone in attendance was fighting the urge to nod off. They'd close their eyes then sit up again, looking horrified in case someone saw them.

KERRY: Maybe that's how he started to nod off then. He started to think about his last sermon.

DAVE: Could be; it was really boring.

(Frankie shuddered.)

FRANKIE: That sounds like my idea of hell. Just *being* in a church makes me feel sleepy. To have to tolerate a sermon in his dreary voice as well... nope. Fuck that. It'd be away with the fairies in no time.

KERRY: Like Stacey over there.

(They all then glanced to where Stacey was happily snoozing with a cheesy grin on her face.)

FRANKIE: She looks...

DAVE: Happy.

KERRY: No. Don't sugar coat it. With that dopey smile, she looks every bit the idiot she is.

(Frankie smirked.)

FRANKIE: Yeah... but I for one, appreciate her honesty.

(They shared an amused grin then Frankie glanced out of the window.)

FRANKIE: Hello. We seem to be slowing.

DAVE: Coming into a station?

FRANKIE: Must be.

(He grimaced.)

FRANKIE: Shit. We forgot to ask where we need to get off.

KERRY: It'll be fine. We can just ask someone at the station.

(Frankie nodded.)

FRANKIE: Yeah. Good thinking.

(They then glanced out of the window, watching the world passing by slower and slower until a platform finally came into view.)

FRANKIE: Warton Checkpoint?

DAVE: Checkpoint?

(Much to their alarm, as the train eased into the station, it then passed a group of armed Asparian soldiers. Upon sighting them, Frankie, Dave and Kerry all gasped in horror simultaneously.)

FRANKIE: Wankers!

DAVE: Wankers everywhere!

KERRY: Hide!

FRANKIE: Hide?

(Kerry gave him her most unimpressed glance.)

KERRY: Yes. Hide.

FRANKIE: Right...

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: Good idea.

(He then shook Stacey awake, causing her scream and lash out.)

STACEY: No means no!!!

FRANKIE: Correct.

STACEY: What? What's going on?

FRANKIE: We need to hide!!!

DAVE: I'll wake Arthur!

ARTHUR: No need! Stacey's scream did the trick.

DAVE: Sweet. Now hurry. We need to hide away before them fucking soldiers get on.

STACEY: Soldiers?

FRANKIE: I'll explain later.

(With that, he upped, grabbed her arm then dragged her off down the carriage.)

STACEY: Where are we going???

FRANKIE: To hide!

STACEY: Oh. Okay.

(Having also alighted their seats and fled off down the train, Dave, Kerry and Arthur looked deeply concerned.)

DAVE: Where are we gonna hide? I mean, where? Surely there won't be anywhere *to* hide!

KERRY: They have guns, Dave. If that doesn't inspire us to find somewhere, then I don't know what will!

DAVE: Right...

ARTHUR: The real question ought to be, why are we all heading in the same direction???

DAVE: Because we're numpties.

(They all then came to a crunching halt and watched on bewilderment as Frankie lifted Stacey up in the air and helped pour her into an overhead luggage rack.)

STACEY: But I don't like heights!

FRANKIE: You wouldn't enjoy being shot either.

STACEY: I'm convinced!

(He then pushed her to the back of the rack, before pushing his bag in there to hide her.)

STACEY: I can't see!

FRANKIE: And with any luck, *they* won't be able to see you *either*.

(He then placed Stacey's bag in front of her legs to complete the trick.)

FRANKIE: Perfect.

(With that, he slid into the gap between a pair of back to back seats to hide himself away. Watching him do so, Dave nodded.)

DAVE: That's not a bad idea.

ARTHUR: Hiding in the luggage rack or...

DAVE: Both. Kerry...

KERRY: You can fuck off if you think you're sticking *me* in a luggage rack.

DAVE: You'd rather be shot, would you?

KERRY: No, I'd rather keep going and find somewhere else.

ARTHUR: And if that big oaf would move, we could.

DAVE: Arthur...

KERRY: Move, will you; you fucking tree?

DAVE: Fine!

(He then took off into the next compartment with Kerry and Arthur in tow.)

DAVE: I just hope we can find somewhere.

(As they bounded down the next aisle, Arthur groaned despondently.)

ARTHUR: Ridiculous. Why do they need checkpoints anyway?

KERRY: So they can verify ID's.

ARTHUR: Yes, but why?

KERRY: Spies.

ARTHUR: Spies?

KERRY: Yes, spies. Our railway did it too. There was a war on, Arthur. They wanted to cut spies off from using infrastructure links.

ARTHUR: You're making that up.

DAVE: No, she's isn't. That's exactly why they do it.

(He furrowed his brow.)

DAVE: Why they're *still* doing it, I don't know. They bloody war ended.

KERRY: To catch any foreign spies returning home, I assume.

DAVE: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

DAVE: Nobody likes a smartarse, Kerry.

KERRY: I wasn't being one!

DAVE: Well...

KERRY: I wasn't!

(She ruffled her neck.)

KERRY: Pillock. I'm hiding now. Go away.

(With that, she jumped into the gap between back to back seats then crammed herself tightly out of sight. Left behind, Dave and Arthur shared uncomfortable grimaces then hurried onwards.)

DAVE: This is shit, Arthur. Where the fuck are *we* gonna hide?

ARTHUR: In a similar place to Kerry and Frankie, I suppose. In a seat gap.

DAVE: Like I'm gonna fit in one of them.

ARTHUR: Right...

(He shrugged.)

ARTHUR: Sucks to be you!

(He then dived into the next seating crevice they came across. Now the only one without a hiding place, Dave could only furrow his brow.)

DAVE: Well that's fucking nice, that is.

(Shaking his head, he bounded in the next carriage then froze in horror. He'd reached the end of the train.)

DAVE: That's bad! No; that's worse than bad. That's worse than anything. We need a new superlative to describe how bad *that* is.

(He then glanced from the window and gulped. The train was now coming to a halt. Any moment now, therefore, the soldiers would board and march through the train. If he was caught having no ID and no ticket, he'd be hauled off for questioning without a moment's hesitation.)

DAVE: Desperate times! Shit, fuck, bollocks. I guess there's only one thing for it.

(He snarled.)

DAVE: I'm gonna have to fight them. There's no other way.

(He puffed out.)

DAVE: I can do this. There might be twenty or thirty of them, all armed with automatic weapons, but if I fight to the best of my ability...

(He whimpered.)

DAVE: I'll still get shot to shit. What do I...

(He then glanced to one side and flinched.)

DAVE: Wait a minute...

(He glanced at the open window on the far side of the train and bit his lip.)

DAVE: That'd be suicidal. Only an idiot would even *consider* doing that.

(He then nodded sternly.)

DAVE: And today that idiot is me.

(With that, he raced to the window, peered through it then nodded.)

DAVE: Seems clear.

(He then proceeded to clamber out of the window. Managing to somehow grip the metal window frame, he then pulled himself outside, before hoisting himself onto the roof of the train. Once up there, he crawled to a flatter spot then glanced upwards. There was an electrified cable, just a few inches above his head.)

DAVE: Fuck me!

(He then laid perfectly flat. The power coursing through that cable could fry a man to charcoal instantly.)

DAVE: This was a really bad idea. A really, really bad idea.

(He grimaced.)

DAVE: But one I'm gonna have to live with... hopefully.

(In that moment, the train came a complete halt. Seconds later, Asparian troops poured into it from both ends. With little in the form of politeness, they immediately set about ordering the passengers

to show their ID's. Not about to defy them, the passengers rapidly ceded to their demand. There were no pleasantries and not a single please or thank you. They'd scrutinise the ID's then hand them back, almost disappointed that the person they'd accosted was innocent. Having just faced the humiliation of losing the war, catching a spy had become something they craved. Someone to punish for their humiliation. Terrified of assuming that role, Arthur was trembling from head to toe. This was not the bravest of men even at the best of times. Knowing that one sneeze or even a shudder could give him away, he was mortified. All he could do was keep perfectly still and pray the guards didn't think to look in between the seats. And pray he did. Silently. Both for a peaceful ending to the situation and for his pains to subside. Crammed into a tiny space once again, his limbs were killing him. Right now, he was not a happy man. Kerry shared his every fear. Being smaller than Arthur her pains were minimal but the fear of getting caught was very real. Therefore, she remained in place, frozen like a statue; desperate not to give herself away. She barely even dared to blink.

Also cramped into a seat gap, Frankie shared Arthur and Kerry's determination not to get caught. He didn't share their fear, however. On the contrary, after hiding in the space, he'd crawled back out, drawn his sword then reversed back into it; feet first. If they found him, he was going to come out fighting. As such, he was primed with aggression and ready to leap into action. There was no hint of fear. Just a man wound up like a coiled spring, ready to pounce as soon as the need arose.

Just like Frankie, Dave had also lost any fear he had about getting caught. The buzzing from the fifty thousand volt cable above his head had given him something else entirely to be terrified of. As such, he laid there, perfectly still with a thousand yard stare set in his eyes. Being there was absolutely mortifying. And knowing it wouldn't be safe to leave there until the train started to move again, served to double his terror. He'd never been so terrified in all his life. The same, however, could not be said about Stacey. Crammed into the luggage rack, she'd nodded off again. As such, she just lay there with a content smile on her face while soldiers streamed back and forth, up and down the train.

Four full minutes after boarding the train at either end, the two sets of soldiers finally met in the middle carriage. At once, the leader of either section saluted his equal then engaged him in a brief report.)

LEFT LEADER: Nothing to report at this end, sergeant.

RIGHT LEADER: Nothing this end either, sergeant.

LEFT LEADER: Open windows, one. No sign of anyone fleeing.

RIGHT LEADER: Open windows, two. No sign of anyone fleeing.

LEFT LEADER: All clear.

RIGHT LEADER: All clear.

(They then saluted.)

LEFT LEADER: Disembark.

RIGHT LEADER: Disembark.

(The two side then parted and marched back off the train again through the nearest door. Upon stepping on the platform, the left and right leaders then paced up to their superior.)

LEFT LEADER: Clear!

RIGHT LEADER: Clear!

(The superior nodded then called out to where the unimpressed driver was staring at him out of the driver's pod window.)

MAJOR: Clear!

(He then saluted, only to receive a dismiss flick of the wrist from the driver.)

MAJOR: He doesn't like me, does he?

LEFT LEADER: Nobody does, sir.

RIGHT LEADER: Confirmed.

MAJOR: Very drool.

(He then smirked and barked an order to his men.)

MAJOR: Return to the station house, gentleman. The next train is in two hours.

(The soldiers then marched away. As they did so, the train slowly started to trickle into life; edging away from the station. Far from sad about that fact, Dave edged himself away from the cable with extreme caution. He wasn't going to wait a moment longer.)

DAVE: Take it easy, you tit. Really easy.

(He then slithered backwards to the edge of the carriage, allowing his legs to dangle. Finally out of the way of the cable, he then poured himself back into the carriage. At once, his legs buckled and he threw himself down on a seat.)

DAVE: That could have gone really, really badly.

(Satisfied that he needed to take a moment, he then sat there and caught his breath. Being so close to the cable was a nightmare he never want to relive.)

DAVE: It's all good, Dave. It's over now.

(He puffed out.)

DAVE: You live to fight another day. You're alright, mate.

(A troubled voice then rose up from behind him.)

FRANKIE: Who are you talking to?

(Dave looked to him then furrowed his brow.)

DAVE: Myself, obviously.

FRANKIE: Right.

(He shrugged.)

FRANKIE: Where did you hide?

DAVE: On the roof. Like a twat.

FRANKIE: Why would you do that? There are fifty thousand volt cables up there!

DAVE: I know that, you cock. I had one of the fuckers buzzing a few inches over my head. I've never been so fucking scared.

FRANKIE: Then why go up there?

DAVE: There was nowhere else I could go! I'm too big to fit in seat gaps.

FRANKIE: Right...

(He sucked his teeth.)

FRANKIE: You're a big old unit, you.

DAVE: Exactly.

(He shuddered.)

DAVE: I'm not going through that again.

FRANKIE: You might have to.

DAVE: Nope. Not happening.

FRANKIE: Right...

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: Come on, let's go and find the others.

DAVE: Find them? You were right opposite where you hid Stacey.

FRANKIE: Yeah... it seemed a shame to wake her though, so I came to find you lot first.

DAVE: Wake her? She slept through it?

FRANKIE: What can I tell you.

DAVE: Wow. She's so lucky. I wish I was too dim to know how much danger I'm in.

FRANKIE: Right?

(They then shared a chuckle and headed off up the train.)

Some five minutes later, having recovered their three travelling companions, Dave and Frankie led everyone back to their seats. Much to his delight, Arthur managed to secure four seats to himself

again. Upon sitting down, he nestled into his seat then exhaled, before trying to take a nap. The others, however, were not so relaxed. Kerry had been scared witless by the affair. Stacey was still sleepy and had become somewhat grouchy as a result. Dave, however, was the most uptight of all. Having had a torrid time, he was adamant that it would not be happening again.

DAVE: Nope. No way. I'd rather be captured, tortured then killed than go through that again. Not happening. Not a fucking chance.

FRANKIE: Was it really that bad?

DAVE: Certain death, buzzing a few inches above my head, mate. One sneeze and I was done for!

STACEY: Why?

DAVE: Because my head would have moved.

STACEY: Wow. Powerful sneeze.

DAVE: It's a natural reaction.

STACEY: Since when?

DAVE: Since sneezing was invented!!!

(Stacey ruffled her neck.)

STACEY: First *I've* heard of it.

KERRY: *You* haven't heard of most things!

STACEY: Well...

KERRY: You'd never heard of surgical gloves until I told you fetch mine.

(She looked to Frankie.)

KERRY: She came back with mittens on.

STACEY: Right. If you're just gonna be mean, I'm going to sleep. So poo to you.

(She then nestled her head into her headrest. Watching her, Kerry could only shake her head.)

KERRY: Even when I finally managed to teach her what surgical gloves are, she wouldn't wear them. They clashed with her clothes, apparently. Never mind the health implications...

(She then took a soothing breath.)

KERRY: Nope. I'm not going to let it annoy me any more. Or the things it says and does.

DAVE: Yeah, well, never mind that bollocks; we've got a decision to make.

FRANKIE: Oh, yeah?

DAVE: Yeah. If there's another checkpoint, where am I gonna hide?

(Frankie grimaced.)

FRANKIE: To be honest, mate; I don't think there really is anywhere else. The luggage rack and the seat gaps are the only hiding places.

DAVE: Yeah... I feared as much.

(He then shrugged it off.)

DAVE: Fuck it. If we do come up to another one, I'll just jump out of the fucking window and leg it. I'm not going up there again. Let me be clear about that. Never again!

FRANKIE: Understood, mate. Understood.

DAVE: Good. Make sure it is.

FRANKIE: I already have, relax.

DAVE: Thank you.

FRANKIE: But right now we've got a bigger problem than what *could* happen *if* we come across a second checkpoint. That might not even happen. We will, however, get to the border eventually, and we still haven't learned the name of the station before it. The one we need to get off at.

DAVE: Well that's easily remedied, Arthur can go and ask his mate.

(Arthur opened one eye.)

ARTHUR: I have a mate?

DAVE: The ticket inspector.

ARTHUR: Ah, yes... him. You want me to ask *him*, do you?

DAVE: If you would.

(Arthur sat up slightly and gave him a condescending glance.)

ARTHUR: And what would I say exactly, Dave?

DAVE: Just tell him you want to get off at the station before Norland, but you can't remember its name.

ARTHUR: Why that's a great idea. And when he reminds me that the name of the station I paid to travel to should be written on my ticket, what do I do then?

DAVE: You...

ARTHUR: Should I tell him I decided to hunt up and down the train to look for him because I couldn't be bothered to simply delve in my pocket and check my ticket?

DAVE: Well...

ARTHUR: That's a no, Dave. We can ask literally anybody. I mean literally *anyone else* on this train. The only person we *shouldn't* ask is the bloody ticket inspector; the one person who expects that a *paying* passenger should know where his ticket *entitles* him to go!

DAVE: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

DAVE: You know, Arthur, I can't help but think you *could have* been a little less condescending there, mate.

ARTHUR: Could have; wasn't; don't care. Mocking you was fun.

DAVE: Tosser.

ARTHUR: Oh, like *you* don't enjoy baiting *me*.

DAVE: Well...

(He grinned.)

DAVE: Fair point.

ARTHUR: Thank you.

FRANKIE: Right. Are you two done?

DAVE: For now.

ARTHUR: Uh-huh.

FRANKIE: Excellent.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: Now one of us needs to go and ask another passenger about the station name. Calmly. Almost in passing, like. You know the way. Say some thing like, you're meant to get off at the last station before Asparia but you'll be buggered if you can remember the name.

ARTHUR: *They'll* tell you to check your ticket too.

FRANKIE: Shit.

(He mused to himself.)

FRANKIE: Then how the fuck *would* you go about asking...

(Just then, the ticket inspector entered the carriage again and yelled an announcement.)

INSPECTOR: Please have your passports ready for inspection! The next stop is the Asparian Border Authority Halt. We'll be arriving in approximately three minutes!

(He then marched out of their carriage and into the next one to repeat the announcement. In the process of doing so, he walked straight past where Dave, Frankie, Kerry and Arthur were staring dead ahead of themselves in mortified horror.)

STACEY: What's wrong with you lot? You've all gone pale. Even Kerry and she was already...

KERRY: Shut up you.

(She looked to Frankie urgently.)

KERRY: What are we gonna do?

(With all eyes upon him, Frankie mused to himself for a moment then looked to Dave.)

FRANKIE: You got onto the roof via an open window, right?

DAVE: I did. And I don't like where you're going with this.

FRANKIE: We're going to have to use that window to jump out.

DAVE: I stand corrected. I thought you wanted us to get on the roof.

FRANKIE: That would be ridiculous. Only an idiot would go up there.

DAVE: Hey!

FRANKIE: I mean, we don't even know what side the platform's on. We could roll into the station on the roof of the train with dozens of border guards staring at us like we're insane.

DAVE: Yeah... that'd be bad.

FRANKIE: So we're gonna have to jump out of the window and hope for the best!

ARTHUR: What??? I refuse!

DAVE: Then stay here and get captured.
(He nodded.)

DAVE: Let's go!

(With that, Frankie, Dave, Kerry and Stacey all grabbed their bags then raced off up the train. Left behind, Arthur could only sigh in defeat.)

ARTHUR: I'm far too old for all this action malarkey.
(He then glanced suspiciously to the sky.)

ARTHUR: You're testing me, aren't you? You are! Well let me just say for the record, I'm not enjoying it.
(He then upped and raced away to join the others. Finding them crowded around the table next to the window, he arrived among them then furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: Who's going first?

FRANKIE: I reckon it should be me.

KERRY: We'll break every bloody bone in our bodies.

FRANKIE: No, we won't.

KERRY: How can you be so sure?

FRANKIE: There's a lot of them. There's bound to be one or two that survive.

KERRY: That's not reassuring.

FRANKIE: Look; you'll be fine. Just remember to land in a roll, okay? Let your momentum carry you as far as it needs to.

KERRY: Fine, but if I die...

DAVE: Then it's game over.

STACEY: Um...

FRANKIE: What's wrong?

STACEY: I'm not doing that. I'm way too scared. I'll just perform sex act on all the border guards and get out of it that way.

FRANKIE: Stacey, as soon as they hear your accent, they'll kill you.

STACEY: Then I'll do my Asparian accent.

DAVE: And they'll kill you twice as fast.

KERRY: Just do it, Stacey. It's our only chance.

STACEY: But I'm scared.
(Frankie nodded.)

FRANKIE: Let's jump together then.

STACEY: Aw, are you scared too?

FRANKIE: Yes. Who wouldn't be? But that wasn't why I offered.

STACEY: Well... okay.

FRANKIE: Let's get this shit done then; before the train rolls into the station!
(With that, he clambered onto the table then offered Stacey his hand. Stacey nervously accepted it then whimpered at him.)

STACEY: This is gonna hurt, isn't it?

FRANKIE: We might be lucky.

STACEY: Aw... luck isn't my thing.

FRANKIE: Then it's overdue.
(He nodded then threw their bags out of the window.)

FRANKIE: Ready?

STACEY: Nope.

FRANKIE: I beg to differ.

(He then cast her out of the window before diving out after her.)

DAVE: Blimey. That was cold.

KERRY: Got her moving, didn't it?

DAVE: True. Who's next.

KERRY: Me!

DAVE: Right.

KERRY: As long as you jump with me.

DAVE: What?

KERRY: At the same time, I mean. Don't just lob me out like Frankie did to Stacey.

(Dave chuckled.)

DAVE: It's a fair request.

(With that, the two of them scrambled up onto the table. Once there, they glanced out of the window, threw their bags out then looked to one another anxiously.)

KERRY: Together, yeah?

DAVE: Yeah!

KERRY: On three?

DAVE: Sure.

(He then grabbed her in his arms and dived out of the window with her.)

KERRY: You complete bastard!!!

(Now all alone, Arthur gulped.)

ARTHUR: Oh my. That looked unpleasant.

(With a whimper, he then clambered onto the table and peered out of the window.)

ARTHUR: Ooh, thick grassland. That might just do the trick. I'd be a fool not to go now.

(He then stared ahead and did nothing.)

ARTHUR: Right... frozen with fear. That's not good. Snap out of it, man. If they catch you, they'll cut your balls off.

(A look of horror then crossed his brow.)

ARTHUR: Nope; fuck that!

(He then dived out of the window. With a scream of terror, he plummeted through the air then came down in some thick grassland. With a bounce and a shriek he then tumbled over several times before rolling into the middle of a shallow stream. Sat on his backside in the shallows, whimpering in shock, he could barely believe he'd made it unharmed.)

ARTHUR: I didn't die. I didn't die. I didn't...

(A whimper then emanated from his lips.)

ARTHUR: I've soaked my only pair of socks. That's gonna get really uncomfortable.

(He then slowly made his way to his feet before trudging back towards where the others had jumped.)

ARTHUR: I'd better not be the sole survivor.

(He mused to himself.)

ARTHUR: Though if there was to be only one, god definitely made the right choice.

(He then glanced up and saw Dave cowering in fear as Kerry laid into him with a series of slaps. She was not a happy lady.)

ARTHUR: Ha. Sucks to be him.

(He then strutted towards them, enjoying the tone of Kerry's angered words.)

KERRY: You complete fuck badger!!! I wasn't ready!

DAVE: I...

KERRY: I've never been so fucking scared in all my life!!! You didn't even give me a chance to brace myself!

DAVE: And that's...

KERRY: I might have wanted to say a little prayer before I died!

DAVE: You *didn't* die!

KERRY: I...

DAVE: Partly because you didn't get the chance to brace yourself. Tensing up is how injuries are caused.

KERRY: Really??? Really, Dave? Is that so? I didn't know that. I'm only a nurse practitioner, after all. What would I know about such things? It's a good thing you're here, really.

DAVE: Yeah, well...

(He ruffled his neck.)

DAVE: Being a nurse just means you know how to *fix* injuries; not prevent them.

KERRY: And besides, when I said *brace myself*, I meant prepare mentally.

DAVE: Right...

(He shrugged.)

DAVE: Sounds like a waste of time to me. I figured it'd be easier just to cocoon you in my arms and cushion your fall.

KERRY: Cushion my fall?

DAVE: Yeah. It could have backfired of course. I mean, if I'd landed on top of you and let you take the impact, you'd probably be dead now, but as it was, everything worked out fine. I took the hit on your behalf.

(Kerry stared straight through him.)

KERRY: You thought it was okay to take that gamble, did you?

DAVE: Well... yeah... I mean, it was only a minor gamble, really. Being heavier, we were bound to land with the biggest one underneath.

(He pointed to his cranium.)

DAVE: That's simple science.

KERRY: Yeah... simple is the word.

DAVE: See?

(At this point, Arthur arrived at their side and nodded warmly.)

ARTHUR: You made it then.

DAVE: Either that or this is heaven and we're all dead.

ARTHUR: Oh, no; this isn't heaven, my friend. Nothing like it, in fact.

KERRY: How do you know?

(Arthur gave her a condescending glance then pointed to his collar.)

ARTHUR: How do you think? Man of god remember.

DAVE: Been to heaven then, have you?

ARTHUR: No, but I've read all about it.

KERRY: And who wrote these things you read? Had they been there?

ARTHUR: Shut up, you.

(He ruffled his neck.)

ARTHUR: This is no time for holy man baiting. Where's Frankie? And that other one?

DAVE: That's a bloody good question, actually. I haven't seen them.

ARTHUR: Bugger.

(Just then, Stacey's voice rose up from a clump of trees to their right.)

STACEY: I bet I've got a massive bruise on my bum because of you!

(As one, they all shot a glance in her direction.)

STACEY: Pushing me out of a train like that. Mean!

(Standing at her side, Frankie rolled his eyes.)

FRANKIE: You'd have been too scared to jump alone, Stacey; so I gave you the shove you needed. Literally. Left to your own devices, you'd still be on the train now. Getting arrested.

STACEY: Well... maybe.

(Relieved to see they were both unhurt, Dave, Arthur and Kerry drew a sigh of relief then headed over to them.)

ARTHUR: See, Dave?

DAVE: What?

ARTHUR: Told you.

DAVE: What? What are you on about? Told me what?

ARTHUR: This isn't heaven.

(He nodded sternly.)

ARTHUR: If it was, young Stacey wouldn't be here.

DAVE: Wow.

ARTHUR: Don't wow me. Destined for hell, that one; you mark my words.

KERRY: You really don't have much faith in your god's capacity to forgive, do you?

ARTHUR: It's not my place to tell god what to do.

DAVE: Mate, she's a nice person. Very nice actually. I'm willing to bet that any god worthy of the name would consider that virtuous.

ARTHUR: Indeed. But having sinned as often and enthusiastically as she has...

DAVE: Oh, give it a rest.

KERRY: Agreed.

ARTHUR: How rude. You know what, Dave...

DAVE: I'm fired?

ARTHUR: Got it in one.

DAVE: I see. Arthur...

ARTHUR: Don't even bother. Your claims that I was never your boss are laughable.

(Dave could only shake his head.)

DAVE: Give me strength.

(They then marched up to where Frankie and Stacey were waiting and nodded to them.)

DAVE: You okay?

KERRY: Don't have to heal anything, do I?

STACEY: I think I've got a bruise on my bum.

KERRY: Nobody? Good good.

STACEY: I said I've got a...

KERRY: And what do you expect me to do about it? It's a bruise. The only thing that'll heal that is time.

STACEY: Oh. I thought you were just being cruel again.

KERRY: I wasn't.

STACEY: I know. But I thought you were. You know... because you're mean. And you don't like me.

KERRY: Then you were wrong.

STACEY: About you not liking me?

KERRY: No, no and thrice no.

STACEY: What?

FRANKIE: Look, never mind chatting, guys. We need to get moving.

(He nodded down towards the railway line.)

FRANKIE: We'll head through the woods in the same direction the train went until we can see the border. At which point, we'll have to find a way to sneak across unnoticed.

DAVE: Sounds good.

KERRY: How far is it, do you reckon?

FRANKIE: Well, five minutes by train, so not too far, I expect.

ARTHUR: Oh, I dunno. Trains are pretty fast.

FRANKIE: Yeah, but we'll be fine. At least we know we're close now. Six miles to go at most, by my reckoning.

(Dave nodded.)

DAVE: Sweet. We've done well, guys.

(He glanced towards the lowering sun.)

DAVE: We had five hundred miles to cover, and we've done all but a few of those miles and the sun's not even completely set yet.

ARTHUR: Well that's marvellous.

(Frankie grimaced.)

FRANKIE: Actually, I must have heard wrong there. There's no way we've covered almost five hundred miles. Two hundred, maybe.

KERRY: That does sound more realistic. We didn't get that far in the truck, not really. And those bikes were ridiculously slow. The train is where we made up all the distance. And we weren't on it that long.

ARTHUR: True. Maybe two hundred miles was an exaggeration too.

FRANKIE: Possibly. Who cares? Fact is, we're close now and we ought to get going.

(He pointed in the intended direction of travel.)

FRANKIE: Hopefully, we can find a place to cross the border tonight.

STACEY: And if we can't?

FRANKIE: Then we won't.

STACEY: Sounds complicated.

KERRY: No. No, it doesn't.

FRANKIE: If we don't make it across, Stacey, we'll just have to camp out and try again tomorrow, okay?

STACEY: Okay.

FRANKIE: Cool.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: Come on, guys. Let's reunite ourselves with our bags then get going.

DAVE: Good thinking.

(They then headed back towards the side of the track to find their bags. Having accomplished the simple task in next to no time, they then headed off into the woods, looking forward to finally returning to their homeland.)

Some two hours later, Frankie's rapidly tiring party started to look the worse for wear. Darkness had fallen and mist had risen throughout the woodland, making visibility extremely poor. It had created quite the mix of emotions within the group. Dave was convinced that if they just kept plugging onwards they were bound to find the border at some point. Frankie, on the other hand, was starting to worry that they may have proceeded forth at an angle and would consequently up walking parallel to the border, thus *never* finding it. Arthur didn't quite know what to believe. Nor did Kerry. For her part, Stacey just trudged on at Frankie's side, with full faith in his leadership skills. As far as she was concerned, he'd get her home in the end, and all she had to do was trust him.

Exhausted and unsure of themselves, the party had fallen silent quite some time ago. They'd all shared their concerns and reached the same conclusion. They should keep going and hope for the best. After all, if they simply stood still, they *definitely* wouldn't make it. Since reaching this consensus, the journey had continued in total silence. The only sounds were those of the birdlife and the odd rustling of leaves in the breeze. Not a fan of such spooky noises, Stacey could only whimper. Getting increasingly nervous by the second, she then finally broke the silence.

STACEY: Creepy.

(Frankie gave her a sideways glance.)

FRANKIE: What?

STACEY: I don't like being in the woods at night. Creepy.

(She then clung onto his arm.)

STACEY: What if there are evil types sneaking about?

ARTHUR: Then a sinner like you should feel right at home.

STACEY: Hey.

ARTHUR: Right...

(He sighed.)

ARTHUR: Sorry, Sinner. Stacey, rather. I'm tired, that's all.

KERRY: I figured as much. It's just not like you to be grouchy.

(Dave sniggered.)

DAVE: Yeah. Normally a fella of your sunny disposition would light these woods right up.

KERRY: With his glowing smile.

DAVE: And dazzling personality.

ARTHUR: Oh, stop mocking me.

(He shook his head.)

ARTHUR: Arseholes.

DAVE: What did you call me?

ARTHUR: An arsehole. Why? This can't be news to you, can it?

DAVE: Do you want a kick in the face?

KERRY: Blimey! Calm down, Dave!

DAVE: *You* calm down!

(He ruffled his neck indignantly.)

DAVE: Right... apparently I'm tired and grouchy too.

KERRY: You think?

DAVE: Now you're doing it.

KERRY: Shit.

(She sighed.)

KERRY: I won't lie. I'm absolutely shattered.

(At this point, Frankie stopped and looked to his comrades. Having started to walk on, Stacey shrieked then immediately jumped back to his side and grabbed his arm.)

FRANKIE: So that's the status, is it? You're all exhausted?

DAVE: Fucked, mate.

KERRY: Pooped.

ARTHUR: Utterly done for.

FRANKIE: I see.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: We should stop soon then. You're all exhausted, we can't see a fucking thing twenty feet ahead of us and we might not even be walking in the right direction.

DAVE: I still dispute that.

FRANKIE: Yes, but what I'm right? If we keep plodding on tonight and we *are* going in the wrong direction, it's a complete waste of time; not to mention a waste of energy which we clearly don't have.

DAVE: Then what do you suggest we do, mate?

FRANKIE: Find somewhere to set up camp.

KERRY: How can we? We ditched the tents when we got on the train.

FRANKIE: That's not an issue, Kerry. My thinking is, if we get a good rest and set off again at dawn, when we can see where we're going, our chances of making it to the border in once piece is increased tenfold. Continuing on in the dark like this, with little energy left is utter tomfoolery.

(He stood tall.)

FRANKIE: So the logical thing to do is set up camp.

KERRY: Again. No tents.

FRANKIE: And again; that's not an issue. I'm a soldier. I can erect a temporary shelter.

KERRY: It's hardly the same though, is it?

FRANKIE: Correct. Shelters like the ones I build have access to the open fire, so their warmer. Thus better.

DAVE: Then why did we bother bringing the tents in the first place? I lugged them fuckers for miles.

ARTHUR: And I had to sit in that tiny cart and hug one of the bloody things, getting all sorts of cramps, aches and pains in the process.

FRANKIE: Fuck sake.

(He shook his head.)

FRANKIE: Can you lot hear yourselves? You're whining like a bunch of old ladies.

DAVE: I'm just miffed about having to lug heavy tents around, when according to you they were useless anyway.

FRANKIE: I didn't say they were *useless*.

KERRY: No, but they were *needless*, weren't they? I mean, if your shelters are better...

FRANKIE: For fuck sake, you silly cunts, just forget about the tents. They've gone, okay?

DAVE: But only after I needlessly lugged them...

FRANKIE: Stop being an obstacle!

(He rolled his eyes.)

FRANKIE: You lot are really annoying when you're tired.

KERRY: And you're really annoying when you're bossy.

FRANKIE: Oh, is that right, is it?

KERRY: Yes!

FRANKIE: Then I'll stand down as leader, shall I? Pass the buck on to you.

(He furrowed his brow.)

FRANKIE: What's the next step, Kerry, ma'am; she who should be obeyed?

KERRY: Frankie...

STACEY: Now Frankie's all grouchy too. Dark times.

(Frankie looked to Stacey then took a deep breath.)

FRANKIE: Right, yeah. Sorry about that. That was unprofessional. Moan all you like, the point is, we're gonna keep going until we find a decent clearing where I can build a fire and set up a shelter. That's what's happening now. You can whine all you like; that's our next move.

DAVE: Right.

(He bit his lip.)

DAVE: And set off at dawn when we can see where we're going?

FRANKIE: Yes.

DAVE: Great plan.

FRANKIE: Thank you.

DAVE: But if you're right about us walking parallel to the border, we're still not gonna get there.

FRANKIE: I know that, mate. But all we can do is hope that you were right and my fears were wrong.

DAVE: Gotcha. Makes sense.

FRANKIE: Thank you.

ARTHUR: Excellent. Can we go now? Now you've mentioned setting up camp, I'm anxious to do that.

FRANKIE: That's the spirit, Arthur.

ARTHUR: I just want something to eat and a nap.

FRANKIE: Which is as good an inspiration as any, my friend.

ARTHUR: I concur.

DAVE: Leader's pet!

ARTHUR: David...

(Dave chuckled.)

DAVE: I'm kidding, mate.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: Lead the way, Frankie.

FRANKIE: Happy to.

(He then headed away with Stacey stuck to him like glue. The others trudged on after them.)

STACEY: I like how you handled that.

FRANKIE: Yeah?

STACEY: You were very manly.

FRANKIE: Well, I'm am quite the...

STACEY: Except the part where you got the hump and started bitching back at them. That wasn't very manly at all.

FRANKIE: You...

STACEY: Other than that you were awesome.

FRANKIE: Right...

(He ruffled his neck.)

FRANKIE: Bloody cheek. Criticising me? Seriously? I don't have to take that from someone who's clinging onto me like a terrified child because owl noises creep her out.

STACEY: It's a girl thing.

FRANKIE: Yeah...

STACEY: I'm not meant to be manly.

FRANKIE: No, but...

STACEY: You are!

FRANKIE: Stacey...

STACEY: And you were. Very manly. It was just a weird when you got grumpy, that's all. I wasn't criticising you. I like you. You're my friend.

FRANKIE: Yeah?

STACEY: At least I hope so. I mean, you don't *dislike* me, do you?

FRANKIE: Of course not.

STACEY: Yay. That makes me happy then.

(She smiled.)

STACEY: I've never really had a proper friend before, you see?

FRANKIE: A pretty thing like you? You're having a laugh.

STACEY: No, I'm not. People like me for a *little* while, but they get bored when they realise I'm a bit of a dipshit. That's just how it is.

(She glanced skywards.)

STACEY: The only person who ever truly liked me was my nan.

(She pointed to her necklace.)

STACEY: She gave me this pendant.

FRANKIE: Nice.

STACEY: Yeah... I miss her. My parents favoured my brother and sister, but my nan liked *me* the most. That's why she choose to give *me* her pendant.

(She mused to herself as she recalled a memory.)

STACEY: She said my brother would be fine, seeing as he was studying to become a lawyer. They makes lots of money. And my sister was studying to become a doctor, so she'd be kinda rich too. Being as thick as shit though, *I'd* need a little extra something to survive. So she gave me this necklace because it's supposed to be lucky. Every little helps, she said then gave me a hug.

(She sighed.)

STACEY: I miss having a nice hug like that. Being groped in gentleman's clubs just isn't the same.

FRANKIE: Well... no.

STACEY: Yeah, I sure do miss a nice hug.

FRANKIE: I'll bet.

STACEY: A nice hug right now would make all the difference.

FRANKIE: I'm sure.

STACEY: Um... yeah. A hug would be great.

(She then looked to Frankie with imploring eyes.)

STACEY: I'd really like a hug right now.

FRANKIE: I hear you.

(He then nodded ahead of them.)

FRANKIE: From what I can make out, the trees seem to be a little more sparse up ahead, perhaps we can set up camp there.

(Sighing in defeat, Stacey could only allow her shoulders to slump.)

STACEY: Sure.

FRANKIE: Well don't sound too enthusiastic, will you?

STACEY: Okay.

FRANKIE: Hmm... you okay, Stacey? You seem down all of a sudden.

(Pacing behind, Dave rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: She wants a reassuring hug, you dumb cunt.

FRANKIE: What?

ARTHUR: How slow *is* he exactly?

KERRY: It's hard to quantify.

FRANKIE: Fine.

(He rolled his eyes then looked to Dave.)

FRANKIE: You take care of that. I'm just going to hurry ahead briefly.

DAVE: She didn't want a hug from...

(He then watched Frankie hurrying ahead and sighed.)

DAVE: Me.

ARTHUR: Seriously. What a buffoon.

KERRY: I'll say.

STACEY: I guess he's not really my friend after all.

(She sighed.)

STACEY: I should have seen that coming really.

KERRY: Yeah, but in your defence, you're too dim to see things coming until they're about to run you over.

(Having stopped some twenty feet ahead, Frankie turned then smiled to them.)

FRANKIE: We're in business, people. There's an abandoned hut in this clearing and a circle that's clearly been used as a fire pit before. It's perfect.

DAVE: Cool.

(Frankie then paced back towards them.)

FRANKIE: Did you take care of Stacey's hugging needs, Dave?

DAVE: No, she wanted...

FRANKIE: Useless.

(He then stepped up to Stacey, wrapped his arms around her and pulled her head into his chest.)

FRANKIE: I'll do it myself then.

STACEY: Yay!

(As the others passed them, en route to the clearing, Frankie smiled.)

FRANKIE: Wow. This hugging thing is really nice.

STACEY: My boobs are squashed against your chest.

FRANKIE: And I'm certainly not complaining.

STACEY: Right...

(Hugging him back, Stacey sighed.)

STACEY: You didn't lie before, did you?

FRANKIE: What?

STACEY: You do like me, don't you? I mean, we are friends, right? Proper friends.

FRANKIE: Of course. I think you're a really nice person.

STACEY: Nice... right. Nice but dim.

FRANKIE: Yeah, well; who cares? So what if you're none too bright? I don't mind that one bit, Stacey. In fact, that was kind of the norm where I grew up.

STACEY: Really?

FRANKIE: Yeah. I've meet people before now who make you look like a genius in comparison. I mean proper numbskulls.

STACEY: Just like...

FRANKIE: Nope. Way worse.

STACEY: Wow.

FRANKIE: Yeah. So don't worry about that. You're lack of brains doesn't bother me one iota.
(He then nodded.)

FRANKIE: Come on. Let's catch up with the others.

STACEY: Sure.

(They then hurried forth to where Dave, Arthur and Kerry were waiting for them. Before them, there was indeed an abandoned hut and an old fire pit. Delighted to see it, Dave couldn't help but smile.)

DAVE: Fire?

FRANKIE: Oh, yes!

DAVE: Excellent. I'll fetch some wood.

FRANKIE: Perfect.

Half an hour later, the weary party of five found themselves relaxing around a soothing, open fire. Despite the fact there was a fair amount of moisture in the air, Dave had managed to secure more than enough dry wood to keep a fire burning for hours. It had then been down to Frankie to build the fire and use his military survival skills to create a spark and ignite the kindling. Between them, they'd done a most excellent job. During that time, the others had taken refuge in the hut. At the very least, it made a good hiding place. Whilst in there they'd also come to an agreement about the sleeping arrangements. There was enough room for four people to lay side by side. Arthur would have to sleep lengthways by their feet. Despite there being no evidence to substantiate their suspicions, Kerry and Stacey were both absolutely certain that he snored, so the further away he was, the better. Not liking the idea of sleeping next to a woman for fear of being led into temptation, Arthur had agreed instantly. With those formalities decided and the fire now built, there was but one thing left to do. Eat.

Chewing away on one of them many chicken pieces that Kerry had swiped from the officer's mess during the previous night's victory celebration, Frankie stared into the fire then exhaled. Very much lost in his own thoughts, he then nodded to himself and proceeded to chuckle quietly. Nibbling at her own chicken piece, Kerry heard the giggling then gave him a sideways glance.

KERRY: What's... so funny?

(Frankie glanced up at her with a baffled expression on his face.)

FRANKIE: Sorry, what?

KERRY: You were giggling.

FRANKIE: Yeah.

(He then proceeded to giggle again.)

FRANKIE: I was just thinking, that's all.

(More than a little paranoid, Arthur looked deeply suspicious.)

ARTHUR: Not laughing at any of us, are you?

FRANKIE: Of course not. Why would you think that?

ARTHUR: Because you can be very childish.

DAVE: Blimey, that's rich coming from you, mate.

ARTHUR: Excuse me?

FRANKIE: Ease off, lads. I was just thinking about what I'm gonna do when I got home tomorrow.

DAVE: *If* you get home tomorrow.

KERRY: Right? We need to *find* the border first. Then cross it!

DAVE: Which isn't going to be easy.

(He grimaced.)

DAVE: That border was designed to keep cunts from Asparia out.

FRANKIE: Yeah, but we'll worry about then when we find it.

(He shrugged.)

FRANKIE: And I've every confidence that, once we do, we'll find a way to cross it. No sweat.

(He nodded sternly.)

FRANKIE: We're going home tomorrow. You mark my words.

DAVE: Right...

(He shrugged.)

DAVE: Let's just hope your confidence is well-founded.

FRANKIE: It is. Trust me. I'm a trained soldier, mate. Infiltrating things is part of my training. I'll find us a way to get across the border; guaranteed.

DAVE: Well, you say that, but *once again*, the border is designed to keep cunts from Asparia *out*; *including* trained soldiers!

(Frankie rolled his eyes.)

FRANKIE: You've got no faith in me whatsoever, have you?

DAVE: Not really, no. I'm a *seeing is believing* kind of guy.

FRANKIE: Right. No wonder Arthur fired you.

(Dave growled.)

DAVE: I didn't even work for...

(He then took a deep breath to calm himself.)

DAVE: Well played, Frankie; well played.

FRANKIE: Thank you.

DAVE: Cunt.

FRANKIE: Right.

(He then mused to himself.)

FRANKIE: What were we talking about again?

KERRY: You were about to explain what you were giggling about.

FRANKIE: I'm pretty sure I already did that, Kerry. Like I said, I was just thinking about what I plan to do once I get home.

KERRY: Which is?

(Suddenly realising that all eyes were upon him, Frankie sighed inwardly then shrugged.)

FRANKIE: It's nothing major. I'm just gonna go for a beer with my old mate, Archie Diamond.

ARTHUR: Archie Diamond?

FRANKIE: Yeah. Harry Diamond's brother.

ARTHUR: I know that name from somewhere.

FRANKIE: Yeah?

ARTHUR: I just can't recall where.

FRANKIE: Doesn't matter. It might not even be the same one. I mean it's a common enough name.

KERRY: Is it?

FRANKIE: Yeah. Probably. I dunno.

DAVE: So that's your big plan, is it? To go for a beer with a mate?

FRANKIE: Yeah.

KERRY: So why all the giggling?

(Frankie grinned.)

FRANKIE: Because whenever we got for a beer, funny shit happens.

(He exhaled.)

FRANKIE: The shit we used to get up to. We were a right pair. People used to say, uh-oh, lock up your daughters, everyone. Here come Frankie Harris and Archie Diamond. Good times.

DAVE: So you were basically a pair of aggravating bell ends?

FRANKIE: What? No. What are you basing that on?

DAVE: Where I come from, people only say *that* about gobby jack-the-lads. The sort of annoying, loud and obnoxious twats that cause all the *trouble* in the neighbourhood.

FRANKIE: Oh, leave off. We were nothing like that. We just had a laugh, that's all.

(He beamed.)

FRANKIE: Just to keep up age old traditions, our town has a town crier still. This old fella comes out on the steps outside the town hall at midday everyday and repeats the local news headlines. So we sneaked into the town hall one night and stole the clanger from his bell. Replaced it with squeaky dog toy. You should have seen it. There he was, yelling "Oh, yay; oh, yay", shaking away at this bell. Rather than going bong, however, it was squealing like he was strangling a dog or something.

(He then sat there, chuckling away with tears in his eyes while the other four stared at him as if he was insane.)

FRANKIE: Priceless. You should have heard the noise it was making.

ARTHUR: Yes...

(He grimaced.)

ARTHUR: Sounds hilarious.

FRANKIE: It was!

(He then looked to Dave.)

FRANKIE: So yeah, we did that kind of thing. Harmless. I know the type you were thinking of, and trust me, we were nothing like that.

(He sneered.)

FRANKIE: Unlike Reggie Burrows. He was the type. After four beers, he'd strut about the pub thinking he was the world's funniest man, annoying the crap of everyone. Hiding your beer and stuff. Or worse, sticking spirits in your pint and hoping you didn't notice. Filling the ashtray with crisps and pretending they were free snacks. The amount of poor cunts who got a mouth full of ash because of him.

DAVE: Yup. That's precisely the type of bell end I meant.

FRANKIE: Yeah, we were nothing like that. We just pissed about on the way home. Mounting people's garden gnomes and stuff. Harmless fun.

DAVE: Fair enough.

STACEY: And that's what you're looking forward to, is it?

FRANKIE: Yeah.

STACEY: Messing about.

FRANKIE: Yeah. I want to have fun for a bit. The war's over and I reckon I've earned it.

STACEY: That's fair.

FRANKIE: Thank you.

STACEY: Personally, I'm hoping to find something a bit more meaningful when *I* get home.

KERRY: Like a brain?

STACEY: Be nice.

(She pouted.)

STACEY: That's not what I meant at all.

DAVE: Then what *are* you hoping to find, Stacey?

(Stacey blushed.)

STACEY: True love.

(Expecting to hear a heartfelt "aw", she was most put out to see everyone roll their eyes at her.)

STACEY: What? What's wrong with that?

ARTHUR: How unambitious do you want to be?

KERRY: And just how tolerant do you think men are?

STACEY: Huh? Unambitious? Tolerant? What do you mean?

ARTHUR: I mean there's more to life than love, young lady.

KERRY: And *I* mean you'd be better off looking for a man who just wants to do you, because the chances of someone falling for a hopeless idiot are infinitesimal.

STACEY: Mean!

ARTHUR: Hardly.

STACEY: Not you. Kerry!

KERRY: I'm just saying...

STACEY: Well, don't.

(She ruffled her neck.)

STACEY: Just because nobody loves me right now, doesn't mean nobody ever will. You don't know; there might be someone out there for me. At least I hope there is. I deserve to be happy like anyone else.

(She then looked to Arthur.)

STACEY: And hoping to find him isn't unambitious. It's very much the opposite. If anything it's *overly* ambitious! It'll be hard for *me* to find love because men have no respect for me whatsoever. They all think I'm an idiot; there to be used. They never want to spend *time* with me just to enjoy my company; they hate my company because I'm flaky and silly.

(She then groaned in defeat.)

STACEY: Aw, poo. Kerry was right.

KERRY: See?

STACEY: I'm never going to be loved, am I? By anybody.

KERRY: Probably not, no.

FRANKIE: Hey. No. That's not fair.

(He looked to Stacey.)

FRANKIE: Like I told you before, Stacey, you're a really nice person. Loving and kind. Sooner or later, someone is going to see that and before they know it they'll be head over heels in love with you!

(Stacey's face lit up.)

STACEY: Do you think so? I mean really?

FRANKIE: I do. You're not being *overambitious* at all. Or *unambitious*, come to that. Finding love is a noble goal. And I definitely think you'll find someone. Sooner than you realise. And who knows, he may be closer than you think.

STACEY: Really?

FRANKIE: Yes!

(Arthur raised a suspicious eyebrow.)

ARTHUR: Hmm... is it you?

FRANKIE: What?

ARTHUR: Are you referring to yourself? Throwing your hat into the ring, so to speak. Have you fallen for her or something?

(Stacey instantly looked to Frankie with stars in her eyes. Frankie didn't know where to look and just covered his face with his palm.)

FRANKIE: I should have shot you in the woods.

STACEY: Mean! You could just say no.

FRANKIE: I was talking about Arthur!

ARTHUR: Me? What did I do?

FRANKIE: Don't put me on the spot like that!

(He ruffled his neck.)

FRANKIE: Let's move on, shall we? What do you plan to do when you get back, Kerry?

KERRY: Who cares? Just answer the question. Have you fallen for her?

DAVE: Well?

ARTHUR: Speak up, lad.

FRANKIE: Will you cunts just fuck off? You're embarrassing her.

STACEY: No they're not.

FRANKIE: Shit.

(He ruffled his neck.)

FRANKIE: If you must know, I'm not looking for love right now...

DAVE: But you're not gonna rule it out?

FRANKIE: Rule what out?

DAVE: Getting with Stacey here.

KERRY: I'll pray for you.

FRANKIE: Enough of that, you tossers. All I said was she might find love sooner than she realises. And not even have to look that hard. How the fuck did you go from that to concluding that I must have fallen for her?

DAVE: We didn't conclude anything.

ARTHUR: We just asked.

KERRY: And your refusal to give us an answer is actually kinda telling.

(Frankie gritted his teeth.)

FRANKIE: Oh, I'll bloody tell you in a minute!

KERRY: Go on then!

FRANKIE: I didn't mean literally. I was threatening you.

DAVE: Yeah, we definitely hit a raw nerve there.

ARTHUR: Absolutely we did. Even though it's pitch black out here, you can quite clearly see he's gone bright red.

FRANKIE: Look, you cunts. I like Stacey.

STACEY: You do?

FRANKIE: As a friend!

STACEY: Aw.

FRANKIE: As such, I want to *encourage* her quest to find true love. That's all.

ARTHUR: And what better way to help her than to throw your hat in the ring!

FRANKIE: Yes! I mean no!

ARTHUR: Right...

FRANKIE: You...

(He shook his head then looked to Stacey.)

FRANKIE: You're a beautiful woman. You are. You have the face of an angel, the body of a goddess and tits that defy belief. You'll find love; I have no doubt about that. None, whatsoever.

(He ruffled his neck.)

FRANKIE: That's *all* I was saying. As your friend I was being encouraging.

STACEY: Right... well... thanks, Frankie.

(Dave rolled his eyes then looked to Kerry.)

DAVE: Who does he think he's kidding? He fancies the arse off it.

KERRY: Clearly.

FRANKIE: Do you mind?

(Dave and Kerry shared a cheeky grin then looked away. At the same time, Stacey blushed then looked to Frankie and exhaled. His words had given her hope. So had his lack of a denial. As such she then beamed happily to herself, content to cling onto the possibility that Frankie might be the one for her.)

FRANKIE: Anyway, that's enough of that bollocks. It's your turn, Kerry.

KERRY: Turn?

FRANKIE: To share your future plans.

KERRY: Oh.

(She shrugged.)

KERRY: There's not much to tell, really. I just want to continue my career. Like I told you this morning, I've passed all the exams I need to become a GP now, so I'm gonna do that.

(As everyone continued to look her way, she shrugged.)

KERRY: What? That's it.

DAVE: Right...

ARTHUR: Good for you, Kerry. Your career is important. An excellent thing to focus on. And I plan to do the same. I shall return to my parish and continue to do god's fine work. And I'm looking forward to it. The vicarage is a lot more comfortable than a tent, that's for sure.

DAVE: So that's it, is it? Just back to the daily grind for you?

ARTHUR: Yes. Because, the daily grind as you call it, is something I happen to enjoy immensely.

DAVE: Cool.

(He then gave a stifled laugh.)

DAVE: So what we're saying is, Kerry plans to focus on healing the sick, Stacey aims to find true love and Arthur plans to go back to guiding people through life spiritually.

(He then threw a thumb in Frankie's direction and chuckled.)

DAVE: Whereas this cunt's sole ambition in life is to go out on the piss with with his mate and rearrange some gnomes on the way home.

(He smirked.)

DAVE: I admire you, mate. As life aspirations go, that's quite the noble cause.

FRANKIE: Oh, shut up.

(He shook his head.)

FRANKIE: You cunts asked what I planned to do when I got home. So I told you what I'm looking forward to doing on the first night. Obviously that's not my *life* goal. In fact, we weren't even discussing life goals to start with. How we got onto life goals, I'll never know.

STACEY: Um... that was *my* fault. I was the one who started talking about my life quest. You know, to find true love. The *first* thing I'll do is go to bed and have a long sleep.

FRANKIE: An excellent plan.

ARTHUR: Yes, well, I think we'll *all* be doing that. What I'm curious about now is what you two gents plan to do career wise.

(He looked between Frankie and Dave.)

FRANKIE: I'm still enlisted in the army currently, Arthur. I'll guess I'll keep doing that until told otherwise. Or until I get kicked out for killing the major's dog. At which point, I'll just go and find a security job or something.

ARTHUR: Fair enough.

DAVE: Whereas *my* career was chosen for me at an early age when my dear old mum, Mrs Grigger, decided to name me Dave.

ARTHUR: Going back to grave digging, are you?

DAVE: Yup. As soon as a vacancy comes up at the local cemetery, I'll be right in there.

ARTHUR: Unless they decided to hire someone else.

DAVE: They won't. The boss, Eric Grigger, my dad, happens to be quite fond of me.

ARTHUR: I see. Excellent.

DAVE: Yes, yes it is.

(He exhaled.)

DAVE: And so is this chicken, by the way. Is there any more?

KERRY: Yes.

DAVE: Can I have some?

KERRY: No.

DAVE: Right...

KERRY: Sorry, but we're gonna have to make it last. It might take all day to cross the border tomorrow; we might not get across at all. And this is all the food we have. We have to use it sparingly.

DAVE: Fair enough. It's annoying, but it makes sense.

(Arthur sighed.)

ARTHUR: I really hope we do make it home tomorrow. After the nightmare we had today, we deserve a bit of luck.

FRANKIE: Right? Attacked by thugs; twice. Our car died. We got attacked again while on those bikes and then had to jump out of a moving train. I never want a day like this again.

DAVE: I couldn't agree more. Laying under that electric cable...

(He shuddered.)

DAVE: I'm gonna be having nightmares about that forever.

STACEY: Nightmares... hmm...

DAVE: What?

STACEY: That's a good idea.

DAVE: Having a nightmare is a good idea? Why would you say that?

KERRY: Why wouldn't she? She's made a career out of turning my life into one, after all.

STACEY: I didn't mean having nightmares was a good idea, silly.

(She smiled.)

STACEY: You have to be asleep to have a nightmare. And *going to sleep* seems like a good idea. I'm really tired.

FRANKIE: Yeah, you're not the only one.

ARTHUR: Far from it, in fact.

KERRY: Yup. I'm pooped too.

DAVE: Full house.

(Frankie nodded.)

FRANKIE: In that case, I'll stoke the fire a bit and add more wood, then we get our heads down.

DAVE: And start early in the morning, right?

FRANKIE: The earlier the better.

DAVE: Fair comment.

(With that, Frankie climbed to his feet, grabbed a log then proceeded to stoke the fire with it.)

FRANKIE: This should burn for a good few hours yet, I reckon.

DAVE: Then we'll be good for the night.

STACEY: Yay. Awesome.

(She beamed.)

STACEY: Then that only leaves one more thing to do.

(With that, she headed for the hut to turn in for the night. Watching her go, Arthur, Dave and Kerry shrugged then followed on. Still working on the camp fire, Frankie couldn't help but smile. Any moment now, he'd be able to get his head down for the night, and he was completely convinced that the morning would bring about their homecoming. It was indeed a satisfying feeling.

Little did the party from Norland realise, they'd actually gone to bed extremely early that night. Nine thirty in the evening, to be exact. Due to the darkness and the hardness of their day, they'd believed it to be much later. As a result, they'd all fallen asleep by half-past ten. Utterly exhausted, lying on the hard wooden floor of the hut was of no hindrance. Kerry had fallen asleep in under five minutes. The last one awake, Arthur dozed off some fifty minutes later. And so, at eleven o'clock that night, all was silent but for the sound of the odd owl and Arthur snoring. The peace was not about to last, however.

Just after the eleventh hour had passed, a series of lit torches appeared in the mist beyond the hut. Some two minutes later, a throng of roughly twenty women in ceremonial robes then arrived at the side of the campfire. Unnerved by the sight of the burning pyre, the leader, Priestess Lacey, glanced at the hut then furrowed her brow.

LACEY: Crossbows, ladies. I fear the enemy may be among us.

(Upon her command, all nineteen of her subordinates pulled small crossbows from their side pouches then proceeded to load them.)

LACEY: Carrie?

(Her second in command smiled.)

CARRIE: Priestess?

LACEY: Check the hut and...

(Her words were then interrupted by an almighty snoring sound from the hut.)

LACEY: Wake them.

CARRIE: Ma'am.

(With that, she strutted up to the door of the hut, flung it open and bellowed.)

CARRIE: Awaken and come outside immediately; by order of the Coven of the Greater Divinity!!!

(The sounds of shuffling and gasping then rose up from inside the hut, followed by the cry of a disgruntled dissenter.)

FRANKIE: Who the fuck's this cunt???

CARRIE: Just come out! Now!!!

(As she backed away slightly, Dave then popped his head out of the hut. Seeing a score of crossbows aimed in his direction, he grimaced then glanced over his shoulder.)

DAVE: Better do as she asks, you lot; this could get nasty.

ARTHUR: What?

DAVE: They're armed.

STACEY: Aw, poo.

(Slowly, but surely, the five inhabitants of the hut then emerged with their hands up. Stacey looked absolutely terrified. The others just looked bitter. To be captured so close to the border was infuriating.)

DAVE: Mate?

FRANKIE: What?

DAVE: Not happy.

FRANKIE: Right.

(At this point, the leader of the female clan stepped towards them.)

LACEY: Identify yourselves!

FRANKIE: No need. We know who we are!

LACEY: Identify yourselves to *me*; you idiot!

FRANKIE: Fine. I'm Frankie. These good people are Dave, Arthur, Stacey and Kerry.

(Lacey bit her lip.)

LACEY: Does someone need to put a crossbow bolt in you before you comply?

FRANKIE: What? No! Fine. I'm Frankie Harris of the Norland Army.

DAVE: Dave Grigger; grave digger.

LACEY: Now who are you *really*?

DAVE: It's true! I'm Dave Grigger and I dig graves!

(Not wanting any trouble, Arthur spoke up nervously.)

ARTHUR: I can vouch for that, actually. His name really is that silly. He worked for me in my capacity as the Norland Army reverend.

DAVE: I didn't work *for* you! I worked with you!

LACEY: Silence!!!

(She sneered.)

LACEY: Who are the others?

KERRY: Kerry, military nurse.

STACEY: Stacey. I was her assistant.

KERRY: In theory.

LACEY: Enough!!!

(She snarled.)

LACEY: Why are you here?

FRANKIE: We're heading home to Norland. Our unit shipped this morning and left us behind.

LACEY: Heading home? That hut is not your home!

FRANKIE: Well, no.

DAVE: We decided to rest here for the night.

LACEY: Rest???

(She growled.)

LACEY: The sacred ceremonial site of the Coven of the Greater Divinity is not a bed and breakfast!!!

DAVE: How were we supposed to know that? It was dark when we got here. We thought, “look a hut”, so we went inside!

ARTHUR: Wait! Did you say the Coven of the Greater Divinity?

LACEY: What of it?

(Arthur whimpered.)

ARTHUR: Shit. They’re the witches affiliated to my church.

(A blank expression then crossed his brow.)

ARTHUR: Wait a minute. Why am I whimpering? That’s great news.

(He then looked to Lacey.)

ARTHUR: I’m Reverend Arthur Woodcut of the Church of the Greater Divinity. We’re on the same team!

(Lacey gave him a doubting glance.)

LACEY: Is that so?

ARTHUR: Yes!

LACEY: And where is your parish?

ARTHUR: Little Francombe.

LACEY: Isn’t that the church that got robbed and vandalised a few years ago?

ARTHUR: Yes. Just before I set out to do my military service.

LACEY: Terrible business.

ARTHUR: Indeed, but at least they caught the little buggers.

(He shook his head.)

ARTHUR: Two little thugs from the neighbourhood. Lenny Bloom and Archie...

(He then glowered at Frankie.)

ARTHUR: Archie Diamond! That’s where I knew the name from. That little fucker robbed my church!

(He snarled.)

ARTHUR: Your friend is a bastard! A complete...

(He then bit his lip.)

ARTHUR: You don’t look well.

(Sure enough, Frankie was sweating and trembling.)

ARTHUR: You okay there, old boy?

FRANKIE: W-w-witches.

DAVE: Mate...

FRANKIE: I don’t like witches, mate. They do horrible things. It was them who made Archie turn himself in. And you don’t want to know what they threatened to do to him if he didn’t.

DAVE: Right... so that’s why you’re so afraid of them.

FRANKIE: Wisdom, yes!

DAVE: Poof. They’re not actually witches, mate. They’re just lonely, deranged spinsters who want something to do of an evening. A coven is pretty much just a social club for crazy women with about fifteen cats at home.

LACEY: Excuse me???

DAVE: Am I wrong?

LACEY: Yes!

DAVE: Let’s just agree to disagree. In fact, seeing as Arthur has confirmed himself as one of your own, why not just put your bows down then bugger off. We need our sleep.

LACEY: Not on our sacred ground, you don’t!

DAVE: Sacred? Look, like I said, you’re just a group of spinsters who...

(Lacey then held out her palm and allowed light to rise from the centre of it. Watching her do so, Dave paused for a moment then continued.)

DAVE: Get together now and again and perform magic; which we totally respect, so we'll be on our way.

LACEY: Yes, you do that!
(She pointed into the woods.)

LACEY: The border is a mile in that direction.

FRANKIE: Wait. What? You're letting us go?

LACEY: As opposed to what?

FRANKIE: Keeping us for body parts. To make your spells with.

ARTHUR: What the hell are you talking about, boy?

FRANKIE: They're evil, I tell you!

STACEY: They don't look evil to me. They said we could go.
(She then smiled at the Priestess.)

STACEY: Can I just get my bag from the hut first?

LACEY: You can...
(Her jaw then dropped.)

LACEY: Wait.
(She gasped then stepped up close to Stacey. Stacey reeled back and whimpered.)

STACEY: What?

LACEY: That necklace!

STACEY: You can't have it!

LACEY: I know. I'd be a fool to even *try* to take it.

STACEY: What?

LACEY: Tell me, young lady, where did you acquire this piece?

STACEY: My nan gave it to me.
(She beamed.)

STACEY: I was her favourite, you see? She said I'm nicer than my siblings, so I could have it.

LACEY: Your nan...

STACEY: Yes?

LACEY: What was her name?

STACEY: Lizzy West.
(The entire membership of the coven gasped.)

LACEY: High Priestess Lizzy West?

STACEY: Some called her that, yes. I never did know why.
(Stacey and her four allies then looked on in bewilderment as the coven knelt before her and adopted praying hands.)

LACEY: Blessed be. A chosen heir walks among us.

ENTIRE COVEN: Blessed be!

STACEY: Um...
(Lacey climbed to her feet then bowed.)

LACEY: I apologise for our disrespect, your grace. We were mistaken.

STACEY: My grace?

LACEY: Please feel free to utilise the hut for as long as you like; it is yours after all.

STACEY: It is?

LACEY: Of course. As the bearer of the High Priestess' necklace, you yourself are a High Priestess; a chosen heir.
(Stacey just stared through her. Frankie, Dave and Kerry just stared through Stacey. Arthur on the hand was trembling and whimpering.)

STACEY: Wait. I'm confused. How can I be a witch? I don't even know any magic.

DAVE: You magically defeated two groups of thugs today, Stacey.

STACEY: Apart from that.
(She pouted.)

STACEY: They tried to hurt me.

LACEY: The necklace will never allow that. As long as you remain a virgin until you're married, the necklace will destroy anyone who tried to defile you, or foolishly tries to steal the necklace from you.

STACEY: I see. That makes sense. She did tell me to make sure no man puts his doodah in my never-never. It made working as whore kind of awkward, but I managed. And she told me never to let anyone touch my necklace. So I didn't. Nobody has ever touched it.

(She nodded.)

STACEY: Except that guy who mysteriously died for no apparent reason, seconds after he tried to grab it. That was weird.

LACEY: No. That was the protection of the coven; and of god. Your nan must have loved you very much.

STACEY: She did.

(Arthur then stepped forward with a terror in his eyes that defied his calm and confident words.)

ARTHUR: Well, of course. What's *not* to love? Our Stacey is a kind, virtuous and loving soul; the likes of which you rarely see. She truly is a gem; a shining light; a bastion of humility that brings hope to my heart.

DAVE: Really? But you've done nothing but insult her since we set out.

ARTHUR: Shut your face, you. I did nothing of the sort.

DAVE: You said she was a sinner!

ARTHUR: I said she was a winner!

KERRY: Then why did you want us to leave her behind? You said being seen with her would sully your reputation and that of the church.

LACEY: Oh, did he now?

ARTHUR: Of course not! I'm Stacey's biggest fan. I did say those things, yes, but satirically.

Kerry hates Stacey, you see? It was *her* who suggested leaving Stacey behind! So I was just mocking her.

KERRY: You...

LACEY: I'm not liking what I'm hearing here. Stacey, are you even safe with these people?

STACEY: I am, yes. Especially, Frankie. He's my friend.

(She then looked to where Frankie was staring at her with terrified eyes.)

STACEY: Right?

FRANKIE: Yes! Please don't kill me!

STACEY: What? Why would I do that?

(She grimaced.)

STACEY: *How* would I do that?

FRANKIE: You're a witch!

STACEY: No, I'm not!

LACEY: Yes, you are!

STACEY: Apparently I lied.

LACEY: You're a high-ranking witch. A High Priestess!

STACEY: Oh.

ARTHUR: A High Priestess whom I respect and admire!

DAVE: Seriously? Why are you grovelling like...

(An enlightened expression then crossed his brow.)

DAVE: This coven is affiliated to your church, yeah?

ARTHUR: So?

DAVE: And she's high-ranking, right?

LACEY: Very.

(Dave chuckled at Arthur.)

DAVE: That makes Stacey your boss.

ARTHUR: No, it doesn't!

LACEY: Yes, it does. And as a priestess, I outrank you too, Reverend. Now apologise to Stacey immediately.

(Arthur whimpered.)

ARTHUR: But why?

LACEY: For calling her a sinner for a start!

ARTHUR: I'm pretty sure I said winner.

LACEY: And I'm pretty sure you're lying.

ARTHUR: Bugger.

(Gulping to himself, barely able to face the humiliation, Arthur looked to Stacey and grimaced.)

ARTHUR: Um... Stacey?

LACEY: Your grace!!!

ARTHUR: Um, Stacey, your grace?

STACEY: Yes?

ARTHUR: I apologise. For everything. For everything mean I may have said.

(Stacey just shrugged.)

STACEY: I forgive you.

ARTHUR: Really?

STACEY: Of course.

ARTHUR: I see.

(He then dropped his face into his palm.)

ARTHUR: Good god, she actually *is* more virtuous than me.

(He then peered through his fingers to where Stacey was grimacing at Frankie.)

STACEY: Frankie? Are you okay? You're sweaty. And you're shaking.

FRANKIE: Witches... everywhere...

STACEY: He really doesn't look very well.

LACEY: Then allow me to heal him.

(She took one step towards him, however, when he shrieked then dived into the hut.)

LACEY: What the...

DAVE: He's scared of witches. You're not healing that.

LACEY: Hmm...

DAVE: He had the right idea though. I'm going back to sleep too.

LACEY: Wait!

DAVE: What?

LACEY: Stacey? Are you happy to allow these commoners to use the hut?

STACEY: Why wouldn't I be?

LACEY: It belongs to this coven. Your coven.

STACEY: Oh. Still... nice people don't mind sharing.

(Tears then welled in Lacey's eyes.)

LACEY: You sounded just like your nan then.

STACEY: Mean. She had breathing problems and warbled like a crow.

LACEY: I meant the context of your words.

STACEY: Right.

(She blushed.)

STACEY: I'm really confused right now? Can I go to bed? I do my best thinking while I'm asleep.

LACEY: Of course you can. Although...

(She smiled.)

LACEY: Before you do, I'd love to hear this young lady apologise to you first. Just for my peace of mind.

(She gestured to Kerry.)

KERRY: Me? What did I do?

LACEY: The Reverend said you suggested leaving Stacey behind.

ARTHUR: She did, yes. She's been very mean to the poor thing. I was horrified.

KERRY: You horrible fucking...

LACEY: Please. Apologise. I have no idea what leaving her behind meant. I don't know where you've been and I don't need to know. I just know that suggesting leaving someone behind is cruel. My coven doesn't take kindly to cruelty to one of our own.

KERRY: Right...

(She blushed.)

KERRY: Um... Sorry, Stacey.

STACEY: Accepted. Can I go to bed now?

KERRY: Don't accept it that easily, you're making us look bad.

STACEY: How can I make people look bad? I didn't do anything. Only *you* can make yourself look bad.

KERRY: And now I look every worse.

(She then trudged into the hut dejectedly.)

LACEY: High Priestess?

(Stacey glanced around the area.)

ARTHUR: She means you, dipshit.

(He gasped.)

ARTHUR: She means dipshit, your grace! I mean you! Not dipshit!

LACEY: Reverend!!!

ARTHUR: Please don't fire me!

STACEY: Who?

LACEY: Listen to me, you nasty piece of work.

STACEY: Me? What did I do?

LACEY: Not you, your grace; this old bastard.

STACEY: Oh.

LACEY: If I hear one more disrespectful word from you...

ARTHUR: You won't. I'll go straight to bed and shut my mouth forever.

LACEY: Yes, you do that. A vow of silence from you would be most welcome.

ARTHUR: Yes, well... sorry, your grace. And you, um... your other grace.

(He then skulked into the hut.)

LACEY: High Priestess?

STACEY: That's me, right?

LACEY: Yes.

(She nodded.)

LACEY: Sleep well. My coven and I will guard you until you awaken.

STACEY: Really? That's so nice.

LACEY: It'll be an honour, your grace.

STACEY: Please, call me Stacey.

LACEY: You'd offer me that honour?

STACEY: Well, yeah, it is my name after all.

LACEY: Blessed be.

DAVE: Right... well... I'm going to bed too.

(He then headed into the hut. Left behind, Stacey smiled to Lacey.)

STACEY: I'm really baffled right now. This is all too much for my brain to take in. Maybe my friend Frankie can explain it in the morning.

LACEY: He's afraid of you.

STACEY: Nothing a cuddle won't fix. My boobies can very persuasive.

LACEY: Huh?

STACEY: Goodnight.

(She then headed into the hut and closed the door.)

FRANKIE: Don't kill me!

DAVE: Frankie!

FRANKIE: What?

DAVE: Grow up.

STACEY: Agreed. Now come and cuddle into my boobies.

FRANKIE: But...

(Silence followed.)

FRANKIE: Seeing as you asked nicely.

(Standing outside the hut at this time, Lacey shook her head then shrugged.)

LACEY: Carrie?

CARRIE: Yes, your grace?

LACEY: Space out. We're going to guard the High Priestess overnight.

CARRIE: Ma'am.

LACEY: Thank you.

(She then headed away, mumbling.)

LACEY: She definitely has her grandmother's kindness, but her brain... fucking, wow.

(She then sank to her knees.)

LACEY: Forgive me father, for I have sinned...

As the early morning mist brought forth dew on the low-lying forest grass, and the first glint of daylight penetrated the canopy of trees, Dave open his eyes and yawned. It hadn't been the best nights' sleep he'd ever had, but it was far better than having none at all. And so, he sat up, wiped the morning drool from his lips then glanced to his right. He couldn't help but grin. Stacey was fast asleep with her boobs pressed against Frankie's chest. Consequently, Frankie was grinning like an idiot in his sleep.

DAVE: That's one hell of a way to cure a phobia.

(He then glanced to his right and saw Kerry staring back up at him.)

DAVE: Morning.

KERRY: What is?

DAVE: Eh? This morning is.

KERRY: I mean what's one hell of a way to cure a phobia.

DAVE: That.

(He nodded towards Frankie and Stacey. Wearing a curious expression Kerry then sat up and peered across him before lying back down again.)

KERRY: She'd cuddle anything, that girl.

DAVE: Hmm...

(He bit his lip.)

DAVE: I feel like there's a story there.

KERRY: Not an interesting one.

DAVE: Right...

(He then sat up and glanced towards his feet, where Arthur was laying on his back, staring at the ceiling.)

DAVE: Morning, Arthur.

ARTHUR: Yes, I'd spotted that.

DAVE: Excellent.

(He rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: Cheerful bunch.

(He then clambered to his feet, waking Frankie and Stacey in the process.)

STACEY: I don't want to.

FRANKIE: What?

STACEY: I don't want it to be morning.

FRANKIE: Yeah...

DAVE: Sorry, Stacey, the songbirds have spoken.

STACEY: Stupid birds.

(Frankie then sat up and glanced to where daylight was penetrating the gap around the door.)

FRANKIE: Well the sun's definitely up, but it doesn't look too bright.

DAVE: Yeah, but that's enough Stacey, let's see what the weather's like.

(He then chuckled his way over to the door, leaving Frankie to explain his quip to Stacey. Having stepped over Arthur, he took a deep breath then eased open the door. Much to his surprise, Priestess Lacey was standing on the other side, almost as if she'd been waiting for them.)

DAVE: Oh. Hello.

LACEY: Is the High Priestess awake?

DAVE: Straight to the point, huh?

LACEY: Well, is she?

DAVE: Yes.

LACEY: Then our work here is done and we shall take our leave.

DAVE: Oh, okay. Bye.

(Ignoring him, she waved to the rest of her coven then they headed away into the misty woodland. Having watched them go, Dave shrugged then looked into the sky.)

DAVE: Hmm... looks like it'll be a nice day once the mist clears. At least that's my guess.

(He then turned around and nodded.)

DAVE: The witches have fucked off.

FRANKIE: Thank fuck. I mean, Stacey's alright, but witches in general...

(He shuddered.)

DAVE: Yeah, well; never mind that shit. Shall we follow their example?

ARTHUR: What example?

DAVE: I'm saying they've fucked off and so should we.

KERRY: I agree.

DAVE: Thank you.

KERRY: Right after breakfast.

DAVE: Of course.

(He then paced from the hut and looked down at the remnants where their fire had been.)

DAVE: Looks like it won't be a cooked breakfast though.

(He then looked down at his feet then nodded.)

DAVE: Right. Forgot to put my shoes on.

(He then returned to the hut, just as the others were slowly filing out.)

DAVE: The fire died.

FRANKIE: That's alright. We can have some of the chicken we cooked last night.

KERRY: Sounds good to me.

DAVE: Fair enough.

(He glanced across the woods.)

DAVE: Apparently, the border is a mile that way. Let's get that feed down our necks then head for home.

ARTHUR: That's a great idea. I'd put my shoes on first though, personally.

DAVE: I'm going to!

(He rolled his eyes.)

DAVE: Cock.

A short while later, with bellies full of food and a few hours sleep behind them, the party of five resumed their trek to the border. Knowing it was only a short distance away, truly was a boost. As such, the mood among the camp was one of hope and optimism. What they'd feared might be an

endless slog that could take weeks to complete had turned out to be nothing of the sort. Frankie, however, was quick to remind everyone not to get too excited too soon.

FRANKIE: Yes, it's only a short distance away, and thanks to the evil witches...

DAVE: They weren't evil.

FRANKIE: That remains to be seen. Anyway, the point I was making is, thanks to those witches we know we're heading in the right direction now, but don't think our troubles are over just yet.

ARTHUR: Seriously? What a mood killer.

STACEY: Be nice, Arthur. I want to hear what he has to say.

(Arthur flinched then apologised wholeheartedly.)

ARTHUR: Right, yes. How horrible of me. I do apologise, your majesty.

FRANKIE: Shut it. I'm trying to make a point. Yes, the border is close, and yes it's in this direction, but we still need to find a way to cross it. It might be protected by armed guards. There may even be a wall. So let's not celebrate until we're actually across it, okay?

KERRY: Fair point.

FRANKIE: Thank you.

DAVE: Great. Right. Understood, mate. But more importantly...

(He then looked to Arthur.)

DAVE: Did you just called Stacey "Your Majesty"?

(Arthur turned bright red.)

ARTHUR: I was just showing due respect to your betters.

DAVE: *My* betters?

ARTHUR: I said *our* betters.

DAVE: No, you didn't.

ARTHUR: Oh, be quiet. I don't have to answer to you.

(He nodded.)

ARTHUR: I only answer to this fine lady.

(He then looked to Stacey and whimpered.)

ARTHUR: Please don't tell the church I called you a sinner and advocated to leave you behind.

STACEY: Okay.

ARTHUR: Really? Well that was easy.

STACEY: Why would I tell them anything? I don't even know who they are.

DAVE: I do. *I'll* tell them for you, Stacey.

ARTHUR: Why you...

DAVE: What was it again, Arthur? She's a sinner and you want to feel her behind?

ARTHUR: You know damn well...

(He ruffled his neck.)

ARTHUR: I see... baiting me again. Well forget *you*, chummy. I'm going to ignore you now.

DAVE: Huzzah!

(Kerry grinned.)

KERRY: Careful, Dave; he might fire you if you carry on.

DAVE: Right, yeah. We wouldn't want that, would we?

ARTHUR: Witty.

(He then growled under his breath.)

ARTHUR: Idiots.

STACEY: Um...

ARTHUR: Quiet, everyone; her holiness wishes to speak.

STACEY: Oh. Sorry.

ARTHUR: Um... no... I was referring to *you*, your grace.

STACEY: My grace?

FRANKIE: Just call her Stacey, for fuck sake.

ARTHUR: Only if she permits it.

STACEY: I do. It *is* my name, after all.

ARTHUR: Why, thank you. I'm honoured.

DAVE: Kiss arse!

ARTHUR: Excuse me?

DAVE: Stop grovelling. Stacey is just Stacey!

ARTHUR: No, she isn't. She's to be respected. Revered even.

DAVE: Right. Do you kiss *all* your boss's arses like that? No wonder the major liked you.

ARTHUR: I'm not kissing anyone's backside, I'm just showing due respect to my superior.

(He nodded sternly.)

ARTHUR: And it wouldn't hurt you to be nicer either. She's your boss too, don't forget.

DAVE: Wow. How many fucking times? I don't work for your stupid fucking church.

ARTHUR: Stupid? How dare you? I've got a good mind to...

FRANKIE: Will you shut up and let Stacey speak?

ARTHUR: No, I bloody won't!

(He then gasped in horror at himself.)

ARTHUR: I mean, yes! Of course. I apologise, your Gracie. Stacey! Your grace!

FRANKIE: What were you going to say, Stacey?

STACEY: I forget.

FRANKIE: Right...

KERRY: Well that was fun.

STACEY: No. That was it. You said it was a mile to the border from the camp, right?

FRANKIE: That's right.

STACEY: And how far *is* a mile?

(Frankie glanced straight through her.)

FRANKIE: About... a mile.

DAVE: It's not far at all, Stacey. It takes about twenty minutes or so to walk a mile, normally.

(He looked to Arthur.)

DAVE: Half an hour with him in tow.

ARTHUR: Just stop. I'm done with you. For good!

KERRY: And there it is. You've finally been fired, Dave.

ARTHUR: Damned right, he has!

DAVE: Arthur...

KERRY: Fun.

DAVE: No, he's not. He's not fun at all. He's a stubborn old bastard who won't fucking listen.

ARTHUR: And *you're* an uncouth slob whom it's been nothing but a misery to supervise.

DAVE: Supervise? Oh my fucking god; it goes in one ear and out of the other.

ARTHUR: Yes, well...

(Stacey whimpered.)

STACEY: I wish everyone would stop grouching; it's making me uncomfortable.

ARTHUR: Oh. I do apologise, your grace. Please forgive me.

STACEY: Okay.

ARTHUR: You're too kind.

(At this point Dave started making a slurping noise with his tongue.)

ARTHUR: Stop that, you. I'm not licking her...

FRANKIE: Wait!

(He then held out his arms and brought everyone to a halt.)

FRANKIE: Listen.

(Wearing baffled expressions, they all glanced about themselves and focussed on the sounds around them.)

DAVE: Is that...

KERRY: Water?

ARTHUR: Could it be...

DAVE: That must be the River Stone.

FRANKIE: Uh-huh.

STACEY: What's that then?

KERRY: It's a river, funnily enough.

ARTHUR: Hey! Show some respect.

KERRY: Ooh, hark at her.

(She then giggled into her hand, much to Dave's amusement.)

DAVE: Kerry's in a playful mood this morning. I like her like this.

FRANKIE: Yes, well, never mind that.

(He smiled.)

FRANKIE: The River Stone is a river that runs between Asparia and Norland.

STACEY: Really?

FRANKIE: Yeah. It's the border.

STACEY: It is? You said the border would be a wall or something.

FRANKIE: Or something. That *something* being a river at this particular point.

STACEY: I see. Cool.

(They then resumed walking.)

DAVE: Actually, Stacey; it's anything but cool. How the hell are we gonna cross a river?

FRANKIE: We can swim over.

STACEY: I can't swim.

ARTHUR: Nor can I.

DAVE: Well there's a shock.

FRANKIE: Look, it doesn't matter. Depending on how wide the river is at this point, we may even be able to wade across as long as there are no guards around. If not, we'll just have to find another way. We can discuss it when we get there and know what we're up against.

DAVE: Fair shout.

KERRY: I'm anxious to see now.

FRANKIE: Same.

STACEY: Let's hurry then.

(With that, they all picked up the pace, leaving Arthur trailing in their wake.)

ARTHUR: Seriously?

(He sighed.)

ARTHUR: Oh, for fuck sake.

(He then hurried after them. As it turned out, however, they needn't have hurried at all. Within a minute of them picking up the pace, Frankie forced his way through some undergrowth and found himself right there, at the water's edge.)

FRANKIE: A-ha.

DAVE: It was a lot closer than it sounded from back there.

KERRY: Right?

FRANKIE: I won't pretend I'm sad about that.

(He then glanced across the river before looking up and downstream.)

FRANKIE: Hmm... no guards about, but it's wider than I'd hoped.

DAVE: Therefore deeper.

FRANKIE: Yeah...

KERRY: Well that sucks. *I'm* not much of a swimmer either.

ARTHUR: What are we going to do then?

STACEY: Well, I think...

FRANKIE: Hold on, Stacey, we need to think of a plan.

STACEY: But...

FRANKIE: Dave and I could swim the girls across... no, that wouldn't work.

DAVE: Why not?

FRANKIE: Because Arthur would be stuck here forever.

DAVE: Only if we didn't come back for him.

FRANKIE: And would we?

DAVE: Good point.

ARTHUR: Very funny.

FRANKIE: I was joking.

ARTHUR: I know. That's why I said very funny.

FRANKIE: Right. See, the reason you'd be stuck here, Arthur, is because swimming across that current will be tough. It'd be a nightmarish chore doing it *once*. None of us are strong enough to do it three times.

STACEY: Um...

DAVE: Three?

KERRY: Swimming over with me, swimming back then swimming across with Arthur.

DAVE: Nope. Fuck that. I'm strong but you'd need to be superhuman to do that.

STACEY: Guys...

ARTHUR: I like the way you've decided *I'll* be stuck here. Not Kerry or her majesty; me!

FRANKIE: Nobody's going to be stuck here, mate. We've ruled out swimming.

DAVE: Yup. It's a non-starter.

KERRY: Then what are we gonna do?

STACEY: Well...

FRANKIE: Hold on, Stacey. We need to concentrate. Perhaps we should walk down river to where it's a bit shallower.

STACEY: Good idea.

FRANKIE: Thank you.

STACEY: Either that or we can use that rowing boat over there.

(She then pointed downstream to where a rowing boat was sitting on the bank. Having not noticed it, Frankie threw a double take in its direction.)

FRANKIE: Holy sandwich fillers!

DAVE: Fucking hell!

KERRY: Nope. That's too convenient. We're not that lucky.

ARTHUR: I agree with nurse what's her name.

KERRY: Kerry!

ARTHUR: Yes, her!

FRANKIE: Let's take a look, shall we?

(With that, they all hurried over there; Frankie mumbling in prayer as he did so.)

FRANKIE: Please be useable, please be useable, please be useable...

(Upon arriving at the side of the boat, he then peered inside it and bit his lip.)

FRANKIE: Guys?

STACEY: And girls.

FRANKIE: Them too.

(He beamed.)

FRANKIE: I reckon we're in business here.

(Dave then peered into the boat.)

DAVE: They even left us the oars!

FRANKIE: Then what are we waiting for?

ARTHUR: Conformation that either of you know how to row.

FRANKIE: I do, yes.

DAVE: So do I.

ARTHUR: Score!

(He beamed.)

ARTHUR: Let's get going then.

FRANKIE: Agreed.

DAVE: Allow me!

(With that, he stepped to the back of the boat then pushed it down the bank and into the water. Still holding onto it, he then gestured towards it with his head.)

DAVE: Your chariot awaits, ladies.

ARTHUR: Well, fuck you!

FRANKIE: I'll second that.

DAVE: What? All I meant was ladies first!

FRANKIE: Right. Sorry.

DAVE: So you should be. Over sensitive, twats. I expect that sort of nonsense from Arthur, but you, Frankie? Are you sure you're a soldier, mate?

FRANKIE: Dave...

DAVE: What if, in the heat of battle, an enemy soldier said something mean and hurt your feelings? You'd be done for.

(Frankie allowed himself a chuckle.)

FRANKIE: Let's just get in the boat, shall we?

DAVE: Ladies first!

FRANKIE: I know that!

KERRY: Okay then. Ladies first. Now that's the kind of sexism I can get behind.

(She then clambered into the boat.)

STACEY: Me now, is it?

DAVE: You or Frankie? Whichever is girliest.

STACEY: That'd be me then, definitely.

FRANKIE: By some margin!

(He shook his head at Dave.)

FRANKIE: You're a git.

DAVE: It has been said.

FRANKIE: Yeah. Just now. By me.

(He watched Stacey climb into the boat then looked to Arthur.)

FRANKIE: Now you.

ARTHUR: No, no. Dave said *ladies* first.

(Dave sniggered then shared a grin with Arthur.)

FRANKIE: Teaming up now, are you? You hated each other a second ago.

DAVE: A lot can happen in a second, mate.

FRANKIE: Right...

(He then climbed into the boat.)

FRANKIE: Arthur...

ARTHUR: The men's turn now, is it?

FRANKIE: Stop that!

(Arthur then clambered into the boat.)

ARTHUR: Right then. That's all of us. Let's get going, shall we?

(Still standing behind the boat, holding it in place, Dave gave him his coldest glance.)

DAVE: I'll just stay here, shall I?

ARTHUR: Yes, please. That'd be excellent.

(Dave smirked.)

DAVE: Wanker.

(He then pushed the boat a little further onto the water before climbed in over the back. Sitting in the middle with oars in hand, Frankie nodded.)

FRANKIE: Okay then. Let's get this show on the road.

(With that, he proceeded to row them across the river. Loving the sound of the water as it washed against the boat, Stacey exhaled.)

STACEY: This is really peaceful.

DAVE: Right?

ARTHUR: It's truly pleasurable.

KERRY: I'll say.

DAVE: Boating is great. Unless you're the poor cunt rowing.

STACEY: Why? Is it hard?

FRANKIE: Not really, no.

DAVE: Instant arm-ache though.

FRANKIE: And then some. Especially with a heavy crew.

(He smirked.)

FRANKIE: I'm just glad Stacey, Kerry and I aren't fat fuckers as well.

(Unsurprisingly, Dave and Arthur were not amused.)

DAVE: Fat? Fat???

ARTHUR: I'm not fat! I'll have you know I'm quite portly for my age!!!

FRANKIE: That means fat!

ARTHUR: Shit! I meant svelte!

DAVE: Twat!

ARTHUR: Shut up, you. It was an easy mistake to make. The two words sound almost the same.

FRANKIE: Portly and svelte?

ARTHUR: Yes. I mean... oh, shut up.

DAVE: You can both shut up. Fat indeed. I've been building these muscles for years, you cunt.

There's barely an ounce of fat on me.

STACEY: He's right. He has a very sexy body.

DAVE: Thank you.

(She sighed.)

STACEY: Shame about his face though.

(She then turned red and hung her head.)

STACEY: Nothing. I didn't mean to say that out loud.

DAVE: Stacey, so help me, I'm gonna throw you overboard, woman!

STACEY: But I can't swim!

FRANKIE: Relax, Stacey; he's not gonna do that. He's seen what happens to people who make you fear for your life, and he doesn't want to end up in those trees back there.

DAVE: Alas, the girly chap with the oars is correct.

FRANKIE: Girly???

(Kerry chuckled.)

KERRY: It's fun listening you guys bait each other.

DAVE: We're just letting off steam, Kerry.

KERRY: Oh, I know. I totally get it. After fearing we'd never make it home alive, knowing we're almost home and hosed has brought everyone out of their shells. We all feel lifted. Thus, the need for light-hearted mocking.

DAVE: Not *that* light-hearted. Frankie really is a little girl.

(Frankie chuckled.)

FRANKIE: I wish we'd rowed off and left you behind like Arthur suggested now.

DAVE: Like I'd have let you.

(They shared a mutual grin then Frankie snarled as he stroked with the oars.)

FRANKIE: It is my imagination or is the water getting heavier at this point?

DAVE: Seriously? Science wasn't your strong point at school, was it?

FRANKIE: Well, let's be honest. Only ugly people and nerds like science.

KERRY: Well, fuck you.

FRANKIE: What? You like science?

ARTHUR: Of course not, Frankie. She became a doctor by excelling at netball.

(He rolled his eyes.)

ARTHUR: Idiot!

FRANKIE: Look, I was just saying...

(He then grimaced as he strained to make the next stroke.)

FRANKIE: The water feels like it's made of lead; we've slowed down ridiculously and unless I'm very much mistaken we're drifting to the right!

(Dave gasped.)

DAVE: Give me the oars!

FRANKIE: What?

DAVE: This is a heavy current, mate. We're gonna need a set of men's arms for this one.

FRANKIE: You cheeky...

DAVE: Seriously, move!!!

(Reacting to his urgency, Frankie moved back towards Stacey then watched as Dave took his place.)

DAVE: Okay...

(He then started to row with as much power as he could muster.)

DAVE: Come on, you cunt, shift!!!

FRANKIE: Um...

KERRY: We've slowed down even more.

STACEY: Let Frankie row again.

DAVE: You cheeky cow. We've slowed because this current has got even fucking stronger.

ARTHUR: Bugger.

(He nodded.)

ARTHUR: Keep going, Dave!

DAVE: Really, you think???

(As Dave continued to row without advancing more than an inch with every stroke, Frankie bit his lip.)

FRANKIE: Maybe, I should swim the rest of the way with one of the girls now, to make the boat lighter.

DAVE: Don't be a twat, mate; that current would drag you off downstream in two seconds flat, never to be seen again.

KERRY: Fuck that. As fifty percent of the girls in question, I'd like to veto that idea.

STACEY: And as the other forty percent, I'd like to veto it too.

ARTHUR: The other forty percent? Talk about low self-esteem.

KERRY: Low IQ, Arthur; get it right. She can't count.

STACEY: I can sometimes!

(She ruffled her neck.)

STACEY: Small numbers.

(Just then, two angry voices rose up from the river back where they'd found the boat.)

SOLDIER 01: Hey!!!

SOLDIER 02: Stop, thieves!!!

SOLDIER 01: In the name of the Asparian Army, return to shore immediately!!!

(They then pulled out their guns.)

SOLDIER: 01: You have until the count of five to start rowing back this way!!! One!!!

ARTHUR: Damn it!

FRANKIE: Fucking... now what?

SOLDIER 01: Two!!!

KERRY: Now we surrender, obviously. They have guns.

DAVE: Yeah... we could do that, I guess. It'd be a shame to give up now though.

SOLDIER: Three!!!

KERRY: But what else can we do?

DAVE: Well...

SOLDIER 01: Four!!!

(Dave then smirked a devilish smirk.)

DAVE: We could do *this*!

(He then lifted the oars out the water. In that moment, with nobody fighting against it, the current grabbed the boat and it zoomed it away down stream.)

FRANKIE: Perfect!

(He then shrieked.)

FRANKIE: Now duck!!!

(In that moment the two Asparian soldiers opened fire. At once, everyone slumped down to the floor of the boat and proceeded to panic.)

ARTHUR: Dave, you're an idiot!!!

DAVE: Bollocks. Saved us, didn't I???

KERRY: Not exactly, no. We're being shot at because of you!!!

DAVE: Right...

(He furrowed his brow.)

DAVE: There's no pleasing some people.

FRANKIE: Guys, just stay down and we should be alright! Their shit bullets haven't penetrated the side of the boat, so I can only assume they're low calibre. Therefore as long as we keep down, we won't get hurt.

ARTHUR: Their bullets haven't penetrated the boat *yet*! Yet! But it only takes one to penetrate it below the waterline and we're done for.

FRANKIE: Look, if those bullets can't penetrate *above* the water, they're definitely not going to penetrate the boat beneath it, are they?

DAVE: What makes you so sure?

FRANKIE: Well...

(He then ruffled his neck as he tried to think of some kind of intelligent reasoning.)

FRANKIE: You know... science.

DAVE: What science?

FRANKIE: Um... boat... science?

ARTHUR: Wow.

FRANKIE: Fine, maybe it's *not* science then, but *I'm* feeling confident!

KERRY: Actually, it *is* science. Physics, to be precise. If the bullets can't penetrate the wood unimpeded, they've got even less chance when faced with water resistance.

DAVE: Meaning?

KERRY: Seriously? Meaning, Frankie's right. Just stay down!

ARTHUR: Right. Like we weren't going to.

STACEY: I'm *definitely* going to. Being shot in the face is no fun. And I should know! At that nightclub I got shot in the face several times a day. Luckily, not with bullets, but still... messy.

ARTHUR: You disgust... um... nobody, your grace.

FRANKIE: Guys, just chill out, okay. Let's stay down and once we've drifted out of firing range, we can sit up and assess things.

DAVE: What *he* said. As soon as we stop hearing gunfire, it'll be fine.

(He then mused to himself.)

DAVE: And speaking of which. I'm not hearing any.

FRANKIE: They might be reloading.

DAVE: True, but...

(He grimaced.)

DAVE: This ride has got extremely bumpy all of a sudden and the treetops are whizzing by at a rate of knots.

KERRY: Yeah... guys... we're going ridiculously fast here.

DAVE: Yup.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: Screw it. I'm taking a look.

FRANKIE: Careful.

DAVE: Obviously.

(With that, he lifted his head over the side of the boat and peered in the direction they bullets had been coming from.)

DAVE: Interesting.

(He then lifting himself higher and turned to look where they were heading.)

DAVE: I see.

(He then sunk down again.)

FRANKIE: Well?

DAVE: Well... there's good news and bad news.

KERRY: Are those gunmen still there? That's all *I'm* worried about?

DAVE: Nope. That's the good news. We've left them two wallies behind already. They're long gone.

(He nodded.)

DAVE: The bad news is, we left them behind so quickly because we've hit a stretch of white water.

KERRY: Fuck!

ARTHUR: Uh-oh!

STACEY: Wait. What's white water?

FRANKIE: So that's why the current was so strong.

DAVE: Yup, the river's heading downhill. Fast!

STACEY: And that's bad, is it?

FRANKIE: Yes. Yes, it is.

ARTHUR: We're in immense danger!

(Silence then descended as Frankie, Dave, Arthur and Kerry stared in horror at one another.)

STACEY: Um... guys? If we're in danger, shouldn't we at least sit up and pay attention? Why are we still slumped over like this?

FRANKIE: Right.

(With that, they all righted themselves then stared downstream. The boat was moving at such a pace, the rocks at the side of the river were no more than a blur.)

STACEY: Too fast!!! I don't like it!

ARTHUR: Somebody do something!!!

DAVE: Like what, you cock?

ARTHUR: I don't know, do I?

(He looked to Frankie.)

ARTHUR: But *you* should. You're a soldier. What's the protocol for this situation.

FRANKIE: Close your eyes and hope you don't die!

ARTHUR: Seriously? Did you *sleep* through your training???

FRANKIE: We're entirely at the mercy of the river, you idiot. There's literally nothing we can do about it other than hold on tight and try not to fall out.

KERRY: And pray the boat doesn't get ripped apart by the rocks.

ARTHUR: Pray? Pray???

DAVE: Yeah. What's wrong with that? Usually it's your answer to everything.

ARTHUR: No, that's my answer to *other* people's problems. When it involves me, I'd rather somebody did something useful!

(He furrowed his brow.)

ARTHUR: But if you ever tell anyone I said that, I'll deny everything!

DAVE: Who would I tell?

KERRY: Guys, I think it's even worse than we feared!!!

STACEY: How?

KERRY: The river just ends in about fifty metres.

DAVE: Ends???

FRANKIE: Aw, fuck! It's a fucking waterfall!

KERRY: We're screwed!!!

STACEY: Help!!!

(Arthur snarled.)

ARTHUR: Nope. I'm not just going to sit here and go over the edge without at least trying something. It's a long shot, but fuck it. I'm going for it.

(He then clasped his hands together before his face.)

ARTHUR: Dear lord in heaven, please spare us your watery wrath!

DAVE: Like that's gonna help!!!

KERRY: Right? I'm gonna jump out!

FRANKIE: What for? You'll get dragged over anyway.

KERRY: Well we have to do something!

STACEY: I agree! Frankie!!!

FRANKIE: Yes?

STACEY: I love you!!!

FRANKIE: And how does that help???

STACEY: I wanted to say it before I die!

FRANKIE: Right. Stacey...

DAVE: Brace yourselves!!!

STACEY: Wait! Let him speak!

KERRY: It's happening.

FRANKIE: Cover your heads!!!

STACEY: But I want to hear...

(Her eyes then bulged.)

STACEY: Waterfall!!!

ARTHUR: Now would be good, for fuck sake, god!!!

DAVE: Shit!!!

KERRY: No!!!

FRANKIE: Fuck!!!

(In that moment, the boat tipped over the edge of a twenty foot drop. Such was the deafening sound of the watery deluge, the screams and curses of the boat's five inhabitants were barely audible.

Tumbling over the edge with a lucky landing as their only hope, they were all rightly terrified. That twenty feet looked more like fifty from their perspective and an imminent fear of death had gripped their hearts. Stacey cried like a baby during the fall. As did Arthur. Dave cursed like a champion.

Kerry just screamed. Frankie, however, fell with a frustrated expression on his face; almost as if he was sarcastically mocking his own misfortune.)

FRANKIE: Seriously?

(Having tumbled out of the boat, he then splashed into the water below. Having sunk down a few feet, he then pushed himself back up and splashed through the surface.)

FRANKIE: Yes! Fucking made it.

(He then glanced around for his four travelling companions. At once, his heart sunk. Stacey was laying face down in the shallows. As soon as he started to swim towards her, however she lifted her head up and gasped for breath.)

STACEY: Not fun!!!

(Delighted to see she was okay, he then glanced around some more. Much to his delight, Dave was already crawling onto the river bank, with Kerry at his side.)

FRANKIE: That just leaves...

(He then performed a double take at the boat. Not only was it still in pristine condition but Arthur was still sitting in it.)

FRANKIE: Arthur? How the fuck did you manage that?

(Arthur just looked to him then winked.)

ARTHUR: It's called having faith in the lord, baby. Praying works.

FRANKIE: Right... you jammy...

ARTHUR: Holy!

FRANKIE: Oh, whatever.

(He then swam over to Stacey.)

FRANKIE: Are you okay? Do you need help getting to the river bank?

STACEY: Um... yes?

FRANKIE: Okay.

STACEY: Yay. A big strong man to carry me is exactly what I need.

FRANKIE: Happy to help.

STACEY: And I'm delighted to *be* helped.

FRANKIE: Then we're *both* in luck.

(With that, he struggled to the river bank with her. Once there, he placed her down then glanced to one side where Arthur was climbing from the rowing boat.)

ARTHUR: The boat even washed ashore by itself.

(He then winked to the sky.)

ARTHUR: Nice going, big guy. You're a pal.

(He beamed with joy.)

ARTHUR: And you cunts said he wasn't real.

DAVE: No, we said your stupid religion wasn't real.

ARTHUR: And what do you think now, sonny boy?

DAVE: That you're a jammy fucking...

(Just then, two men emerged from the trees with guns pointed at them.)

FRANKIE: Aw, fuck.

GUARD 01: Freeze, by order of the Norland Border Unit.

(Arthur's face lit up.)

ARTHUR: Norland?

GUARD 02: Yes; Norland. Where did you think we were?

FRANKIE: Leave this to me, guys.

(He nodded.)

FRANKIE: We're members of the Norland military, formerly based at Shay Beach Asparia. We've just returned home from duty.

GUARD 01: That may well be true, but we're not just going to take your word for that.

FRANKIE: Of course.

KERRY: What are you going to do then?

GUARD 01: Take you in, get you processed and if you are who you say you are, you can go.

STACEY: Yay.

GUARD 01: We will have to put handcuffs on you though.

STACEY: That's fine. I don't mind handcuffs. I used to wear them for work sometimes.

KERRY: Shameless.

GUARD 01: Yes, well, never mind that.

(He then looked to his fellow guard.)

GUARD 01: Cuff them, Morris.

GUARD 02: Sir.

(As the guard proceeded to place them in handcuffs, Frankie looked to Dave then nodded.)

FRANKIE: We made it, mate. Alive and in one piece.

DAVE: That we did.

FRANKIE: I'll buy you a pint when this is over.

DAVE: And I shall drink it.

(They then shared an amused chuckle before being led away. Despite being placed in handcuffs, knowing they were home and that freedom was just around the corner was the very epitome of a dream come true for one and all.)

Some twenty minutes later, Frankie, Dave, Arthur, Kerry and Stacey found themselves sitting inside a cell at the local guard station. Waiting for the simple formality of having their ID's checked to be

completed, they couldn't have looked more relaxed. Freedom was imminent and that thought dominated their minds entirely.

DAVE: A proper pint of beer. In a decent pub. I can't wait.

FRANKIE: Accompanied by pie and mash.

DAVE: Yeah... that sounds good, mate. I could definitely go for that.

(Arthur rolled his eyes.)

ARTHUR: Slobs.

DAVE: Slobs?

ARTHUR: You heard me. A pie and a pint, indeed. I'm looking forward to some fine dining. With a decent glass of claret.

KERRY: *Both* sound good to me.

DAVE: Both or either?

KERRY: Either, obviously!

STACEY: I'll have what Frankie's having.

DAVE: A pie and a pint then.

STACEY: Yeah. I don't like pies though. Or beer. I'll have something else. With Frankie.

FRANKIE: Stacey...

STACEY: A friend's day out, so to speak. That'd be nice.

FRANKIE: Well... yeah. Definitely.

(He exhaled.)

FRANKIE: Sweet, sweet freedom.

DAVE: Oh, yes.

FRANKIE: I know it seems weird to say that while we're sitting in a jail cell, but...

ARTHUR: It's coming.

KERRY: And I can't wait.

(She beamed.)

KERRY: Just to wander outside and smell the fresh Norland air in peace time is going to be wonderful.

DAVE: Yup. We're about to get our lives back. I'll go back to my grave digging business, Arthur can go back to tricking gullible, middle class idiots into donating to his cult...

ARTHUR: Excuse me?

DAVE: Frankie can resume doing... whatever it is he does.

FRANKIE: Soldiering.

DAVE: Yeah, that.

(He exhaled.)

DAVE: Kerry will become a GP and Stacey will... well... probably get arrested one day, but until then our lives will finally be back on track.

STACEY: Wait. Why will I get arrested?

ARTHUR: Because what you do is illegal.

STACEY: I don't think so somehow. The chief of police was one of my customers.

DAVE: Then I stand corrected.

FRANKIE: Not on the bit about us getting our lives back.

(He exhaled.)

FRANKIE: Finally, our hell is at an end.

(Just then, a guard strode up to the cell bars.)

GUARD: Frankie Harris?

FRANKIE: That's me.

GUARD: We've just checked your records, and it appears you're a serving soldier.

FRANKIE: Correct.

GUARD: Then what are you doing in Norland? You need to get back to the frontline.

FRANKIE: What frontline? The war's over.

GUARD: Hardly.

(He shrugged.)

GUARD: I mean, we thought it was. They surrendered and everything, but the following day they went back on the agreement and the war resumed immediately. You need to get back to your unit.

(Frankie just stared through him.)

FRANKIE: This is a joke, right?

GUARD: Far from it!

(He then flicked through his notes in relation to the others.)

GUARD: In fact, Dave Grigger, you're supposed to be down at the frontline digging graves, and Arthur Woodcut, you're meant to be the unit's priest. And you, Kerry Waters, you're their nurse.

Why are you here?

DAVE: They shipped out and left us behind, so we made our own way home.

GUARD: Then like I told Frankie, you'd better get back there, hadn't you?

KERRY: No! No way! I'm not working with Stacey again. I'd rather kill myself!

(She growled.)

KERRY: No, that's crazy talk, it'd make more sense to kill *her*.

STACEY: Mean.

GUARD: As for this Stacey here, the records state that you died during the war. Clearly that was a mistake. You are, however, discharged. You can go.

STACEY: But what about the others?

GUARD: They'll be going back to the war zone.

(He then opened the cell door.)

GUARD: Out you pop.

STACEY: I don't want to. I finally have a friend.

GUARD: Out!

(He then yanked her from the cell by her arm.)

GUARD: Leave!

STACEY: Mean!

(She whimpered then looked to Frankie.)

STACEY: I'll wait for you, Frankie!

FRANKIE: What for?

(Stacey blushed then hung her head.)

STACEY: Um... I don't know.

(The guard then led her away, sobbing. Left behind, the others all shared an exasperated glance.)

FRANKIE: How?

DAVE: And why?

ARTHUR: All that effort...

KERRY: I can't believe this.

FRANKIE: I thought our hell was over.

(A mass groan ensued.)

KERRY: Still, there is one bright side.

(Everyone gave her a sideways glance.)

KERRY: Two weeks ago, I told head office that Stacey died in action and it seems to have paid dividends. I did that in the hope they'd send me an adequate replacement and now they'll have to.

ARTHUR: Right... and how is that a bright side for the rest of us?

FRANKIE: Yeah, we liked her.

DAVE: You liked her boobs, you mean.

FRANKIE: I did, yes. I like Kerry's boobs too, but that doesn't mean...

(He then clammed up.)

FRANKIE: I've said too much.

(He sighed.)

FRANKIE: Stupid Asparia.

DAVE: That war's never going to end, is it?

ARTHUR: Nope. Our hell is going to be eternal, I feel.

KERRY: Permission to cry?

DAVE: Granted. Mind if I join you?

KERRY: Be my guest.

FRANKIE: This is so messed up. Yesterday alone we were in mortal danger more times than I've been in danger during the rest of my entire army career. And for what?

ARTHUR: Nothing! We fought our way home and faced our mortality a million times for nothing.

FRANKIE: The world feels like a cruel place right now, it really does.

(Silence then descended and a dark depression overwhelmed the cell. For well over two minutes, they just sat there staring dead ahead, turning pale as they rued their misfortune. In this moment, their spirits sunk to their lowest ebb. It was a scene of misery and lost hope; despair and emptiness. There were no words to sum up how they felt at this time. They were broken. To have worked so hard, to have stared death in the face and have it all go so wrong was devastating. For those two minutes their cell felt like a giant void. Before they could dwell any further, however, the guard who'd ejected Stacey, paced into the room and approached their cell again.)

GUARD: Frankie Harris, Kerry Waters, David Grigger and Arthur Woodcut?

(They all looked up at him with empty eyes.)

FRANKIE: Yes?

(Bizarrely, the guard then burst out laughing.)

DAVE: What's so funny?

GUARD: Just kidding!

FRANKIE: What?

(The sound of further laughter then echoed out from behind one of the desks.)

FRANKIE: Wait a minute. I recognise that laugh.

(In that moment, a second guard stood up and pointed at them repeatedly.)

ARCHIE: Hook, line and sinker!

FRANKIE: Archie???

(He burst out laughing.)

FRANKIE: You fucking wanker!

DAVE: Wait. What? What's going on?

KERRY: What does he mean, "just kidding"?

FRANKIE: We've been had, Kerry.

ARTHUR: What???

(Archie laughed even harder.)

ARCHIE: I told you I'd get you back for that prank you pulled on my birthday, didn't I?

FRANKIE: You cunt. You got me big time!

(He glanced back at the bewildered trio of Arthur, Kerry and Dave.)

FRANKIE: It's my old mate, Archie Diamond.

(Arthur instantly leapt to his feet.)

ARTHUR: You're a cunt!

ARCHIE: Steady on. It was a joke!

KERRY: What was a joke?

ARCHIE: Telling you the war isn't over!

(Arthur growled.)

ARTHUR: You cunt! I've got a good mind to come out there and sock you right in the kisser.

ARCHIE: Calm down, old man. What's eating you?

FRANKIE: He didn't appreciate your joke!

(He winced.)

FRANKIE: Plus, it was *his* church you vandalised, Archie.

ARCHIE: Oh.

(He grimaced.)

ARCHIE: Whoops. Um... sorry about that. Um... what say we let you out then?

ARTHUR: Yes, you do that!

KERRY: Really? So it was a joke? The war is actually over? For real?

ARCHIE: Done and dusted, love. Finished.

DAVE: Thank fuck.

KERRY: You arseholes. That was a horrible thing to do.

ARCHIE: Oh, give over. There's no harm in a small prank between friends.

KERRY: We're not friends!

ARCHIE: Right...

(Arthur sneered.)

ARTHUR: Frankie, your friend is an arsehole. A proper, genuine, bona fide chasm in the posterior of man.

FRANKIE: Nah, he's alright. Like I told you, he's a lad. Like me.

(He then looked to where Archie was unlocking the cell.)

FRANKIE: I didn't know you'd joined the border unit, mate. When did that happen?

ARCHIE: Right after I got out of prison. I had a choice, do ten more years in the clink or join the army. So I did the latter and this is where they sent me.

FRANKIE: Cool.

ARCHIE: It was fate. The good lord sent me here just to play that prank on you, I reckon.

ARTHUR: Doubtful. The good lord thinks you're a...

DAVE: Shut it, Arthur. He's the man with the key to our freedom, so put a sock in it and laugh at his jokes then we can all go home.

KERRY: Amen.

ARTHUR: Fine. It's not down to me to punish him anyway.

(He then beamed with fiendish delight.)

ARTHUR: God will do that job for me. In style!

(In that moment, the cell door opened and Archie gestured towards the exit.)

ARCHIE: Your freedom awaits, my friends.

FRANKIE: Perfect.

(He then exited the cell and shook Archie's hand.)

FRANKIE: Great to see you, mate. I'll come back later and we can catch up.

ARCHIE: Make sure you do.

FRANKIE: I will. Firstly though...

(He then beamed with joy.)

FRANKIE: I have plans.

(A few moments later, Dave, Frankie, Kerry and Arthur paced from the front of the guard station.

Sat there on a bench, sobbing her heart out was Stacey.)

STACEY: Why? Just when I'd finally found my one true...

DAVE: Alright, Stacey?

(At once, Stacey shot a glance in their direction then leapt to her feet.)

STACEY: You're free!!!

(She then raced over to them, sidestepped Dave and threw her arms around Frankie.)

STACEY: Told you I'd wait for you.

FRANKIE: Right...

STACEY: I'd have waited forever too.

KERRY: On that bench?

STACEY: Possibly.

(She exhaled.)

STACEY: Now we can start our future together.

FRANKIE: I'll have to go back to my unit tomorrow, Stacey.

STACEY: That's okay. I'll come with you. We are friends after all.

FRANKIE: I see...

(He then shrugged.)

FRANKIE: Fuck it. Why not? You are a looker, after all. Let's go.

(He then put his arm around her and they wandered off together. Watching them go, Dave and Arthur shared a grimace.)

ARTHUR: I'll give it a week.

DAVE: She'll drive him potty long before then.

KERRY: It won't even last the day.

(Frankie then called back to them.)

FRANKIE: Are you coming? Those pies and pints won't order themselves.

(Dave shrugged.)

DAVE: He's right.

KERRY: Yup.

ARTHUR: But I don't want a pie and a pint.

KERRY: Then you can sit and watch us devour ours.

(Kerry and Dave then paced onwards. As they did so, Arthur could only sigh in defeat.)

ARTHUR: Fine. I guess slumming it for once won't hurt.

(He then hurried after them, grinning from ear to ear.)

ARTHUR: Freedom!!!

THE END.

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