**Hedgehog**

by **paperscribe**

**Summary**

Robbie has a rather unusual secret.
Chapter 1

Lewis yawned, stretching as he leaned back in his chair. "Might even get home before dark tonight, lad."

"That's good, sir," Hathaway said. "Full moon tonight."

Lewis froze mid-stretch. "Tomorrow, I thought."

Hathaway shook his head. "No, it's tonight."

Lewis said something rude, then grimaced. "I've got to get home." He hesitated, looking at his car keys, and then he pocketed them. "James…can you drive me?"

"Did your car break down?" Hathaway asked, concerned.

"Mm," Lewis said.

"I can take a look at it. I don't claim to be able to fix it, but I can probably…"

"No, there isn't time now," Lewis interrupted, voice edged with desperation. "I need to get home. It's important."

Hathaway frowned. "All right."

They were halfway to Lewis's flat when the sun began to slip behind the horizon. Lewis groaned softly, hunching forward, and Hathaway looked at him in alarm.

"What's wrong?" Hathaway asked. "I can turn here and take you to casualty…"

"No," Lewis whispered, sweat beading on his face. "No, I'm…please, just take me home."

"If you're ill…"

"James, please!" And there was that same desperate tone in his voice. "I need…I need to tell you what to do in case I can't do it meself."

Hathaway nodded. "All right."

"There's a food bowl and a water bowl on the floor. The food is on a high shelf…the one on the right. You can fill the bowl." Lewis winced as another cramp seemed to hit him, and then he continued. "If I can't get inside on my own, I'll need your help. Please…make sure I get inside, and if you could stay…"

"Of course," Hathaway said firmly.

"I might be afraid of you," Lewis whispered. "Just…do the best you can."

"Afraid of me?" Hathaway felt a twinge of hurt. "I…I don't understand."

"I wish I could've told you a different way…" Suddenly, as Hathaway pulled in front of Lewis's flat, Lewis let out an intense whimper of pain, and Hathaway turned so quickly he nearly sprained something. What he saw was enough to make him stare and stare.
Lewis was shrinking. He was almost half the size of his normal self now, and his face...his face looked as though it was starting to change shape.

Lewis could see the look on Hathaway's face, and he opened his mouth to respond, but instead of words, only grunts emerged, and Lewis closed his mouth with a look of pained resignation. One more sudden contortion and another whimper of pain, and he was gone.

Or was he? Something stirred beneath the pile of Lewis's suddenly unmanned clothes, snuffling experimentally. Then a tiny head poked out from beneath Lewis's shirt.

A hedgehog. Lewis had just turned into a hedgehog. Well. That was...different.

"I think I'm supposed to take you inside," Hathaway said to...Lewis the hedgehog. He reached out to pick Lewis up, and Lewis made a distressed sound and curled into a ball. Hathaway winced, but...now he understood why Lewis had explained he might be afraid of Hathaway. Carefully, gingerly, Hathaway picked up the little ball of hedgehog, holding Lewis close to his body to protect him from falling. *I'm holding you in my hands.*

Hathaway fished in Lewis's pockets until he found his keys, and then let them both into Lewis's flat. Once he was inside and had closed the door, he placed Lewis on the floor carefully, and Lewis went snuffling round the room, exploring. His flat must've been hedgehog-proofed, or Lewis wouldn't have given him the instructions he had. Hathaway found the hedgehog food, filling the food bowl, looking carefully round the floor every time he had to step somewhere so he didn't accidentally find Lewis underfoot.

Finally, Hathaway retreated to the sofa, carefully removing himself from the floor so Lewis could go round the flat wherever he liked. Lewis did make an adorable hedgehog, Hathaway had to admit, and his snuffling sounds were also very endearing.

After a while, Hathaway fell asleep.

***

Hathaway awakened to the sounds of sleepy snuffling and chirping...which was why it was such a surprise to see Robbie curled up on the floor, completely starkers, making hedgehog noises in his sleep.

Hathaway tactfully removed the blanket from the back of the sofa and draped it over Lewis, who woke instantly at the touch and scrambled away a bit in a panic. Then he calmed down a bit, seeming to recognise Hathaway. "James?"

"You could've told me you were a were-hedgehog," Hathaway said.

Lewis shook his head. "Not if I wanted you to believe me. Not unless I changed right in front of you."

"Which you did," Hathaway said. "Didn't last very long though."

Lewis shook his head. "Just the night of the full moon. Normally I'm better at getting meself home before...anything happens." He paused. "You won't...won't tell anyone, will you?"

Hathaway gave Robbie a slight smile. "Who would believe me, sir?"

Lewis was uncertain for a moment. Then he relaxed, meeting Hathaway's smile with one of his own. "Right."
"Of course, I do have a phone with which I could document the transformation process," Hathaway joked.

Lewis gave Hathaway a withering look. "Smartarse." But he was calmer now, less worried, and that was why Hathaway had told the joke in the first place.

Hathaway nodded in agreement, unable to keep from smiling.
"So, I have to ask," Hathaway said one morning when they were in their office with the door closed, "how does one become a were-hedgehog?"

Lewis gave him a curious look. "You really want to know?"

"I really do," Hathaway said. "Is it like werewolf films, where you have to be bitten?"

"Not exactly," Lewis said. "It's a bit odd. How much do you know about hedgehogs?"

"Not much," Hathaway said, "though I have been reading up since, well, since I found out."

Lewis chuckled. "Doesn't surprise me. So hedgehogs do this thing called anointing. When they smell something new, they sort of lick it and then foam at the mouth and spread the foam on their spines."

Hathaway was glad Lewis hadn't done that in his first experience of Lewis as a hedgehog. He would probably have driven him to St Tiggywinkle's Wildlife Hospital. "Why do they do that?"

"Well, with normal hedgehogs, people don't know exactly but they think it's to do with blending in with their surroundings. Smelling like what they're near and all that." Lewis sighed. "If a were-hedgehog anoints him- or herself with your scent, that's what makes you a were-hedgehog."

"Dare I ask where you came across a were-hedgehog exactly?" Hathaway asked.

"Morse."

Hathaway's eyes widened. "DCI Morse was a…?"

"And a bloody reckless one," Lewis said. "Never prepared the way I do. Just turned wherever he was at the time. Including in our office one night when we were working late."

"You tried to help," Hathaway said.

"Tried to. He bit me." Lewis smiled ruefully at that. "Didn't have to be a hedgehog to be prickly, Morse."

Hathaway smiled slightly. "He anointed himself with your scent? Did you change right then?"

Lewis shook his head. "No. It was the next month. My kids thought it was brilliant…Val used to have to tell them to be careful with Daddy because they'd want to play with me all the time."

"Have you ever turned anyone?" Hathaway asked.

"No, and I'm glad," Lewis said. "It's no more than an annoyance, but I still wouldn't have wanted to do that to anyone. Even Morse knew he'd complicated things for me. It's the only time he ever bought me a pint."

Hathaway had heard tales of Morse's extreme parsimony. "I see."

"Full moon nights, I always went home early, and Val would help me through the change and look after me when I was helpless." Lewis paused to take a breath, and Hathaway could see that this was yet another area in which Lewis sorely felt the want of his wife. "After she passed, I had to see to it myself. I kept a schedule so I could manage it sensibly. The last time's the only time I've ever got the
"Is it odd to say I'm glad you did?" Hathaway asked. "I'm...glad to know this about you."

Lewis nodded. "I'm glad you know too. It's nice to have someone I don't have to keep it from." He paused. "Would it be too much of a bother to...?"

"You want me to look after you next time?" Hathaway asked.

Lewis looked relieved. "Would you?"

"Of course," Hathaway said. "You make a very cute hedgehog. I might set you on my shoulder and go on the pull."

Lewis snorted. "You think carting round a hedgehog will help with that, do you?"

"I know my chances without a hedgehog," Hathaway deadpanned, "and they'd have to improve from there."

Lewis hesitated. "There is a risk, though. In you caring for me."

"You mean you might turn me."

"I'm not myself when I'm changed," Lewis said quietly. "You saw--I was afraid of you even though this me, human me, has known you for years. I never turned Val but that was down to luck more than anything else."

Hathaway shook his head. "I'm not afraid."

"It hurts. The change."

"Worst case scenario, sir, you'll turn me and then we'll frolic round your flat till we turn back. You can show me all the hedgehog hot spots."

Lewis gave him a penetrating look. "You're sure you're not worried?"

"I'm not worried," Hathaway said. "And I want to help."

Lewis was clearly very pleased and relieved. But, with his typical sense of understatement, all he said was, "Good."

Hathaway was undeniably curious what it was like to turn into something else. Maybe he'd ask Lewis that question.

Another day, though. For today, Lewis had told him enough.
"You know," Hathaway said as they drove to Lewis's flat, "the moon is closer to the earth tonight than it will be the rest of the year."

"Mm, they've said that on telly," Lewis said. "I hope it doesn't make a difference in my transformation."

Hathaway frowned. "Why would it?"

"Sometimes on the day after, the hedgehog instincts linger a bit." Lewis smiled. "After the first time it happened, Val used to ask me, 'Is Snuggly Robbie going to pay us a visit'?"

Hathaway couldn't stop himself chortling. "Snuggly Robbie?"

"You're not to call me that at work, mind," Lewis said wryly, "but yes. Apparently when I'm in the process of de-hedgehogging, I can be quite cuddly."

"I'll keep that in mind, sir."

At least they didn't need to work the next day, so Lewis wouldn't have to try to solve cases while still feeling a bit hedgehoggy. Hathaway wasn't at all sure how that might work.

***

This transformation was much simpler now Hathaway knew what to expect. As had happened the last time, Lewis grimaced in pain, curled up and grew small, and then emerged from a pile of his clothes as a tiny hedgehog.

Hathaway had positioned himself on the sofa so he wouldn't step on Lewis or injure him in any way. And it was undeniably entertaining to watch Lewis potter round the flat, sniffing and exploring. After eating his dinner, Lewis moved to the sofa, standing on his hind paws, front paws climbing up the sofa.

"Hello," Hathaway said. "Do you want to come up?"

He reached down his hand so Lewis could sniff it if he liked. Instead, Lewis crawled onto Hathaway's hand and began walking up his arm.

"Oh! Right! That's...different," Hathaway said, trying not to giggle at the tickly, scratchy feeling of Lewis's claws.

Lewis crawled onto Hathaway's shoulder, then waddled his way down Hathaway's chest before resting on his stomach. He stayed there, apparently fascinated by the rise and fall of Hathaway's breathing beneath his feet. They looked at each other quietly until Hathaway's eyelids began to droop and he fell asleep.

***

The first thing Hathaway noticed after waking up was how warm he felt without a blanket. The second thing he noticed was that the reason for this was a very human and very naked Lewis pressed against his side.

"Sir?" he said cautiously.
Lewis snuffled contentedly, nestling against Hathaway.

Hathaway moved his arm, which had somehow tangled itself around Lewis's shoulders in the night, to rub his hand up and down Lewis's upper arm. "Robbie?"


That made sense. Hedgehogs were nocturnal, and Lewis had probably been awake all night. Hathaway allowed himself a smile.

"So this is Snuggly Robbie," he said quietly.

Lewis sighed contentedly. "Mm-hmm."

Hathaway pulled down the blanket from the back of the sofa, tucking it gently around Lewis to make sure he was warm enough. "I'll walk you to your bed if you like."


Hathaway was beginning to feel rather affectionate toward snuggly Robbie. He gently wrapped his arms around Lewis, holding him. "All right."

Lewis pawed drowsily at Hathaway's chest with one hand. "Safe," he mumbled. "Like her."

It only took Hathaway a moment to realize who 'she' was. "Her? You mean Val?"

Lewis nodded. "Mm."

Hathaway felt almost awed. He was someone safe to Lewis. Safe, as his wife had been. "Thank you."

Lewis burrowed into Hathaway's embrace. "Miss her."

Hathaway hugged Lewis closer, impulsively. "I know you do."

Lewis's eyes were starting to close as he began to lose the battle to stay awake. "You, though." He yawned. "Nice. Safe." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Stay."

Hathaway felt his heart almost stutter in his chest. "If you like."

Lewis's eyes were closed now, and he nodded against James's shoulder. "Yes." He curled up against Hathaway and fell fast asleep.

Hathaway smiled, letting himself relax a bit. Maybe he could doze a little longer…with Lewis in his arms.

"Goodnight, Robbie," he whispered.

***

"James?" The word was hissed. Urgent.

Hathaway opened his eyes, blinking at Lewis, who seemed to be frowning at him. "Hmm?"

"I don't want to embarrass you," Lewis said hesitantly.

Hathaway shook his head. "I'm not embarrassed."
Lewis blushed uncomfortably. "But I was naked and well, still am, actually, but you put the blanket around me, which, thanks for that…"

"Sir, breathe," Hathaway said.

Lewis nodded and obliged.

"I'm not embarrassed," Hathaway repeated. "I know you're naked, and I know I'm holding you, and if I'd been embarrassed, I would have said something before this." He rubbed Lewis's upper arm gently, just as he'd done the last time Lewis had awakened. "Everyone needs touch. Comfort. Closeness to someone."

Lewis clearly hadn't expected such a measured answer. "You don't mind?"

"I'm honoured, actually." What Hathaway doesn't say is I need it as much as you do. But that's also true.

"And you'd say no if I did something you didn't like."

Hathaway nodded. "I would."

"Then can I ask you something?" Lewis's voice wobbled slightly. "Can we stay here just a few minutes more? I haven't been held…” His voice cracked and he couldn't finish his sentence.

Hathaway drew him closer, holding on tight. "Depend on me."

Lewis whispered two words that were almost too soft for Hathaway to hear. Almost. But Hathaway did hear them.

"I do," Lewis whispered.
Chapter 4

They have, against all odds, established a routine in connection with Robbie's transformations.

James drives Robbie home the night of the full moon, before the sun goes down. When they get inside, Robbie prepares for his transformation and James readies Robbie's food and water for him. Then, once the transformation occurs, James confines himself to the sofa and Robbie goes snuffling about the flat. Robbie likes to climb on James, either to explore his clothes to see if there is any food there or to simply sit there and watch James. Sometimes he makes a sort of purring sound that James thinks must mean Robbie is happy.

More often than not, James wakes with a nude Robbie curled up against him. Sometimes Robbie is particularly cuddly afterward, but even if he isn't, he likes to stay there…to be close to James.

It is one of those mornings after Robbie's transformation, and Robbie is cuddled against James. James pulls down the blanket from the back of the sofa so Robbie won't be cold, gently tucking it around them both.

"I know you now," Robbie says.

"I should hope so," James says jokingly.

"No, I mean when I'm a hedgehog," Robbie says. "I know you even then."

"Really?" James is undeniably curious what a hedgehog must think of him. "How does Robbie the hedgehog think of me?"

"Well, first, you're huge," Robbie says with a grin.

James laughs. "Naturally."

"But you're not frightening," Robbie says. "You never scare me. And I know if there's danger, you'd take me away from it."

James feels warmed by the thought. "Of course I would."

Robbie smiles. "I think the closest I can come to what it's like is to say you're like another hedgehog to me."

"An honorary hedgehog," James says with a grin. "I like that."

Robbie rests his head on James's shoulder. "If I get any say, it's the only sort of hedgehog you'll ever be."

"I don't know," James says. "I might make a good hedgehog." He nudges Robbie with his arm gently. "It's interesting to me. Imagining what it must be like to change into something else."

"It changes a lot about you," Robbie says. "You can't think as an animal the same way you think as a person. Everything's instinct." He smiles. "Your brain gets too small for proper thinking."

"That must be interesting," James says.

"Yes, but you can't think about how interesting it is, because you can't think," Robbie says, with some humour.
"Hmm," James says, conceding Robbie's point.

"I'd never want it for you," Robbie says, "but I think…if you did become a hedgehog, I think I'd look after you." He nudges James playfully. "After all, who knows more about being a hedgehog than me?"

"Only hedgehogs born as hedgehogs," James says, "but I don't think they're telling."

Robbie laughs and snuggles close to James. "Probably not."

James hugs Robbie warmly and closes his eyes, soaking in the moment. He'd never have asked for it, of course…but he does rather like getting the chance to take care of Robbie.

Being an honorary hedgehog is just a bonus, really.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!