

Knot Work

By Cindy Rae

In commemoration of the birthday of Edward Albert, Jr. The jealous fates took you far too soon.

Thank you for being Elliot.

Author's note: Just in case you actually want to see some of what Elliot is up to in this little fic, here is a site which lists some of the knots I mention and more, and shows how intricate they can look, and how much study it would take to perfect them.

<http://www.realmenrealstyle.com/how-to-tie-necktie-chart/>

This vignette takes place after the events of 'Siege,' and right before 'Shades of Grey.' It's that moment when a person is doing one thing, but really thinking about another. I think Elliot had a lot of those moments. And I definitely think he had more than one of them about Catherine.

With love, for Judi, and all who remember Elliot so fondly.



Elliot slid the fabric of his unknotted necktie along his collar, then gently tugged the tie's ends down to where he wanted them, smoothing the expensive material so that it lay flat on the front of his starched white shirt. The secret to a good knot was to begin, correctly. And not every knot started with the ends in the same place. For some few, the ends would be nearly even with each other, at the beginning. But for the most part... no.

Foundation was important, here. Just as important in correctly knotting a tie as it was in building an office complex, or a set of high rent apartments.

The tie was Italian silk, and only lightly patterned. Elliot didn't like garishly patterned ties.

He did, however, like tying them.

Windsor, half Windsor, Victorian, Pratt, four-in-hand... all were names for the knots that could be at a man's throat. All were descriptions, in Elliot's sharp mind. And to a real degree, he knew they were also designations.

To a certain extent, Elliot Burch knew that the knot defined the wearer.

Some men learned one way to tie a tie, and used that one way, their entire lives. That defined them, too.

It was part of what marked them as plebian.

That, Elliot knew, was not simply a conclusion of snobbery. It was a conclusion of fact, and of effect. The man who wore his tie but one way all his life had not bothered to do his homework, on those, had not bothered to apply himself, overmuch. So he was probably lacking skills

in a few other areas, as well. It was a reasonable conclusion.

What came off as being a thought only a snob would think was also a realization for a canny businessman, and Elliot prided himself on being one of those.

And never being taken for a “plebian,” again.

The knot in a man’s tie said something about him. And just what it was that got said, Elliot knew he wanted to be in charge of.

As far as Elliot was concerned, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. And when in Paris, wear a Balthus knot, for godssakes. It telegraphed that you knew what one of those was.

The almost subliminal message sent by the way(s) a man tied his tie was a truth Elliot accepted, as easily as he accepted that white wine went with fish, while a good red went with beef. It was a thing the upper class was aware of, and used. It was a subtle prejudice, but one Elliot's razor sharp mind hadn't missed, in his ascent to the halls of power. Climbing up the ladder where the wealthy and powerful ruled took more than just money, and damn sure more than just chutzpah.

Max Avery had both, in spades, yet he’d never navigate the board rooms (and the bedrooms) Elliot did. Elliot knew that. And accepted it as a personal surety.

No, many subtle things would need to be observed, for a meteoric rise, and Elliot’s had been nothing, if not that. The width of a man’s belt. The shine on his shoes. The amount of gold in his ring. The knot of his tie.

A man's face was the first thing a business rival (or a business partner) saw, and the appearance of a tie was part of that. Slide the knot up to the collar, but tie it unevenly, and you looked like you didn't know how

to dress yourself. Pull the knot down, and it indicated you were winding down from work. Slide it back up when someone entered the room, and it indicated you were paying attention, and being courteous. Untie it completely and leave it loose, and it indicated you were about to change clothes, or get ready for bed. Hopefully, with a beautiful woman.

But the latter was a thought for the end of the day. This was the beginning, of this one. Elliot ran strong, carefully manicured fingers over the expensive cloth, making sure the ends sat just where he wanted them to, before he began.

Tied well, and correctly, so that the knot was both even and secure, and the ends laying down like they should be, and the tie would subtly telegraph to everyone who dealt with him that he meant business. Serious business.

This was part of his morning ritual, and it was a ritual he never skipped.

Elliot had made it a point to know how to tie a tie (both correctly, and in a large number of ways) almost before he'd known how to use a pair of cuff links, or tuck in a dress shirt.

Some styles left a large knot right near his Adam's apple, and some left a medium one. A few he knew left a very small knot, and he'd practiced them all to ridiculous perfection, back when he was utterly determined to break out of poverty and into prosperity.

He'd spent hours in front of a small shaving mirror, seeing not his bearded, young face, but the thin (and sometimes not so thin) moving swatch of cloth, as it fumbled through his fingers. His first "tie" had actually been a cut up piece of bed sheet, trimmed and sewn by hand. His hand. Just something for practice.

Now, however, a considerable selection of designer fabrics was at his disposal, and he'd obviously never stitched any of them. Today's selection was a reddish shade, a bit on the brown side, close to russet.

Elliot knew every knot there was to know, even though he never planned on using some of them. It was part of his personality to know and learn all he could about a thing. So he did.

In some styles, the correctly executed finished product was actually not a perfect, symmetrical creation, but was a tad "off" that way. Most men tied their ties in one of those knots. They were easier to learn, and faster to execute.

But Elliot, the man who hated to sleep, the man who'd once told Catherine Chandler that sleep was a waste of precious time, and friends were inconvenient, didn't mind standing in front of a mirror and tying his tie. It was the last thing he'd do before he donned his coat, shot his cuffs, grabbed his briefcase, and headed out the door.

And while someone who thought they knew Elliot well might think that this was a thing he didn't like to take much time with, (this man who had no friends because they were inconvenient), they'd actually be quite wrong.

Standing in front of the mirror, tying his tie, and then re-tying that, allowed him time to arrange his day, mentally. And playing with a few knots was essentially the closest thing to therapy that Elliot ever actually indulged in. It was both relaxing and stimulating, to take a simple piece of patterned cloth, and make a statement with it.

A statement about who he was, and what he intended. (Or at the very least, a statement about who he was, today.)

It wasn't a sense of Narcissism that drove him to his looking glass each morning.

It was a sense of control.

Whip the cloth around, then up, and pull it through.

They weren't words he thought, anymore, so much as instincts he followed, at this point. Muscles had memory, and he'd taught his fingers well.

Elliot made love and built buildings with no less deftness and consideration, though he well knew the difference between them.

He played around with an Eldredge Knot, which was an even, medium-sized knot that required him to work far more with the small end of the tie, rather than the larger one. Very few men could tie an Eldredge well, or wear one. At least, very few who didn't have a valet.

Elliot had never had a valet. And he knew he never would.

He had a chauffeur, more than one body guard, an accountant, and a phalanx of attorneys, one major one of those. He paid a gardener to take care of the exterior of his home, and a maid to take care of the interior. He didn't pay a cook because he almost never ate at home.

And though many men of his station had a valet, or at least a butler, Elliot knew he never would.

Dressing himself was one of his pleasures, in life.

A man who'd gone from rags to riches stared back at him, in the reflecting glass, and Elliot knew that no shadow of Stosh Kasmarek looked back, in the sky blue eyes. None. Elliot knew he'd eradicated Stosh from his life, right about the time he'd bought his first Bentley.

Stosh had struggled with the Eldredge. Struggled until Elliot had made sure he knew how to hold his fingers so that the final loop at the neck, the 'finishing loop' could be made correctly, so that the intricate knot pulled up, smoothly.

Elliot knew that the slate grey suit was perfectly tailored to his long frame - and that the Eldredge knot was too fussy for the day. Though, perfectly done, the intricate braid work effect looked effete, to Elliot, and he knew he was anything, but that.

The Eldredge was the kind of knot some hot-to-trot twenty-something might have sported, some time, trying to hit on Cathy Chandler. Someone from old money. And though Elliot knew he was impersonating one of those (the old money side, not the age; Elliot was a bit over thirty, and very close to becoming a year older), he also knew he hated at least some of the trappings he forced himself to adopt.

He tugged the tie loose, knowing the Eldredge was a warm-up, anyway. Elliot always practiced at least one knot he wasn't planning to wear, that day. It was how he kept his repertoire sharp.

He toyed with the idea of a trinity knot, and weighed the look, mentally, over a cafe-styled one. They were both good, solid knots, the kind that left an even, medium knot at the throat. The trinity was a bit fussier, with an extra "wrap" of cloth on the bottom of the knot.

He opted for the cafe.

The problem most men had with a cafe knot, was that they couldn't get the ends of the necktie to lay evenly, after they were done. It had taken Elliot many tries, back when he was new, to learn it. (Which was to say it had taken Stosh many tries.)

But while a lesser man might have given up, Elliot knew that if there was one thing Stosh Kasmarek had never been, it was a quitter. He might have had not the vaguest clue about art, and he might have had an accent you could cut a knife with, but he was no quitter.

Basic seamanship helped with the damndest things, sometimes.
(Knowing how to tie a good knot was stock and trade, on a steamer.)

The cafe knot was half done and going well, when Elliot abandoned it, as well, knowing it wasn't going to be the one he wanted, for the day.

The four-in-hand? No. God, no. Too common. Not even for the sake of practice would he toy with one of those, today. Too small, and uneven, as far as knots went. It was the "easy" knot. The knot favored by harried used car salesmen and Boy Scouts.

Elliot knew he was none of those. And he bet Charles Chandler had never gone to work sporting a four-in-hand in his immensely successful life.

She was beautiful, wasn't she?

The thought of Catherine, and the image of her, came both clearly and unbidden, and he yanked the cloth down a little harder than he'd intended. Putting his collar back up, he slid the silk fabric lightly along the back of his neck until the material rested there gently, not forced, and not tugged. Tugging, at this point, left wrinkles in the shirt fabric, and made the collar bunch up on one side, or even screwed up the line of the shoulder. That would never do.

Elliot inhaled, deeply. And began again, letting his mind take him where it would. Therapy. You had to let your mind wander, sometimes. Sometimes, that's where answers lay.

But she was beautiful. And smart. Rich, as well, he acknowledged, but of all her virtues, Elliot actually cared for that one the least. He had no need to marry for money. *Not now.*

And though he admitted he liked the notion of being with a woman who had been born *into* money, it was by no means a requirement, for him. The man who had abandoned the notion of having friends because they were inconvenient had never fancied himself as a man with a wife, not really. His own parents' disaster of a marriage had disabused him of the notion of matrimonial bliss, though the notion of having a long-term affair was pleasing enough.

How many times have I called?

Elliot knew it didn't matter. A number was a number, and if that number had gotten close to fifty, what of it? If Stosh Kasmarek had been no quitter, Elliot Burch surely wasn't one. He also knew that today wouldn't be call number fifty-one. He was done with that.

That left him with the unsolved problem of how to get her back again. But to Elliot, there was a world of difference between an "unsolved problem" and a "defeat." A *world* of difference.

In his mind, Cathy Chandler occupied the former space, and not the latter.

Though it still rankled that she'd left him. Utterly.

Women did not slip away from Elliot Burch. He slipped away from them, like the fabric coming loose from a knot. It was a truth he knew, as surely as he knew he was slipping silk into a designated hole, and tightening down this fabric, so that it would stay.

The Victoria knot. Small. Uneven, and uncommon. A bit like the woman

he was thinking of, right now.

He grasped the silk and slid it firmly upward, so that it would stay in place. Right where he wanted it, and expected it to be.

Cathy hadn't done that. She hadn't stayed in place. Hadn't stayed with him, been right where he'd expected her to be. Damn it.

Elliot was not a vicious man. And he didn't consider himself a compulsive one. Compulsion was a weakness. For booze, for sex, for food, drugs, or anything else.

His father had been guilty of at least one of those addictions, and too many people he knew were guilty of others, and more, besides.

The only compulsion he allowed himself was work, and work was going... *Hmmm... How was the work going?*

He tugged the Victoria down. It came loose with only so much pressure. It slipped away easily, and smoothly.

Rather like her, again. She'd slipped away too smoothly. Again, that rankled. More than a little, even after all these months.

If he went down to the work site today, he'd have to opt for a simple knot, something less intimidating than the ones he was currently playing with. Looking like "one of the guys who had made it big" was also one of Elliot's tricks, and he used his tie to accomplish that look, as well.

There was nothing wrong with a bulky Christensen knot, even if he didn't favor the look. Sometimes it was the effect he was after, rather than the appearance itself. A big knot was sometimes viewed as a "working class" thing, if the tie was solid. Though the effect would be rather florid, if the tie was patterned.

Sometimes, like the night he'd met Cathy, a bow tie was called for. Sometimes, no tie at all was the best idea. Elliot was no fool, about that. And when that was his choice, that, too, was by design. He always had one. A design, that was.

There were days when he left the house wearing one style of knot, then changed it, for another, as he rode in the car from one meeting to the next. His was a chameleon's life, and Elliot prided himself on being one of those, though he never considered it in lower, reptilian terms. To Elliot, he was a survivor, a highly adaptable (very highly adaptable) creature with a specially honed skill-set. One most people knew nothing about.

All the better to catch them by surprise.

Elliot knew he had a few surprises still up his single needle stitched cuffs. And that some of those surprises were quite large, both in size, and scope. Not to mention cost. A tower loomed, in his dreams. A very large, very expensive one. Even without Max Avery in the way. But with him...

Max Avery would need to be dealt with. Would need to be... taken by surprise. There was no other way to do it.

It wasn't the first time he'd thought it, exactly. But it was the first time he'd thought it in just those words, the first time the idea began to crystallize, in his adaptable mind.

But dealing with Avery is tricky, and it's risky.

Unlike the man Elliot fancied himself he'd become, Max Avery was vicious, and there was no sense pretending otherwise. It would be a good idea to beef up security, if he was seriously contemplating taking

on the mob boss who had his fingers in every building project of note, east of the Hudson.

It was also very much the right thing to do, turning Max Avery in, bringing him down. Elliot knew a stack of file folders in his safe might accomplish just that.

He also knew that "doing the right thing" was an act he had only so much acquaintance with, and use for. And "use for" was the operative term. It wasn't that he had anything against doing the right thing. It was that like keeping a friend, it wasn't always... convenient. Paying off Avery was both easier and cheaper than causing his fall. It was why Elliot had dealt with him, and others like him, for years.

I had to, if I wanted to get anything built. And Elliot knew that he very much wanted to get things built.

The fabric in the mirror was in constant motion, now. A full Windsor knot was elegant, and classic. But the knot was a large one, and meant for a different type of collar. *Ah, but a half-Windsor would be perfect.* Similar in the steps it took to make the Windsor pattern, it left a medium knot, one that would stay where it was put, without slipping, easily.

Deft fingers flew, as Elliot considered his options. Not the ones for the tie. That had just been settled upon. The ones for his future.

I'll need a lawyer. A different one than I have, now, more than likely. Probably a stash of cash and a valid passport, just in case.

Then: *I could use it to see Cathy, again...*

And suddenly, the two dissimilar problems, that of Max Avery's graft and Cathy Chandler's stubborn steak, came together, in a perfect blend of ... knot work.

The blue eyes blinked with understanding as the realization crossed through them, the blink being the only outward indication Elliot gave that the idea had jarred him. And it had indeed jarred him.

While thinking, in front of his mirror, while tying the knot he knew he would wear for the day, two different problems, that of Cathy and Max Avery, combined, in his mind.

Cathy. Cathy works for the DA's Office. Not only could I see her, I could make it so that she has to agree to see me, to speak to me... She won't like it... Well, we all get things we don't like, in this life.

The silk half-Windsor knot slid up cleanly, and Elliot smoothed the expensive swatch of cloth down his chest, making sure (without actually needing to) that the ends were just the right length. He'd paid more for the tie than he had his first car. Oh, well. It had been a junker.

The tie wasn't. It was a keeper.

And so is the woman, he thought, settling his collar down.

His handsome, successful face stared back at him, before he turned away from the mirror for good. It had served its purpose. Time for other things to do that, now.

Elliot kept his hand on his chest as he crossed to his safe. He could feel his heart beating quickly, again.

Beating with a touch of trepidation. And something like... hope.

It was a sensation he hadn't had since the day Cathy had walked unexpectedly into his office, in the middle of the day.

But then, just as unexpectedly, she'd walked back out, and she'd taken that hope with her. She'd walked in, and she'd walked out. Out for

good.

Or so she thought.

As he spun the dial on the safe, he knew this would not make things right, between them. That Cathy would be angry at being so maneuvered, and that her ire might have consequences.

It didn't matter. Right now, they were nothing. *And "fighting" was better than nothing*, he told himself.

Perhaps he could make her see reason. Perhaps he could make her see that there really was a difference between him and Max Avery. That he truly was not a bad man. That in his heart, he'd only ever wanted to build things, and make the city more beautiful.

Skyscrapers, art collections... relationships.

Elliot took the damning files out of the safe, and shoved them into a Moroccan leather briefcase, without even looking inside at the papers. He knew what was there. He'd put it there, just in case. Just in case he'd needed them. Just in case of a rainy day.

Well, it was about to rain on Max Avery.

He'd have to clear his schedule and arrange a meeting with his attorney. *Probably have to fire him, and get a new one.*

Elliot's wheels were in motion.

And the scrap of silk that covered his heart was keeping it warm. Almost as warm as she'd kept it.

Almost... but not quite.

It was going to be a busy day. One full of maneuvers, and plans. Phone

calls and a secret meeting or two. A day for unexpected surprises. A day to be taken seriously, and for all he was worth. And “all he was worth” was no small sum.

He was about to be worth a great deal to Cathy Chandler, and to her office. A very great deal, indeed. One Catherine Chandler and her bosses couldn't resist.

Fortunately for Elliot, he knew he was dressed for the occasion.



~ No matter where you are in your own fairy tale, I wish you love. ~

Cindy