

Room to Run by Madeleine Urban

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Allan stood on the balcony with a cup of gently steaming tea and a saucer, watching the sunrise. After several long moments he smiled wryly and toasted the sun, taking another sip before setting it down on the wrought-iron table next to him.

“Can I get you anything else, sir?” a servant asked quietly. When Allan shook his head, the servant disappeared respectfully inside, leaving the master of the house to his thoughts.

Leaning on the rail, Allan looked out over the English countryside, surveying the estate he’d recently bought, sight unseen, from his home in America. His business trip to London gave him the perfect excuse to visit the estate and check out his good luck. A longtime business associate had given him the tip about the estate, knowing Allan would love to have the land, the stables and the horses.

“Excuse me, sir, the phone is for you.”

Allan glanced around and reached to take the blinking mobile off the linen-draped silver tray the servant offered. “Thank you,” he murmured as he opened the device. “Westerna.”

“Allan, happy birthday.”

Allan indulged in his first genuine smile in weeks. “Marcus. Thank you. And thank you again for the tip on the estate. It’s gorgeous.”

“There now, are you? Weren’t you going to call and invite me ’round?”

“Just arrived last night. Thought I would call you tomorrow.” Allan leaned on the rail again, propping one foot up on the lowest bar.

“Plans for your birthday, then?”

Allan sighed silently, realizing he’d given his British friend the opening to exploit. “No, just relaxing. Business has been booming lately, since Roskilde won the Kentucky Derby.”

“Ah, lovely race it was, too... Wait...you mean you’ve been working since then without a break? That was six months ago!”

Allan chuckled and shook his head. “It’s what I do, Marcus. And I do take a break to go riding almost every day.”

Marcus’s harrumph over the phone made Allan laugh. “Well, since you’re here, I’ll send over your birthday present. Lucky, that...I was having a devil of a time trying to figure out how to ship it to Kentucky.”

“Marcus, you didn’t have to get me anything.”

“Bah. Just wait. You’ll love it. I’ll send it ’round ’bout noon, yeah? Relax and enjoy your birthday, Allan.”

“Thanks, Marcus, I’ll try.” With that, Allan severed the connection and drew in a breath, wondering what his present would be.

He’d known Marcus for several years, and they knew each other quite well. Thinking of different things Marcus might send entertained him for some hours as he worked on basic paperwork and industry research, and soon a servant appeared at the door, announcing the arrival of a truck and trailer.

Allan raised an eyebrow and pushed back from the desk, a smile forming. One of the options closer to the top of the list of possible gifts was an English thoroughbred. Marcus would know that would appeal to his American friend. He made his way through the estate house down to the front door and stopped on the front steps, trailing his hand over the marble pillar next to him as he watched two men unhooking the trailer door and lowering the ramp.

He watched curiously as the men called inside rather than going inside themselves, and soon Allan had his answer. A beautiful black stallion stepped cautiously down the ramp, carrying a rider perched on a casual riding saddle.

If the horse was stunning, the rider was beyond belief. Allan's eyes widened as the slim young man with red curls and a sweet-cream complexion directed the horse to step off the ramp with a twitch of the reins. Allan wondered idly for a moment whether the horse or the rider was his present before dismissing the thought as crazy and descending to the concrete.

"Mr. Westerna?" The rider asked in a smooth, English accent.

"Yes, I'm Allan Westerna," Allan answered, trying to calm his racing pulse when faced by two such magnificent animals.

"I'm Colt Cross. And this..." he patted the horse's neck, "is Pacific." Allan smiled and stepped slowly to the horse, showing years of experience as he let the horse get acquainted by scent before touch. After several long moments, Allan looked up to meet deep green eyes and a smile. "He likes you, that's great," Colt said as Pacific tossed his head, trying to get Allan to scratch his nose some more.

"He's magnificent," Allan said as he accepted the lead from Colt and started walking, Pacific following him around the estate house toward the stables nearby.

"Happy birthday, by the way," Colt said from his seat on Pacific's back when Allan stopped inside the stables and closed the gate behind them.

Allan turned in time to see the small-framed man dismount smoothly right next to him, the flow and pitch of understated muscles very similar to Pacific's movements. Allan found himself mesmerized.

Allan nodded. "Thank you," he said, eyes still on Colt.

The younger man noticed Allan watching him and smiled, pausing for a moment to look Allan over as well. "Would you like a ride?"

Allan blinked, his mind jumping to all sorts of conclusions. "A ride?"

An amused grin pulled at the corners of Colt's mouth as he just reached out and patted Pacific's side. The horse looked back at them and huffed.

Allan broke out of his daze and shook his head, trying to clear it. "Ah, yes, I'd love to."

Colt nodded and took Pacific's lead, stepping to stand in front and a bit to the side of the horse while Allan climbed gracefully into the saddle. Once he saw Allan was settled, he unclipped the lead

from Pacific's bridle and opened the gate that led out into the countryside.

Allan knickered, and Pacific walked calmly out of the stable into the grass. Colt patted Pacific's neck again. "Have a good time," he said, looking up at Allan.

The older man paused a moment, then lowered his hand down to Colt. "Come with us?" Allan asked. Colt's eyes brightened, and he nodded, took Allan's hand and allowed the other man pull him up onto Pacific's back, where he settled behind him. Within moments they were flying over the fields, bodies glued together in the rocking motion of the gallop as Allan let Pacific have his head. There was plenty of room to run.

Some time later, Allan pulled their mount to a stop near a bubbling brook, and the horse happily drank from the cool water. Colt slid off Pacific's back and stretched as Allan climbed down, tying the reins loosely to a limb that extended over the water. The two men walked companionably along the stream in the shade.

"Are you a horse trainer?" Allan asked.

Colt nodded. "Born and raised. Too tall to be a proper jockey, although I raced quite a bit in my youth."

Allan nodded and smiled. "You trained Pacific?"

A bright smile transformed Colt's face and Allan had to stop walking for fear he'd trip over his feet. "Yeah. He's beautiful, isn't he?"

"How did Marcus find you?"

“Knows my Mum.” Colt stopped walking when he noticed Allan wasn’t keeping up with him. “Told me what he knew of you and what he had in mind. I thought Pacific would be a good fit for you. He’s a hell of a runner.”

Allan frowned. “Be a good fit for me? You don’t know me.”

“Course I do,” Colt replied. “At least professionally. You’re quite popular in the industry, you know. Especially after you put out that poster with Roskilde.”

Allan flushed slightly. That damn poster. Pinup was more like it – him on Roskilde bareback out in a wheat field, wearing only torn-up jeans, sweaty, and looking at the camera suggestively.

Colt grinned and stepped closer to Allan, standing only inches away. “I have that poster on my wall,” he murmured, reaching out to lightly touch the buttons on Allan’s shirt.

Allan’s eyes widened, and he swallowed hard as his body reacted to Colt being so close. “You do?”

“Oh yes,” Colt whispered, sidling up against him, their hips and chests brushing, his lips not even inches away. “My bedroom wall...” Allan groaned and crushed Colt to him, their lips meeting in a hot, wet press. Fingers moved to push away clothing and soon they were wrapped around each other in the sweet clover. “Allan...” Colt panted. “Please...I’ve dreamed...I want you to ride me, like you rode Roskilde...”

Clutching the younger man's hips, Allan growled and pounced on him, applying hands and mouth to Colt's pleasure for several long minutes before pulling away. "We don't have..."

Colt reached for his jeans and pulled some items from a pocket, effectively shutting Allan up. The slim rider turned to his hands and knees and looked over his shoulder, pleading. Allan took in the gorgeous view – a fine ass, knees spread, cock heavy and hanging, just waiting for Allan's touch. He wouldn't wait any longer.

They strained together as Allan mounted Colt, the younger man crying out at the pleasure of it, the muscles in his flanks rippling as Allan began thrusting. Colt tore up the clover as he grabbed at the ground, trying to anchor himself. They wouldn't last long, pent up longing versus longtime loneliness. Allan grappled with his lover's hips before moving to pump him to his finish, Colt's muscles pressing ecstasy out of the older man. They collapsed together onto the grass.

After several moments of breathing like they had finished a race, Allan managed to ask jokingly, "Who the hell are you?"

Colt smiled up at the blue sky. "Your birthday present."

"What?" Allan sat up, surprised.

"From Marcus?" Colt prompted.

"You...but...I thought...what about Pacific?" Allan's face was a study of confusion and Colt had to laugh.

“Pacific is my horse – I thought you might be interested in racing him. But I’m actually the present.” He chuckled again at Allan’s wide eyes and tugged the older man back down into his arms. “Doesn’t Marcus pick lovely presents?”

Allan swallowed hard and nodded before capturing Colt’s lips. When he pulled back, he relaxed when he saw Colt’s happy, contented smile.

“Happy birthday to me...happy birthday to me...” Allan crooned.

They both laughed, rolling in the soft green grass under the warm sun.

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