

The Better Person

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The Better Person

by [Sixthlight](#)

Summary

“It’s such a pity you’re still my boss,” Thomas said mournfully. (In the same universe as The Right Sort).

Notes

Because I couldn't resist writing a bit of Starlingale in this particular AU.

- Inspired by [The Right Sort](#) by [Sixthlight](#)

“It’s such a pity you’re still my boss,” Thomas said mournfully. Up until that point on our way home he’d been maintaining a reasonable facsimile of sobriety, or at least of genteel tipsiness.

“Look,” I said. “If you really want to transfer we can talk about it, but I haven’t spent the better part of a decade training you so you can bugger off to the Murder Team or whatever. Lesley would never let me hear the end of it. But either way, that’s probably something you want to reconsider when sober.”

“That’s not what I meant,” he said, with a disturbingly direct look. “It’s a pity you’re my *straight* boss.”

“How much beer have you had, exactly?”

“Not that much. But Alex gave me some tequila.” He grinned, only a bit lopsided.

Damn Alex Seawoll. “Are you going to need help getting back home to bed?”

Thomas draped an arm around my shoulders, and said, a bit closer to my ear than was strictly necessary, “Saying things like that doesn’t help, you know.”

“I’ll make a note of it.” It was a good thing he’d decided to get handsy, as it happened, because he tripped over the footpath, or maybe it was his own two feet. I grabbed him around the waist to keep him upright.

“Also not helping,” he complained. “Promise me you won’t remind me I said any of this in the morning.”

I thought about that as we rounded the corner into Russell Square. “Don’t think I can.”

“Oh,” said Thomas. “I – sorry. I’m sorry.”

“I *should*,” I said. “But I’ve had about a century to figure out when I’m capable of being the better person, and this is not one of those instances.”

“Oh,” Thomas said again, and, “I’m not sure I follow.”

He was very warm against my side, in the way drunk people are because of the increase in bloodflow to their extremities. Despite his relatively uncharacteristic lack of sobriety, he still had his jacket and tie on. It was one of his nice suits – the ones he never wore for work, in favour of Marks & Spencer camouflage. My hand was still tucked around his waist. I used it to bring him to a halt at the back gate – he would have walked right past.

“Let me put it this way,” I said as I punched in the code and the gate opened. “If I *wasn’t* your straight boss, and I quote you there, would you have said any of that?”

“...no,” said Thomas. “D’ve just gone for it. Ages ago. That’s why it’s a pity.”

Molly opened the back door before I could; she looked Thomas up and down dubiously.

“He doesn’t *quite* need to be poured into bed,” I told her. There was a muffled but indignant noise from Thomas at that; I ignored it. “Abigail make it back yet?”

Molly gave us both a look of deep scepticism, shook her head, and glided away.

Once we got to the atrium Thomas unwrapped his arm from around my shoulders. “I. Still not following.”

“Go to bed,” I said. “Or – no. Please drink a lot of water and *then* go to bed.”

He swayed into me, brow furrowed. His lips brushed the edge of my jaw – I *think* it was an accident. It didn’t help one bit. “I can’t. You haven’t let go.”

“Mmmm, fair point.”

“Don’t tell me you’re actually tempted.”

“Not in the slightest.” I should have stopped there, but – I know my limits. “I don’t sleep with people who’re drunker than I am, and I don’t sleep with my apprentices.”

“M not an apprentice anymore.”

“No. You’re not.” I took my arm away. He didn’t fall over. Should be capable of making it up to his room in his own steam, then.

He stood there, still frowning; maybe the alcohol was wearing off. I wasn’t sure that was a good thing, at this juncture.

“Go to bed,” I said again. “I’m not having the rest of this conversation until you’re sober.”

I went to bed myself before he could think up a response. I’m as capable of cowardice as anybody else.

*

“Hi,” said Thomas. It wasn’t the first time he’d talked to me since last night; he’d shown up for breakfast. Abigail had already informed me she’d found him asleep on an armchair in the lobby when she’d gotten back. She found this entirely hilarious. At breakfast, Thomas had taken his coffee black and shown unwonted attention to the business section of the newspaper, which in this household normally got discarded after a cursory scan. I’d meant exactly what I’d said the night before. I wasn’t a good enough person to forget what he’d said altogether. But I wasn’t going to bring it up first. I had *some* morals left. Somewhere.

Not enough to turn Thomas down flat the way I should have, but it’s good to know your limits.

I hadn’t seen him after that until supper – we all had things to do, it wasn’t an unusual occurrence. But I was getting the impression that now he was ready to *actually* talk. I was

impressed. If it had been me, I'd probably have put it off indefinitely. Alright, not indefinitely, but more than twenty-four hours. Then again, Thomas did always prefer direct action, when it was possible.

"Hello," I said. "Plans for the evening?"

"I don't know yet."

"Ah." I was very conscious of the need to not read into that. Things you say when you're drunk - they might be true, but they're not necessarily truths you want to tell. "Well, I-"

He was standing squarely in front of me; Thomas is very slightly shorter than me, but he's broader in the shoulder. I recognised the determination in his face. "Firstly - I wanted to apologise."

"I don't think there's anything you need to apologise for," I told him, with a surprising wash of regret. I was pretty sure he'd meant it, what he'd said, but - bad enough I hadn't put him off. I couldn't push it any further, not with the slightest sense of propriety. Still his boss, after all. "

"I do," Thomas said. "I wasn't *that* drunk. I should have - I wasn't drunk enough to not know better."

"I know. But you were definitely a few sheets to the wind."

"So..." he hesitated. "We'll just...write it off to that?"

It was my turn to hesitate. "If you like."

We stood there for a few seconds, I think both waiting for the other person to think of something to say.

"I don't," said Thomas eventually, "I don't like, and..." and then he saved both of us from my further attempts at encouraging him without technically making indecent approaches to a subordinate officer by kissing me. Still technically indecent, but I could live with that.

It was careful, I suppose in case he thought he'd misinterpreted things. I tried to make it clear he hadn't, in a strictly non-verbal fashion. He still pulled back to check my expression, after not so very long. It was, frankly, all a little bit *too* careful for my liking. If someone had walked in on us just then, we probably could have carried off pretending we'd just been talking; at least if we'd been quick about it.

So I went for it again, and that time it was all the things I'd thought it might be, when I'd let myself think about it, Thomas and his grey eyes and broad shoulders, his carefully ordinary suits, his banked-up intensity. He'd shown up out of nowhere, nothing I thought I wanted in my unit or my life and lots of things I needed, and at some point I'd started to want this, too.

I'd never been good at knowing when to stop. If I had, I'd never have become a wizard all those years ago.

That second time, he was left with colour in his cheeks and his lips damp. My stomach did a slow lurch. It was probably protesting the sudden redirection of bloodflow so soon after supper.

“For reference,” I said, “that was a much stronger argument to lead with than *it’s such a pity you’re straight*.”

Thomas grinned, an expression I rather liked on him. “You really aren’t going to let me forget any of that, are you.”

“I told you – I know when I can be the better person, and this is not one of those times.”

He kissed me again, as if daring me to prove it. It got somewhat involved, in the way that ended up with untucked shirts and mussed hair. We were going to need to decamp to somebody’s room if this went on.

“I think,” said Thomas, “that’s a consequence I can live with.”

“Good,” I said. “Me too.”

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