Blue is a Complicated Colour if you're a Greyhound, especially at the weekend

by ncruurk

Summary

Just a simple weekend away, that was the plan. Kate and Osgood didn't want to do anything fancy, just get away from London for the weekend....they weren't to know that Osgood not liking pink hydrangeas was going to make life complicated.

Then again, when they first met, they had no idea how complicated life already was...

Notes

Another 'one-shot' within my 'UNIT-verse' in which Kate and Osgood have known each other for quite a while.

If you haven't read 'A New Year…and McGillop drank (most of) his beer' (found via my author page here on AO3) yet, you're going to be thoroughly confused I'm afraid. Otherwise, this should be relatively self contained although, as always with my Kate/Osgood stories, the more of them you've read, hopefully the more enjoyable the read will be as more little bits of various jigsaws come together....

There's a 'reader's guide' post I put together on tumblr if you would like a bit more guidance on how all the stories interlink.
As always, I hope you enjoy the read ahead: I'd love to hear what you think!

See the end of the work for more notes.
August 2003

“What if we, given all those assumptions….” Kate strode up to the white board she and Osgood had been staring at for the last few minutes and, using a blue whiteboard marker, drew a box around half a dozen lines that Osgood had written out that morning. “...and that one…” She walked to the other end of the long whiteboard, where a list of other factors were arranged in a more haphazard ‘clump’ that she’d drawn up that afternoon.

“You need to include the two below then.” Osgood turned her head to the side as she tried to read Kate’s writing, which she was in the process of ‘acquiring the taste’ for and finally being able to read, most of the time. “Yes?”

“Uh…” The problem with her haphazard arrangement was it made it a little tricky to know which two were the ‘below’ ones Osgood had spotted, forcing her to return to first principles and replicate her colleague’s thinking. “Ah, I see. Yes.” She circled the two in question and stepped back to consider what they’d now identified. “Does that work?”

The click as Kate put the cap back on her pen was loud in the otherwise silent seminar room that they’d taken over yesterday when it became clear that they had reached a rather fundamental theoretical stage in their research project and needed more space than her office whiteboard could offer.

“Umm…” Osgood took her glasses off and cleaned the lenses with a cleaning cloth she had in her pocket while she thought about it.

“No.”

“No?” Blinking, Osgood put her partially cleaned glasses back on and looked at Kate, then back at the boards. “Ah.” She saw what she thought Kate had seen. “Yes.” Sensing the biologist look at her, Osgood grinned when she realised what she’d done. “I mean no, you’re correct, it doesn’t solve the original problem and actually makes it worse…unless….” Dropping lightly from the tabletop she’d been sitting cross-legged on, Osgood headed over to Kate and held her hand out for the marker pen. “May I?” Kate gave her the pen and caught her lower lip between her teeth while she tried to anticipate what her wrong idea had suggested to the physicist.

“Given all of this…” Osgood waved her arms in the direction of everything Kate had identified. “...which we know we can do…” She double checked that they’d not accidentally relied on something that wasn’t actually already resolved. “...it’s possible as long as that works.” Osgood tapped the board with the pen where their new problem was shown.

“But it doesn’t work, not if all of that has to happen….” Kate trailed off, feeling like she’d just stated the obvious which, based on the last couple of weeks of working with Osgood, usually meant there was something interesting in the obvious that she’d not yet spotted. “Oh.” She looked from the board to Osgood who was smiling now that she saw Kate had got it. “That’s…” Kate’s first instinct was to say ‘brilliant’ but she wasn’t sure it was the right thing to say just yet given Osgood’s more cautious nature when it came to hypotheses.

“Something we can fix?” Osgood held the pen out for Kate to take back.

“Don’t see why not…” Taking the pen back, Kate found herself surprised by a yawn, prompting her
to look at her watch and see how late it was. “How did it get to nearly midnight?”

“Really?” Surprised, Osgood looked at her watch and double checked it against the seminar room wall clock which confirmed that Friday was very nearly Saturday. “Sorry….” They’d only been working together for a couple of weeks, but it was already clear that while they were both probably equally likely to lose track of time when absorbed in the research, Kate’s need to get home to her husband and teenaged son meant she rarely actually lost track of time. Her son. “What about Gordy?” Osgood remembered that was what Kate had called her son last week, when they’d been awkwardly making small talk.

“He’s away for the weekend with his best friend, Max and his parents.” Kate put the pen back on the tray next to the overhead projector. “And Thomas…” She saw Osgood’s expression twitch slightly, making her realise she’d never actually called her husband by his first name before. “…my husband, he’s also away for the weekend.” Kate tried to remember who he’d gone with and what the occasion was. “Someone’s stag do, so they’re probably in a police cell somewhere by now…”

Osgood wasn’t quite sure what to say in response to that, although she was at least reassured that Kate’s son wasn’t stranded somewhere. The idea of having people to ‘get home to’ wasn’t one she’d really needed to consider - while her flatmate had been amused and concerned when she’d disappear into the lab for long periods, she’d never been depending on Osgood to get home to make the dinner, do laundry, help with homework and all the other myriad of tasks that Kate seemed to be constantly juggling. At one point, Osgood had been about to ask what exactly her husband did to contribute to the operation of his home and family, but she bit her lip and had asked instead if he was also a scientific academic like his wife. He wasn’t.

“…so no one’s missed me and no doubt the sky’s still up.” Kate couldn’t actually remember the last time she’d had ‘a night off’ from wife and mother duties, it was certainly long enough ago that it felt strange to even think about. “I should probably be thanking you actually.”

“Me?” Confused by Kate’s observation, Osgood tried to pay closer attention to what the biologist was talking about. “What did I do?” Apart from keep you here until almost midnight she thought…

“Saved me from going home to an empty house and a guilty conscience.” Kate rubbed the back of her neck as she tried to force herself to find enough energy to go home. “I’d have probably been rearranging the kitchen cupboards by now…. this…” she gestured towards the whiteboards, “…was far more interesting.” Smiling nervously at Osgood, Kate suddenly realised she’d made one rather rude and insensitive assumption. “Oh, but what about you?” Kate tried to remember what plans she might have had on a Friday night when she hadn’t had the ‘wife and mother’ labels around her neck. “I should be apologising for keeping you so late, and on a Friday…”

“I’d planned to stay until now actually.”

“Planned to stay?” Concerned, Kate tried to remember what, if anything, she knew about Osgood’s accommodation arrangements - unlike Kate, this wasn’t Osgood’s ‘home patch’, with Osgood agreeing to come work alongside Kate in her university department for this research contract. “Is there something wrong with your digs?”

“Hmm?” Osgood had been concentrating on writing down what they’d captured on the whiteboards so that they didn’t lose their progress on Monday in the unlikely event of someone accidentally cleaning off their work over the weekend. “Oh, no, it’s fine.” Sensing Kate’s lingering concern, Osgood stopped her note-taking. “I’ve got one of the flats over by the athletics track, view of the fields actually…. She’d had sheep to look at when she brushed her teeth this morning. “I just…” For a brief moment she felt a bit silly but then decided that she had no reason to think Kate would think this any sillier than some of the assumptions they’d had to factor into their thinking this week.
“I wanted to walk home when it was properly dark tonight.”

“Why?” Kate tried to remember what the weather forecast had been promising when she’d driven to work this morning.

“What do you see when you look at the stars Kate?”

“I don’t look.” Kate stiffened as she spoke, looking around for something to occupy herself with, but there was nothing to rearrange, nothing to tidy up.

“That’s a shame.” Understanding her newest colleague well enough to know that the biologist didn’t want to talk about it, Osgood returned to her note-taking, content to work in silence for a few more minutes until she’d captured their latest thinking.

“I’m sorry…” said Kate eventually, unusually finding the silence that had settled between them uncomfortable. Normally, she was never comfortable in prolonged silences with anyone, so it had been something of a surprise, albeit a pleasant one once she’d recovered from the shock of the discovery, when she’d noticed she was at ease with the silence that would settle comfortably between them in the lab. It had been strange, in the last few minutes, to return to the uncomfortable silence. It just felt wrong.

“You don’t need to explain.” Osgood put the cap on her pen and closed her notebook, then looked up at Kate.

“I…” Kate frowned, realising that a part of her wanted to explain, explain everything that she knew and share how little she really understood about what was really up there, in amongst the stars. But after a life lived with secrets hidden in plain view in front of her as well as buried deep and far away from her, it was hard to know where to begin, to know how to begin.

“I always think of my father as being a scientist.” There was something in Osgood’s tone that caught Kate’s attention.

“But?” Kate looked at the younger woman with curiosity, in spite of her lingering anxiety about her stargazing question.

“He would say he was a soldier who knew a bit about science.” Osgood took off her glasses and began to polish the already pristine lenses, having already worked out that the older blonde never seemed to really let go of the tension she carried with her, but did occasionally let herself relax for a moment if she knew she wasn’t being ‘seen’. Given they’d established fairly early on how limited Osgood’s vision was if she didn’t have her glasses on, Osgood had also discovered that an occasional ‘strategic’ glasses cleaning gave the other woman a moment to collect her thoughts and regroup in an ‘unobserved’ moment. “And that he was lucky to have a commanding officer who respected him enough to let him have a go with science rather than soldiering.”

“Sounds like a lucky man…”

“My Dad?”

“His Commanding Officer, to have someone who could give him options like that…” Kate still didn’t know what this had to do with her question about stars, but it was, for some reason, making her remember a summer’s day a long time ago.
“Again!”

“Again what Tiger?”

“Pwease…” The three year old Kate frowned, that wasn’t what it was supposed to sound like. “Please Daddy, again!”

“Very well Tiger, but this is the last time today….” Making a big show of putting his hands over his eyes, Brigadier Alastair ‘Daddy’ Lethbridge-Stewart stood by the heavily scented pink roses that were looking almost perfect in the sunny afternoon and began to slowly and loudly count. “One… Two….”

Dashing off, her pale blonde hair catching in the sunlight and shining, Kate ran across the grass, avoiding the gravel path this time as it was so noisy that must have been how he’d found her last time.

“Three… Four….” Through his slightly parted fingers, he watched his clever ‘Tiger’ avoid the gravel and stick to the quieter grass as she scampered around the corner of the bay windows and set off up the side of the house, probably heading for the laurel bush in the middle of the front garden that they’d played peekaboo around last time he’d been home and able to play with her.

“Five… Six….”

Running across the front lawn, Kate wanted to get to the big green shiny bush Daddy called Laura to hide behind. It made no sense for Daddy to call the bush ‘Laura’ - Laura was at nursery and had really curly orange hair she had to remember to call ‘red’, but he’d just laughed and given her a hug when she’d told him so. The hug had been nice.

“Seven… Eight…”

“Oh.” Kate skidded to a stop and looked up - she hadn’t planned on someone already hiding behind Laura. “Are you hiding from Daddy too?” she asked, looking at the man who was quite kind looking, and his glasses were funny.

“I don’t know.” Bending down so he was on her level, Tom Osgood looked at her seriously. “Should I be?” He was actually looking for the Brigadier, having come by to drop off his report now he’d finished it, so that his Commanding Officer could have read it before Monday.

“He’s going to hunt for me when he gets to…” Kate frowned and concentrated on her fingers, trying to remember what the thing was that made Daddy look for her. “Ten!” That was it. She looked up at her new friend with renewed interest. “He always finds me, but he’s not a very good looker.”

“Is he not?” Tom Osgood grinned at this, finding it hard to reconcile the ‘not very good looker’ that played hide-and-seek with a child and the Brigadier. “I’m not a very good hider.”

“Oh dear.” Kate peeked out from behind the bush and saw her Daddy just coming round the side of the house. “Do you want to hide with me? Then he could find us together.”

“Thank you.” Straightening slightly, Tom allowed himself to be guided around the side of the laurel bush, so they were just out of sight but able to look round the side of the bush and monitor the Brigadier’s progress, leaving him to wonder if she’d been taught how to hide by her father.

Satisfied that they were appropriately hidden, Kate studied her new friend with interest. He was wearing the same funny green clothes that her Daddy wore, with the silly hat that tried to slide off
their heads. She wondered why they continued to wear the hat even though it tried to run away all the time, but had never asked Daddy that. She could ask her new friend...but first:

“I’m Kate.” She stuck her right hand out like Daddy had taught her to. “Kate Lethbridge Stewart. Daddy calls me Tiger. You can call me Kate.”

“Hello Kate.” With due solemnity, Tom Osgood shook her little hand. “My name is Tom Osgood...ee...ah!” So absorbed had they been in their own conversation, that they had both forgotten that Kate’s father was looking for them, so when the Brigadier came round the side of the bush to find them, they all had a shock, the Brigadier included as he’d not expected to find Sergeant Osgood behind the laurel bush as well as Kate. “Brigadier!” Tom jumped to his feet, still holding Kate’s hand. “Sir!”

“Dad would say he is the lucky one…” Osgood chewed on her lip as she put her glasses back on, the need to be able to see Kate’s reaction greater than her desire to give the blonde the space to think.

“Your father…” Blinking, Kate looked at Osgood, trying to remember more about the man who hid with her behind ‘Laura’ the laurel bush. “...what’s his name?” It was a slightly redundant question Kate knew, although there was just a chance that Osgood’s father wasn’t called Osgood...

“Tom Osgood.”

Osgood waited to see what reaction she’d get, not sure whether Kate knew much about what apparently connected their fathers - she admittedly had only learned when she’d mentioned to her Dad that her newest research project was with someone who ‘wasn’t as posh as their surname sounded’. That had promptly led her father to ask what the surname was and then saw him almost choke on his tea. That in turn had led to her mother demanding to know what was going on...an hour or so later, Osgood finally understood that she’d managed to end up in a project team of two with the daughter of her father’s old Commanding Officer, a daughter who last Tom Osgood knew, wasn’t on that great terms with her father.

“Of course…” Kate blushed, realising now the mistake she’d made as a little girl, and how patient and kind their fathers had been with her. “I met him once, he’d come to see my father. We were playing hide-and-seek.”

“You and Dad?” Osgood frowned at this - her father was not a great hide-and-seek player as he usually got distracted while seeking her and her sister when they’d been kids.

“My father and I. Your Dad was looking for my father.…” Kate smiled shyly. “I got his name rather wrong I think… I seem to remember calling him Mr Goodie.” She saw Osgood try and fail to hide her grin. “In my defence I can’t have been older than three…”

“Makes all the difference,” agreed Osgood, trying to sound suitably sincere.

“Oh stop laughing at me!” In spite of everything else she was feeling right now, Kate couldn’t help but smile at the gentle teasing, something she normally wasn’t very good at tolerating.

“I’m sorry.” Smoothing down the points of her t-shirt collar, Osgood looked at her shoelaces to
“That makes two of us.” Realising she’d perhaps sounded a bit cold, Kate leaned back against the whiteboard and went to put her hands in her pockets, only to release she didn’t have any in this dress. “Sorry. My father…” She stopped and smiled self-consciously. “Dad and I are...doing better now, but it was difficult for a long time...probably my fault.”

“I’m sure he’d say the same thing.” Seeing Kate’s surprised look, Osgood coloured slightly and clarified what she’d meant. “Never met your father, but I have a lot of experience of Sudden Spontaneous Father-Daughter Stand-Offs.”

“You do?” Kate found that hard to believe given the little bits and pieces they’d shared with each other during the last couple of weeks.

“My sister.” Osgood winced. “She’s the perfect one. I’m…”

“The interesting one,” said Kate promptly and sincerely, not liking the idea of Osgood thinking herself less than her sister, no matter what claim to fame this other Osgood might have. “And perfect is extremely dull.”

“Ah, right…” Osgood felt her cheeks flame as she searched for her pen and notebook, never very good at accepting compliments at the best of times, nevermind from…. Giving herself a mental shake for wandering thoughts and making a note to follow up with giving herself a stern talking to about marriage vows being important to the people who took them, Osgood changed the subject, but not before remembering her manners. “Thank you. I’m going to look at the sky now.”

“Why?” Again, Kate regretted the tone she’d used to ask her question, not knowing what a ‘better’ tone would be, but knowing that she’d sounded far more combative and challenging than she’d intended. “I mean…” What did she mean?

“You mean, given what we know through our fathers is really out there, why do I want to go and look at the sky now?” Osgood watched with interest as Kate chewed her lip and wrestled with whatever it was that she was struggling with before seeing the blonde nod, first tentatively and then with increased confidence. “Specifically? Because about now is the when there’s the best display this year as, looking at the weather forecast, it will be cloudy later.”
“Display of what? And if that’s specific, what’s the general answer?” asked Kate, her curiosity sufficiently sparked that she was already at the door, turning off the lights, clearly ready to go.

“Only one way to find out Kate.” Osgood waited in the corridor while Kate locked the seminar room behind them, keeping their research suitably ‘secure’ as per their contract with the Ministry of Defence which, in retrospect, was perhaps a hint that they should have individually connected their respective fathers’ military careers sooner, especially as neither had a particularly common surname.

“Lead on then, it’s clearly time I started looking at the sky again…”

“Umm, Kate?”

“Yes?” Kate had stopped on hearing her name being called and turned round, seeing Osgood hadn’t moved from the seminar room door.

“I was planning on going back to the lab first, to get my things?” Osgood’s shyly amused smile put in another appearance, something that had been starting to happen a little more often in the last few days as she became more at ease around the biologist. “I only meant ‘about now’ in the broader sense, not to the minute.”

“Ah.” Kate really wanted to be wearing something with pockets but had to make do with crossing her arms loosely around her middle instead. “Lab’s that way.” She nodded in the direction she hadn’t been going in.

“Last time I checked…” agreed Osgood, amused.

“Oh stop laughing you!” And, shaking her head with good humour at the physicist’s amusement, Kate retraced her steps back to the seminar room door where Osgood still stood and then set off in the right direction to head back to her lab, in her university that Osgood had just had to remind her about. “Next thing you’ll be telling me is that the sky’s an illusion and is actually down there…” she joked, gesturing to the floor as Osgood fell into step with her.

“Well…” Osgood adjusted her glasses. “I think Australia’s first….”
Chapter 2

“I look forward to the next update,” said Kate, putting the cap on her fountain pen and smiling kindly at the still rather nervous looking Hertens, despite the successful presentation and good progress with his project. “And I’d like to see the detailed analysis, if I could?” Kate looked to Fran who nodded and made a note to follow up with him after the meeting.

“I…”

“I’ll come and talk to you about it on Monday Teddy…” said Fran quickly, saving the young Chemist from going any whiter, clearly not expecting Kate’s interest in the detail. Relieved that he could escape the meeting, Edward ‘Teddy’ Hertens scrambled to his feet and left the room, still counting his blessings that, for whatever reason, he managed to get through the Prototype Board Approval meeting on a day when McGillop was standing in for Osgood. Kate Stewart was quite terrifying enough on her own for the young scientist, without adding the brilliant and intuitive Osgood to his anxiety.

“Dr Stewart?”

“Yes McGillop?” Kate glanced at the meeting agenda while she waited for his question, relieved to see that Hertens’ project had been the last item. Hopefully ‘Any Other Business’ would be brief and they could finish on time.

“Can I ask what you’re hoping to discover from the detailed analysis?” Hertens wasn’t the only one who was nervous, with McGillop’s gulp at the end of his question practically audible.

“Learn, not discover…” Kate leaned back in her chair and looked faintly amused by the question. “Everyone seems to always forget I’m a biologist…” While it was flattering that the rest of UNIT seemed to always credit her with a near infallible ability to understand all things scientific, the truth was somewhat more mundane as far as she was concerned.

Kate Stewart didn’t find science intuitive, not like Osgood did. For Kate, Biology was intuitive, and in particular how biological processes and principles were ‘the same but different’ as the environmental factors and species characteristics changed. She understood most of the rest of the science she needed on a day to day basis because it was some variant of physics or chemistry that she’d come across before - learned and remembered principles and processes she then used and applied in the latest context or situation. When combined with her intuitive understanding of living ‘things’, it meant she coped with the multitude of alien species and technologies far better than the majority of the UNIT Science establishment and made her extremely well qualified to be the Chief Scientific Officer. But it was a ‘trick’ that she could pull off only as long as she continued to mechanistically (as Kate saw it) learn the ‘basic’ chemistry and physics the various specialists were incorporating into their inventions and discoveries.

“…and I’m rather rusty when it comes to the transition metal reactions at the ligands.”

There was an audible groan from McGillop and Dr Ethel ‘Rosie’ Onurosie, while Robert Shonbrun, their new Chief Chemist smirked, not yet confident enough to groan at the Boss.

“Could someone explain the joke for those of us without chemistry degrees?” Colonel Maria Walsh was, most of the time, completely lost by the scientific discussion that went on in these meetings, but made a point of attending as she was really very interested and experienced at explosions, which was invariably a frequent by-product of the Prototype process.
“Iron’s a transition metal…” volunteered Dr Shonbrun, not yet sure to what degree the Colonel either had a basic understanding of Chemistry, or a sense of humour.

“The reactant can be Oxygen…” added Rosie, not that familiar with Maria either, but very familiar with Kate and her propensity for bad puns when she could get away with them.

“That’s a horrible pun…” groaned Fran, shaking her head at her boss who was not looking remotely guilty at the crime against humour she’d just committed.

“Any Other Business?” asked Kate, leaning forwards again and reasserting her control on the meeting, happy for her colleagues to be amused by her but increasingly conscious of time. “Maria?” Seeing it was only the Colonel who’d raised her finger to confirm she had an item of AOB, Kate took the cap off her fountain pen again and prepared to make a final meeting note.

“We’re cleared to use a section of Salisbury Plain on Saturday afternoon, tomorrow that is. It’s the regular exercise slot we have but since I’ve only received one Prototype test approval…” She looked around at her fellow Board members to see if anyone was reacting in a way that suggested she’d lost any others. She hadn’t. “...I’m going to be doing the controlled destruction of last week’s seized contraband…” Maria looked around the table again, smiling. “You’re all invited to come and watch.”

“These are the Korrungh shells?” asked Kate, double checking she’d made the right connection.

“Yes. There are also a few mines and a good sized consignment of the Korrungh equivalent of plastic explosive… in three sorts we think.” Maria double checked her post-it note that had all the relevant details on it. “For good measure, since the forecast is good, we’re going to deal with the final box of Wadexium distress flares as well.”

“Very pretty.” Kate looked at the thoroughly bemused expressions on the rest of her colleagues’ faces. “The Korrungh, for reasons we still don’t quite understand, make explosives out of something that scatters glitter not dust.”

“You’re inviting us to go watch you cover Salisbury Plain in glitter?” asked Rosie, finding the idea amusing.

“Multi-coloured glitter actually - the different types of explosives…” Maria trailed off, not actually sure she could remember enough of the explanation as to why the shells were blue or green but the mines were red or purple. “There’s a book running on the plastic explosive...yellow and pink are evens apparently…”

“Dare I ask what the Wadexium distress flares do?” asked Dr Shonbrun, quite liking the sound of this pyrotechnic field trip.

“Think Roman Candle fireworks…” Maria wasn’t sure how to explain the rest of the ‘display’.

“...and know that the Wadexium olfactory sense is approximately 1000 times more highly developed than a dog’s. They’re unexpectedly fragrant,” explained Rosie, turning to look at the man who had replaced her as the ‘newbie’, “…and my favourites,” she added conspiratorially.

“I think you’ve got Rosie and Robert to entertain tomorrow then,” declared Kate, wanting to now conclude the meeting. “You should have a lot of fun with that lot Colonel.” No one was quite sure if ‘that lot’ applied to the scientists or the explosives, but no one was prepared to ask Kate to clarify. “And I look forward to the photographs and outrage from the Regulars on Monday!”

“You’re not coming?” asked Maria, surprised. Normally, Kate made a point of attending the
Prototype Tests or any of their unconventional firework displays when they were destroying the seize contrabands that was another part of the UNIT military’s business-as-usual job.

“Not this weekend, no.” Seeing there was nothing else that the meeting needed to cover, Kate closed her file of papers. “Speaking of, have a great weekend however you spend it and I’ll see you all next Board which is in…” she looked to Fran for the reminder.

“Two weeks today.”

“If not before…” And, on that note, Kate stood up and headed for the door: only two more meetings and she was done for the week!

“Captain Stewart…” Max wasn’t sure what to say next, unable to remember the last time the telephone that sat on his desk had actually rung.

“Are you wearing civvies?” Although Colonel Maria Walsh didn’t identify herself by name, Max knew precisely who he was speaking to, recognising her voice immediately.

“Uh…” Despite knowing that he wasn’t in uniform, reflex saw Max glance down at his shirt and jeans before answering. “Yes Ma’am.” It was his first ‘day off’ from Troop Command and after a rather busy fortnight when Troop had been almost continually mobilised as they collectively lurched from one high priority alert to another, he was woefully behind on his paperwork. Therefore, after some sleep, a shave and something to eat he’d returned to the Tower, off duty, to catch up with the paperwork, having learnt the hard way that it took miracles to catch up once you’d fallen behind.

“Sun’s out, I’m buying you an ice cream.”

“Yes Ma’am.” Tapping a sequence of keys on his computer, Max quickly saved and closed the numerous mission reports and personnel reviews he’d been trying to update and pulled up the Ops alert system, relieved to note that there didn’t appear to be anything happening that his on-duty colleagues couldn’t cope with.

“Ten minutes. I need to change.”

“Yes Ma’am.”
Chapter 3

“Max.”

“Ma…” Her use of his first name confused him and he found himself swallowing the remainder of his instinctive ‘Ma’am’, sensing that this was a very very off-the-record conversation between the two of them.

“Walk with me?”

“Of course…”

Max gestured for her to set the pace and direction for their stroll, her gait shifting away from the regimented cadence of a military march and into a more casual, easy amble. Whatever it was that saw Colonel Walsh have time to take a stroll in her summer dress, sunglasses perched on her head where he was more used to seeing her UNIT beret was clearly something she didn’t feel she could share with his on-duty colleagues or with him within the Tower. Was she worried about a leak? Alien infiltration? Just as Max was about to lose control on his thoughts and rush through another half a dozen ideas all variants of various Doomsday scenarios from Sandhurst, Hollywood and the last fortnight, he saw a discarded Metro newspaper, abandoned in the morning rush hour and left on a bench.

“Wait…” Forgetting who he was walking with, he dodged a toddler intent on getting their melting ice cream everywhere except their mouth and grabbed the paper, his eye caught by the headline on the random page it had blown open to. Picking it up, he scanned the page, checked the date on the paper against the date displayed on his watch and looked at the Colonel who had also managed to negotiate the toddler, a dog and a street mime performer to join him. “It’s to do with Mum, isn’t it?”

“Yes…” Now, stood by the river surrounded by tourists caught up in the history of the Tower and spectacle of the Bridge opening to let a sailing boat through, Maria Walsh felt decidedly un-Colonel-like and rather foolish. “I…” She glanced at Max, now she was actually stood talking to him, or rather not talking to him, wondering if she was making the biggest mistake of her career. “…don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

There was a long silence that hung heavily in the air between them as both watched the bridge start to close once the sailing boat had slipped by, heading back out to the Estuary and beyond. Just when Maria thought she’d overstepped a line and broken all manner of trusts, Max turned and looked at her.

“Permission to speak freely Ma’am?” Instinct told him this conversation was so far off the record that he was probably supposed to be using her first name, but there was nothing wrong with double checking.

“Absolutely.” It was now that she saw it, the beginnings of a faint half grin on his face that, despite there being no biological connection between him and Greyhound One, was somehow pure Kate Stewart. Whatever it was that Greyhound One was up to, her son wasn’t worried which didn’t mean Maria wasn’t abandoning the worries just yet, but she was at least breathing again.

“Do you know what a Perseid is?”

“No. What’s it got to do with your Mother…” Maria found that she couldn’t actually finish that statement.
“...rebelling even more than usual?” Max mentally ticked off the list of things that would, in their current heightened state be mandatory for Greyhound One - close protection security detail when ‘off site’ and away from either the Tower or the Kennel (Troop speak for the house Kate and Osgood lived in), minimum 24 hour notice wherever possible to enable adequate security planning to be completed and all ‘non-essential’ events and plans postponed. No one actually felt able to ‘ban’ Greyhound One from doing something, merely strongly discourage, and that was usually only General Bambera.

“Yes.”

“Everything.”

“Everything?”

“Well, almost everything... Osgood too.”

“Oh hell.”

“She hadn’t told you.” Max chuckled as he watched his normally fairly composed Commanding Officer let rip with some rather impressive whispered swear words.

“I should have guessed.” Maria was kicking herself for missing what seemed now so obvious. Of course, if Kate Stewart was wanting to disappear from UNIT’s view for 48 hours at less than a moment’s notice, Greyhound Two would be involved as well. “It’s not their anniversary is it?”

“Kind of, but no...that’s in October I think....”

“No.” Kate softened her intransience with a kind smile at her positively saint-like PA. “I will read them first thing on Monday morning, but I am not taking them with me.”

“What do you want to take with you?” Fran held the rejected pile of files against her chest, hugging them as if to prove to her boss that she had understood and wouldn’t be trying to sneak them back onto Kate’s desk when she wasn’t looking.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?” Fran, seeing the clear look of determination in Kate’s eyes, was suddenly grateful that she’d gone with her instinct to not bring through the entire stack of accumulated paperwork that was all requiring Dr Stewart’s review and sign-off and which had been growing at an alarming rate in the last few hours. In the last 48 hours there had been no alerts, no alarms false or real. In fact, it was the calm that they’d all been hoping for after the last couple of weeks of chaos: scientists were going back to their research, returning to abandoned projects now they no longer needed to ‘work out what this does NOW and how to stop it’; soldiers had gone back to their regular shift patterns and for once were not complaining about the steady tick of the clock as they mounted guard and stood watch. The Tower was back in its groove, its rhythm rediscovered as the ‘business as usual’ activity of a business that was far from usual resumed...in triplicate, and most of it ending up in Dr Stewart’s in tray.

“You have my permission to make next week a paperwork hell…” A flash on her computer screen caught her eye - it was the reminder to go from her calendar. “Here…” She reached for her pen
and, grabbing the first piece of suitable paper she spotted, quickly wrote a short, to the point statement and signed it with a small degree of flourish. Standing up as she recapped her pen, she picked up the paper and held it out to Fran. “It’s not in triplicate, but it will be enforceable.”

Reading the note, Fran couldn’t stop herself from an involuntary smile as, written in her boss’ distinctive hand was that ‘permission’.

Smile and sign Stewart.

“I’m blocking out your diary…” Fran generally only resorted to such extreme tactics as a last resort, with Kate normally being incredibly good at somehow managing to juggle the demands that people had on her time during the working day and the continual flow of administrative work that was required of her.

“For Monday? Good idea.” Kate forced herself to smile as she unrolled her shirt sleeves, continuing to prepare to leave. “Cufflinks…” she muttered, scanning her desk while she absently patted her trouser pockets, wondering if she’d put them there. As such, she missed Fran’s wince - she wasn’t just blocking Monday…

“There, by the photo.” Fran gestured towards where Kate had carefully put her cufflinks, by the photograph she had on her desk of her and Osgood: she had a second, identical frame in her desk drawer, intended for a photograph of the boys but she was still waiting for the right picture to put in it. “And I’m blocking out your diary for the whole week.” Fran waited, not sure if Kate had heard her since she seemed rather focussed on putting her cufflinks back in that, to Fran’s surprise, were not the silver greyhounds that were normally the cufflinks that Kate was worried about misplacing.

“Fine. Damn…” Kate looked up at Fran, holding up her right arm by way of explanation. “Missed the last buttonhole.” Giving her arm a shake, Kate started again, concentrating hard on trying to manipulate the fiddly face through her double cuffs. “The whole week?”

“There’s rather a lot Ma’am.”

“Got it!” Kate had managed to get cufflink finally wiggled home, enabling Fran to see that they weren’t the silver greyhounds but a dark, perhaps navy blue, enamelled disk with little pinpricks of silver white sparkle in some sort of pattern. “Block out as much time as you need,” encouraged Kate kindly, true to her word and smiling as she spoke about this marathon signing session she was setting herself up for. “Anything else you need to tell me before I’ve gone?”

“Geneva wanted a whole list of reports approved before close of business…”

“Have I approved them?”

“You’ve not seen them.” Fran watched as her boss managed to get the second cufflink, with the same dark blue background and little sparkling dots - Kate was always open to interesting cufflinks, but they had to be an identical pair as she really didn’t want to have to cope with trying to get the correct cufflink in the appropriate cuff - the cufflink slipped home first try which meant that Fran was running out of time. “But Geneva won’t like that.” ‘Geneva’ in this context being somewhere above the mailroom but below General Bambera and her peer group, a faceless, nameless mass of intransigence not known for its willingness to negotiate on deadlines.

“Where are they?” Kate turned off her computer monitor as she pulled on her jacket, distributing glasses, phone but not Blackberry, pen and other random miscellany that definitely wasn’t work amongst her pockets and briefcase.
“Umm…” Fran was confused by Kate’s question - how was her outright refusal to take the small selection of files Fran had tried as a test of Kate’s resolve to not take any work with her reconciling with this? “On my desk...and the table…” There were, in fact, rather more files accumulating than her desk could cope with.

“Then show me the piles and then you can tell Geneva I’ve seen them but not approved them.”

“And when they ask why?”

“Tell them I’ve got some unanswered questions!” Jacket on, briefcase in hand, Kate gestured for Fran to precede her out of the office, grabbing her long forgotten about raincoat from the coat stand on her way past, the weather being obligingly warm and dry this week. “Hello files,” she declared as she stepped from her office into Fran’s, dutifully turning and looking at the stacks that were beginning to accumulate on every available surface as Fran tried to keep them semi-organised. “That do?” She turned and looked at Fran, amused as she waited for the penny to drop for the other woman. Before Fran could answer however, her phone rang.

“Dr Stewart’s office.” Kate paused when she saw the face Fran pulled, torn between wanting to make good on her promise to have left by 4pm sharp but equally curious - it really was a most impressive facial expression. “No, I’m sorry, those files haven’t been released by Dr Stewart yet.” There was another pause only this time, Fran met her boss’s gaze and rolled her eyes as she waited for a break in the stream of waffle from the other end, waving for Kate to go and start her weekend off. “Yes, she’s seen the files but hasn’t authorised their release yet.” Fran now had to look away from Kate, who was struggling not to laugh as it became clear to her that this was ‘Geneva’ calling already… “Dr Stewart has some outstanding questions that prevent her from releasing the reports until they are answered.” Fran risked looking back at her boss who appeared to have composed herself sufficiently to at least put on her raincoat and was waving goodbye in between miming applause. “Of course, I will pass on your request. Goodbye.”

By the time she’d put the phone handset back on the desk, Kate Stewart was gone… it was 3.59 and 43 seconds….

“You’re kidding me.” Maria Walsh looked up from her tablet and looked at Max whose expression was a careful blend of ‘wouldn’t dream of it Ma’am’ and ‘I have no idea what you’re talking about’.

“Ma’am?” Max was reasonably confident that he’d not done anything in the last five minutes or so since he arrived in Ops to trigger the Colonel’s ire, which meant it was most likely caused by one of the regular top three reasons: since aliens were usually announced by alarms and Troop soldiers misbehaving generally resulted in property damage, that just left one option on his mental short-list - his mother, their boss.

“Tell me this is some sort of delayed initiation ritual?” The Colonel passed him the tablet, enabling him to see the email that had caused her reaction. “Some sort of ‘congratulations on being alive despite us pissing off seven different alien races last week, including three we’d never heard of before’?”

“It was eight and four actually Ma’am…” Max passed the tablet back to her while trying to if not outright change the subject, at least delay the conversation long enough for someone else to change the subject for him. “The scientists completed the analysis less than an hour ago - what we thought was a single contact with the Gardblum on Tuesday was actually a combined force of the
“Who we knew about?” checked Maria, not because she didn’t recall the contact - she did, but then fluorescent orange excretions were rather memorable, and toxic: the traffic jams from the resultant road resurfacing works were causing all manner of problems.

“Who we knew about, but what we didn’t know was they were joined by what the Gardblum appear to call the Pogplump.”

“The Pogplump?” Maria opened her mouth to ask something else before changing her mind, the pounding of her headache shifting gear just in time to stop her shaking her head. “Wait, don’t tell me, I’ll wait for the briefing. But they make it eight and four?”

“They make it eight and four, and I believe the next level of initiation doesn’t kick in until you’re at double figures.”

“Of previously unknown alien species or alien death threats?”

“Both. And Ma’am?”

“Yes Captain?”

“In anticipation of your next question, I’m very reliably informed that Greyhound One has never seen a whole Bond film.”
“Ready?” Kate had only taken a couple of steps inside their front door before she’d seen Osgood and immediately asked her question.

“Hello…” Osgood paused, two steps from the bottom of the stairs and thought for a moment, mentally ticking off things on her to-do list, starting with printing the current chart and finishing with double checking the conservatory door was locked. “Yes, but you’ve only just arrived.”

“I’m ready if you’re ready.” That she was still wearing her work suit and had only got as far as sopping her tailored raincoat for a gorex outdoor jacket didn’t seem to bother Kate - she could drive as comfortably in her suit as anything else she owned. She’d also managed to go to work this morning having packed most of her overnight bag...what she’d forgotten or left out she’d intended to go without but Osgood had repacked it for her and added in the missing socks, hairbrush and, after changing her mind three times, some pyjamas, before adding to it inhalers, Osgood’s own clothes and the jumper that she only packed for Kate to borrow.

“Are you sure you don’t mind driving?” Although Osgood had been home since lunchtime, she’d not had the best of weeks as, in addition to getting the same small amounts of sleep her girlfriend had, she’d been struggling with frequent asthma attacks triggered by the pollution and pollen that had been accumulating in London during the warm August weather - trying to lie down to sleep somehow making everything worse.

“Of course not!” Kate waited until Os was standing securely on the hall floor, the final steps safely navigated before slipping her arms around her girlfriend’s waist and stealing a quick kiss. “I’ll drive and you sleep…” Their foreheads naturally gravitated together and touched gently, their eyes closing as they just savoured the moment of peace and quiet, of it being just the two of them with no impending disaster or alien crisis looming. “You’ve barely managed more than an hour at a time this week…”

It had only taken Osgood about five years to understand that there was no point trying to remind Kate that she’d had just as disturbed a night’s sleep during the nights when Os had spent most of the night wheezing. Not only did Kate refuse to entertain the idea of leaving Osgood to cope with her nighttime wheezing on her own in the spare bedroom, Kate was also always adamant Osgood had the worse deal since she had to not only be awake but wheeze. The least Kate could do, as far as she was concerned, was to be awake and supportive. And anyway, not that she’d admitted it at the time, but she’d found the first few of Os’s nighttime wheezing attacks terrifying enough just having to listen to her breathing as she held her, nevermind actually being the one unable to breathe. Not that she’d ever imagined being able to sleep through her lover being awake and struggling to breathe however...such behaviour felt impossible to entertain, something that could only be possible if Kate no longer loved Osgood...and that was definitely impossible for Kate to contemplate.

“Thank you.” Osgood had always been good at sleeping in cars, probably a legacy from childhood when, faced with children who wouldn’t settle her father had taken them for drives in the family car. Now, decades later, she was suddenly overcome with a yawn that she couldn’t contain when she automatically remembered their cars had modified air conditioning systems that included heavy duty air filtration systems, ostensibly to ensure that they could withstand direct alien assaults and the particulates released by some of the on-board defensive systems. It was a sensible UNIT precaution that happened to also produce Osgood-compatible air across a range of temperatures. The long drive was starting to sound blissfully close to Osgood’s current personal definition of Utopia. “Which car are we taking?”
“Which car would you like to take?” countered Kate, already knowing the answer even before she’d asked the question: they had two, both heavily customised to UNIT’s exacting standards, standards originally developed by Kate’s department in Geneva before being comprehensively rewritten and enhanced by Osgood not long after she arrived at the Tower.

“The Aston…” mumbled Os, becoming sleepier by the second now she’d allowed herself to notice how tired she was, not to mention that she’d be able to breathe nice, clean, dust and pollen free air and therefore sleep not wheeze. It wasn’t that there was anything wrong with the BMW estate car that would be their other option - it was powerful, comfortable and almost as comprehensively upgraded as the sports car...but only almost. Plus, the Aston’s seats were more comfortable to practically lie down in and you could still see the sky through the windscreen….

“Of course.” Smiling, Kate affectionately kissed the tip of Osgood’s nose before tugging her gently towards the garage, deciding that she’d steer Osgood into the car now before taking the few minutes she needed to nip to the bathroom and grab their neatly assembled bags from the hall. “But it’s your turn to convince old Mrs Fermaugh that I’m not James Bond…”

“Your phone’s ringing…” Well, vibrating actually, which was why Osgood knew that someone wanted to talk to Kate.

“I was trying to ignore it…” groaned Kate, nevertheless reaching into her trouser pocket and extracting the offending communications device. “Stewart.”

“Ah, umm…” Somewhat surprised by the venom in her voice, Max quickly snatched up the phone handset from the Colonel’s desk. “It’s Max…”

“Oh, Max.” Kate consciously tried to relax as she looked at Os to see if she had any idea why Max would be calling her now. “Everything ok? We’ve not left yet…” While she really, really didn’t want to be delayed for even a moment longer than absolutely necessary, that only applied to UNIT - if Max or Gordy needed them, that was a very different matter.

“Gordy and I are fine…” Max wondered what he could say that would see him get in the minimal of trouble with both women. “Trying to be helpful?”

“I thought it was your day off?” The petulant part of Kate wanted to end the call and throw the phone to the far side of the garage, not caring what damage she did to it, not wanting to deal with UNIT until Monday. However, that part was microscopic in comparison with her professional responsibility, so she didn’t. She did however try to step away from Osgood, something which evidently her girlfriend disagreed with as Kate found herself being tugged gently back into Os’s embrace, their hips flush together, Osgood leaning against the side of the car.

“It is, but I’m…” Max wondering what he could say that would see him get in the minimal of trouble with both women. “Trying to be helpful?”

“You mean mediate between Maria and me…” translated Kate, sinking into Osgood’s body as she tried not to sigh too loudly in frustration, prompting Osgood to quietly increase the size of aimless
squiggle she was currently tracing on her girlfriend’s back. “You can put me back on speaker Max…” Osgood conveyed her approval of Kate’s request by gently kissing the only bit of Kate she could easily reach, which, based on texture and response, was collarbone, prompting Os to kiss again, accompanied by a happy little hum. She did like her girlfriend’s collarbones….

“You’re on speaker…” announced Max after a moment, wondering why there was a humming noise on the line, “…but we seem to have some interference…” he started to glance around the Colonel’s office, wondering what might be causing it.

“That’s Os…” Kate cleared her throat pointedly and somehow managed to gently but pointedly pinch her mischievous girlfriend’s earlobe which did, regrettably, see the kisses stop as well as the humming.

“Hello Os…”

“She can’t hear you Max,” said Kate mouthing at Osgood that Max was saying hi and thus not noticing the rather long pause as Max and Maria both worked out what Kate’s comment had really meant. If they could hear Greyhound Two but she couldn’t hear them… “…but you didn’t ring for small talk.”

“No Ma’am.” Grateful that he’d at least managed to stop Greyhound One sounding like an angry lion, Maria felt she had better ‘woman up’ and take over the conversation. “It’s about your travel plans Ma’am.”

“What about them?”

“There aren’t, that is….I mean…”

“Troop don’t have any details about your weekend plans…” Max just about remembered not to finish his comment with a ‘Mum’, which did mean he forgot about a ‘Ma’am’ although that was the lesser of the two evils.

“Because I haven’t invited them.” All three heard the rising heat in Kate’s voice again, prompting Osgood to resume her hopefully calming movements and Max to take a deep breath as he tried to work out what compromise options there might be. “And don’t ask me not to go away…”

“Wasn’t going to.” Max jumped in quickly, before the Colonel could, earning him a rather fierce look but he could live with that. “But Aunt Win would…”

“That’s uncalled for Max.” Kate had interrupted before he’d finished what he had just worked out.

“I was going to say, but Aunt Win would expect us to find a solution that meant she didn’t have to ask you not to go away once it was logged that you’d refused Troop.”

“What’s Win got to do with it?” Kate wasn’t yet following what he was thinking, but was at least finally noticing that he was referring his very senior officer by her ‘family’ title, suggesting that her ire was misplaced. “Sorry for interrupting and being a grump…” It was rare for Kate to hold a grudge, especially against family. “What have I forgotten?”

“We’re currently at Bravo Two, priority blue Ma’am.” Which, knew Kate, suddenly finding a couple of things slotting into place, explained why she was meeting such resistance to wanting to go away for the weekend.

“I’m putting us on speaker,” she announced, managing to disentangle herself with efficiency and reluctance from Osgood and hand her the phone, knowing Os would find the speakerphone button
far faster than Kate would herself since, now she thought about it, her glasses were in her raincoat pocket, something else she needed to remember to grab before they left.

“Hello Colonel, Max.” Osgood held the phone out for Kate to hold while she repositioned her glasses and reached for her inhaler which, based on how her breathing was going, was probably going to be useful in a minute or two: she really, really hated a polluted pollen season.

“Maria was just reminding me we’re at Bravo Two Blue Os….”

“We are?” That Osgood also was surprised by this made Kate feel a little better - at least she wasn’t the only one who’d not immediately remembered the memo. “Oh, of course. I’d forgotten.”

Nodding to confirm that she had remembered, Osgood saw Kate was still not following, having not yet remembered. “UNIT activity puts us at Bravo One Yellow…”

That bit Kate did remember - it was hard not to given the events of the last fortnight when they’d gone from one unexpected alien interaction to another, which explained the ‘Bravo’. That there was no indication of any coordination between the various individual incidents kept them at Level One and given they could find no evidence of aggressive intent from any of their alien ‘surprises’ kept the priority level at a gently glowing Yellow. Or, put another way, lots of aliens bumping into the UK, making it hard for UNIT to keep the civilian world calm but no actual planet or humanity ending threat. Two Blue on the other hand, was rather more....well, tense if you were Troop.

“JTAC revised the Threat Level on Tuesday… we’re now included and at Heightened…” Osgood saw that Kate had caught up.

“That increases UNIT severity and priority threat assessment indices by one for the local jurisdiction…” Kate’s frown had turned into a smirk. “That bit I do remember, since I wrote it…” It was another legacy from her time in Geneva before the Tower. “But I’d forgotten we’d shifted to Heightened.”

“You probably haven’t been to Whitehall since it changed,” observed Osgood practically, knowing that few at the Tower outside of Ops received the alerts about changes to the level of status alert in the UK, with Kate generally knowing anyway because of seeing it displayed in the various MOD and Whitehall buildings she had meetings in.

“No…” Kate chewed her lip, deep in thought as she searched Osgood’s expression for clues, determined that she was not abandoning their weekend plans, especially given they’d missed the last couple of years for one reason or another and not actually managed to get away. “There’s an excellent weather forecast.”

“What if…” Max had, while Kate and Osgood worked out why he and the Colonel were appearing to make it difficult for them to just go away for the weekend, been rereading the current JTAC assessment. “What if you had an escort as far as the border?”

“And then what?” That, realised Kate, was something they could live with - in fact, not that she made a habit of thinking how to use her job to her advantage, the Friday night London rush hour would be significantly less time-consuming with an escort.

“And then nothing, well, nothing up close. Usual monitoring and extract team on standby….”” Max trailed off when he realised he could practically hear his Mum frowning, making him change tack. “What I mean is, it would be like if you stayed at home…” And now he had the Colonel glaring at him. This was turning into one hell of a day off… “...assuming you’re going to the Croft?” Finding a scrap of paper on his boss’s desk, he scribbled a quick note that he held up for the Colonel to read, a warning to never, ever refer to his the late Brigadier Alastair Lethbridge-Stewart’s remote Scottish
house and smallholding by its UNIT codename in Kate’s presence.

“How do you propose downgrading to Yellow in the next four hours or so Max?” asked Osgood, liking the sound of his plan but not seeing how they could actually achieve it before they’d got to the Scottish border.

“I don’t. But based on how the JTAC assessment is written…” He passed the tablet that he’d pulled the report up to the Colonel for her to read as he kept talking, “...I don’t think the Castle has to move to Heightened…” Which, if that was the case, meant that Scotland, which, as far as UNIT was concerned, still maintained some degree of autonomous Sovereignty on account of the 1707 Acts of Union post dating the foundation of UNIT’s predecessors and original sources of authority, was able to remain at Bravo One Yellow so long as there was no change in either UNIT or JTAC’s threat assessments.

“Colonel?” Kate liked the idea, and could see from Osgood’s face that she did too. But it had to be Maria’s decision.

“I agree with Captain Stewart Ma’am. The Castle is outside the JTAC threat zone. At the Border we shift to Bravo One Yellow and the escort can stand down. Assuming that your final destination is the, uh, I mean your…”

“It’s ok Maria, I know that the codename is ‘Doghouse’. Yes, we’re going to the Doghouse for the weekend. And in anticipation of your next question, I’m driving us in the Aston.”

“Oh.” There was a long pause while Max waited for his superior’s brain to restart and Maria prayed for the ground to open up before she finally found her voice again, “uh, yes Ma’am.”

Max scribbled something else on that handy piece of, now he looked at it, not so scrap paper he’d been using and passed another note to his Boss who, reading it quickly, gave him a nod of support, once again inordinately glad that he had advanced ‘Kate Stewart handling skills.’

“The escort will be standing by for your departure in 30 minutes Ma’am,” said Max, finally feeling as confident as he was trying to sound - that, at least, was standard operating procedure in these situations and the Colonel had already placed the necessary personnel on standby before they rang Greyhound One.

“We were planning on leaving in…” Kate glanced at Osgood’s watch, taking advantage of the opportunity to reclaim her girlfriend and hopefully, in a minute or so, reclaim their earlier relaxed and ‘off-duty’ mood as well. “...fifteen minutes?” She heard the sharp intake of breathe as, presumably, she’d just given Max and Maria a shared heart attack, although why she wasn’t entirely sure…

“Very good Ma’am.”

Max knew that she wasn’t really going to leave in fifteen minutes - Kate Stewart might be a bit unconventional in her approaches at times, not one to let the military machine slowly rumble into place if there was a better, quicker option that she wanted them to take, but she wasn’t a maverick. What she was, on occasion though, was a woman who valued her independence and liked to be spontaneous, particularly when it came to treating those that she loved. The ‘Kate Stewart’ that was wanting to leave before they appeared to be ready was the Kate Stewart who had turned up at school one weekend with rugby tickets for England-Fiji at Twickenham, wearing a Fiji Rugby Shirt and an England Scarf; the Kate Stewart who had hugged him and said ‘of course’ when he’d sniffed and stuttered his way through asking her if he could honour his parents’ wishes and have their funerals completed in Fiji. This was his Mum, trying to be ‘Greyhound One’ but wanting to be Os’ girlfriend. “Jenkins is 4 minutes away and will drive the BMW for you then Ma’am.” Unfortunately
though, as much as he might want to be that boy who went to the rugby and cheered everything as a proud English born Fijian, who honoured his Fijian heritage and parents’ wishes with her constant support and blessing, this was the moment when he had to be Captain Stewart, Troop Commander and lynchpin of the military machine that wasn’t quite rumbling fast enough for her.

“BMW?”

“You don’t like the back seat of the Aston….Ma’am.” Or maybe, realised Max, seeing the look of approval on the Colonel’s face when she pieced together what he was thinking, what he’d anticipated and planned for, he could be both, just as his Mum was.

“It doesn’t have a back seat, it has an upholstered boot,” muttered Kate, knowing that she probably shouldn’t be quite so grumpy, not after everything that had happened in the last fortnight, and not after everything Max was doing to try and keep their weekend plans on track.

“Why can’t Kate drive if we go earlier Max?” interrupted Osgood, having also heard the reaction Kate’s proposed timetable had triggered. As she asked the question, Osgood reached for the phone that Kate was holding between them and finding the mute button, took advantage of Maria and Max not being able to hear them as she kissed Kate’s neck and collarbone and wrapped the hand that wasn’t holding the phone around her girlfriend’s waist, trying to get her to if not relax, at least stop becoming even more tense.

“Because the Police escort won’t be in position.” Max remembered just in time that Osgood hated it when he called her ‘Ma’am’ and snapped his jaw shut, earning him a questioning look from the Colonel, one he had to risk waving away with a silent promise he’d explain later. “For another 26 minutes.”

“Ah.” Osgood unmuted the phone and repeated her ‘ah’ for Max and Maria’s benefit, then waited patiently, watching Kate carefully as she saw the pieces of the jigsaw come together for her, the realisation that without the police escort comprising motorbikes that slipped ahead of them to hold the traffic and block the junctions neither Kate nor Osgood could drive the car to Scotland. It was one thing to have the UNIT Land Rovers in immediately in front and behind them, a reassuring presence when the world and universe were proving to be the sort of mood that saw Kate (and Osgood, but Osgood always ignored that bit) wearing a target seemingly visible across most of time and space, but quite another to be having to force their own way through the traffic. Yes, they could both do it for short journeys but not for the hundreds of miles to the Croft, a journey that would see their UNIT and police escorts change as they moved through the different local jurisdictions.

No words needed to be spoken between them as they came to their decision, a decision that saw Kate’s desperate need to sweep Osgood up and get her into cleaner, easier air tempered by Osgood’s silent promise that she’d last a few more minutes, that she loved Kate for wanting to not waste a moment no matter what obstacles they faced.

“Max?”

“Yes Os?” He didn’t normally use the abbreviated version of her name ‘at work’, trying to only save it for family moments but he could see them too clearly in his mind, stood together, foreheads touching as if trying to be of one literal as well as metaphorical mind, each calming the other, each the other’s constant - like gravity, always there no matter where they were in the universe, even if at times it was barely detectable.

“Thirty’s lovely, thank you.”

“Thank you Ma’am.” There may be many things that Maria Walsh hadn’t yet learnt about at the
Tower in her first few months but she had, very quickly, understood that when addressing both Greyhounds ‘Ma’am’ was like sheep - the single and plural forms were the same. Or, put another way - don’t ever address Osgood as ‘Ma’am’ in a way she noticed.

“Thank you Maria, Max.” And, after a few more muttered civilities, the phone call was over and the offending phone was back in Kate’s pocket.

“You’ve got time to change…” observed Osgood, reaching out and absently fiddling with the topmost fastened button on her girlfriend’s shirt.

“Mmm…” Kate leaned her head forwards and gently kissed Osgood’s neck, maintaining the small space between their bodies. “I could…” She kissed again, a little bit higher up Os’ neck this time, clearly not that interested in getting changed.

“But?” Osgood was still fiddling with the shirt button, turning it round and round with her fingertips but not actually unfastening it, her disinclination to encourage Kate to go change confirmed when she tilted her head to make it easier for Kate to explore her neck.

“Cufflinks…” muttered Kate, using her right hand to brace herself against the car that Osgood was leaning against while she held up her left hand for Osgood to see. Deciding that Osgood would work out what she was talking about, Kate was happy to keep kissing Os...a much better use of time than changing.

“Why…” Osgood’s concentration was being sorely tested by Kate who, now she no longer needed to worry about squashing her girlfriend, was happily entertaining herself with kisses that occasionally were accompanied by hums and licks and….blinking hard, Osgood forced herself to keep her eyes open and her brain engaged with studying the cufflink that was hovering in front of her nose, back to front. Turning Kate’s shirt cuff around, Osgood saw what the problem was - the cufflinks were the sort that had the front and back faces connected with a short length of chain, making it extra fiddly to get them through the cuffs of her shirt. Most of Kate’s cufflinks were therefore now like her silver Greyhounds - an interesting ‘front’ mounted on a stiff bar that could be easily pushed through the cuffs and then held in place by turning the end of the bar through a right angle, creating the ‘back’, which was facing Osgood. “...did you put these on?” she asked, impressed with how coherent she sounded given where Kate’s licking and nipping and kissing had got her to.

“You…” Kate moved her attention back up her girlfriend’s neck, “...gave them to me…”

“I’ve given you lots of cufflinks…” Osgood started to work the cufflink loose from the shirt cuffs, practiced hands then keeping hold of the cufflink while she then neatly, well neatly-ish as Kate really was being very distracting, rolled up the sleeve to just on Kate’s elbow.

“Mmm…” Glad of her arm being free to move again, Kate shifted her weight slightly and stopped Os from asking her more questions by claiming slightly parted lips with her own as she let her left hand come to rest on the car, enabling her to now brace her weight with both arms, one either side of Osgood. “...thank you…” No matter how much she was enjoying these precious few minutes being able to just be ‘Kate’ and ‘Os’, and no matter how much she’d have gladly lost track of everything and just enjoyed being with Os, Kate kept her individual kisses short and light as she kept one ear alert for wheezing.

“For the cufflinks?” Osgood felt Kate’s slight frown in her lips when she met not Osgood’s lips but her cheek, the mystery of what exactly Kate was thanking her for prompting Osgood to turn her head just enough so she could keep talking and keep Kate’s kisses without having to worry about wheezing. “But I haven’t given you ones like these for years…” Somehow, Osgood managed to surprise herself with her own level of multitasking: without discouraging Kate’s kissing (she was
asthmatic not dead), Osgood adjusted her glasses with one hand and brought the cufflink up to her eyeline with the other, grateful for the support of the Aston behind her. “...not since…” She was about to say ‘since you moved back from Geneva’ but she caught sight of the face of the cufflink first. “...oh…”

“Oh?” This time, Kate did stop her kissing, much to Osgood’s disappointment although it was nice to be able to look at her properly, especially when Kate went cross-eyed trying to blow an errant strand of hair out of her eyes. “And stop laughing at me…” teased Kate, reluctantly conceding defeat and lifting her right hand off the car so she could tuck the hair behind her ear. “...Waste of a wheeze…”

“I remember…” began Osgood, catching hold of Kate’s hand and starting to work the cufflink loose, “...getting you these cufflinks…” before starting to fold the sleeve up so it matched Kate’s left sleeve.

“They were the first ones you gave me…”

“For when you had to ‘dress up’ like a diplomat…” It was Osgood’s turn to tease, pointedly tweaking Kate’s shirt collar with one hand and feeling the fine linen of her suit trousers with the other before glancing down at her own chinos and polo shirt, knowing that her belt and socks had question marks on them.

“A reminder to not let the sky fall…” agreed Kate, deciding she really would quite like to kiss Osgood again - it had been a very, very trying fortnight and they’d hardly had a moment’s peace, nevermind a moment’s peace together, alone and with enough energy to do anything more than try to sleep. But Osgood, it seemed had other ideas and moved her head annoyingly out of reach.

“What?”

“You need to get changed.” Osgood tried to look sternly at Kate although she knew that her ‘fierce’ look had about as much fierceness in it right now as the Winnie-the-Pooh bear sitting on the window seat in their bedroom upstairs. “You’ll feel crumpled by Carlisle.”

Recognising her girlfriend’s good sense, Kate reluctantly stepped back from the car and, accepting and pocketing her cufflinks, she opened the passenger door for Osgood to get in, knowing that in the few minutes while she nipped upstairs to change, Osgood would programme the sat nav, albeit redundantly since for most of the journey they’d only have to follow their escort, and set up the air conditioning how she wanted it. Her chivalry however, did at least earn her a kiss…

“Kate?” Osgood’s call saw Kate pause in the doorway, almost back into the house.

“Yeah?” Turning, Kate was relieved to see Osgood sat comfortably in the front passenger seat looking slightly pinked cheeked which she was confident enough to attribute to the last few minutes rather than another bout of wheezing.

“Picnic’s in the fridge… sandwiches and fruit.”

Kate didn’t need to ask, nor did Osgood need to tell her what sort of sandwiches they were.
“Dr Stewart.”

Kate looked up at Jenkins as she got out of the Aston and smiled at the softly spoken transport coordinator and her usual driver. He was, she knew, a man of few words but he was excellent at what he did and over the years they’d become used to each other, starting with his preference for as few words as possible and her preference to be called anything other than Ma’am.

“Jenkins…” Kate glanced back at the car dashboard, trying to see the clock - she didn’t think they were late. “Are you early or am I late?”

“Early Dr Stewart.” He held onto the car door as she stepped clear of it, not surprised when he saw her shove her hands in her pockets, although he hadn’t expected her to be wearing casual trousers and boat shoes but then, it was Friday afternoon and she was trying to have a holiday, or at least as much of a holiday as Greyhound One ever got.

“Problem?” Glancing back to the front door of their house, which was propped open enabling Kate to see Osgood still on the phone with her mother, Kate leaned back against the side of the car and waited for Jenkins to explain, content to just enjoy the warm August sunshine and not being underground for a few minutes.

“No Dr Stewart…” Jenkins swallowed and frowned, nervous ‘tells’ he had about speaking before, confidence gathered, he continued. “I will be driving with you to the village.”

“Ok.” Kate was concentrating on watching the leaves moving on the Rowan tree in the front garden, originally so she wasn’t adding to Jenkins’ nerves by staring at him although she’d quickly become absorbed in trying to work out which of the branches were going to benefit from an Autumn prune in order to help the tree thrive...plus it would be good if some more natural light could reach the far corner.

“I won’t be at the d…” He stumbled on the word ‘doghouse’ which was the unflattering codename for her Scottish house and corrected himself, “...house but in the village.” Mrs Fermaugh, in addition to keeping a maternal eye on the house for Kate when they weren’t there and being convinced that James Bond was alive, real and actually Kate Stewart, also provided a billet for a couple of UNIT staff if it were necessary.

“Mrs Fermaugh puts whiskey in everything…” Which wasn’t a bad thing if you were about to spend a day fishing the loch but was somewhat problematic if you were a driver like Jenkins.

“She knows I’m Chapel.” This unexpected revelation from him did distract Kate from her rowan tree.

“Really? I did not know that…” Kate was about to go and ask why he hadn’t said anything before when she saw his cheeky grin reappearing.

“Lapsed.”

“I see…” Smiling, she understood - it was an innocent ruse that didn’t cause offence to Mrs Fermaugh but didn’t compromise his situation either....and explained why he’d always thanked her and Osgood for his alcoholic Christmas and birthday tokens with what they’d taken to be genuine appreciation. “...our secret then?”
“Our secret.” His grin faltered slightly when he saw Osgood appearing at the front door, still on the phone and looking to his mind a little exasperated, prompting Kate to turn around and exchange a look with Os that said nothing but told her everything.

“My mother-in-law is a worrier,” explained Kate, turning back to Jenkins and deciding to return the confidence he’d just shared with one of her own. “It seems my father-in-law established a precedent…”

“My mother’s the worrier.” Kate almost laughed at the look of surprised shock on his face when he realised what he’d just said - not because he’d shared it with her, as he’d become comfortable sharing the odd little detail with her over the years, but because he’d talked without really thinking about it. “Gareth’s good with her.” Surprise had taken him beyond nerves it seemed, something Kate was pleased about for him but suspected it had a fair bit to do with mentioning Gareth who was a lovely chap that she’d met not long after she’d taken over at the Tower, at her first Tower Christmas party.

“I’m not, good with Os’ Mother when she’s worrying I mean…” Kate shrugged as she settled back against the car again, “…but then I’m not sure Becky’s quite forgiven my father for…actually, I have no idea what.”

“His 1977 Christmas party…” Osgood rubbed her nose, trying to stop the sneeze she felt coming, “…and all Dad would tell me was it is the reason we never had tinned fruit at home after that.” The sneeze appeared to have taken the hint and gone away. “Hello Jenkins, everything ok?”

“Y...yes… Police due in…” he glanced at his watch to double check. “Two minutes. Permission to check the car Dr Stewart?”

“Of course…” Kate held out the car key for him, knowing that he would be setting the car systems up to connect securely to his so that things like the sat nav and radio frequencies were continually up-to-date. “Becky ok?” she asked, heading back to the house with Os for one final double check they hadn’t left anything behind they might want or, and this was the more likely scenario, they’d failed to leave behind something that they didn’t really want to take with them, like UNIT.

“Yes...Mrs Fermaugh’s got a present for us.”

“Mrs Fermaugh’s giving us a present?”

“No, Mum posted her present to us to Mrs Fermaugh…” Osgood reached for Kate’s shirt buttons and started to fiddle with them. “…we’ve got to stop by and pick it up on our way…”

Neither of them wasted any time trying to work out why Becky Osgood had gone to the trouble of posting her unexpected present to Scotland for them, rather than saving it until she next saw one of them, or even just sending it to their home or the Tower. When it came to Becky Osgood, they’d both just come to accept that she did things the way she wanted them done - it had taken Kate a little while to get used to her mother-in-law’s unique form of logical and, while she still rarely fought it now, she invariably never understood or followed it either..

“We can do that when we drop off Jenkins…..” agreed Kate, pulling her phone out of her trouser pocket and pressing the speeddial for Ops as she saw Osgood’s frown, clearly being of the same mind as her.

“Greyhound One for Colonel Walsh or Captain Stewart…..ah, Captain…” Osgood couldn’t help
but smile at the pride that she saw in Kate’s eyes as she addressed Max by his rank - even when she was being a grumpy greyhound she was still a proud Mum. “...Jenkins is coming with us?” It wasn’t that she was resistant to the extra UNIT presence if it were necessary, but Kate Stewart did not take kindly to being ‘handled’ or kept in the dark by her more militaristic colleagues, even if they were family.

“Not exactly Ma’am…” Max wasn’t quite sure how to explain in a way that wouldn’t make her crosser.

“Are we on speaker Max?” asked Osgood quietly, catching hold of Kate’s hand with hers and starting to run her fingers over her girlfriend’s knuckles, trying to encourage her to relax.

“No.” Max was about to ask if she wanted him to, but Osgood carried on before he had a chance.

“Good. Max?”

“Yes Osgood?”

“Tell your Mum what’s up please?” Now he understood why Osgood had wanted to know if they were on speaker - the call was being recorded, as all calls into Ops were, but it would only be reviewed were it to be necessary as part of an incident report, by which time it wouldn’t matter that he was talking to Kate more informally than the situation would otherwise require - it was one thing however for history to know that, quite another for all of the current Ops Control shift to overhear it.

“Nothing bad, promise…” He felt his shoulders and neck relaxing as he started to just talk, rather than try and conform to the expected protocols. “And it’s not an attempt to manage you either.” He cleared his throat and ran his hand over his head, feeling the slight prickle of his close cut hair against the palm of his hand as he gathered his thoughts and waited for her reaction.

“That’s good to know…” agreed Kate, mouthing a thank you to Os as she, like Max, started to feel some of her tension dissipate. She knew she was probably raising the odd eyebrow with her behaviour but this was her one point in the year when she really, really didn’t want the constant reminder about alien threats and the dangers of space, time and everything else that she was dealing with the rest of the year. In short, she wanted one UNIT free weekend, and she was adamant it was going to be this weekend.

“But why isn’t he staying at Dumfries with the rest of UNIT?” asked Max rhetorically, knowing what she was thinking.

“Yes.”

“Because McBridie’s got the golf tournament this weekend and it only takes a few missed putts to push him to Two Yellow and if it’s the wrong player…”

“We’re back at Bravo Two Blue…” concluded Osgood, seeing the problem they now found themselves with. “I’d forgotten about the golf…” The golf was the annual Earth Handicap Championship, open to any and all humanoid aliens with a normalised golf handicap of less than 10. It was one of the highlights of the sporting calendar if you were an alien with a penchant for chasing after a little ball that you’d just hit a long way and one of the many seemingly trivial events that UNIT permitted and co-ordinated throughout the year - it didn’t do much for their on-going scientific research and often generated some minor incidents that required careful management, but went a long way to ensuring that ‘brand Earth’ was thought of fondly across Time and Space which in turn helped to ensure that Earth stayed out of most races’ ‘top ten planets to invade or destroy next’. Kate had always considered this to be a rather good value piece of diplomacy, but then she wasn’t a golf
fan so didn’t appreciate how problematic a few extra bunkers could be for a golf course if they appeared in the wrong place.

“Where is it this year?”

“Troon…” Which was, relatively speaking, just up the road from Loch Doon and the Doghouse.

“I’m not putting in an appearance…” warned Kate, wondering if that was where this was headed - normally she avoided the Golf Tournament as it was never near the Tower and since so many of her colleagues actually liked golf, she was happy for it to be handled by those who considered it a perk not a chore.

“Wouldn’t do that to you,” agreed Max promptly, the ‘Mum’ unarticulated but clearly heard by both Kate and Osgood. “But if they go to Bravo Two Blue then Jenkins will drive you both back and we’ll retrieve the Aston later…and yes, he’s driving something comfortable. If they don’t, you come back as planned and he’ll be co-ordinating the escort forming between Dumfries and the border.”

“Thank you Max…” Kate let go of Osgood’s hand and slipped her arm around her girlfriend’s waist, feeling Osgood’s arm doing the same as relieved, Osgood relaxed against Kate, her own tension easing and making her realise she’d been having unnoticed issues breathing. Knowing she really should use her inhaler, Osgood settled instead for resting her head against Kate’s shoulder and, closing her eyes, let the rhythms of Kate’s heartbeat and breathing help her gradually start to take deeper, steadier breaths. “And sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry about…” Max knew how important this weekend was, to both of them, and also knew that if the reasoning was more widely known few would disagree with their desire to have one UNIT free weekend, but he understood why they didn’t say anything - it wasn’t their style and he respected that. For years it hadn’t been as difficult to organise, hadn’t been something that had really been noticed by the UNIT machinery but that was not going to be the case this year. “Umm, can I ask a favour?”

“You can always ask Max,” reminded Kate kindly, shifting slightly so she was able to lean against the newel post of the bannister without jostling Osgood.

“Do you mind if we, Gord and I, take Jess and Soph up to the attic later? And open the skylight? It’s going to be clear tonight, and fairly dark with the trees and stuff…”

“Of course you can, just remember not to…”

“...not to climb out onto the roof, we remember.”

“And you’d like me to remember you’re not 16 still?” guessed Kate, trying not to think about the night she’d come home late from a function and seen her two sons sat on the roof tiles having climbed out through the skylight in the attic. She couldn’t really fault their desire to get their telescope positioned in the best possible place to be able to see the sky, nor accuse them of being irresponsible since it was her father’s idea in the first place and he had, at least, managed to find some climbing gear so they were all wearing safety harnesses and roped onto the internal roof trusses but that wasn’t the point...actually, she’d been pretty impressed once the shock had worn off, although her father forgetting she was visiting London that week for a series of meetings hadn’t helped - it implied that he’d have done it anyway with them and probably not told her…

“Something like that…” agreed Max, knowing the Colonel was noticing him blushing and looking amused by it.
“Have fun, and feel free to raid my study for the good drinks - the kitchen’s only got cooking brandy at the moment.”

“Awesome, thanks Mum…”

Kate and Osgood were suddenly bathed in waves of blue light as the police escort outriders arrived on the driveway.

“Escort’s here…” began Kate, only to chuckle, “…but you knew that already.”

“Yup. Anything else you’d like to mention Dr Stewart? Colonel Walsh is here if you’d prefer to talk to her?”

“Wish her a good weekend Max…and say hi to Jess for us?” Kate felt Osgood nodding in agreement against her.

“Will do. Have a good journey.”

Ending the phone call, Max looked up at his immediate superior, wondering what she was going to mention first - it hadn’t exactly been a textbook briefing update.

“Awesome?” It wasn’t what Max had thought she’d pick up on first, but Maria Walsh was deciding she’d learned a lot in the last few months, weeks and today especially and, unconventional as it perhaps was, she was just grateful she had Max around to help - unsurprisingly he was rather better at reading Kate Stewart than most.

“She, uh…” Max ran his hand over his head again, trying to work out how much he should share, trying to find the balance between keeping family stuff private and keeping on good terms with the Colonel. “…told me where the really good brandy is at home…”

“How good is really good?” asked Maria, remembering the exceptionally fine whisky she’d been offered one evening when she’d stopped by Kate’s office with her first big post-mission update.

“I’ve had a whisky with her in the office…”

Max whistled in appreciation at the admission, knowing that it would have been a good drink, glad that the Colonel was someone who shared his mother’s taste in spirits.

“That’s good whisky…but the really good stuff is in her study.”

“There is no greater compliment a mother can give,” observed Maria quietly, seeing from the computer screens that either Jenkins or Greyhound One had just brought the Aston Martin radio connection online which suggested that they were about ready to leave. “Than to encourage her children to drink the really good stuff when she’s not home.”

Returning her smile, not having thought of it like that, Max joined her in paying attention to what their screens were starting to tell them - ready or not, and fortunately they were ready, just, it was time to start their weekend.

“Max?”

“Yes Boss?”

“Are you quite sure about the Bond thing?”

“Positive. Osgood’s seen them all, more than once but not, uh, her …”
“Really?” Maria was surprised, not having expected that at all.

“Yeah...she, Osgood, likes the gadgets and picking holes in the plots with...” He caught himself just in time, “...her friend...”

“Friend?”

“The real Q...” Max wished he had the guts to take a picture of the Colonel’s face, but he didn’t think he’d survive for long if he did. “...she’s a member of Os’ chess club...”

“Of course she is...”
“Comfy?”

“Mmm…” Osgood instinctively wiggled slightly in her seat, as if checking that where she’d been sitting was, in fact, the absolutely best spot to be sat in. “Watch the road.”

“I am doing.” Kate grinned as she reached down for the gear stick and changed gear smoothly, the powerful engine responding immediately - the flyover was normally a slow grind at best and gridlock usually, but with their escort clearing the road ahead and holding the traffic on the slip roads they had the opportunity to actually do the speed limit and get as high as 4th gear. “I do check the wing mirror occasionally though…” It had taken a while for Kate to understand how she had to adjust her driving style when she’d first started to drive within UNIT convoys and with police escorts. But like everything with becoming Greyhound One, she’d learnt quickly, paying attention to how Jenkins used his mirrors and indicators when he was driving her and become fairly proficient with practice. She reached for the gear stick again, changing down this time as they slowed to merge with the main carriageway, the sounds of police whistles and car horns joining the almost ignorable wail of sirens as some drivers tried to cut ahead of them or failed to move over. “...And you sound comfortable.”

“I feel comfy,” agreed Osgood, knowing that what Kate was basing her assessment on was the sound of Osgood’s breathing or, more importantly, not being able to hear any sounds of breathing over the general vehicle noise and sirens. The air filtration was working, keeping the pollen and pollution out of the car and the air conditioning was keeping the air not too hot or dry. She’d not breathed this easily in days. “We’re trending…” Osgood looked up from her mobile phone, noticing where they were, “...on Twitter.”

“We are?” Kate concentrated on making the sweeping turn that normally took three if not four cycles of the traffic lights to crawl through, automatically smiling as they passed the police motorcycle officer who was holding the oncoming traffic for them and who, once the police car that was the last vehicle of the convoy had made the turn, would release the traffic and roar off, overtaking the convoy to get in position at a junction further along their route.

“Not UNIT, us…” Osgood refreshed the twitter feed and skimmed down through the lengthening list of tweets. “…hashtag James Bond question mark seems to be the main one. Actually, it’s not a bad picture of the car…” She selected one of the tweets and zoomed in on the picture, checking to see if it was something UNIT needed to be concerned about. “Side view, no number plate. New York Yankees fan.”

“Who is?”

“The guy who took the photograph - his reflection is on the side of the car. Can’t see us.” Not that Osgood had expected to given the angle of the photograph and the treated glass which meant the windows didn’t photograph well. But the UNIT Cyber team would still check it out, like they always checked anything of this sort. “Can see him. Oh…” She closed Twitter and opened her messages. “Gordy says hi and wishes us a good weekend.”

“We’re approaching his office…”

“Soph?”
“Hi!” Delighted with the distraction of her boyfriend on an otherwise rather slow and hot August Friday afternoon, Sophie Abillou automatically saved the article she’d been working on and looked up at him.

“You busy?”

“Not especially, why?” There was something about the way he was grinning and fidgeting that caught her attention.

“C’mon.” Gordy picked up her building pass from her desk and motioned with his head that she should come with him.

“Where are we going?” Intrigued, Soph grabbed her sunglasses and, standing up, set off with him towards the bank of lifts.

“Just outside…” Gordy pressed the lift call button again, glancing at his phone to check the time and looking at the floor indicators above the lifts, trying to anticipate which lift would arrive first. “...will only take a minute…”

“Okay…” Stepping into the lift, she was amused when Gordy pressed the button for the main lobby and then used the mirrored finish of the lift wall to check that his face was clean and his hair was neatly chaotic rather than looking like he’d gone through a hedge backwards. He wasn’t usually particularly concerned about his appearance, in fact the only other time she could remember him doing anything similar was when he’d suddenly produced a tie and started putting it on when they’d been at Chelsea… “Are we meeting your Mum?” she asked suddenly, double checking her own appearance, glad that she’d managed not to spill her lunchtime ice cream down her dress.

“Not exactly…” He pressed her building pass into her hand as the lift doors opened and then guided her through the always busy lobby towards the security turnstiles, glad he couldn’t hear the sirens yet.

“Gordy…” Through the turnstiles at the second attempt, her pass being on its last legs but not so dead she was prepared to brave Security for the replacement, Soph caught him up by the doors, reluctant to step out into the bright sunshine without knowing what she was leaving air conditioned comfort for. “What’s going on?”

“Quick…” He could hear the sirens in the distance, suggesting that they didn’t have long to wait. They stepped out onto the pavement, Soph immediately putting her sunglasses on. “Max thought you’d like to see this…”

“Max? Your brother?” She didn’t think he would have meant the old guy in the post room, but he was being sufficiently weird that she wasn’t prepared to assume anything now. “What are all these sirens for?”

“I’m going to put your window down,” announced Osgood the moment Kate had finished making the turn that meant they were now approaching the bridge over the River Thames.

“Oh?” Kate risked a quick glance across at her, wondering what Osgood was planning as opening the window would see the car filled with unfiltered air. Glad that she’d twisted her hair into a vague sort of ‘do’ with a clip due to the heat, Kate didn’t have to worry about her hair flying about when her window opened. “We’re about to pass Gordy’s office…”
“I know. Don’t wave.”

“Wonder who the big wig is…” pondered Soph as she allowed Gordy to steer her into the gap between two parked cars just as two police motorbikes roared past them, obviously planning on getting to the other end of the bridge in time to hold the traffic for whoever was in amongst all those police cars and black Land Rovers with blue lights flashing in their radiator grilles.

“Three guesses, but you’ve probably only got time for one…” teased Gordy, seeing the sleek shape of his Mum’s car in amongst the UNIT Land Rovers and police cars.

“Is that an Aston?” Soph glanced at her boyfriend, her jaw slack - she knew her cars having written features on all the luxury supercar brands at one time or another so hadn’t needed to see much more than the car’s silhouette as it came round the slight bend to identify the brand of car.

“DB9 Q Team customised Coupe with extra boffining…” confirmed Gordy, slipping his arm round her waist as the lead police car came past them, the role of the convoy in Central London more about keeping the road clear and the vehicles continually moving rather than excessive speed.

“Nice…” Soph’s reaction was instinctive at first, reacting entirely to what she was seeing on the road in front of her and his description, only for her brain to kick into gear and fill in the missing link.

“That’s your Mum’s car?”

“Told you you’d only need one guess…” He gave her waist a gentle squeeze and casually raised his left hand in an easy wave, returning his mother’s smile and wink with one of his own as the Aston swept past them…

“You didn’t wave.”

“You told me not to.” Kate glanced to her right again, catching sight of the Tower and mentally daring it to disrupt her weekend at this late stage while at the same time sending grateful thoughts to the likes of Fran, Maria and Max who had all somehow managed to work the miracles to enable her and Os to be on their way and on track for an incident free smooth and quick journey to Scotland.

“Soph looked surprised…” huffed Osgood, closing Kate’s window and turning up the air conditioning so the air quality improved again. “Hadn’t she believed us?”

“Knowing Gordy…” Kate made the left turn easily although she had to use the horn as apparently four police whistles, two motorbikes with sirens and lights, a police car with lights, sirens and horn, Jenkins in his Land Rover with grille lights, siren and horn and the Aston’s blue and red flashing grille lights weren’t enough to convince those tourists not to try and cross the road in front of them. “…he probably hadn’t told her what she was about to see.” She changed gear again, taking the opportunity to reach over and gently rub her girlfriend’s knee before returning her hand to the gear stick. “It’s what I’d have done.”

“How did you know she was going to do that?”
“Do what?”

“Wind down the window and wink at us like that,” said Soph, still buzzing with the high of seeing the car she’d heard about at Chelsea, never having doubted that it wasn’t exactly as they’d described it but finding it looked even better than her mental image had been.

“It’s what I’d have done…”

“Silly fool.” She playfully pushed against his shoulder, knowing that for all his attempts at being a laid back guy who was completely indifferent to his Mother’s job, he really was a super-proud son.

“And that…” declared Gordy, steering her back towards their office building now the excitement was over, “...is exactly what Os would have done to Mum if she wasn’t driving.”

“What?”

“Nothing.” Osgood shifted in her seat slightly, not guilty about being caught staring by Kate, but self conscious enough to return her attention to their surroundings, automatically noting that they were about to join the motorway.

“Okay…” Kate concentrated on changing lanes so they were headed for the motorway and not the North Circular. “I can never decide if this is easier to drive with or without blue lights,” she added conversationally once they were through the roundabouts and traffic lights.

“Easier,” decided Osgood promptly, using the question as a legitimate justification for returning her attention to her girlfriend. “I never like arriving in the fast lane.” She took a moment to listen to the sound of the engine as Kate, now they were on the motorway and arrived in the fast lane, changed gear. “Blue lights help.”

“Mmm…” Kate wasn’t sounding entirely convinced as she reached out for the gear stick and changed gear again, a quick glance at the speedometer confirming that this was one of the quicker escorted convoys she’d driven in. “Do we need to worry about petrol?”

“Petrol?” Osgood adjusted her glasses and frowned, sounding almost indignant. She did however, because she was Osgood and preferred to confirm her hypotheses with empirical data, reach forwards and start to use the touch screen computer mounted in the central console. “Theoretically, we could do…” Selecting sub-menus and scrolling through diagnostic reports, Osgood navigated her way through the relevant car systems, listening carefully as Kate changed gear once more as they continued their steady acceleration. “But in practice…” Kate changed gear again and the engine roar changed dramatically. “No.” If there was an unspoken ‘harrumph’ with her reply, Kate diplomatically decided she hadn’t heard it. “Jenkins will be calling.”

“He will?”

Even if she’d wanted to answer Kate’s question, Osgood couldn’t as the computer screen changed to show that there was an incoming radio message.

“Hello Jenkins, it’s Osgood.”
“Osgood.” In the privacy of his own vehicle, Jenkins permitted himself an amused grin as he acknowledged the decidedly non-protocol response. No one would dare to point out to a Greyhound that they were supposed to be following set protocols on the radios.

“That was me, sorry.” Osgood adjusted her glasses again and shot a pointed look at her girlfriend. “I was just checking the systems.”

“Of course Osgood.” It had taken a little while for him to retrain his automatic instinct to call them both ‘Ma’am’ - he still couldn’t always get it right with Dr Stewart but it had helped immensely once he’d worked out that ‘Osgood’ could be spoken with the same ‘colours’ as ‘Ma’am’.

“I promise my hands never left the steering wheel,” assured Kate, her amusement as clear in her voice as his respectful but concerned skepticism had been in his.

“You did change gear,” qualified Osgood, still a bit insulted by Kate’s petrol question. “But she didn’t go into the systems menu, I did.”

“Is everything satisfactory Osgood?” asked Jenkins finally, unwilling to actually go as far as to ask her why she was fiddling when the remote monitoring that fed back to both the Tower and his vehicle were indicating that everything was performing well with their vehicle.

“Apart from the driver’s memory, yes thank you.” Osgood wasn’t really meaning to be grumpy but after a trying fortnight when she’d felt like she was continually having to cobble together one improvised defence or diagnostic device after the other, she’d just reached her limit.

“What Osgood means is I’m in the proverbial doghouse for asking if we needed to stop for petrol,” translated Kate, not feeling able to look away from the road ahead in order to see how badly she’d upset her girlfriend.

“Thanks to Geneva we’re both in the actual doghouse tonight…” grumbled Osgood, knowing she was being a total idiot taking out her mood on Kate and, indirectly at least, Jenkins since he was having to listen to her being a grump. And she didn’t really care that the cottage in Scotland was known as the ‘doghouse’, since one codename was as good as any other, but right now it was just another thing to irk her.

“Anything to report from your side Tommy?” asked Kate, cutting across Osgood’s grumbling, not in the least bit offended as she knew the scientist was worn out to the point of exhaustion after the last two weeks of alien irritations, even without also being almost continually on the verge of an asthma attack thanks to London’s borderline toxic air quality.

“Lieutenant Bishop has taken over from Captain Stewart…” Tommy Jenkins paused for a moment when his earpiece that was connected into the police networks burst briefly into life. “…and there will be an escort change between Junctions 5 and 6, but you just keep following me Dr Stewart.” He glanced in his rearview mirror, seeing the flashing blue lights in the Aston’s radiator grille, the bright summer’s afternoon meaning the headlights weren’t necessary.

“Thanks Tommy…I’m switching to earpiece…” There was a pause while Kate took the earpiece that Osgood had suddenly produced from the small compartment that once upon a time might have been an astray and positioned it in her right ear. These were brilliant little devices that Osgood had designed shortly after she’d arrived at UNIT - now distributed throughout all UNIT vehicles, they were activated at a press of the finger and automatically connected the wearer to the vehicle’s onboard wifi and into all the appropriate communications networks based on their operational status thanks to the fingerprint identification that was built into the on button. It also connected to the wearer’s mobile phone…Kate was frequently tempted to ask Osgood if she could have one to use
whilst gardening but she never quite remembered to actually ask. “Can you thank the Met for me at
the appropriate time?”

“Of course Dr Stewart.” Recognising the end of the conversation, he closed the comm link and
began to pay closer attention to his link into the Police comms...it was all very well him saying that
all she had to do was follow him, but that wouldn’t do anyone any good if he made a mess of things
as the Metropolitan Police escort peeled off and were replaced by Thames Valley Police.

“Os?” Kate finally realised that now she was on the earpiece, unless Osgood took an earpiece as
well, she’d have no idea Kate wasn’t still having to split her concentration between driving and the
radio.

“Mmm?” Still feeling rather guilty about her little burst of bad mood, Osgood turned to look at Kate,
knowing that she shouldn’t take any offence at Kate not looking back at her.

“Try closing your eyes…” Kate knew that while Osgood was very good at sleeping in cars, she was
not very good at falling asleep in cars unless she was so exhausted that she was virtually asleep on
her feet. Even then, if Kate was driving, Osgood’s stubbornness would see her try to stay away so
as to not leave Kate ‘on her own’. For all her good intentions about having a nap on the drive up to
Scotland, now that she was actually in the car, Kate knew Osgood would be fighting to stay awake.
“I promise not to stop for petrol…” she teased, feeling foolish for not remembering that one of the
many ‘somethings’ that Osgood had designed and added to this and other cars in the UNIT fleet was
some sort of alternative power supply that Kate didn’t really understand but did mean that their miles
to the gallon increased dramatically. It didn’t mean they weren’t using the petrol in the tank, but they
used much less of it once they were travelling above 60 miles per hour, which they would now
hopefully be doing for the next couple of hours at least.

“Sorry…” mumbled Osgood, feeling her tiredness start to creep up on her again now she’d been
‘given permission’ to notice it and fall asleep on Kate. “...being an idiot…”

“Nonsense!” Kate risked a glance across at her, relieved to see that Osgood was relaxing back into
the comfortable seat again and hopefully starting to drift off into sleep. “Anyway, I’m the official
idiot in this relationship…”

“Silly…” muttered Osgood sleepily, somehow managing to snuggle into the seat, her eyes opening
just enough to see Kate’s smile as she concentrated on driving while the police cars and motorbikes
switched from the Metropolitan Police to Thames Valley Police, further confirmation that London
was now well behind them. “My silly…”

“Your silly fool,” agreed Kate quietly, hearing her lover’s breathing shift into the familiar rhythm that
she knew meant Osgood was finally getting some sleep…”Sleep well Os…”
“It’s Max…” explained Gordy, glancing at his girlfriend as he answered his vibrating phone.  “What’s up?”

“Yeah, as they went past the office…” He grinned at Soph as he took a sip of his pint, glad of the cold beer on a warm early evening.

“Really?…hang on, I’ll ask.” He angled the bottom of the phone away from his mouth slightly so that Max didn’t quite get the full force of his voice as he talked loudly across the table to Soph, needing to make himself heard over the loud group of city types that had suddenly congregated around them.  “Max asked Mum about the roof at hers…” He waited a moment, wondering if she’d make the connection, but relieved when he saw her nod and then start to grin, starting to share his train of thought.  “Max wants to know if we have plans for food yet?”

“Outside?  Not noisy?” suggested Soph promptly, wincing as the loud group suddenly got louder.

“Max?  What about….” As Gordy started to make plans with his brother, Soph sipped her own beer and allowed her mind to wander, not particularly surprised when she found herself picturing the Aston.  Just when she was starting to mentally speculate as to what exactly might be some of its customisations, she realised she was actually listening to the conversation that was drowning out her boyfriend’s chat with his brother, and it was surprisingly amusing.

“Maserati?  Nah, posers car.  Weren’t that…”

“Wasn’t a Porsche.  Lambo?”

“Wankmobiles don’t get police escorts.”

“But they do get nicked.”

“Wasn’t nicked.”

“How do you know, lambo lover?” Clearly, decided Soph as she masked her smile with her pint glass, not wanting to distract Gordy from his phone call, the four held strong views on supercars without being overly concerned about facts.

“Blue lights in its front and back.”

“It was an Aston Martin.”

“You’re thinking of James Bond…” This fine specimen of the City Male burped, loudly which appeared to be universally understood by the group that it was time to gulp the rest of their pints and leave, although whether it was for more alcohol elsewhere or trains and tubes home, Soph couldn’t tell.  Not that she cared, just pleased to have some relative peace and quiet now they’d stop showing their ignorance.  Still, at least she’d learned not to try and educate them now - the few times she’d tried when she’d first moved to London hadn’t gone so well and she’d soon mastered the art of ignoring her trouble-making inner voice that would try and encourage her to talk sense into them.

“That’s strange.” It was easy to hear Gordy’s conversation now the background noise was far less intrusive.  “I’ll call Mum and ask?”  Soph watched him drink some more of his pint while he listened to Max’s response.  “Sure, no problem.  I’ll text you.”
“Problem?”

“Max texted Os but she’s not replied…” He was about to hit the speed dial key for his mother’s mobile but paused, deciding he probably should get his girlfriend’s answer to his question before he spoke to Kate. “Would a barbecue with Max and Jess qualify as dinner outside and not noisy?”

“Sounds lovely...but you don’t have a barbecue.”

“Mum does…”

“Gordy?” Surprised to see her son’s name flash up on the dashboard, Kate checked her rearview mirror to make sure that the distance between her and the UNIT car behind her was close enough but not too cozy and pressed the button on the steering wheel that answered the call. “Gordy. Hi.”

“Is Os alright?”

Confused, Kate risked a glance to her left, a gentle smile forming when she saw Osgood turned slightly towards her, hands resting neatly in her lap, her phone safely tucked under her right hand.

“She’s asleep...problem?” Refocusing on the road ahead, or more specifically, Jenkins’ rear number plate which was leading her up the motorway, Kate started to keep an eye out for a roadsign so she could answer Gordy’s inevitable question about where they’d got to when he asked it.

“Max had texted her...is the weather still good with you?”

“It’s a lovely summer’s evening here…” Where exactly ‘here’ was still had to reveal itself mind. “Was Max asking Os for a weather report?” As much as Kate enjoyed chatting to Gordy, and hands free did mean she was theoretically ‘safe and legal’, she did find driving at speeds which would see her attracting police attention if she didn’t already have them escorting her easier without a phone call in progress.

“Oh, no. Sorry.” He cleared his throat, nerves making him feel like a schoolboy asking to ‘play out’ late because it was sunny rather than the grown up he was. “Please can, I mean may the four of us barbecue at yours for dinner?” Kate smiled when she heard him correct himself, the whole may versus can distinction being one of her father’s bugbears that he’d made a point of ensuring both boys properly understood.

“Actually you were right the first time.” Kate concentrated on following Jenkins as they changed lanes, repositioning themselves in the correct lane to switch from one motorway to the next.

“You mean we have permission but not the means?”

“No charcoal…” It had been such a wet spring that Kate hadn’t liked the look of the charcoal when she’d been at the garden centre earlier in the summer and so had not bought any charcoal. “Or sausages.” And since they had no charcoal, every time she’d sat down to make a shopping list, she’d not bothered to put sausages and other barbecue food essentials on the list as she always remembered their charcoal deficiency first. “And the chilled wine is with us.”

“If we go shopping for everything we might need, may we use the barbecue in the garden before going up onto the roof please?”
“Yes you may.” Shaking her head slightly with amusement at his antics, Kate anticipated his next question. “And I get the charcoal from the garden centre. You’re on your own for sausages.”

“Thanks.” Gordy grinned at Soph and gave her a thumbs up sign, only to see show him her phone. “Oh, you’re trending on Twitter.”

“Os mentioned that…one sec.” Kate started to brake and change down through the gears as they slowed down in order to safely navigate the rather optimistically called ‘Toll Plaza’ lanes and continue on.

“You’re on speaker, no need to talk,” said Gordy suddenly, confusing Kate but since he didn’t sound alarmed or worried, she maintained her focus on Jenkins’ rear number plate and keeping the right distance from him as they swept around the bends and up and down on the flyovers as they merged onto the next motorway. As their speed increased, she listened to the roar of the powerful car’s engine and changed gear when needed.

“Permission to talk now?” joked Kate once she and the car had settled into their spot within the convoy in the outside lane of the motorway that would now, barring any surprises, see them continue up to the Scottish border and the end of their escort.

“That was…” To Kate’s surprise, it wasn’t Gordy that was talking. “…incredible.”

“Soph?”

“Sorry Dr Stewart.” Blushing with embarrassment, Soph tried to hide behind her drink and hand, prompting Gordy to laugh and try to bat her hand away from her face.

“No need to apologise.” The spare capacity of Kate’s concentration which had enabled her to talk and drive was temporarily diverted to helping her find the itch on her shoulder that was starting to really, really irk her. “Damnit…”

“Mum? You ok?”

“Got an itch Gord, hang on.” Realising she couldn’t reach it with her left hand reaching across her, Kate checked all her mirrors, relieved that they were through the peak of the Midlands rush hour and the road was, by M6 standards, relatively quiet. Then, knowing that this itch if left to its own devices, was only going to fester into something far more irritating, she leaned slightly to her left, the steering wheel firmly in the grasp of her left hand while she reached behind her back with her right hand. After a further little shift, she managed to catch the itch with her fingertip. “Haaaaaaa….”

“Better?” Gordy couldn’t contain his grin when he heard his mother’s classic ‘oh, that feels good’ reaction to dealing with an itch. When he’d been a teenager he’d found it embarrassing, but now it was reassuringly familiar, not to mention also helping Soph regain her confidence after her earlier embarrassment.

“Much.” That her combined earpiece & microphone hadn’t dislodged during her shuffling and contortionism was testament to Osgood’s excellent design, and also meant he could still hear her clearly. “Thanks. Now, what was incredible Soph?”

“You’ve remembered.”

“She’s got a memory like an elephant’s,” stage whispered Gordy before drinking a bit more of his pint.

“Unlike my darling son who is constantly forgetting things...does he know when your birthday is
Soph?

“Ye...es...” Soph looked at Gordy, clearly remembering when it had come up during a conversation in the office canteen one day about what age you stopped buying presents for siblings. However, judging by his pinking ears and how he was chewing on his lip, he clearly didn’t remember it.

“Feel free to tell him again, regularly. And if he grumbles just ask him what happened on my birthday three years ago.”

“Mu-um...” Clearly, whatever it was that had happened was still a bit of a sore spot for her boyfriend as not only was Gordy groaning, the pinkness in his ears was starting to meet the pinkness in his neck and cheeks.

“April 17th.”

“Excellent. Now, what was incredible?”

“Your V12...” Soph’s expression was one of genuine delight as she elaborated. “540 of the finest sounding bhp around...”

“Ah.” Frowning, Kate glanced across at the passenger seat, seeing Osgood was still asleep and so unable to translate for her.

“The engine, she’s talking about the engine.”

“I’ll let Os know when she wakes up...” Kate glanced at the clock on the dashboard. “The garden centre closes at 9 in August...”

“Right, charcoal...” Gordy looked at Soph who proceeded to finish her beer, clearly still keen on the barbeque plan. “Is there anything else you want?”

“A decent damson and some plug clemati...and what do you know about wisteria?”

“Not enough.” Gordy was prompt to answer, knowing even as he’d asked the question that he’d not a hope of actually being helpful. “I had been thinking more along the lines of getting Max’s muscles to move some bags of compost...”

“Two bags of John Innes number 2 and 1, three of John Innes seed...do you still want me to rescue your azalea and hydrangea?”

“My what and what?”

“The red flowering thing on the left of the window that doesn’t have many leaves and the big white flowering thing in the corner with the big leaves,” translated Soph, not knowing very much about plants but knowing enough to have at least worked out that the little terrace at her boyfriend’s flat had, amongst other things, a japonica, an azalea and an hydrangea in pots. “That you thought were looking sad?”

“Oh, right. We’d still like you to rescue our azalea and hydrangea please.”

“Then you could pick out some bigger pots you like and two bags of Ericaceous...”

“Eric-what?”

“Ericaceous. It’s...” Kate was about to start explaining what it was before realising there was a simpler way to ask Gordy and Max to get the compost. “Nevermind. Just go and get me two bags
of each of the John Innes Composts except number 3.”

“Two of everything except number 3. We can do that.”

“Thank you.”

“That it?”

“Yes, thanks.” Kate caught sight of a passing signpost, surprised to see how far north they already were, the gardening conversation with Gordy and Soph helping to be just the right sort of distracting. “Oh, and pick some bulbs you like.”

“Bulbs?” Gordy didn’t need to admit that he had little idea what she was talking about - in the same way that Kate could never really grasp anything about Star Wars, Gordy and gardening had never mixed.

“They’re what you need for the flowers in the pots in Spring. Daffodils, tulips...pick something you like the look of...about 12 bulbs for the two new pots, and…” Kate tried to picture the pots that Gordy had managed to repot the camellias into earlier in the year with only a couple of panicked phone calls while he was doing it. “About 8 for each of the camellias.”

“They’re the ones I did?”

“Yes.”

“Cool.” Gordy turned off the speakerphone and held it back up to his ear as Soph led him through the busy pub and out into the street, thinking Max could sort the compost out while he picked out some nice bright flowers.

“And Gordy?”

“Yes Mum?”

“Let Max pick out some of the bulbs…” Not least because Max had managed to master some basic horticultural knowledge over the years and would stop Gordy doing something silly like buying hyacinths. Had she not already told him this particular shopping trip was to take place at the garden centre, she might have also worried about him buying light bulbs if he was left without more specific instructions.

“Yes Mum. Gotta go, we’re at the tube...” Blushing, Gordy tried to ignore Soph’s laughter, not sure what they were talking about since she couldn’t hear Kate’s side of the conversation but able to at least guess that it probably involved Kate knowing precisely what he’d been thinking.

“Cheeky rascal,” declared Kate with affection, knowing he was stretching the truth a bit but forgiving him. “Have a good weekend.”
“...no idea.” Osgood rubbed the end of her nose, refusing to give in to the sneeze that was building. “What are they?” She’d done quite well, considering she really wasn’t a gardener, working out what Kate had got growing in the various pots and trays that covered every available surface of the greenhouse, but this last crop were defeating her.

“Sausages.” Kate came up behind Osgood and wrapped her arms around her girlfriend’s waist, her hands impressively soil free considering they’d been ambling around the greenhouse for the last hour or so judging by how the sunset had developed. “Three varieties.”

“Is that why they’re in three separate pots?” asked Osgood, leaning back against Kate, enjoying the calmness of the greenhouse compared to the chaos of their work over the last few days at the Tower.

“Mmm…” Kate let go of Osgood with her right arm and started to gesture to the individual pots and varieties. “Cumberland on the left….pork and apple in the middle….they could have been in the same pot, but I wanted to give the Cumberlands plenty of room to coil…”

“That’s part of what makes them Cumberland,” agreed Osgood, knowing that theoretically the ‘Cumberland-ness’ came from the seasoning, but in practice she’d never had the same satisfaction from a straight Cumberland sausage that a sausage ring gave. “And there?”

“Pork and chorizo…they’re planted in ericaceous compost.”

“Ah....” Before Osgood could say anything else, she lost the battle with the sneeze... and woke up.

“Bless you.”

“Hmm?” Still more asleep than awake, it took Osgood a minute or so to work out what Kate had said, being first rather preoccupied with finding her handkerchief and then repositioning her glasses. “Thank you.”

“Good dream?” Kate was still concentrating on following Jenkins, their fast pace and police escort having helped them to eat up the miles at an enviable rate. “We’re almost at Carlisle...”

“Apparently pork and chorizo sausages need to be grown in ericaceous compost.” Osgood declared this while looking out the window in the direction of the still rather bright sky considering it was after 9pm. Satisfied that the sky was still nice and clear, she turned and shifted in her seat so she was comfortable and angled slightly towards Kate again. “Why did I dream about ericaceous compost? What does ericaceous compost have to do with sausages?”

“Umm...” Turning on the windscreen wipers, Kate tried to work out whether Os was awake enough yet to be teased, before deciding to err on the side of caution given she was driving. “That was my fault...”

“I gathered that.”

“...mostly my fault...what do you mean?”

Kate’s expression was a fairly textbook Lethbridge-Stewart ‘who me? I’m innocent’ look that Osgood had never been taken in by, although she had on occasion pretended to have been convinced.
by Gordy’s attempt when he’d been younger…

“They were planted in the greenhouse.”

“And that makes it my fault?” Kate was grinning as she protested her innocence - she couldn’t remember the last time they’d had one of their silly out-logicking each other debates…

“Cuttings. Or seeds. Either way propagation was involved.” Osgood emphasised her point with a couple of nods of her head as she became increasingly awake. “I don’t propagate. I dig.” It was Osgood’s only real contribution to the garden, and one that had been short lived as she gladly relinquished the spade and fork to a teenaged Max when it became apparent that it was while digging holes for Kate to plant into or filling pots with compost for her that he’d started to talk to Kate about his parents. It was a habit he’d maintained to this day really, often finding Kate at her most approachable when she was doing something in the garden… “Or rather dug…did dig?”

“Have dug?” suggested Kate, catching her bottom lip between her teeth as she considered the linguistic possibilities.

“Have been known to do the digging for you, when Max isn’t around.” Or you have a broken finger, thought Osgood, shifting slightly in the seat.

“Stop feeling guilty about my finger…” Kate gave the windscreen wipers another short burst, wondering what it was about flies that made them so...adhesive. “I wish I’d got that stewardess’s name…”

“She was very...blonde.” It was more than a decade ago, but Osgood was still in a bit of a huff about that particular incident in their relationship, much to Kate’s amusement, not least because she really did find Osgood’s rare bouts of ‘the huffs’ as Kate thought of them extra loveable.

“Not like that! I only meant...wait, what’s wrong with blonde?”

“Not blonde you blonde...blonde bright blonde, the sort that can only happen if you apply a peroxide based dye.”

“You mean bleach.”

“I was trying to be kind…and I like your hair. Why did you want the stewardess’s number?”

“Name. I said NAME.” Kate was struggling not to laugh but bit her lip increasingly sharply to keep her mirth contained. She was determined to not be the first one to ‘break’ this time. “You’re the one who brought up numbers, not me.”

“You are a biologist.” Osgood shifted in her seat again so she could look out of the windscreen and join Kate in focussing on the numberplate of Jenkins’ car in front of them. If she continued to look at Kate she was going to giggle and lose...she didn’t like to lose, especially not when she’d ‘won’ the last three of their little competitions.

“You make me sound like a humanities student...and I wanted to know her name so I could blame her for my finger without you bringing up her excessive blondeness…”

“I would never accuse you of being a humanities student …”

“Oh?” In retrospect, Kate should have noticed the emphasis placed on the word ‘student’, but in her defence, she was driving in the middle of a convoy that was travelling rather quickly.
“Post doc if not professor...in...something tweedy.”

“Tweeddy?” Kate knew that Os was deliberately trying to make her laugh now, all pretense at trying to have a serious conversation abandoned. “What sort of humanities subject is tweeddy?”

“Hebridean poetry in celebration of the longevity of Sherlock Holmes.”

It was no good, Osgood was just too good.

As they crossed the border into Scotland, Kate laughed.

“Do you want a sandwich?” Osgood opened the glovebox and considered the neatly packed selection of sandwiches and fruit. In deference to the car’s interior, they had cheese sandwiches with apple wedges and grapes rather than Kate’s preferred tomato. “Or a Twiglet?” Spying the bag of crunchy snack, Osgood decided that was what she was in the mood for.

“Go on then…” Kate checked the rear-view mirror and saw that Jenkins was still behind them. Since they were now in Scotland, and thanks to Max’s rather inspired interpretation of the UNIT regulations and protocols, they no longer had a police escort. While that meant their journey time was a little slower, it did make for an easier driving experience for Kate which was why Osgood was now considering feeding her.

“I will.” Opening the bag of Twiglets, Osgood noisily crunched one while looking slyly at Kate, wondering what sort of a reaction she was going to provoke.

“Oooo...ssss…” Kate proved that it wasn’t just her children that could stretch the abbreviated version of her girlfriend’s name into something that took several seconds to say, although Kate was still struggling to at least pretend that Os’s teasing was winding her up. It was actually doing the opposite, with the combination of being away from London and the more obvious reminders of UNIT like piles of work and emails being conspicuous in their absence all helping long-forgotten and ignored knotted muscles to start to relax and help them forget about being ‘Greyhounds’ and just be Kate and Os… starting with lots of good-humoured teasing. In fact, it was only because they were in the car and both being mindful that Kate did have to concentrate a bit on driving, that the teasing hadn’t developed into full-blown flirting…yet.

“Yes?” At least, that was what Osgood meant to say, but it came out rather more ‘crumbly’ as she was still enjoying her Twiglet. “Oh…” Grinning at Kate’s goldfish impression as she started to open and close her mouth like she was trying to find something to bite onto, Os pulled out another twiglet from the bag and reached across to feed it to her girlfriend, only just managing to avoid Kate claiming her fingers as well as the Twiglet. “I’m not on the menu yet!” Snatching her fingers back, Osgood shuffled in her seat and adjusted her glasses as she looked out of the passenger door window, willing her cheeks to stop flaming, wondering if Kate had heard that last word which she’d really not meant to say aloud.

“So I’m not booked in for the three course table d’hote that comes with coffee and Osgood?” Kate braked as they approached the roundabout, changing down the gears at the same time, although she did manage to sneak a quick look at Osgood who was still blushing, but her expression made Kate feel reasonably confident she’d moved on from blushes of mortification. “Pity.” Accelerating when
there was an opportunity to merge onto the roundabout, Kate concentrated on making sure she took the correct exit as it was one thing for Os to know they’d done an extra loop around the roundabout, but her pride couldn’t cope with Tommy Jenkins being a witness to it. Fortunately the traffic was relatively light and when she nearly missed the exit, there wasn’t anything stopping her cutting across the lane she should have been in and making the exit after all. Cancelling her indicator, she shifted slightly in her seat so she was more comfortable again, before asking in theatrically dubious non-specific ‘foreign’ accent, “Would ze Management permit Madame to change her reservation?”
“That was…” Soph put down her fork and picked up her wine glass, savouring the last hints of chilli and pineapple from the salsa she’d enjoyed with the barbecued sausages.

“Unexpectedly edible?” suggested Max, immediately ducking in anticipation of retaliation from his brother, only to be instead surprised by a gentle kick on the ankle from his girlfriend. “What?” Looking at Jess, Max tried his ‘innocent look’ which never worked on Kate or Os but still occasionally worked for him with his girlfriend. “It was… edible I mean.” Feeling he’d made his point, Max took a swig of his beer.

“It was very tasty,” confirmed Soph, looking at her boyfriend who was grinning despite the teasing. Gordy had stopped getting upset about his reputation for being a hopeless cook a long time ago - as a general rule, no one volunteered to eat or drink anything he’d had to ‘make’ which wasn’t instant coffee or a gin and tonic unless death from dehydration or starvation was imminent. There was, however, one exception - for some reason, he was rather good at barbecuing, as he’d just proved with the assortment of sausages and other bits and pieces he’d cooked for the four of them when they’d arrived at Kate and Osgood’s house from the garden centre. “Thank you.”

Ducking his head, certain his ears were going pink from the embarrassment of being complimented for his limited cooking skill, Gordy stood up, planning on going back into the kitchen to get another bottle of wine and another couple of beers.

“Uh…” Putting her wine glass down, Soph leaned forward and blinked. “Gordy?”

“Mmm?”

“What’s did you put in the salsa?”

“Secret recipe…” he joked, his back to the garden as he stretched, feeling pleasantly full after the meal. “Not going to tell…”

“So I’m not the only one seeing that?” asked Soph, not sure if she should be drinking more wine to calm her sudden nerves or easing off in case it was causing her to hallucinate. Either way, she’d sort of expected to have to be a bit more persuasive than that to get anyone to take her seriously. Therefore, she was rather surprised but relieved when Max immediately stood up and looked serious, clearly preparing to go and investigate whatever ‘that’ might be. “There?” She decided the wine glass was safer on the table. “I’m sure it wasn’t there before…”

Turning round, Max and Gordy saw what Soph had already seen, while Jess leaned sideways so she could see past the boys and out into the garden where, next to greenhouse, sat a blue telephone box.

“It wasn’t there before,” agreed Gordy, turning to look at his brother. “Was it?”

“No…” Max put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his work mobile phone which was still dark and quiet. “It wasn’t.”

The phone started vibrating, the screen bright and the ringer loud. It was Ops.
“Apple or grape?” asked Osgood, swallowing her last mouthful of sandwich as they continued towards Dumfries, the traffic light.

“Surprise me?” Kate held out her hand, not needing to either change gear or navigate any tight bends for a while.

“Hang on…” Frowning, not usually expecting anyone to be calling her at almost 10 on a Friday night except UNIT or family, both of whom she’d already spoken to not all that long ago, Osgood pulled her mobile out of her pocket as Kate let her hand drop onto the gear stick. “…it’s Gordy.” Answering the phone as she shifted in her seat so she could look at Kate, Osgood answered. “Hello Gordy.”

“Os!” Relieved that she’d been in mobile phone signal, Gordy gave Max a thumbs up sign before blurring out. “The Tardis is in the…blue flowers by the greenhouse.”

“Pull over.”

Osgood spoke with such calm certainty that Kate didn’t attempt to debate or question her request, nor even point out that they were less than an hour from their destination. Instead, with a quick glance in her mirrors to check that they were alone on the road aside from the suddenly reassuring presence of Jenkins still on their tail, she changed down a gear and pressed hard on the accelerator. Flicking the switch that turned on the blue lights on the principle of better safe than sorry, Kate encouraged the powerful engine to roar with all its horsepower and eat up the distance between where they were right now and the lay by parking area that would be somewhere up ahead, knowing Jenkins would follow right behind and ask questions later.

“There’s a lay by.”

“We’re stopping in less than a minute Gordy,” explained Osgood, realising now that he’d rung her because he knew Kate would be driving. “Are you all together?”

“Yeah…” Not sure whether he should be watching the Tardis or his brother or his girlfriend, Gordy kept darting his head between all three, only to stop when he realised that the near constant movement was making him feel sick. “Can I put you on speaker?”

“Of course.” Adjusting her glasses, Osgood saw the big blue and white ‘P’ signs appearing as she felt the car respond to Kate’s braking. “We’re just parking.” Osgood listened as she heard faint thumps as Gordy put his phone down, presumably on the garden table, before everything got louder again as he switched it to speaker. Osgood could now hear that the no longer faint thumps were actually the sounds of plates and dishes being scraped and stacked as somebody tidied the table up a bit. As the car slowed to a stop, Osgood tapped a button on the car’s central console and put her phone down in her lap. “Gordy? You’re on speaker in the car, we’ve stopped.”

“Gordy?” Kate put the car into neutral and engaged the handbrake, but kept the engine idling. “What’s happened? You all alright?”

“The Tardis is in the…” Waving his arms about, Gordy’s tenuous grasp of horticulture completely failed him.

“…hydrangeas,” volunteered Soph, catching hold of her boyfriend’s hand as it flew past her shoulder. “The tardis…” Soph pronounced the new word carefully, not sure what it was but grasping from how Max and Jess gave her nods and thumbs ups that she’d got it right. “…is in the hydrangeas.”
Kate and Osgood looked at each other, Kate chewing on her lower lip as she tried to restrict herself to only her top five ways she’d like all things UNIT to cease to exist as Osgood felt in her trouser pocket to make sure her inhaler was still there, while simultaneously trying to calculate the probability of such an intrusion from the Doctor being accidental and how many languages Kate would have sworn in by the time whatever this was had been sorted.

“Has anything else happened?” asked Kate as, by some tacit telepathic understanding, Kate continued to talk to Gordy (and by extension Soph and Jess) while Osgood, extracting a tablet computer from the storage tray under her seat, started to access all the current UNIT scans and intelligence to see whether the Tardis was their only visitor. Ops presumably, would start by making contact with Jenkins for a status update.

“Like what Mum?” Gordy’s tone did convey a slight suggestion that he personally thought she was being rather hard to please - wasn’t a blue police telephone box that bore a startling resemblance to the one aesthetically favoured by their neighbourhood Time Lord enough for her?

“Has the door opened? Are there any smells or sounds or clouds? And where’s Max?”

“I’m here Mum…” Max decided talking to his mother was more important and sensible than staying on hold with Ops. “…and there’s nothing else weird happening…it’s just parked.” Without waiting to check with anyone, Max ended the call with Ops and put his phone back in his pocket, earning him a horrified look from his brother which he waved away. “Ops are alerted…”

“Did you phone it in?” asked Kate, looking at Osgood for any clues as to what was going on based on what their access to Ops was telling them.

“No, they rang me, not realising I’m here.” Max rubbed the back of his neck in such a way that Soph and Jess found themselves doing a double take between him and Gordy, their mannerisms almost identical. “But I’m not on duty tonight.”

“He hung up on them!” In response to his brother’s ‘snitching’, Max retaliated in the traditional way known to all brothers: he shoved Gordy, whose noisy regaining of his balance told Kate everything she needed to know.

“That’s enough boys…” Pinching the bridge of her nose as she tried to keep her headache at bay, Kate counted to five while she waited for the boys to ‘shake and make up’ - it didn’t matter that they were in their twenties not their teens, she was still their mother and still had a very limited tolerance for roughhousing. “Who’s on duty?”

“Sam Bishop at the Tower and Maria Walsh on call,” said Osgood, listening but remaining focussed on the tablet. “They shouldn’t have called Max Gordy. Apologise please.”

“Yes Os…” Rubbing his nose, a childhood habit he’d never quite grown out of, Gordy held his hand out to his brother. “I panicked...sorry…”

“That makes two of us…” agreed Max, equally embarrassed at his over-reaction to what was a fairly understandable reaction by his ‘civilian’ brother, returning Gordy’s proffered handshake.

“Jess and Soph? Are you both okay?” asked Kate, rolling her eyes as she pictured the boys trying to recover their dignity in front of their respective girlfriends. “Nothing else happening?”

“We’re fine Dr Stewart…” Soph decided that, since the tardis was apparently connected with whatever it was that Max and Jess worked on, she’d answer the well-being part of her question and let Jess handle the ‘else’ bit.
“And it’s just sitting there…” Jess stood up and craned her neck to make sure she couldn’t see anything else of note or relevance in the garden. “...in, or on, the hydrangeas.” She sat down and frowned. “How is that possible?”

“It’s…” Osgood stopped talking and adjusted her glasses. “...the tardis.” She looked at Kate, having found what she was looking for in the streams of data the various monitoring systems were capturing. “Just the Tardis, no ruptures or voids. There’s a possible infraction attempt at the Tower…”

Kate took a moment to translate what Os had just said.

“He forgot about the Ravens?”

“Looks like it.” Osgood manipulated the sensor data so she could check something else. “Yes, two attempts I think, oh, that’s odd.”

“Odd?” Kate bit on her lower lip to stop herself from saying something that might either scare the kids on the other end of the phone or have her accused of being nauseatingly sweet.

“Yes...very odd.” Oblivious to how accidentally frustrating she was being, Osgood continued to scroll through the data.

“Os?”

“Mmm?”

“Could you share with the rest of us what very odd means?”

“Mmm?” Confused, Osgood looked up at Kate, only to remember she was the only one who could see the data. “Sorry. I think…” She looked at the data again and then passed the tablet to Kate. “Gordy? I’m just putting us on mute for a minute...” She didn’t think that what she wanted to say would necessarily be a problem for any of them to hear, but it would no doubt raise questions that were easier answered another time.

“What am I looking at?” asked Kate, reaching into the side pocket of the car door to find her glasses.

“I narrowed the sensor data to just show the global incidences of sub-space distortions in the last three hours at the frequencies which are most probably caused by the Tardis…”

“He was already here? On Earth?” Kate scrolled up and down the list, following the Tardis’ progress around the planet. “Before he bounced against the Tower’s shield and landed in the hydrangeas?”

“That’s most probable…”

“But?”

“But it’s theoretically possible there are two of them….” Osgood took her glasses off and polished them while she waited for Kate to react.

“Tip top.” Kate passed the tablet back to Osgood and pressed the ‘unmute’ button on the central console. She’d had quite enough of the Doctor’s intrusion in her weekend getaway for one evening. “Max?”

“Yes Mum?”
“Keep an eye on the Tardis for me?” Pulling her phone out of her trouser pocket, Kate winked at Osgood, confident their evening would sort itself out again fairly soon - there was a time and a place for theoretical possibilities and this wasn’t it. She was going to go with her instincts, and her instinct was telling her that this wasn’t going to be some grand or complex invasion - it was just too nice a day for it. Starting to type in a search parameter in her phone, which thanks to the phone being connected to the Aston’s on board computer meant she was actually searching the entire UNIT phone book, Kate found the number she wanted. “I’m going to stretch my legs…” she muttered to Osgood, double checking that she’d parked up with the gearbox in neutral and the handbrake definitely on.

“What’s that noise?” asked Jess in the background, the pinging noise that the car insisted on making whenever the driver’s door opened whilst the engine was still running sounding like bad news through the tinny speakers of Gordy’s mobile.

“Driver’s door open while the engine’s running,” explained Soph pragmatically, finding her nerves were generally much steadier if she concentrated on picturing Kate and Osgood sat inside the sleek sports car rather than trying to work out what she was supposed to be worried about.

“What are you going to do?” asked Max, glancing over his shoulder at the still ‘quiet’ Tardis but feeling more comfortable addressing his question at his brother’s phone. While he was happy to ‘keep an eye’ on most things in the garden for her, Max generally preferred to be accessorised with rather more than his sunglasses and mobile phone when the ‘thing’ was alien and probably a Time Lord. “Should I go and get some kit from the car?”

The surprisingly quiet and muffled thump of the driver’s door closing was immediately followed by silence as, with the driver’s door no longer open, the pinging had stopped.

“Os?” Max and Gordy shared a brief glance of concern - while it was nice that the pinging had stopped, they’d rather expected Osgood to be answering Max’s question.

“Yes?” Blinking rapidly, Osgood shifted in her seat, looked resolutely out of the windscreen and counted the line of seven trees that were obstructing the view of the valley but providing a useful windbreak for the lay by. Then she adjusted her glasses, attempted to ignore her very warm feeling ears and looked straight down at the tablet that was sitting in her lap.

“Kit, that’s in the BMW…” Max was trying not to let his increasing concern show - it wasn’t like Os to be inattentive in moments like this. “Should I go and get some?”

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” declared Osgood promptly, starting to turn towards the driver’s side of the car in order to seek Kate’s opinion, only for her to force herself to count the five telegraph poles she could see were in amongst the trees, certain her cheeks were bright red based on how glowy they felt.

“You okay Os?” asked Gordy, relieved to hear her confirmation that Max didn’t need to go and get anything from the garage - he wasn’t sure he’d be very good at being calm in this sort of crisis on his own.

“Hmm?” Osgood divided her attention between talking to Gordy and responding to Kate’s tap on the driver’s door window by lowering the electric window. “Fine thank you!” Checking that the collar of her shirt was still as it should be, Osgood carefully turned to look at Kate who finally had finished stretching the stiffness out of her legs and back and was no longer standing with her back to the car door. “Everything ok?” she asked of Kate, willing her girlfriend to either not notice the effect said stretching had had on her or, if she did notice, have the good sense to remember the four on the other end of the phone line.
“It’s ringing…”
“Ow!” Hopping in the general direction of the really irritating ringing noise, the Doctor rubbed his knee, wondering why it was supposed to make the soreness go away when all it was doing was making the hurt hurt. “Silly humans…” he grumbled, abandoning the hopping and taking three big strides forwards….

….and saying something in Gallifreyan that would have seen him in a lot of trouble had anyone who spoke Gallifreyan been in earshot when his soft and delicate bits collided with something hard and pointy that was probably a hand rail.

Doubled over, and now of the opinion that a shuffling hop was the best way to navigate the pitch black nothing that was delaying his arrival at the irritating ringing noise, he continued forwards, muttering.

“This isn’t funny you know…I can hear you laughing…ok, not laughing, but nervously smiling. It doesn’t suit you, you know…OW!”

Standing up, at least, he thought it was up but there was actually no way of knowing when the old girl was in this sort of mood, the Doctor rubbed his head without realising he was doing it.

“There is no way I found the door with my head that hard…” He stopped rubbing his head and wagged his finger into the nothingness, remembering just in time to grab hold of the door handle with his other hand to stop it rushing away again. “...Next time you want to be helpful, you could turn on the lights…” For a moment he was worried that the thump on his head had caused an irritating ringing noise in his ears before remembering that the ringing noise was the reason he’d been moving through the nothing and he could make the irritating noise stop if he opened the door and answered the telephone.

So he did.

“Is that an arm?” asked Gordy, angling his head as they all watched the door open and a hand start to wave about, clearly trying to find something.

“What’s it wearing?” asked Osgood, tapping away at the tablet as she watched the data streaming in. “The telemetry data is fascinating…” she muttered, making a mental note to investigate this further next week at the Tower - knowing the precise moment that Kate dialed the Tardis, they would be able to track the signal through all their monitoring networks and compare it to the...blinking, she realised she’d completely missed whatever it was that Gordy had just said.

“Can you repeat that please?”

“Brown?” suggested Max, surprising Jess who had given up trying to get her boyfriend to ever pay any attention to clothes. Closing his eyes, he tried to picture the Doctor’s various ‘known appearances’ that they kept on file in Ops… it wasn’t stripey so…. “tweed?”
“Does it matter?” asked Soph at the same time, looking to Gordy for some clue as to what was going on.

“Kate?” Osgood leaned across the car and called out to her girlfriend. “Probably Eleven. Max thinks he sees tweed.”

“Max thinks it’s tweed?” Alarmed by this unexpected piece of wardrobe commentary from her notoriously fabric confused son, Kate looked at Os in confusion through the open car window: he might know his hydrangea from his lupin after years of careful coaching, but one of the best bits about the Army as far as Max had been concerned, like his father before him, was that they generally told you what to wear when. “Jess? Soph? What do you think it is?”

“Umm…” Soph looked at the arm waving around, trying presumably to find the telephone that was still ringing, before looking at Jess to see what she was thinking. “Jacket sleeve, like a…”

“Dad jacket.” Jess coloured slightly when she realised she’d said that aloud - given what she didn’t really know about Gordy’s father and what she did know about her boyfriend’s, that felt the wrong thing to say. “You know, the sort of brown checked but not checked…” she gestured to Soph for some help.

“It could be tweed…oh, and there’s a shirt cuff, something light but not white.”

“Is that a gold watch?” asked Gordy, deciding that whatever it was that was happening, he was going to join in. “Why would a Time Lord wear a watch?”

“An excellent question Gordy. And Max is right,” agreed Kate, now talking to Osgood, still waiting for the Doctor to actually pick up the phone. “Anything?”

“No…wait…” Osgood tapped on something and started to scroll. “…Based on where it was, before, it’s one not two and definitely Eleven…unless it’s Three.”

It was sentences like that, realised Jess, that saw most of the scientists not really know how to behave around Osgood.

“Three? Why Three...” Osgood shrugged and adjusted her glasses. “Wait, my father?”

And counter-questions like that, knew Jess, that meant all of the scientists were secretly or not-so-secretly in awe of Kate Stewart. Not only did she follow what Osgood was saying, she understood enough to ask questions.

“Possibly. But I still think it’s Eleven.”

“Uh guys?”

“Yes Max?”

“The hand’s disappeared…and the ringing’s stopped.”

“Not on Tuesdays thank you!” Feeling quite pleased with himself, the Doctor started to move the telephone receiver away from his ear, confident that had dealt with the annoying ringing thing.
“Today’s Friday Doctor.” Kate leaned back against the side of the Aston and looked up at the sky, partly in an attempt to help her keep from saying something potentially undiplomatic and mostly to check that they weren’t yet too late. At least old Mrs Fermaugh would still be up - she did insist on listening to the late shipping forecast before she went to bed.

“Oh.” Looking suspiciously at the telephone handset, the Doctor tentatively returned it to his ear. “Kate?”

“Good evening Doctor.”

“Kate Stewart?”

“For you I’ll even admit to the Lethbridge…” Slipping her free hand into her trouser pocket, Kate couldn’t help but smile at his voice. Even though he was currently in danger of ruining her weekend plans she couldn’t really bear a grudge against her father’s quite literally oldest friend.

“This isn’t a good time Kate…” Glancing over his shoulder, looking back at the totally black nothingness, the Doctor straightened his bowtie and worked his jaw.

“I quite agree Doctor, but now that you’re here, you can stop hiding in the shrubbery.”

“Hiding in the what-ery?” Losing interest in the nothingness behind him, he stood up tall and squared his shoulders, preparing to take a peek outside again. “And we’re not hiding. Time Lords don’t hide.”

“Then could you please explain why you’re parked in my hydrangeas? For one thing, you’ve disturbed my children.”

“Parked in your…” Muttering to himself, the Doctor decided that either she’d gone totally doolally or, and since she was a Lethbridge-Stewart he really ought to give her the benefit of the doubt, she was talking perfect sense, although it would help if he knew what a hydrangea was.

“Uh, Os?”

“Yes Gordy?”

“The door’s opening again…”

“…blue things!”

“Yes, my hydrangeas are blue, due to the presence of…” Kate could feel Os’s glare on her back as she veered towards horticulture lecture territory. “…never mind. That doesn’t explain your presence in them?”

“Camouflage.”

“Camouflage?” That wasn’t what she was expecting him to say.

“For the old girl. She’s...well, I’d rather not say on this line to be honest, rather rude you see.” He looked up from Kate’s blue things, wondering whether her children had been disturbed doing something interesting. He was good at interesting.

“What’s that pointing at us?” asked Soph in a whisper, looking at Jess as her sudden authority on all things blue box related since Max and Gordy were out of whispering range, forgetting for a moment that she also had Osgood at the other end of the phone which was still sitting on the table in front of
“It should be a sonic screwdriver…” Osgood tapped away at the tablet, doing a quick bit of cross referencing to double check that the sunglasses were definitely only a Twelve thing. They were.

“Is that like a special kind of Phillips?”

“Not really.” Osgood thought for a moment, considering how the sonic screwdriver worked as far as she knew, and realised she’d done Soph a disservice. “Actually yes, it could be…”

“You’re not there.”

It took Kate a moment to work out that she was the ‘you’ and ‘there’ was presumably meant to be her patio.

“No.” It was tempting to add ‘I’m here’ but at the last second she restrained herself from indulging her inner child as she doubted it would help expedite the whole process of finding out what on earth he was doing on Earth. “My two sons are.”

“There are four of them.”

“Did your screwdriver tell you that Doctor?” Kate winced, regretting the sarcasm almost immediately - it wasn’t his fault that she’d had rather different plans for her Friday evening.

“Do you think we should wave?” asked Gordy, looking at Max for advice in the relative absence of either his Mum or Osgood. “Offer him a beer?” he asked, looking at the table to see what they had left from their dinner that could be extended to their unexpected visitor by way of hospitality. “He does eat, doesn’t he?”

“I think so…” Max looked at Jess, wanting her opinion.

“What? I don’t know!”

“But you’re the biologist!”

“I’m not that sort of biologist…”

“No Osgood either…what have you done with Yes?” The Doctor shook his screwdriver and glared at it, in case it was deciding to apply an Osgood filter without authorisation.

“Nothing yet, more’s the pity…” muttered Kate, leaning back against the car and closed her eyes, finding it necessary to count backwards from twenty in English, French and Swiss German. “Osgood’s here, with me. We’re away.” And please don’t call her ‘Yes’, thought Kate, but she managed to refrain from voicing that thought aloud.

“Obviously.” It was the Doctor’s turn to sound grumpy, which was something Kate didn’t take too kindly to. He may be her father’s oldest friend but with that tone, he was sounding more like Max or Gordy when they were tired and hungry.

“You’re a big boy Doctor, and my children don’t bite. I’m hanging up and you’re going to walk up the garden path and introduce yourself like my Father would expect you to. I’ll give you a clue, Gordy is the skinny one and Max isn’t that keen on hugs.”

“What has biting got to do with anything?” asked the Doctor, putting his screwdriver back in the inside pocket of his jacket while he waited for an answer that never came. “Kate?” Frowning, he
pulled the telephone away from his ear and glared at it in case complacency was making it keep Kate’s answer from him. “KATE?”

Realising that no amount of glaring was going to restore the telephone connection between them, he put the phone back on its cradle as he tried to work out what he was going to do next. His options were unusually limited as, on account of the Tardis’ internal distress he now couldn’t go back to the Library, swimming pool or even his bedroom. Nor, therefore, could he call Kate back as to ring her he needed the telephone number, which was written down in the little book he kept useful numbers in which was mostly Earth numbers and the combination to the safety deposit box at the bank on… giving himself a bit of a shake, he told himself to concentrate on the things that were relevant and interesting which meant these blue things of Kate’s and her children, and ignore the irrelevant and boring which meant no more thinking about, well, that.

“Uh, Os?”

“Yes Gordy?” Osgood put aside the tablet now the data streams had stabilised again - as much as she was fascinated by all manner of things scientific, now she knew that whatever had brought the Doctor to the garden was not registering on any of their scanning networks, she was remembering they’d only got half way through their snack supper, were still an hour or so from the house and Kate hadn’t had a four hour nap like Osgood had.

“The arm put the phone back.”

“Ah.” Osgood wasn’t sure what he wanted her to infer from this update - she’d expected as much when she’d heard Kate’s rather tart instruction to the Doctor, only to remember that it was unlikely that Gordy would have heard Kate. “She just used her…” Osgood chewed on her lip for a moment as she attempted to work out what was a meaningful way of describing Kate’s tone. “…’you know where the food is’ voice.”

“Really?” Gordy grimaced - he knew that tone of voice and it was never a good starting point when his mother was using that.

“Is that bad?” asked Jess, looking to Max, not yet familiar with Kate’s sharper side outside of UNIT work, and even that was fortunately only heard third hand - she was doing everything she could to avoid having to ever directly experience one of Greyhound One’s less than impressed moments.

“It’s the Mum version of Greyhound One’s ‘I’m tempted to blow you up but I’m concerned you’d enjoy it’ voice,” translated Max, sharing Gordy’s opinion that the conversation between the Doctor and Kate had perhaps ended less than well.

“That really doesn’t sound like a good voice…” agreed Soph, wondering who the owner of the arm might turn out to be, not to mention what they’d done to get on Kate’s bad side so quickly.

“It’s not that bad though,” decided Gordy, seeing Max nod in agreement, attempting to reassure Soph that on the mood scale of happy to epic warpath, his Mum’s ‘you know where the food voice’ was actually fairly mild.

“What’s worse than ‘you know where the food is’?”

“There’s the ‘I’ll pretend that you didn’t just’ voice…” Gordy smirked when he saw his brother wince - as a general rule, Max came off worse with that one than Gordy did. “That one comes with a more extreme version…”

“The ‘we’ll pretend that’…” Max was certain his ears were glowing as he remembered being on the
receiving end of that particular voice on New Year’s Day when he’d shouted from the top of the house…

“We?”

“Mum and Os…”

“…who is still here…” came the gentle reminder from the table as she reminded them that Kate was the only one who had hung up and therefore Osgood had heard their whole conversation through Gordy’s mobile phone.

“Sorry Os…” Max and Gordy shared a look that was so text-book ‘naughty school-boy’ that Jess and Soph had to look away from them to not start giggling. “Uh, what do we do?”

“Do? When?” Osgood concentrated on cleaning her glasses, finding the fading sunset was drawing her attention to the fine layer of pollen and general grime that had settled on the lenses, waiting for some clarification.

“If he comes out of the Tardis?” Gordy looked accusingly at his brother. “Max ate the last sausage just before it turned up.”

“Before the sausage turned up? But that’s….oh, I see what you mean.” Putting her glasses back on, Osgood forced herself to keep her thoughts away from anything too…alien, including time-travelling barbequed meat. “Hang on, I’ll check.” Opening the passenger door, Osgood got out of the car and, like Kate had earlier, immediately indulged in a quick stretch. Turning round, she leaned against the roof of the car. “Kate?”

“Mmm?” Startled out of her meditative day dream, Kate opened her eyes and turned around so she was looking at Osgood, resting one arm against the roof of the car as she put her other hand in her trouser pocket. “Sorry. What’s up?”

“The boys want to know what to do if the Doctor comes out of the Tardis.” Osgood smiled with a shy amusement - only Kate could ask ‘what’s up’ in that ridiculously laid back way while they were in the middle of a Doctor related something.

“Boys?” Kate raised her voice just enough for the car microphones to pick it up through the open window.

“Yes Mum?”

“There should be some Jelly Babies in the cupboard, next to the bottle of Bombay Sapphire...use a lime not a lemon too.”

“O..kay…” Max looked at Gordy to see if this was making any more sense to him, but a shake of the head suggested it was news to him too. “Since when did you have Bombay Sapphire?”

Although both fans of gin and tonics, Kate liked her G&T to taste of juniper and just a hint of citrus while Os preferred the more floral, botanical flavours, which explained the bottles of very traditional London and Plymouth Dry Gins (for Kate’s G&Ts) and more ‘contemporary’ gins from micro-distilleries (for Osgood’s G&Ts and her current ‘go to’ birthday present from the boys and her father). Bombay Sapphire just didn’t get a look in, being too floral for Kate but not floral enough for Osgood.

“Since always…” Kate looked at Osgood, not understanding what the confusion was, only to see Os mouthing something at her. “...oh, Os has just reminded me - I’m talking about the cupboard in my study…”
“The cupboard…” It was Gordy who realised what she was talking about first. “Wait, you’re talking about the cupboard you never talk about?” That wasn’t quite what he’d meant to say, but it was near enough to make his Mum laugh and Osgood to shake her head with amused affection.

“Yes, I’m talking about the cupboard I never talk about because you boys were never allowed near it when you were younger and it was at Gramps’.”

“But it’s where the Bombay Sapphire and the Jelly Babies are?”

“Yes.” Kate cleared her throat. “Everything in there is for the Doctor. It’s the stuff he likes. Oh, and if he wants a brandy...”

“...use the kitchen one?” asked Max, remembering her earlier careful distinction that it was ‘only cooking brandy’.

“Certainly not!” Kate’s horror was plainly visible in her expression and matched by Osgood’s wince as she took up the explanation and filled in the gaps for the boys.

“Your grandfather would be horrified - the Doctor might recognise the study decanter...” It had been the Brigadier’s and Kate continued his habit of keeping a very good brandy in it and always having two glasses ready, just in case. The cupboard was also her father’s - he’d kept it with him in the nursing home, a little free standing cupboard on which the decanter sat while inside it, along with the Jelly Babies and the Bombay Sapphire gin, were various other bits and pieces that he knew would interest or amuse the Doctor if he dropped by for a chat. After his death, Kate had moved the cupboard with its contents to her study and continued the tradition. Periodically, she or Osgood would go and replace the uneaten jelly babies with new ones, or add another item that had appeared in the Archive’s record about the Doctor’s interests. The latest addition had been a Fez and some custard powder with a note that the fish fingers were in the third drawer of the freezer. “…and can you take a photo of the chess board please?”

“Uh, which one?” It had been a while since Gordy had been round for a visit and usually Os had at least three chess boards set up in the dining room, but that number could grow to as many as, well, he remembered eight once, but he tried not to remember that for lots of excellent reasons, so promptly forgot it again.

“The penguins - I’m playing a game against Claire, but there’s been bad weather.” Osgood was currently playing a chess game by email with a scientist friend who was currently posted to the Survey base in Antarctica - she didn’t think she’d be able to recreate the board from memory if he started playing with the pieces - not that she could really blame him if he did, as the pieces were made of glass and quite unusual, but fitting considering where her opponent was…

“Cool…” Gordy liked the penguins chess set, although he always got confused as to which penguin was which piece being almost equally rubbish at chess as he was about knowing the difference between a chinstrap or gentoo penguin. “Uh, you’re not going anywhere right?”

“Pardon?” Kate rubbed the back of her neck, wondering what he meant by that - she did not plan on spending her entire weekend in this lay-by, even if she would at least be ’stranded’ with Osgood.

“The door’s just opened…”
Pausing to double check that he had both his screwdriver and the door key in the relevant pockets of his jacket, the Doctor had a moment of doubt. “Is it left or right?” he muttered to himself, reaching into the darkness with first his left hand and then his right hand. That was the problem with being a Time Lord who’d met virtually everyone in practically every way possible across time and space - there were a lot of introductory protocols to get muddled up. His normal approach was to disregard all of them and just do whatever seemed the right thing to do at the time, but since Kate’s reminder that these children, well two of them anyway, were the grandchildren of The Brigadier he’d felt himself feeling nervous: he wanted to get it right for his old friend. “Is it left?” He closed his eyes and reached into the darkness again with his left hand, trying to picture his old friend. Left felt familiar on its own, but wrong when he thought about greeting his old friend, whereas right… He reached into the darkness of the Tardis with his right hand and it felt…right. Pleased with himself, he opened his eyes and stepped towards the door which had opened even wider while he’d been double checking his handshaking skills. “Hint taken old girl…” he acknowledged, tapping the door frame affectionately and tried to step forwards, only to feel a weight sitting on his foot. “Tripping me up won’t help me leave…” he grumbled, reaching down around his ankles to find the offending item. “…oh.” Picking it up, he felt the shape and grinned. “Sorry Sexy…” He stepped up to the open doorway. “…thanks…” and was immediately propelled out into the garden by the slamming door.

“…is he alright?” asked Gordy, looking to Max to see what they should do - he’d always imagined that he’d meet the Doctor for the first time without having to go and retrieve him from the hydrangeas.

“Are those bananas?” asked Soph, looking to Jess to see whether she was also surprised that a bunch of bananas had landed on the lawn.

“Look like it…” agreed Jess, wondering if she needed a bio-hazard containment kit in order to retrieve them from the grass and to what extent there might be a alien flora contamination risk.

“YOU COULD HAVE JUST ASKED ME TO LEAVE!” Untangling his legs from one of the blue things, the Doctor stood up carefully and, forgetting his audience for the moment, continued to be cross with the Tardis. “There was no need to shove me like that…” He dusted himself down and considered the damage his undignified landing had done. “...and you’ve damaged Kate’s blue things.” One of the hydrangea flower heads had snapped off and was lying on the soil. Picking it up and giving it a shake to free it of the worst of the soil, he studied it for a moment then decided to take it with him, if only to help him remember where she’d parked herself. Double checking he still had the key (since she’d almost certainly locked herself but he wasn’t going to risk checking in case she repositioned herself on his foot or something equally painful) and his screwdriver, he carefully stepped around Kate’s blue things and went to find his bananas. “...which are probably bruised now, and who likes a bruised banana?” he asked of the world at large as he bent down to pick the bunch up.

“You can make banana bread with bruised bananas.”

“GAH!”

For the second time in as many minutes, the Doctor found himself not standing up, only this time he did at least land pointing in the direction of the source of his surprise. He also dropped his bananas, again.

“Sorry…” Jess tried to hide behind Max, embarrassed that she’d not only answered his evidently
“Oh.” Seeing the four people gathered by the table, the Doctor remembered Kate’s request and scrambled to his feet, his bananas clutched to his stomach. “Hello.” He walked across the grass and bounded up the steps onto the patio. “I’m the Doctor.” He juggled the bananas into his left hand and stuck his right hand out in front of him then pivoted round to his right so that his hand was pointing to the skinny one who, now he thought about it, did look a bit like the Brig and a lot like Kate. “You’re Gordy.” He shook Gordy’s hand vigorously then let go and turned to his left. “And you’re Max,” he said, shaking the hand of the not skinny one who looked nothing like either Kate or the Brig aside from being another human (which, for the majority of species, was actually enough to call them identical). “I brought bananas.” He thrust the bunch of bananas forwards with a triumphant flourish leaving Jess no option but to accept them. “They’re a bit bruised…”

“Thank you…” Taking hold of the bunch of bananas, Jess exchanged a glance with Soph, who shrugged, having no idea what the significance of the bananas was. “I’m Jess.”

“Hello Jess.” Grinning, the Doctor stuck his right hand out again to shake her hand. “I’m the Doctor.”

“Hi.” Smiling at him, Jess let go of his hand and tilted her head towards Gordy’s girlfriend. “And that’s Soph.”

“Hello Doctor,” said Soph promptly, anticipating he’d want to shake her hand and so moving around the table so she was in reach. “I’m Gordy’s girlfriend.” It was tempting to ask him to share more about himself than the fact that he was ‘the Doctor’, but based on how the boys had been talking to Kate and Osgood about him, clearly that was all that was needed with it being a sufficiently distinguishing name as well as a title.

“I, uh…” The Doctor held up the snapped off hydrangea flower he’d brought with him. “…also have this.” Now he was holding it the right way up, he realised it was actually quite pretty. “I don’t think it will reattach.” Well, it probably would - given enough sub-atomic energy and a wave manipulator it was possible to attach anything to anything else, but it would probably melt in the process.

“No…” Max looked from the hydrangea flower to Gordy, his eyes darting back to the table where his brother’s phone was still lying, presumably with their Mum and Os still listening. “…uh, Mum?”

“Yes Max?” It was Osgood that answered.

“Os! Where’s Mum?”

“Just talking to Jenkins…” Osgood looked over towards the second car, which per the protocols was parked diagonally across the lay-by, acting as a sort of barrier (visual and defensive) between the Aston and the road. Jenkins remained in the driver’s seat with the engine running and would no doubt have preferred it if Kate had sat in the car to talk to him rather than stayed standing and caught up with him and Ops through the open driver’s window. “What’s the Doctor broken?”

“Hello Yes!” The Doctor leapt up to the edge of the table and started looking around, as if expecting to find her under a side plate or in the salad bowl. Instead, he found a radish, which he chewed with a surprised look on his face, and a stick of celery that still had its flowery top on it that he put through the buttonhole on his jacket lapel. “Kate said you’re Away.”

“I, I mean, we are.” Osgood adjusted her glasses and waved to catch Kate’s attention, finding she was feeling a mixture of her usual excitement at ‘meeting’ the Doctor was tempered this time with
resignation and frustration - was it really this hard for her and Kate to have a weekend together? Just the two of them? “What have you broken?” She was tempted to ask him to not call her ‘yes’, but was still a bit too nervous to go that far.

“This.” He thrust the hydrangea head towards the sound of her voice, which of course did little to help enlighten her.

“He snapped a flower off one of the hydrangeas when he…” Max looked at Gordy, wondering what words his brother could suggest.

“Fell.” Max winced at Gordy’s choice, not sure whether this was one of those moments when being polite and sticking to the absolute truth were a bit incompatible.

“Fell?” Osgood looked visibly relieved when Kate arrived in time to hear her ask for clarification - her girlfriend was much better at working out what was going on when all they had were random bits of an incomplete jigsaw and no quantitative data. “Over or off?”

“Umm…” Gordy pulled a face at his brother when Max had made it clear that he was not having anything more to do with this particular part of the conversation. Keeping a careful eye on the Doctor who was still holding the hydrangea in one hand and eating slices of radish with the other, he hoped his Mum was within earshot. “Out of.”

“Doctor?” It was interesting, thought Soph as she watched this strange conversation continue, there was something about the way in which Kate called out the visitor’s name that meant Max, Jess and her boyfriend all visibly relaxed and the visitor? He stopped eating radish slices and looked a bit like he’d just been caught doing something he shouldn’t have while he waited for her question. “Why did you fall out of the Tardis?”

“I didn’t fall…” Soph revised her opinion - he didn’t just look like he’d been caught doing something he shouldn’t have, he also sounded like he’d just been caught doing something he shouldn’t have, and knew it. “She pushed me out.”

Kate opened her mouth to ask her next question, then shut it again as she remembered arguing with a nursery school attending Gordy about various issues that had seen mother and son holding unexpectedly polarised views such as whether trousers should be worn or not. There had been an art to navigating Gordy’s moods and bouts of willfulness that was not that dissimilar to the way to negotiate with aliens, especially those that were easily distracted, in possession of a very short attention span and yet prone to bouts of dogmatic stubbornness. Who would have thought that twenty plus years later, she’d be grateful for her son’s contrary phase? Question appropriately reframed, Kate leaned against the Aston and began to idly play with a strand of Osgood’s hair. “What has upset her enough to not tolerate your presence and also need to seek refuge in my hydrangeas?” She could easily imagine the Doctor doing something to warrant the Tardis locking him out for a while - certainly the Archive contained at least four examples of that happening during her father’s command, but usually he was locked out somewhere less...boring than her back garden, which suggested that the Tardis was concerned about her external environment as well as her inside one.

“Umm…” Absently, the Doctor twirled the hydrangea head, which combined with the celery buttonhole and his bowtie, was making him look an odd mix of debonair and whimsical. “...slow over rate and Mrs Hutching’s custard tarts.” In spite of the indignity of having to explain himself to her - it would ordinarily go against his very Time Lord make-up to trouble himself with explanations, but even Time Lords were not immune to the ‘mother’ voice - he found himself feeling contentedly full again at the memory of those quite fabulous custard tarts… “With prawn sandwiches.”
“I see.” Leaning back against the Aston, Kate lapsed into thoughtful silence, trying to work out more of the puzzle, only to be rather pointedly informed by Osgood’s gentle prod in her stomach that she might like to share her understanding with the group. “Cheldon Bonniface is a village in Norfolk…” With one single piece of the jigsaw added, Osgood’s frown disappeared and she ‘apologised’ for the prod she’d delivered to Kate’s stomach by starting to fiddle with her girlfriend’s shirt buttons. “It’s the village where Gramps spent Christmas that year we were all in Geneva…” Kate would have preferred to be able to see Max and Gordy but the faint hums she thought she heard sounded like them both sounding suitably enlightened

“I was there too!” added the Doctor, working out that she was talking about him as well once he’d realised who ‘Gramps’ was - he’d not really looked like a ‘Gramps’, but then the Doctor didn’t think Kate knew about the giant space slugs that took over the Andromeda galaxy in the 57th century. “Well, not this me, but…” Distractedly, he ate another radish slice to stop himself saying anything else, as there was something in Max and Gordy’s expressions that reminding him of Amy Pond when she thought he was talking himself into trouble.

“Yes, you were.” Kate couldn’t really be cross with him for interrupting her - she was very glad that he’d dropped by that Christmas as it meant her father wasn’t spending the holiday on his own without needing to get Win Bambera to help her get him to Geneva: he’d already said no when Kate had invited him, and it would have taken nothing short of kidnap by elite special forces to move him internationally, which at the time was more Win’s area of expertise than Kate’s. It still was Win’s area of expertise, but Kate did now have the authority to organise it, even if she found the idea extremely distasteful and something she was generally reluctant to consider ever resorting to. “Were you playing cricket today?”

“Me?” Discovering he’d eaten all the radishes, the Doctor experimented with a piece of avocado. “Bleugh!” He spat it out, not liking the mushy greenness of it.

“Avocado. Not as tasty as radishes.” Soph had very little idea what was being talked about, but had enough experience of trying to encourage small relations to talk to older relations overseas by phone to know when an enhanced audio description commentary was helpful.

“Ah.” Kate and Osgood shared a smile, all too easily able to picture the Doctor’s exaggerated facial expressions now they knew what the issue was.

“Not playing, watching. And tea eating.” Looking around for something else to eat that wasn’t going to be mushy green, he found some lettuce which was still green but at least was back to being crunchy rather than mushy. “But I was late, and the old girl’s upset.”

“Which is why you were kicked out…” Glad they’d reached some level of understanding, Kate drifted off into thoughtful silence, starting to feel the effects of a long day at the end of a long week. Distracted by Os’ fingers which had, in the course of fiddling with her shirt buttons, managed to find their way inside her shirt, Kate knew she was supposed to be trying to think her way through the next layer of the puzzle but was finding it easier and more interesting to try and work out what pattern Os was sketching on her stomach. Experience, and lovely experience at that, had taught her that no matter how random the tracing might feel, Os’s fingers were never actually moving randomly.

“You were late…” Gordy gulped when he realised not only had voiced that thought aloud, but everyone, including the Doctor, was looking at him intently.

“He said, slow over rate and a good tea.” Jess had grown up with her father playing for the local cricket team at the weekends - she knew how lethal that particular combination could be.
“But he’s a Time Lord.” This time Gordy felt he could look at Jess, since she was the scientist, and this felt very much like a moment when the scientist should have the question answering responsibility.

“That I am.” The Doctor saluted Gordy with a lettuce leaf - green wasn’t so bad if it was crunchy. And not celery.

“Doctor?” Osgood carefully extracted her fingers from inside Kate’s shirt but forestalled any protest from Kate by slipping her hands around the blonde’s waist instead as she moved from leaning against the car next to Kate to leaning against Kate, who was leaning against the car.

“Yes?” He didn’t think Kate would be pleased if he said ‘yes? yes?’ so didn’t.

“What doesn’t the Tardis like about Comets?” As she felt Kate’s hands drift around her waist and her girlfriend anchor her hands by slipping her fingers inside her waistband, Osgood shifted her feet slightly so she was hopefully not squishing Kate. As a result of that, she was rather more focussed on whether Kate was looking comfortable rather than how she’d asked her question.

“Ssshhh!” The Doctor leaned over the table and glared at the little black box Osgood’s voice was coming out from. “She’ll hear you.”

“Sorry…” Brought back to things scientific, Osgood let go of Kate’s waist and instead braced herself by resting her hands on the edge of the car roof, either side of her girlfriend’s chest. Chewing on her lip, she tried to work out what might be the issue without saying anything else that could upset the Tardis.

“Whisper then Doctor.” Kate, on the other hand, was reaching the end of her tether, both in terms of how long this conversation was lasting and what effect it was having on the position of her girlfriend’s hands and lips.

“She’s frightened of things that go bump in the vortex.”

It was, not surprisingly, Osgood that made the connection first - Kate might be better at jigsaws, but Osgood’s all around scientific instincts were unbeatable, although Kate’s fingers starting to explore the bare skin of her lower back were an effective handicap that gave others a fighting chance, but only if Osgood remembered to conclude her thinking out loud.

“My nieces don’t like thunderstorms.” She hadn’t, and had instead failed to ‘show her working’ as some of the junior scientists at the Tower would occasionally grumble when they’d have one of Osgood’s projects delegated down to them and have no idea what they were supposed to do next.

“What do your nieces do in thunderstorms?” asked the Doctor, pleased to be talking about something else and not sure why.

“Hide under the bed…” said Max, remembering the last time there had been a thunderstorm while the Lethbridge-Stewart and Osgood families mingled.

“…or in the wardrobe…” added Gordy, grinning at the ‘confession’ he’d been sworn to secrecy on at the same gathering. They might not know much about the Tardis or vortexes, but they were both very good ‘uncles’ during scary thunderstorms.

“Blue things.” Soph looked past the Doctor and at the blue box she now knew was called the Tardis and was no doubt the real reason why Gordy’s suit lining was blue telephone boxes. “The blue hydrangeas are camouflage.”
“Obviously.” The Doctor looked at the hydrangea flower he was still holding. “Whoever heard of a wardrobe big enough to take a Tardis?”

“How long?” Kate wasn’t doing very well at trying to convince Os she’d be more comfortable if she settled back against her, a frustration that she chose to vent in the Doctor’s direction.

“Would a wardrobe need to be to take the Tardis?” The Doctor held the hydrangea out to Soph who took it when he gently shook it at her. “That’s rather indelicate Kate…” Nevertheless, he took his sonic screwdriver out of his jacket pocket and started to point it at the Tardis.

“How long…” Kate was certain her back teeth were going to have grinding marks on them by Monday at this rate. “...does the Tardis plan on hiding in my shrubbery?”

In retrospect, she would eventually agree with Osgood that she should have either phrased her question differently or not been surprised when the boys sniggered.

But retrospect was about an hour down the road, another sandwich and a good couple of dozen kisses away...
“Thank you...” Accepting the bowl of custard with four fish fingers sticking out of it from Jess, the Doctor looked at Max who was holding one of those fruit communicators that had become so popular in this time. “Are you writing this down Max?” The Doctor narrowed his eyes as he realised something else, aside from the impracticality of using fruit for written communication. “Were you called Min when you were smaller?”

“What?” Confused, Max looked up from his phone, the Doctor’s question stopping his typing.

“No Doctor…” Struggling to contain her giggles at her boyfriend’s expression, Jess almost lost it completely when the tassel on the Fez the Doctor had found somewhere or other swung round and almost bopped him on the nose when he turned to look in her direction.

“My brother is known as Max as long as he’s not in trouble.”

“Ooo, what does Kate call you when you’re in trouble then.” Entertained by the idea of guessing, the Doctor sat down on top of the coffee table, his crossed legs revealing that he was wearing question mark socks. “Maxwell? No…” Frowning in thought, he considered another half a dozen suggestions that he eliminated immediately for being too alien even for a Lethbridge-Stewart. “Macclesfield? No, that’s not right....” Putting down his bowl of fish fingers and custard on the table next to him, he steepled his fingers in front of his face, his elbows on his knees and gave the matter some deep thought for a few microseconds. “What?” He was disturbed from his deep thought three microseconds before he was bored with the think when he realised that both boys were looking at him strangely. “Is it the socks?” He unfolded his legs and stuck them out at odd angles in front of him, checking they were the ones he thought they were. “No, it wouldn’t be the socks. Yes has a matching pair.” He crossed his legs again, the leather of his shoes squeaking as it moved against the polished table top.

“What’s your name Doctor?”

“That’s a very personal question Gordon James Lethbridge-Stewart.” Feeling proud that he’d got the names right, he frowned. Lethbridge-Stewarts didn’t ask questions without good reason. “Why do you ask?”

“Just curious what Mum’s going to call you when she finds out you put your feet on the table.”

Somehow, the Doctor managed to jump up and land on the carpet, Fez only slightly askew, his feet very definitely not on the table. Unfortunately, he appeared to have left his innocent look in the Tardis but the custard and fish fingers stayed in the bowl although no one was entirely clear when or how he managed to snatch them up again.

“Maximillian.”

“Bless you.” The Doctor accompanied his answer with a flourish of a handkerchief that he pulled out of his jacket pocket.

“Thank you, but I didn’t sneeze.” Max grinned when he saw the handkerchief. “And I have one of my own.” He pulled his own handkerchief, with his initials embroidered in the corner, out of his pocket. “That’s what Max is short for.”

“Nice handkerchief.” The Doctor shook his out and stuffed it back in his trouser pocket, in the process revealing that it was remarkably similar to Max and Gordy’s, only instead of initials, his had
“Osgood gave it to you.” Jess wasn’t going to be caught out twice. “White handkerchief, embroidered question mark in the corner.”

“Yes.” He realised what he’d said and understood why the four of them were looking less than impressed with him. “I mean correct, Osgood gave it to me.” He put the handkerchief in his pocket. “How did you know?” Such insight would normally suggest a temporal fold or other unhelpful something or other, but his sonic screwdriver hadn’t detected anything and he didn’t think Kate or Osgood would have tolerated such temporal misbehaviour for very long either. He ate a custard coated fish finger while he waited for one of them to start talking.

“Long story….” Jess wasn’t keen to tell it, not yet at the stage where she was more amused than embarrassed by it. In fact, she was fairly certain she would never be at that point as every time she remembered it, she found a new way to be mortified. “And it matches Max’s.”

“And mine.” Gordy produced his handkerchief from his pocket and held it up, the initials confirming that the Doctor had indeed got his name right. “But Max has more letters.” Seeing his girlfriend’s confusion, Gordy made a mental note to explain to Soph about the handkerchiefs and Jess’ rather more dramatic way of discovering about Osgood and his Mum another time.

“Maximilian Walota Joni Vonu Lethbridge-Stewart.”

“That’s a lot of trouble.” The Doctor punctuated his statement with a wave of a second custard covered fish finger before eating it in two rapid bites.

Soph was the first one to work out what the Doctor meant despite being rather mesmerised with watching him polish off his fish fingers dipped in custard with what she could only think to describe as relish.

“I don’t know Dr Stewart as well as all of you, but personally? I’d be behaving by the time she’d got to the ‘illian’.”

“That’s about right,” agreed Max, understanding now. “Do you want any more fish fingers Doctor? Or Custard?” He stood up, intending to go into the kitchen to get himself another beer as well as whatever anyone else wanted.

“Or jelly babies?” added Gordy, remembering bringing down the bag of sweets he’d found inside the cupboard along with the Fez and Bombay Sapphire Gin.

“Jelly babies?” The Doctor gave the empty bowl to Max, took off his Fez and spun it in his hands before sitting down on the couch and putting it firmly back on his head, grinning. “I’ll share, but only if you want an orange one.”

“Sure.” Reaching for his empty beer bottle, Max turned and set off for the kitchen.

“Wait!” Leaping up again, the Doctor almost tripped over the coffee table in his haste to get to Max.

“Doctor?” Concerned, Gordy and Max both looked at Jess, clearly anticipating she had some sort of biologist super-power that would tell them if there was something wrong with their unexpected guest.

“What’s that?” He prodded Max in the back.

“Oh, don’t worry Doctor, they’re just…” Gordy was about to say ‘made up aliens’ then realised that
might not be the best thing to say. “Characters from a film.” How did he explain Star Wars to a
Time Lord?

“I know that Gordon.” The Doctor shot him a long-suffering look. “K9’s favourite is R2D2. I
meant…” He looked back at the Star Wars characters printed on the back of Max’s t-shirt that he’d
not properly seen until Max had turned in order to go into the kitchen. “What…” He emphasised
what he was talking about by poking Max’s t-shirt. “….is…..” Another poke. “…that?”

“My kidney…..” grumbled Max, trying not to wince - did the Doctor have to prod so hard?

“Oh, that’s BB8,”

“Bee Bee What?”

“Oh, well…” Gordy rubbed the back of his neck and looked hopefully at his girlfriend and brother,
knowing he always got Star Wars references a bit wrong. Not as wrong as his mother mind, but a bit
wrong nevertheless, and unlike her, he didn’t really have the excuse of not seeing the films.

“How well do you know Star Wars Doctor?” asked Soph, trying not to dwell on the fact that not
only was he an actual alien confirmed, were proof over and above his unexpected arrival in the
hydrangeas needed, by hearing his two hearts beating (Jess asked, the sonic screwdriver improvised
as a sort of stethoscope with a speaker function) and watching him eat vast quantities of fish fingers
drenched in custard of all things, but he was an actual alien who knew about Star Wars.

“We saw the latest film seven times.”

“Then you…” She’d been about to say ‘then you should know about BB8 before wondering,
“We?”

“K9, your grandfather….” he gestured to Gordy as he stopped prodding Max and instead patted him
on the shoulder. “…although I think he slept through most of it after the third visit.”

“Doctor….?” Max turned around slowly, a grin beginning to form when he thought he’d worked
out what was going on. “Can you remember which film it was?”

“Of course.” He took off his Fez, spun it around in his hands again and, after a moment’s
contemplation of it, put it back on his head with a tap to make sure it was on securely. “I’ve seen all
three. I liked them more than the other Star thingy. That was just silly, especially when they kept
wearing red shirts despite those clearly being death magnets. What’s this got to do with Bee Bee
whatsit?”

“You’ve missed four films…well five if you count the animated Clone Wars one.” Max’s frown
suggested he personally didn’t, or at least, not in the ‘proper films’ list.

“What?” The Doctor looked horrified and pulled out his sonic screwdriver, testing that everything
was as it had been two minutes ago. It was, so he put it away again. “This is a disaster. How could
she do this to me?”

“She? Mum?” Max looked at Gordy, wondering if he had any idea what the Doctor was talking
about – somehow Max didn’t think Kate knew about the Doctor being a Star Wars fan…

“What? Don’t be silly, POND!” Agitated, the Doctor jumped up again, took his Fez off and put it
on the couch while he rubbed his head, as if trying to rub away memories. “All that time waiting and
I could have been watching Star Wars!”
His slump back onto the couch was incredibly dramatic and would have left the four of them lost for words and wondering what to do, except for one small detail.

He’d sat on, and squashed, his Fez.

“I’ll get the jelly babies…” said Jess suddenly, recognising the slightly crumpled expression appearing on the Doctor’s face as being not dissimilar to what her two-year old nephew looked like the moment his ice cream fell off his cone. She did not want to conduct an experiment to see whether Time Lords and toddlers shared more characteristics than just extremely expressive facial expressions.

“I’ll get the beers,” decided Gordy, following Jess’ lead and thinking being elsewhere for a moment or two while the loss of the Fez was come to terms with was a good plan.

“The wine’s finished…” added Soph, not really caring if she looked suitably subtle or not as she joined the mini exodus to the kitchen, leaving Max and the Doctor.

“Do you want to watch them?” offered Max, not sure what to say about the Fez so sticking to his more secure topic of conversation.

“Them?”

“The films…” Max gestured towards the large TV that he was reasonably confident he and Gordy used more than either their Mum or Osgood, but nevertheless had brilliant sound and was connected to the internet. “We could watch the ones you’ve not seen, or the ones you’ve seen or…” Max trailed off, not sure if the Doctor was ready for the TV series cartoons or the Lego game.

“Now?” The Doctor extracted his sonic screwdriver again and assessed the black boxes that Max had gestured towards, amazed to see how the technology had advanced again in the few years that had gone by from Earth’s perspective since he’d last visited for an extended period and stayed with the Ponds.

“If you like…” Max shrugged, trying to appear indifferent but he was actually very excited at the idea of watching his favourite films with the Doctor. “Which one do you want to see?”

“All of them.” Shifting on the couch, noticing it wasn’t as comfortable as before, the Doctor reached underneath him and pulled out the now flattened Fez. “What use is a flat Fez?” he asked rhetorically as he went to toss it away, only to remember that this was no-feet-on-coffee-tables Kate’s house, which probably also meant it was a no-throwing-Fez-even-if-it’s-squashed house too, so he put it underneath the couch instead.

“All seven?” Max saw the Doctor nod. “Uh, that could take a while…” Max cringed when he realised he’d possibly just made a really bad pun, so concentrated on turning on the TV and getting it set up.

“Good.” The Doctor stretched his feet out in front of him, only to leave them hovering above the coffee table, his hands almost tucked behind his head as he got half way towards his watching things comfortably pose when he remember the feet on coffee table situation.

“Socks are allowed…” Max had seen the Doctor pause in the reflection on the TV screen, so he turned around to look at the confused Time Lord. “Mum doesn’t like shoes on the table, but you’re okay if you take your shoes off.”

“Ah ha!” In a tangle of limbs, the Doctor removed his shoes and put them under the couch with the squashed Fez before stretching his legs out in front of him again and this time, letting them rest on the
coffee table, his hands tucking behind his head as he settled, ready for some serious film watching.

“And a while is good.” He straightened his bowtie self-consciously as he became aware of the other three coming back into the room with drinks and jelly babies. “I’m locked out for that long too.”

“What about the email to Mum?” asked Max, accepting his beer from Gordy with a grin of thanks as he headed over to sit with Jess, Gordy and Soph claiming the end of the long couch the Doctor had sat at one end of. “And do you want to watch in release order, chronological order or…” Seeing the eyerolls Gordy and Jess were sending in his direction, Max lapsed into silence, acknowledging he’d perhaps become just a little too geeky for a moment.

“Hello Kate, Hope Away is nice. I’ve been locked out til Tuesday so can I stay with you Kate because it’s a long walk anywhere else?” He wiggled his ear while he tried to think if there was anything else he needed to say to Kate. There wasn’t. “Release order first please. Ooo…” He grabbed the bag of jelly babies and tore it open, giving it a shake so he could find a red one in amongst the other colours. “Who wants to eat my orange jelly babies?”
Chapter 13

Reaching carefully into her pocket, Osgood managed to extract her mobile phone without disturbing Kate who was asleep, using her girlfriend's lap and body as a pillow. Ignoring her phone for a minute, Osgood watched her girlfriend rest, the open windows allowing the light breeze to occasionally play with a strand or two of blonde hair. Clearly this created a slight tickling sensation that Kate, although aware of, wasn’t all that bothered by as she stayed asleep but would twitch her nose and turn her face away from the irritation...turning herself more deeply into Osgood’s body until now, after a couple of hours of this shuffling, Kate’s nose was almost resting in her girlfriend’s belly button. Amazed that the vibrating phone, which must have been almost immediately under Kate’s head, hadn’t woken the blonde up, Osgood unlocked her phone to see who was sending her a message at almost 3am. It could only be UNIT or family, and after the mild chaos of the Doctor’s unexpected (by both UNIT and the Doctor it seemed) arrival in their garden in London, Osgood was fairly certain it wouldn’t be UNIT.

Seeing the message was from Max, Osgood hurried on to open it, surprised as to why he was emailing her.

And then she grinned, and relaxed before she’d fully appreciated she’d tensed up. It wasn’t a message from Max, just from Max’s phone.

Yes!

Hello. Doctor here, with Max who is doing the writing down. Say hello Max.

[Hi Os...don’t worry, everything’s ok and nothing’s broken. Say hi to Mum?]

I wanted to talk to you and Kate, but apparently that’s rude if Kate’s asleep, but writing to you like this isn’t. Why aren’t you asleep yes?

Smiling into the darkness of the room, the only light coming from her phone screen and the moonlight that was just strong enough to help the stars put on a good show in the clear night sky without drowning them all out, Osgood looked down and checked that Kate was still asleep and, judging by the faint smile on her face, hopefully enjoying pleasant dreams. She was awake because she’d spent most of the time they’d been travelling asleep in the Aston while Kate did all the driving, at Kate’s insistence. That meant, she’d argued, years ago when they’d first done this trip, that Osgood could stay up until dawn and not miss anything, while Kate was happy to then sleep for a couple of hours and be woken up by Osgood when it got to the ‘best bit’. Then, as the dawn light began to fill the sky, they’d both get a few more hours sleep together. It was funny, ‘hearing’ the Doctor worrying about why she wasn’t asleep given she couldn’t ever remember him being tired, which suggested that Max had probably spent a fair bit of time trying to talk him out of just ringing Kate when he wanted to talk to her.

Max keeps looking at me when I call you yes, Yes. Yes, write that down! Show me! [Sorry Os, he’s insisted I keep that bit in....M] You can explain yes. In triplicate.

Osgood had to bite her lip to stop herself laughing and disturbing Kate when she read that - she wasn’t sure she wanted to explain to Max why the Doctor sometimes called her ‘Yes’, remembering the first time she met this particular version of the Doctor all too clearly...as clearly as she remembered seeing Kate caught up in that...suppressing a shudder at the memory of the ‘Zygon slime’ that had been enveloping Kate, Osgood blinked and adjusted the blanket she’d put over Kate a couple of hours ago, the moonlight catching on the pattern, distracting her from the email.
The blanket had been the present from her mother that they’d collected from Mrs Fermaugh when they’d stopped in the village on the way up to the cottage, dropping off Jenkins and thanking her for keeping an eye on the place as she always did. Becky Osgood had explained, in the enclosed note, that she’d found some rather sparkly silver ‘wool that wasn’t wool’ which she’d then used to make the ‘sparkle pattern Tom had worked out for her.’ That had in turn prompted a scribbled note on the back of her mother’s note from her father, explaining in case Osgood hadn’t already spotted it, that the ‘sparkle pattern’ Becky had knitted into the inky blue-black blanket was the constellations of the night sky for late summer in the Northern Hemisphere. The perseids, he’d gone on to say, were hopefully visually plausible but obviously had to be ‘invented’ although he’d made an attempt to get the right sort of density for the Zenithal Hourly Rate at peak observation.

Looking from the blanket to the section of night sky she could see through the open window, Osgood made a mental note to email her father in the morning to thank him for his effort and confirm that he’d done a very good job of designing the Perseid Meteor Shower into her mother’s knitting pattern and that overall it was an excellent representation of the August night sky at about 3am.

Knowing Becky’s views on email, Osgood also made another mental note to telephone her mother in the afternoon - Saturday morning would see Becky fully occupied with her routine of ‘weekend shop and chores’ just as she had done every weekend that Osgood could remember, a routine that had no place in it for telephone calls, even if they were to say thank you.

Remembering that she’d actually been reading the email from Max and the Doctor, Osgood tapped her phone screen back on and continued to read the message from the Doctor.

*Max has told me why you’re not asleep. I like the sound of your car. Can I drive it? You know, I can drive, I’m very good at it. Does it help if I remind Kate I’m the President of Earth? Max is shaking his head at me. Why is Max shaking his head at me?*

Osgood winced at the mention of the Doctor’s other title - the last time Osgood knew he’d been on Earth and needed to be President was another period of time for her that came with mixed memories that she tried not to remember too often. But he wasn’t to know that, probably. As far as their records went, that was the most recent time that the Doctor had been on Earth and needed to be President, but that had been the next regeneration of the Doctor, not this one. Without extensive cross referencing across numerous sections of the Archives Black and ordinary, Osgood could only guess as to whether the Doctor currently staying in their house in London was aware of what had happened on Boat One, and Osgood didn’t guess. Instead, she made a rational assumption which was that the Doctor’s timeline was linear insofar as each regeneration was incremental and therefore, since this was the Doctor known in the Archives as Eleven, and the whole Missy-Cybermen-plane explosion-Kate free-falling without a parachute experience had involved the Doctor known to be Twelve, he hadn’t meant to be rude or insensitive. She did wonder however, since she didn’t think Max knew about that particular ‘adventure’ as he’d not yet transferred to UNIT then, why Max had been shaking his head.

*I don’t agree with Max’s theory that you wouldn’t let me drive your car because he’s not allowed to either. Time Lords and sons are quite different.*

Osgood could picture the Doctor adjusting his bowtie at that point and generally looking like he’d just presented an unbeatable argument. She wasn’t entirely sure that Kate would agree however, perhaps by first pointing out that her sons had never parked in her hydrangeas. Furthermore, she wasn’t sure that the insurance, which did permit anyone employed by UNIT to drive it, extended to cover Time Lords… and she wasn’t volunteering to ask.

Before she could return to the email, Osgood was distracted by a slight snuffling sound and a warm tickle on her stomach that experience told her was Kate trying to shift into a new position, a new
position that she’d not be able to get to because Osgood was sitting up. Glancing at her phone to check the time, Osgood saw it was about the time that Kate had wanted to be woken up anyway. Abandoning her phone for the moment by tucking it down the side of the seat cushion, she paid attention to her still fidgeting lover, not wanting to wake Kate up if she could avoid it. When the fidgeting turned to gentle headbutting though, Osgood gently pinched Kate’s nose which woke her up.

“Mmm!” Blinking sleepily, trying to come to terms with being awake, Kate rubbed her nose against her ‘pillow’.

“Hello…” Osgood’s patient greeting confirmed what Kate had just realised her nose was already telling her - her ‘pillow’ was her lover’s lap.

“Sorry…” Twitching her nose, Kate turned onto her back, taking care to neither fall off the couch nor prod Osgood with an elbow. “I was headbutting you…” Kate frowned as she tried to search her memory for any clue as to what she might have been dreaming about. This dream, whatever it was, had been something of a recurrent one for the last few years, and always ended with Kate either waking up with her head under Osgood’s pillows if she was in their bed on her own, or when Osgood had to wake her up for self-preservation. “…again.”

“You were being very gentle.” Osgood grinned as she brushed some strands of hair away from Kate’s face. “It was ticklish rather than bruising…”

“Still…” Slightly more awake now, Kate reached up and ran her fingers down her lover’s cheek and along her jaw, before tracing the lines of the strong muscles of Osgood’s neck, strong from hours of standing over microscopes and other lab apparatus over the years. Finally, having reached the open neck of Osgood’s shirt, Kate ran out of reach and could go no further. Reluctantly losing contact with Os, she started to let her hand return to her side, only for Osgood to catch hold of her fingers and guide them back to her lips so she could kiss them. “I wish I could remember what I’m dreaming about when I do that…”

“We’ll figure it out one day.” Unconcerned, Osgood kissed Kate’s fingers again and then remembered her phone. “I was going to wake you anyway…” She let Kate guide her hand round so that the blonde could see the time on Osgood’s watch without her glasses, the moonlight just enough to help the dial be readable. “…and Max emailed…” Osgood waited until Kate had carefully moved herself around and was sitting upright before continuing. “Actually, the Doctor’s got Max to write down what he wanted to say to us.”

“That’s different.” Frowning, Kate set about trying to work out why that might have happened - it wasn’t the usual way the Doctor communicated with them.

“I don’t think this is an ‘official’ visit…” explained Osgood, retrieving her phone from where she’d tucked it. “…and Max stopped him ringing you so you got some sleep.” Unlocking her phone with one hand, Osgood ran her fingers through Kate’s ‘bed head’ so she could see her without the random bits of hair in the way.

“Oh? Settling back on the couch, tucked up against Osgood’s side, Kate shifted until she’d settled in the familiar comfortable position that they’d found through years of experimentation and practice - her head resting against Osgood’s chest, Osgood’s arm around her shoulders and their legs crossed together, on top of each other’s. “I don’t know where my glasses are.”

“Do you want me to read it from the beginning? I’d only just started it.” Osgood knew Kate’s glasses were still with her things which she’d dumped in the bedroom before returning to the couch to keep Osgood company, even if she didn’t manage to keep awake. Ordinarily, Kate would have
probably gone and retrieved her glasses if Osgood told her where there were, but Osgood was comfortable where she was and didn’t want her girlfriend to move.

“Just carry on from where you’d got to…” Kate shifted her head slightly, trying to find the millimetre perfect place to rest her head where she didn’t keep finding the metal adjuster of Os’s bra strap with her cheekbone: it required a combination of repositioning her head on Os’s chest, but also just nudging the strap a fraction…there! Comfortable, Kate let out a quiet hum of contentment that she repeated, more loudly, when she felt Os’s kiss on her head.

“I’ve just solved a mystery,” muttered Osgood, kissing Kate’s head again, the email momentarily forgotten.

“That’s what the Doctor wrote?” Kate frowned and began to play with the hem of her girlfriend’s shirt while she tried to work out what the often confusingly cryptic Doctor might be talking about.

“No...just now, with you. I know what you dream about…” Osgood felt Kate’s expression shift based on how her head moved against her chest, which encouraged her to continue. “...when you’re not a truffle hunting pig.”

“You have?” This time Kate did move, lifting her head away from her ‘pillow’ and twisting around so she could look at her girlfriend. “How? What?”

“Because you just did it...you’re dreaming about us, or at least, you are sitting like you were, just now. I hope I’m there too. The headbutting is…”

“Is me trying to move your bra strap so I can get comfortable…” Kate’s frown turned into a smile as she realised not only was Osgood right based on the movement her head was making, but because it made sense - despite her often abrupt waking, she always felt relaxed and calm, like she was at peace...like she’d been able to just escape from whatever was going on and just retreat back to a simpler time when weekends were predictable and would include lazy hours spent watching films, sunsets, the boys playing cricket, or nothing at all...but whatever it was they were or weren’t watching, they’d end up sat on a couch or bench, Os’s arm around her shoulders. “That’s what I’m dreaming.”

“You’re dreaming about being asleep?” Osgood repositioned her glasses while she thought about that. “Isn’t that paradoxical?”

“I don’t think so, but I’m not necessarily asleep…” Kate caught her lip between her teeth and absently fiddled with the hem of Osgood’s shirt again as she tried to search her memory for any other clues. “Just comfortable,” she decided finally, emphasising her point by settling deeper into her girlfriend’s body again, her lips managing to find a tiny sliver of skin through the open neck of Osgood’s shirt which she kissed. “And you’re definitely there.”

“Comfortable is good,” agreed Osgood, discovering that there was a conveniently untucked bit of Kate’s shirt that she could just ease her fingers through. “I wonder what we’re doing…”

“If you don’t know after all this time…” teased Kate, following Os’ lead and finding her own way through gaps in clothing so she could start randomly trailing squiggly patterns over warm skin.

“Not now!” Osgood’s exclaimed reaction was almost comically prim. “I meant in your dream.”

“Ah.” Lapsing into silence, Kate found herself being gently lulled into what could almost have been a nap with her eyes open as the combined effect of the steady beating of Osgood’s heart under her ear and the teasing caresses of her fingers under her shirt began to take hold. “A mystery for another
“day,” she decided eventually, not sure it mattered, but then, if she was strictly honest with herself, nothing really mattered right now.

“Kate?”

“Mmm?”

“Are you falling asleep again?” Osgood wouldn’t blame Kate if she was.

“No…” Despite very nearly doing just that, Kate forced herself to wake up a bit. Contrary to how she was behaving, she really did want to be awake. “What else did the Doctor say in the email?”

“Umm…” Realising that her phone had shifted out of her reach, Osgood untangled herself from Kate with some reluctance and retrieved it. “Verbatim? There was a pause as Osgood scrolled up and down the screen until she found her place.

“You don’t have to read it word for word.”

“Alright...actually, that’s probably easier than paraphrasing... Sons are very different to Time Lords, and I’m older…”

Osgood paused in her reading out of the rather amusing, now joint recounting by Max and the Doctor of their evening so far, the gist of it being how the Doctor had immediately demanded to know what he’d missed in Star Wars, and looked sideways at Kate, wondering what was the explanation for that rather theatrical groan her girlfriend had just made.

“He might have mentioned that…”

“Who mentioned what?”

“That Dad turned the him into a Star thingy…” If there was one thing almost guaranteed, it was that Kate would never get any reference to either Star Trek or Star Wars right first time.

“You’re thinking ‘Trekkie’, and that’s my Dad, not your father.” That Tom Osgood was a Star Trek fan was not something Osgood had known until relatively recently courtesy of, of all things, his mobile phone. Osgood hadn’t thought that she would ever discover a greater surprise than her father’s delight (or her mother’s disgust) on demonstrating he could replace the conventional bleeps and chimes on his mobile phone with Star Trek catchphrases, but finding out that Kate’s father had taken the Doctor to see the Star Wars films was certainly equal to it.

“What are they called then?”

“Star Wars fans.” Osgood reconsidered what Kate had said. “And you didn’t know? Not even in his diaries?”

“Nothing.” Kate stood up and stretched, her eye having been drawn to the sky outside. “Am I right in thinking Max is now taking it upon himself to continue where Dad left off and show the rest of the films to the Doctor?”

Struggling to focus on the email, having been distracted for a second time since they’d left London by Kate’s arse as she stretched right in front of her, Osgood scanned the remainder of the email
which, although it didn’t say so explicitly, was clearly written by Gordy as the style was different.

“Pretty much.” Osgood locked her phone screen and put it in her pocket as she stood up and moved to stand behind Kate, her hands slipping around her girlfriend’s waist as she rested her chin on Kate’s shoulder, looking out into the small garden and across the hills and Loch into the dark night sky beyond. “He might have also been rude about silly romantic types who want to look at vortex smog.”

“Vortex smog?” Kate leaned back a fraction and closed her eyes, savouring the feel of Os’s body and trying not to think how long it had been since they’d last been able to just ‘be’.

“What the Time Lords call the sort of space debris a comet leaves in its orbit.”

Gordy’s section of the email had explained that Max and the Doctor had started writing the email about the same time Kate and Osgood had made it to the village, only to be distracted from then finishing it by the need to watch Star Wars films. After the second film, which had seen the Doctor surprise them all when he began quoting lines he’d evidently found memorable, they’d left the Doctor to rewatch the third film and the two couples were going up onto the roof to look at the stars and see a bit of the Perseid Meteor Shower. It was at that point that the Doctor had finally provided some sort of explanation for why he’d made the unexpected appearance at the house.

“And it’s what goes bump in the vortex...” concluded Kate, running her hands over her girlfriend’s, not actually sure if she was trying to put up a token resistance or encouraging a not very stealthy attempt by Osgood to now completely untuck her shirt.

“Mmm…” Osgood’s intention had been to just kiss whichever bit of Kate was in easy reach, only to discover that the spot she picked was that spot that made Kate hum and sigh in that particular way that did extra nice funny things to Osgood’s insides....

So she did it again.

“Ooo....sss...” Kate surprised herself with how much willpower she managed to draw on as, when she felt Osgood’s lips brush against her neck again, she somehow leaned away just enough that she was able to retain some focus to think.

“Mmmm?” Abandoning any attempts at being even remotely stealthy, Osgood continued to explore Kate’s neck and jaw with gentle kisses and licks while her hands worked out how to unbutton the bottom of her girlfriend’s shirt.

“Haven’t we a sky to see?”
Chapter 14

“Can I ask a stupid question?” asked Soph, as she leaned back against Gordy and looked up at the rather amazing display of stars they were watching from the top of the house, the surrounding roof and garden helping to make the night seem extra dark despite still being in relatively central-ish London.

“Sure…” Gordy ran his hands up and down his girlfriend’s bare arms, partly to make sure she didn’t get cold in the cooling summer’s night but also to encourage her. “Although in this family stupid questions usually have the most complex answers…and might involve signing the Official Secrets Act.”

“She already has.” Max had spoken before he’d really thought through whether that was a good idea, although Jess’s rather sharp and swift elbow to his stomach told him her opinion on the subject immediately. “Sorry Soph.” Max looked at his brother’s girlfriend and smiled apologetically. “I only know because I was working at the Flower Show.”

Once it became clear to Max that Gordy probably wanted to bring his new girlfriend with him to see Ossy the Iris, Max had adjusted Troop’s security plan to include her, which had meant Ops doing a rapid deep background review on her. Discovering she’d already been vetted fairly thoroughly and made to sign the Official Secrets Act less than a year before she’d started to go out with Greyhound One’s son had made everyone at the Tower breathe a little more easily and save Max an embarrassing and too public row with his brother in the middle of the Chelsea Flower Show. But maybe not avoided completely, judging by how Gordy was currently looking at him...

“I’d guessed as much, don’t worry Max.” Admittedly, she’d taken a day or two to piece everything together, but Soph had at least been able to work out that whatever it was that Kate Stewart did, it wasn’t going to be casually talked about in front of a journalist unless they’d already checked her out. Not to mention, given the closeness between mother and son, she doubted she’d have managed to stay Gordy’s girlfriend for much longer without being checked out either. “And stop glaring you…” she added, nudging her boyfriend with her elbow. “I had wondered why you were all talking about their work in front of me that day given I’d not been made to swear to secrecy or something. Then realised it was because they knew I’d already signed.” For Jess and Max’s benefit she added, “I’ve done some interviews and articles on defence innovations and technology that needed background briefings…”

“Ah, that makes sense.” Jess thought about some of her own work. “Actually, some of my research is like that - I had to be given clearance to do the background reading but the actual scientific work doesn’t need any clearance.” Mystery solved, she decided to carry on talking to Soph while Max and Gordy concluded their ‘glare off’ or whatever they felt was necessary to restore brotherly harmony. “What was your question?”

“Hmm? Oh…” Looking back up at the night sky, seeing the meteor shower in all its dramatic splendor as the pinpricks of bright light shot across the starry sky, Soph tried to think of a way to ask her question that wasn’t going to sound rude or unappreciative.

“Just ask Soph…” encouraged Max, sensing her reluctance. “We’ll still like you afterwards.”

“Promise…” added Gordy, agreeing with his brother and wrapping his arms around her waist for added assurance. Although he wasn’t entirely happy with Max knowing more about his girlfriend
than he did, Gordy was able to appreciate there was a difference between Max his brother and Max, one of the soldiers tasked with keeping his mother and Osgood safe from alien randomness. He was rather keen on the latter, which meant, just this once, he’d let his brother off.

“What am I supposed to see when I look at the sky?”

“That’s not a stupid question,” said Gordy, resting his chin on her shoulder and kissing her cheek.

“It isn’t?” Relieved, but still confused, Soph relaxed a bit, but she still wasn’t seeing something that made her understand why Kate and Osgood had gone away for the weekend.

“No… Mum asked the same question.”

“Kate Stewart didn’t know what she was supposed to see when she looked at the sky?” Jess, in contrast to Soph, was far from relaxed and standing looking between Max and Gordy in disbelief, unable to reconcile the woman she knew, mostly from a distance admittedly, leading UNIT through one alien engagement after another with barely a blink or faltering step with such an Earth-centric viewpoint. To say that working at UNIT broadened your horizons was considered to be something of a bad pun - for most, it was impossible not to look at the sky and mentally add in the passing spaceships hovering just out of phase, the distant planets and the countless alien species, so the idea that anyone, never mind Kate Stewart could look at the sky and wonder what she was looking...

“Sorry Soph, I didn’t mean…” Jess looked apologetically at the journalist, realising she might have sounded rather rude.

“I know what you meant,” assured Soph, smiling at the biologist who she was discovering she was getting on quite well with despite them having nothing in common aside from who their boyfriend called ‘Mum’. “Actually, that was kind of my point.”

“I don’t.” Max frowned and his nose twitched as he kept changing his mind about how to say what he wanted to ask Gordy given both Jess and Soph were there too. Fortunately, while Jess might not have yet learned that his twitching nose meant he was struggling with something, it was a ‘tell’ Gordy had mastered when they were seven and the toad they’d ‘rescued’ at morning break wasn’t there at lunch time. Despite claiming he’d not told anyone their secret, Max had actually told their teacher, something Gordy had worked out that afternoon. Max however, didn’t admit that to Gordy that he’d told their teacher until after they’d graduated from short to long trousers and been studying for their A Levels.

“Mum’s not always been like she is now…” Gordy looked at his brother, on one level aware that Soph and Jess were still there and that this was as much for their benefit as his brother’s, but only really concerned about Max understanding without upsetting him. “Do you remember how Gramps being weird?”

“Gramps being weird?” Max’s immediate thought was to ask Gordy to be more specific as it was fair to say that the Brigadier had been an excellent if not always conventional grandfather. Their adventures with him often left Kate wondering who was the naughtier schoolboy - her father or the two actual schoolboys.
“The quiet weird, not the silly in trouble with Mum weird.”

“I thought that was because he didn’t like…” Max frowned, trying to remember what it was that he’d just assumed made the Brigadier behave differently in that strange, withdrawn way that they’d labelled ‘quiet weird’ when they’d been teenagers.

“Aunt Flo?”

Gordy couldn’t quite understand why Max looked so startled for a split second and glanced nervously at Jess, nor did he see Soph’s frown quickly followed by smile of understanding as she remembered the lady with the incredible mobility scooter she’d met at the Savoy the same day she’d first met Kate and Osgood. “Yeah, I thought that too, but we were really wrong…”

He couldn’t remember what specifically had caused him and Max to decide that General Bambera’s partner Flo and their Grandfather didn’t get along, but it was something they’d both considered as ‘fact’ without questioning it, right up until Gordy had seen them clearly enjoying each other’s company one summer barbeque in Switzerland not long before Gramps died. “…he loved Aunt Flo but…” Gordy rubbed the back of his neck and adjusted his glasses, nervous fidgets that he’d inherited from both Kate and Osgood and ones that Jess now recognised in her boyfriend as well, although Max didn’t need glasses and only wore sunglasses so it had taken her a while to spot. “She wasn’t tactful like Aunt Win or Uncle O.”

“Aunt Win’s tactful?” Max wasn’t entirely sure he could ever imagine describing the straight-to-the-point General as being anything other than direct, whereas with Osgood’s father it was sometimes impossible to imagine him being blunt or stern, although clearly he could be from some of the adventures he’d been a part of.

“Most of the time no…” Gordy grinned when he remembered some of her more to the point observations, usually with regard to his hairstyle if they were directed at him, “…but she’s very tactful about not bringing up the time when Mum and Gramps didn’t talk, unlike Aunt Flo which meant he’d be quietly weird…”

For Jess and Soph’s benefit, and potentially his brother’s too he now realised, he quickly turned and gave them the impossibly brief and oversimplified version. “Gramps left Mum and her Mum when she was really small and Mum didn’t really see him again until I was about the same age as she’d been when he left. And they only really met up because of some alien stuff that happened when I was…” Gordy thought for a second. “…five I think.”
“...which is why I had no idea.” Max looked at Gordy and saw him nod in the starlight, confirming Max had worked things out well enough for him to start to understand why he hadn’t known about a time when Kate hadn’t been confident about what was ‘up there’. Explaining a bit more, mostly for Soph’s benefit as he didn’t know what she knew, he continued, “I’ve known Gord since I was…” He couldn’t actually remember. “Six? Seven maybe… either way, it was a few years before....”

“Before you got to know Osgood?” suggested Soph kindly when she saw he’d run out of words, knowing a little bit about how Max and Gordy came to be ‘brothers’ from Gordy but not sure that Max knew she knew.

“Something like that. Uh, Mum, I mean Kate…” He stumbled a bit, not quite sure how to make his point without being awkward about it, before realising awkward was maybe alright… “Blonde woman, about this tall, gave birth to this one…” He threw his arm around Gordy’s shoulders and gave him a brotherly one-armed hug that made Jess and Soph smile. “...was already working for UNIT when I my parents died. I guess she’d had to work out what she was looking at in the sky long before she did that...did Gramps tell her then?”

Directing his question to Gordy, Max tried to put together the various different sorts of memories he had of looking up at the stars and putting questions to his father when he was home from leave as well as his Nana and Kate during summer evening joint family barbeques or later, when Kate had become ‘Mum’ and he’d started to learn about UNIT. Whichever way he looked at the memories he had of growing up knowing Kate Stewart, he’d been left with one overriding impression - that she’d never had any doubt what she was looking at when she looked up at the sky.

“Not exactly…” Gordy slipped his arms around Soph’s waist again now he was through the awkward bit of his story. “I think she bluffed it after she and Gramps started getting on.” He was fairly certain he could remember lying with her on top of the canal boat one night when he’d not been able to sleep and being told stories about stars called ‘Charles’ and ‘Darwin’ which, he now knew, had to be clearly made up. Probably. “It was Os I think, who made it real....”

“So, what am I looking at?” asked Kate, standing with her back to the nearest street light and looking up at the dark sky.

“Umm...” Turning around, Osgood looked up at the sky Kate was looking at. “That’s the Corona Borealis...” She pointed at the reasonably bright semicircle which she thought was probably the most distinctive ‘landmark’ given the direction Kate had been looking. “It’s 73rd...”

“Out of how many?” Kate wasn’t entirely sure she’d been looking at the sky expecting to discover there was a ranking system, but she found the idea that there was a ranking system that Osgood knew rather charming. “And on what basis is the ranking?”
“88, and percentage of the sky…” Osgood had to reposition her glasses as she was currently seeing a mixture of sky and blurriness. “…the unit of measurement is square degrees.”

“It’s at the small end.”

“Very. Less than 0.5% of the sky….but it is one of the original constellations that Ptolemy recorded.”

“Ptolemy? That’s a tortoise…” It took Kate a moment to realise that Osgood was looking at her like she’d just suggested gravity worked upwards or something equally baffling. “Alderman Ptolemy was the tortoise friend of Jeremy Fisher…” Seeing her fellow scientist’s blank look turn into a frown, Kate was suddenly conscious as to how different their lives were. “Beatrix Potter? Peter Rabbit?” Osgood looked less confused, much to Kate’s relief - she knew she was older than her colleague, but hadn’t thought there would be that much difference between their childhood experiences, especially given Kate’s more recent ‘second childhood’ bringing up Gordy. “Gordy’s favourite was Jeremy Fisher… Alderman Ptolemy comes to lunch and brings his own salad in a string bag.”

“My favourite was Mrs Tiggywinkle.” Osgood thought for a moment, trying to remember more of the Beatrix Potter stories. “Does anyone ever have Peter Rabbit as their favourite?”

“Doris…” Kate realised she’d just introduced a name that meant nothing to Osgood. “My father’s wife…” Which, worked out Osgood from the phrasing, was clearly not the woman who was the biologist’s mother. “…claims that a sign of being an adult is reading the Tale of Peter Rabbit and feeling more sympathy for Mr MacGregor than Peter.”

“That’s probably true,” decided Osgood after giving the statement some thought. “If you are assuming that an inherent characteristic of being an adult is having a vegetable plot within a garden.”

“Not objecting to a rabbit wearing blue jackets and shoes?” countered Kate, not sure why she was debating the moral of the first Beatrix Potter story.

“You must have a vegetable bed in your garden.” Osgood wasn’t sure why they were talking about Beatrix Potter stories, but she found herself enjoying the conversation so didn’t actually worry about how they’d arrived at the topic. “And I do have more sympathy for Peter Rabbit and don’t have a garden.” She wasn’t counting the green grassy space that her surrounded her temporary ‘home’
while she worked alongside Kate on this research contract as a garden.

“Garden yes, vegetables no.” Kate looked up at the ‘picture’ of a semicircle in the stars that she now knew was a constellation called Corona Borealis and this conversational tangent’s origin. “I’m guessing it wasn’t an Alderman Tortoise that named it?”

“Hmm?” Osgood looked at Kate in confusion before seeing the blonde’s grin and nod in the direction of the sky. “Ah, right. No. Ptolemy was a Greek astronomer who charted the sky in the second century. Haven’t…” She was about to point out that Kate must have heard of him given his work was rather fundamental to modern knowledge in a number of relevant scientific fields before remembering that Kate was from a very different scientific field to Osgood’s own, and she managed to stop herself from sounding rude just in time. “…described him properly - he was rather more than an astronomer and Egyptian…”

“But at a time when Egypt was part of what we now think of as the Ancient Greek Empire.” Kate smirked when she saw her younger colleague’s head turn sharply at her sudden and unexpected display of knowledge. “In making sure Gordy actually did his revision for his end of year exams, I think I learned more than he did.” Kate switched her bag from her right hand to her left. “We don’t have quite the same history in the biological sciences…it wasn’t until comparatively recently that we could scientifically look at things for the sheer delight of looking and understanding.”

“It wasn’t?” Osgood hadn’t considered the different branches of scientific study from that perspective. “But all the herbal remedies and toxins…”

“…were studied because of how they were used to positive effect or because of the consequences they generated.” Kate rubbed the back of her neck, not sure she was actually up to having a conversation about the philosophical origins of the different scientific disciplines if ever, never mind at this late hour, but decided it didn’t matter as she was enjoying herself. “In Europe, non-medical biological science only really got going properly in the Renaissance, by which point you physicists had a fifteen hundred year head start…” Kate gestured towards the constellation again. “Even if you did take that long to agree that the Earth wasn’t flat and could still be banned for saying it wasn’t the centre of the Universe.”

“A spherical Earth was widely accepted as early as the sixth century…” Osgood repositioned her glasses so they were sitting more comfortably on her ears, fairly confident Kate was teasing her rather than trying to start an argument but wanting to be accurate nevertheless. “And heliocentrism wasn’t always controversial…”

“Galileo ended up on the wrong end of an Inquisition and the Church banned it as a theory!”
Gordy’s history syllabus had been somewhat varied this year - apparently the Head of History had strong views on the tedious way the GCSE History syllabus had to be taught and promptly over-compensated by being extra-interesting when he taught the more junior classes. Kate wasn’t sure how much Gordy had appreciated this approach when it came to revising for his year end exams, but she’d found it interesting when she’d been testing him.

“He liked to argue.” Osgood took her glasses off and started to clean them, muttering grumpily to herself about how it was Copernicus who had done most of the groundwork for contemporary understanding and anyway, it was a working theory at the time of Pythagoraras….

“The right-angled triangle guy?” Kate blushed when she realised she’d not only interrupted her friend’s clearly private grumble, but for someone who was supposedly making a relatively successful career out of science, she wasn’t exactly coming across as being terribly scientific.

“Philosopher in Ancient Greece who has ended up with a fundamental relation in Euclidean geometry named after him, yes. He put forward a theory that the Earth was a sphere that moved and that theory then led to others…” To Osgood’s frustration she couldn’t remember exactly which others, “…first thinking about the Earth not being at the centre of the system.”

“And that was all before Ptolemy plotted the constellations including that one?” Kate was fairly certain she’d be right to state that Pythagoras and Euclid were before ‘BC’ became ‘AD’ but then distracted herself wondering if she was supposed to be thinking of them as BCE and CE, another consequence of making sure Gordy was actually revising. “So he was a round Earth not at the centre of the Universe supporter too?”

“Round Earth yes, but he advocated geocentrism and…” Osgood put her much cleaner glasses back on and looked at Kate, expecting to see her showing signs of frustration or boredom at what had ended up being a rather circular conversation and not one Osgood had intended to end up having when she’d impulsively invited Kate to come and look at the sky with her.

“…it was accepted because he’d labelled the stars?”

“In a manner of speaking.” Osgood grinned, amused at hearing herself accept such a vague conclusion and not immediately start to explain in great detail which was her more usual tendency - there was something about the way in which Kate made these generalisations and over-simplifications that left Osgood feeling comfortable about them, like the statement from Kate came with its own non-verbal footnote confirming there was far, far more complexity and detail needed to provide a comprehensive answer but this ‘would do for now’.
“Clever salesman…” Kate was embarrassed when anything else she might have been going to say was lost in a yawn. “…sorry, it’s nothing to do with the conversation.”

“It’s late…” Feeling guilty about detaining Kate, especially since she had to drive home to wherever her garden without a vegetable bed was, Osgood started to turn around, intending to walk in whatever direction Kate’s car was parked. “I’m sorry I…” She stopped talking when Kate, much to Osgood’s confusion, wasn’t moving.

“I should apologise…” corrected Kate, catching her lower lip between her teeth and frowning slightly as she tried to remember what Osgood’s original invitation had been and how they’d ended up talking about tortoises and Egyptian Ancient Greeks… “I never gave you a chance to show me what you wanted to specifically look at in the sky…”

“Ah.” It was Osgood’s turn to retreat into her thoughts for a moment, her eyes darting either side of Kate as she scanned their surroundings, seeking to orientate herself, the tip of her tongue peeking out between her lips as she concentrated on spotting particular trees and landmarks that were not as obvious in the moonlight as they had been earlier in the day by sunlight. “Yes, well…” Reference points found, Osgood looked past Kate at the North-Eastern sky. “…look…”

“Look at…” Kate was about to ask ‘what’ she was supposed to be looking at but the word died in her throat as, turning around, she saw a meteor falling through the upper atmosphere and burn out. “…oh.” She glanced at Osgood, who was stood watching that patch of sky with a bright grin on her face that Kate was confident she’d have seen even without the moonlight. “I’m sorry, you missed it…”

“Keep looking Kate…” Not turning away from the spectacle, Osgood gestured up to the sky, encouraging Kate to look again. “…and don’t forget to make a wish…”

“A wish?” Kate knew that it wasn’t uncommon to make a wish when you saw a falling or shooting star, she just hadn’t expected someone as scientifically aware as Osgood would still think about things like that.

“Just because we’re scientists doesn’t stop us having dreams…”

“Aww…” Relaxing back into Gordy, Soph couldn’t help but react to that. “They’re so romantic…”
only to be met by a rather unexpected lack of response from the others. “What?” She looked at Jess who had slightly confused look on her face, just about visible in the starlight.

“That’s her ‘Greyhounds are scary not sweet’ face,” stage-whispered Gordy, familiar with what happened when someone predominantly used to Kate and Osgood at UNIT was being asked to consider them as a couple, knowing Soph now knew enough about UNIT to know that ‘Greyhounds’ was a shorthand reference to his Mum and Os.

“Really? It looks more like I’d just made her think about her parents having sex…”

“In a way it’s the same thing, they’re Greyhounds...” said Jess, wincing as she was given another mental image thanks to Soph’s comment that she’d have happily gone without, as if that explained everything which, if you worked at UNIT, it did.

“And for some of us, that’s literally the same thing…” muttered Max, giving his head a sharp shake like he was trying to throw off the train of thought.

“Oh look!” said Gordy with exaggerated enthusiasm, deciding he didn’t want to end up with the mental image Max had clearly got too close to. “Anybody made a wish?”
“Just now?” Osgood felt her girlfriend’s murmuring hum of confirmation as much as she heard it. “Not telling.”

“No?” Resting her chin on Osgood’s shoulder, Kate slipped her hands around her girlfriend’s waist and smiled when she felt warm hands run down her bare forearms and wrap around her own.

“No.” Osgood leaned back against Kate, feeling the familiar soft, warm strength of her against her back and sighed contentedly as her gaze stayed fixed on the still dark sky above. “If I told you what I wished for, it might not come true…”

“Ah.” Tentatively exploring with one fingertip where her hands had ended up, relative to her girlfriend’s belt and still neatly tucked in shirt, Kate quickly abandoned her intended distraction mission when she realised quite how tidily tucked in Osgood still managed to be, and instead turned her head just enough to start a new campaign by kissing Osgood’s neck, just below and behind her ear.

“I know what you’re doing…” The small part of Osgood that could still think about work was trying to work out how much more reliable their alien intelligence could be if the ‘honeytrap’ style of interrogation was incorporated into the UNIT methodologies...but it was a very small part of her, and one that was very quickly told to shut up by the rest of her when Kate’s lips worked their way up to the shell of Osgood’s ear. “...and it’s…mmm…”

“Not working?” teased Kate, knowing from the wonderfully sensual humming sound that Os was making that she’d managed to find her lover’s ‘gooey’ spot.

“Depends…” Osgood tilted her head, trying to encourage Kate to resume her kissing, which she did, but the kisses were carefully scattered anywhere but the point that Osgood was silently hoping for.

“On what?” asked Kate, in between kisses.

“What you wished for.” Osgood was incredibly proud of herself for getting that statement out with only a couple of stutters given that, while not quite as sensitive as Kate’s neck was, her neck was one of the more….mind blowing places Kate could kiss her.
“Ah…”

“Ah?” Osgood chuckled as she settled back against Kate and heard the little ‘hmph’ when Kate realised she was now unable continue with her kissing strategy. As lovely as the kisses were, Osgood had spotted that they gave her girlfriend too easy a way out of answering her question. “Oh…” And she’d also just worked out what was probably prompting Kate’s distraction strategy.

“Oh?” In response to Osgood’s latest shuffle, Kate shifted her arms so they were once more comfortably wrapped around her girlfriend’s waist and, in the process, discovered that Os’ shirt wasn’t quite as neatly tucked in as she’d previously thought…

“You didn’t make a wish.”

“No.” Feeling rather pleased with herself, Kate smiled in triumph as she managed to work her fingers inside Osgood’s shirt and started to aimlessly explore, although she did take care to avoid her lover’s more ticklish spots.

“Oh.” Osgood tensed her abdominal muscles when she felt Kate’s fingers ghost across her skin, preparing for the inevitable tickling sensation that more often than not happened when Kate’s fingers were anywhere near her stomach - she had no idea how or why she was that ticklish there, but it was extremely annoying when her body insisted on confusing ‘friendly’ with ‘tickly’. Kate’s fingers were always ‘friendly’ in Osgood’s opinion, or should be, but she was unable to persuade that bit of her body to agree all the time.

“Relax…” whispered Kate, feeling the subtle shift under her fingers as muscles tightened, understanding what Os was now instinctively preparing for.

When they’d first been together, this reaction to Kate’s fingers had been one of their first misunderstandings with Kate feeling a little bit hurt that her girlfriend didn’t trust her to have understood where Osgood’s ticklish-in-a-not-fun-way spots were and know to avoid them. Instead, Osgood was tensing every time Kate touched her front between ribs and hips, leading Kate to try to avoid touching her girlfriend there at all, equating tensing with not trusting and generally being something she didn’t want to associate with anything intimate. Osgood, on the other hand, had been increasingly troubled as to why Kate wouldn’t touch her there: she wanted Kate to touch her front between her ribs and hips as she’d discovered that, for the first time ever she really liked it when Kate drew those same random squiggly patterns on her tummy like she did in other places…and once she’d worked out how to stop the ticklishness ruining everything by lightly tensing her tummy muscles, Kate’s reluctance had been even more frustrating. It had, however, like most things that didn’t quite go to plan at the beginning of a long and successful relationship, been untangled and resolved…which just left Osgood with a more immediate and specific mystery: where were Kate’s fingers going?
“Oh…” Osgood hummed as she felt Kate’s hands gently slip around her ribs, not realising how hot and tight her bra had started to feel until she was feeling it lifted away from her sticky body as Kate’s finger slipped between the creased band and her skin. “Still not working…”

“Mmm?” Kate let her hands still for a second while she tried to work out what wasn’t working, having been lost in her own thoughts, which had been rather squarely centred on trying to make Osgood feel as comfortable as she could, prompting her to resume her gentle easing and resettling of her lover’s bra in what was hopefully a less uncomfortable spot. “Oh….umm, I wasn’t trying.” She had toyed briefly with the idea of trying to distract Osgood away from thinking about what Kate might or might not have wished, but that had gone the moment she’d felt Osgood’s skin under her shirt. Then, Kate had realised how warm it must have been for Osgood to have sat for a couple of hours with Kate fast asleep half lying half leaning against her, prompting a change of plan.

“So you did wish for something…” The combination of having her hunch confirmed, albeit in a very Kate way of confirming by not denying, and having sudden relief from a long ignored and almost forgotten about discomfort was almost more than Osgood could cope with, something Kate guessed because she stilled her hands again and prepared to ‘confess’.

“Not exactly.” Kate cleared her throat self-consciously, knowing that she’d probably be about to sound nauseatingly sweet but there wasn’t an acceptable alternative. “I didn’t make a new wish…” She felt Osgood lean slightly more heavily against her, gladly accepting the responsibility for keeping them both on their feet as Osgood relaxed into her arms even more, knowing what was coming. “…last year’s turned out rather well…” She was, even when being a hopelessly lovestruck fool, still Kate Stewart and not able to completely reign in her wit.

“You said that last year…” Admittedly it had been by phone, with Osgood in the garden in London and Kate stuck in Geneva for a reason Osgood couldn’t be bothered trying to remember.

“And the year before that…” Kate dipped her head down, managing to blindly find her way through Osgood’s shirt collar and unravelling ponytail and kiss Osgood’s neck, although then it had been a muttered acknowledgment in the thirty seconds or so of relative privacy and peace they’d snatched in the middle of some alien attack. “…and the year before that…” She didn’t want to dwell on the year before that one however, which had seen her wish be rated ‘not bad, but could be a hell of a lot better’, so she skipped over a few years in her mental timeline, back to what she thought of as ‘BZE’ - Before Zygon. “But I did thank my lucky stars…”

“They’re not stars…” grumbled Osgood, putting up only token resistance as she relished in being able to just ‘be’ with Kate, not having to think about the universe or UNIT. “…they’re perseids…”
“Then they’re my lucky perseids…” agreed Kate, correcting herself in good humour. “…which I’m still thankful for.”

They stood together, enjoying the quiet as, this far up the valley this close to dawn there was no sound travelling on the light breeze. It was too late for people and too early for wildlife, and coincidentally also the perfect time to watch the Perseid Meteor Shower which, this year, was peaking with a far more dramatic display than the first time Kate saw them. With only a thin edge of moon hanging in the dark sky, there was just enough moonlight for Kate and Osgood to see each other but not so much moonlight that most of the meteors were too faint to spot without a telescope. Instead, as Kate took in the whole sky, she could see numerous constellations that she still didn’t know the names of, as well as the pale smudge that was the Milky Way, stretching across the dark night sky - had the moon been bigger and brighter, that detail would have been invisible. Not that Kate was that interested in the Milky Way, or the constellations or even the Moon, with her interest being caught by two things - the woman she held in her arms and the annual Meteor Shower display that Osgood had first introduced her to.

“They do know they’re not the same perseids…”

Kate ‘answered’ by blowing a raspberry against Osgood’s neck.

“Just checking…” teased Os, chuckling at her lover’s silliness.

“So what’s your one?”

“My one what?” Osgood knew what Kate was asking her about, but here, where there were no Greyhounds present, Osgood could and would give as good as her lover did in terms of teasing.

“Wish…” Angling her body slightly, Kate could create enough room between their two bodies to slide her fingers around Osgood’s ribs and find the pair of hook and eye fastenings that she was confident of being able to undo and, as a result, ease the discomfort that a tight bra at the end of a long, hot day could cause. “…better?” Feeling the hooks slip from their eyelets, Kate carefully the moved still trapped fabric - since it wasn’t a strapless bra, she couldn’t completely get rid of it - so that the hooks and underwiring weren’t digging in to Os anywhere.

“Mmm, thanks.” Feeling far more comfortable, not that she’d been overly conscious of being uncomfortable before, Osgood turned just enough so that, while still leaning against Kate, she was at least able to reach her girlfriend to give her a kiss of thanks. She could, however, only reach Kate’s chin, as anywhere else would have meant Osgood moving and dislodging Kate’s hands. This new position did have its upside though, as it enabled Osgood to catch hold of her girlfriend’s shirt where
it was gaping slightly between two buttons….two could play at this game. Furthermore, it was a
game Kate knew she was going to ‘lose’ with Osgood having a distinct advantage as Kate’s shirt had
buttons which could be unbuttoned… “You were asking?” repeated Osgood, the moonlight just
bright enough for Kate to see her cheeky smirk as she felt the shirt button just above her waistband
be guided out of its buttonhole by her girlfriend’s nimble fingers. When you could disassemble any
number of alien technologies whilst under direct alien fire, Kate’s shirt buttons were neither a
challenge nor something Osgood needed to be able to see to unfasten…

“I was, wasn’t I…” agreed Kate, knowing she’d lost this ‘battle’ before it had barely started.
Ordinarily, she was a very competitive person, with much of her success both in UNIT and
scientific research prior to working at UNIT coming from tenacity and a general reluctance to come
off second best to anyone, on anything. There were, however, two consistent exceptions to this - her
children and the woman she loved, who coincidentally was perhaps the one person she’d met who
was as tenacious as Kate was. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” It was only after she’d spoken that Osgood realised she had no idea what she
was being thanked for. “What for?”

“For making the Perseids my lucky stars…” Kate slipped her hands down the outside of Osgood’s
ribs and moved so she could stroke her lover’s lower back, meaning she was now standing in front
of Os. “For showing me how looking at the stars could be done with optimism and excitement in
anticipation of what we could discover and dreams we could achieve….for helping me to see there
was more to the night sky than nightmares and terrifying monsters.”

“I didn’t do anything…”

“Except be you….wonderful you.” Kate leaned forwards and brushed a light kiss against Osgood’s
lips, having to fight every instinct she had to avoid just sinking into those lips and kissing Osgood
properly as she had one more thing she wanted to say. “I love you, so much…” Kate really, really
wanted to go and find her glasses, frustrated that she couldn’t see the micromovements in her
girlfriend’s expression that she could read as easily as the alphabet, but given the choice of holding a
blurry Os close or keeping a sharply in focus Os at arm’s length, well, Kate wasn’t letting go.

Osgood however, being able to see and ‘read’ Kate in perfect focus thanks to her glasses and own
feelings for the blonde, had a different idea.

“Go.” Osgood punctuated her instruction with a quick kiss of her own, feeling Kate’s frown against
her lips, a frown that caused her to smile. “I’ll still love you after you’ve gone and had a wee…”
Grinning, Osgood deliberately and carefully stepped back, letting her fingers fall away from Kate’s
shirt. “More actually…” She reached behind her and caught hold of her girlfriend’s forearms, gently
easing them out from under her now thoroughly untucked t-shirt.
“How did…?” Kate was about to ask how Os knew she was suddenly painfully aware of her decidedly unromantic need, only to laugh when she realised she’d already answered her question. “...of course you know, you’re you…”

“Go!” encouraged Osgood, letting go of Kate’s hands with an affectionate and reassuring squeeze, amused at Kate’s need to try and understand how Osgood had known about her urgent need in spite of its urgency…. amusement that turned into full blown laughter when Kate stuck her tongue out at her before dashing indoors, bashing her shin on the coffee table in the process and demonstrating a remarkably fluent command of swear words in Swiss German and Italian.

She may be Greyhound One, but she was still Kate… still the one person Osgood would fervently do anything and everything she could to help hold the sky up and the world together. “Daft fool…”

“I HEARD THAT!”

“Silly idiotic thing….,” muttered Osgood affectionately, still smiling as she looked around and saw the sky was starting to be streaked with dawn, the Meteor Shower still happening but starting to fade into the brightening sky. Heading inside, she methodically checked everything was appropriately turned off or shut as she headed for their bedroom, pausing when she saw how much the coffee table had moved. “Kate?”

“Hmm?”

“Do you want some ice?”
“I should have probably mentioned a while back (perhaps even a few stories ago never mind chapters) that neither Lego nor Star Wars are mine and they're just borrowed to enhance general amusement.....

“Really?” Osgood pushed her glasses back up her nose as she switched from standing with her right foot resting on top of her left foot to having her bare right foot on the cool tiles of the kitchen floor, giving her left foot the chance to warm up again. There may have been a nationwide August heatwave during the week, but this was a tile floor in Scotland and she should have stopped to put some socks on.

“How did you discover that?” Switching her phone from her right ear to her left, she realised her issue wasn’t with her glasses but her nose, which was itching. “Most things with him are accidents I think…” She smiled at Jess Padwinkski’s response as she took her glasses off and put them on the kitchen counter, right in front of the coffee percolator so she could find them again. “Was Max alright? I know he…” She was about to say that he could behave like a toddler when one of his Lego models broke, but stopped herself just in time - she suspected Jess and Max probably hadn’t yet got to the point in their relationship where she should be describing Max as a toddler to his girlfriend. “Ah.” Rubbing her nose to try and get rid of whatever it was that was causing the irritation, Osgood listened as Jess explained she was already very aware of what happened if Max discovered someone had broken one of his Star Wars Lego constructions. “Do I…”

Putting her glasses back on, Osgood glanced around the kitchen, looking for Kate’s phone - Osgood had been in the process of checking hers when Jess rang and hadn’t found any messages telling her that an intergalactic incident had been started as a result of Max’s Lego R2D2 being knocked over by the Doctor, but they might have only told Kate. “Really?” Smiling at the good news, Osgood continued to hunt for her girlfriend’s phone, knowing they probably should know where it was even if they were trying to have a few hours of ‘vacation time’. “Yes, of course…” Phone found, Osgood returned to the coffee machine as she listened to Jess’ suggestion. “Can you use your credit card? I’ll sign for you on Monday…”

Seeing that the coffee was nearly made, Osgood put Kate’s phone done on the counter and crossed the kitchen to the cupboard containing the mugs. “Based on Max’s birthday present, I think it’s going to be outside his authorisation…” Osgood looked at the two mugs she’d taken out of the cupboard and put one back, deciding sharing was preferable to spilling. “Don’t worry about it Jess…”
“It’s raining.”

“Only outside.” Osgood put the coffee mug down on Kate’s side of the bed and, now she had a hand free, was able to rub the tip of her nose again.

“That’s a relief.” Rolling over in bed so she was looking at Osgood, Kate grinned. “Can I still say morning?”

“You can still say morning,” confirmed Osgood, putting Kate’s phone down next to the coffee mug. “It’s almost 11.” Which, on a more usual Saturday morning, was an extravagantly embarrassingly late lie in, but this morning? “Why are you awake?” For lots of reasons, Osgood had been expecting Kate to still be asleep. “Not that I want you to go back to sleep….” she added quickly, not wanting Kate to get the wrong idea. “I just thought…” Osgood felt herself blushing as she finished that ‘thought’ off.

“That you’d turned the alarm off?” teased Kate, not actually certain Osgood wasn’t correct with her original thought - Kate was surprised that she’d woken up this early relative to what time they’d made it to bed...which was, at a rough guess based solely on how parts of her were still feeling, probably a couple of hours before they’d actually got to sleep.

“That something like that.” Osgood found herself rubbing her nose again, prompting her to frown as she tried to glare at her nose in the hope it might stop itching. In doing so, Kate’s attention was drawn to what Os was, and wasn’t wearing.

“That’s my shirt…”

“Yes.” Abandoning trying to work out why her nose was so itchy suddenly, Osgood looked thoughtfully at Kate, trying to decide whether she was the sort of awake that meant they’d be up and dressed in the next few minutes or whether this could be one of those rare mornings when Kate Lethbridge-Stewart actually had a lie-in. “It was…” Osgood was going to say closer, but then realised that she actually had no idea where her shirt was. “This or unpack.” Her pyjamas were still in the overnight bag which was sitting tidily on the floor at the foot of the bed. “I’m not sure it suits me…” she added, looking down at herself before looking back at her lover whose expression was perhaps suggesting she disagreed, prompting Osgood to amend her opinion slightly. “...at least, not as well as it suits you.”

“It being…” Kate reached out and caught hold of the shirt edge, teasing the fabric through her
“It’s pale pink.” Osgood’s nose was wrinkled, although whether it was at the idea of deliberately owning pale pink clothing or because the itch was back was hard to know. “I don’t like pale pink…” She was interrupted by Kate’s rather pointedly cleared throat, although her eyes were sparkling with amusement. “…on me.” Osgood repositioned her glasses as she gave Kate a long suffering look that clearly suggested she knew what her girlfriend was thinking. “I do like pale pink on you…” The long suffering look disappeared, and was replaced with a look of such open love and sincerity that Kate, as the combination of being able to ‘read’ Osgood’s meaning as well as being reminded of memories recent and older about quite how much Os liked pale pink (and other colours) on her sunk in, saw her blush and in turn, demonstrate that stronger colours of pink looked rather nice on her too, if as Osgood was, you were the person lucky enough to see them.

“Thank you.” It wasn’t often that Kate Stewart was lost for words, but she was finding it difficult to know what to say next. “Can I disagree?”

“About it being pale pink?” Osgood frowned, wondering if this was about to be one of those moments where an inherent assumption was going to be challenged and overturned, such as Kate and her having an equivalent number of functioning L-cone receptors in their retinas or did she mean M? Kate would know, but Osgood was fairly confident she didn’t mean S, not if she was correct in observing the shirt to be pale pink.

“No, we’re both trichromatic.” Kate grinned as she saw her girlfriend’s frown disappear - it had taken many years of careful loving and paying of attention to get to this point but she did, on occasion, not only follow what her girlfriend was saying (at times no small achievement and worthy of celebration, even if she was biased), but also follow what Os was thinking. “And it is pale pink.”

“But?” Osgood hoped Kate wasn’t about to try and convince her she suited pale pink, because she refused to entertain it as a suggestion. Her sister liked pale pink quite enough for both of them.

“But I disagree about it not suiting you…”

“Kate?”

“Hmm?” Forcing herself to pay attention to her girlfriend’s face, Kate smile turned into more of a smirk - she knew she’d been caught.
“Would it suit me as much if I’d done the buttons up?” Looking down at herself, Osgood held the edges of the shirt together, only to demonstrate that they didn’t quite meet.

“No…” Kate was trying to keep her smirk at ‘not in trouble’ levels - there were still two ways a conversation like this could go with her girlfriend, and one was much more enjoyable on a lazy work free rainy Saturday than the other. “Unbuttoned works best.”

“That it would require a vest.” Osgood confirmed this conclusion with a nod of her head as she looked back up at her girlfriend who, she decided, couldn’t decide whether she was supposed to be taking Os seriously or not.

“At the very least,” agreed Kate, reaching for the front of the shirt again, knowing Osgood was teasing her and deciding that two could definitely ‘play’ at this game. “Not to mention underwear…”

“And socks,” agreed Osgood, becoming aware again of her cold feet, prompting Kate to shuffle across the bed a bit so she could peep over the side and see that yes, Os was not currently accessorising the shirt with socks along with the aforementioned lack of underwear.

“Very important.” Kate looked back up at her girlfriend, purporting to be giving the matter serious consideration. “Unless…” she caught her lip between her teeth in an attempt to not grin.

“Hmm?” Osgood wiggled her toes to try to warm them up as she looked down at Kate, unable to not notice how the duvet had shifted, meaning she could see more of Kate than she had been seeing, with the duvet now trapped across her girlfriend’s chest rather than still being up around Kate’s chin and shoulders. “Unless what?”

“Unless you come back to bed?”

“Do I need my glasses?” asked Osgood as the shirt in question fell silently to the floor.

“If you can’t tell what I’m doing without them…” began Kate, making no effort whatsoever to conceal her interest in her lover’s body.

Osgood took her glasses off and got into bed.
“Ooooo!”

“I did tell you my feet were cold…”

“Anything else you can think of?” asked Jess, double checking the list they’d put together while eating breakfast.

“You’ve got fish fingers?” asked Soph, eying the empty packet that was currently balanced on top of the recycling bin.

“Yes…” Jess followed Soph’s gaze. “24 isn’t going to be enough, is it?”

“Not if he has them for breakfast, lunch and dinner…” agreed Soph, glad they’d decided to grab the open packet and bring it with them when they’d relocated the Doctor to Max and Gordy’s flat once it became clear that sleep wasn’t something the Doctor was interested in but anything Star Wars was. “How much custard have you got?”

“I put down powder…” A tin of Custard Powder would be easier to carry home but it would mean buying lots of milk as well and, as they’d discovered in the last 12 hours or so, making custard from custard powder and milk was rather more involved than they’d collectively thought, and that was before the washing up. “...but I think fresh might be better?”

“Then Gordy can take his turn.” Soph was beginning to understand quite how much of a disaster Gordy was in the kitchen having at first thought it was just an act to get her to do the cooking. However, when she’d tasted his few attempts at cooking for her, she’d started to understand that it wasn’t an act and he was, quite genuinely, a walking disaster in the kitchen. Last night’s barbecue had therefore already been quite a surprise, and that was before the Doctor appeared. “What about radishes?”

“Good idea.” Jess had forgotten that the Doctor had eaten the radishes that had been left in the salad. “I’ve got limes…” She looked around the kitchen. “Did we bring the gin?”

“Oh, no…” Soph looked at Jess as both women tried to remember what gin the brothers had in their
“On the list?”

“Probably best. And jelly babies.” Jess picked up the other bit of paper which was the shopping list Max and Gordy had already been putting together for what they needed to get for the flat. “Are we staying?” asked Jess, showing the list to Soph. “Because if we are…”

“Fruit, vegetables, white wine?”

“My thoughts exactly.” Grinning at her newest friend, Jess once again found herself hoping that Gordy and his girlfriend ‘worked’ as, despite not really having any non-scientist friends, she’d found herself genuinely getting on well with the two journalists, so much so that she was starting to think of Soph as a ‘friend’ rather than as ‘my boyfriend’s brother’s girlfriend.’

“What did Osgood say about the other stuff?” While Soph had gone home and packed an overnight bag, not yet having stocked Gordy’s bedroom with anything more than the most basic of emergency supplies, Jess had rung Osgood to see whether she agreed with the tentative plan the four of them had put together over breakfast that, for want of a better name, they were calling ‘the Doctor Entertainment Plan’.

“She’ll authorise the expenses on Monday.” Jess looked round the kitchen once more, wondering if there was anything else they might have forgotten before they set off on this rather varied shopping excursion. “Apparently she’s expecting them to be outside my boss’ sign off limit.”

“What limit have we got?” Soph had done enough interviews with people over lunches and the like to understand the importance of knowing how much money you had to spend before you started trying to stretch it to make the impression you needed to make - there was a reason she usually had two starters, no dessert and sparkling mineral water when she was interviewing as that ‘economy’ enabled her to make the newspaper’s credit card stretch to a Michelin Star.

“Umm…” Jess realised she actually had no idea, but fortunately Max came into the kitchen.

“Max?”

“Yeah?” Max filled up the kettle and turned it on - apparently tea was something else the Doctor found acceptable.

“Any idea what Osgood’s expenses allowance is?”
“For the shopping list?” Max leaned back against the sink while he waited for the kettle to boil and gave it some thought. “Not sure, but pretty good…”

He saw them glance at the tablet on the table which he’d used to show them the sorts of Lego kits that seemed to be capturing the Doctor’s attention, with some of the character models being dismissed as ‘too easy’. This had, at first, upset Max who had remembered taking significantly longer than the Doctor to make the R2D2 and C-3P0 models, but he’d cheered up immensely when Gordy had pointed out that a sonic screwdriver probably counted as cheating. When they got back to the flat with the Doctor, Max had given him his Millennium Falcon model, which he’d only just finished building last month, and said he could take it apart and remake it while the four humans got some sleep. Based on how quickly the Doctor had made the character models that Max had found in his bedroom at Kate and Osgood’s house, and recognising that they couldn’t really confiscate the sonic screwdriver, Max had picked the spaceship model as it was the biggest kit he had, hoping that it would keep the Doctor occupied while they got some sleep. He was currently feeling incredibly satisfied as, despite the sonic screwdriver’s help, the Doctor had only just finished building the model now, which was a good couple of hours longer than Max had guessed. Therefore, when the question of getting the Doctor some of his own Lego sets to build and ultimately have in the Library on the Tardis had come up, Max had immediately started thinking about the larger, more complex and more expensive, Lego sets. “And this would be classified as alien something anyway.” He smiled in what he hoped was a reassuring way while trying to remember enough of the expenses policy to try and work out what the ‘something’ might be.

“That makes a difference?” Soph was less concerned about the ‘something’ and rather more interested in the ‘alien’.

“Yeah…. You have to be a certain level to get to authorise alien related expenses but the limits are pretty generous - they have to be as, well, property damage can be expensive to fix.”

“So we could get goujons instead of fish fingers then?” joked Soph, trying not to panic at the mention of ‘property damage’.

“Yup.” The kettle clicked, announcing that it had boiled, reminding Max what he’d actually come in for. “We could fly to LegoLand in Denmark to buy the kits and Osgood could sign it off, though only if it were scheduled flights.”

“And if it wasn’t scheduled flights?” Jess wasn’t quite sure how they’d get to Denmark (not that they were going) if they weren’t on scheduled flights.

“That would be Mum’s sign-off, but only because you have to be Brigadier or higher to request a UNIT private plane for non-military missions.” He decided it wasn’t necessary to explain that Colonel or higher could request aircraft for military reasons and that Osgood held honorary Colonel
“We were thinking Hamleys…” said Jess, looking at Soph to see if she was feeling as thrown by all this as Jess was, with Jess at least having the advantage of knowing quite how much influence a Greyhound commanded within the UNIT organisation.

“Or LegoLand Windsor at a push…” agreed Soph, giving herself a swift talking to that really, all things considered, the Aston with the police escort should have been a bit of a clue if the helicopter arrival at the Chelsea Flower Show hadn’t been clue enough about what being a ‘Greyhound’ meant.

“I think Osgood’s got you covered.” He grinned, a new idea forming.

“No.” Jess had learned what that grin meant, just as Soph was starting to learn to recognise it on her boyfriend.

“But…”

“No Max…” Jess glanced as Soph who nodded her head in agreement. “…you’re not taking the Doctor to Legoland.”
“I…” Kate swallowed, finding her mouth and lips dry, as she tried to hang onto her thought long enough to voice it. “Os…” Her girlfriend however, was not making it easy for her. “Ah…” When Kate moved her head just enough to reluctantly get her mouth out of Osgood’s kissing range, Osgood just shifted her focus and started to press kisses along the taut muscles of Kate’s neck. “O...s….”

“Hmm?” Osgood hummed against Kate’s neck, acknowledging that she was listening, even if she also wasn’t exactly paying attention.

“I think…” As Osgood’s tongue began to trace the edge of her collarbone, Kate found she was not only unable to finish that thought, but was never going to be able to start it again unless she started to ‘fight’ back in this distraction contest.

“Yes?” Osgood was momentarily distracted by the itch on the end of her nose that she mustn’t scratch because it was a midge bite, only to decide that if her nose were to bump against Kate’s shoulder as she explored her girlfriend’s other collarbone, that wasn’t scratching.

“I think…” repeated Kate, glad in a funny sort of way that Os’s kisses had stopped for a second, “...mmm…” Despite wanting to ask Osgood if she was also hearing the faint buzzing noise that could be their phones ringing, Kate was sidetracked by suddenly having Os lying across her: in order to be able to reach Kate’s other collarbone and not scratch her nose, Osgood had shifted and was no longer lying next to her girlfriend but on her. Wiggling slightly so she was comfortable, but also confident that she wasn’t making Kate uncomfortable, Osgood set about exploring the other side of her girlfriend’s neck and upper chest. “Os?”

“Bein’ fair…” mumbled Osgood in between kisses and ‘eskimo kisses’ that were definitely helping her nose not itch so much.

“Oh.” As Osgood moved from collarbone to that spot on Kate’s neck, Kate forgot about trying to ask Osgood if she could hear their phones ring and instead arched her neck, savouring the chain reaction of tingles and shivers Osgood was triggering. Reaching with hands and mouth, she tried to reciprocate but, to her frustration, found that somehow, Osgood was lying across her in such a way that nothing was in reach. And that, as far as Kate was concerned, was definitely not fair.

“You’re thinkin’…” mumbled Os, working her way down her girlfriend’s neck again and planning on visiting each collarbone next. “…can hear you…” While not normally against the idea of advanced cognitive activity, with it being one of Kate’s many very attractive attributes as far as Os
was concerned, there was a time and a place for being able to string coherent thoughts together and right now, if Kate would insist on thinking so hard, Osgood was just going to have to up the ante. “Stop thinkin’...” she muttered, arriving at the dip at the bottom of Kate’s throat, taking full advantage of not having to worry about scratching Kate with her glasses. Finding she was a little uncomfortable if she tried to explore further down her girlfriend’s chest, Osgood decided she’d better move a bit. Moving her hands from Kate’s shoulders so she could brace against the mattress while she shifted, Osgood was so focussed on making sure that she didn’t squash Kate that she failed to notice Kate was taking the opportunity to do a bit of shuffling of her own.

“Ooooffff!” Blinking rapidly, momentarily winded by the surprise of finding herself lying on her back with Kate above her, Osgood reached up to find Kate’s body with her hands, appreciating that her girlfriend was still bracing herself with her weight off Osgood while she recovered from the surprise.

“Okay?” asked Kate, her hair tumbling forwards as she looked down at Osgood, spoiling the view but unable to do anything about it until she was confident Os was comfortable.

“Almost…” Finding Kate’s hips with her hands, Osgood started to run her fingers up her back, tracing swirling patterns that Kate knew she should be able to decipher if she could only concentrate on them, but for once, science wasn’t holding her attention. Increasing the pressure of her hands, Osgood wordlessly encouraged Kate that it was alright to relax her arms and settle some of her weight onto her girlfriend. “Hmm…” Happy and comfortable, especially when Kate ‘eskimo kissed’ her, Osgood threaded her fingers through errant blonde hair and lifted it fully away from Kate’s face: at this distance, she didn’t need her glasses to see Kate clearly.

“Hey you…”

“Hi.” Osgood wriggled her nose, partly because it was still itching but mostly because she was still trying to work out exactly what had just happened.

“Being fair.” Kate demonstrated her definition of ‘fair’ by lightly kissing Os’s lips, only to decide that wasn’t quite satisfying enough and so proceeded to follow up with a more thorough exploration of her girlfriend’s lips and mouth, which Osgood was more than happy to encourage and participate in.

“What wasn’t fair?” asked Osgood eventually, when the kiss gently petered out into the occasional nip or hot breath interspersed with open mouthed kisses along jaws and across cheeks.

“You…” Kate dipped her chin towards her chest by way of a clue as to what wasn’t ‘fair’.
“Left and right isn’t fair?” With a reverent care that might otherwise be reserved for the finest antique glass or china, Os traced the path her kisses and taken down the sides of Kate’s neck and along her collarbones.

“I couldn’t reach.” Kate demonstrated what she’d wanted to reach with a nuzzling kiss or two to both sides of her girlfriend’s neck. “

“Not my fault.” Osgood emphasised her point with a sly pinch to a nipple that she’d just ‘happened’ to find, drawing attention to where her hands had got to in their roaming. “You were talking…” Osgood’s withering look lost some of its bite when she wasn’t wearing her glasses and couldn’t actually focus on Kate properly, but it was still pretty effective given the circumstances….circumstances that for once were in Kate’s favour and meant it was acceptable for her to respond instinctively….

….by attempting to kiss her girlfriend senseless, for once not having to worry about trying to maintain a professional degree of detachment or worse, try and referee whatever stand-off was starting to develop between Os and whoever.

Eventually, when conversation was possible once more, Kate ‘felt’ Osgood’s questioning look.

“Had you never noticed I might have a ‘thing’ for you trying to be…” Once upon a time she might have said ‘nice’ but that was a word that was no longer in her vocabulary after the first Missy-related aircraft misadventure. “…diplomatic in the presence of idiots?”

“You’re not an idiot.” Osgood trailed her fingers up Kate’s spine as she considered this semi-new piece of information. “Scientifically speaking.”

“Thanks…” Kate’s amusement was audible, as was her humming when she started to work out which bit of Os, exactly, she was using as a pillow: she could have found her glasses but kissing was more fun.

“Daft fool…” Osgood hugged Kate closer to her and savoured the feeling of having Kate in her arms like this. “What did you want to ask me? Earlier?”

“Hmm?” Kate rested her chin on Osgood’s chest and looked up at the fuzzy face of her girlfriend, no doubt looking equally fuzzy to Os. “Oh, I thought I heard our phones ringing, not ringing,
“Ah…” Osgood considered this for a moment. If it were the boys or the Tower, they’d have left a message if it was non-urgent or kept ringing either their phones or the landline if it was urgent. “They’ll call back…” She resumed her lazy tracing of the constellations of the night sky, as catalogued by Ptolemy, on Kate’s back using her spine as the East-West axis with her hips being the western horizon. Currently, she was as far as Corona Borealis, which she was tracing on Kate’s left shoulder-blade with her right hand.

“Mmm…” Kate smiled as she felt the now-familiar constellation on her shoulder…one day someone would work out that her knowledge of the night sky had a few obvious omissions, like all the constellations not listed in Ptolemy’s Almagest, but as long as she didn’t have to deal with too many incursions in the Southern Hemisphere she’d continue avoid that conversation. “…or call here…” As she let her head drop once more to comfortably rest on Os, she hummed…

….and then groaned when, as if by some poorly planned magic, the phone by their bed rang.

“Silly idiotic thing…” teased Osgood, feeling as aggrieved as Kate did.

“Boys or the Tower?” Kate pushed herself up, bracing herself with her left arm as she stretched across Os and the bed to the phone handset that was sitting in the charger unit on ‘her’ side of the bed.

“Do I win a prize if I’m right?”

“Funny…” Clearing her throat, Kate pressed the answer button and put the phone to her ear, still stretched across the bed, not prepared to abandon their lazy day in bed unless she absolutely had to. “…Kate Stewart.” As she spoke, she trapped the phone between her left shoulder and ear, freeing up her right hand to clamp firmly but kindly over her girlfriend’s mouth - Os was incredibly short-sighted without her glasses but that hadn’t stopped her working out what part of her girlfriend had ended up barely an inch or so from her lips…

“Becky!”

It took, on the Kate Stewart willpower scale, the same level of determination she needed to brightly greet a clutch of cybermen outside St Paul’s, to not either hang up on Osgood’s mother or answer her ‘hope I’m not interrupting anything?’ enquiry honestly.
Listening to her mother-in-law explain how she’d already tried calling their mobiles, Kate took her hand away from Os’ mouth as she shifted position so she was kneeling in the middle of the bed, her legs either side of her girlfriend’s, deciding from the headbutt she’d received from Osgood when she’d jolted in surprise as Kate greeted their caller that Os trying to distract her was definitely off the menu for the remainder of this phone call. Switching ears while Becky continued to speculate that, if the weather forecast was correct and it was raining with them, they’d presumably failed to answer their mobiles because they were indoors and the phones were in another room, Kate stretched out to Osgood’s side of the bed and retrieved her girlfriend’s watch and glasses. By the time Becky was explaining it had taken her a while to find the telephone number for the cottage, noting that it was wonderful they had mobile signal up there now, Osgood was sitting up wearing her glasses and had put her watch on.

“Well, you got us eventually. Here she is…” And, without giving Becky a chance to protest, Kate passed the phone to Osgood.

“Hello Mum…” Osgood watched appreciatively as Kate carefully extracted herself from the bed on her side but kept her hands very firmly to herself given her mother’s unexpected appearance in their afternoon. “...I said I would ring after lunch…” Reluctantly, Osgood tore her gaze away from Kate and looked at her watch - it was later than she’d thought but still... “...we’re about to have it, lunch I mean.” Osgood looked at Kate who had now got to the bottom of the bed and was in the process of unpacking the bag they’d brought.

Finding the baggy navy blue cotton jumper with the silhouette of a ‘Queen’ chess piece on its front and back in yellow, Kate pulled it on, smiling when she heard her girlfriend’s little huff as the hem settled around her thighs. It had become one of Kate’s favourite jumpers to borrow, with Osgood only wearing it once a year at her chess club’s annual summer ‘Lawn Chess’ competition - each year they marked out a large chess board on a croquet lawn and a leisurely game took place, with club members being the pieces (hence the jumper) and invariably sharing their square with friends or family and a picnic.

“Oh, I hadn’t realised…” Frowning as she listened to her mother extol the virtues of being able to get her supermarket shop ‘done’ by ordering most of it online now that Osgood’s sister had set her up with the app, Osgood watched as Kate found two pairs of thick socks, knickers and one of Osgood’s shirts. So long was Becky’s monologue on the brilliance of getting the shopping delivered, and not on the weekend too, that Osgood had to only hum in acknowledgement periodically while she watched as Kate came round and sat down on the side of the bed to put her socks on. “It is, very clever.” Experience had taught Osgood to not try and explain to Becky that she and Kate had been ordering most of their supermarket staples online for years, in fact ever since Kate had moved permanently back to London from Geneva in 2009, nor remind her mother that Osgood had been offering to help her get going with an online supermarket shop since shortly after that. Not actually, that either daughter had needed to help Becky - had she given her husband half a chance he’d have mastered it for her, but somehow her father managed to be quietly competent at the internet while remaining firmly excluded from the long-standing ‘family food shop’.
“We did, yes…” Accepting her little bundle of socks, knickers and shirt from Kate, Osgood mouthed ‘I’ll try to be quick’ to her girlfriend before watching Kate saunter out of the bedroom…in the process missing a question from her mother. “Hmm? Yes, of course I’m listening Mum…”

Repositioning her glasses and giving her nose a rub in the process, Osgood tried to demonstrate she had been paying her mother some attention. “…and I don’t think Dad’s ever knitted anything, so I’m not surprised he made a pattern that wasn’t very knittable….”

This, was suddenly not feeling like a 'quick' conversation…and, now her mother had brought it up...Osgood's stomach started to rumble...
Glass of water in hand, and very glad of the thick socks covering her feet, Kate stood in front of the fridge and tried to work out what would do for lunch. Ideally, before she’d made lunch, it would be good to know what they might be doing for dinner and what sort of appetite Osgood might have. Glancing back towards the bedroom, Kate toyed briefly with the idea of going and seeing if Osgood could answer the dinner question before deciding that it was safer to just make something now and worry about dinner later. Based on her own level of hunger, being audibly demonstrated by her stomach, she was also fairly confident portions needed to be on the large size for both of them.

Draining the last of her water, Kate put the glass on the top of the fridge and started to extract the ingredients that she needed, putting them on the worktop next to the kettle. Then, once the kettle was full of water and turned on, she filled another glass with water and headed back to the bedroom to deliver it to Osgood. By the time she returned to the kitchen, both their mobiles with her, the kettle was boiling and starting to tell everyone in the valley with its piercing whistle.

“Hush you…” chided Kate as she picked up the kettle with her right hand while tossing the phones in the general direction of the heap of ingredients she’d assembled next to the fridge. Grabbing a large, gleaming copper pan from the pan rack, she put it on the hob and poured the water into it, turning on the heat as she did so. “...Why Dad had to get a whistling kettle…” Putting the kettle aside, Kate moved on automatic pilot around the kitchen which was, with only the odd exception, almost exactly like it had been when the cottage had been her father’s. Not having ever been overly domesticated, he seemed to have selected everything for the kitchen based on whether it was possible to polish it until it was possible to see your face in it, which right now was only serving to remind Kate she probably needed to brush her hair at some point.

Working with a practiced efficiency, Kate soon had the pasta in the boiling water and the bits and pieces she’d found in the fridge were appropriately diced and sliced and cooking quickly in a small pan. With everything able to look after itself for a couple of minutes, Kate went over to the phone extension that had the answer-phone and started to read the note Mrs Fermaugh had left for them.

“Something smells good…”

“Hey you…” Smiling at the unexpected surprise of seeing Osgood before their pasta was ready, Kate tried to work out whether the unexpectedly short conversation with Becky was a good thing or not. “...she’d rung our mobiles…”

“So she said.” Osgood repositioned her glasses but managed to avoid rubbing her insect bite at the last moment. “Then hunted for the landline number.” It took a lot for Osgood to get irritated by something or someone, but like most daughters in families, her mother and younger sister were the two people who managed it when it did happen.
“Is everyone alright?” Wrapping her arms round Osgood’s waist, Kate held her close enough to be able to tightly hug if there was a crisis in the Osgood household but not so close that she was in danger of becoming distracted and failing to notice their late lunch was ready.

“Fine.” Realising she still had her teeth gritted and her jaw clenched, Osgood closed her eyes and rested her forehead against Kate’s as she concentrated on taking deep breaths and trying to relax. Knowing the effect Becky could have on her, Kate was more than happy to just wait in supportive silence for Osgood to find the words to explain whatever had happened, starting, Kate assumed, with why Becky had rung them in the first place. “I emailed Dad, when I first got up, thanking him for helping Mum with the pattern for the blanket.” Osgood swallowed and opened her eyes, lifting her head away from Kate’s so she could look at her, each able to see the other in perfect focus as both were wearing their glasses. “In it I said I’d ring Mum after lunch, rather than interrupt her morning.”

“Okay…” Kate didn’t want to interrupt or second-guess what Osgood was telling her, but was conscious their lunch probably needed a bit of attention. “…can I stir and listen?” she asked, tilting her head towards the cooker.

“Do I need to set the table?” Letting go of Kate, Osgood tried to guess from the pans what they might be eating. “It smells good…” she realised, not sure what ‘it’ was beyond a bit of seasoning and the generally warm tasty smell that was starting to fill the kitchen.

“Just pasta, like we used to do…” For a moment, Kate was distracted trying to work out quite how long ago it was that they’d last had pasta for lunch like this, just the two of them with nothing planned for the rest of the day, and found she could only remember making it in either her flats in Geneva or Osgood’s flat that the boys now lived in. “…before I moved back.”

“Lovely.” Watching as Kate checked on the pans, Osgood continued with her recounting of her phone call. “Emma’s got Mum doing online shopping, so Mum’s no longer going to the shops on a Saturday morning as it’s all delivered on Friday morning now.”

“Ah.” Breaking up a lump of salmon in the pan to see if it was cooked, Kate scooped up some of the fish and creamy sauce she’d just made on a teaspoon and held it up for Osgood to try. “Open?”

“Mmm…” Grinning as she chewed, Osgood confirmed that there was no need to worry about extra seasoning or whether the salmon was over-cooked. “Is that whiskey?”

“Just a little. The salmon’s caught by Jock Fermaugh.” Jock was Mrs Fermaugh’s nephew and a
reliable provider of very fresh fish when they were up here. “So your sister’s freed up Becky’s Saturday mornings?” Kate nudged Osgood into continuing her story while she set about checking to see if the pasta was sufficiently cooked and generally getting the pasta and sauce onto a big plate for them to share. Not only had it saved on the washing up, it had been the ideal way to eat something while curled up together on Osgood’s sofa watching all the films each thought the other had missed out on, or in Geneva when the kitchen was too stark and stiff. Once Kate was permanently living in London again, somehow they’d never done this at the house, although having the boys around more was probably the main reason.

“And Mum’s wondering why I didn’t tell her about this years ago.” Osgood filled two glasses with tap water and put them on the table. “Of course she’s forgotten we’ve been trying to convert her to it from the beginning.” Huffing in frustration, knowing this was yet another of those moments when Emma was the perfect daughter as far as her mother was concerned and Osgood was the daughter her mother didn’t understand, Osgood got two forks and spoons out of the cutlery drawer. “But since she’d not told me, I didn’t know I could have rung this morning to thank her for the blanket but instead told Dad in his email I’d ring after lunch.”

“So at half-past 1 she started ringing….” Kate put the now empty pans in the kitchen sink and carried the plate heaped with pasta and salmon over to the table, knowing from past experience that ‘lunch’ in Becky Osgood’s home was at 12.30pm sharp every day, with everything in the kitchen washed up and tidied away by twenty past 1. “Did you tell her?”

“That we were having a late lunch?” By UNIT in a crisis standards, half past two ish was hardly a ‘late’ lunch, but compared to her mother-in-law’s timetable, Kate was apparently a very bad influence on Osgood’s mealtimes, with Osgood long since learning to ignore her mother’s mutterings about this particular flaw in Kate’s make-up. “Yes…” Stabbing a forkful of pasta, Osgood concentrated on satisfying her hunger for a couple of mouthfuls before adding, “…so you might get a lecture about not letting me get wet next time she sees you.”

“Will I now?”

It took Osgood two mouthfuls to work out that while she knew she was talking about her mother presuming they’d gone for a walk down to the Loch in the rain, Kate was electing to insinuate something quite different...

“Kate?”

“Mmm?”
Kate’s ‘innocent’ look was remarkably successful when worn during everything from UNIT budget negotiations to facing down homicidal megalomaniac aliens and her children. It completely baffled Osgood as to how this was possible, since she had never been taken in by it, knowing Kate was rarely innocent...but then again, there was a rather fundamental point in Kate’s favour with Osgood.

“Daft fool...”

“I love you too.”

“Is that everything?” asked Soph, casting her eye over the heap of boxes they’d managed to carefully stack on the counter thanks to the efforts of a very helpful assistant.

“I think so…” Jess consulted their list for what felt like the twentieth time. “...we’ve got the ships and the scenes…” Looking at the boxes that Soph had just counted off, Jess frowned. “Are they really going to make a scene from the film out of Lego?”

“Just go with it.” Soph didn’t quite understand it either, but wasn’t quite sure she was confident enough in her friendship with Jess yet to be able to point out that half of the ‘they’ in her question was Jess’ boyfriend. As far as Soph could tell, Gordy would go as far as making a Lego model of something - he had a rather impressive model of a tiny old-fashioned typewriter on his bedside table, and would watch a film several times in order to spot the continuity glitches and hidden ‘in-jokes’ on-screen, but he hadn’t yet combined the two...unlike Max.

“My brothers used to delight in breaking up each other's’ Lego constructions when they were younger…” recalled Jess, checking that the details matched their list and nothing was gathered up twice apart from the things Max and the Doctor had insisted they needed more than one of, although they were going to be restricted to a fleet of four on the occasions when it was ‘canon-appropriate’ to have more than one of something. Fortunately, they’d managed to find an assistant who had been as knowledgeable about Star Wars as Lego and had, on seeing how long their list was and understanding that they were serious, risen ably to the challenge. “...I suppose we’ve that to come too?”

“What was it Max said?” Soph waited until the assistant was out of earshot before continuing, and even then she spoke in barely louder than a whisper. “Property damage is expensive to fix? Isn’t it
better that they destroy Lego rather than…”

“Actual alien space ships?” Jess’s smile confirmed she was glad of Soph’s common sense observation, as now she thought about it, if several thousand Lego bricks kept the Doctor from damaging anything other than the hydrangea flower that was currently stood in a vase on the kitchen table at Kate and Osgood’s, then that would probably be considered a good thing by everyone at the Tower.

“Is that possible?” Soph blinked, trying not to look completely shocked by the suggestion. “I mean…” Actually, she wasn’t sure what she’d meant.

“It’s UNIT - anything’s possible…” Jess stopped talking as their eager assistant bounced back, this time with another assistant in tow who started to help with the scanning through the till and putting into bags.

Even if Soph had known what to say to that, or had the confidence to say it, she was distracted by her mobile ringing.

“It’s Gordy…” Answering, she put the phone to her ear and moved away from the till, hoping she’d find somewhere a little bit quiet in the otherwise rather noisy Toy Store. “…hi!”

“...BLUE THINGS!” That hadn’t sounded like Gordy.

“Pardon?” Switching the phone from her left to her right ear, Soph put her hand over her left ear and tried to work out what was happening based on what she thought she’d just heard. “Gordy? Are you alright?”

“Sorry Soph…” Shutting the kitchen door behind him, Gordy rubbed his face with his hand. “…that was the Doctor shouting.”

“So I heard. Is everything alright?” Confused, Soph looked towards Jess and shrugged, conveying that she had no idea yet what was going on.

“How are you doing with the shopping?” Gordy could hear faint noises in the background which suggested he’d rung in time. “Have you got the Lego yet?”
“We’ve got everything on the list, Jess is just paying for it now…” Soph had been feeling bad about Jess having to do all of the paying for things, but the reminder from Jess that she was taking every receipt to Osgood on Monday morning alleviated some of Soph’s guilt, as did insisting she paid for their lunch when they’d stopped between buying the Doctor some clothes and embarking on ‘Operation Lego’ as they’d taken to calling it. “Why?”

“Can you put something else on the list?” asked Gordy, hoping that what they wanted to get was even possible.

“Is it Lego?” asked Soph, seeing their very helpful assistant was, now the mountain of boxes was scanned and packed into half a dozen bags, in danger of disappearing so she made her way back to Jess, signalling he needed to wait. Surely though, there couldn’t be any more Star Wars Lego that Max needed to keep the Doctor occupied, could there?

“Blue bricks, dark blue Lego bricks…” Gordy was grinning in spite of the chaos that no doubt this was going to cause once his Mum heard about it. “Lots and lots of them.”

“Okay…” Soph caught Jess’ attention. “...we need some more Lego.”

“We do?” Jess’s face was almost as disbelieving as the shop assistant’s had been, before he’d quickly worked out that he was supposed to be encouraging customers to spend money. “What sort?”

“Bricks, lots and lots of bricks…dark blue colour” Soph had worked out what must have happened if the Doctor was wanting dark blue bricks. “...and maybe some white ones I’m guessing?” she asked Gordy, hoping her hunch was correct.

“Yes, do they make clear ones?” Gordy wished he’d taken a photograph of the Tardis before they’d left it to hide in the hydrangeas, but he was fairly certain it had windows, and windows usually were clear.

“We’ll check,” promised Soph, watching Jess work through what was happening.

“He’s not.” Jess looked at Soph, not sure whether the laugh she was trying to suppress was genuine amusement or hysteria. “He is, isn’t he?” She decided, on balance, that Kate treat it as amusement, and ‘what would Kate Stewart do’ felt like a fairly good approach to follow.
“Yup.” Soph listened while Gordy told her a couple of other things before hanging up, actually looking forwards to going back and joining in the grand Lego construction session the Doctor had started on once he’d discovered there were no more Star Wars kits to make. So far, he’d managed to do some quite passable daleks and Cybermen from the bits and pieces he and Max had found amongst the various kits and bricks Max did have.

“Right, then we better have some dark blue bricks…”

“What sizes? And quantities?” That was not a question Jess had anticipated.

“Umm…” What sizes of bricks were there? And what sort of quantities did you need to build a Lego Tardis? It wasn’t like there was a plan to follow or anything. Starting to panic a bit, Jess chewed on her lip and tried to keep calm while waiting for Soph to get off the phone and help her with this. In the meantime, Jess continued to recite to herself what was the universally understood private mantra of all the junior scientists at the Tower if not UNIT-wide: What would Osgood work out? What would Kate Stewart do?

“Right, sorry, what was the question?” asked Soph as she rejoined them, having got assurances from Gordy that aside from a few stormtrooper models that Max had made a couple of years ago, nothing was actually broken at the flat.

“Bricks - how many and what sort?” Jess looked at Soph, the answer coming to her as she put the question to her new friend. “All of them? Yes…” She turned to the assistant. “All of them please, the dark blue ones I mean.”

“That’s…” Again, the assistant was about to start explaining that the computer was showing they had quite a good stock level in dark blue bricks, which could result in it being quite an expensive purchase if they were serious about wanting ‘all of them’ but then he stopped talking, remembering that his purpose in this conversation was to help these nice ladies spend lots of money. Swallowing, he tapped away at the computer. “I’ll just go check the stock room.”

“It’s got to be cheaper than property damage,” agreed Soph, giving Jess’ a one-armed hug of support as the assistant went off to the stock room to work out exactly what ‘all of them’ worked out to be.

“Probably more entertaining to watch too…” agreed Jess, a new thought striking her. “Do you think they’re going to try and make the Lego Tardis to scale?”
“Probably…. Do you think Osgood would mind if we drink cocktails while we watch?”

Jess knew the answer to that one - the UNIT scientist’s mantra applied perfectly.

“I think…. I think Osgood would know that’s exactly what Kate would do.”
Chapter 19

“I don’t mind…” began Osgood, pausing to concentrate on putting the larger saucepan on the draining rack in such a way that it actually drained and didn’t just topple over and tip all its accumulated water into the other smaller pan she’d already washed.

“Don’t mind what?” Kate, having finished drying up the pasta plate and one set of water glasses, was putting them away in the relevant cupboards and hadn’t entirely heard what Osgood was talking about.

“You calling them…” Had Osgood not been searching through the soapy water, trying to find the pan lid that she knew had to be in the sink because she’d put it in there but currently couldn’t find, she’d perhaps have been looking back at her girlfriend who only remembered part way through her stretch that she was still only wearing Osgood’s baggy chess jumper.

“I don’t want to…” Kate avoided explaining what she was avoiding by coming to join Osgood by the sink, teatowel in hand.

“Mother them?” suggested Osgood, her hands emerging from the dishwater with the elusive pan lid which Kate promptly took from her and started to dry.

“Mmm…”

“If you thought I was talking about the boys, you are their mother…” Osgood’s hands reappeared, holding a wooden spoon and large metal serving spoon this time, both of which she rinsed under the tap and then tucked into the draining rack under the saucepans. “And if you thought I was talking about the Tower…”

“I’m a control freak?” joked Kate, realising she needed a dry teatowel if she was to actually dry this pan lid.

“I was going to remind you that Maria Walsh is on Salisbury Plain this afternoon and you might prefer to call her mobile first.” Putting her hands into the water once more, Osgood pulled out the plug before turning and taking the damp teatowel from Kate. “Leave it to drain?” she suggested, not really expecting Kate to have done any drying up but appreciating that putting the pans on the draining rack had been much easier when she’d not had to worry about avoiding the glasses and plate.
“Oh.” Obediently, Kate put the pan lid down the side of the draining rack, making sure it was anchored by the pan so it wouldn’t topple over, not arguing with Osgood’s suggestion. Kate, as everyone in her family knew, was a reluctant dryer-upper, volunteering to wash rather than dry whenever there was the option, but that wasn’t why Osgood had suggested letting the pans drain for a bit. Osgood had made the suggestion because there was one thing that Osgood knew with total certainty: a thoughtful Kate with nothing in her hands and no pockets to hide them in would, when within an arm’s length of Osgood, occupy her hands by hugging a bit of Os.

“G&T for them?” Osgood turned and rested her now only slightly damp hands on Kate’s jumper-covered hips. In response, she felt Kate’s hands snake around her hip to rest in the small of her back.

“Inflation done for the tea?” joked Kate, knowing Osgood had moved on from offering her a ‘penny for her thoughts’ some years ago when she’d pointed out how little value, either economically or emotionally, a penny had compared to, say, a mug of tea or a hug. The hug it seemed, was recession-proof at least.

“Probably, but I can’t remember where Mrs F’s hiding the tea bags at the moment.” Osgood had intended to make tea earlier when she’d first woken up, but had failed to find the tea bags in any of the semi-usual places that she’d come to expect to find them, so had made coffee instead. Given their subsequent morning, she hadn’t yet had a chance to mount a further search for them, whereas she knew where all four ingredients for a drinkable G&T were, with lemon and ice counting as ingredients obviously.

“There aren’t any…it’s in her note…” Kate felt her neck muscles loosen a fraction when Osgood’s fingers started tracing circles on her back. “...tea leaves are in the caddy that matches the biscuit barrel and there’s a strainer in the drawer with the corkscrew.”

“Ah.” Osgood wrinkled her nose in an attempt to try and cure it of its itching without moving her hands, although realistically, she probably needed to go and take another antihistamine: if her insect bite didn’t start driving her mad with its itching, the sneezing from the heather pollen would. “In that case, tea or G&T?” She decided to have a read of the note later to find out why they were being returned to tea leaves and strainers. She was fairly certain she’d heard about the battle of wills between the Brigadier and Mrs Fermaugh, probably twenty years ago now, which saw Kate’s father secure victory and the box of PG Tips becoming a regular feature of the kitchen.

“I don’t want the boys to think I’m checking up on them…” mumbled Kate, not needing any incentive to share her thoughts with her partner. “…I do know they’re not teenagers anymore…”

“Having the Doctor visiting is very different to using the house for a barbeque with their girlfriends,”
reminded Osgood gently, knowing that Kate was still feeling a bit guilty for underestimating Max’s maturity when he’d asked about watching the meteor shower from the roof yesterday, even if Max himself had been rather unfazed by it.

“Hmm…” Clearly still conflicted, Kate rested her forehead against Osgood’s and closed her eyes, trying to find some way through the swirling chaos that was her thoughts. Her desire to trust her children was contradicted by her sense of duty to UNIT and skepticism as far as aliens sticking to any sort of plan, with the Doctor’s unexpected appearance a case in point. And then, alongside all of that was an intense frustration that she was doing this to Osgood: wonderful, patient, brilliant Os who put up with Kate being distracted and worried and not, as far as Kate saw it, her behaving like a lover should on what was supposed to be their one brief escape from it all.

“If I’d been at home when the Doctor appeared and you’d been in Geneva, would you have rung me to see how I was?” Osgood in contrast, was far from conflicted, finding the situation perfectly clear-cut.

“Of course!” Experience had taught Kate that if her first thought was how silly Os’ question was, that was usually a clue that she was the one missing something obvious, which was most of the reason why they’d come to have ‘silly idiotic thing’ as a term of endearment between them.

“Why?” There was a kindness in Osgood’s voice and face that, had her question not originated in a conversation about the boys, would have probably seen Kate trying to persuade her girlfriend that conversation and logical analysis was overrated and could she not consider another few hours of kissing?

“Because I love you…” Kate felt herself smile sheepishly. “Oh.”

“Call the flat…” Osgood kissed Kate lightly on the lips before stepping back, letting her hands fall away from Kate’s body, unable to ignore her nose any longer and so needing to go and find her antihistamine tablets. “I’ll make some tea.”

“Mmm, sounds like a plan…” A plan that Kate confirmed her approval of while revelling in another stretch, a stretch that this time Osgood saw.

“On second thoughts…” Kate grinned, intensely flattered when she saw Osgood’s expression. “…I might go and put some trousers on first. Shower too, first, before the trousers I mean.” Few would believe at the Tower that Kate Stewart, Chief Scientific Officer and all round unflappable sort, could get herself tongue-tied, but then few at the Tower were privileged enough to know quite how in love Osgood and Kate were, or the effect a single look could have on them in the right circumstances.
“Trousers before the shower would…” Osgood swallowed, wanting to take her glasses off because they were now resting on her itching insect bite, but that would mean her lover wasn’t in focus which was unacceptable. “…mean you had wet trousers for the rest of the day.”

“Uncomfortable,” agreed Kate, having to bite her lip not to start to laugh. “And counter-productive,”

“Counter-productive?” Osgood scratched nose, surprising Kate who was usually the one to struggle to ignore an itching bite. “Oh, I see.” Osgood smiled, then grinned, then started to chuckle.

“You do?” Kate tried to solve the puzzle she’d missed, but was unable to match Osgood’s ‘spot’ with the chuckle, unless… “Wait, are we back to me being lectured about taking you for walks in the rain?”

“Maybe…” Unable to contain her giggles, Osgood decided her only safe option was to make a break for it. “….last one in gets the tiles!” Unlike the en-suite bathroom at the house in London, the shower here was rather more compact and meant that a shared shower required a degree of compromise….and a side always turned towards the tiled wall and away from the water.

“What?” Flat footed for a second, Kate set off after her girlfriend, all thoughts of aliens and children gone from her mind for a little while at least. “But it was my idea!”

“You don’t have any bow ties.”

“No.” Gordy turned around and looked across the kitchen to the Doctor, finding it slightly disconcerting to see his clothes on the Time Lord. He did think briefly about correcting the Doctor’s statement, because strictly speaking he did own two bowties, but decided that was unnecessary as somehow he doubted either a black silk or white Marcella bow tie for wearing with evening dress was quite what the Doctor meant. And anyway, neither were in his bedroom currently, with the white tie at his Mum’s place and the black tie…actually, he needed to ask Soph what had happened to his black bow tie.

“Bow ties are cool.” Instinctively, the Doctor reached up to his shirt collar to adjust his bow tie before remembering that was part of the problem - he currently didn’t have one on.
“On you and Os they are…” Turning back to the sink, Gordy turned off the taps now the sink was full.

“Fortunately I travel with a spare,” declared the Doctor, looking around the kitchen for his jacket, which he’d left on the back of a chair somewhere. “Ah ha!” Jacket found, he set about going through the pockets, knowing it had to be one of them.

“How are the rest of the clothes?” asked Gordy, deciding not to take offence at having his broader offer of being able to help himself to any of Gordy’s clothes that both fitted and appealed to the Doctor unacknowledged. Instead, he just decided it was like eating fish fingers with custard - the sort of strange that made sense to an alien.

“Better with a bow tie,” muttered the Doctor as, bow tie found, he set about fastening it around his neck. “See?” Task complete, he stood ‘on parade’ for his newest Lethbridge-Stewart friend to inspect.

“Very cool.” Grinning at the Doctor, Gordy hoped they’d find some reason to take a photograph of him at some point, as he very much doubted his mother would believe that the Doctor would ever wear blue jeans without photographic evidence. “Are those my braces?” He knew he had a pair somewhere, but for the life of him couldn’t remember what they looked like.

“No, mine…” Max came into the kitchen and stood behind the Doctor, making it immediately obvious why it had been Gordy’s wardrobe that had been raided for clean clothes for the Time Lord, as Max was clearly a good few inches taller and broader. “…they’ve got Millennium Falcons on them.” Surprised, given that they were quite distinctively patterned, Max glanced more closely at the Doctor. “Or would have if you weren’t wearing them inside out.”

“You can wear braces inside out?” This was news to Gordy, who had never worn braces.

“With difficulty.” Max, on the other hand, had several sets of braces and wore them with his more formal uniforms.

“Ah.” There wasn’t really anything else Gordy could think to say on the topic of clothes, so returned his attention to the washing up. “Do Time Lords dry?”

“I generally try not to get wet.” Watching as Gordy took the plates out of the sink and lined them up
in the rack at his side, the Doctor realised what he meant. “Oh, yes. Pond taught me.” At least, she kept throwing a tea towel at his head until he worked out she wanted him to remember she had taught him to do the washing up and drying the very first time he’d met her.

“Pond?” Gordy wasn’t sure he had ever heard his Mum or Osgood mention a ‘Pond’. “What is it with UNIT and water features?” he asked, mostly to himself as he set about starting to dry the plates, having learned how to love drying up from an early age: he just about remembered drying up his child’s plastic bowl and cup on the canal boat now he thought about it. “...of course, Jeremy Fisher...”

“Friend?”

“Frog.”

“The two are not mutually exclusive,” declared the Doctor, who with Max’s help had just finished wiggling about and getting his borrowed braces the right way around. “Some of my best friends are part-amphibian...very good at hop scotch, less good at conversation.”

“Right.” There was, decided Gordy, no point trying to back-track the conversation to the point where it last made sense. If the Doctor hadn’t been an alien it would probably have been less confusing to attempt to explain that he’d been remembering that his plastic bowl and cup had been decorated with his favourite Beatrix Potter character, the frog Jeremy Fisher. “Do they triple jump?”
Following the sound of Kate’s voice, Osgood saw that the rain had stopped and the doors out onto the little paved area at the back of the cottage were open.

“It’s stopped raining…” observed Kate, her smile telling Osgood that she’d thought it was a rather redundant observation as, in Kate’s opinion, if it had been raining she wouldn’t have been standing outside without an umbrella. “…and I wanted to look at the heather…”

Wordlessly, Osgood handed over the mug of tea she’d made for Kate, knowing better than to make any observations about Kate having a one track mind when it came to horticulture and a total disregard for meteorology.

“Thank you.” Automatically, Kate took a sip of it, despite knowing it would be too hot to actually drink given Osgood had made it less than a minute ago. “Do you think it’s too big?”

“The heather?”

“Mmm…” Stepping forwards, Kate reached into the plant she was concerned about and lifted up a section of it. “It’s starting to get a bit woody…”

“I always thought of heather as…” Osgood paused as she tried to settle on the perfect word, in the process rescuing Kate’s tea from her as the mug was starting to veer alarmingly away from the horizontal. “…soft and flowery.”

“Then I shall prune them later,” declared Kate, letting go of the heather and giving her hand a bit of a shake to try and shift some of the excess moisture that she had picked up from the plant. “It’s a bit early as some of them are still flowering but at least we’ll have soft and flowery heather next year.”

“Can’t you just be twice as mean next year?” Osgood passed the mug back to Kate and adjusted her
glasses. “It’s not the heather’s fault we’re visiting before they’ve finished flowering.” Osgood knew there were some plants in the garden Kate was rather more relaxed about when it came to the annual pruning. There were some which didn’t cope so well with missing a pruning - Osgood had learned which ones fell into this category over the years because they disappeared from the garden as Kate replaced them with plants that were more compatible with the unpredictable nature of UNIT’s demands on her time. She hadn’t realised heathers were on the not compatible with UNIT list though, and hoped that they wouldn’t disappear - they really were rather pretty and did seem to be very popular with the bees.

“That works on some shrubs but not heather…” Kate sipped her tea again, “…and not all heathers, just this one…” she gestured to the one she’d just been inspecting, “…and the three over there, as left unsupervised they’d outgrow the flowerbed.” She turned back to look at Osgood. “The ones in the garden in London are different varieties.”

“Ah.” Osgood considered the four plants Kate had identified. “I didn’t know you pruned these?”

“Neither did I, but I’ve just worked out what they are…” Kate risked a mouthful of her tea now it was a little bit cooler, enjoying the peacefulness of being in the garden up here brought...Os and a mug of tea was a very calming and lovely bonus. “...I read a book about them on the way back from Geneva last week.” It had been the one relative high-point of an otherwise fairly grim three days which had seen Kate having to leave Osgood and the rest of the Tower coping with the various alien misadventures that were suddenly all congregated in the South-East of England while she went to Geneva for a series of non-reschedulable meetings. “Once they expand, they don’t appreciate being reduced in size.” Kate’s grin warned Osgood that there was an excessively wry observation headed her way. “Bit like the stuffed shirts on the Oversight Committee…”

“Do you want me to get your phone?” asked Osgood, knowing that the only way to cope with Kate when she was being wittily rude about Geneva was to change the subject unless Osgood was in the mood to talk about Geneva, which she wasn’t.

“Hmm? Oh, no, I’ve got one…” Reaching into her trouser pocket, Kate produced one of the portable phone handsets. “…and it’s not like I don’t know the number…” There were only three phone numbers Kate now remembered - her own mobile number, the landline number for the house and this number, a number that she’d spent six years dialling, first from Geneva and then from the house while she tried to persuade Osgood to move in with her. All other numbers were stored in her mobile, desk or home phones and were remembered as speed dial requests, with Gordy’s mobile 4, Max’s 6 and Osgood’s 5.

“I can still remember your direct dial number in Geneva…” realised Osgood suddenly, having the number appear from the recesses of her mind for the first time in years.
“I wouldn’t dial it…” teased Kate, checking the number on the phone display before she pressed the call button. “...unless you want to talk to Claude Tredoment?” At the mention of their pompous and patronising scientifically unaware Geneva colleague, Osgood shuddered and set off back indoors.

Maybe she would have that G&T after all….

“There…” Letting go of the last piece of Lego that he’d carefully reassembled, the Doctor considered his handiwork with an inordinate amount of pride considering how many regenerations he’d come through. “…and it spins!”

To prove his point, he reached forwards and gently tapped the end of the long pipe-shaped piece that he’d clipped to a brick that in turn stuck to a round disk that did in fact spin.

“And if it attaches to this…” Tongue sticking out in concentration, completely oblivious to the fact that he was talking to himself since the Tardis had kicked him out for a couple of days, the Doctor carefully stuck his Lego pipe-that-spins onto the top of his Lego tower-that-rolls. “…it moves!”

With a careful flick of his finger to the base of the small tower of black and grey blocks that he’d built, he watched the whole construction roll across the table. Running his hand through his hair to move his fringe out of the way, he marvelled at his miniature Lego Dalek: after a few false starts he’d managed to make one that moved and spun. Which just left one very important question.

“Can you move and spin at the same time?” he asked, addressing himself to the Lego as he stretched his arms and wiggled his fingers - this was going to require a carefully co-ordinated tap and flick, or should it be flick and tap? Telling himself off for making him doubt himself, he decided that tapping had to precede flicking so, with a final adjustment to his bow-tie and stretching of his fingers, he took aim and….

“GAH!”

He flicked then tapped and far too hard and banged his knee on the underside of the coffee table in the process, having completely forgotten he was sitting cross-legged on the floor, his legs tidied away under the table.
“Stop ringing, I’m not at home to callers until Tuesday,” he declared, looking around the room for the offending ringing noisy thing that had surprised him at the crucial tap-then-flick moment while rubbing his knee. “And why am I doing this?” he asked his hand, letting go of his knee when he remembered that no, it still didn’t make it hurt any less. “I already decided that it didn’t help when I…” Blinking, he realised that the ringing thing was still ringing, he wasn’t at home and Tuesday was a long way away if that ringing thing wasn’t going to go away.

So where was it?

Scrambling to his feet, sonic screwdriver in hand, the Doctor set about determining exactly where the ringing thing was….

“Nine…” Kate was counting the ‘rings’ under her breath as she took another mouthful of tea. “Ten…” Experience told her that the boys never left the answerphone turned on, unlike when Osgood lived there. “Eleven…” She would have been hearing the bright sound of Osgood asking her to leave a message by now, but instead there was another ‘ring’. “Twelve…” The other massive difference between the boys and Osgood when it came to this particular telephone was the boys’ ability to misplace the portable phones… “...thirteen…” with each phone call often triggering a scramble through the flat to find where they’d last left one. “Fourteen….” Drinking another mouthful of her now extremely drinkable tea, Kate debated with herself whether to let it get to ring number twenty or twenty five before she abandoned the ‘old fashioned’ telephone and went and found her mobile. “Sixteen…”

“Hello?” Slightly breathlessly, Gordy snatched the phone up from the wine rack in the hallway.

“You found the phone then?” teased Kate, smiling at the triple warmth that the tea, the sound of her son’s voice and the sudden appearance of the sun collectively delivered.

“Hall wine rack, no idea why.” It was a long-standing routine that, when they did finally answer the phone, the first discussion with their Mum was always where the phone had been, unless they were in trouble.

“OOOO-EEEEE-ARGH!”

“What was that?” Muscles tightening, not liking the strangled shrieking sound that had almost deafened her, Kate forgot about the traditional small talk routines and waited for an explanation from
her son. Just because they had a Time Lord for a houseguest on the weekend the Universe was apparently very reluctant to let her and Osgood take off did not mean the noise confirmed Alien Armageddon: it merely increased the probability.

“Umm…” Following the sound which he had heard without the assistance of the telephone handset, Gordy set off down the hall towards the living room. “Oh, ah, I mean…”

“Gordon…” Kate’s patience was starting to be stretched, especially as the shrieking wailing noise was not only continuing but getting louder. She was however moderately reassured by his stumbling, recognising it as his childhood habit of muttering to try and avoid laughing. Like her, Gordy’s sense of humour tended towards the wry and it had seen him in trouble with teachers at a young age for laughing and generally showing his amusement at the wrong moment. To cope, he’d developed the habit of muttering as he’d soon worked out that while he was talking his face wasn’t giving him away, although he’d mostly grown out of the habit by his teens having acquired the ability to keep a mostly straight face.

“It’s the Doctor, hang on…”

Putting the phone down on the bookshelf, Gordy carefully picked his way across the Lego-strewn floor towards the still yelping Doctor, avoiding stepping on the little bricks. Catching hold of the second phone handset that the Doctor was holding during one of the Time Lord’s more gangly leaping yelps, Gordy pressed the end call button when he saw that the Doctor had managed to turn on the speakerphone function at some point. Deciding it was probably better to just let the Doctor work out that he didn’t need to keep leaping about once he was no longer landing on Lego bricks, Gordy cleared a good sized patch of floor with his foot and nudged the Doctor towards it.

“Eeee….” Unfortunately for the Doctor, he managed to land on one brick that Gordy’s quick clean-up operation had missed, seeing him leap up one more time…. “Oooo….” And land on his other foot…. “...Oh...” which, now he looked down at it, wasn’t being attacked by any of those pesky little bricks.

“Gordy?” Relieved to hear the gradual quietening and now total stopping of the shrieking, Kate was still not ruling out Alien Armageddon but was downgrading her concern from ‘Armageddon’ to ‘haphazard invasion’.

“Hi Mum? You there?” Picking up the phone he’d brought in from the wine rack as he put the phone the Doctor had been holding on the windowsill, Gordy looked at the Doctor with a grin firmly on his face.
“What’s going on? What did the Doctor do?”

In retrospect, Kate would agree with Osgood that she was being a little undiplomatic and that yes, UNIT would have expected her to be concerned for the Doctor’s well-being before asking for a damage report. Then again, in retrospect Osgood would also agree with Kate that UNIT could go take a long walk off a short pier sometimes because was it really too much to ask for a weekend to be alien free?

“Stand on Lego bricks…” Gordy rubbed his neck as he looked around the room, realising that not only had the Doctor ignored their suggestion to not let any Lego fall on the floor, but he’d clearly taken to tossing aside any brick that didn’t suit his immediate requirements and had therefore ended up with bricks scattered across the entire floor. “...actually, I think I owe you an apology.”

“No.” Shifting from kneeling to sitting down, three and a half year old Gordon ‘Gordy’ Lethbridge-Stewart quite literally dug his heels in amongst the pile of Lego bricks he’d created. “Not hu'gry.”

Sighing and counting to ten, Kate dried her hands on the tea towel and double-checked that everything was either turned off or safe to be left for a potentially indefinite amount of time. As much as she was grateful for his inheriting her blonde complexion and general Lethbridge-Stewart bone structure, it was times like this that she found herself wishing he hadn’t also seemed to inherit the family stubbornness. “We both know you are…” she continued, moving down the boat so she was no longer in the ‘kitchen’ but now in the bit where, on one wall was her bed that doubled during the day as Gordy’s play space, while the other had her study stuff and his bed. “...so get down from the bed and come and eat please.”

“No.” Grabbing two handfuls of bricks, Gordy hunched his shoulders and tried to turn his back on his mother. He also looked down at his tummy, which was making noises. How did he get his tummy to stop being noisy?

“Right, no play after dinner.” Kate knew he was hungry - not only had he not eaten enough at lunchtime and barely had more than half his banana when she gave him an afternoon snack, but she could hear the ‘monster in his tummy’ that did appear to be another family trait he’d inherited from her. At this rate, she wasn’t actually sure what he’d got from his father although there were times
“No dinner!” Gordy’s view was somewhat contradictory - why couldn’t she just let him finish with the bricks? Food was boring and meant washing first... “Stay with Lego!” Tired and hungry, but backed into a corner entirely of his own making, Gordy sensed her leaning towards him and reacted the only way a stubborn toddler knows how to in such moments and kicked out with his feet as he threw his arms up...

....scattering Lego everywhere.

“You do?” It took Kate a moment to work out what he was talking about, then it all came back in perfect agonising clarity. “I forgave you, not quite at the time, but thank you, apology accepted.”

“You did?” Gordy was amazed - from what he could remember about growing up on the canal boat, which wasn’t very much as they’d moved when he was starting primary school, he must have filled his Mum’s bed with Lego bricks, as well as covering the floor with the painful things. “What did I do to deserve that?”

“You don’t remember?” Kate wasn’t sure if she should be relieved or disappointed that he didn’t remember what happened next.

“No...I don’t really remember whole things from being a little kid Mum, just bits.” As weird as it was having this conversation with her by phone while, of all people, the Doctor was trying to rebuild his Lego Dalek in front of him, Gordy leaned against the doorway and just waited, wanting to hear more about whatever it was he did next.

“Of course...” Kate cleared her throat self-consciously, wondering if she would be able to persuade Os to make her that G&T after all. “...I’m surprised I’ve not told you this before...”

“Mum?”

“What is it Gordy?” asked Kate, trying not to sigh as she put her pen down. A quick glance at the
clock on her desk told her he’d been asleep for less than half an hour.

“Hurts…” As weak and feeble as his hoarse whisper sounded, Kate was still feeling enough of the Lego brick shaped bruises on her feet and knees from where she’d trodden and knelt on the pesky things to be not completely convinced this wasn’t the precursor to another bout of ‘toddler takes charge’.

“Where does it hurt?” She’d made the mistake a couple of weeks ago of asking ‘what hurts’ when she’d found him in a weepy heap at the bottom of the two steps down from the small deck area at the back of the boat to their living space. At least she’d managed to work out that he had confused ‘knee’ with ‘bee’ before he’d fallen and therefore wasn’t actually concussed, but it had been a useful reminder to never underestimate a toddler’s ability to take an unexpected leap of logic.

“All where.” Gordy scrubbed at his eyes with his fists, making Kate realise that this was perhaps rather more serious than she’d first thought as he was still lying in his bed. Usually, when he woke up he crawled down to the foot of his bed and tried to clamber over her work and into her lap for a hug. “Hot…” he added, kicking the duvet off which enabled her to see that actually, he did look rather flushed and sweaty. “...sore inside…” he continued, clearly trying to work out how to be more specific in his explanation. Either that was his attempt to tell her he had a sore throat or he was trying to put himself into a chokehold.

“Let me feel…” Standing up, Kate moved over to his bed and sat down, lifting him up and into her lap in one smooth movement, immediately feeling how warm he was through his pyjamas. “Am I spinning Gordy?”

“Yeah…” Closing his eyes, not liking how the world went when it was moving about, he let his head drop against her, his head hitting Kate’s collarbone hard although he barely noticed. “Stop it…” he commanded sleepily, feeling a bit better now he was being given a hug.

“Do you want to try Mummy’s bed?” asked Kate, judging from what he was telling her that he’d picked up the sore throat and temperature bug that was going around his nursery after all - she just hoped it wasn’t tonsillitis. She’d get him settled on her bed where at least the bedding was fresher while she went and got the Calpol she’d bought last week, just in case this happened. Hopefully a dose of that and perhaps some diluted fruit juice would help him get back to sleep.

“Mmmm….” He nodded groggily, managing to clout her chin and dig her in the boobs with his chin in the process, no doubt adding to her growing list of bruises. Still, at least he didn’t have sharp corners and dimples like those bloody Lego bricks. “…ju’ce?”
“Alright Gordster…” She blew a raspberry on his head which, in conjunction with the silly name
caused him to giggle feebly, suggesting there was perhaps a bit of him well enough to notice she’d
not corrected him for forgetting the ‘please’. “…Mummy’s bed it is with clean pyjamas and some
juice…” Holding him to her, Kate stood up and, slightly stooped so she didn’t bang her head
against the roof of the canal boat, took the necessary couple of steps to move them both over to her
bed. “Tractors or penguins?” she asked, not really expecting him to care about which clean
pyjamas he got but it would give him something to think about while she was sorting out the juice
and and Calpol.

“Those penguin pyjamas were amazing!”

“They were your favourites, I was dreading when you’d grow out of them…” agreed Kate, amused
at what he could remember but deciding now was a good time to let him in on the secret after all
these years. “…so I went back to Marks’ and bought a pair in each of the next three sizes up.”

“So they weren’t magic?”

“No more magic than any other piece of clothing, no…” Kate smiled, remembering Gordy’s faith in
his ‘magic penguins’ that kept growing with him until he was about seven when finally, much to her
relief, he went off penguins completely and he could just grow out of them and into something
different. “I’m just glad you drank the juice before you put them on…”

“Oh? Why?” Gordy remembered the pyjamas but had absolutely no idea why this particular night
and this particular childhood ailment was standing out in her memory but not his.

“The juice had grapefruit in it…”

Even now Kate could remember the sense of growing panic and terror as, almost as soon as he’d
drank the small cup of diluted tropical mix fruit juice he started to vomit. Since this was well before
the advent of mobile phones, she remembered just scooping him up in her arms and clambering up to
the deck and down the gangway to the towpath, shouting for the neighbouring boats to help her. It
had probably been no more than a matter of minutes before the first blue lights started to appear, as
there was a phone box just up the mooring, but sat holding him as he kept wretching had felt like a
lifetime.

“Oh.” Blinking, Gordy lapsed into silence, stunned by this piece of news. It had never occurred to
him to ask how they’d discovered he was allergic to grapefruit - it was just one of those things he’d
always known, with his occasional rebellious attempt at drinking a tropical fruits Capri Sun always
reminding him why he wasn’t actually supposed to have anything to do with grapefruit. It had
actually got to the point that he wasn’t sure he knew what grapefruit tasted of, just knew to avoid
anything citrus looking that wasn’t also displaying its ingredients. It had served him fairly well as a
self-preservation mechanism as long as he didn’t go drinking with Troop…. “I don’t remember
that.”

“Until you mentioned the Lego, I hadn’t remembered that bit…” observed Kate reasonably, feeling
herself start to shift towards university lecturer mode and promptly stopping herself. “…just as I’d
nearly forgotten about your houseguest…”

“Oh, yes. Him.” Gordy rubbed his neck and looked across the room to the Doctor. “He seems
happier now his Dalek’s working again….”

Given everything she could and quite probably had said about the Doctor over the years, silence was
not something he’d been expecting.

But then, Kate hadn’t been expecting him to bring up Daleks.
Chapter 21

Daleks.

The horrifically grotesque creation of Davros, combining the single-minded obsessive hatred for everyone and everything that wasn’t ‘them’ with the almost indestructible exterior tank-like casing. This was the ultimate threat, the ultimate destroyer... This was the darkness of the Universe, the enemies Earth now had, the enemies that she’d sworn she’d protect her children from...

In a split second, she considered several possible options as to what could happen next, from evacuating several postcodes and requesting an air strike, to mobilising the SAS and imposing a curfew... No doubt, there were still colleagues of hers at UNIT, both today and in years gone by, who would be already firing off orders and initiating military strategies, but she wasn’t those other UNIT leaders, and this wasn’t an ordinary situation... this was an extraordinary situation and, at times like this, an extraordinary response was needed.

So Kate Lethbridge-Stewart took a deep and calming breath and then, with her mind clear and her heart only slightly racing, she determined their course of action with one single, simple request...

“Tell me you’ve taken a photograph?”

“What?”

As he spoke, Gordy winced - one of his mother’s pet hates was him answering her questions like that, but she had been quiet for a good long time by her standards.

“A photograph, have you taken a photograph?” repeated Kate, ignoring his woeful listening skills on this one occasion as, even by the Doctor’s rather wide and varied range of behaviour over the years, this did sound like it was turning into one of the more eccentric visits.

“Umm...” Reaching into the pocket of his jeans, Gordy fumbled with his mobile phone as he tried to turn on the camera function, muttering to himself about it always turning on when he didn’t want it. “…yes.” He looked at the screen and smiled - despite his slightly clumsy attempt, he had managed to capture the Doctor, tongue sticking out between his lips, concentrating on making sure his miniature Lego Dalek was just as he wanted it. “Is he normally like this?”
“Yes…” Stepping back into the cottage from the garden, her mug of tea now empty, Kate smiled at Osgood who had just emerged from their bedroom, “...and no. You’re sure it’s a Dalek?”

Osgood’s expression went from a relaxed smile to tense frown in a split second when she heard Kate’s question, immediately followed by her starting to search for her inhaler as she felt in her empty trouser pockets.

“It’s what he said it was…” Gordy waited until he could see the Lego model again clearly, once the Doctor’s hands were no longer obstructing his view. “...is that not a thing?” Gordy had never actually met a Dalek, but had heard them being mentioned over the years so he wasn’t unfamiliar with the word.

“It’s a thing…” assured Kate, spotting Osgood’s inhaler on the table and taking the necessary couple of steps needed to reach it. “...but I wouldn’t have thought they’d work in Lego…” Abandoning her empty mug, Kate held out the inhaler for Osgood to take before returning her focus to Gordy’s call. However, when she didn’t then hear the telltale hiss of the inhaler spraying a dose of Ventolin, she looked back at Osgood in concern, only to see her girlfriend starting to grin. Confused, but reassured, Kate returned the majority of her focus to Gordy, although she didn’t object when Osgood came over and tangled her fingers in the hand Kate had used to pass her the inhaler. “...they’re, well, cone shaped. I would have thought something else might be easier to make from bricks…” Like K-9 perhaps? While the ears and tail might have been tricky, from what she remembered of the Doctor’s associate, he was rather more Lego brick shaped than a Dalek was.

“Oh…” Gordy grinned now he understood the reason for her confusion. “...Lego doesn’t just come in brick shapes any more...it has curved and circle bits.”

“I see.” Kate didn’t really, not having paid particular attention to the brick composition of the models that Max had made over the years, with most of her memories of Lego coming from standing on Gordy’s abandoned bricks as a little boy. “And he’s made a Dalek…”

“Yes, it’s cute.” Gordy knew he probably wouldn’t think that if he met a properly sized Dalek, but the small model that the Doctor was currently admiring as he sent it gently rolling across the coffee table from one side to the other was, well, cute. “Do you want to talk to him?” asked Gordy suddenly, realising that there was probably a reason why she had called, and it clearly wasn’t to discuss the current range of Lego components. “Or Max? He’s just outside with Jess and Soph…” He was helping them bring in the shopping which would hopefully include a weekend’s worth of fish fingers and custard as, so far at least, the Doctor had shown a reluctance to vary his diet, although radish slices had met with approval.

“I’ll talk to the Doctor please…” Hearing Gordy’s agreement, Kate moved the phone away from her mouth so as to create a small degree of privacy. “Hey…” She squeezed Osgood’s fingers in case her
girlfriend was in any doubt that she was one Kate was greeting. “...inhaled working?” she asked carefully, knowing from experience that Os, quite correctly, did not appreciate being unduly fussed over with regards to her asthma, but did understand and appreciate Kate’s inevitable concern as long as it wasn’t fussing… it was a fine line that Kate mostly managed to tiptoe along, but being on the receiving end of an Osgood grump was not unheard of.

“Yes thank you…” Osgood caught hold of Kate’s trouser pocket with the fingers of her other hand, not intending to let go of Kate’s left hand unless the blonde needed it for something more important. “...Lego Daleks?” She’d not expected, on emerging from their bedroom where she’d been doing a quick tidy-up, to find Kate returning indoors, nor apparently talking about Daleks. The double surprise had seen her catch her breath and, for a split second it hadn’t been entirely clear whether she’d startled herself into an uneven breathing pattern that could in turn then start her wheezing. Then, her rapid exhale when she realised it was a Lego Dalek briefly made it worse, before finally, she felt in control again.

“Lego does more than bricks now…” Kate was feeling rather proud of her newly acquired ‘advanced’ Lego knowledge, only to see Osgood giving her the same fond look that was usually the precursor to being told she was Os’ ‘silly idiotic thing’. “You knew that?”

“So did you…” pointed out Osgood kindly, amused by how quickly Kate could grasp all manner of alien, scientific or horticultural ‘thing’ but could be seemingly permanently baffled on occasion by the straightforward or mundane. “...Max’s models?”

“Are special kits…” Half listening to the noises she could hear through the phone, Kate was content to just stand with Os and enjoy her company while she waited for the Doctor to come to the phone.

“...full of Lego bricks…” Osgood wasn’t entirely sure what was the root cause of Kate’s unexpected revelation, especially considering that the variety of Lego models that they’d got Max for various birthdays and Christmases in recent years.

“Pieces, not bricks.”

“Everything is a brick,” explained Osgood, finally seeing what Kate’s confusion was caused by. “Even the ones that don’t have corners.” Deciding that she didn’t have anywhere else she was in a particular rush to be, Osgood shifted so she was slightly more comfortably leaning against her girlfriend, one arm loosely draped around Kate’s hips, the other tangled in Kate’s non-phone-holding hand. “Except the people, they’re not bricks…” Osgood knew they had a name, but it was currently escaping her.
“That’s…” Kate was about to say something about it being poor geometry, but she heard the Doctor’s voice getting louder as he accepted Gordy’s offer of a cup of tea. “Hello?”

“Kate!” Standing straight and checking his bowtie was neat and tidy, the Doctor considered his surroundings. “Your children are not very tidy.”

“No, they’re not.” Kate’s entirely reasonable agreement with his assertion caught the Doctor slightly off guard - he wasn’t used to her agreeing with him just like that, but he couldn’t worry about that now as she was still talking.... “But I stopped worrying about it when they stopped living with me.”

Even when the boys had been teenagers, or earlier, when Gordy had been a toddler, Kate hadn’t often discussed her parenting strategy and attitudes, and, while she certainly hadn’t had many conversations about it in the last decade or so, it wasn’t completely unfamiliar territory for her. The Doctor, on the other hand, she suspected had launched himself into unchartered conversational territory if this lengthening silence was anything to go by.

“Yes, of course…” Swallowing repeatedly, wondering why his throat was misbehaving, the Doctor started to look for his sonic screwdriver, just in case it.

“Doctor?”

“Yes Kate?” Standing stock still, his elbow pointing sharply towards the window as, sonic screwdriver now in his jacket pocket again, the Doctor was almost saluting as he held the phone to his ear and waited for her question.

“What’s going on?” Kate sighed as soon as she’d finished asking her question, realising the error she had made.

“Many many things my dear, in all parts of space and time…” This really was most bizarre - his throat was now operating more sensibly but his stomach was not...and as for his hearts...he knew it had been a mistake to listen to jazz - it had given them ideas...

“I’m aware of that…” Kate consciously relaxed her jaw at the same time she felt Os snuggle against her and let go of her other hand, experience telling Osgood that Kate would never let go of her girlfriend’s fingers, even if she did want her hand back to gesticulate as a way of managing her frustration. Acknowledging Osgood’s actions, Kate rested her chin on the top of her girlfriend’s
head and, for the moment, wrapped her now free hand around Os. “...so could you narrow down your summary to those parts of space and time that you have been in recently?”

“I told you, yesterday...keep up Kate!” His hearts were definitely demonstrating a love of jazz now and his throat was back to not behaving.

“Before you watched the cricket...” For a brief second, Kate closed her eyes and tried to decide to what degree she might need to prepare to argue semantics with him about the time frame meant by ‘before’... then she decided that really was borrowing trouble and she’d just carry on. “...and ate prawn sandwiches and custard tarts and stayed longer than the Tardis wanted you to...” She opened her eyes again, surprised that he hadn’t immediately interrupted her to point out that he was the Time Lord in command of the Tardis not the other way around as she’d just implied. “...before all that, what happened Doctor?”

“What makes you think something happened?” He’d slumped now, his elbow no longer pointing out of the window and his toes were exploring a Lego brick they’d found - funny how they didn’t hurt if you found them rather than them finding you....

“Experience?” Kate tightened her hold on Osgood, grateful that Osgood immediately returned the gesture and hugged Kate tightly, not knowing the reason why it was suddenly important but understanding that it was needed. Shifting her head slightly, Osgood found the open neck of Kate’s shirt and gently kissed her, just for added emphasis that whatever was happening, she was there.

There was something in her voice that made him stop his instinctive brush off and dismissive ‘I’m a Time Lord’ remark. This was Kate... Kate, who already knew he didn’t always have the answer, wasn’t always completely confident in the outcome... “It almost happened...too soon...”

“It?” Kate tried to work out what ‘it’ was, what was the event that could disturb the Doctor to the point that he panics...what could happen to the Doctor that was ‘too soon’... “Regeneration?”

“Yes...” He abruptly sat down on the floor again and began to push his Dalek across the coffee table again, watching its progress as it rolled across the table.

“Where were you?” As much as she wanted to ask him other questions, her first priority was to Earth...and to her children: if his presence was a threat she had to know...

“The far side of the Universe...” He tapped the Dalek so it turned and stayed on the coffee table.
“...far away from here, far away from anywhere....” It was a part of space he’d never been to before, somewhere that didn’t seem to have anything, ever... somewhere so boringly full of nothing it made it interesting... too interesting as it turned out as there, in the middle of this eternal nothing there was something, something so completely unlike anything that had ever been seen or found or known about. “...the most nothingest nothing point ever...so nothing it was something...”

“Empty space?”

“Space is never empty Kate...” For a moment, he was full of bluster and confidence, almost to the point of arrogance before he remembered, remembered why he was telling her this in the first place. “...but yes, it was just space... the Old Girl took the scenic route though, just in case.” He understood what her concern was, understood what her priority was. “And she’d have landed with someone else’s blue things if there was any danger...” He adjusted his bowtie again. “...I think she likes you...” he joked, his earlier energy starting to return, this time masquerading as cheekiness.

“And I like her...” Kate felt Osgood shift against her, no doubt preparing to ask who this ‘her’ was. “...the Tardis I mean...” clarified Kate, mostly for Osgood’s benefit although it wouldn’t have been the first time she’d decided not to rely solely on pronouns - English didn’t always have quite enough range to cope with all the possible alien-related situations UNIT found themselves in. “Is there anything UNIT can do to help?” Given what she’d just learned, Kate was starting to understand why he’d appeared from nowhere and watched a village cricket match in the village he’d spent so much time in, why he was showing a mixture of characteristics and traits from a variety of his previous reincarnations.... From the sounds of things, a weekend with the boys was probably precisely what he did need to help him recover his general equilibrium, but that wasn’t for her to dictate, especially as suggesting it would probably automatically see it dismissed.

“No thank you.” The Doctor rubbed his nose, wondering why it was tingling before deciding it was allowed to tingle as long as it didn’t make a habit of it. “I had a spare bowtie and handkerchief, and Max has braces.”

It took Kate a moment to work out what that particularly random comment meant.

“Gordy’s clothes fit you then?”

“Yes.” The Doctor stood up and inspected himself, double checking that he was appropriately costumed, then looking up when he heard the door open. “Ah! Tea!” Advancing on Gordy who was carrying two mugs of tea, the Doctor took one and, despite Gordy’s attempts to stop him, took a big gulp... “...hot!”
As the Doctor set about trying to recover from the surprise of hot tea, in the process rediscovering a couple of bits on Lego still on the floor, Gordy managed to extract the phone from his hand and passed it to Max who had followed him into the room carrying a pile of Lego boxes which he put down on the couch.

“Hello?”

“Max? Everything okay?”

“I think so…” Max watched as, mouth no longer burning and mug of tea safely placed on the coffee table, Gordy and the Doctor were investigating the Lego. “…yes…” Seeing he wasn’t needed, Max slipped from the room and, realising that Soph and Jess were in the kitchen with their own mugs of tea, he headed for his bedroom. “…he’s…” Shutting his bedroom door behind him, Max exhaled loudly and ran his hand over his head, not sure what to say next.

“Not what you expected?”

“Yeah…wait, is that bad?” It weird - he was in his bedroom, talking to his Mum and yet he couldn’t help feeling like he should be in uniform or something.

“No, that’s not bad Max…” Kate felt Osgood shift again as she relaxed her hold on Kate and pulled away far enough to be able to look properly at Kate while she explained the situation to Max. “…I’m going to put you on speaker, Os is here too…” she added, moving the handset away from her ear and in the process realising she’d been using the cottage’s phone rather than her mobile. Did this one even have a speakerphone?

“It has a speaker function…” assured Osgood, pulling the handset towards her and pressing the relevant button. “Hi Max.”

“Hey Os, thanks for talking to Jess this morning.” Somehow, it felt easier to talk to his Mum when Osgood was there too, making the whole conversation feel more like a family chat about work rather than an on the spot interrogation with Greyhound One.

“Did they manage to find something?” asked Osgood as she repositioned her glasses now she was no longer hugging Kate.
“The Doctor and Gordy are looking at it all now… lots of Star Wars Lego kits and a massive bag of blue Lego bricks.”

“He wants to build a Lego Tardis?” guessed Osgood, finding the idea a good one now she thought about it - no doubt Kate would approve as well, since it would require brick shaped bricks… a lot of brick shaped bricks…

“Yes… he said something about it being a good doorstop for the squeaky door by the swimming pool?” Max wasn’t sure whose swimming pool the Doctor was talking about, but had dismissed it as a detail not worth worrying about.

“On the Tardis,” explained Kate while she waited for Osgood to finish whatever she was puzzling over. “That’s quite a big bit of Lego…”

“He seemed to want it to be about knee-height… he tried to make a Dalek that big but I didn’t have big enough wheels…” While Max did have some Lego models that were of the size that the Doctor had taken a fancy to, they were all models that were static, with any moving parts being components within the model rather than the whole model. “…so he made the biggest one he could that would spin and move. Apparently it was ‘just a pepper pot’ if it didn’t spin and move…”

“And how big’s that?” asked Kate, rather relieved that the Doctor’s Dalek ambitions had been miniaturised.

“About mug sized.” It had looked quite cute actually, but Max knew better than to actually voice that thought, not knowing his brother had already beaten him to it. “It’s rather good actually, considering there’s no plan…” Max thoroughly enjoyed the methodical process of laying out all the bricks in a model kit and then following the instructions - it had the same satisfaction of a job well done that stripping down and cleaning his gun had given during basic training. He knew that if it didn’t quite turn out as it should do, then he must have made a mistake and would backtrack through the steps until he found his error. Give him a pile of bricks and no plan and he was lost, considering himself to be not remotely creative, whereas clearly the Doctor had the talent. “And he couldn’t cheat…”

“How do you cheat building Lego?” asked Kate, looking to Osgood for reassurance that she was equally bemused, but Osgood was still distracted.

“He used his sonic screwdriver to sort the pieces… he never makes a mistake putting a kit together.”
“You mean he follows the instructions…” corrected Kate, knowing that for all Max’s method, he still had the occasional moments of ‘gung ho’ when he got ahead of himself and tried to be a bit too clever and skip a few steps. At least, that was what he was like assembling flat-pack furniture, so she’d always assumed there was the same problem with his Lego creations “…let him use the screwdriver Max…” For all Max’s mostly easy-going nature, he could become oddly fixated on being the ‘best’ at something on occasion, with his stubborn competitive streak having the potential to get him into difficulty. Kate could all too easily picture this being one such occasion and wanting to nip it in the bud.

“But…”

“No Max.” Kate’s tone was one that all of UNIT recognised as her ‘Greyhound One has decided’ voice, but to Max and Gordy it was also known as their mother’s ‘Final Warning’ voice. You could continue to discuss the topic with her if you really wanted to, but it was not going to end well for you, and she certainly wasn’t going to change her mind.

“Is he okay?” Accepting her instruction, Max tried to work out why she might be taking that stance - from what he’d read, this wasn’t exactly typical behaviour from the Doctor and, except in times of banishment or crisis, he’d not dropped by Earth for this long before. “Are you coming back?”

“Yes…I mean yes, he’s okay in the broadest sense.” Kate looked at Osgood, wondering what was preoccupying her, trying to work out whether it was something that would mean they needed to go back to London… if they had to be back in London, they’d go but she was realistic enough to admit to herself she rather hoped they didn’t have to. As much as she loved her job and everything it entailed, it was nice to be away from UNIT and away from being a Greyhound.

“Do you want us to come back?” asked Osgood, rejoining the conversation, her puzzle clearly solved.

“I think we’re good…” Max thought about the Doctor’s requirements as a guest - now Jess and Soph were back with the shopping, Max and Gordy could provide fish fingers and custard in the relatively huge quantities he seemed to enjoy, and they had plenty of Lego to construct and all the Star Wars films on hand. “…if all he wants to do is hang out?” As questions went, that was fairly high up his list of ones he never thought he’d ask about the Doctor.

“You’ll be fine,” assured Kate, smiling at Osgood as she felt genuinely confident in Max and Gordy’s ability to host the Doctor, with a fairly high degree of ‘proud Mum’ at the same time. “He’s just had a bad day…” Suddenly, Kate realised that she was speaking with a confidence she didn’t necessarily have. “…or week, recent past at least.”
“Anything to worry about?” He’d been with Troop long enough to learn that this was a question that should always be asked about every situation.

“As far as I can tell, he was exposed to something, somewhere in space, that made him think he was starting to regenerate…” Kate rubbed the back of her neck as she tried to work out what else she could infer from the Doctor’s rather fractured account, conscious too that Osgood was probably already about nine questions in to her ‘but what about’ list. “...it seems to be a fixed point in space and the Tardis got them away from it and brought him to Earth for…” Kate struggled to think of the right phrase.

“A rest cure?” suggested Osgood, knowing that as treatments went it had become rather unfashionable long before the Second World War but Max would recognise the term from the Detective Stories he and Gordy had enjoyed reading as teenagers.

“That explains why he’s eating so much…” concluded Max, before adding for their benefit. “He ate the whole packet of fish fingers last night, almost in one go. And is...more like a baby giraffe than I was expecting.”

It took Kate a moment to make the connection, before remembering that Freddie, Max’s mother and her best friend from her student days when they’d been first living together in Halls and then latterly worked together in the same University department, had had a particular interest in giraffe husbandry, meaning Max had spent a fair few school holidays accompanying her to zoos and safari parks.

“All legs and stumbles?” she guessed finally, able to picture the Doctor being slightly gawky - Gordy was the same when he was tired or drunk, although fortunately she rarely saw either occurrence aside from around Christmas time when both boys moved back home for the few days of festivities. “He’s still finding his feet I expect.”

As if on cue, there was a loud shout from the other room which prompted Jess, Soph and Max to all converge on the sound, a sound that Kate didn’t need any help in identifying: no matter how old or tall their children become, a mother always knows the sound of their yell.

“It’s okay…” began Max, standing in the doorway and grinning when he saw what the source of the noise was.

“...Gordy’s stood on Lego?” guessed Kate, recognising her son’s yelp which hadn’t really changed all that much from when he was tiny.
“Yeah…” Max was struggling not to laugh at his brother’s antics, made all the funnier by the Doctor not moving the bits of Lego he’d just dropped out from under Gordy’s feet, although how anyone would get to them while Gordy was still leaping about clutching his foot was another matter.

“You’ll be fine Max….ring us if you need to though.”

“Thanks Os…you too Mum…”

And, leaving him to his chuckling, all too easily able to picture him leaning against the doorframe laughing and no doubt taking pictures for future wind up threats on his phone, Osgood ended the phone call.

“What?” asked Kate finally, her hands snaking back around Osgood’s waist now they didn’t have to hold a phone.

“If the Doctor makes a Tardis door stop out of Lego…”

“You’re going to tell me how many bricks it would take?” teased Kate, respecting Osgood’s grasp of arithmetic and engineering design skills and knowing that she probably did know the unit size of a Lego brick.

“I wasn’t…” Osgood caught her lip and did a quick calculation or two. “…but if it’s roughly to scale and knee height probably about 1,000 per side, assuming it was only two layers of bricks thick and he was using the most prevalent two by four stud brick, so about 10,000 in total by the time the roof and details are added.”

“Am I signing off the expenses or are you?” asked Kate, not sure how much a brick cost on a unit basis.

“I’ve told Jess to come find me on Monday with them…” began Osgood, only to remember she’d been distracted from her original point. “…but that wasn’t what I was going to say.”

“I’m sorry…” Kate didn’t manage to hide her frustration at not being able to find an untucked opening at Osgood’s waist, meaning she had to make do with starting to tease patterns on Osgood’s
shirt rather than her skin, unlike Os who had strategically ensured there was plenty of opportunity for her fingers to worm their way between Kate’s shirt and trousers while they’d been on the phone. “Do carry on…” she encouraged, wondering why she was always the more untucked one.

“If the Doctor makes a Tardis door stop out of Lego…” repeated Osgood, grinning triumphantly when she saw Kate’s little huff of defeat at trying to stealthily untuck Osgood’s very neatly tucked in t-shirt and instead just gave it a sharp tug. “...and takes it into the Tardis…” Osgood hummed when Kate’s fingers finally brushed against the small of her back, confirming that she really hadn’t minded becoming untucked. “...then the Tardis will be smaller on the inside after all…”

Kate’s fingers stilled as she looked, slack jawed, at Osgood.

“What?” asked Os finally, grinning broadly.

“That was…” Kate shook her head as she tried to think of an appropriate way of describing Osgood’s statement.

“...bad?” guessed Osgood, in all honesty expecting Kate to have groaned at the very ‘Kate’ joke she’d just made - while Osgood often thought of them, she really was not very good at delivering them, with Kate being much better at keeping a suitably neutral expression.

“...brilliant.”

“You’re biased…” dismissed Osgood, resuming her teasing exploration of Kate’s back, not really accepting Kate’s compliment but just pleased that she’d actually managed to deliver the quip.

“Absolutely…” agreed Kate, leaning forwards to kiss her girlfriend, “...but that was brilliant...just like you..” And, before Osgood could protest any further, Kate proceeded to show her quite how brilliant she thought she was… a ‘conversation’ that fairly quickly became a very animated debate between them both...after all, Osgood held equally strong views on the brilliance of Kate…

Meanwhile, in amongst the hydrangeas, the Tardis sank down more comfortably amongst the shrubs as, diagnostics complete, she could now do a quick scan to see how things were. The Doctor was easy to find, and her readings showed that he was starting to stabilise again...and that looked to be a
most impressive miniature version of her he was currently constructing with his young friends… her access to the UNIT databases telling her she was ‘meeting’ the children of the daughter of the Brigadier and their girlfriends… with the discipline of the experienced Type 40 that she was, the Tardis closed down her access before she’d drifted too many decades into the future and set about scanning for Kate and Osgood.

It had taken strained her flux capacitors and chameleon circuits to their limits, but she had remained concealed until she had detected that Kate and Osgood were in Scotland… not because she didn’t want to see them - the Tardis liked both women immensely and did wonder sometimes if they could be persuaded to accompany the Doctor on some adventures some time… no, the Tardis had waited and waited, not wanting the two women to find it easy to rush back to see the Doctor. Just as he and the Tardis needed to have a rest and recover from their… actually, the Tardis made a note in the log that whatever it was they’d been at was unclassifiable, which was unusual as, being of the Type 40 class, she had fairly comprehensive knowledge databanks and interpretive circuits…. but yes, the Doctor and the Tardis needed a rest, and Kate and Osgood needed their time together…. and yes! There they were… Circuits humming in electronic satisfaction at finding the right scanning frequency, both women were… oh.

Shutting down her scan, the Tardis would have blushed if she could, but instead the rapidly dispersing energy from her scanning circuits caused her floomph capacitor to glow a luminous peach colour and almost overheat. And that would have been unfortunate and required the Doctor to go rummaging in the compartment that was especially ticklish before they could set off again, but it would have been worth it… as for all her ability to roam through time and space, the Tardis did generally prefer to not to pry…
Chapter 22

“Good morning!”

Fran watched with a mixture of disbelief and amusement as her boss positively sailed past Fran’s desk, oblivious to the mountains of paperwork still covering every surface, including the laps of three of her fellow PAs who had insisted on sitting on the chairs previously covered with paperwork, before following Kate into her office and deliberately shutting the door behind her.

“Good morning…” Fran was tempted, based on the good mood radiating from Kate, to ask if she’d had a good weekend, but stopped herself, afraid it might sound sly. Instead, she found herself hovering just inside the now shut office door, a probably silly grin stuck on her face and no idea what to say.

“Mmm…” Kate had tossed her bag on one of the armchairs and leaned forwards to smell the delicate, subtle fragrance of the roses that were displayed in a rather fine crystal vase on the coffee table. “…Hippolyte.” She didn’t always know the specific name of the roses that Osgood sent her each week during the ‘summer’, but over time she had learned to recognise some of the more distinctive blooms, and this one was very distinctive.

“It doesn’t look like a hippo…” Fran had misheard Kate and was trying to work out what it was about a pinkish-purple pom-pom of a flower about the size of a tennis ball that could make anyone think of Hippos, never mind lightweight ones.

“Rosa Gallica Hippolyte,” repeated Kate, standing up and heading towards her desk chair, smiling at Fran as she spoke, “to give it its full title. Gallica roses are the ‘oldies’ of the rose world, grown by the Ancient Greeks and Romans…” Kate paused while she took off her linen suit jacket and hung it on the back of her chair, rescuing her glasses from the pocket in the process. “…but then the new varieties were bred in the 19th century…”

“So it’s a new old rose?” asked Fran, looking again at the flowers which were looking very pretty in the smallest of the vases that lived in the cupboard in the corner of the office, the collection having grown from a water jug to half a dozen crystal vases able to cope with a range of stem lengths and bloom sizes. Fran’s childhood had, horticulturally speaking, been the muddy grass of the nearby park and her grandmother’s window box, but she and her husband tried in their small garden, refusing to convert the front garden into a parking space or the back garden into a playground like their neighbours had. Instead, and with Kate’s occasional input with the loan of a book or particular tool, gift of cuttings and a handful of ‘site visits’, the Waincroft front and back gardens were ‘proper gardens’ to Fran’s eye and little havens she and her husband thoroughly enjoyed.
“Yes.” Still standing up, Kate reached for her left shirt cuff and started to remove her cufflink.
“Named after Hippolyta…”

“Wonder Woman’s mum?” Fran blushed, not having intended to have interrupted her boss and with comic book stuff as well… “I mean…”

“No, you’re right…” Kate finished rolling up her sleeve to the elbow - it wasn’t as neat as when Os did it for her, but by Kate’s more haphazard standards, it was actually quite tidy. “...at least, that’s one version of her.” The boys had gone through a superhero comic book phase in their late teens so Kate had picked up some basic knowledge that was coming back to her rapidly as more films were made and advertised. “She’s also in A Midsummer Night’s Dream…” Kate looked up at Fran as she moved onto her right cuff, noticing the closed office door for the first time. “How was your weekend?”

“Good thanks…” It felt a bit surreal, standing here discussing the weekend which, for Fran, had included the usual weekend ritual of pushing the trolley round Tescos while Jesse did the housework. “...I still don’t understand why my husband prefers cleaning the bathroom to doing the weekly shop…” Fran shrugged good-naturedly - it was a mystery that fifteen years of marriage still hadn’t solved, “...but I’m not complaining.”

“Nor doing Ocado…” teased Kate, recalling Fran’s one and only experiment with ordering her groceries online like Kate and Osgood now mostly did. To Fran’s horror, while the grocery delivery had been excellent, Jesse no longer needed an ‘excuse’ to dodge the weekly shop...and so the following weekend Fran was back pushing a trolley around Tescos and coming home to a clean house: nowhere in her marriage vow had she promised to clean the loo...

“Quite…” Fran watched as Kate finished rolling up her other sleeve, knowing the inevitable was now unavoidable.

“I brought you this…” Unaware of the dilemma her secretary was putting herself in, Kate headed back to where she’d tossed her bag and opened it. “...or rather Os found this at home and decided I needed to give it to you…” Kate passed Fran a plain cardboard box that was about the size of a magazine and just under an inch thick. “...I was telling Os about the paperwork crisis…” Kate watched as Fran opened the box carefully, relieved when she didn’t see a pile of broken glass fall out of it. “...she thinks you should put my note in that…”

Putting aside the box, Fran pulled away the single sheet of tissue paper and revealed what Osgood’s gift to her was - a simple clip frame, that would trap a piece of paper up to about A4 size between a stiff board and a piece of glass, and an ‘art easel’ style stand to put the frame in.
“...and stand it on my desk so I don’t forget…” Kate almost laughed when she saw the shocked expression on Fran’s face, but caught herself just in time. “...I happen to agree…” In fact, it had been Kate who had given Osgood the idea in the first place: in concluding her story about writing the ‘Smile and Sign’ note as she rushed from the Tower on Friday, the blonde had offhandedly observed as they followed Jenkins’ lead through the motorway interchange on the journey back last night that Fran should probably get her note framed for frequent future use. Clearly Osgood agreed.

“...anyway…” Kate extracted her pen from her trouser pocket, picked up her glasses and sat down. “...I’m ready to start my first pile…”

“About that…” Fran felt like she was squirming in front of the headteacher at primary school when Kate looked at her, waiting for her to continue. “...there’s been a change of plan…”

“Oh?” Not that she’d ever admit it to anyone except possibly Osgood, but Kate had actually been looking forward to a quiet week with minimal meetings and some time to just catch up on the paperwork and generally feel like she wasn’t lagging behind on everything. “How many are in the queue then?” Kate added together the three people she’d noticed sitting in the ‘waiting room’ section of Fran’s office, and the closed office door and correctly came to the right answer - namely that Geneva would be waiting a while longer for their reports.

“Seven…” Fran did a quick scan of her mental list, “...well, eight if you include me, nine if you add in Osgood.” Osgood hadn’t yet announced that she needed Greyhound One’s input, but then Fran knew that the scientist probably hadn’t made it to her lab by the time Fran followed Kate into her office, nevermind checked her own ‘queue’ of urgent emails and people. “But I’m guessing about Osgood.” It was, however, a good guess and one that would come good just after half past ten once she’d dealt with her own queue...

“Tip top.” Kate put her pen back down on her desk and relaxed back in her chair, easily accepting the change of plan. “Who’s first then?”

“Osgood?”

“Come in Jess,” encouraged Osgood, turning around and smiling at the exo-biologist. “You got my message…” Since the message was telling Jess where to find Osgood, it was a decidedly redundant observation but did help Jess actually cross the threshold.

“I didn’t know you had an office…” Nor, had it turned out, had most of her colleagues when she’d asked them where Osgood’s office was. In fact, she’d had to resort to texting Max and asking him for directions and, judging by his reply, even he’d had to stop and think.
“I don’t use it very often…” Once upon a time, Osgood had a desk calendar that gave her an interesting quotation every day, but after tearing off whole months at a time, she now had an 85.72% less interesting one as it was a one-week-to-a-sheet calendar instead. Even so, she’d still had to tear off five pages in one go this morning, confirming it had been over a month since she’d last made it to her office.

Osgood looked around the small office that was ‘hers’ following the most recent Division reorganisation six months ago, necessitated when it became clear that the work the team in Chem-4 was doing was rather more unstable, chemically speaking, than first thought and consequently had to be relocated into the Medieval part of the Tower. This meant Bio-6 took the opportunity to insist on being relocated somewhere sub-terranean as they were really struggling with keeping their research ‘controlled’, as exposure to any natural light having a destructive effect on their Roquering plant samples they were trying to study as part of the interplanetary agreement. In the resultant major reshuffling of the science teams, if Osgood hadn’t moved office, she’d have ended up sharing a corridor with Biomed Alpha, and no one ever volunteered for that, including Rosie and she was the Chief Scientist responsible for Biomedical Sciences team, including Biomed Alpha within the Sciences Division.

“...and I’m not sure Kate actually knows where it is now…” In fact, Osgood still had to stop and pause to remember how to find it if she was tired - she’d not actually spent long enough in this office to retrain her auto-pilot. She had, however, at least remembered to extract the very battered photograph of Kate’s foot against a background of daffodils from her filofax and stick it up against her pen pot, next to her computer screen and that had made it feel instantly ‘hers’ as, except for her previous office, she’d always had that photo stuck up on her desk since she and Kate had been together.

“I do know where it is…” declared Kate, unexpectedly appearing in the doorway, surprising Jess and Osgood. “...at least, I knew where Room T27-4 was…”

“But Fran told you it was my office now?”

“No, Rosie, when I met her on the way to your old one…” admitted Kate sheepishly, leaning against the doorframe and sticking her hands in her pockets. “...which I’m sure is something Rosie will enjoy reminding me about frequently…” Kate was, outside of the more extreme alien related crises or anything directly threatening her family, fairly relaxed about being teased - she could hardly expect to go through life making the occasional wry quip and not expect a few to be launched in her direction, but working at the Tower, there were few who actually believed this to be true. Dr Ethel ‘Rosie’ Onurosie however, who had been one of the people to first teach an undergraduate Kate that she had to learn to take it if she wanted to ‘bring it’ as the older scientist had unexpectedly put it, was one of the few who did tease her.
“Umm, where were you when met her?” asked Jess cautiously, deciding this was probably one of those moments when she was actually best thinking of Kate as her boyfriend’s mum rather than the Big Boss, but it wasn’t easy to do this far into the Tower’s rabbit warren. She was however, as a member of the Biological Sciences Group, rather more familiar with the current layout of Dr Onurosie’s department and was able to all to clearly imagine what might have gone wrong if Kate hadn’t been intercepted.

“Outside of the quarantine zone fortunately…” confirmed Kate, much to Jess’ relief.

Biomed Alpha were reasonably confident that what they were working with at the moment wasn’t actually capable of permanent side effects for humans, but since the Xentranptic scientists hadn’t been able to provide a definitive confirmation of this, they were not taking any risks and following UNIT’s most comprehensive quarantine protocols. Extremely stringent, they generally meant no one could access a reasonably large surrounding area when a lab was operating under them, but as with most things alien, there was always an exception. If you were the UNIT Chief Scientific Officer (or CSO in the language of protocols), on point of principle always had immediate access to any UNIT science lab, in any scientific discipline, anywhere in the world, although you might not be able to get to the lab if it was under strict quarantine as the security protocols would keep you away. You may be able to access the lab if you got to the door, but to get to the door you needed operational command status that being CSO didn’t grant.

Unless the CSO was also a Greyhound and the lab in question was at the Tower.

When that happened, what was supposed to be the most secure and inaccessible places that UNIT security and scientific protocols could create became a whole series of unlocked doors for Kate. The protocols had just never considered the idea that the CSO could also have operational command status or, in Tower speak, be a Greyhound. Also, the security protocols rather presumed that the CSO never left Geneva except in a crisis and under escort, while the scientific protocols relied on the front line commanders being scientifically illiterate and therefore never granted scientific clearance to access the high risk labs.

“...and yes Os, I do have permission…” joked Kate, spotting her lover’s glance at the phone and knowing what she was thinking - Kate leaving her office and going for an unscheduled wander about the Tower usually saw search parties being launched and ‘the usual suspects’ being rung about potential sightings…

“But not directions…” pointed out Osgood reasonably, adjusting her glasses as she grinned in amusement. She knew that for all her laid back indifference and apparent casualness, Kate was extremely alert to her surroundings and aware of the potential for her to accidentally stumble into a dangerous situation and would have noticed long before she actually got into the containment zone… unfortunately there wasn’t a straightforward way of adjusting the protocols and the computerised locks that protected so much of UNIT’s hidden dangers to cope with the uniqueness of Kate’s dual
position and yes, Osgood had looked. Repeatedly.

“I was waiting for the office-warming…” continued Kate, looking around the small office with interest, knowing Osgood really wasn’t that bothered what her office was like, originally being far more interested in what her lab spaces were like. Now, since she rarely spent much time in either due to always being needed somewhere else, be it a meeting or alien crisis, Osgood’s main focus became making sure she knew where her inhaler was and had a spare battery for her tablet… unless they weren’t at the Tower in which case she also worried about secure communication links back to the Tower and occasionally, what trouble Kate had got herself into.

“Staff review fortnight starts next week…” grumbled Osgood, hating that part of her job. Fortunately, she only had to do three review meetings: McGillop as the Chief Physicist, Rosie as the Chief Biomedical Scientist and the still very new Chief Chemist, Robert Shonbrun. What was more intensive and time consuming was having to satisfy herself, as Senior Scientist, that the three specialist Chiefs had done their departmental reviews properly, and that was something Osgood definitely could not do in the lab.

As the Tower’s Senior Scientist, Osgood’s review was supposed to be completed by the CSO in Geneva but that would have meant Kate doing it. As a consequence, Osgood’s review was traditionally done by Win Bambera who followed a simple strategy of waiting for Kate to complete the reviews for the other six Senior Scientists and reading the reviews. Then Win read Osgood’s review paperwork, which usually meant her having to get Kate to explain half of it to her since Win wasn’t exactly a scientist, before the General then decided if Osgood was as good as or better than her six colleagues, each covering one of North and South America, Far East, Oceania, Africa and HQ in Geneva (who generally dealt with anything in Europe that the Tower didn’t). So far, Win had yet to determine that any of the other six Senior Scientists were remotely as good as Osgood and that was without her being biased. Being biased would have seen Win form that opinion without reading any of the paperwork.

“Thanks for the reminder.” Pulling a rather expressive grimace, Kate deliberately pushed all thoughts of what that would entail for her firmly to the back of her mind and instead directed her attention to Jess who, had Kate not been still leaning in the doorway, might have attempted to disappear already. “Thank you, again, for this weekend…” Kate smiled at the younger exo-biologist, unable to imagine what the weekend might have been like if Max and Gordy hadn’t been at the house when the Doctor and Tardis arrived, or how the boys might have coped if their girlfriends hadn’t been around to help them. And, while Soph was appearing to be thoroughly level-headed and remarkably relaxed despite not being familiar with UNIT, both Kate and Osgood knew that Jess’ presence had played a massive part in the weekend not being the biggest headache of UNIT’s morning.

“I’m not sure I did anything much…” began Jess, looking between Osgood and Kate, suddenly feeling very much like she was talking to the UNIT living legends she was in awe of, rather than her boyfriend’s Mum and Mum’s partner.
“Nonsense!” Kate had little time for people with over-inflated senses of their contribution to something, but she was adamant that people should properly understand their contribution to something which meant, at times, giving pep talks to people like Jess and, occasionally still, Osgood too. “You did very well. A situation doesn’t have to be exploding to be challenging…” Kate momentarily cast her mind back to those unfortunate explosions that occasionally included marauding telephone boxes and other delights earlier in the year which had been when she’d first become aware of Max’s interest in Jess Padwinksi. “…in fact they’re sometimes the easiest to cope with because Troop are very good at chucking exploding things back…” she teased, winking at Osgood when she saw Osgood’s wry smile and slight head shake at her silliness.

“So wanting to shake him isn’t…” Jess worried at her lower lip, wondering if she had to finish her statement for Kate and Osgood to understand.

“...an unusual reaction? No…” Kate watched as Jess looked like a heavy weight had been lifted from her shoulders. “...he has his moments, just like anyone else.” And, not that Kate was going to tell Jess this unless she absolutely had to, but in light of his very recent accidental brush with regeneration, when Jess had first met him he would have been at his more eccentrically alien and therefore most shakable, which made it extra impressive that the younger biologist had managed to give the impression of taking it in her stride. “Although he also has his moments when he’s brilliant…”

“Max and Gordy were very good with him…” Jess looked from Kate to Osgood, finding it easier to tell Osgood this next bit in case Kate hadn’t already been told it by someone else, “…in between the Star Wars stuff, which Max could do for hours and hours…”

“And did I bet…” muttered Kate, thinking she really needed to have a word with her second son about remembering to pay attention to his girlfriend when they were on a date.

“It was sweet.” And had, for a split second or two, had Jess imagining what Max would be like when he had children, but she wasn’t going to bring that up with Kate and Osgood, so she cleared her throat and continued in a rush. “Because the Doctor was just as enthusiastic, asking so many questions all the time…”

“My father hated people talking during films…” recalled Kate, a slight tinge of sadness washing over her as she thought about how he’d driven some of the other residents at his nursing home mad with his intolerance of any conversation while there was a film on the television, so she could only imagine what he would have been like at the cinema watching Star Wars with the Doctor.

“That’s what Gordy said...he and the Doctor talked about…” Jess stumbled to a stop and looked at
Osgood for help - it felt rudely impersonal to call Kate’s father ‘the Brigadier’ in her presence, but hugely disrespectful to the UNIT legend that was ‘the Brig’ to describe him as ‘Gramps’ like Gordy did, and as for ‘your Dad’...

“Gordy’s Grandfather?” Osgood repositioned her glasses as she looked at Jess, wondering if that was a way of describing Alastair Lethbridge-Stewart that Jess could use.

“Yes. And Gordy kept mentioning ‘Uncle O’ as well…” Jess and Soph hadn’t been able to work out who ‘Uncle O’ was, either when Max and Gordy had mentioned him while they were up on the roof watching the meteor shower, or when Gordy and the Doctor were later talking.

“That’s what Gordy calls my father,” explained Osgood quietly, wondering what they could have been talking about that meant her father was a topic of conversation. “He worked with Gordy’s grandfather…” Some of her father’s research and designs were still in use today, but Osgood didn’t think the work of Tom Osgood had ever really made it to Exobiology, so wasn’t surprised that Jess hadn’t made the connection.

“That explains it…” Jess looked between Kate and Osgood again, checking that she wasn’t outstaying her welcome or keeping them from something that was a greater priority than listening to Jess ramble. “‘Uncle O would say that Gramps was’ is how Gordy kept mentioning Uncle O,” explained Jess, seeing the exchange of smiles between Kate and Osgood as confirmation that whatever Gordy and the Doctor had been talking about, it clearly wasn’t anything to worry about. “Anyway, Max and Gordy did all the hard work. Soph and I just made tea and custard.”

“And went and did all the shopping,” pointed out Osgood, not wanting Jess to downplay her contribution any more than Kate did.

“Yes but…”

“Yes but nothing.” Osgood’s rather forceful, by Osgood’s standards at least, interjection surprised Jess who had been clearly not expecting it. “It was what was needed...and on a Saturday morning…” Osgood automatically felt for the outline of her inhaler in her trouser pocket at that point, a nervous habit missed by Jess but noticed by Kate: Osgood didn’t like crowds, or shops, so Hamleys on a Saturday morning was right up there on Osgood’s list of places she’d never want to be. “...in school holidays!”

“It could have been worse…” shrugged Jess, finding herself amused by Osgood’s genuine horror at the thought of having to wade through the crowds she, correctly as it happened, was imagining must have been in the store on Saturday morning.
“Oh?” Kate was intrigued by Jess’s reaction, being of the same opinion as her girlfriend - give her marauding telephone boxes any day if she could avoid the crowds in the shops on Oxford and Regent Street at any time.

“...it could have been when they were playing Christmas carols.”
“So…” Osgood looked at Kate with curiosity after Jess had left to take her now completed and authorised expenses claim down to Mags in Finance, along with a scribbled note from Kate that they were to organise a payment to Jess today. “…what happened to your paperwork?” There was no way that Kate had managed to clear the backlog she had been describing this quickly, not even if she’d taken every possible short-cut.

“It’s still waiting for me.” Hearing footsteps echoing down the corridor, Kate stepped fully into Osgood’s office and shut the door behind her. “But the weekend’s rather changed the plan.”

“The Doctor?” guessed Osgood, knowing that the Tardis was still resting or whatever it was she was doing in the hydrangea bed in the garden and, as of half an hour ago, Max and the Doctor were packing up the Doctor’s various Lego constructions ahead of taking them to the Tardis.

“A bit, but mostly Geneva…” Kate was generally fairly relaxed about dealing with Geneva on a day-to-day basis, in part because of the additional perspective and contacts she had compared to some of the other Senior Leaders within the UNIT hierarchy. Some of this appreciation was because she’d actually worked at Central Command, but also because she did appreciate that UNIT functioned better as a collective whole when there was some degree of accountability and oversight. However, that didn’t mean she wasn’t occasionally irritated or frustrated by their Central Command colleagues, particularly when they were being unduly pedantic or unrealistic in their expectations.

“What do they want now?” Osgood wasn’t as kindly disposed towards Geneva as Kate was, finding the interference of people without the relevant skills or knowledge in things they were unable to understand a pointless waste of time. However, unlike Kate, Osgood generally didn’t say this to anyone except Kate, and instead just patiently suffered Geneva’s interventions and obstructions, reasoning that perhaps one day they’d learn to be more helpful and sensible.

“Honestly? No clue…” Kate rubbed her neck and looked at her girlfriend though half closed eyes as she leaned back against the closed door. “…I told Fran to stop counting after the fourth contradictory demand from Oversight and sixth from Diplomatic, but I think the gist of it is that there’s only one of me and I wasn’t in any of the four or five places the different bits of Geneva each presumed I would be this weekend.”

“Ah.” Osgood took her glasses off and cleaned them, finding not being able to see Kate in sharp focus wasn’t helping her willpower or concentration as much as she’d hoped. She’d rather enjoyed where Kate had spent her weekend and didn’t want the memories of it contaminated with thoughts of
“So I’ve told Fran to stop taking their calls.”

“Geneva’s?” Osgood put her glasses back on and frowned. “That’s…” Actually, Osgood wasn’t quite sure what that was, other than something that only Kate could really successfully pull off without it triggering something else rather more dramatic.

“Career limiting?” Kate grinned lazily at Osgood, starting to feel the positive effect of her ‘don’t give a damn’ decision from half an hour ago as her shoulders unset and her headache stopped forming. “Perhaps…” Kate shrugged and put her hands in her trouser pockets, wondering why they hadn’t stayed in the cottage for another day if this was what Monday had in store for them. “If I do get fired, can you cope with being the breadwinner? I promise to be very doting…” she teased, knowing Osgood had a particular hatred of the verb ‘to dote’ in any context, including being doted on.

“Ka-ate…” Blushing, Osgood shook her head in disbelief at her girlfriend’s sense of timing - where on earth did her ‘to do’ list have time or space for flirting?

“Sorry…” Making a conscious effort to be serious and sensible, Kate studied the toes of her yellow shoes that contrasted rather gloriously with the dark grey of her linen suit for a moment while she gathered her thoughts and, most importantly of all, made sure that she didn’t take any of her frustration with Geneva out on Os or worse… “They want to go after Max.”

“Geneva?” Osgood watched Kate’s slow nod of confirmation and immediately set about trying to either guess which part of Geneva were proposing this or what Max was supposed to have done “Because of the Doctor?”

“Because Max hung up on Ops before he’d finished providing a report about the Doctor’s arrival and received orders.” Unfortunately, while it was a completely ridiculous suggestion that Max had done anything other than an excellent job over the weekend, it was possible for some box ticker in the depths of Geneva, whose nose was already out of joint because the Tower was behind on their paperwork, to construct a bleak looking disciplinary case against him.

“Ah.” Osgood chewed on her lip as she thought about this, considering all the possibilities she could think of, none of which were terribly good as UNIT really was rather particular about chain of command...most of the time. “Does Max know?”
“Not yet.” Kate rubbed her neck again, starting to feel like the morning had already gone on too long and it wasn’t even mid morning yet. “Maria Walsh is assiduously failing to find the email…”

“How has this even happened? I mean, he hung up on Ops because Gordy got hold of us…” Osgood didn’t think much of the paper-shuffling layers of UNIT in either London or Geneva, but unlike Kate she was generally a bit more diplomatic and long suffering about them. “And why was Gordy telling you that the Doctor was in the garden anyway? What if they’d not been in the garden…” There was something not quite connecting here, but Osgood was still, by her standards at least, feeling a bit Monday morning-ish and wasn’t yet running at top speed.

“Win Bambera already asked that and…” Kate sighed and looked at Osgood with an air of defeat that was more alarming to Osgood than the thought of Max being in difficulty. “…apparently it’s just given the pen pushers more ideas…” Kate chewed on her lip as she searched Osgood’s face for any hints or clues as to what might be a way forwards. “I wanted to go to Geneva and shake the little upstart…” Kate smiled weakly when she saw Osgood’s eyes go wide at that. “Yeah, Win pretty much thought the same thing…”

“The Tardis had already been on Earth before it came to the garden…” Osgood had, for a brief moment, allowed herself to picture their friend listening to Kate plan to charge right into Central Command, not sure if Win would be laying on an escort or trying to restrain Kate herself, before focussing on what might be used to prove that this was just a witchhunt against Kate. “So Max wasn’t first contact…”

“He was first UNIT contact claim Geneva…” and Kate hadn’t been able to see how to argue that point with them. In fact, so far, she was just relieved that the bureaucrats hadn’t yet discovered Soph was there with Gordy too…

“But he wasn’t.” Leaping up and heading towards the filing cabinet that had moved from her old office with her, Osgood set about inputting the long combination code that would see her able to open the third drawer down. “At least, not technically…” She looked back over her shoulder at Kate, her eyes bright and in sharp contrast to Kate’s still wary ones - clearly whatever it was Osgood had realised was still eluding Kate.

“Go on…”

“WOTAN knew.”

“Wotan?” Kate had a nagging feeling of hearing the word before, but she couldn’t remember why or what it meant. “Who’s that?”
“Not who, what.” Finding the file she wanted, Osgood turned back to her desk and opened it up, extracting the paper thin blueprints and carefully laying them out across her desk. “It’s one of the original monitoring networks…” Osgood took a moment to orientate herself within the diagrams, knowing Kate didn’t need to understand the details about how exactly it worked and not interested in wasting a few minutes trying to explain it. “…we don’t really use it anymore as the satellite based networks give us better notice but it still operates. Mostly we use it to calibrate the newer networks but yes, here…” Osgood found the sheet she wanted and drew Kate’s attention to it, prompting Kate to retrieve her glasses from where she’d left them on top of the other filing cabinet just inside the door so she could see. “…it had a dedicated In-Atmosphere Tardis Monitoring module…and it’s far more sensitive than anything we’ve got today.”

“Why?” Seeing how sensitive it was, Kate pulled off her glasses and looked at Osgood, a mixture of curiosity and concern prompting her question. “I mean, why don’t we have anything so sensitive? Or why…” She put her glasses back on and looked at the signatures on the corner of the sheet. “Or why did my father have your father develop something so sensitive…wait, In-Atmosphere Tardis Monitoring? As in on planet?”

“Yup, although my Dad only maintained it, not designed it.” Pleased that Kate was starting to follow her logic, Osgood started to brighten and talk quicker. “Our satellite networks are predominantly looking into deep space trying to anticipate aliens approaching us, but WOTAN was ground based and stood for Wireless Observation: Terrestrial Aliens Network…”

“WOTAN monitoring! I remember reading about that when I worked in Geneva…” Bells were ringing loudly in Kate’s memories now, and they were finally not the sort that denoted doom and gloom. “…wasn’t it needed for the Doctor’s exile…” The bits and pieces were starting to return for Kate, but not quickly enough and not in such a way that it was obvious how this might help their current Geneva problem.

“Yes, well the IATM was. It maintained a log of any and all Tardis activity on Earth, in case the Time Lord Tribunal wanted to check that the Doctor was…where they wanted him to be I guess. Anyway, it’s still operational, at least, it should be…” Osgood frowned again as she tried to work out how this helped them, her initial enthusiasm fading slightly in the process.

“If it is working, who gets the data? Ops?” Kate wasn’t sure how that helped them, since based on what the Doctor had told her, it was clear he had already been on Earth, Norfolk in particular, long before she or possibly even Osgood had left the Tower on Friday, which meant if Ops had known he was on Earth no one had told her.

“Ops gets WOTAN outputs as part of the consolidated multi-spectrum monitoring but not IATM. That’s an analogue system that doesn’t integrate into the multi-spectrum monitoring feeds…”
“Oo-oss…” Kate’s stretching of the abbreviated form of her name saw Osgood’s thinking accelerate rapidly as she picked up on Kate’s frustration.

“So sorry…” Adjusting her glasses, Osgood looked at the ceiling for a couple of seconds as she pictured the complex monitoring network systems diagrams, tracing through the signals and relays as she worked out where the IATM output went. “…The IATM data is consolidated at WOTAN One then transmitted to Geneva under encryption.”

“So the Duty Officer here wouldn’t have it?”

“No.”

“But the Duty Officer in Geneva would?” Kate’s expression was brightening by the second - if Osgood was right, and Kate had no reason to doubt her brilliant girlfriend, then this was the answer to Win Bambera’s request for Kate to find something that she could use to end this latest farce that had started months back with the Banshee.

“From the moment the Tardis landed at Cheldon Boniface…and tea is taken at 4pm.” There were few things more metronomically regular in an English summer than the time a cricket match stopped for tea which, in this instance, was distinctly to their advantage.

“I was here until 4…” Kate’s smile had reached broad grin levels. “…and that’s assuming he only just arrived in time for tea…” So Geneva Duty Ops had known the Tardis was on Earth, which constituted a notifiable event that the CSO should be informed about given the Doctor never actually resigned from his post as part-time scientific advisor to UNIT. Furthermore, Geneva Duty Ops had known by 4pm that the Tardis was in England, which was something they definitely needed to tell their London counterparts about who would, in turn, have let a Greyhound know… “How do we prove it?” Kate wasn’t usually this distrustful of her Geneva colleagues, but there was clearly an agenda running here and she wasn’t prepared to take any risks, not when it was an agenda that was trying to go after her and her family. “Can you decrypt the transmission to Geneva?”

“No.” Osgood couldn’t help but smile when she saw Kate deflate at her pronouncement - it was something Osgood had found rather cute when she’d first become familiar with it during their original research project time together, and it had become increasingly rare over the years as Kate became more assured in her leadership at UNIT. “But I can retrieve the pre-encrypted transmission files from WOTAN One and we can isolate the encrypted transmission to show that Geneva received it…” It would be up to Win Bambera to determine what Geneva Duty Ops then did or didn’t do with it. “But I need to go to WOTAN One to get it.”
“Post Office Tower?” Now she’s been prompted to search her memory for WOTAN references, Kate was finding bits and pieces coming back to her rapidly, including that in the early days of UNIT they could bounce messages to other UNIT bases around the world using the WOTAN infrastructure, dramatically increasing the ranges of Walrus and Battenberg receivers….but that wasn’t relevant now. Interesting, but irrelevant, so she gave herself a quick telling off and tried to refocus on Osgood.

“Yup.” Osgood started to carefully fold up the blueprints again, deciding it might be better if she took them with her in case things weren’t quite as she expected them to be: she’d only been once, only a week or so after she’d started work at the Tower. “Can Maria lend me some of Troop? The doors are quite solid…” And, if she was going to go through the hoopla of getting into WOTAN One again, thought Osgood, she might as well do a full diagnostic on all of the equipment so that she didn’t have to worry about it for another few years, but that meant taking in the diagnostic equipment too, which was definitely a two person job.

“I think Maria will lend you all of Troop if you ask her to…” teased Kate, putting her hands back in her trouser pockets but this time, it was to stop her reaching out to touch Os…

“Six is plenty,” huffed Osgood, missing Kate’s smirk of amusement. “But I’ll go and see her now. Can you wait to talk to Geneva until I’ve checked it out?” Osgood reached under her desk for her rucksack, intending to put the blueprints in it. “It should only take a couple of hours to confirm the IATM bit, then I’ll do the full diagnostic on everything, though that will take the rest of the day.”

“Of course…” Stepping to the side so that Osgood could get by to start gathering up whatever it was she wanted to take with her, Kate suddenly felt rather awkward. “Thank you…”

“What for?”

“Dropping everything to help me with this?” Kate recognised Osgood’s rather withering look as the non-verbal equivalent of ‘daft fool’. “Sorry…” Shrugging, Kate saw her girlfriend’s expression evolve into the ‘silly idiotic thing’ stage where Osgood was showing her amused affection for Kate’s stupidity rather than Osgood’s version of exasperation. “I…”

“Did your mother-bear impression,” observed Osgood kindly, putting an extra inhaler in her bag as well as her father’s small toolkit she generally found useful to take to UNIT bases as well as her own: not all bases were refurbished and therefore having her father’s Imperial scale tools was a useful backup as sometimes a 4mm Allen Key was useless on a 5/32 inch socket, despite manufacturers claiming they were ‘virtually the same’.
“Yes, well…”

Kate was rarely flustered, and if she was it was usually only in front of Osgood or the boys which, as far as Osgood was concerned, made it even more special as it had felt like one of the first privileges she’d gained when they’d started their relationship….along with being able to get Kate to make all those lovely little noises when she kissed her neck and…

“Os?” Kate saw the colour rising in Osgood’s cheeks and became concerned. “Everything okay?” Kate went to put an arm around Osgood’s shoulders, only to be surprised when Os backed away.

“At work…” muttered Osgood through gritted teeth as she deliberately and carefully listed the Group Nine elements to herself as she tried to most definitely not think about hearing those lovely humming sighing noises very early this morning before Kate was summoned to Downing Street by the PM… she was normally better at not thinking about that when they were at work.

“Pardon?”

There was a long moment when, if it was possible for Osgood to glare ‘silly idiotic thing’ while semaphoring ‘daft fool’ with her scarf ends, she would have done. Fortunately, Kate wasn’t quite that oblivious and caught on.

“Oh.” She stepped back. “Ah. Sorry…” Catching on her lower lip, she chewed it nervously.

“Kate?”

“Yes?”

“Why didn’t you ring me?”

“Ah, yes….about that…” Kate rubbed the back of her neck and looked at her shoes. “…I was much better at this when Monday morning saw me in Geneva and you at the NPL…”
“Oh thank goodness…” rushed out Osgood, sitting down in her chair like she’d just been deflated, the relief flooding through her when she discovered she wasn’t the only one struggling. “…it’s not just me then.”

“It’s definitely not just you…” promised Kate, feeling part of her insides unknot now she knew she wasn’t alone.

“Kate?”

“Mmm?”

“You need to go to your office now.” Osgood was impressed with how confident she thought she managed to sound when she spoke. “And I need to go to WOTAN One.”

“See you at home?” That was something Kate hadn’t been able to ask on the Monday mornings when all she could do was sit at her desk in Geneva and send a text to Osgood to check she’d landed alright and made it to her office without too much inconvenience.

“See you at home,” agreed Osgood, smiling broadly.

“Tip top!” And, with a final wink and a lightness back in her step that hadn’t been there on her walk down to Osgood’s office, Kate went back to her office to update Win Bambera on their current little difficulty and make another attempt at sorting through her admin backlog… sometimes she missed the relative straightforwardness of her job in Geneva but then she was reminded of the advantages of being Greyhound One…

…and most of them started with Greyhound Two…

Chapter End Notes

WOTAN One is a tiny bit of Dr Who canon I stumbled across when looking for something else, and is a UNIT monitoring station under Post Office (BT) Tower in London. What WOTAN is or does however, wasn't exactly clear so I've....been inventive in a way that hopefully doesn't cause too much wincing pain for anyone who recognised the reference from canon right away.

As for Walrus and Battenberg....the eagle eyed of you might recognise one of them from
somewhere else in my UNIT-verse stories ;-)
“See? I told you I was a very good driver.” Feeling pleased with himself, the Doctor sat up straighter and checked his bowtie was nice and square in the rear view mirror of the transit van that he had driven from Max and Gordy’s flat back to Kate and Osgood’s house. If he had been aware of the escort vehicles driving ahead and behind them on the short journey between the two, the Doctor had done a very good job of deliberately not being aware.

“Yes Doctor.”

Actually, apart from a brief disaster when the Doctor had changed from third gear into reverse rather than second without attempting to use the clutch, Max hadn’t been unduly phased by the Time Lord’s driving skill. In fact, he’d probably tease Gordy later about his driving being worse than an alien’s…but only if Os and Kate weren’t around. “But I still don’t think Mum’s going to let you drive the Aston.” In fact, both Gordy and Max were going to be quite upset if Kate were to ever let the Doctor drive it when they weren’t allowed to. They could just about accept that Osgood was ‘different’ to sons in both Kate and UNIT’s view, but the Doctor? That wasn’t going to feel very fair...

“Then I won’t let her fly the Tardis!” Deciding that was the end of the matter, the Doctor flung open the driver’s door and jumped out, causing Max to have to quickly apply the handbrake and reach across to turn the engine off. It wasn’t ideal, leaving the van parked in second gear, but he wasn’t going to try and change gear without the clutch and nor was he confident that he’d be able to climb over the gearstick to get from the front passenger seat to the driver’s seat without catching the accelerator with his foot or a more delicate part of himself with the gearstick.

“Clearly the Tardis does her own parking…” muttered Max as he satisfied himself that, while it might make a bit of a mess of the gearbox when it came to driving the van back to the Tower, at least he’d avoided having a runaway van drive into the front of the house, although if that happened Kate would be more concerned about the flowerbeds than the brickwork. “...and I’m not sure Mum wants to fly the Tardis…” Actually, he wasn’t even sure if he wanted to fly the Tardis - there was a reason he’d been Infantry and not Army Air Corp or even the RAF.

“Hurry up!” Impatiently bouncing on the balls of his feet, the Doctor looked critically at his new friend who was being unaccountably slow at coming to open Kate’s front door. Not that he’d ever admit it out loud to anyone, but he’d missed the Old Girl these last three days, although Kate’s children had been very welcoming and friendly. But the Tardis was where he was supposed to be, and it was past time for him to be there. In fact, had the front door not been made of wood, he would have used his sonic screwdriver to let himself in already.
“What’s your first name Doctor?”

Max’s genial question brought the Doctor’s bouncing to a halt and saw him stick his tongue out at Max before settling quietly in the corner of the porch while Max unlocked the front door and went into the hall and shut off the security system. It had, after the discussion on Friday night about Kate’s attitude towards shoes on the coffee table, become the way that Max and Gordy had managed to let the Doctor know when he was becoming a bit too much for them to cope with… although initially they’d also derived a fair bit of amusement from the knowing that the Doctor didn’t like the thought of a telling off from Kate Lethbridge-Stewart anymore than her sons did.

“Sorry…” Adjusting his bowtie again, the Doctor followed Max into the hall, through to the kitchen and on into the conservatory where again, he waited without fidgeting too much, until Max had opened the door. “…thank you.” Heading out into the back garden, oblivious to how the morning dew was soaking into his leather shoes, the Doctor strode out across the lawn in the direction of the hydrangea bed which, much to Max’s surprise, looked like an ordinary hydrangea bed.

“Umm…” Rubbing his head, Max set off across the lawn more slowly, not sure why he had been expecting to be able to see the Tardis this morning given that she’d not been visible when they’d left on Friday night. “…is everything okay?” he asked finally when he drew level with the Doctor who had stopped about five yards from the hydrangeas and was currently frowning at his sonic screwdriver.

“What? Yes!” Tossing his screwdriver up in the air so it spun end over end twice before landing in his hand again, the Doctor pointed it at Max’s stomach and grinned. “Everything’s marvellous! She likes you, you know…” He tossed the screwdriver up in the air again, this time catching it and tucking it in his jacket pocket. “…or at least, she’s always had a bit of a thing for a Lethbridge-Stewart so maybe it’s just that she’s picking up on.”

“She?” Confused, Max looked between the Doctor and the flower bed, fairly certain he’d counted seven hydrangeas on the right of the Tardis on Friday night so directing his gaze accordingly. “The Tardis?”

“Had a soft spot for the Brig and approves of Kate despite the unfortunate confusion with the helicopter…” The Doctor rolled his shoulders tentatively, a reflex response to the memory of that rather breezy journey across London when there had been a misunderstanding of some sort and Kate had ordered the Tardis to be transported to Trafalgar Square without appreciating the Doctor was still on board. “…the Old Girl found that rather funny actually…” She’d been rather too quick to set that particular section of her external visual scanner recording as her ‘screensaver’ choice which he had thought was rather unfair at the time. “…so it might not be anything personal, her liking you I mean.”
“Thanks...I think.”

“You’re welcome.”

There was a long pause during which it became clear to Max that the Doctor was evidently expecting him to be doing something, but what it was he had no idea.

“Oh....” Max shrugged, as if to say ‘well, go on then’ before, exactly like Kate or Gordy would have done, he demonstrated his ‘Lethbridge-Stewart-ness’ as Osgood occasionally described it, and he put his hands in his trouser pockets. His fingers instinctively recognised the feeling of his house keys and the van keys in his left pocket while his mobile phone was in his right pocket along with his handkerchief, the latter definitive confirmation of the influence Osgood had had on both his and Gordy’s lives in the last ten years or so.

And a key.

In his right trouser pocket.

He never put keys in his right trouser pocket - Osgood’s influence again, but that was because she’d shown them what happened to a smartphone screen that was cracked and scratched.

Surprised and confused, he pulled the key out of his pocket and let it drop into the palm of his left hand, feeling the weight of it resting in his palm, which didn’t feel all that different to the weight he’d expect an ordinary key to be. Conscious of the Doctor’s scrutiny, Max held out his left hand so they could both see...

….nothing. There was nothing in his hand. Except there was something in his hand, because he could feel it, feel the outline of it and the weight of it.

“But....” Just when he was about to start asking the Doctor what was happening, since logically a key he could feel but not see had to have something to do with the Time Lord, a few bronze coloured sparks started to shimmer across his hand as a rather ordinary looking key, one that looked a lot like the one Max had felt, appeared.
“Is that? What do you think it is?” asked the Doctor, resuming his enthusiastic bouncing as he waved in the direction of the hydrangeas where now, just as Max remembered, sitting seven plants in from the right, was the Tardis.

“It looks like a door key…”

“See?” The Doctor strode across the grass and stepped carefully into the flowerbed so he could rub his hand down the familiar warmth of the Old Girl’s side. “Told you she likes you. If we’re lucky, she might have the kettle on for us.”

“...and one tank,” concluded Colonel Walsh, leaning back in her chair and resting her tablet on her knee. It had taken a lifetime of determination and commitment to get to the position of Officer-in-Charge of the UK UNIT detachment and, despite Kate’s more civilian style for day-to-day business, Maria couldn’t entirely let go of her military ‘stiffness’. She had, however, managed to stop calling Kate ‘Ma’am’ every other sentence.

“A big tank?” asked Kate, sipping her coffee as she tried to visualise quite how much damage the prototype test had caused. For one prototype, it was sounding quite impressive - fortunately however, since they usually tested three or four prototypes in an afternoon, the overall damage list was small by UNIT’s usual standards so the Army’s level of distress appeared to be fairly low.

“A little tank…” It took a moment for Maria to regain her professional composure having briefly been reminded of one Lieutenant Gruber and his ‘little tank’ - she wasn’t sure that UNIT permitted its Colonels to have a fondness for sitcoms that were almost entirely comprised of catchphrases. “...the Regiment’s CO was very understanding all things considered…” Maria checked her notes again. “...as it was very clearly inside the zone that was supposed to be cleared for us.”

“Why was it there then?” In Kate’s experience, Regiment Commanders were understanding right up to the point that the MoD told them precisely how much it would cost to replace their damaged or destroyed equipment, at which point their understanding evaporated and their demands for compensation became quite insistent. “And no one was in it?” It was that last point that Kate truly cared about. It was inconvenient having to replace Army equipment as it attracted undue attention to UNIT, but equipment was easy compared to coping with injured or fatally wounded personnel.
"No casualties...it had broken down on Friday and someone apparently decided we didn’t have a problem with parked Scimitars…” Maria saw the beginnings of a puzzled frown appear on Kate’s face. “...little tanks.”

“Since when were Scimitars little tanks?” asked Kate, remembering having to climb into one on a previous visit to observe a Troop exercise: it had felt quite large and tank like to her at the time.

“When they’re compared to Challenger 2s Ma’am.” Maria thought for a moment, not all that familiar with the detailed specifics of the British Army tank models but knowing a couple of key fundamental differences. “The Scimitar is about a third of the length and a tenth of the weight of a Challenger 2…”

“Tip top.” That was the sort of fact that Kate liked, in part because it was the sort of fact she could occasionally surprise Osgood with. “So I should be on the lookout for a request to buy the Army a new little tank…” Kate made a note of it on her list of ‘things to expect’ that she scribbled out for Fran as she went through her day of meetings. While not a perfect prioritisation system, it did help Fran to know what Kate was especially keen to not have take longer than it absolutely had to, not only in terms of making sure such documents were on the top of Kate’s to do pile, but often saw Fran prodding the people earlier in the process to apply themselves extra quickly. “...I assume the Army won’t mind if we give them a working tank rather than a broken down one?” Tossing her pen on her desk, Kate leaned back in her desk chair and grinned at Maria. “I think that might be easier to get hold of than a broken down one.”

“I think they’ll be very happy with a working Scimitar Ma’am.” It had taken Maria a little bit of time to get used to how unfazed Kate Stewart usually was - she’d been assigned to UNIT before assuming the Tower Command so had a fair bit of experience with UNIT’s uniqueness, but Greyhound One’s general ability to accept all manner of things in her elegant stride went beyond just being experienced with all things UNIT...and made a bit more sense when she discovered that her new boss was actually Kate Lethbridge-Stewart.

“Excellent…” Kate trailed off as she shuffled the papers on her desk, looking for something which she couldn’t find before, with an apologetic smile at Maria, called out loudly, “...Fran?”

“Yes Boss?” Fran’s head appeared in Kate’s doorway remarkably quickly, only for it to be clear she had been already on her feet and intending to come in to Kate’s office with some lunch for her. “They were out of acceptable cheese, so I got you a choice of egg mayo or tuna.”

“Tuna, thank you.” As Kate held out her hand for the sandwich, her stomach grumbled its appreciation for Fran’s forethought.
“No problem. Have you had lunch Colonel?”

“Umm, no, but…” Maria found herself being offered the egg mayonnaise sandwich that did look very good.

“If it helps you decide, I’m fairly certain Fran’s already had some delicious soup noodle concoction thing with…” Kate looked at Fran in thoughtful amusement as she tried to guess the other part of Fran’s lunch, “…battered and deep-fried crustacean of some sort as a starter?”

“Pho Ga and they were prawns, which were breadcrumbed,” confirmed Fran, not that impressed by her boss’ ‘mind reading’ since Kate had known that Fran was going out to lunch with the interns who were going to be leaving UNIT next week having completed their Alien Diplomacy Summer Placement. “How did you know the kids were going to pick Vietnamese?” ‘Kids’ was the acknowledged collective noun for the annual crop of Interns that UNIT hosted for a dozen or so exceptional teenager equivalents from various corners of the Universe.

“Because if they’d picked pizza you’d have gone to the place next to the sandwich place that puts raw onion in the tuna mayo but has really good crispy bacon.” Kate unwrapped her sandwich to reveal a tuna mayo with cucumber and mixed peppers granary bread sandwich that she knew would be onion free before looking to Maria. “Unfortunately the kids didn’t pick burgers and sushi was never an option.” Sizing up her sandwich, Kate prepared to take her first bite, only to notice both Maria and Fran were looking at her with expressions that indicated they’d not quite followed her thought process. “Furtugnians are herbivores and are afraid of fish for some reason, I think because the marine environments on their planet are toxically acidic…” Kate chewed her first mouthful of sandwich thoughtfully as she tried to remember the other diplomatically vital fact about them. “…and are positively addicted to mushrooms, meaning sushi would be off the menu but a fancy mushroom pretending to be a burger is haute cuisine, which reminds me…” They might not always follow Kate’s logic, but both Maria and Fran had learned to keep pace with Kate’s topic changes and worry about unravelling the logic later. “Can you make sure Geneva’s remembered to arrange their souvenirs.”

“Geneva?” Fran hadn’t been expecting that, especially given Kate’s current Geneva related frustration. “I thought we were handling their departure?” Gatwick was going to be fog bound a week on Tuesday to enable all the various alien ships to discretely land, collect their respective interns and leave again. It really was helpful having a large runway in a naturally foggy spot in Southern England as it meant few people were suspicious when there was an artificial fog bank scheduled and no one remembered to ask the Met Office to forecast it, although with this particular transit day planned almost twelve months in advance, it was definitely going to start appearing in the long range forecasts any day now.

“We are, but the Furtugnian mushroom package is the size of a shipping container and contains about 20% of the European non-cultivated truffle crop as well as numerous other mushroom varieties
fresh and dried.” Kate took a healthy second bite of her sandwich as she saw Fran wince at the bureaucratic headache such a shopping list would create. “...so when Claude Tredoment asked to be involved in the Internships, General Bamera volunteered him for truffle sourcing.”

“Don’t they use pigs for that?” asked Maria, having finally given in and started to eat the rather tasty egg mayonnaise sandwich.

“Both literally and metaphorically in this case…” agreed Kate, still appreciating Win’s sense of humour, before remembering what she’d actually called out to Fran about. “Can you keep an eye out for a couple of tank requisitions please?”

“Tank as in fish or scuba diving?” asked Fran promptly, not remotely phased by the change of subject.

“Army and septic.” Kate took another bite of her sandwich. “But only a little one for the Army.” The septic tank was rather large and best not thought about.

“Little?” Fran looked from Kate to Maria, wondering if she might get a more coherent explanation from the soldier, but she was sensibly preoccupied with demolishing her sandwich at speed. “As in ornamental?” she asked finally, when it was clear Kate wasn’t going to be spontaneously forthcoming with further details.

“As in full size and appropriately lethal but smaller than a big tank.” Kate reached for her coffee mug before remembering it was stone cold. “We melted one on Saturday when the prototype went awry. Can you…” Kate trailed off, not actually sure what exactly Fran did to ensure that certain bits of paperwork emerged from the UNIT bureaucratic maze in record time, so took another bite of her sandwich instead.

“Of course.” Fran had heard that the weekend prototype testing had been eventful, but most people were talking about the contraband controlled destruction which by the sounds of it, was probably for the best.

“Thanks…” Kate swallowed the last bit of her unexpected lunch. “...and thanks for lunch too.” She didn’t need to add that without Fran’s intervention she’d have gone without.

“Mmm, thank you,” agreed Maria, thinking she needed to find out from Fran exactly where that particular ‘sandwich place’ was as it was vastly superior to anything Maria had managed to buy in
the Tower’s immediate vicinity. “Can I ask a question though?”

“Of course Colonel.”

“What makes a cheese sandwich unacceptable?”

Chapter End Notes

For those of you still wondering who Lt Gruber was and what his 'little tank' has to do with anything, he was a character in the BBC sitcom 'Allo 'Allo.... he was very fond of his 'Little tank' and, along with Michelle 'Listen very carefully, I shall say this only once' of the Resistance and a whole cast of characters all of whom had a catchphrase...and are best discovered 'live' through youtube etc to do them justice!
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

For some reason, I'm not exactly fond of Captain Josh Carter (who appears in the Big Finish Audios). He's not really done anything specific to earn my dislike, aside from perhaps be a little too keen on Osgood.

But that's the audios.... this is my fic....and that's a gentle warning that fans of Captain Carter might be slightly offended ;-) 

“Are you sure we can’t use the electric screwdrivers Osgood?”

“Yes.” Osgood’s complete lack of any further detail or explanation should have been Josh Carter’s first big clue that he was firmly into stupid question territory, assuming the wince from Lt Chen hadn’t been enough of a suggestion that was conversationally somewhere he shouldn’t be.

“But…”

“Fine.” Osgood put her own tools down, the sound of metal landing on metal echoing around the cavernous space that was the home of WOTAN One. There was a stunned silence from the rest of the Troop soldiers who had been assigned to assist Osgood however she ‘deemed it necessary’ in the words of the Colonel - it had become clear to most of them at the third seven point turn and double back that they’d been forced to complete due to random surprise road closures that Osgood was, by Osgood’s standards, mildly irked today.

Translating ‘mild irk’ on the Osgood scale of short-temperedness into the more universally understood ‘the Colonel’s pissed’ scale of out and out fury, Lt Chen had managed to convey via hand signals to everyone in his eyeline that Osgood was to be treated with the same care they reserved for the Colonel if an alien something had just exploded. Unfortunately, Captain Carter hadn’t been looking in Chen’s direction and wasn’t known for taking a hint from his surroundings either.

“Great…” Tossing aside his ‘old fashioned’ Allen Key, Josh rummaged through his backpack that he’d set down by his feet and found his battery operated electric screwdriver that came with 100 drill bits in different shapes and sizes and set about working out which shaped bit would best fit the bolt heads that Osgood had requested they release.
“Chen?” Osgood walked over to where he was working on releasing another panel for her, remembering him as the officer who had met her and Gordy at the Chelsea Flower Show.

“Yes Ma’am?” He knew she preferred Osgood to Ma’am, but that didn’t come easily to him at the best of times, nevermind when she was, well, irked.

“How’s your Morse Code?”

“Pretty good Ma’am.” It took him a moment to work out what the significance of her question was, before catching sight of what she’d just finished working on. “Is that what I think it is?” asked Chen, eyes widening in awe when he actually looked properly at it. He’d heard about them, even read a bit in the databases over the years when he’d been working the quiet duty shifts, but never thought he’d actually see one, nevermind use it.

“If you think it’s a cocktail cabinet with a bookend no.” Osgood saw his faint grin and realised that he must have been the one who was borrowing the WOTAN official history from the non-Black Archives almost as often as her a few months ago.

“But if I think it’s a Walrus and a Unicorn?” Chen would never know if Osgood’s smile was at his question or Captain Carter’s struggles - the reason they’d not been using their electric screwdrivers hadn’t been given, but it had been fairly obvious from how Osgood had pointedly told everyone to leave all their electronic devices including digital watches and laser gun sights in the vehicles, as well as increasingly urgent looking signs repeating the reminders as they navigated through the access tunnels to the entrance to WOTAN One. Clearly, Carter had either forgotten his screwdriver or decided it didn’t really count, but it certainly wasn’t wanting to line up with the bolts and work.

“Foxglove, not Unicorn…” Osgood adjusted her glasses and smiled at Chen. “…but understandable. We just need to put the containment shielding back on the front and then it is operational.” She looked past him to the piece of equipment she’d asked him to reveal from behind its panel shielding, the positively elderly overhead lightbulbs providing a warming glow rather than the bright illumination they were more accustomed to in the age of the LED. “That doesn’t look too bad…” She tried to get closer, only to find he was in the way. “…excuse me please…” Even mildly irked, Osgood was still Osgood, and Chen had already moved out of the way before she’d finished saying ‘please’. “…thank you.”

Putting the mirror she’d been using to boost the ambient light level in the corners of the cabinets she was exploring as she wasn’t a fan of the chemical glow sticks they also had with them in case ‘torches’ were needed sitting directly in her eyeline, Osgood’s head and shoulders were soon invisible as she set about checking over whatever it was that Chen had revealed by removing panel
Seeing that there was nothing he could immediately do to assist any of his Troop colleagues who, much to his relief, were not attempting to follow Captain Carter’s lead and abandon their ‘old fashioned’ Allen Keys, Chen moved to the corner where there wasn’t a panel needing opening but was a lightbulb. Leaning against a bit of brick wall that didn’t look like it would suddenly transform into a doorway if he leaned against it, Chen opened up his backpack and found, right at the bottom of the rarely opened ‘emergency’ pocket, the reassuringly battered blue cover of the original UNIT Codebook that he, like all aspirational future members of Troop, were issued on their first day with UNIT and examined on it three days later.

Fail the codebook exam and that was your UNIT career over before it had even begun. No resits, no special circumstances or excuses. 99% was a fail, so Chen had made absolutely certain that not only did he score 100% in his exam three years ago, but that he kept the codebook with him on every duty ever since. He’d never had to use it on duty so far, with their more contemporary communications systems that had replaced the Morse and Semaphore systems of UNIT’s long history always working for him. But still, and much to the amusement of some of his more ‘gung-ho’ colleagues, he always kept the codebook with him and read it periodically, just to keep him fresh. Chen figured it really was the least he could do: every soldier who completed the UNIT induction learned about Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart including his role in the formation of the UNIT of today generally, and the UNIT military induction specifically. As far as Chen was concerned, the Brigadier was clearly a UNIT soldier who knew what he was doing, and if the Brigadier had declared that no soldier could call themselves a UNIT soldier if they didn’t know the codes, Chen had made sure he knew the codes…but that was then.

Here, right now in the heart of WOTAN One deep underground beneath the distinctive Central London landmark that was the Post Office Tower, knowing he was about to use the codes to transmit via Foxglove for Greyhound Two? That made all the hours of reading and rereading the little blue codebook after long duty shifts worth it. He knew his codes without his little blue codebook to tell them to him, but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t have a read through of them one more time while he waited for Osgood to be ready to transmit. After all, why else had he always carried in his kit one extra item, inventoried by the Quartermasters always as ‘blue thing, other’ if not for a moment exactly like this?

“Greenhouse.”

“The Old Girl prefers blue…” muttered the Doctor automatically, still focussed on his Tardis doorstop that hadn’t stopped the door, only to pause and reconsider what Max had just said. “No hyphen or space...greenhouse….no, not got one of those…” Satisfied that he’d answered the question as it had been intended, the Doctor pushed the door open with his shoulder and tried to
‘stop’ it open with his Lego Tardis model once more.

“I meant Mum’s.” Half an hour ago, Max would have dismissed the Doctor’s comment as some sort of wind-up, but that was before he’d been given the whistlestop tour that included the library, croquet court and Control Room but skipped over the laundry, the Doctor’s bedroom and Left Luggage.

“Explain.” The continued failure of his doorstop was making the Doctor grumpy, and he wasn’t very diplomatic when he was grumpy.

“If the model is going to hold open the door, it needs to be heavier. Mum’s got all sorts of sands and gravelly stuff in the greenhouse for potting on…” Max gave himself a mental pinch and ordered himself to stick to the point before the Doctor lost interest. “…we could get whichever is the heaviest and put it inside the model to make it heavier…” Max remembered helping the Doctor put the ‘roof’ on his Lego Tardis, so knew that inside its walls, which were two bricks thick as Osgood had imagined they would be, there was an empty space that could be nicely filled with something. “…the gravel’s probably best…” The sand would be ideal, but probably only if it was wet and Max didn’t think the Tardis would appreciate them bringing in bags of wet sand, not to mention keeping it moist in the future. “…so do we take the model to the greenhouse or bring the gravel to the model?”

“Gravel to Tardis,” declared the Doctor, carefully picking up his Lego model of the Tardis and putting it back on the table before spinning round and hustling Max back out into the Control Room, his general attitude improving now there was a plan. “Should I have a greenhouse?”

“Umm…” Following the Doctor across the Control Room and to the door back out into the garden, Max blinked as his eyes adjusted to the bright sunshine, glad that it hadn’t rained recently so the flowerbed wasn’t too muddy. “Do you have a garden?”

“Several.” There was a pause while the Doctor and Max navigated the hydrangeas and made it back onto the lawn. “Not easy to do, indoors, even for the Old Girl.”

“Then you probably have a greenhouse somewhere…” Actually, Max wasn’t feeling all that confident about that as, while a garden could look after itself like the one in Scotland mostly did, a greenhouse was only any use if you had a gardener and the Doctor wasn’t giving off much of a horticulturalist vibe. On the other hand, how could there be a garden if there wasn’t a gardener… Max felt a headache forming just trying to finish that thought so stopped thinking about it. “…which means you might have had gravel or something we could have used as a weight already…”

“This is better.”
It was unclear to Max from the Doctor’s statement as to what exactly made getting gravel from Kate’s greenhouse ‘better’ than using something already inside the Tardis, although Max suspected that him doing the carrying probably was a large part of the Doctor’s reasoning if unloading the van had been any indication. Then again, given that the Doctor was currently scanning the greenhouse roof with his sonic screwdriver, maybe the ‘better’ had meant seeing the greenhouse.

“She wasn’t lying then.”

“Excuse me?” Max let go of the handle of the greenhouse door, not interested in going inside his mother’s domain until he’d worked out what exactly the Doctor meant.

“Kate…” The Doctor trailed off and frowned, recognising the awkward fuzzy feeling that meant he was experiencing the combining of a couple or more different time streams as a piece of time from his future collided with a piece of time from his surroundings’ past. In this case, it passed quickly, meaning it was just an anecdotal sort of detail rather than the beginnings of a full timey-wimey unravelling which was a relief. Full timey-wimey unravelling gave him a headache and made him feel space sick, which wasn’t ideal when he’d had three breakfasts. “...hadn’t thought she was serious about the Bridge playing.”

“Uh…” Max had no idea how the Doctor knew about her fondness for the card game, or why he was suddenly mentioning it now, but he did, with total certainty, know that Kate’s bridge playing skill should never be underestimated. “...she’s very, very good at it.”

“Outstanding.” The Doctor pocketed his sonic screwdriver and rubbed his hands together, keen to get inside the greenhouse and find this gravel.

“You could say that…” agreed Max cautiously, before deciding to stop worrying about the bridge references for now - he could always ask his Mum or Os later for an explanation...they’d probably know what it was all about as neither Gramps nor Uncle O played bridge.

“I just did.” And, giving up on waiting for Max to open the greenhouse door, the Doctor strode inside...
Chapter 26

“Mais…”

Maria Walsh didn’t really know very much French, but she knew that meant ‘but’ and, despite the slightly tinny quality that a speakerphone always gave to everyone’s voice, she definitely recognised the speaker’s tone - in fact, she’d even go as far as to say it had the same characteristics as her children’s voices had when they were tired and hungry. It was unpleasant to hear it from teenagers, and positively alarming to hear from the ‘bigwigs’ of Central Command.

“Mais rien…”

Maria winced: you didn’t need to know any French to understand that Kate Stewart was far from impressed with where the conversation had gone.

Feeling slightly exasperated by the never-ending circle this ‘discussion’ had degenerated into long before it had slipped out of English and into French, Kate smiled apologetically at Maria and picked up the handset of her desk phone, which in the process switched off the speakerphone and enabled Kate to effectively mute the call by putting her hand over the microphone in the handset.

“Sorry…” Despite her efforts to mute the handset microphone with her hand, Kate still stage-whispered. “...I’ll just be a minute...” she apologised, only just remembering that Maria’s languages were Russian and German, not UNIT’s preferred French, meaning the last few minutes had been somewhat incomprehensible for the Colonel who made a move to stand. “...stay, really…telling them they’re idiots isn’t something I need privacy for.” Relieved when she saw Maria relax a fraction and look less like she was about to make a dash for the door, Kate uncovered the handset’s microphone again.

“Allors….écoutez très attentivement, messieurs, parce que je parlerai cela une seule fois et je ne me répèterai pas encore…” Kate waited a moment for her shift in tone and attitude to register with the majority of the people on the other end of the call - while it was gratifying that most people had stopped talking over each other, she could still hear some of the side discussions carrying on in the background. “...en Français, auf Deutsch, en Español o en cualquier otra lengua including English...” she finished pointedly, picking off the languages of the side conversations one by one.

The conference call went quiet, and not just quiet but pin drop silent as everyone now realised that ‘La Première Levrette’, as Claude Tredoment insisted on patronisingly referring to her as, was definitely serious….and not going to repeat herself, in any language. Actually, a good number of them who were ‘only’ bilingual were starting to panic in case she continued to switch that quickly
between the languages that had been audibly muttered during the last twenty minutes or so - then, even paying attention wasn’t going to help most of them follow whatever it was Kate wasn’t going to say more than once....

Kate took a sip from her glass of water and switched back to French, mostly because she’d almost exhausted her conversational Spanish but also because that was the language they’d drifted into before Kate’s tolerance for drifting conversations, well, drifted. Winking at the quite shell-shocked looking Maria, Kate took a final steadying breath while she finished counting backwards from ten to trois, deux, un…

“Je serais intéressé de voir comment vous avez tous fait face à une situation réelle compte tenu du nombre de règlements que vous avez oubliés ou que vous n'avez jamais voulu apprendre. Mais je soupçonne que l’acte d’observation altère votre performance, ou, comme l’a dit Schrodinger, jusqu’à ce que vous ouvriez la boîte, le chat peut être vivant ou mort.” Kate paused to see whether anyone was going to try and shout her down, but no one attempted to interrupt her.

“Je n'ai pas besoin d'ouvrir la boîte pour savoir que ce chat est déjà mort. Ou, pour ceux d'entre vous qui ont du mal à comprendre la théorie quantique ... puisque je souhaite planter les nouveaux rosiers que j'ai commandées, je continuerai à faire les choses à ma façon.”

There was a long silence as the assembled bureaucrats who didn’t have the good fortune to be fully conversant in both quantum theory and horticulture tried to infer from the expressions on the few who did understand one of those subjects just what they had been accused of.

“Quelle est votre nouvelle rosier Madame?” asked a voice that Kate didn’t immediately recognise, only to then realise it was Oscar Weinz, the Chief Archivist with ultimate responsibility for all non-Black Archives who was trying to keep the conversation in French despite being more comfortable in his native German or English. He was also a friend of Kate’s from her time working in Geneva and had a lovely garden which he and his partner were inordinately proud of. “Et pourquoi avez-vous laissé le commander jusqu’à la fin de l’été?” Far from planning to plant new specimens in his garden, Oscar was starting the process of preparing his garden to cope with the winter cold and snow.

In Kate’s outer-office, Fran silently groaned as she reached for another notepad and started a fresh set of notes as Kate began to answer his question. As per the UNIT regulations that, at the Tower at least, they did bother to learn and didn’t dare forget, Fran had been listening in to the conference call and taking minutes for the official, highly classified record of all actions and decisions taken by Greyhound One. As the meeting had shifted from English to French, so too had Fran’s notes shifted from her first to second notepad as she kept her notes of the discussion that was conducted in English separate from her translation of the discussion that was conducted in French. Now, with Kate electing to answer Herr Weinz’s question about why she was leaving it so late in the summer to buy her new rose bushes in his native German, a third pad was needed. And possibly a horticultural encyclopaedia if they carried on for much longer…
“Thank you.” Osgood nodded politely at Josh Carter when he finally had finished unfastening the panel she’d asked him to open up. Some might have made a pointed comment about how it would have been quicker if he had just stuck with the ‘old fashioned’ but effective Allen Key like everyone else, but that wasn’t Osgood’s style.

“So what is it then?”

“What is what?” asked Osgood, not following Josh’s question but continuing on with her review of the equipment he’d revealed. “And could someone please pass me the grease?” These valve-based late Victorian machines were really very reliable with little that could actually go wrong or suddenly stop working as long as they were properly maintained which, in this case, meant ensuring that the mechanisms were well-lubricated. “Thank you.” Absorbed in her task, Osgood had forgotten about Josh’s question knowing he’d get around to asking it more clearly in a second or two.

“Some sort of EM interference maybe Sir?” suggested one of the newer members of Troop who had misunderstood the Captain’s silence and thought it meant that Josh had not asked the question of Osgood but of the soldiers in his Command.

“Can’t be…” Josh pointed to the ceiling where there were the gently glowing filament lightbulbs. “…electric light and who would put EM interference inside a Communications monitoring station? It makes no sense.”

“Much like putting an ammunitions store in the middle of a military target like a tank makes no sense,” observed Osgood mildly, straightening up and wiping her greasy hands on a cloth she’d brought with her, not wanting to get the thick black grease on her handkerchief or glasses. Her scarf, since it was August, was at home.

“Yes, but you put armour on a tank…” began Josh, not appreciating Osgood’s point, although the soldier who’d first suggested EM interference did.

“So there’s shielding around the equipment…” Whoever he was, Osgood made a mental note to find out what his name was later.

“Exactly, which is why the panels need to now be screwed back in place please.” The lightbulbs were an interesting anomaly as, based on the point at which they were installed, Osgood was certain
that the clear acrylic polymer materials they now used for EM shielding at other facilities were not available to UNIT. However, Osgood wasn’t that concerned - she knew she’d remember what the reason was in due course, so instead carried on with her original to-do list. Putting the greasy cloth into the small plastic bag she’d brought for the purpose, Osgood put it back in her bag and extracted the large bunch of brass keys she had brought with her from the Tower. Sorting through them until she found the one she wanted, Osgood then walked over to the far side of the room where, running along the wall at roughly rib height, were a line of locked doors, all about the size of a letter box and each with a sturdy brass doorknob.

Counting in from the left, Osgood walked up to the sixth door and, after double checking her key selection, put the key in the lock and turned anticlockwise until it wouldn’t turn any further. Then she pulled it out of the lock. Searching through the bunch of keys, she identified the next key she wanted and inserted it into the lock which, if it had been a normal lock, shouldn’t have worked, but these weren’t normal locks. Instead, they had been provided to UNIT along with a fair amount of the equipment WOTAN used, including the IATM, by the Time Lords Council at some point in their history. Where and when they had got all this from, neither the regular or Black archives could tell Osgood, nor could her father when she’d asked him a few years back. As long as everything continued to work, not knowing where the locks and equipment came from wasn’t really an issue which was why, as a general rule, the WOTAN network was generally left alone apart from an infrequent service.

Turning the second key the three-quarters of a turn it would go in a clockwise direction, Osgood turned the doorknob anti-clockwise and was relieved to hear a loud metallic click. Removing the key from the lock, Osgood stepped back sharply as the metal door started to swing open now there was nothing keeping it shut.

“Ah…” Looking closely at the combination lock the door had opened to reveal, Osgood turned around and went back to her bag and exchanged the bunch of keys for a small notebook. Ignoring the members of Troop, who were just lifting the final two panels back into place, Osgood headed back to the combination lock as she turned the pages of the notebook until she came to the one she wanted. “...left is bottom and right is top…” she muttered, remembering the instructions she’d read before she’d left the Tower, “...and then…” Marking the string of six numbers she’d identified from the list written down on the page of the notebook with her finger, Osgood used her other hand to reposition her glasses and look once more at the lock. “....left is right so the first number is…”

Looking back at the notebook, Osgood focused on the bottom-most string of numbers on the open page and then counted up six lines, since she was wanting to know the code for the six lock in from the left. Then, looking to the extreme right of the page, she saw the last number on the line her finger was still marking was 33. “70 minus 33 is 37, so the first number is…” Spinning the dials around on the lock, she set the two digit combination lock to 73 and was relieved to hear another click. So far everything was working.

Nodding her head in approval, Osgood set about working out the next numerical input which, since the number in the notebook to the immediate left of the 33 was 24, meant that the expected input was, “70 minus 24...46, 64.” Again, Osgood adjusted the dials and again, was rewarded with another click. Repeating the process for the remaining four numbers on the line, she soon entered the
sixth two digit code that meant the inner door that the combination lock had been mounted in also swung open.

“Excellent!” Seeing the stack of thick cream paper sitting in the now open cupboard, Osgood reached in and pulled the sheets out.

“What is it?” asked Josh, coming to stand next to her, unable to not sound disappointed that, after all that key turning and code decrypting, all Osgood had got was some notepaper. He also managed to block what little light there was, making reading the faint print even more challenging for Osgood.

“The original IATM reports for Friday evening…” Osgood turned so she was closer to the lightbulb which, she now remembered was recessed into the ceiling above the interference field, and carefully rested the top piece of paper against her chest so she could read the second one. “…Friday evening again…” She moved on to the third one, “…and again…” The IATM record of the two times the Tardis bounced against the Tower’s Shield were no more helpful to Kate than the first record confirming the Tardis’s arrival in the hydrangea bed, but the fourth one… “Lt Chen?”

“Ma’am?”

“Ready to telegraph?”

After reading the codes, Chen had been studying how he got his hands through the now replaced panel and onto the Foxglove transmitter while waiting for Osgood to be ready. He’d found the slide shutter that he could open which then gave him a hole through which he could put his right hand, once he’d rolled his sleeve up to above his elbow and removed his fingerless glove. This meant he could put his finger on the button that he would use to tap out the Morse code. Standing with his index finger on the button, he’d then spent another minute or two looking for the second slide shutter that, when opened, enabled him to reach through with his left hand, again after rolling up his sleeve and taking off his glove, and hold the spike, which was actually a series of buttons arranged around a cylinder and the reason this particular transmitter was known as a ‘Foxglove’.

Depending who Osgood wanted him to transmit to, and in which code, Chen would have to press different combinations of buttons, all of which had been in the little blue codebook and his memory. What hadn’t been mentioned in the codebook or during induction was that he would have his hands inside a brass box that he couldn’t see into, with his nose only half an inch or so from the wall. Suddenly, the requirement for them to be able to transmit these codes blindfolded with their hands behind their backs while stood in a pitch black room made a lot more sense as, with the wall that close to his face, Chen found he was instinctively closing his eyes.
“Ready when you are Ma’am…”

“Alright then…” Looking back down at the fourth piece of paper she’d looked at, which was the IATM record of the Tardis arriving on Earth, Osgood took a moment to work out exactly how she was going to put her message.

“Transmitter power Ma’am?” asked Chen, discovering it was more comfortable if his forehead rested against the wall.

“Oh, yes…” Osgood had forgotten that with the Foxglove nothing was preset. “..umm...Local Alpha thank you.”

“Local Alpha confirmed…” said Chen, once he’d found the correct buttons and pressed them: it was exactly as they’d been taught to expect it to be - just like the chord fingering on a guitar.

“Transmission frequency Ma’am?” As he waited for Osgood’s next instruction, Chen just hoped that the Duty Ops Officer at the Tower was sitting down…the WOTAN terminal was one you always saw but never watched...and never expected to get a message on...
“You can blame Maria for that…” pointed out Kate grinning, anticipating whatever Fran was going to say to her when she walked into Kate’s office less than five minutes after Kate had put the phone down on Geneva. “...she was the one who brought up little tanks.”

“Blame me for what Ma’am?” Maria knew she wasn’t very good at following conversations when they shifted into French, but she was fairly certain the accidental destruction of the Scimitar during the prototype testing on Saturday afternoon had not come up when they’d been conferenced with the Oversight Committee in Geneva. In fact, it was about the only part of the weekend that hadn’t been picked apart, although no one had got much of an answer from Kate beyond ‘somewhere else’ when some of them had tried to find out where precisely she had been when the Tardis had appeared in her hydrangeas, although a few still tried. It had taken the Colonel herself to point out that the location of Greyhounds when the Tower was at priority Blue was a security issue which this particular collective group of people were not universally cleared to know about, at which point the fascination with Greyhound One’s weekend abruptly stopped.

“You said…’Écoutez très attentivement, messieurs, parce que je parlerai cela une seule fois.’” Fran was trying very hard not to let her genuine amusement show as she read back to Kate what she’d transcribed from a few minutes before, knowing already that Kate had known precisely what she was saying. “Really? You want that the record?”

“I don’t see why not.” Kate leaned back in her chair looking completely relaxed and at ease despite the tension at the end of the call. “After all, I meant it, even if I did get the phrasing a bit...” Kate shrugged when she couldn’t quite work out what she wasn’t liking about the translation she’d come up with.

“I don’t speak French….” Maria’s quiet admission was a surprise to Fran, who hadn’t known.

“Oh, I’m sorry Colonel, I thought…” embarrassed, Fran looked from Kate to the Colonel.

“That everyone here spoke French? Nope, I stopped after Russian and German.”

“Ah.” Nodding in acknowledgment, Fran made a mental note not to worry about getting German reports translated for the Colonel in future, and now understood why General Bambera’s security communiques had started to come through in German shortly after the Colonel’s arrival. “The translation is...” Pausing to try to glare at a still amused Kate who, Fran now realised, almost certainly only said it in French in order to get various other UNIT people to have to translate it, Fran looked down at her notepad and began to mentally translate her shorthand French into longhand.
French and then into English. “...umm...Listen very carefully gentlemen, because I will say this only once…” It was very tempting to adopt the silly accent, but Fran thought she’d managed to avoid doing that, just.

“That’s…” Swallowing deeply, Maria tried not to laugh but wasn’t doing very well. “...Dr Stewart’s right…” she spluttered, finally giving in to her laughter as she found herself picturing Kate Stewart in the trademark beige raincoat and black beret that the French Resistance were always wearing in the sitcom.

“See?” Kate reached for her glass of water, wearing her ‘innocent’ expression that Osgood never fell for. “Told you to blame the Colonel for that one… although it did seem to work.”

“It certainly did,” agreed Fran, amused. She’d recognised the catchphrase from ‘Allo ‘Allo as soon as she heard it despite it being in French, but hadn’t been entirely certain if Kate had done it deliberately or whether it was just a coincidence. “Do you think anyone else got it?”

“Win Bambera would have, but she wasn’t on the call… same for Osgood.” Actually, thought Kate with only a little bit of bias, Osgood was probably the only person who would have picked up on the ‘Allo ‘Allo catchphrase, the Schrodinger’s Cat thought experiment and known that each July Kate ordered some bare root roses that would then be delivered for planting outdoors in November as she tried to nurture the far flowerbed into something resembling a rose garden. “Not sure Win knows much about planting roses, but she’s not bad on Schrodinger.”

“The cat guy?” asked Maria, struggling to follow what they were talking about given her lack of French, although given she was fluent in German, she had followed the short conversation between Kate and Oscar Wienz about the roses.

“Yes… oh, sorry Maria…” Kate looked from the Colonel to Fran. “...could you read the other bit back please? That came between ‘Allo ‘Allo and rose planting.” Kate had never mastered Pitman shorthand in English, nevermind the French shorthand system Fran also knew, so knew better than to offer to read Fran’s notes, not to mention that Kate also knew from past experience that one of the quickest ways to irritate Fran was to attempt to paraphrase what she’d said based on memory when Fran had the transcription ready to read out.

“Of course…..umm…” Fran found the bit Kate was talking about and took a minute to just get her translation clear in her head. “I…” Fran gestured towards Kate with her notepad, just in case there was sudden doubt as to who ‘I’ was, “… would be interested to see how you would cope in an actual situation given the number of regulations you’ve forgotten or never bothered to learn. But I suspect that the act of observation would alter your performance, or as Schrodinger said, until you open the box, the cat can be alive or dead. I do not need to open the box to know that cat is already dead. Or, for those of you who struggle to understand quantum theory... since I wish to plant the new rose...
bushes I have ordered, I will continue to do things my way.” Fran looked up from her notes. “Then it switched to German for a bit…”

“I’ve never had much luck with roses myself…” admitted Maria unexpectedly, although it did at least confirm that she had been following the conversation then.

“Probably the wrong variety…” Kate was interrupted by a knock on her outer door. “Yes?” She waved in the Duty Officer who looked like he’d just sprinted from Ops to her office.

“Urgent signal received for Greyhound One Ma’am…” He held out the folded paper which Fran took being closest and passed it to Kate, only to see the Colonel was also present. “We’re unable to acknowledge receipt Colonel, it came through on WOTAN.”

“Thank you Tomkor.” Maria nodded a dismissal, having a pretty good idea where the signal had come from and why a reply wasn’t possible having been updated by Kate earlier as to what Osgood’s idea and plan was. Relieved to be excused, Tomkor risked a quick glance at Greyhound One before doing an about turn and rushing back to Ops, wondering what else was going to happen today. His exit gave Fran the opportunity and excuse to also retreat back to her desk in Kate’s outer office, closing the door to Kate’s office behind her: Kate Stewart might be a Greyhound, but Fran was her guard dog.

“The signal’s from Osgood…” Kate had found her glasses and had read the message twice through, her smile broadening by the second. “Good news…” She reached for her desk phone again and hit the speed dial number for Winifred Bambera who was clearly waiting for the phone call as the phone was picked up before the second ring could start.

“Bambera.”

“Win? Osgood’s just sent the message.”

“And?” Win put down her pencil before she snapped it, not sharing Kate’s calmness.

“Friday, 10.31am London time.”

There was a long silence as Win Bambera digested this piece of information, a silence that Kate wasn’t inclined to interrupt, which just left Maria sitting tensely, wishing she could be in Ops
awaiting some orders to *do* something.

“What number contact was Max?” asked Win finally, feeling able to pick up her pencil again, not that she was going to make any notes, not yet.

“Fourth, if you include the two collisions with the Tower shield.” Kate cleared her throat before adding dryly, “the IATM did.”

“Is it enough do you think?” Win turned away from her desk and leaned back in her chair as she looked through the window into the distance, looking towards but not seeing the view. “To get him?”

“Who, Max?” Kate willed herself to remain objective, to not react with a mother’s emotion in the face of Win’s skepticism.

“No, Claude. Why did you think…” Win trailed off when she realised how the ambiguity of her question, which Kate would have normally not been tripped up by, was currently confusing her friend. “…No, not Max. Max is fine.” Win pinched the bridge of her nose. “Sorry, should have been clearer.” Win was very conscious of the relationship between Max and Kate, remembering that horrific November all those years ago when Kate’s world, only recently righted after her divorce by being turned on its head by Osgood, had been turned on its head again as she rushed back to England at the news of Freddie’s accident. But while Win had remembered, General Bambera had forgotten that, to Greyhound One, Captain Stewart wasn’t just another Troop Commander and this ‘unscheduled civilian contact at a domestic residence’ as the unduly damning report was putting it had been Kate’s children in the garden at her home. “If the Tardis appearing in your garden is the fourth IATM report, that means three were missed...”

“Four were missed,” corrected Kate firmly. “I’m putting you on speaker so Maria can join in.” Kate didn’t give Win a chance to reply, but instead pressed the speakerphone button and put the handset down. “Maria, when Ops rang Max on Friday night, what triggered the call?”

“From Ops to Max?” checked Maria, pulling her chair forwards so she felt like she was improving her chances of being clearly heard by Win Bambera in Geneva. She’d intended the question to be mostly rhetorical, but Kate’s sharp nod was added confirmation. “Kennel security registered an energy spike from the garden sensors that was transmitted through to Ops as an alert.”

“What sort of alert?” asked Win, starting to make notes now.
“Audible alarm and flashing status indicator on the Duty Officer’s station General.” Despite feeling a bit like she was being cross-examined, Maria was fundamentally relaxed - these were questions about process and protocol responses, questions she not only knew how to answer in terms of what should have happened, but because she knew it had happened. They might not be perfect at the Tower, but they were now damn good at the basics.

“For an energy spike in the garden?” Kate didn’t say that she thought that sounded overkill in terms of response, but her tone implied it, as did her expression when she looked across her desk to Maria.

“When we are at Priority Blue yes Ma’am.” Maria met Kate’s look with a steady gaze that, had this been happening a few months ago, might not have been quite so steady, but she’d learned a lot in her last few months at the Tower, including that Kate Stewart didn’t mind her experts being expert.

“I keep forgetting that, don’t I?” Kate smiled sheepishly at the Colonel, recalling she’d needed to be reminded of it on Friday as well.

“You’ve had other things to concentrate on Ma’am,” replied Maria diplomatically, deciding she probably wasn’t senior enough to think about why Greyhound One was suddenly appearing to blush and General Bambera had chuckled before saying what sounded to Maria like ‘truer words have never been spoken’. Deciding it was probably best to just carry on with her explanation of what happened on Friday evening, Maria cleared her throat and carried on. “Ops logs confirm that Lt Bishop, as duty officer, followed procedure and immediately ordered a security team to go to the Kennel while he also accessed Kennel Security to understand what the situation was. Remembering that Greyhounds One and Two were…” Maria paused, finding what she was supposed to say tricky. Kate however, was sufficiently impressed with the Colonel’s calm update to help her out.

“…on our way to the Doghouse…” No doubt there were many in Geneva that would like Kate to be permanently sent to a more metaphorical doghouse thought Kate, acknowledging Maria’s smile of thanks with a saluting gesture with her water glass.

“…Lt Bishop requested a status report for Greyhounds One and Two from Jenkins. Just as Jenkins was confirming you were north of the border…”

“…which was at Priority Yellow still then yes?” checked Win, remembering the observation Max had made about Scotland not being Priority Blue on Friday night despite England being at the elevated state.

“Yes General. Scotland only went to Priority Blue at 1437 yesterday after the unfortunate incident on the seventh tee.”
“Of course.” Win briefly remembered that particular problem having earlier deliberately tried to forget about it - like Kate, she wasn’t interested in golf and failed to see the attraction of the sport. She therefore left the managing and coordinating of the Earth Handicap Championship to those that enjoyed the sport and could tolerate the rather grumpy McBridie.

“We’re still awaiting toxicology reports on the crater that was the seventh tee by the way….” volunteered Kate suddenly, remembering that nugget of information from one of her earlier unscheduled meetings that had prevented her tackling her paperwork. “…once we know the results we can advise on a decontamination timeline…” The ‘we’ in that statement was the Chief Scientific Officer’s Senior Scientists, in the form of Rosie and two of her team who were currently in Scotland analysing what was left of the seventh tee. “…and from that we’ll then look at possible security implications…” whereas that ‘we’ was Greyhound One, proving that, as a general rule, conversations with Kate Stewart were generally more comprehensible if you concentrated….and prayed she stayed in one language.

“Who’s up there with the scientists Colonel?” Win’s other solution was to assiduously ignore Kate being Chief Scientist and just stick to the security side of things.

“Bishop Ma’am.” Maria Walsh was both irritated and relieved that Sam Bishop had gone to Scotland with Dr Onurosie and her small team of experts. Irritated because it had made trying to double check exactly what had happened on Friday night extra long-winded but relieved that it hadn’t been Josh Carter up there as, once the novelty of his mutated muscle fibres had worn off for her, Rosie had revealed herself to be even more incompatible with Captain Carter than she was with the rest of the Tower’s military machinery.

“McBridie likes him Win…” assured Kate, knowing Maria wouldn’t be drawn into a discussion about their at times prickly Scottish colleague who generally resented anyone who wasn’t a Greyhound or a Lethbridge-Stewart intruding on his authority. Kate also knew that Win would hear her unspoken request to respectfully steer well clear of their Scottish difficulty.

“Bishop’s had a busy weekend then.” Win heard the request and took the hint. “So back to Friday night, he’d seen the alarm, sent the patrol out, checked in with Jenkins…” Completing the recap of her notes so far, Win waited for Maria to continue with her update.

“He, Bishop also then saw that immediately prior to the alarm being raised, sensors had been showing there were four people at the Kennel and in the garden, all classified ‘friendly’. And one of them was Captain Stewart.” Pausing to draw breath, Maria saw Kate’s wink and nod, welcome confirmation that she was very pleased with what she was hearing.
“And that’s when Ops rang Max?” asked Win, finishing her notes and giving them a quick reread, satisfied she now had a fairly detailed understanding of the Ops timeline in addition to her earlier broad understanding of events.

“Yes General. Bishop reasoned that calling the Captain wouldn’t delay the four man security team deploying by helicopter…” Maria wondered if that was something else Kate had forgotten would be happening because of the Priority Blue Status but a quick glance in Kate’s direction only served to remind Maria that a big part of Bridge playing was bluff, and consequently, Kate Stewart’s ‘poker face’ was as good as it got when she wanted it to be.

“But Captain Stewart didn’t answer Bishop’s call Colonel.” Win knew she was playing devil’s advocate with her continued challenging for extra detail, but knew that if she didn’t press now, someone else would later and with the IATM reports she only had one shot, and it was a precision sniper’s shot at that. “Logs show he ended the call without answering even. That’s concerning is it not?”

“I don’t consider it to be so General, no. Not when the logs also show that by then Lt Bishop knew that Mr Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart was in contact with Greyhound Two…” Maria saw a flicker of a frown cross Kate’s face, wondering what she’d said that could cause it, not realising that Kate had not expected to hear Gordy named so formally, “...with it being a reasonable assumption therefore that Captain Stewart and Greyhound One were also involved, especially when cross-referenced with the log from the Aston Ma’am.” Maria knew she wasn’t wearing a shirt with a tightly fastened top collar button - she wasn’t wearing a shirt with a collar button, never mind a too-tight collar buttoned up, but that didn’t stop her feeling a tightness in her throat as she swallowed thickly.

“What’s the car got to do with it?”

“Os told me to pull over so I floored it to find a lay by,” summarised Kate, knowing the car’s speed and position was constantly tracked as well as a few hundred other things that she wouldn’t pretend she could remember, not when her petrol station faux pas was still potentially relatively fresh in Osgood’s memory. “And turned on the blue lights.”

“Awkward to explain that if you didn’t know about the Tardis…” agreed Win, knowing that their use of blue lights on vehicles was a potentially twitchy subject with some of the police forces out of fear of abuse of the privilege, meaning that all vehicles fitted with lights and sirens were also fitted with monitoring devices that logged when they were used.

“I think blue is becoming my favourite colour…” muttered Kate, realising without needing reminding this time that, in addition to everything else that was already being monitored and recorded that evening, because they were at Priority Blue, Ops would have been monitoring the communications originating from and being received at the house as part of the overall security
monitoring at the ‘Kennel’, not to mention her and Osgood’s phones being constantly tracked, along with the Aston itself, which would have started recording the call once Osgood switched it through to the car’s speakerphone system.

Maria, hearing the unexpected comment which hadn’t been as quiet as Kate had thought, bit her tongue and therefore managed to not say out loud that she’d already assumed it was given how often Kate wore blue.

“I thought it was.” Win, though, had heard it too and had known Kate and UNIT long enough not to need to bite her tongue.

“No.”

Kate’s favourite colour was definitely not blue - she didn’t really have one but had become increasingly fond of the caramel and biscuit colours that Osgood invariably wore, not because of the colour itself, but because of what, or rather who, she’d come to associate those colours with. In fact, it was for the same sort of logic that, as a general rule, she’d not been that keen on blue as ‘Priority Blue’ generally meant missed meals and sleepless nights trying to keep the planet in one reasonably habitable piece. But even before that, she’d not been all that keen on blue as it was also the colour of Freddie’s car, which is why Kate had always insisted on having non-blue cars once Max had joined the family.

“If anything it’s...some sort of brown.” She was tempted to say ‘the colour of Ossy’, but knew Maria wouldn’t know she was talking about an iris. “What made you think that?” Kate couldn’t remember the question of favourite colours coming up ever with Win, although she had discussed colour in general with Flo on more than one occasion, most intensely when seeking Flo’s assistance in designing the lining fabric for Osgood’s jacket.

“You’re usually wearing blue when I see you.” In fact, Win was struggling to think of an occasion in the last few years when she hadn’t seen Kate wearing a blue shirt and suit.

“Ah.” Kate’s cheeks coloured slightly as she realised which outfit Win was remembering before rapidly clamping up.

“Colonel?”

“Yes General?” Maria could hear the amusement in Win’s voice which was proof of the General’s
rumoured sense of humour that seemingly only emerged when a Greyhound was around.

“Is she blushing?”

“Umm…” Actually, Maria was now the one that was blushing the most, finding herself caught between declining to answer her superior officer’s question or ‘telling’ on her Boss.

“I’ll take that as a yes then.” Chuckling, Win was all too easily able to picture her friend’s reaction to what was a genuinely gentle and kind teasing, making a mental note to ask Osgood about it next time she saw her.

“How’s Flo enjoying Ermintrude?” asked Kate suddenly, rediscovering her voice and completely confusing Maria in the process.

“She’s loving her…” The mobility scooter that Flo had acquired last time they’d been in London for the unveiling of Ossy had transformed Win’s partner’s mobility and general confidence, helped in no small part by the modifications and extra features that Osgood had incorporated into it for them both. “Why’d you ask?”

“Because I really must invite her to dinner next time I’m in town, just the two of us…” ‘Town’ in this context was Geneva, and Kate’s friendly ‘threat’ was heard loud and clear by Win - Flo was a very good storyteller who knew far too many stories about Win’s only recently retired ‘wild side’.

“On second thoughts, I don’t remember seeing you wearing blue any more often than other colours…”

“Well remembered…” teased Kate, relieved that Win felt everything was sufficiently clear-cut about events on Friday night that she’d detoured into ‘non-work’ territory for a minute or two. “...but I would like to have dinner with Flo if she’s able,” repeated Kate more seriously, missing seeing Win’s partner as often as she used to when they’d all been a bit younger and Flo in particular had been a lot more mobile.

“I’ll ask her what time she’s free on Thursday and get Henri to book something,” promised Win, making a note on a different bit of paper to give to her secretary.

“Lovely...wait.” Kate sat forward in her chair and nudged her computer mouse, forcing her
computer screen into life so she could see her calendar. “Thursday? As in…” As in the night she
and Osgood had dinner with the boys? And tried to be at home for the groceries to be delivered so
that they had some food to make dinner with?

“As in Thursday, the evening you’re going to need a drinking buddy after a morning with the
Interns…”

“Yes, but…” Kate knew about the morning session she had in Geneva with the Diplomacy Summer
Interns where she, in her capacity as Chief Scientific Officer, had a question and answer session with
the usually undiplomatic aliens about all things Earth ‘science-y’ which invariably at some point
ventured into human reproduction and anatomy. It was one of those moments in her year that Kate
dreaded in the run up to it but, once it was done she found she’d not only quite enjoyed, but also had
a whole new supply of anecdotes for various UNIT social events. “…I was going to fly back straight
after it…” Actually, according to her calendar, it had been about the only meeting in her diary that
Fran hadn’t rescheduled on account of the paperwork crisis, which probably meant that the flight
there and back came with its own reading and signing pile. And as lovely as Flo was as a drinking
buddy, Kate’s favourite drinking buddy was Os. “What have you volunteered me for?”

“Nothing, yet.” Win noticed the time and, genuinely regretting how she was leaving Kate hanging,
saw that she had to go and interrupt a meeting. “Colonel?”

“Yes General?”

“Is there anything on any of the logs from Friday night or the weekend that shouldn’t be?”

“Not from my command, no General.” That was the nearest Maria Walsh could bring herself to
saying that she felt Geneva should get its own house in order before it started questioning the Tower.

“That’s what I thought. Thanks.” And, as abruptly as the phone call had started, Win ended it,
leaving a confused Colonel looking to Kate for an explanation.

“I think…” Kate picked up her pen and spun it between her fingers for a turn or two, ordering her
thoughts as she tried to put together what might be happening now in Geneva, starting with which
meetings were happening at 3, no 4 in the afternoon local time that Win could have headed off to
barge into...suddenly, Kate had a pretty good idea what she was going to be volunteered for. “...I
think we should probably carry on with what we were talking about before…” Kate gestured
vaguely with her pen, not yet sufficiently refocused back in the here and now to be able to recall
what they had been talking about.
“Rose bushes?”

“Ah yes, you’re probably just unlucky with the varieties you planted. Can you remember what they were?” It had taken Kate a good few years to understand which types of roses worked for her, both in terms of the garden environment’s characteristics, but also her gardening style, with there being no room in the garden for plants of any sort that required daily intervention.

“No…” Maria thought for a second, trying to remember what she could about the three plants her sister-in-law had given her a few years earlier. “…they were a present, picked for their names I think….they’re still alive, but don’t really do anything, just fill a space.”

“Which can be useful but dull,” agreed Kate, knowing what Maria meant - once a shrub or bush had filled a space with foliage in a flowerbed, it was very difficult to replace as mature plants were expensive and not always successfully replanted and young plants didn’t fill the space properly. “Show me a photo sometime and I’ll have a think if you like,” offered Kate easily, liking a good horticultural mystery to ponder. “They could just need feeding and pruning…”

“Thank you Ma’am…” Maria had not expected to receive an offer of gardening help from Greyhound One ever, nevermind in the middle of whatever this current situation would eventually be archived as. So far Maria didn’t think enough things had exploded for it to be classed as a ‘crisis’ but it had involved more report cross-referencing than was normally associated with a ‘problem’.

“You’ve got me intrigued,” Kate put down her pen and picked up her glasses again, her attention now being drawn to the report they had been looking at before the call from Geneva had set them off on a horticultural detour. “…and speaking of intrigued, you were just about to tell me how the disposal of the contraband went and the pool. Had anyone picked blue and,” Kate angled the photograph of the fallout from the destruction of the unknown plastic explosives, knowing that there was an unofficial sweepstake for people to guess what colour the new explosives would create. “...is that pink?”

“Pink, silver and gold. Each type appears to be blue plus one of those colours.”

“Attractive…” Actually, looking through the stack of photographs, the dark blue speckled mostly with silver and gold was reminding Kate of the meteor shower. “...do you know who won then?”
“Umm…”

“Yes?” The Doctor looked up from the box he was unpacking to see Max stood in the doorway looking like he’d just hiccuped...

“The shelves….” Max looked around the room that, less than five minutes ago when he’d left it last, had been completely empty except for the Doctor stood in the middle of it, waving his arms about.

“Are not in the right places yet, I know…” Returning to his unpacking, the Doctor failed to realise that he’d not anticipated Max’s question correctly.

“...are new since I went out to get this box,” finished Max, struggling to believe what he was actually looking at. “...and make the room look bigger.”

“The room is bigger.” Looking up again, this time carefully holding his Lego Dalek which still spun but no longer moved as he’d used the wheels to make his model of K9 mobile instead, the Doctor looked thoughtfully at Max. “You didn’t say it.”

“Didn’t say what?” Max put the box he’d brought into the Tardis from the van down on the floor next to the table that, now he thought about it, also hadn’t been in the room when he’d left a couple of minutes earlier. “When?”

“Before, about it being bigger on the inside…” The Doctor put the Dalek down carefully on a shelf, next to the R2D2 model he’d already unpacked, only to move the Dalek onto a separate shelf. It wouldn’t do to mix space opera with reality. “…or smaller on the outside, though not very many say that…”

It took Max a minute or two to work out what the Doctor was talking about.

“No, I didn’t.”

“Why not? Everyone else does.”
“Tata would say that’s their problem.” Max cringed when he realised he’d said that out loud - it sounded ruder than he’d intended.

“Who’s Tata?” The Doctor hadn’t noticed any rudeness, quite the opposite in fact, with it sounding like exactly the sort of thing he might have said if only he knew who ‘Tata’ was, which was not a problem he often encountered.

“My Dad.” Max ran his hand over his head before, in a movement that saw him suddenly remind the Doctor of Kate more than anything else he’d said or done since Friday night, Max shoved his hands in the pockets of his jeans and shrugged. “Tata is Fijian for Father…” Max wasn’t sure if the Doctor had been to Fiji but decided not to ask. “He taught me it was lazy to judge someone by their appearance, and disrespectful to Nana to…” Max took an extra breath to help him keep his composure now he was thinking about his parents. “...to treat women like objects. Which also means disrespectful to Mum and Os too…” Max knew his father had never met Osgood, but he’d always assumed that Tata would have liked her. “I don’t think he knew about you Ma’am…” said Max finally, casting his eyes to the ceiling, not quite sure what to address the Tardis as but feeling uncomfortable talking about her without including her while he was….he didn’t finish that thought as, well, it felt like it would sound weird in his head. “...but he’d have been delighted to meet you Ma’am.”

The room, which Max was correct to think had got bigger and acquired shelves since he’d stepped out of the Tardis to go and collect another box of the Doctor’s new Lego collection, acquired a warmth to it as the light softened and took on a pinkish cream hue instead of the more sterile bright white it had been before. Where the floor had been a smooth, featureless flat surface, it was now carpeted in a nondescript neutral colour which also helped make the whole place feel more welcoming and comfortable.

“There’s no need to flirt…” grumbled the Doctor, taking out his sonic screwdriver and waved it in the direction of the far wall which had seemingly acquired alcoves and a fireplace.

“Oh no, I…”

“Not you, Max, I was talking to the Old Girl.” A short flight of steps appeared under the Doctor’s feet, meaning he landed on the newly lowered floor in a tangle of legs. “Now wait a standard Gallifreyan minute…”

“I’ll, uh…” Feeling like he was intruding on a moment that was probably best had in private, Max took a step backwards and was relieved that the Tardis was sufficiently distracted by the Doctor’s very animated monologue to not have moved the door from behind him or generally impede his
“Thank you.” Osgood shut the Land Rover door behind her and did an awkward half wave as she watched Lt Chen drive off. It had been a long day that had started at the Tower not long after 7 when she and Kate had both gone in extra early to try and make inroads into their backlogs of work from the past fortnight, knowing that by about 10 they’d no doubt be dragged into whatever was the new issue or concern. But Osgood hadn’t expected that the new issue would see her having to spend the rest of the day giving WOTAN One a thorough overhaul that had seen her miss lunch and become covered in grease and grime despite her usual carefulness. That plus the constant presence of Troop not only at WOTAN One but also on the journey home on account of their current elevated ‘Blue’ status and Osgood was tired, grumpy, grubby and hungry, although she did have the presence of mind to concede that had she not had the lift from WOTAN One straight home, she’d have been even grumpier: the Troop Land Rovers were certainly more pleasant than the tube, especially in August.

Osgood stood in the middle of the driveway, her bags still on the ground by her feet and closed her eyes, enjoying the feel of the light evening breeze on her face and the relative quiet. It wasn’t as quiet and peaceful as yesterday morning had been, but that was hardly a fair comparison considering this was London and yesterday morning she and Kate had been in Scotland.

Was it really only yesterday?

Opening her eyes, Osgood rolled her shoulders and repositioned her glasses before reaching down and picking up her bags. She’d go and have a quick shower to deal with the accumulated grease and dirt, then… she paused when she felt a pull in her shoulder, another reminder that servicing WOTAN was rather more physical than cerebral, and repositioned her bag before carrying on toward the front door. After her shower to get clean she’d have a soak in the bath, and then she’d have something to eat and start to tackle some of the paperwork she’d asked Fran to send home with Kate, knowing Kate would be bringing her own paperwork stack home with her as well...assuming it was before midnight.

Pleased with her plan, Osgood opened the front door and methodically went through her automatic routine of taking off her shoes and putting her bags neatly to one side so they didn’t become a trip hazard. Out of habit, she also picked up Max’s backpack that he had a habit of hanging on the bannister newel post and put it next to her own bags. He never did take the hint, but Osgood couldn’t really blame him as Kate was just as bad at using the newel post as a coat and bag hook, although Osgood was now used to thinking of the newel post as ‘Kate’s hook’. In fact, that was the real reason Osgood continued to move Max’s things now - not because she was still bothered by there being bags and coats hanging from the end of the staircase bannister, but because she was used to seeing Kate’s bag and coat hanging there, not Max’s.
“Hello Os…” Max came into the hall from the kitchen just in time to see her jump of surprise. “...sorry, didn’t mean to startle you…” He held out a glass and a plate as a peace offering. “G&T and cheese and biscuits - the nearest I could get to canapes.”

“Thank you.” Accepting the glass and plate, realising that a gin and tonic sounded wonderful and the cheese and biscuits were definitely sensible, Osgood now had her hands full so was unable to reposition her glasses or straighten her shirt collar, both of which were starting to distract her from trying to decide which question she wanted to ask him first. “How did, or why….what about…”

“I saw you get out of the Land Rover and decided you probably could do with a drink.” Max was used to Osgood starting a number of questions at once and set about answering as many of them as he could guess. “I’ve been catching up on emails…” He pulled his phone out of his back pocket and, after showing it to Osgood as if to confirm how he’d managed to access his emails, put it back in his front pocket where it felt safer. “...and know you couldn’t have had lunch if you’ve been in WOTAN One since mid morning.” He put his hands in his pockets as well, not quite sure what to do with them. “The Doctor’s in the Tardis, they’re…” Max smirked as he tried to picture what he’d seen the last time he’d stepped into the Tardis. “...redecorating.”

“Redecorating?” Osgood blinked and took a gulp of the gin and tonic, discovered the gin, then blinked again.

“You looked like you needed a double.” Max rocked on his heels. “And the Doctor is setting up a new room in the Tardis to keep his Lego in...the Tardis wants it to look like a study or something but the Doctor’s trying to get her to recreate the Millennium Falcon. My money’s on the Tardis.”

“Are they still in the hydrangeas?”

“Yes. I helped for a bit earlier, carrying in the Doctor’s things from the van…” Max wasn’t sure if Osgood had noticed the van which was still parked on the driveway but was no longer right in the way of everything, as Max had moved it to over by the hedge. “...but he accused her of flirting with me so I left them to it.”

“And read your emails…” Osgood hadn’t had a chance to find out how much Max knew about the issues Geneva had generated and quite how it all connected in with her day servicing WOTAN One.

“I’m working backwards, so I know I’ve been cleared of something but not found out what yet.” For someone whose career was hanging by a very thin thread a few hours ago, Max was looking
impressively relaxed. “The Colonel said she’d catch me up tomorrow.” The unspoken ‘if you or Mum don’t tell me first’ was left hanging in the space between them. “What was WOTAN One like?”

“Dirty.” Osgood felt her breathing become shallower as she started to worry about all the possible questions he could ask her that she didn’t really want to be the one to answer - Kate was much better at that sort of thing. “And heavy. It’s mostly brass.”

“I turned the immersion on about half an hour ago….” Max took a half step back so he wasn’t obstructing Osgood’s ability to get to the stairs or the kitchen, depending what she wanted to do next. “…so there should be plenty of hot water.”

“Oh!” Relief rushed through Osgood when she heard this, relief that he hadn’t got particular curiosity as to why she’d suddenly had to go to WOTAN One and relief that there really would be enough hot water for both a shower and a soak in the bath. “Thank you!” Osgood went to give him a hug but her hands were full of gin and tonic and cheese and biscuits, plus she was still grimey, so she stopped mid movement.

“You’re welcome Os.” Grinning, Max watched her set off up the stairs before turning and heading back to the kitchen. He had no idea why Kate hadn’t wanted him to tell Osgood she’d asked him to do turn on the hot water, or make the gin and tonic and the snack, but he knew when to follow orders… especially when they were from his Mum. Getting himself a glass of water, he sat down at the kitchen table and continued to catch up on his emails while keeping an ear open for the Doctor, Kate and anything else that might happen….after all, they were still at Priority Bravo Two Blue.
Chapter 29

“Hey you….” Kate leaned against the doorframe of their en-suite bathroom and sipped her own gin and tonic, smiling fondly as she watched Os blink as her eyes adjusted to being open again. “…were you asleep?” She didn’t think Osgood had been properly asleep in the bath, but Osgood had looked very relaxed and comfortable.

“Don’t think so…” Osgood blew on the mound of bubbles that was drifting towards her, not wanting it to beach itself on her chest. “…you’re home.”

“Mmm…” Taking another sip of her drink, Kate came all the way into the bathroom and leaned against the basin so Os could see her without twisting around. “…a few minutes ago, had a chat with Max.”

“He’d been reading his emails when I got in…” Osgood stretched her legs under the water and rolled her shoulders, savouring the warmth of the bath - she clearly hadn’t been in the bath for too long if the water was still warm. “…knew about my visit to WOTAN One but hadn’t got to why.”

“He now knows about everything else too.” Kate ran her fingers through her hair and rubbed her neck. “Well, most of everything else. He knows you went to WOTAN One to find the IATM reports. I think he’s still a bit confused about how Geneva didn’t see them, but then he’s not alone on that.”

“Is anyone going to do a cross-reference between the IATM archive and the Geneva Ops records?” Osgood had been relieved that the IATM outputs had not yet been archived when she’d got to them, knowing that if they had left it until tomorrow they’d probably already have been dispatched. “The sheets are automatically bound, packed and posted every 12 reports. Oscar Weinz should have the records in Geneva.” There was a reason that the IATM was at WOTAN One under the Post Office Tower as it then was, with a number of the monitoring systems automatically archiving their reports via the Royal Mail.

“How many reports were there when you found the one we needed?” asked Kate, only now prepared to let herself wonder how close they’d come to a whole different problem. “And he says he doesn’t. I already asked.”

“11. Then where are they?”
“A problem for Thursday afternoon...I’m staying in Geneva and doing an Ops review for Win. She’s in command now.”

“Since when?” That was good news as far as Osgood was concerned, with the Oversight Committee being the wrong people in her opinion to have the Geneva Ops Room within their jurisdiction, but it was one of those pieces of UNIT weirdness that had never quite been untangled when everything else was reviewed and improved. But Kate going to Geneva was less good news - that was suggesting they were about to have another of those weeks when they were rarely in the same place….

“About an hour ago. In her words, she invaded the Board and showed them why Oversight couldn’t be allowed to continue to not oversee it. I think she was hoping we’d get it but the Board gave it to her.”

“What did Claude say?”

“Not much for once.” Kate took another long sip of her gin and tonic and rolled her shoulders, wincing when she felt the stiffness.

“Get in.”

“Hmm?”

“Come on…” Osgood moved forwards in the bath, intending on letting the plug out so she could drain some of the water to create room for Kate and fresh hot water. “...I promise not to fall asleep on you, even if you are comfortable.”

“Thank you…” Kate put her glass aside, liking the sound of a soak in the bath, only to feel her shirt sticking to her back, reminding her how hot and sticky she felt after a day shut up in the Tower: underground didn’t always mean cool. “...I’ll just…”

Pulling her shirt off over her head, Kate reached into the shower and turned it on, before with an unselfconsciousness that came from more than a decade of loving and living with Os, she finished undressing and stepped into the shower to rinse the stickiness of the day away. Less than a minute later, she was out again and stepping into the bath behind Osgood who promptly turned on the hot tap to top up the now much lower water level.
“Mmm…” Sighing in relief as she felt the warm water rising up towards her shoulders, Kate reached for Os’s shoulders when she heard the water stop running, encouraging Os to settle back against her.

“Thanks for asking Max to turn on the hot water, and make me a drink…” mumbled Os, sinking against the familiar contours of Kate’s body and relaxing into her embrace.

“He wasn’t supposed to tell you…” muttered Kate, kissing the side of Osgood’s neck, feeling the stiffness in the muscles with her lips.

“He didn’t.” Osgood was disappointed when she felt Kate’s lips leave her neck, only to discover that her girlfriend was replacing lips with fingers….strong fingers that started to work on stiff muscles that had been gently warmed by the water. “Oh…just….”

“There?” teased Kate, finding the particularly stubborn spot that she knew gave her girlfriend particular grief.

“Mmm….” Osgood shifted in the bath, oblivious to the consequences her shuffling was having to Kate as her sole focus was on encouraging Kate to follow the knot down her shoulder blade.

“How did you know?” asked Kate, trying to stay focussed on Osgood’s neck and shoulder for just a few more minutes.

“About…” Osgood took her glasses off and blindly dropped them over the side of the bath, knowing they wouldn’t come to any harm on the carpet and that Kate would find them for her afterwards. “…you calling Max?”

“It was a text…” Kate eased up on her pressure having felt the knot loosen under her fingertips, prompting Os to start shuffling again, shuffling that this time Kate had a harder time ignoring the effects of, prompting her to bite her lip so as not to groan when Osgood wiggled again.

“Oh.” Finally comfortable, Osgood relaxed back against Kate’s chest, and closed her eyes in genuine contentment. “He made the G&T with the one you got me for my birthday…” That bottle, a limited edition gin that was one of only 120 or so bottles, was kept in Kate’s study with the very, very good whiskey and brandy, rather than with the decanters and bottles which the boys knew to used for ‘everyday’ drinks.
“You’ve got me…” agreed Kate, wrapping her arms around her girlfriend’s body and kissing the underside of Os’s jaw. Osgood was absolutely right, Kate had asked Max to make her a gin and tonic using the birthday gin. “...I’d intended to make it for you myself after a long quiet day of paperwork…” she continued, tracing her way around Osgood’s ear and savouring the happy little sounds that doing so triggered.

“Paperwork’s not that special…” As lovely as it was, being in the bath like this, Osgood was starting to become frustrated with Kate being behind her.

“It wasn’t because of the paperwork…” Kate picked up on Osgood’s fidgeting and loosened her hold, wondering what Osgood was trying to do. “It was because…” Kate frowned, confronted with the dual puzzle of what was Osgood trying to achieve with her fidgeting and how was she going to say what she meant. “...what are you doing?”

“I’m trying to turn around…” huffed Osgood, frustrated that she’d not managed to do so even after Kate was no longer holding her. “...but I’d forgotten this bath is too narrow.”

“Ah.” Kate reached down over the side of the bath and retrieved Osgood’s glasses for her, holding them out for Osgood to put on. “I would ask why you wanted to turn around but...”

“...your memory’s not that bad!” Osgood blushed as her memory proved it was working fine aside from the momentary lapse concerning bathtub dimensions, so leaned forwards to reach the flannel so she could de-sud her glasses, meaning Kate had enough room to stand up and step out of the bath, droplets of water landing on Os’ back as she did so.

“Was that an age joke?” teased Kate, happily surprised.

“What?” Osgood was disappointed when Kate reached for a towel, the pale blue one in fact, although it did restart her brain. “I mean pardon?”

“Nothing…” Amused, and rather aware of Osgood’s attention, Kate concentrated on wrapping the towel around herself. It wasn’t the same pale blue one she’d wrapped herself in the first time Osgood had seen her step out of the bath in Geneva that first weekend...those blue towels had washed thin long ago and been replaced, just as the dark blue towel Kate was now holding out for Osgood wasn’t the same dark blue towel Osgood had bought to expand her set a week after that first weekend, just before Kate came to stay with her for the weekend that first time.
“Wait a minute.” Osgood stopped, one leg in the bath still.

“I’ll wait an hour if you just finish getting out of the bath first…” encouraged Kate gently, not wanting Osgood to be stood around dripping cooling water everywhere longer than she had to as, August it may be, but there was still the risk of a chill. She was also rather aware that her lover’s position was somewhat precarious and Kate didn’t want to distract her - even with all the support and assistance that UNIT could provide wouldn’t make a trip to A&E a fun way to spend an evening, whatever priority level they were at.

“Sorry…” Realising the position she’d stopped in, Osgood concentrated on getting out of the bath completely and wrapping herself in the towel. “When did we last have a Monday like this?”

“Going to work at the Tower? Last week, no, week before last? Or three weeks ago?” Kate had rather lost track of the weeks during the second half of July and August with one lost or confused alien after another seeming to just bump into Earth, each requiring a fair bit of sorting out that somehow kept finding its way to the Tower. “Or did you mean the bath after work, because that’s….” Wrapping her arms around her girlfriend’s towel covered hips, Kate knew she didn’t know the answer to that one. “...much more difficult...” she added, leaning forwards and capturing Os’ lips with her own, relishing being able to just love Os without having to worry about anything else.

“Mmm….” Eventually, and with a fair bit of reluctance, Osgood pulled back so she was deliberately just outside of Kate’s kissing range. “I think I meant a Monday where we’re in the same place together after a wonderful weekend together...” she said, her eyes sparkling with amusement and love. “So the bath is optional.”

“That’s a shame...” Kate moved a damp strand of hair away from Os’ eye. “...although it would save the mess of having to redo the bathroom.”

“Redo the bathroom?” Osgood thought for a moment, looking around the room as she tried to work out what Kate was talking about, before her eyes landed on the bath. “Oh…” She bit her lip while she considered the options. “The bath in the cottage is wider...”

“Long way to go for a bath...”

“Showering is supposed to save water...”

“You know me, always keen to save the planet...” joked Kate, disappointed when Os backed away
again.

“Very planet conscious..” agreed Osgood seriously, demonstrating that she’d been staying out of kissing range so she could reach for Kate’s hand and set off for their bedroom. What the bath lacked, their bed more than made up for…

Obediently, Kate allowed herself to be led through to their bedroom, glad she’d remembered to shut the bedroom door properly when she’d come upstairs, although with their room being at the top of the house, no one would go past the door unless they wanted to get to the attic.

Osgood stopped by the side of their bed and looked at Kate thoughtfully, searching and studying her face like she was seeing it for the first time and not wanting to miss any detail

“We both are…” said Kate softly, not wanting Os to underestimate her own importance now their thoughts were back in UNIT territory.

Reaching forwards, Osgood threaded her fingers through Kate’s hair and kissed her, tentatively at first and then with increasing energy as lips parted and tongues met, teeth touching but not clashing as they instinctively moved together in a complex choreography that only years of love could coach.

Finally, when they drew apart, their chests rising and falling in unison as they stood, arms around each other, foreheads touching, it was Kate who broke the silence first.

“Os?”

“Mmm?”

“We should have more of these Mondays…” Kate leaned forwards and kissed her lover gently. “...especially if they can finish like this…”

“Mmm…” Agreeing, Osgood leaned in and caught Kate’s lips with hers again, keeping her kiss lazily gentle like Kate just had. “But…” Osgood wasn’t going to argue, but duty did make her instinctively attempt to disagree.
“Paperwork can wait…” Kate kissed Osgood’s jaw, planning on finding the spots around her girlfriend’s ear that usually managed to stop her thinking about most things, including the more interesting Tardis-like things as well as paperwork. Geneva would throw a fit but Geneva was already in something of a tailspin so another fit wouldn’t really change anything. “...as everyone keeps reminding me, we’re at something Blue something…” muttered Kate, finding the spot she was searching for and exploring it mercilessly. “...so priorities change…” she added, just in case Osgood was in any way unclear as to what Kate’s immediate priority was. “Plans change…” Tracing her way down Osgood’s neck now, her mouth following the line her fingers had worked along in the bath earlier, Osgood understood what her lover’s new plan was, and what her role in the new plan could be.

“I like Something Blue Something…” decided Osgood, finding the edge of the bed with her knee and managing somehow to tumble them onto the mattress without too much bruising or elbowing, only to end up with a mouthful of towel which she promptly spat out. “....some blue…” she amended, deciding that the blue towels were not helpful and therefore pulled Kate’s away from her as Kate tried to unwrap the dark blue one from around Osgood, who had somehow managed to remain reasonably tightly tucked.

“I don’t like blue…” declared Kate frowning, having to admit defeat and give Osgood the space to sit up slightly so she could work the end of the securely tucked towel free from where she’d been lying on it, only to relax and grin once the obstructive towel was dealt with. “...I like you…”

“Ka-ate…” Despite everything, Osgood couldn’t stop the groan that Kate’s cheesy rhyme caused.

“I love you…” corrected Kate, stretching out over Osgood and starting to explore her neck.

“I love you too…” agreed Osgood, no longer interested in conversation… at least, not one that needed words….
“Os?”

“Mmm?” Osgood got to the end of the paragraph of the report she was reading and marked her place with her finger before looking up to see what Kate wanted. They were sat on the patio, damp hair almost dry in the warm summer’s evening as they made progress on their respective paperwork heaps, the light from the conservatory windows helping to boost the light from the citronella candles that were keeping the flies at bay as the sky, previously lustrous reds of the sunset had faded to inky black.

“I never told you what I wished for…."

“You don’t have to.” Osgood had worked out a few years ago that, for whatever reason, Kate didn’t actually want to tell her what her wish was, just that it was the same as the year before’s and had come true, and, in its way, that had been enough for Osgood.

“I want to.”

“Okay…” Putting aside her report, Osgood adjusted her glasses and wiggled her toes, causing Kate to smile as said wiggling toes found her one slightly ticklish spot on the instep of her right foot as they were sharing a chair as a footstool. “But why now?”

“Because it’s come true and now I need a new wish.”

“But…” Osgood was confused, Kate said every year that her wish had come true and she wouldn’t have been lying… Osgood wasn’t too bothered by paradoxes at work, but she wasn’t sure she was prepared for Kate to have a paradoxical wish….

“The first time you showed me the stars, do you remember what you said? About dreams?”

“Just because we’re scientists doesn’t mean we can’t have dreams…” Osgood remembered it very clearly, remembered watching Kate, very much married and settled with a life and career, looking at the sky with such sadness and defeat that all she’d wanted to do was make her smile and laugh and be delighted in something, even if it was only for a second.
“I did make a wish then, and it is the same wish I’ve made every year since…” Kate reached out and caught hold of Osgood’s hand. “…I wished that I would get to look at the stars again the following year, and I would be as happy that next year as I was then, standing there looking at the sky with you and being seen for who I was…” Kate looked at Osgood with what at first looked like an extra sparkle in her eyes before Osgood realised it was tears catching the light. “…the next year I stood on the verandah at Win and Flo’s and watched the stars and I was…”

“Miserable?” guessed Osgood, remembering that was a couple of weeks before the divorce had been finalised, when Kate didn’t really have anything or anyone except her new job as even Gordy was on the other side of the world, visiting Fiji with Max and his parents.

“Happy because I could see a future…” Kate squeezed Osgood’s hand and smiled, her tears adding a sadness to what was actually a happy smile. “…I was starting to have dreams…”

“Oh.” That wasn’t what Osgood had expected Kate to say.

“I’ve made that same wish every year, and every year I’ve looked at the stars and every year I’ve managed to be happy when I look at them…” She’d not always managed to look up during the Perseid Meteor Shower, but she’d always remembered around August time, often prompted by the news coverage of the meteor shower even if she never actually managed to see them. It hadn’t always been easy, especially not in the year when Os was ‘away’ but Kate had still managed, even then, to look up at the stars and find something to dream about, something to look forward to that lightened some of the weight pulling her down, lowered some of the walls keeping everyone else away. “But I don’t think I can be any happier than now..”

Sensing that Kate hadn’t finished her thought, Osgood just squeezed her hand in confirmation that she’d heard the softly spoken words and agreed with them, before changing her mind and gently pulling on Kate’s hand, wordlessly communicating to her lover that she should stand up and come and curl up with Os on the single chair, the few inches separating them a few inches too many.

“Today has been difficult...impossible to concentrate on work, to not think about you…” Kate settled down on Osgood’s lap, their bodies instinctively shifting so that Kate was comfortably curled into Osgood’s body even though it had been a long time since they’d sat like this. As Osgood wrapped her arms around Kate, holding her close and safe, she shifted back in her chair, pulling Kate with her so they were both looking out at the sky above the garden.

“...to not feel unprofessionally happy and wonderful despite everything else going on…” finished Kate, her fingers automatically finding Os’s shirt buttons and starting to play with them.
“I was humming when I was working on the valves down in WOTAN One earlier,” admitted Osgood, still somewhat disappointed with herself for not noticing that she’d been doing so. “After I’d sent the message…” After she knew that Kate would be able to make everything alright…for their family and for UNIT which at times felt like a larger family… “Chen had to tell me to stop.”

“What were you humming?” Kate used ‘humming’ in the loosest sense - Osgood and musicality were strangers with few tunes ever emerging from Osgood as the composer, or even Osgood herself intended.

“He didn’t know, but he hummed it back to me…” Osgood hummed a couple of phrases, knowing Kate would recognise it despite her lack of musical ability, it being a song Osgood had become inordinately fond of not long after their first weekend together. “I’m just glad he was asking me to stop not identify it…”

“But might have been enough of a clue for Josh Carter to finally understand…” muttered Kate, finding it incredible that he still tried to ask Osgood out for a drink and the like - he never crossed any lines, just failed to take any hints and short of kissing Osgood at length and repeatedly in front of him, Kate was rather out of ideas. Not that she minded the idea of kissing Os at length and repeatedly, but neither of them were particularly fond of exhibitionism and Kate always thought Ops was rather claustrophobic...

“Max is going to have a word I think,” said Osgood quickly. “But can we not talk about Josh….” her nose wrinkling at the thought - she had nothing against him specifically, but he wasn’t Kate..

“Sorry…” Kate looked suitably sheepish and was ‘rewarded’ with a kiss. “…anyway, what I was trying to say was…” Actually, what was she trying to say other than something nauseatingly syrupy like being as much if not more in love with Osgood than ever before and feeling like she was in danger of exploding?

“Kate?”

“Mmm?”

“I think we can be happier than this next year…”

“How?”
“By being as happy as we are now but with another year of happy memories.” Osgood moved a strand of hair away from Kate’s eyebrow so it wasn’t irritating Kate’s eye. “And hopefully fewer trips to Geneva…”

“That sounds good…” Kate closed her eyes for a moment to gather her thoughts and make that wish, the wish that would see her hang on to her dreams through whatever the universe had in store for them next. “…I love you…”

“I love you too.”

Osgood stopped Kate from speaking with a kiss, a kiss that was languid and leisurely and full of the love they’d found with each other, the love that had, not that they’d known it, started from tiny seeds sown fourteen summers ago in a car park, when Osgood coaxed a woman who’d almost lost herself to look up at the night sky and discover that she could still have dreams… dreams that would see Kate discover who Kate Lethbridge-Stewart really was and what she was capable of…

In the darkening sky above them, the stars began to stand out even more vividly, their pinpricks of light painting a picture not that different to the one Ptolemy had charted centuries before, right down to the occasional meteor appearing to fall from the sky, the streak of light fading as it disappeared high above the Earth as the final few Perseids streaked across the sky before the Earth left their space….

Except there was one extra streak of light, one glowing point of light in the night sky that hadn’t been there when Ptolemy charted the heavens… One shooting star that brightened as it soared, rising up from the Earth to resume its rightful place amongst the stars, no longer fallen but flying high…

It was one minute past midnight, one minute into Tuesday.

Sitting in the firmament, her floomph capacitor charged and now glowing a steady blue, the Tardis completed her diagnostics and scans.

“No longer space sick Old Girl?” asked the Doctor, strolling into the Control Room, his newest room finally set out to their mutual satisfaction, with the alcoves and shelves perfectly spaced to show his
Lego models at one end. At the other, there was now sleek big screen that could have come from the Millennium Falcon which the Doctor could watch all the films on after Max had found a DVD player in a cupboard. He’d immediately given the Doctor his ‘box set’ and set up the player, knowing not to ask why someone had written ‘POND’ on the top of the DVD player although the Doctor had just nodded and smiled when he saw what Max had done.

In response to his question, the Tardis switched on her favourite screensaver, showing the Doctor the view of himself hanging down from her as she was lifted over London: she’d enjoyed that trip far more than he had.

“Yes, yes…” The Doctor reached into his jacket pocket and found his sonic screwdriver, conducting a quick internal scan to reassure them both that all really was well once more. “I’ll just go and say thank you for the hospitality…” he muttered, heading for the door, nearly falling out when he saw where she was ‘parked’. “…no blue things…” Looking down at where he’d expected to find Kate’s blue things, instead all he saw was the planet that, for some reason, he really was rather fond of despite the silly humans, looking like a bright blue and white swirled marble sitting in the blackness of space.

“Is this your way of saying we don’t need to say goodbye?” he asked the Tardis, shutting the door behind him and returning to the centre of the control room.

The Tardis didn’t answer, but instead switched her screens to show that she was awaiting space and time coordinates.

“Probably right Old Girl, we’ll be back again at some point…”

Spinning the dials and turning the handle, the Doctor watched her lights begin to change colour as the floomph capacitors discharged and the whatever they werees did their thing… He was a Time Lord, able to travel through time and space…. it was time to travel once more…..

“Kate?”

“Mmm?” Kate was almost asleep, curled up against Osgood.
“I think the Tardis left us a present….”

“What?” Reluctantly, Kate lifted her head up from her girlfriend’s chest and, seeing Osgood’s nod, looked out into the garden, towards the flowerbed that, for the last few days, had contained twelve blue hydrangeas and a Tardis.

Sitting on the grass, in front of the flowerbed, was a bunch of bananas and a brand new Fez, along with a piece of paper. Intrigued, Kate stood up and walked over the grass and picked up the three items, returning to Osgood so she could share the discovery but also because Osgood had her glasses.

“There’s a note…”

“From the Doctor?” asked Osgood, giving Kate her glasses so she could read it.

“No, from the Tardis… I think?” Kate tried to read the note a second time and then passed it to Osgood, knowing Os’ ability to read the Gallifreyan alphabet script based on circles and lines was probably the best in UNIT whereas Kate could only recognise certain pictograms. “What does it say?”

“It is… from the Tardis.” Osgood adjusted her glasses and angled the page so it caught the light from the conservatory windows, working her way through the characters. “Umm… it’s not exact, but basically… Thank you for the camouflage, here’s a new Fez. Little bricks painful. Always bring bananas to a party.”

“Little bricks? Does she mean stones in the soil?” Kate had gradually been improving the quality of the soil in the whole garden, but some of the flower beds still had rather more rubble-like stuff in them than she’d like, with the hydrangea bed being one of the more problematic areas.

“I think she means Lego…” Osgood looked at Kate fondly, not at all surprised her thoughts had gone immediately to gardening: it was a very ‘Kate’ thing to do. “Didn’t you say Max said the Doctor dropped a box of bricks in the Control Room?”

“Yes, but he didn’t say the Doctor stood on them.”

“Is it possible to not stand on dropped Lego?” asked Osgood reasonably, remembering a recent visit
to her sister’s where, thanks to her father, her nieces had just discovered Lego and Osgood’s sock-clad feet therefore discovered that standing on the little bricks was not pleasant.

“Good point.” Kate had managed, for almost twenty years, to forget the pain of standing on Lego bricks dropped by a small Gordy, but this weekend had seen those memories resurface. “New Fez?”

“Max said the Doctor squashed the last one when he sat on it.”

“Ah.” Kate chewed on her lip for a moment. “You know what this means?”

“She likes your shrubbery?”

“I’m not going to live that one down, am I?”

“Nope…” Chuckling Osgood began to tidy up their things, including the Fez and bananas, realising it really was rather late and they both had work again rather soon. Speaking of work...

“Kate?”

“Hmm?”

“Tomorrow’s Tuesday…”

“So?”

“Have you put the bins out?”

They may be at Priority Blue, they may be Greyhounds. But they were still Kate and Os…
Throughout the first part of the story there's a slightly recurring 'in-joke' about people making associations with James Bond.

If you'd like a visual hint/clue/reminder, this youtube video might help. [The video's not mine, I just found it with the help of google].

Equally, in the latter stages of the story, 'Allo 'Allo makes an appearance in the form of Lt Gruber's 'Little tank' catchphrase and 'Listen very carefully, I shall say this only once' which was always said by Michelle of the Resistance....again, this demonstrates the show's use of the phrase.

Hopefully Kate's linguistic skill was correctly displayed - my French isn't what it once was and while it didn't fair too badly when I double checked it with the help of online translators, if there's a horrible error, please let me know!

As always, thanks for reading...I do hope you enjoyed it...?

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!