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| **Fandom:** | Doctor Who, Doctor Who (2005), The Thick of It (TV), Doctor Who (1963) |
| **Relationship:** | Malcolm Tucker/Kate Stewart, Malcolm Tucker & Original Female Character(s), Twelfth Doctor/Clara Oswin Oswald, Kate Stewart & Original Female Character(s), Kate Stewart & Original Male Character(s), Malcolm Tucker & Original Male Character(s), Malcolm Tucker & Original Female Character(s), Malcolm Tucker & Glenn Cullen, Malcolm Tucker & Jamie MacDonald, Malcolm Tucker & Sam Cassidy, Original Character(s)/Original Character(s) |
| **Character:** | Malcolm Tucker, Kate Stewart, Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart, Glenn Cullen, The Doctor (Doctor Who), Petronella Osgood, Malcolm Tucker's Niece, Osgood (Zygon), John Benton, Winifred Bambera, Colonel Ahmed (Doctor Who), Ollie Reeder, Jane Blythe (Doctor Who: The Sea Devils), Jac (Doctor Who: The Magician's Apprentice), Clara Oswin Oswald, Eleventh Doctor, Twelfth Doctor, Third Doctor, Malcolm Tucker's Mother, Jamie MacDonald, Sam Cassidy, Cal Richards, Zygon(s), Sea Devil(s) (Doctor Who), Silurian(s) (Doctor Who), Zygon Bonnie (Doctor Who), Jamie McCrimmon, Colonel Walsh (The Zygon Invasion/Inversion), Nicola Murray |
| **Additional Tags:** | also contains OCs, cracky crackship, badass middleaged beauracrats kicking ass and taking names and giving bollockings, Malcolm Tucker working at UNIT, Post-Goolding Inquiry, Episode: s08e11 Dark Water, Episode: s08e12 Death in Heaven, Post-Episode: s08e12 Death in Heaven, mentions of Danny Pink and Pinkwald, Classic Doctor Who References, Workplace Relationship, Workplace Sex, dating while middle-aged, Fluff, Angst, cuddlecore, UNIT, Post-Episode: 2014 Xmas Last Christmas, Episode: 2014 Xmas Last Christmas, Dream Crab antics, whouffaldi, Third Doctor as a Dream Crab person, obligatory Jamie being Catholic for like five seconds, Episode: s09e01 The Magician's Apprentice, bad attempt at military jargon, Episode: s09e07 The Zygon Invasion, Post-Episode: s09e08 The Zygon Inversion, Zygon Invasion/Inversion fallout, Gordon is a protective son, there are two Osgoods again, internal mainframe politics, bottle chapter, Original Character Death(s), grievous harm to original characters, Minor Character Death, Glad to Be Alive Sex, Malcolm and Gordon have an important heart-to-heart, Jamie did not do well during the Clearances, Malcolm does not appreciate the Doctor, World Cup is going on in the background, Engagement, Relationship Hurdles, Wedding Planning, Weddings, Honeymoon, Australia, Silurians have a fcking cryptid farm, Alien Biology, Time Lord Biology |
| **Series:** | Part 1 of The Thick of UNIT |
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The Thick of UNIT

by Nehszriah

Summary

Malcolm Tucker has settled into his new life of incarceration when a mysterious recommendation has freed him from the custody of the Crown, only to fall under the command of UNIT and the Director of Mainframe UK.

[solidly Malcolm/Kate beginning in ch7, with other ships throughout*; contains strong Tucker-esque language, mature situations, and many OCs/canon cameos throughout]

[*other romantic ships contain varying levels of: OC/OC, Pinkwald, Whouffaldi, TTOI!Jamie/OFC, Cal/OFC, and others to be added as time goes on]

Notes

This will be multi-chapter, with sporadic updates, as well as picking and choosing what I want to keep/change from each continuity because AU holla. Set sometime post-Goolding Inquiry/Day of the Doctor.
Chapter 1

The guard knocked on the open door of the prison cell, alerting the lone occupant of his presence. "Hey Tucker, you're wanted in the offices."

Malcolm Tucker snapped the library book he was reading shut and placed it on his bed as he sat up to pocket his spectacles. His cell was sparse—just a change of clothes and a couple books under his bed. He had no room for comforts here, he had decided, and it was for the better. The past two months of having no contact with the outside world, not to mention three required squares a day, had done wonders for him, making him the most relaxed he had been in years... no, decades. The perjury sentence (there were others he was serving, but he liked to take them on by one) was a blessing in disguise, making him understand why it was a thing for prisons to be hotbeds for religious conversion.

Silently, he followed the guard as they made their way through the corridors. At least the court had the decency to send him to a minimum-security prison, one full of debtors and white-collar crooks. It was a congenial atmosphere, if a prison could be called one, and it suited him, if he was completely honest.

A few minutes later and Malcolm was sitting in a plain room of concrete and steel. A table was situated in the middle, with two chairs facing one another and a lamp hanging from the ceiling—very Hollywood set if he said so himself. The mirror on the wall was a one-way, he knew; even an idiot without a functioning brain stem could have seen that. The guard left the room and suddenly he was alone.

Nearly half an hour passed with nothing happening. Finally a woman walked into the room, his age, blond hair to her shoulder, and in a well-tailored suit. She placed a manila folder on the table and sat down, folding her hands over it.

"Been enjoying yourself, Mister Tucker?" she asked, voice flat.

"Well, they haven't found me hanging by my trouser ties yet," he shrugged. A silence fell between them, the woman not moving a muscle. "Tough crowd."

"I'm not here to crack ill-suited jokes, Mister Tucker," she said. She opened the folder and began to flip through the papers—a dossier on him, complete with his prison mugshot and the photo that was his doom in the Inquiry. "A total of twenty-seven years spent working in politics, with the most recent twelve used to lurk in and around Whitehall. Only living family a mother, a sister, and a niece back in Glasgow, whom you only see on rare occasion; no personal life outside of them, so no partner or children; not even a pet. Seems like a fairly lonely life you lead."

"What do you care?" he asked, narrowing his eyes. Malcolm tensed up, straightening his back and shoulders. "No one fucking cares, not unless they think they've got something on me. Let me tell you, sweetheart: even in here I'm unfuckable."

"Good thing that was proven wrong at the Goolding Inquiry, or I'd have to worry about the social structure of the entire prison collapsing," the woman snarked. She plucked a paper from the dossier and read it aloud. "'Good with technology, easily adaptable, temper issues and prone to swearing'—they were right on that part—'good at intimidation tactics, and will work himself endlessly for a given cause.' That doesn't even start on the glowing recommendation we got from another one of our agents..."
"Agents...?" he growled. Malcolm leaned forward, brows furrowed and voice low and gravelly. "What game are you playing?"

"We've been monitoring your behavior for a long time now, Mister Tucker, much longer than you realize, and I think I can get you out of here before tea time."

"I'm serving multiple consecutive sentences; the only way I'll probably get out of here is either with a walker or in a bloody box."

"That's where you're wrong," the woman said. Putting down the paper, she picked up another and put it in front of Malcolm, along with a pen from her jacket pocket. "If you sign right there on the line, you will never have to worry about such things as prison terms and shivs and whatever cock-and-bull happens in these places. Sign, and you gain your freedom."

"...and what's the catch?" he asked, pulling his spectacles out of his shirt pocket and putting them on. He began to scan over the document and frowned. "I heard of you—you're that pet project of the PM's."

"We've been the pet project of the PM's since before there was a PM," she replied. "That's just a contract, nothing out of the ordinary. It merely states that you will serve out the remainder of your sentencing under our watchful eye, where you will lend your expertise for the good of Queen, Country, and Planet."

Malcolm pushed the paper back towards her. "I already gave my all for Queen and Country, and the only thing those two old bats have bothered to give back is free room and board for the rest of my miserable wank of a life. What makes you think adding 'Planet' to the list is incentive?"

"I was told that you went into politics because you thought you could make a difference that way," she said. "Brown-haired and bushy-eyed, you didn't realize that sort of life would only spit you out after taking you for everything you have and stand for and distorting it beyond recognition. Well, Mister Tucker, this is an opportunity for something better than that."

"...with a bunch of limp-dicked egghead scientists pushing pencils and testing theorem about microwaving water or whatever it is you tits do?"

"Not quite that, but I think you'll catch on pretty quickly." She pushed the contract back and straightened the contents of the manila folder. "Now if you excuse me, I don't have all day. Either you sign that and come with me, or you rot in your cell while creeping further and further into such a despair that, yes, they do find you hanging from your trouser ties in five years. Take your pick."

Looking at the paper, Malcolm considered his options. He could stay where he was, reading the entire prison library and avoiding all contact with anyone ever again. It was safe; no one wanted to bother him and there was no one around to bother him. The only things he would truly miss were milestones of his niece's, and considering how many he had missed already that was nothing new.

...or, he could leave.

Malcolm picked up the pen and signed the document on the blank line, right above where his name had been printed. He passed it all back across the table and saw the woman smile for the first time, even if it was a thin, polite one.

"Welcome aboard," she said, standing up and holding out her hand. "My name is Kate Stewart, head of UNIT." He shook her hand and stood, wondering what was to happen next. Kate spun on her very orange heel and began to walk towards the door, taking all the papers with her. "Are you
"Oh, uh, yeah," he replied, slightly confused. "They're going to let me out? Just like that?"

"It's all settled—we just have to get you in some normal-looking clothes again." She walked out into the corridor, not even checking to see that Malcolm was following. A young woman was standing right before a set of double-doors, glancing down at a mobile as she adjusted her scarf. "Did you complete the wipe?"

"Yes ma'am; in two hours, they won't even remember any of us were here," the young woman replied. She looked over at Malcolm and held out her hand cheerily. "Osgood; nice to meet you, Mister Tucker."

"Charmed," he deadpanned, walking right past her hand. "So when do we get to the part where I don't have to babysit a bunch of mewling infants as they shit their pants and fucking spit up all over the rug?"

"Patience, Mister Tucker, patience," Kate replied calmly. She led him to the room where his suit and other effects were waiting for him. He changed quickly, never having thought that wearing a tie could feel so good, and grabbed what few possessions he had brought with him in his pockets—his wallet, the case for his eyeglasses, his watch, and his old security clearance badge. Were there ever the chance for him to get out, he wanted to be reminded of what had gotten him into the mess to begin with. Malcolm exited the room and followed the women out of the prison, now sure that he felt the most relaxed in decades.

A driver ushered them into a car and began to maneuver his way back towards London. As soon as they entered city limits, Malcolm took his eyes off the passing scenery and glanced at his ride companions.

"So, tell me, what sort of dirty work do you need done that makes you bust a convicted felon like me out of jail for?" he asked, flashing his teeth.

"Our previous PR head has been proving to be less than stellar as of late," Kate explained. "Of course he was highly capable when he came on under Brigadier Bambera, but the times have changed and he has been unable to properly change with them." Osgood handed her another manila folder and she examined the contents as she continued to talk. "This does mean that we have been looking at not only your skills in media management and your connections, but your ability to adapt as well."

"That's some pretty big fucking talk for someone who still finds it necessary to horde tree carcasses like that," Malcolm chuckled, pointing at the papers. "I thought most of the government's gone paperless, or is at least on their way."

"Utilizing both low and high tech is going to be a daily part of your job for security reasons," Kate replied sharply. "If you don't like it, we can still turn around and take you back."

"Forgive me, madam, but I don't think you remember the one photo you had in my dossier—the lack of security that comes with hard copies cost me my career."

"If our parents' generation could do it, we can as well; only difference is we know how to program a mobile as a bonus." Kate's face remained straight as she passed the manila envelope across the back of the car to Malcolm. "You'll have a variety of assigned tasks, most of which concern public relations and media wrangling. Sometimes there are disciplinary measures involved, and sometimes you'll be told to do menial tasks. All of us complete menial tasks now and then, just to make sure
there's no discontent amongst the ranks. Fortunately for you, I need you as one of the Constants."

"Pardon?"

"Constants are people we don't mind-wipe," Osgood explained. "The three of us are Constants, as well as a couple others. We're the top of the chain and we need to have knowledge of past days' events."

"...is mind-wiping a regular occurrence in this place?" Malcolm asked, raising his brows. "Sounds a bit too much like something a pisspot comic book villain would do if you ask me. I don't want to accidentally go back too far and start shitting my pants." He began to look through the folder contents—floor maps and lists of subordinate names. There was also a new security badge, which he clipped on over his old Whitehall one.

"For you? Only if you misbehave," Kate said, cracking the bare semblance of a grin. The car stopped and the three got out, the ladies leading Malcolm into a perfectly normal-looking building. It was plain sandstone, its most notable feature being there was nothing particularly beautiful or ugly about it; the man-behind-the-man's dream castle. They walked in, flashing their credentials to security before getting into a lift. Instead of pressing one of the floor buttons, Osgood swiped her keycard and a separate set of buttons slid out of the lift wall. She touched one and they plummeted with enough force for Malcolm to stagger slightly.

"Don't worry, you get used to it," Osgood said sympathetically. Eventually the lift stopped and the doors opened, allowing them exit.

"Welcome to UNIT, Mister Tucker," Kate said as she walked along at a brisk pace. Clearly she had brought him to the central hub, as the corridor opened up into a large, high-ceilinged hall where close to a hundred people were monitoring computer displays and even more were running about doing errands. "This is Mainframe UK, where we process all the local data for the North Atlantic and Western Europe."

Feeling very small and uncharacteristically speechless, Malcolm stared at the multitude of workers. "What sort of data?"

"Alien activity of the extraterrestrial kind," Kate replied. "Anything not of Earth or seemingly supernatural in origin we investigate and handle. You remember the cubes that fell from the sky a few years ago? The little black ones that tried to kill people?"

"Yeah, had one in my office; I was using it to teach this tit a lesson when the thing just fell like an old man," he said.

"That was the work of one of our top operatives—the deactivation, anyways." She kept on walking, with Osgood zooming off into the mess of people and leaving them alone. The two entered another lift, one that moved much slower than the first, and stepped out into a spacious office that overlooked the crowd below. "This is now where you work. As soon as we get hold of your personal belongings you can be escorted to your living quarters. I hope you find the place suitable."

Malcolm looked out the window down onto the dozens of people working below him. "So you're the Men in Black? Like X-Files and Star Trek rolled into one?" He had to strain to talk, too stunned to even swear. "I don't believe it."

"You have to, or we will make you," Kate reminded him. "Now come… I need to introduce you to your team before lunch."
A few more lifts and corridors later and Malcolm found himself staring at a group of six rather ragged-looking people, three men and three women. When he and Kate walked in they all stood at their desks and gave them their full attention.

"What is it, Director Stewart?" one of the women asked.

"You finally have your new boss," Kate replied. "I'd like you all to meet Malcolm Tucker, former Director of Communications for the PM. He starts immediately."

"With all due respect Director Stewart, but weren't you planning on hiring the new PR Head from within?" one of the men asked. He looked young, possibly the youngest one in the room. Kate calmly walked up to him, folding her hands behind her back.

"Are you questioning me, Shaw?"

"I, uh…"

"If you had been hoping that you were going to apply for the position, I hate to say that you wouldn't even have been in the running. Blood only gets you so far in here, after all." She leaned forward slightly, just enough to make the man half a head higher shrink back. "You do want to do well in here on your own merit, correct?"

"Y-Yes ma'am."

"Then shut up and greet your new department head with a smile," she said. Kate turned around brusquely and made for the door. "I leave them to you, Mister Tucker."

Malcolm, however, couldn't help but watch her leave. It had been quiet and clean but it was still one of the most artful bollockings he had seen in a while. He turned towards his team, unable to help the half a grin making his face lopsided.

"Alright, you heard the lady: you're in Tuckertown now, my little fetus-children, and you take a listen here. I saw where they keep the tea on the way in. I'm going to go and make myself the first fucking decent cuppa I've had in months and when I come back, you all are going to give me the projects you're working on so I can review them."

"Don't you want us to introduce ourselves?" one of the other women asked.

"I'll decide who deserves names around here, sunshine," he replied. "Now a cuppa, then I start on correcting your fuck-ups, got it?" Malcolm backed away, hands jammed deep into his pockets, and turned to leave the room. The grin on his face grew a bit wider as he found the tiny kitchenette just down the hall and began to rifle through it for things to make tea.

Maybe, he might be able to enjoy it here.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I dunno how this story ended up on the "complete" list since I could have sworn I hit the multichapter button, but it is ongoing, so many apologies about that. I'm posting the first four chapters I have done, one a day, then we'll have to wait until I get chapter five together.

Birdsong was what had woken Malcolm up, being that the sun had yet to rise and his alarm had not gone off. Opening his eyes a crack, he tilted his head and glanced out the window to look at the paling sky. A week ago he would have seen bars over his window, but now it was a pane that was clear and unobstructed by nothing but a rustling tree branch.

Getting out of bed, he showered, dressed, and downed a couple cups of coffee with his toast before leaving his flat. It was a change from his house, that was for certain, but it wasn't a downgrade by any means. It was spacious and located in a better-than-decent neighborhood. He was even allowed to have his family over for visits, and if his niece wanted to try to make something of herself in London she could stay with him (which had been the entire purpose behind having a house in the first place). Now he was a two minute walk to the Tube, had a gorgeous view of the city, and was permitted to come and go as he pleased.

The only issue was that it was closely monitored, "a requirement for all UNIT staff, Constants in particular," Osgood had explained when she brought him there. Apparently so was doing things such as eating and sleeping and returning to one's home every night, as there was always an agent that seemed to be around at work to remind him to do certain things. During his time in the Party, no one minded when he stayed at the office for a couple days or when he skipped a meal to stay on-task. It had been annoying at first, but he was beginning to grow used to it.

A half an hour later and Malcolm made his way into his office, where one of his subordinates was already waiting for his arrival. Shaw was a stringy, blond lad who was almost able to be considered bright. Unfortunately, he was also doing a very poor job of not riding the coattails of his family name, apparently, and it was enough to make him a jittery mess.

"Mister Tucker, sir, I've got that press release you wanted me to have by today," he said, holding out a stapled set of papers. Malcolm took it and gave the document a quick look-over, passing it back.

"This looks like you projectile-vomited a thesaurus," he glowered. "Rewrite it and have it back to me in three kicks of a robot's arse."

"…but…"

"We're convincing the public that some wankers didn't happen upon a colony of hibernating lizard people while demolishing an office building, not writing a persuasive essay on why it's acceptable to sodomize a donkey." He watched as Shaw retreated from the office, all sorts of frayed nerves, and sank into his chair to officially start the day.

As things had turned out, it was not much different being the head of UNIT Public Relations in comparison to Director of Communications for the Party. There were still floods of emails to wade
through, pieces of shite to bollock, tea to drink, and occasionally there was a bright spot in the day where he wasn't completely going out of his mind (usually involving when he had to call up an old contact and scare the wits out of them). The only real difference was that he was learning rapidly about all things extraterrestrial in manner—and sometimes ancient terrestrial—and how it seemed like far too many of them liked to converge on London and the United Kingdom in general at the most inopportune moments. He had remembered things here and there having happened, such as the attack-cubes and living mannequins and other things of that nature, but whenever he had to field a question on them he was forced to make something up or gag the questioner with blackmail-like remarks. Now he knew why, and it was all just as well he was putting out the press releases.

It had taken Malcolm a few minutes to sift through his email—a couple procedural memos, the aftermath of something he wasn't around to handle on account of still being in prison, a snark-filled message from his niece—and his personal assistant came into the office. From the very moment they were introduced, Aparajita Khan had only been a consummate professional when it came to how she treated her new boss and his transition into the world he was now privy to, and yet at the same time her daily persona could have only been described as icy. She did not like him, which was fine; had he been given his choice in a PA he would have rescued Sam Cassidy from the clutches of that lurid supermarket CEO she had gone to work for after his thorough sacking from the Party, but considering she was only allowed to know he was alive and working out the rest of his sentence under the government's watchful eye… well… beggars couldn't be choosers.

"Did you remember your meeting today with Director Stewart?" Aparajita asked, flicking through files on her tablet.

"Of course—three o'clock, can't be late, about some sort of peace treaty between us and the lizard people. A debriefing, I assume?"

"Us and the Silurians, and you are correct. You have to get better than that if you're going to last around here, quickly." She selected a file and brought it up on Malcolm's computer monitor, right over his email, and continued on. "One of the things we're going to need to go over today before the debriefing is the various encounters Earth has had with the Judoon…"

"Yes, yes, I know," he said, minimizing the window. The first time she had done that startled him, but now it was starting to get annoying. "Tell me: what do I need to know about the bipedal rhinoceroses in biker gear again, other than the fact they seem to have a better sense of justice than half of Parliament?" Aparajita pressed her lips together in a thin, disapproving line, refusing to answer. "They answer to a fucking book in the most literal sense and have about enough brains amongst their entire species to go toe-to-toe with a primary student… again, which is better than half of Parliament on a good year…"

"Your comparisons don't amuse me, though I appreciate the restraint used on the more colorful terms," she frowned. "Is this another thing you wish to go over in private before we let you loose for the day?"

Malcolm pondered the notion for a moment and nodded. "Yes. Hey, do you think you can get an intern on some tea? I think we both need it."

"Right away, sir." With that she left, leaving her boss to shudder in the cold breeze that followed.

"One of these days I'll convince her that I'm not her enemy,' he thought. Not fighting with one's personal assistant was generally advisable, since it was always hell trying to make sure the closest coworker wasn't in backstabbing mode (as he had done a couple times before hiring Sam what felt like oh-so-long ago). Otherwise, he really couldn't care less.
The rest of the morning went about as well as Malcolm had assumed it would. Shaw came back in twice to get his draft approved, tea had come, he read up on the Judoon as promised, and even ate his lunch. He was nearly done when his assistant came back in to hand him a stack of papers filed in various manila dividers.

"Did you go over what you were supposed to?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, adding a slight edge to his voice. It was almost as if he was a fucking child. Once he had some idea as to which cactus-face was which and the proper names for galaxies, he would get his footing and no one would dare treat him like that. "How'd the press release go over?"

"Director Stewart approved it and it's queued for release in a couple hours," Aparajita said. "Though speaking of, she stopped me in the hall earlier—she wants to see you at your earliest convenience."

"Oh?" he wondered, eyebrows arching as he peeled the rind off a satsuma. "What does the boss-lady have to talk to me about that can't wait until three?"

"She didn't say, just that she needed to have a word in-person; we were walking in differing directions at the time."

"Fair enough. Her office is the floor above, yeah?"

"Correct. If you need me for anything, you have my mobile number."

With that, Malcolm was off, headed up the lift to the highest floor the lift would service. Kate's personal assistant, a mousy young woman who never seemed to be able to string a sentence together to his face, directed him towards something called the Archive, where the Scientific Director apparently was going to be until quarter till three. He politely thanked her—no use in scaring the help as long as they were helpful—and went in the direction of the Archive.

It took a couple wrong turns and a few growled orders to some snarky young pups before he finally found the Archive. It was more a warehouse than anything, and felt very out of place with the rest of the underground labyrinth's light taupe walls and brushed steel doors. He caught sight of her right away: she was taking notes on a clipboard and muttering to herself.

"Oi, Stewart, I was told you needed to see me?"

Kate looked up from her clipboard and watched as Malcolm crossed the room. He walked right by shelves upon shelves of tech that would make just about anyone else stare and gawk and who knows all what else. Instead, he directly approached her, hands in his pockets and half a smirk on his face.

"Who sent you?" she asked.

"Khan…" He saw the way she went back to her papers and grumbled, throwing his arms up in the air. "Fucking fuck that… hazing."

"That's what it looks like," she shrugged. "She was fond of your predecessor, if I'm not mistaken. Stay here a while and cool off—that'll confuse her enough to where she won't do it again."

Malcolm grunted in agreement, shoving his hands back in his pockets. He silently observed Kate as she made check marks and notes on the handwritten paper. "So, what are you doing?"

"Inventory."

"One of those 'occasional menial tasks' I was warned about?"
"The very same."

Silence settled down between them and Malcolm started to get antsy. He glanced around; the room didn't seem like anything special to him. It was mainly crates, boxes, stored on shelves made of metal and plywood, and some things sitting on their own in glass-encased plinths over to the side. Something vaguely car-shaped sat in the very back, draped in a cloth that hid its true form from view. Pacing, he gave some of the visible things a good look-over. Some of the plinths held odd-looking firearms, or sharp things that looked they'd cause a very painful prodding, but there were a few that held perfectly ordinary items.

"So you've got some interesting shit here, don't you?" he wondered aloud.

"Bits and bobs from around the galaxy, mainly, though some is from Earth in make," she replied, voice dull and monotonous. It was clear that Kate was bored, but she knew things had to get done. "I take inventory bit by bit, and usually, if things go well, I can clear the warehouse in a year. Since the treaty went over better than expected, I figured I'd fill the spare time getting a jump on things here; the days when my father could do it all in a month are gone, I'm afraid."

"What, can't you pitch it all in the recycling or set up a charity shop?"

"With the kind of stuff that's in here? Not likely." She turned to face Malcolm so that she could begin explaining the finer points of artifact archival (something that she was very much a forerunner in, not to mention the fact that she was readying some of the items for storage in the highest-tech storage systems known, both terrestrial and extraterrestrial in manner), when she noticed that her new PR head was handling a wristwatch-like object that he definitely should not have been touching. Dropping her papers and pen, her face blanched in panic as she tried to figure out what to do.

"You alright?" he asked, looking up at the sound of the clipboard hitting the metal floor. "Why are you staring at me like I'm Sid Vicious risen from the grave?"

"Tucker, I need you to put that back where you got it," Kate said, her tone slow and deliberate. She reached out cautiously, trying not to alarm him. It wasn't his fault he knew nothing about what anything in the storage level was capable of, least of all the more harmless-looking things, the ones that were most dangerous. "That is very dangerous and is on its way to a high-security vault."

"It's just a watch—is this something they whipped up after seeing a Bond film? Wrist-held radar?"

"No, Tucker, just put it down, don't touch that screen—DON'T TOUCH THAT SCREEN!"

It was too late. Malcolm pressed the screen of the device just as Kate grabbed his wrist. Both of them felt a slight tug in their chests and vanished into thin air. When the two of them finally came to their senses they were standing in the middle of a dirt road, horse-drawn carriages swerving all around them and rain pouring from the sky in torrents. Malcolm swore angrily the entire trek through traffic, dodging hooves and wheels until they were in the relative safety of a stone walkway.

"What the fucking hell just happened?!" he gasped as they stood there, soaked to the skin in mud and rain. Kate examined her trousers—ruined—and grabbed the device from his hand. It was whirring and sparking, signaling that it was being damaged by the weather.

"When I tell you not to touch something, don't touch something," she hissed, making him cower slightly. "This is a vortex manipulator, and we just space-and-time travelled."

For having rarely been left speechless in his twenty-seven year career pre-prison sentence, Malcolm was finding himself stunned into silence with increased frequency since being released into UNIT
custody.

"We… what…?"

Keeping her voice low and level, Kate narrowed her glare. "Space and time; this is not my archive and I doubt we'll get a signal on our mobiles for another two centuries." She saw him blink rapidly and begin to fidget, signs that he was trying to devise a route to talk his way out of everything. Considering his job in spin had nothing to do with actually interacting with what he was trying to disguise with his language of smoke and mirrors, he had little ground on which to stand, and even less when it came to actual-excuse cobbling. "Now we're who-knows-where, during who-knows-when, in a rainstorm, with a broken vortex manipulator that should have only enough power for one person."

She turned on her heel, not checking to make sure that Malcolm was following close behind. If there was any time to turn to that grinning idiot of a Doctor for a favor, it was now.

"Wait, wait, wait… a what manipulator?" he asked, trying to keep pace with her.

"Vortex, as in the time vortex… you know what? I just don't have the patience for this right now… aw, fuck." Kate stumbled slightly and stared at the cobblestone a few feet behind them. There, stuck between two rocks, was her left heel. She kicked off her shoes to abandon them, dropping down a couple inches until her head was just past Malcolm's nose. "We need a pub."

"Um, why…?"

"…because I need a sodding drink, that's why."

Twenty minutes later, Malcolm found himself maneuvering through a pub with a bottle of whisky in one hand and two glasses in the other. The regulars were all staring at him in his grey suit while they wore beaten frock coats and high boots. He eventually found where Kate had sat, soaking wet and shoeless, in a booth shoved in the corner by a window.

"I can't believe you just happened to have some Regency-era money on you," he said as he sat down and poured her a drink. Kate slammed it back and shuddered as she enjoyed the warmth that was pooling in her stomach.

"Since Osgood accidentally launched herself into the War of the Roses, I've been making it a habit to keep an emergency supply of things on me whenever I go into the Archive," she explained. She took the small clutch out of her inner breast pocket and reached her hand in much farther than she should have been able to, pulling out a kerchief that she wiped off her smudged makeup on. "Once the rain stops and we get our bearings, I can concentrate on getting us out of here."

"Since the Prince Regent isn't Hugh Laurie, I've no idea how you expect to get us back to the Silicon Age."

"It's just a matter of getting hold of the right people," Kate said plainly. She poured herself another drink, which she just sipped, and frowned at the label on the bottle. "Pity; this was the only whisky they had?"

"Barman swore on it."

"If the Clearances weren't going on, I'd say we should make a quick stop northward and get something halfway decent." She glanced out the window and nodded. "Come on, Tucker. The rain's stopped and we need to get going."
"With you barefoot? You sure you don't have emergency trainers in that fucking creepy Mary Poppins bag of yours?"

"No, but all we need to do is get to a park, so it won't be long." Kate stood and corked the bottle, stuffing it in her clutch and putting it away. "Let's go."

"Wait a tic," he said as he slid out of the booth. Malcolm walked over to one of tables and gave the occupants his best grin. "Hey there, mates. Can anyone tell me if there's a place nearby we can get my lady-friend there a pair of shoes? Hers broke and…"

"Go find 'im yourself," the nearest patron sneered.

Rolling his eyes, Malcolm took a deep breath before leaning down close to the man's ear, keeping his teeth bare and his glare intense. "So you're going to hand over yours then, hmm? Because I really can't let her go walking around in that disgusting vat out there of muck you ancient fops call a street and I sure as fuck can't carry her all the way we need to go." The man looked at him as if he was speaking French.

"Are you out of your bleeding mind? Why would I give you my boots?"

Kate watched from over by the booth, wondering with a dry sense of curiosity what Malcolm was saying to the man. He whispered something in his ear and suddenly the patron's face went sheet-white before hurriedly taking off his boots. Malcolm took them with a nod and brought them over to her with a smirk on his face.

"What did you say?" she asked, hesitating to take the footwear.

"Just thank your lucky stars that Wee Malcolm had an interest in reading about the grim and gruesome events of Old London Town," he replied. He watched as she slipped into the boots; they were too big and came over her knees, but they stayed on. "Couple murders happened not long ago that the press bled to death—giving him a few of the more details was enough."

"You threatened a man so I could have shoes?"

"You're my ticket home, so unless I want to die before Vicky takes the throne I better make sure you're treated like a fucking queen."

"Well said," she said, the corner of her mouth quirking upwards. The two then walked out the pub with no problem whatsoever, the other patrons too stunned to even move.

A short while later the two walked into a park. It was fairly deserted thanks to the rain that had been pouring until recently, making it so that Kate made the executive decision that it was the perfect place.

"Perfect for what?" Malcolm asked as he watched his boss dig through her clutch. She was in past her elbow before she let out an accomplished chuckle and pulled out a pen.

"Spacecraft landing—the Doctor's not always the best pilot," she said. Kate then pressed a button on the side of the pen and held it high above her head. It whirred and glowed a pale green at the tip. She brought it down as the wind picked up and a wheezing sound began to crank through the air. A blue police box materialized in front of them, which Malcolm wished was the weirdest thing he had witnessed in the past week.

"Kate! Funny to find you here!" a young man smiled as he walked out of the police box. He gave her a hug and then turned to Malcolm, who scowled in return. "Oh, you look new."
"Been on the job a week—the reason why I'm here in the first place," Kate said. "Doctor, this is Malcolm Tucker. Malcolm, this is the Doctor. He's our best and longest-served agent."

"Pleased to meet you Mister Tucker; big fan of your work," the Doctor said. Malcolm wasn't sure what to make of the young man before him in tweed and a waistcoat that was shaking his hand. He looked into his eyes and saw instantly that there was something more to this Doctor character, something that gave credence to his supposed length of service.

"You are? Didn't know I had admirers."

"Could do well with cleaning up your language, but work with the image you've cultivated I suppose… though I thought they put you away…"

"I was released early, if that's what you mean," Malcolm bristled.

"Oh, don't think I'm judging you; I break my wife in and out of prison all the time. It's really nothing to worry about." The Doctor slung his arm over Malcolm's shoulders and led the man back towards the police box. "Now, let's just get the two of you to your proper time and place and we'll be all set."

"But how the fuck are you going to do that? The thing that got us here is… fried…"

As soon as Malcolm entered the TARDIS, his eyebrows shot up and his jaw dropped. He spun around with a chill shaking his entire body.

"It's… it's…"

"A pocket dimension," the Doctor grinned as he threw the ship into the vortex. "I'd explain the math if you'd like."

"Mister Tucker is a spin doctor, not a scientific doctor," Kate quipped. She sat down and began to switch out her borrowed boots for a pair of heels the TARDIS had made for her. "Thanks for picking us up."

"The least I could do for one of my favorite Stewarts," the Doctor replied. He fiddled with some switches and levers and the TARDIS ground to a halt. "Here we are! Your stop."

"Your services are appreciated, as always, Doctor," Kate said as she began walking towards the door. The Doctor cut her off, however, blocking her exit.

"First, you're going to tell me how you two suddenly found yourself as temporal fish out of water," he said. Kate took the clutch from her pocket and dug out the vortex manipulator.

"We thought it was busted, but apparently not," she said. "Should be now though, considering the rain." The Doctor took out his sonic screwdriver and scanned it—completely shorted out.

"Then it's a good thing you didn't toss it in with the rubbish, now isn't it?" he said. He held out his hand and Kate put the vortex manipulator in it begrudgingly. The Doctor then opened the door for her, allowing her leave. He glanced over at Malcolm, who was still gawking at the ceiling of the console room. "Are you going too, Mister Tucker, or is this telling me you would fancy a trip?"

Snapping out of his stupor, Malcolm furrowed his brow as he went back into work mode. "No—get me out of this fucking thing," he scowled as he stomped to the door. He didn't even look back as he heard the door shut and the TARDIS wheeze out of sight. Fuming the entire way to his office, all he had was a glare to greet his personal assistant with as he came out of the lift.
"Been gone a long time," Aparajita noted casually. "It's almost five." She saw the fire in her boss's eyes, yet was distracted by his suit that was still damp from the rain. "Did you have a dip in the Thames while you were out?"

"If it were up to me, your self-important arse would be sacked quicker than a punk can drop acid," he snapped. He stormed into the main of his office and slammed the door behind him.

Once Malcolm was sure Aparajita had left for the day, he whipped out his mobile and looked up a number, waiting with bated breath as it rung.

"Hello?" answered a voice. It was young and female—just the person he wanted to hear.

"Hey, Lex, you got a minute?"

"Uncle Malc! I've been trying to reach you for hours! Where were you!"

Grimacing, he made a mental note to write down a list of apologetic lies for later and brushed off the worry in her voice. "Sorry sweetheart. It must have been the building I was in—built right after the War and meant to withstand two more and some nukes fueled by vodka and borscht, you know?"

"Oh, I see. Hey, we still on for next weekend? I was just confirming."

"Of course, of course," Malcolm replied. "Can't miss out on seeing you without bullet-proof glass between us; it's what uncles are for."

"Awesome," Lex chuckled. "Well then, what's going on... other than the fact your new job is in want of a few building updates?"

"I need to ask a favor of you—a coworker had a particularly bad day today and she's one of the ones worth worrying over. What's something little that won't make me look like a prat? I actually don't want to scare this one half to death."

"What, are you after her or something?"

"No!" Malcolm groaned. He pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed; he could hear the smirk on the little shit's face. "It's just... I want to do something nice, but not too nice, and you know better than I do how to do that."

"Have flowers delivered anonymously," she said, a hint of amusement in her voice.

"Can't—don't know her home address and the building we work at is under very strict regulations."

"Huh... okay... do you know what she likes to eat?"

'...aside from single-malt whisky, no,' he thought. "No, not really."

"Chocolates are a safe bet; even if someone's allergic, it's the gesture that counts. There's some that are really popular right now. I can't pronounce the name, but I can send you a link."

"...and me getting them isn't weird or anything?"

"Not at all. What, did you fuck up something?"

"Yeah... your old uncle really took it up the arse this time." He ran his fingers through his hair—a nervous habit he was doing more as of late. "Listen, tell Granny I say hello and keep this under wraps, alright? I don't want your mam getting the wrong idea."
"You can count on me. See you later."

"See you." He hung up the mobile and let it drop to the wooden desktop. It was time to do what Malcolm Tucker never, ever did—it was time to grovel.

Seven o'clock and Mainframe UK was virtually empty. The night shift was on, though it was a skeleton crew in comparison to the daytime employees. Kate took advantage of the quiet by leaning back in her desk chair and silently nursing down a drink. Three in one day was earned this time around, she figured, and her limit was considerably higher. She closed her eyes and exhaled heavily—time travel was not her cup of tea.

The door opened and a voice cut through the serenity of the moment. "Director Stewart?"

"What is it now, Tucker?" she groaned. Kate opened her eyes and watched Malcolm advance further into her office, a shopping bag in-hand and a concerned expression on his face.

"Is that the swill you took from the pub earlier?" he asked.

"Private stock; my father laid it down," she explained. "What are you doing here? You should be home by now."

"I know, but…" Malcolm put the bag down on the desk and took a step backwards. "For you."

"What's this?" Kate asked. He shrugged in reply.

"It's an apology, and I thought you'd need something of a pick-me-up after getting tossed back in time by my stupidity. My niece, um, she suggested them." Picking up the bag, she looked inside and pulled out a small box of chocolates. "Apparently they're trendy right now; Belgian. I wouldn't know though—the tapes usually don't mention foodstuffs unless it's a fad diet."

"Uh, thank you," Kate said quietly. Malcolm nodded and shoved his hands in his pockets before leaving. Once he was gone, she opened the box and carefully nibbled on one, not wanting to overpower her whisky. It was delicious.

'Well, at least he has some sense to admit when he's wrong,' she thought. 'Maybe the Wolf of Whitehall is trainable after all.'
Chapter 3

Malcolm waited patiently along the wall of the station, his hands jammed in his pockets as he rocked on his heels. The whole sitting around until something happened game was never his strong suit. He tried though, especially for the important people, and the one he was waiting for was definitely important.

Once he saw her, his face lit up and he grinned happily. His adult niece, Alexandra, emerged from the crowd of commuters and approached him silently, burying her face in his grey fleece pullover as they hugged. At twenty-three, there were significantly less height-related surprises to come along with her, but now it was more a matter of her hair being all chopped off and a few shades lighter than her natural dark brown. Last time he had seen her, her hair was past her shoulders and had stripes of color best described as various flavors of candy floss.

"There's my girl," Malcolm choked, his voice low. "It's been too long since I last saw you—hey, thanks for cleaning out my house for me. I owe you and what's-his-name a favor."

"What's-his-name and I broke up while you were packed away, so you owe him nothing—I thought I told you that," she replied with a chuckle. Pulling away, she gently punched his shoulder. "Let's get back to your place before the waterworks start; thought you can't have any of that in public."

"Times have changed, Lex," he said, taking her duffel bag and slinging it across his shoulder. "You know how I was positioned to where no one could fuck me?"

"Not for long, anyway," she added as they walked out the door and into the London streets. "Something about your arse growing fangs... that's honestly one of my favorites. Used it on a chav a couple months ago and he about wet himself."

"First, that definitely makes me proud," Malcolm replied. "Second, that doesn't matter anymore. They can't fuck me even if they tried. Provided I don't fuck up too bad, I've got immunity."

"Oooh, nice," Lex whistled. She and her uncle made their way towards the Underground and hopped aboard. Long ago there had come a "Silence Agreement", where provided the two of them were together on public transport, they'd stay quiet to the point it nearly appeared that they didn't know one another. It was first enacted when he was in Whitehall and she was a young teen, due to a pap that was known for riding the Tube and could pick out a target from three cars down. A high-ranking member of the Opposition had been nailed for soliciting favors from an underage girl, and it had been Malcolm's saving grace that the PM himself knew about his niece beforehand, down to having met her for a nanosecond a few years back at that point. Since then it had been a precaution, in case another photographer with a short attention span happened on by them, since at least when they would happen out to do something in public, chances are they weren't holding any luggage and were someplace perfectly family-friendly.

They got off at the appropriate stop and Lex wordlessly followed Malcolm back towards his new flat block. It was only once they were in the building and waiting for the lift did Lex say anything else.

"Wow... and to think you having a London house was swank," she nodded, impressed. "This certainly is a change of pace from a bit ago, isn't it?"

"I'd rather have this flat than my previous one," he snorted. The lift doors opened and they entered, going up to his floor. "Would you believe some tosser tried to make me his bitch? I thought that only happened in American prison movies."
"You'd be surprised at the bollocks that passes for entertainment over there," Lex said. They stepped out of the lift and Malcolm allowed her access to his flat. It was spacious, as far as flats went, with whitewashed walls and a large, open area that melded from sitting area to dining room to kitchen. A small hallway went off towards the inside of the building, with a couple doors in-sight before curving off behind the kitchen and out of view. The young woman was struck speechless as she spun around and silently took it all in.

"Rethinking that offer of a place to crash for graduate school?" her uncle smirked. "It's not the house, but…"

"Let me get accepted first—then we'll talk," she replied, letting out a little laugh. Putting down her backpack, she went to a window and looked out at the view. "This place must cost a fortune."

"It's equipped with a fuck-ton of surveillance bullshit, since one of the terms of my release is my employers being able to keep color-coded tabs on me," Malcolm explained. "This was the only place available, and it's on their dime."

"Then maybe Granny was wrong and you don't work for a bunch of wanks," Lex said. Her uncle furrowed his brow at her.

"What did your Granny say…?" he wondered.

"Oh, just that this UNIT place you're in now is just historically governed by a 'bunch of international wanks that piss about while occasionally muttering about alien nonsense and performing occasional military operations in Wales'."

"…yeah, that sounds like your Granny," Malcolm sighed. "You have to remember though that Mam last worked for the government in the early Sixties—since then barbed wire became a wall that went up and was torn down and we can go holidaying in St. Petersburg if that's what we wanted." He went towards the hallway, dragging Lex along behind him. They went around the bend and he showed her to the guest room, now her room, tossing her duffle on the bed. There was a bed, a desk, a nightstand, and a wardrobe, all in oak, with the same white walls as the rest of the flat and white-and-grey bedding. "It's a bit bare, but I think you can make do."

"I made do with a camp bed, some plastic crates, and stepladder for three months; I can deal with this for a weekend," she said. He left her alone to unpack and went back to the sitting room, his turn to look out the window at the view. It was a lovely view, if he did say so, with just enough sky and buildings and tree branches to make it nearly feel cozy. The door to the guest room closed and Malcolm turned around, watching Lex cross the length of the flat.

"Alright, what do you feel like doing?" he asked as she vaulted over the back of the couch and landed on the cushions. "We've got all of London at our feet and for once I'm not on-call in case some high-roller gets caught on camera with his cock hanging out."

"Oh, I don't know… got any good gossip?" Lex grinned. "How are things between you and that lady you got the chocolates for? Any improvements?"

"She's perfectly fine as far as I know; how's your da? Hear from the louse lately?" he asked, shutting her down. She slumped back into the couch and folded her arms over her chest in irritation.

"When was the last time you heard from your dad?" she groused. Malcolm raised his eyebrow at her in a sly manner.

"There we are—now what do you want to do other than gossip?"
"Some of my mates told me about some exhibits they saw last time they were down, if those are still running," Lex mused. She was attempting to think of something else when Malcolm's mobile began to chirp in his pocket. He checked it: Osgood.

"Just a sec; it's work," he apologized. He swiped the call to answer and held it up to his ear. "Fuck off, Scarfy—I've got company."

'I don't care,' Osgood said cheerily. 'You've got to come down and change the batteries in the ravens. They're a bit sluggish.'

"You need me to what?" Malcolm snapped into the mobile. "Let me tell you something, young lady: I am nobody's fucking fetch dog. Have one of your forsaken interns do it."

'Not my orders," Osgood sang. Her voice was smug—too smug for comfort.

"I'm on my weekend off, entertaining my niece. How would you feel if you hadn't seen your niece in two years and once you suddenly could, without some uniformed wanker breathing down her neck, you get called into work?"

'I don't have a niece,' she replied simply. Malcolm put the mobile to his chest and rolled his eyes.

"Sorry kiddo—some upstart shite at work is trying to yank your ol' uncle's chain."

"Hasn't learned to keep out of your way yet?" Lex giggled. Her uncle scowled and held up a finger to silence her. He pressed a button and put the call on speakerphone.

"Alright Osgood, you give me one good reason why I have to take the time to go all the way down there just to tend to some overpriced lawn ornaments when all you have to do is tell some brain-dead little twat from IT to do the same and they'll be more than happy to between their Tesco run and sobbing lunchtime wank in the loo."

'…because I said so,' replied Kate's voice. Malcolm's face went blank as he processed what had just happened. 'See you in about half an hour?'

"Forty minutes—there's that match today that's going to clog the Tube and I'll be bollocked if I can't get in a train the first time."

'Thanks so very much. See you within the hour, Malcolm. Ta."

The call cut off and the mobile emitted a dull dialtone. Malcolm turned off the speaker and locked the screen, turning his sitting room into an awkward miasma of silence.

"So… I take it that wasn't Osgood?" Lex assumed.

"No; that was the boss—I have to go," he muttered, pocketing his mobile. He grabbed his keys and headed towards the front door. "I shouldn't be more than an hour. How about we go get some dinner after this, yeah? Still on that Thai kick or do you like something else?"

"Wow Uncle Malc… I didn't think you were the type," she replied. He furrowed his brow in confusion.

"What type? The Thai food type? The type to dote upon his niece-but-might-as-well-be-daughter?"

"The type to go after your boss; I thought you swore off workplace relationships after Kelly."

Malcolm's face blanched, then his ears turned red, and a scowl spread across his face. "Alexandra,
you better come up with a good fucking reason I don't ship you back to Marcia the moment I get home." He then left in a fluster, slamming the door behind him.

"Huh… that reaction's improved," Lex mused aloud. She turned back so that she sat on the couch properly and turned on the telly. There was no reason to think of anything to keep her here—he always bristled at the mention of exes and the two hours it'd likely take for him to get to work and back would be enough time for him to scare enough belligerent youths for him to be more than happy to let her finish visiting through the weekend.

Thirty-seven minutes later and Malcolm came storming into Mainframe UK, a takeaway tea in-hand and a sneer slapped across his face. He glanced up in the atrium at the window he knew to be Kate's office. She was standing by the glass while on the phone, giving him a wave as he glowered off, a grey Glasgow storm in the heart of London.

Getting into the lift that went to his office, Malcolm rode it all the way to the top, angrily sipping his tea. He stepped out in the reception area and ignored the weakly-protesting personal assistant to barge into Kate's office, standing there with one hand jammed in his pocket and the other concentrating on keeping his tea from shaking in his ire. Kate held up a hand to keep him at bay and continued concentrating on her conversation.

"Right, so I will see you in a couple weeks then," she said. A pause. "Okay then dear; listen, I've got to go deal with one of the new guys. Lots of love." Kate then hung up the desk phone and sat down, folding her hands over her closed notebook computer with a smirk. "Yes, Mister Tucker?"

"Kate, love, why am I standing here?" Malcolm asked from behind his tea. He lowered it as menacingly as possible, baring his teeth in a snarl.

"You haven't done anything 'menial' for a while, so I thought it was about your turn," she replied snarkily. "Besides, it's Friday, early afternoon. You should be here."

"I've had this scheduled for ages," he snapped, pointing at her with his tea hand. "You approved it yourself."

"Your niece is perfectly capable of entertaining herself for a couple hours if my information is reliable," Kate said. "She did get rid of that ridiculous hair color, didn't she? I was hoping that part was correct because I'd really hate to see her unemployable due to something as trivial as…"

"I don't know what game you're playing, but stop it," Malcolm growled, cutting her off. His nostrils flared and his hand came out of his pocket to clench and flex in anger. "Stay away from my niece and my sister; it's your fault if you cross my mam, but don't take me away from my family again unless it's absolutely necessary, you hear? If you don't, I will make your life Hell."

"Malcolm, I know what it's like to be taken away from your kid when you have plans," she said calmly. "I have two, and better yet: they're ones I gave birth to and won custody over and raised often on my own. Alexandra will survive."

"That's because a Tucker survives," he hissed. He turned on his heel and stomped off, not wanting to hear another word. Down the lift, out into the corridor, and away he glowered.

With tea gone and cup disposed of by the time he found the tech corridor, Malcolm felt only nominally calmer once he reached the Raven Room. He had switched out the batteries before, so he didn't need instructions to hit the button on the wall and start to grab a couple of spare power packs from their chargers sitting on a shelving unit. A vent in the top of the ceiling opened and one by one
a flock of ravens came fluttering down onto the table in the center of the room. They hopped about a little and twitched, but as soon as Malcolm clucked his tongue twice they all froze in place and their heads halved at the joint of the beak, opening up to reveal their internal batteries.

"C'mere, Rab," he nodded, beckoning one of the birds over. Power pack still exposed, it bounced over and allowed him to switch out the old for the new, which he put separate from the ones that still needed to be installed. After carefully snapping the raven's head back in place, he stroked its back and watched as it fluttered towards the other side of the table. "Alright, who's next? Alba? Eustace? Ken? Flossie?"

"Good thing I'm not on speaking terms with much of the old crowd, or they'd have a juicy email to read in about twenty minutes," a voice laughed. Malcolm jumped, nearly dropping a battery in shock. He shot a glare over towards the door and saw Glenn Cullen standing there, snickering at him from behind a yogurt.

"For fuck's sake—I thought they put you out to pasture after the Inquiry," Malcolm cursed. Glenn stepped casually into the room and stood next to his old workplace bully, looking at the automated ravens curiously.

"Which one's Ken?" he asked. "...and Flossie? Why'd you name one Flossie?"

"You don't fuck with a Flossie; it's common sense." Malcolm took a small step away and continued switching out battery packs. "So, aren't you going to explain yourself or am I going to have to bollock some poor interns until I get some answers?"

"Good to see you again too," the older man deadpanned. "What's the one with the chip in his beak paint and a shattered eye called?"

"Malcolm Junior—that one got in a scuff with a cat—now seriously, am I being visited by the fucking Ghost of Careers Past or...?"

"My nose still throbs when I come within arm's length of you, so it's definitely me," Glenn replied. He shrugged noncommittally and continued eating his yogurt. "I was out of work about a week when Director Stewart approached me about coming to work here. They made me head of Data Management, if you'll believe it."

"Not sure I do, no," Malcolm said flatly. He shut a bird's head and scratched it beneath the beak absentmindedly. "You survived with your reputation intact, so why didn't you just leave for good?"

"...because they needed me," Glenn said. He glanced over at Malcolm, who had raised an eyebrow at him, and turned back to the mechanical birds. "It's pretty nice, this being relied on stuff. Now I'm a Constant, I have subordinates, my opinion is actually considered to have value... they took this old dog in and made him feel like a pup again."

"I hope that's only in the metaphorical sense."

"Purely." Glenn tossed his empty yogurt cup in the trash bin and continued examining the ravens. "Since I had been part of the plain-view political word for so long, Director Stewart actually asks me from time to time who we should keep an eye on, who we should try to recruit. Might be a bit haughty of me, but I will admit to even suggesting a jail break to get a hold of a prospect."

Malcolm stopped moving, dead battery in one hand and a raven in the other. "You...? You were the agent that gave me a 'glowing recommendation'...?"

"We needed someone who commanded an air of authority, that got the job done no matter the cost.
Who else could I have pointed her towards? Olly? That little prat will sting you the moment you turn around."

"Sounds about accurate," he agreed. Malcolm pointed out one of the ravens waiting to be tended to and quietly said, "That's Cullen."

"A little molted there, isn't he?"

"No more than you are."

Silence fell between the two men and a minute passed, unspoken.

"See you around, Malcolm," Glenn finally said. "I've got some work to do."

"Yeah." He stood in silence as the former aide left. Once the sound of footsteps could no longer be heard in the hall, Malcolm clucked his tongue again. "Cullen, c'mere. If I won't replace your brain, no one will."
Okay, with this, I'm caught up to where I'm at on tumblr and ff.net, so *hopefully* I can get another chapter out soonish. Hopefully.

Malcolm groaned as he leaned back in his chair, staring at the ceiling; very little had happened all week, which caused a distinct lull in the hustle and bustle that he thrived on. Things were calm and quiet, like a shop before its big holiday sale, and he didn't like it one iota.

"Rajit, what do you do when there's nothing to do?" he asked, raising his voice so his personal assistant could hear in her section of the office. "I get this means we've done our jobs well, but a little too well doesn't sit right."

"That's not my name," Aparajita said dully. Malcolm suspected she was playing some game on her mobile just to avoid him. "Rajit is my cousin… my decidedly male cousin."

"Tell that to the name Ashley—it doesn't know what's going on anymore." He was trying with her, he really was, in his effort to get her to warm up a bit. There were worse uphill battles, he supposed. Glancing at the clock, he held in a groan realizing it was only three, prompting a rapid-fire text.

'Save me—PA a fucking bore –Malc'

Not even two minutes passed and his phone chirped in a demand to be answered. He picked it up, barking "Yeah?"

'Go on, have a shout and pretend like this is an actual emergency,' Glenn said, boredom apparent in his own voice. Malcolm then stood up briskly, furrowing his brows.

"What?! I can't leave you soggy cunts alone for two fucking days without things going to shambles?" he snapped. "Stay right there and you better pray I can get you out of this mess." He quickly rushed over towards the lift, slamming the button to open it. "Gotta take care of this fuck-up real quick; might see you later."

"It's about time you got something," Aparajita said. Her tone told him she wasn't convinced, and he didn't even look back before the lift doors closed on him.

"Fuck, that was close; thanks," Malcolm exhaled. He drew his hand over his face, coming to rest along his jaw. "Nothing gets by her."

'Well, she's damn good at her job. No one can fool Rajit Khan and get away with it.'

Malcolm blinked in surprise. "How do you know what I just tried to call her?"

'That's what your predecessor called her—served alongside her granddad in the Gurkhas or something like that. Never did get the full story, now that I think about it. Hey, are you coming over? I'll put the kettle on if so.'

"I'll take a raincheck on that—I just want to get out of here since half the staff seems to be keeling
over of the fucking Plague." He dodged a coughing IT member and ducked into the atrium. "I almost feel like calling in tomorrow whether I catch this damn bug or not—shit, there's one of my staff. Keep it oiled, sunshine." He pocketed the mobile without waiting for Glenn to answer as a hefty woman, closer to fifty than forty, ran up to him from across the way. "This better be good, Beresford, if you're risking rupturing several internal sacs at once."

"There's been a crash-landing out in Lincolnshire," she informed him between gasping breaths. "Rutan—non-hostile, dead well before impact—and we can't reach Commander Stewart!"

Malcolm's eyebrow quirked up, a mixture of intrigue and worry spreading across his face. "Why not?"

"She went home after lunch because she wasn't feeling well. I think the virus that's been going around got to her too."

"For fuck's sake… where in Lincolnshire?"

"On a farm, just outside the Wolds, but there's no one with the security clearance to go mop things up! They're all out sick!" By now she had caught her wind and looked significantly less like she was going to die. "This is the first emergency I've seen like this—I've only been here a month longer than you."

"So you think you'd know the drill by now." Malcolm snapped his fingers and pointed towards one of the seemingly-healthy-looking people on a computer monitor. "Hey, moleman, what sort of cleanup crew we have that can take care of something that's dead but also…?"

"Rutan," Beresford clarified.

"Yeah, that."

The man tapped on the keyboard in front of him and squinted at the results. "We have a recon team specializing in hostile extraterrestrial forces; I'd go with them, since where there's a Rutan, dead or alive, there's a good chance a Sontaran's not far behind."

"The talking tatties with a hard-on for war?"

"Uh… yes, sir?"

"Good. Who has to hit the button to scramble them?"

"Director Stewart, but—"

"Yeah, yeah, she's puking her guts out with the rest of staff. Who the fuck do I see to override normal protocol?"

"Ah… ummm…" The man pointed in the direction of a series of empty chairs, the entire cluster out. Malcolm growled and took the monitor man by the shoulder of his shirt, dragging him over to the necessary console and tossing him into it.

"Override normal protocol; authorization code: Canmore."

"…b-but, sir…!"

Leaning over, Malcolm got within an inch of the man and narrowed his eyes. "What's the use of being Intergalactic Big Brother if we can't override our own fucking system?" He dropped his voice
low and curled his upper lip into a sneer. "Do it."

The man whimpered and nodded quickly before sliding away to sit in one of the chairs. He began typing away, attempting to initiate the scramble of the clean-up crew. Once he was unable to continue, Malcolm swiped his ID card and all the lights on the console that were red and yellow perked up in a bright neon green.

"Thunderbirds are go," he nodded. He looked over at Beresford and flashed his teeth. "Alright, I'm catching a ride with the squad—you hold down the fort, make sure Shaw doesn't piss himself, and if Rajit complains, she's got my number, yeah?"

"She's your PA, so I should hope so…"

"Right; see you when I see you."

"…but…!"

There was no time for Malcolm to reply, for he was off, nearly gliding away as he went to go find someone both well and important enough to not be mind-wiped regularly to ask where the squaddies were stored for just such an occasion as this.

Malcolm was the last one out of the military convoy, hands in his trouser pockets as he glanced around at his new surroundings. It had been a tolerable ride—the soldiers he rode with had amazing senses of humor—but now it was time for business. He meandered about, examining the smoldering wreckage from afar as it sat in a barley field. The dirt road he was on squelched underneath his shoes, telling him that the rest of the field had been saved by recent rain and nothing else. Watching the clean-up crew, he stood silently until he heard the sound of someone running down the dirt track, shouting loudly the entire way.

"Hey you! What the blazes are you doing out here?!" Malcolm took one look and knew he was dealing with the farm owner: over sixty, the beginnings of a hobble in his gait, and patched overalls covered in various sorts of stains he did not want to think about. Grinning politely, Malcolm held out his hand as the man approached.

"Hey there, mate. You the owner of this lucky field?"

"Lucky me arse! I thought I called the police! Now I've got soldiers and hazmat suits and I don't know what-all buggering up my field! This is my livelihood you know!"

"You think we don't realize that?" Malcolm scoffed jokingly. "It's farmers that make sure we don't have to import all our food from fucking who-knows-where and while I'm all for modifying our crops for health reasons and better shelf-life, enough is enough. It's a tough one, yeah?"

The farmer squinted at Malcolm, unsure what to make of the Scottish stranger who was currently the most normal-looking of the strangers currently stomping about on his property. "Who are you people?"

"The ones the police call when they're damned if they know what's fucking going on. Malcolm Tucker; I'm one of the higher-ups over at the UK sector of the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce." The farmer cocked an eyebrow, but finally shook his hand. "Now tell me: what can I do for you that would make both of our lives much easier?"

Kate woke up the following morning about as gracefully as she fell asleep: crumpled over in the
bathroom whilst huddled next to the toilet. A pounding headache, sandpaper throat, an unsteady hand and a queasy stomach... it was punishment for not having been majorly sick in fifteen years, she imagined, and the price had been huge. She heard her mobile buzz atop the counter and crawled over to get it.

'Are you coming in today?' Her PA checking in—had to remember to give her a nicer bonus at the end of the year.

'No. Will try for tomorrow. Don't let the place burn down.'

Leaving it at that (the details of one’s illness always best left private), the mostly-incapacitated scientific director and leader of UNIT's Mainframe UK picked herself up off the floor and stumbled out into the main of her room. Finding it too cold for just pajamas, she found her robe and shuffled her way down the stairs. She curled up on the couch in the sitting room and closed her eyes, attempting to not fall asleep sitting up while taking in the sounds of the day. A few minutes passed and she heard the other occupant of the house, her adult son Gordon, come out of his room and start looking around.

"Mum? Where are you?"

"Down here," she replied, grimacing at the sound of her own raw voice. Gordon came down and found his mother, groaning in frustration upon seeing her.

"You should be in bed," he scolded gently. "You're never going to get better if you don't rest up."

"I don't need you to tell me what to do," she frowned. A blanket was soon draped over her and Gordon was walking away. "Are you even listening to me?"

"Yes Mum, and did you already forget who came home last night to find you so delirious you were vomiting in the dishwasher?"

"It was that medication—it was out-of-date," she reminded him. A moment later and he was back in the sitting room, fussing over her blanket.

"Don't give me that; the box was printed in America and they mix their days and months."

"Go away Gordon," Kate scowled. "I don't need you hovering over me like I'm about to die." She grumbled as her son forced a mug of soup in her hands. "Don't you have anything better to do?"

"Mum, I don't report in for my last month at Wyton for another week—let me do this," the young man replied. When he saw his mother take out her mobile, he confiscated it, holding it high out of her reach. "No; not until you're better."

"Gordon James Lethbridge-Stewart, you give me back that mobile. I made you, and that means I can unmake you," she hissed.

"You could, but it would be much less effort to just sit there and let this bug run its course," he said. The mobile beeped and he checked it from afar. "It's Ms. Khan. I thought you gave her a new boss to bother."

"Oh God, those two are fighting again," Kate groaned. She coughed roughly and sank down onto the couch cushions. "Tell her I'm not around. Tell her I'm in the loo vomiting my guts out. I don't want to hear another squabble out of them until I'm well again."

"Okay," Gordon shrugged. He swiped the phone and answered, a smirk on his face. "This is the
'Put Director Stewart on the phone, now,' Aparajita demanded. 'Tucker is going to ruin everything.'

"Ms. Khan, I'm sorry, but Mum's home sick and…"

'I don't care what's happening you little RAF reject. We are currently panicking and we need the Director's instructions!' Gordon wrinkled his nose at the device in his hand and held it out towards Kate.

"She's being incredibly rude and insistent, but I assume it's the fault of this Tucker fellow and whatever they're scared he's going to do."

"If this is her exaggerating again I'm going to sack her myself," Kate muttered. She took the phone from her son and held it up to her ear. "This better be good, Khan."

'Director Stewart, there's been a breach in protocol that I was only made aware of just now,' Aparajita stated. 'Mister Tucker is going to give a press conference.'

Kate's face blanched as all the remaining blood drained out. Her face set and she reentered work mode, ready to kill. "He's giving a press conference?! On what?! Where's Miller?!"

'I forbid it and told him just to wait, but I need your permission to conduct a blackout before—oh sodding hell he's on-air.'

Lunging for the remote, the sick woman turned on the television just in time to catch Malcolm stepping up to a podium amongst camera flashes and microphones. He gave the press a grin and cleared his throat.

"Good afternoon. First off, I would like to apologize for the little change in programming—an unexpected bug is going around the office and our official spokesperson is where we all want him to be: at home and away from us," he began. No one in his audience made a noise. "Down to business: there have been claims that at approximately two-forty-three yesterday afternoon there was an 'alien invasion' on the outskirts of Caistor, Lincolnshire. We at the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce have looked into the matter and have deemed it merely the remnants of a rather large decorative paper lantern used as a school experiment that had been launched from an old strip of military tarmac, and the farmer whose crops have been damaged will be subsequently paid for his troubles. Any questions?"

The press was dead silent, not a one knowing quite what to say. Malcolm continued his cheeky smirk as he scanned the crowd. "No takers?"

"Khan… why did no one tell me there was an incident this morning?" Kate wondered aloud. The woman on the other end of the call gulped.

'Well, you called in sick and…'

"…and you let Malcolm handle things. Malcolm, the man who has been aware of extraterrestrial life forms, let alone out of prison, for how many months? How many of those people there covered the Goolding Inquiry? How many of them covered him getting hauled off to the penitentiary!?" She let out a hacking cough into her kerchief, disgusting herself.

'He was the one that went off on his own!' Aparajita replied. 'He took things into his own hands without telling me a word. To make matters worse, he was talking to your PA about protocol instead
of his PA first thing this morning and by the time I come into work I'm chasing him all around the compound trying to keep him in-check!"

"Wait… he handled it…? The entire thing?"

'He was there when the clean-up crew arrived yesterday and didn't leave until he had talked with the farmer personally,' was the response. 'Does he not know what his job entails?'

"No… I think he knows exactly what his job entails," Kate nodded. "Thank you for keeping me updated—see you tomorrow." She ended the call without allowing Aparajita to respond.

"So… is this a good thing…?" Gordon asked warily, eyes glued to the television. Not a single member of the press had asked a question and now the pundits were merely complaining about people blowing things out of proportion.

"It's more a confidence-building thing," his mother admitted. Her mobile chirped again and it was Malcolm. "Have fun scaring half of the political world to death with your inability to stay behind bars?"

'Oh, you know, just thought I'd make sure the cattle could understand what was being said to them without getting out the fucking prod,' he chuckled. 'You know, that farmer bloke out in Lincolnshire was a real nice fellow once he calmed down. Gave me some local ale—put a bottle of it on your desk for when you're better.'

"That's nice, but, why'd you go? There's plenty of other people who could have gone with much more experience than you…"

'Yeah, but you all talk in such gobbledygook that sometimes all the men in black and soldiers stomping about just confuse 'em more,' Malcolm explained. 'Simple men sometimes need simple terms. It's not a bad thing, unless you don't have someone around that wasn't handed everything on a silver platter, no offense meant.'

"All the offense taken," she deadpanned.

'Get better or I'm taking back that bottle—it was tasty. Ta.'

The phone went dead and Kate locked the screen, plopping the device down on the couch next to her. "Well, that's a relief."

"Then I'm taking this back," Gordon said. He walked by the couch and plucked the mobile from the cushion, pocketing it immediately. He turned around just before the sitting room doorway and stared his mother down. "Okay, I'm going to the store and getting you some orange juice and something for that cough. Any requests?"

"No bits in the juice," she said, curling up and flipping through the television channels.

She had him trained.

Finally able to maintain an upright position without either wobbling or being criticized by her son, it took Kate nearly a full twenty-four hours before walking back into Mainframe UK. Some of the staff was still hobbling along looking rather thread-worn themselves yet she exuded the air of someone simply come back from a business trip. She went rode the lift up to her office, only to find Malcolm sitting in one of the chairs across from her desk, looking impeccably smug.
"Welcome home, love. Cat made a mess while you were away so I cleaned it up all nice for ya."

"Don't do things just to irritate Ms. Khan—it's not nice," she replied, sitting down in her chair. "She was very cross when she rang me yesterday during your press conference."

"Yeah, got to apologize about that; Miller was keeled over from this thing that's going about and things were getting too hot under the collar without putting something out there. Not that keen on taking over for Miller though—just 'cause I could do it once doesn't mean I won't cock it up eventually, and leaving himself open to a fucking like that is not what a Tucker does." He grinned, teeth flashing cheekily in a demand to be praised.

"Well next time, be sure to clear it with someone else first before you go ahead and do something," Kate said. "I don't care who, just as long as they're not gang-pressed into it."

"Got to have more than one of me to have a gang."

"There's only enough room in the world for one Malcolm Tucker… at least one in your likeness," she quipped. "Now where's this bottle of Lincolnshire ale you promised me?"

"What… you don't want to hear about my daring-dos? How I figured out how to use the neuralyzer without setting it off on myself first? Maybe the jokes I told the lads on the way up to the where the Flying Spaghetti Monster took a dive?"

"Getting back to your regular duties will suffice." She watched as Malcolm stood and exited the office, hands jammed in his pockets, and gave her a wink as the lift doors closed. Her PA giggled in amusement.

"I don't know why everyone is always so terrified of him," she said. "He really is a nice man."

"He's nice to those who know how to do their job, and it seems like we passed the test," Kate said. It wasn't until her assistant took the lift down to do her own errands did she begin to look through her desk. There, in the bottom drawer, was a bottle with a ribbon around the neck and a scrap of paper shoved behind the knot. She took the paper out and unfolded it, rolling her eyes at the scrawl.

'Drink me.'

"We might as well be through the Looking-glass in this occupation," she groaned. She replaced the bottle and closed the drawer—that was going to have to wait until lunch.

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A day later and it was Aparajita's turn to get a text implied to be filled with mucus and bile, making her loudly thank her parents' gods in the middle of a hallway that she was to have a Malcolm-free forty-eight hours, which she took to do little things around the place that needed to be done. By the time he returned, she had his office equipped with a fruit bowl, heavy on the satsumas, and a formal promise to call a truce based on his admittedly cool demeanor during the Rutan fiasco. It was good, Malcolm knew, that he and Aparajita were now on the same page. That just made them all the more dangerous to whatever intergalactic pile of goo decided to crash-land on his home soil in the future.
Chapter 5

Malcolm put down the box and wiped his brow, feeling achy. Looking around the room, he saw the explosion of cardboard and stuff that was the act of moving his niece into the spare bedroom of his flat and grinned. It was going to be just as they had planned while she was applying to universities in high school: she could save on housing and use his place as a home base of sorts, while he would have someone to come home to on a more regular basis. The plan hadn’t panned out for her undergrad work, and when he had landed in prison it looked like graduate work wasn’t going to benefit either with his house sold and stuff packed away in storage, but now that he was a member of UNIT things were smooth sailing.

“…and this is the last of it,” Lex said, bringing in a laundry basket full of electronics cords. She put it down atop the bed and glanced around the room, happily taking in the sight. “I can’t believe this is finally happening.”

“Yeah; now you get to make all your little mates jealous, living rent-free in London,” Malcolm laughed. “Too bad I only have the one room, or that one friend of yours could come down too.”

“Kanda? She’s too busy with her new beau to be of any use to the rest of us,” she replied, rolling her eyes. “Her parents hate it; keep on threatening to send her back home.”

“…but Kanda was born the same hospital you were, wasn’t she? I thought Scotland was her home.”

“It’s called ‘diaspora’ Uncle Malec, and it doesn’t matter if Kanda brings her lad to Glasgow or stays with him in Aberdeen; she’s not home according to her folks.” She kissed her uncle on the cheek and began rummaging through the nearest box. “At least I know wherever you, Mam, and Granny are, I’ve got a home.”

“Uh-huh, yeah, don’t try that sentimental shit on me young lady—already got enough of that coming from Cullen at work.”

“How is the old kettle-lugger anyhow? Did he break and get a hairpiece yet?”

“Nah, still holding out,” he smirked. “Say, speaking of, you gonna be alright if I go in and clock in a couple hours?”

“Can you, even though you’ve been hefting boxes all morning?”

“Ach, you’ll be fucking fine.” Malcolm flipped Lex his middle finger and left the room. He grabbed his laptop bag and keys and went off towards the old grind, despite the fact there was little he could consider repetitive about it. Even the more mundane things he had to do—changing the ravens’ batteries, writing out speeches because his staff was too frazzled, walking people through what should have been simple tasks but they were too egg-headed to realize it—usually they involved something wild and crazy that he’d never have thought of even a year before.
For the first time in years, he felt as though he was thriving. It felt fucking great.

Ride the Tube, get off early due to a station renovation, walk the rest of the way, get through security—everything seemed fairly typical. Malcolm rode the lift into his office and greeted his PA, glad she was in a good mood.

“Move the nipper in alright?” Aparajita asked, holding out a manila folder. Her boss took it and scanned the contents; things that needed his approval before heading out towards the press hounds.

“She’s not that much younger than you, you know,” he said as he flipped through the papers. “Actually, she could have had a sibling older than you if my sister had wanted and it would have been perfectly normal.”

“…and you still sound like her dad when you talk about her, so I don’t want to hear it,” she snarked. “Oh, and Glenn came by earlier today before lunch; wanted to know if you were free for some tea this afternoon.”

“That limp sack asks me for tea every other day,” he replied. He looked back down at the papers and wrinkled his nose. “This the most exciting stuff?”

“The only thing that’d make it more exciting is if the molemen revolted.”

“Then I might as well take him up on the offer and play nice; never know when it’ll come in handy,” he said. Malcolm handed Aparajita the folder back and turned to leave. “If you need me, I’ll be in Data Management being bored out of my skull.”

“If that’s the case, then you don’t mind if I leave a bit early?”

“You could leave now if you wanted. This sort of shite we can manage in our sleep. Just tell Sanchez to use fewer big words and we’re set.”

“Already did; see you tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow or an emergency—whichever comes first.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Malcolm went into the lift and hit the button to go down further into the depths of Mainframe UK until the doors popped open and he was on the floor that contained Data Management. It was a vast, high-ceilinged level, just as spacious as the atrium upstairs. The main difference was that while the main level had walls full of screens and running displays of their monitoring zone, the Data Management floor was packed with servers and the main thing people were doing seemed to be diagnostics and coding. He wasn’t entirely sure how computers worked from the ground-up—one of the worst classes he had in university involved dialing an actual phone in order to connect to the internet—so what he gleaned was probably what was going on… somewhat.

“I see you got my message,” said Glenn’s voice from seemingly nowhere. Malcolm turned around and saw the other man standing there, holding a water jug that had clearly just been refilled.

There was no backing out now. He was trapped.

Glenn poured some more tea from his small teapot into the two mugs between him and Malcolm. They had been chatting for most of the afternoon at that point about various things, though now that it was close to the time to leave, the topic had begun to shift towards what they were planning on
doing when they were let loose from the confines of Mainframe UK. Malcolm had told him all about 
the ordeal about moving Lex in that morning, from the amount of stuff she had to how amazed he 
was she could fit it all in the tiny car she drove.

“You must be proud, moving in to attend grad school,” he nodded as he put the teapot down. “You 
don’t have any kids yourself, right?”

“If I did, then it’s news to me,” Malcolm replied. He sipped at his drink; it was going cold. “Lex is 
the closest thing I’ve got to a kid, which means that if she’s in need of a place to stay, then my door 
is always open.”

“Never thought of you like that—the sort of man to have a small child to dote upon. It makes more 
sense since she’s your niece and not your daughter,” Glenn said. “Can always give a niece back, but 
you’re stuck with a daughter.”

Malcolm raised an eyebrow, somewhat curious about what sort of air he had cultivated back in his 
government days aside from one who could render a cunt to shreds at a hundred paces by glare 
alone. “What sort of man did you think I was on the outside?”

“Not sure,” Glenn replied. “I’ve seen you interact with kids before that were on school trips, but you 
didn’t seem to give them much of the Tucker the Fucker we all knew and feared, so I figured it was 
just you holding it in until you could have a shout at someone else.”

“It’s no fair swearing and having a shout at school kids—they’ve done nothing wrong and if they 
have, chances are it’s an honest mistake. It’s the adults that have to watch out for me, because they’re 
the ones that are supposed to know what they’re doing.”

“…like the Gordon Ramsay of politics, you were,” Glenn deadpanned. “I hear he treats kids and the 
little guy nicely too.”

“Yeah, that’s an issue we Scots have: we like to see competence in our work field and go into a rage 
when it’s not there,” Malcolm fired back. Sentiment and touchy-feely shit was alright at times, but 
this conversation was beginning to get on his nerves. Glancing over at the clock on the wall, he 
stood. “Would you look at that, it’s quitting time.”

“If only we got hired in here sooner—you’d still have brown hair and I’d have hair period,” Glenn 
said. “See you tomorrow?”

“Maybe; depends on what cock-up happens within the next sixteen hours,” Malcolm grunted. The 
air had definitely gotten better between them, but that didn’t mean he wanted to make this a daily 
occurrence. “Thanks for the tea.”

“Thanks for the company. I understand them when it comes to work, but try to get one of those kids 
I oversee to talk in coherent sentences otherwise and everyone’s shit out of luck.”

“Maybe you need a Lex more than I do. Ta.” He then left as quickly as he could, not wanting to get 
wrapped up into too much else. Malcolm stopped by his office for a brief moment and made sure 
there was nothing urgent waiting for him. When there wasn’t, he felt absolutely no qualms in 
leaving, for the lack of emergency was a great thing to revel in.

His commute back home was fairly typical for the time of day: week-old shite in a bedpan. The Tube 
was cramped with tourists, commuters, and students, jostling and bumping into one another so much 
that Malcolm was surprised that he still had his wallet on him when he left the station. Seeing his flat 
block made him chuckle to himself; how many people would be livid to know he was living the life
he was now? A steady, well-paying job, a home that did not involve bars on the windows or a distinct lack of privacy, the ability to come and go as he pleased, and to have anyone over he wanted… it was fucking fantastic.

“Uncle Malc, some stuff came for you while you were gone,” Lex said as soon as he opened the door to the flat. She was sitting at the breakfast bar, typing on her laptop while having tea.

“What sort of stuff?” he asked.

“Looks like clothes; didn’t go through it since the guys that brought it over seemed rather official—knew my name and everything.” She sipped her tea and continued writing. “They put it in your room.”

“Thanks for the warning, kiddo,” Malcolm grumbled. He went into his bedroom and found a suit bag, which had a tuxedo and spit-shined shoes inside. “Uh… Lex? Did the guys that brought this over say anything about what it’s for?”

“Nope,” she replied, raising her voice so he could hear. “Just said it’s for your field mission tonight and I wasn’t to touch it.”

“…but I don’t have a field mission.” He walked back to the kitchen and stared at his niece. “Are you sure? You’re not fucking with me?”

“I’m at uni, Uncle Malc; even if I had the funds I wouldn’t use them on whatever it is they brought over just to fuck with you.”

Nodding silently, he went to the bathroom and took a shower, knowing it was sacrilege to put on a tuxedo after helping tote boxes up from the parking level and sitting in the presence of Glenn’s old-man funk for a couple hours. The hot water of the shower made his aching muscles relax and coaxed him into staying a little longer than normal just to ease the tension. By the time he was clean and putting the finishing touches on his outfit, his mobile rang—Kate.

“Mind explaining to me what the fuck’s going on here, love?” Malcolm asked as he put the device to his ear.

“You have five minutes to get down here or I’m coming up and do you really want to try explaining this to Alexandra?” she replied frankly. “Tick tock.”

Hanging up the mobile, Malcolm shoved it back in his pocket and stormed through the flat to the front door. “Don’t wait up for me, kiddo; don’t know what’s going on.”

“Okay. Just watch your arse and remember I want an auntie, not several,” she said frankly, not even looking away from her computer screen. Her uncle simply rolled his eyes and made his way down to the main floor and out to the discreet black saloon that was waiting for him. He got in and buckled up, not glancing over at Kate until they were moving, instantly resisting crossing his legs.

It should have been illegal for her to wear a cut that tight… not that he would tell her, of course. She could do what she wanted but… damn. Her dress shimmered just by her breathing and she gave him a smug smile as he sat there silently.

“Time to earn your keep, Tucker,” she said. “Let’s use your charms for the forces of good, shall we?” He simply nodded in reply, not trusting his charms at that very moment.

The atmosphere reeked of the most upper of upper-class, the pungent aroma filling Malcolm’s nose
and sending jolts through his system. While he enjoyed the concept of the local as much as any bloke, it was here, amongst the low-slung gowns and expensive wine and sit-down dinners of the tiny-portioned and trendy sort, where he really flourished. Women without a clue found his crude demeanor witty and the men laughed to take it in stride.

“Were you really helping your niece move this morning or did R&D use you as a test subject for some new drug?” Kate quipped into her drink, having noticed his unnaturally-congenial nature. As she had explained the mission on the way over, a combination of funds farming and surveillance, he could barely keep his eyes off her, realizing that, fuck and tits, the night was starting off as a wet dream. It hadn’t gotten much better, but he was coping incredibly well. It was a true privilege to escort her to the charity function, he felt, though considering how bored she seemed elsewise, he suspected it was more for the entertainment factor than anything else.

“Not unless they shot me with a blowgun like one of those tiny Amazon men on my way in,” he smirked. Sarcasm—an excellent shield if there ever was one. “Could learn loads from that lot, what, with them going about starkers all the time and knowing how to live off the land.”

“It’s truly always about sex and voyeurism with men, isn’t it?”

“Och, thinking on your behalf too, love. Wouldn’t work be interesting with no one hiding? Nothing concealed?”

“It’d be cold and what little you have would shrivel up.”

“You wound me.” Kate was definitely the best dinner-date he’d ever had, beating all the old girlfriends and professionally-amicable escorting details by miles. She was the sort of person that didn’t need someone’s arm linked with hers, nor was she liable to become giggly and drunk, as had always been a crapshoot no matter who he attended functions with. Malcolm knew the only reason he was there was because it looked better having a seemingly-stable couple ask for monetary funding than a single person and he did not mind in the slightest. It was merely how the world worked, as twisted as that was, and if it’d help keep UNIT from groveling for a hand-out from the Queen, then it was more than worth it.

Besides, he liked being reminded that he could wear the ever-living fuck out of a tuxedo.

“We should go for the minister over by the punch bowl—favorite uncle was a botanist and always has had a soft spot for big words because of it,” he muttered. Malcolm leaned down towards her ear and tried not to take advantage of the fact he could easily appreciate Kate’s attire, specifically chosen to help them blend in. “We could say ‘supercalifuckilisticexpialidocious’ and boom—we can upgrade the molemen’s computers, paint the men’s loo, and have enough left over to let Osgood play around in her sandbox.”

She let out a false laugh and looked up at him, tone all business. “…and why is painting the men’s restroom that high a priority?”

“You ever been in there? Glenn and other Glenn-like entities bomb it with such regularity and potency that the paint’s peeling and I swear it’s discolored around the stalls.”

“That is more description I’ve needed concerning a toilet than I’ve ever needed in my life,” she deadpanned. Kate put her glass down on the tray of a passing waiter and scanned the room. Everything seemed normal, average for one of these events of showy donations and high-society hobnobbing, until something caught her eye. She gently placed both hands on Malcolm’s arm and made direct eye contact. “Let’s go have a dance.” It took a moment to process, but he nodded in agreement.
“Whatever the lady wants.” He led her out to the dance floor, where there were other couples dancing slowly to the partial orchestra that seemed to play merely slight variations of the same song. Chortling, he put one hand on her waist and the other on her shoulder as he stayed close enough to catch a hefty whiff of her perfume. “If only the lads at D Cat can see me now.”

“Yes, good for you, but can you see that man chatting with Lady Hamstead?”

They turned enough for him to catch what she was referring to. “The one that screams Poxbridge twat?”

“No, the other one.” She pressed against him so she could lower her voice further. “The one with green skin.”

Cocking an eyebrow, Malcolm waited until the group was in sight again before casually glancing over. There was Lady Hamstead, the Twat, and…

“If that’s normal then I’m a fucking nun,” he marveled. “How does no one notice that?!”

“You can see it because I can—my perfume contains anti-hallucinogens and shimmer-decoding nanobots. I’ve only seen a shade like that on a Trion.”

“A what?”

“A Trion: humanoids from outerspace, but they tend to come in a wider variety of colors,” she explained. Now Malcolm understood why they were attending this charity event in particular. “Most Trions on Earth are either registered with UNIT or are closely monitored; some are benign and have gone native, but overall they’re a dangerous lot to have around. The only ones in that particular green that I can think of off the top of my head live in Hong Kong and have strong enough roots to where I’d know if they left.”

“A regular Jamesina Bond, you are,” Malcolm smirked. “Does that make me your Bond Boy and Scarfy our Q?”

“Much more of that and you’re on permanent Raven Room duty,” Kate warned. The song switched up and she stepped away, keeping a hold on him as they pretended to meander towards the punch that both of them secretly hoped was spiked. It was, pleasantly enough, and the new position in the room gave them a better view of their target.

“The green keeps on going in and out, like a pixelated distortion,” he mentioned.

“That’s the perfume filtering in with normal air—just make sure you remember what he looks like,” she assured. Going into her clutch, Kate palmed something small as she rummaged around. “I’m going to head to the powder room; entertain yourself, will you?”

“Sure thing, sweetheart,” he replied. Malcolm watched as his boss (’your boss, Tucker’) crossed the room, walking as though she wore such high heels and elegant dresses every day, and shoved his hands in his trouser pockets. He tried not to bug his eyes in surprise as he found something in the one that he hadn’t remembered putting in there—the thing from Kate’s clutch. It felt metallic and cold, with buttons his fingers only just brushed against.

Taking another serving of punch, Malcolm began to mingle, using his decades-honed ability to move unnoticed throughout the crowd. He watched as the alien excused himself and made his way towards the hall that contained the coat-check and restrooms. Apologizing to a waiter as he left his punch with him, he went and followed the now-ordinary seeming man all the way to the loo. While the alien went and used one of the urinals, Malcolm took a stall. Looking at the device that had been
deposited in his pocket, he found it was exactly what he had expected: a tranquilizer pen.

After waiting until the alien began washing his hands, Malcolm used his foot to hit the flush on the toilet and casually strolled out into the main of the restroom. He went to the sink next to the Trion and began to run the water. The alien went over to the hand-dryer and activated it, the sound of rushing air overtaking everything as it echoed off the tiled walls. It was only in his peripherals, but Malcolm watched in the mirror as the man took something from his jacket pocket and opened it under the cover of noise—too sci-fi to be a gun but too gun-shaped to be anything else.

Everything after that seemed to happen in a flash. Malcolm ducked as the alien spun around and fired the weapon; energy blaster, muffled, perfect for assassinations. The human hid inside a stall, prepping his own weapon as his assailant came for him. Without giving him time to fire, Malcolm struck, stabbing the Trion in the neck and injecting the sedative. The reaction was instant, with the alien crumpling into his arms. Hearing the door to the restroom open, Malcolm panicked and dragged the failed assassin into the stall with him, closing the door and setting the dead weight on the toilet.

“Malcolm,” Kate scolded, the sound of her voice making the man in question cringe. “Now you’re one of the last men I think I’d find in a stall with another man.”

He opened the door and casually leaned against the stall wall, grinning cheekily. “Space-shags don’t count… didn’t anyone ever tell you that?”

Apparently, no one had ever told her that.

The remainder of the charity function had gone well enough. Kate and Malcolm had been able to keep the restroom contained with a well-place out-of-order sign until the hall was cleared and a small dispatch team from Mainframe UK was able to come and collect the rogue Trion. It was well past when either of them normally went to bed when they piled into the car ready to take them home.

“Why did I think it was a good idea to commute so far?” Kate moaned. She leaned back into the seat and tried to relax. “I won’t be in bed for another hour.”

“If this were yesterday, I’d invite you over to stay the night,” Malcolm smirked, just as exhausted. She raised an eyebrow at him curiously.

“Why yesterday?”

“…Lex,” he explained. “She now has the spare bed… unless you were thinking something else.” He grinned at her, wiggling his eyebrows for effect. That only made her more exasperated as she exhaled heavily and shook her head.

“No, I’m just… tired.” She thought for a moment and let out a tiny noise of resignation. “You have a couch, yeah?”

“I’ll take it; you can have the bed,” he said.

“You sure?”

“I’ve napped on the couch enough to know it’s good enough.”

“Alright then… thanks.”

Kate gave the driver new directions and they stopped by Mainframe UK for a quick moment for her to snatch the emergency set of clothes from her office. That didn’t take long and before the tired
coworkers realized it, they were being dropped off in front of Malcolm’s flat block.

“Milady,” he said, offering her a hand out of the car. She took it and they walked in together, failing at their attempt to not lean on one another for support while they rode the lift up. The flat block was deathly quiet as they went down the corridor to his door. He fumbled with the keys, bleary-eyed to the point where he could barely see straight.

Immediately upon entering the flat, Malcolm and Kate encountered a big problem. Lex was curled up on the couch having fallen asleep watching movies. Malcolm draped a blanket over his niece and turned off the television, returning to his boss as she took off her shoes by the door.

“I’ll take the armchair,” he explained quietly. “You just get to bed.”

“Fuck it Malcolm, we’re both adults and I already feel bad for imposing,” Kate said. “Sleep on the sheets if you want, but we’re sharing.”

Too tired to come up with a snarky retort, Malcolm shrugged and showed her to his room. He loaned her a pair of pajama bottoms and a t-shirt to wear, and by the time he was done changing in the main bathroom, she was already out of the ensuite and comfortably sleeping in his bed.

“Not the way you would’ve liked, but beggars can’t be choosers,” he muttered to himself. He walked around to the other side of the bed and slid under the covers, taking delight in the extra weight on the mattress as he quickly drifted off into sleep.

A few hours later, still in the dead of night, Malcolm woke to use the loo, as was customary for his bladder at the appointed time. He checked the couch to see Lex still there, curled up and snug, and returned to his room. When he got back in bed, the shifting of the mattress made Kate stir enough to roll over and drape her arm over him. She murmured something in her sleep too incoherent for him to understand and held his chest tight. He smiled privately as he closed his eyes and enjoyed the moment. When he woke up again she was gone, his borrowed pajamas neatly folded on a chair and not much else left to show that Kate had spent the night other than a couple blonde hairs in his comb and a note thanking him on his bathroom sink.

He went and woke up Lex from her spot on the couch and began shuffling around in the kitchen to put together a meager breakfast. Malcolm wasn’t going to tell her, else risk the teasing that would incur if nothing ever came of it. Everything was fine, he supposed, because even if nothing had changed, it all had anyhow.
Chapter 6

It had been a week since the Trion Incident and things seemed to be going fairly normally at Mainframe UK. People still showed up to work, did their jobs, sometimes meddled with others’ jobs, and nothing unusual for UNIT was going on. Everything was fairly normal, and it made Malcolm a bit on-edge. Kate had appeared to be distancing herself from him, going back to only using his surname despite the fact they had played Bond together all the way down to sharing a bed. Okay, so the bed-sharing involved a lot less shagging than what Roger Moore got up to on film, but the two of them had still slept on the same mattress using the same bedding at the same time, which he’d think that there would be some sort of verbal acknowledgement. Things were instead the same as ever, only serving to dishearten the spin master, something that he attempted to shield from his personal assistant and his niece alike.

Walking into work one day with a takeaway coffee in his hand, Malcolm scowled his way through security and glowered towards his office. The molemen seemed like they were doing an acceptable job at a quick glance so he didn’t bother to check in with anyone else. He walked right past Aparajita and sat down at his desk, immediately getting to work.

“Uh, Malcolm?” Aparajita wondered, poking her head in the room. Her dark brows were furrowed in concern. “I’ve got that write-up you wanted Husak to compose.”

“Sounds good,” he replied dully. She frowned at that, not liking his tone.

“Shaw shat on the rug this morning.”

“Good for him.”

Aparajita rolled her eyes and plucked the manila folder containing Husak’s write-up, carrying it over to Malcolm’s desk. She plopped it right on his keyboard and left before he could protest, returning to her alcove of the office. Just before she sat down, however, the lift doors opened and Kate’s son Gordon popped out looking very nervous.

“Uh, hi,” he mumbled anxiously. He stepped forward and held out his hand. “I’m Corporal Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart, and I’m starting tomorrow as an assistant to the Head of Mainframe Security.”

Aparajita shook his hand and chuckled in amusement.

“Don’t play dumb with me, kid; I know you’re Director Stewart’s son,” she replied. They’d met over the phone, but this was the first time they’d seen one another in-person. “You just want to be treated like everyone else, right?”

“Yeah,” he admitted. He leaned over and peered inside the main office, staring at Malcolm tapping away on his computer. “Is Mister Tucker available, or is he busy? I wanted to meet him, since we’ll be working together at times.”

“He shouldn’t be busy enough to meet you.” She turned her head so that she could see her boss and whistled sharply. “Hey, Malcolm, we’ve got a newbie running around introducing himself; come on over and play nice.”

“I’m busy,” he grumbled.

“How about if you get your pasty arse over here or I’m bringing him in there.”

“You don’t know how pasty my arse is.”
“Oops, my mistake—that was your face,” she deadpanned. Malcolm stood and stomped over towards his assistant and the new guy, sticking out his hand.

“Tucker, Public Relations.”

“I’m Gordon, Director Stewart’s son. I just transferred over from the RAF this week to work security detail—better than being a mall cop.” He laughed nervously, attempting to gauge the grey, sour-looking man before him. “Mum… um… talks about you…”

“Does she now?” he wondered, attempting to hide his interest.

“Yeah; I was at home on leave during the whole Rutan incident you handled while she was down with that bug and she spoke favorably of you,” the younger man said. “I still can’t believe she and an Osgood had to break you out of prison.”

“That’s only ‘cause your mam knows talent when she sees it,” he preened. Malcolm frowned as Aparajita let out a snorting giggle, returning to her desk. “Anyhow, I didn’t think Kate was into nepotism, unless this is something else…”

“Consider UNIT something along the lines of the family business,” Gordon admitted. “I was able to transfer in on my own, and I’m going to keep this job on my own. Mum’s going to have nothing to do with it, hence Security.”

Looking at the young man before him, Malcolm considered him. He seemed too baby-faced and fresh to be much older than his niece, if he was that old at all, and wondered how he would keep a job in security of all things. “What were you in the RAF? Desk clerk? Recruiting officer?”

“Corporal—kept my rank on the transfer, sir.”

“Save the sirs for the bleeding exercises; I’m Malcolm.” He turned around and began the walk back to his desk.

“Thanks for letting Mum stay over last week,” Gordon said. His words made Malcolm freeze in the middle of the room, looking back at him. “I get sort of worried when she’s out late on UNIT work and knowing she had your guest room the other day was a relief.”

“Yeah… no problem,” Malcolm said quickly, attempting to brush it off. Kate had lied to her kid; worse yet, she had a kid that was old enough to be their coworker, which could definitely complicate things. “It was getting too late and I’ve done the commute shit before, so I know what it’s like to get home only to turn around to go back. Fucking sucks.”

“Still really nice of you; thanks Malcolm,” he repeated. Gordon then went back towards the lift, waving cordially at Aparajita. “Ms. Khan.”

“RAF Reject,” she replied with a smirk. She finished what she was typing and rolled her chair so that she could see Malcolm, a grin plastered on her face. “You had just moved in Lex—Director Stewart couldn’t have had your guest room.”

“I slept on the couch,” he stated.

“I don’t believe you.” She stared at him, trying to figure him out. “What did your niece say to you bringing your boss home the first night she was there, the two of you dressed in a tux and a gown?”

“Nothing—she didn’t even know Director Stewart was there.”
“Gotcha,” Aparajita said, clapping her hands together and pointing at Malcolm. “Either you two got drunk and slept together, or there’s something else that happened you don’t want to admit.”

“I had a drink that night to be polite and blend in, which is more than I should have had, and she didn’t have much either,” he scowled. “Why are you being so fucking nosy?”

“…because it’s my business to know if my direct boss is sleeping with, and-or wants to sleep with, his direct boss,” she replied. “Didn’t your old PA get to know all your dirty little secrets?”

“My old PA actually predicted and blocked many dirty little secrets from even happening,” he said. “Not knocking any of your ability, since having you helping me is like a fucking dream, but she was Super Assistant, partly because we were a team for so long.”

“You have to be in order to manage a guy like you,” she scoffed through a laugh. “So tell me: do you want to shag Director Stewart, or do you want to shag Director Stewart? Alternative answer is: you want to shag Gordon’s mum, who is, funnily enough, Director Stewart.”

“Yeah, I want to shag her, though I thought her kids were too young to work here,” he admitted.

“What, hoping some primary schooler would want to call you Dad?”

“Nah; that ship has long-sailed and got caught up and sunk in some Bermuda Triangle shit. I’m a better long-distance uncle than a father and always have been.”

“Oh, you don’t know that,” she chuckled.

“No Rajit, I think I do,” he said. “Hey, this doesn’t leave the office, yeah? This stays between the two of us—none of this gets out unless it’s abso-fucking-lutely necessary.”

“Don’t worry; I’ve got your back,” she smirked. Rolling out of sight, she went behind her desk again and returned to her work. “Just remember who you’re making eyes at; Director Stewart isn’t the kind of woman to simply take unwanted advances demurely.”

“It’s something I’ve considered,” he replied. Malcolm smiled privately as he opened up the folder and looked over Husak’s write-up. Had it not been for the week prior, he wouldn’t even be considering it. Now…? He was at least hopeful.

Gathering up his courage, Malcolm paced around his office in an attempt to calm himself down. There hadn’t been much for him to focus on that day, meaning that he had way too much time to think and overthink the woman whose office was above his—the woman he admittedly wanted to get to know better on a personal level. He’d gone into similar relationships before, where he and a woman were contractually obligated to occupy similar buildings for at least eight hours a day, but many of them had ended badly and he wanted to make sure he was sure he wanted this.

Now that he thought about it, some of them ended more than badly, down to the point that he could say some of them had been right fucked. One had even gone as far as her moving into his house with him, despite their lack of true compatibility. Later on, after a crazy year of being cheated on and even divorce papers because yes, he had been that brain-dead-stupid, he had glanced around his home and knew the only thing he had wanted for a long time afterward would be a companion. It had been difficult to take the ring off—sentimental bullshit that actually made things a mite easier on the hobnobbing front—but once he did a weight lifted from his chest and shoulders. He had always been of the mindset that personal relationships were never supposed to be a burden, never a stone to drag around every fucking minute of every sodding day. Friendships, dating, even marriage if things went that far, was all supposed to be a support beam for a person, so he didn’t want to overcomplicate
what he already had. Malcolm had his freedom, his job, his flat, his family… did he really want more?

Yes. Yes he did. Malcolm thought about Kate and her intense composure and power when it came to things so fucking ridiculous it made cheap sci-fi seem same. It sent something through him, and he wanted to feel more of it. The way it felt having her in the same bed as him the week before had been nice… better than nice, truth be told. It was so rare for him to find someone who was intelligent, competent, dangerous, and unattached, that the opportunity was one he couldn’t pass. Okay, so she had a kid that now worked in Security, but that office was on the other side of the compound. She didn’t wear a ring and had talked about custody procedures—Kate was as single of a woman as they came. That green whelp from earlier didn’t need a da, since he probably was still in contact with his real one, so it was safe.

If she spurned him, so be it. At least he’d be able to say he tried.

“Hey, Rajit, I need to talk with Director Stewart for a tic; I’ll be there in case of an emergency,” he said, walking by his PA.

“What level of emergency are we talking here?” she wondered.

“Invasion-levels—fuckall to everything else,” he replied, entering the lift and hitting the button. She affirmed as the doors closed and a moment later Malcolm found himself staring at Kate’s PA. “Director in?”

“She is,” the young woman answered. “Is she expecting you?”

“Nah; just thought I’d pop in for a quick face-to-face chat,” he said. Malcolm put his hands in his trouser pockets and rocked on the balls of his feet, trying to keep his cool. There was no use in cussing out this one, since she was nearly on the same level as Aparajita and Sam as far as competence as far as competence was concerned. “She busy?”

“Not sure… let me double-check,” she said. The assistant stood and vanished behind the door leading into Kate’s office, staying there momentarily before popping back out again. “She can spare a minute.”

“Thanks Morton.” He slipped in through the open door, shutting it quietly behind her. Malcolm could see Kate sitting at her desk, glancing over a dossier as she slowly munched on a sandwich.

“You wanted to talk about something?” she asked, flipping over a page. He found a chair and placed it next to her desk, almost so that it was right next to hers, and sat down.

“If it’s alright, I want to talk to you about last week—”

“There’s nothing to talk about.” She put down her sandwich and locked her gaze with his. “We were doing what we had to do.”

“…except you didn’t have to accept my invitation and we both fucking know it,” he mentioned. “Kate, love, do you want to try something or am I grasping at straws here?”

She stayed silent for a while, turning her eyes back to the papers in front of her. “I don’t think you are, but I don’t know what precisely you’re grasping at. We aren’t kids anymore and there’s shit to get done.”

“…but you’ve felt it too, yeah? I mean, I knew I liked you and that we’d get along from the moment you broke me out, but there’s more than that… fucking hell there’s more than that on my end, and I
wanted to check to make sure it wasn’t just me.”

“We can’t, Malcolm,” Kate said. “Even if we both want it, there’s too much to do.”

“There are worse things than to work alongside the one you’re shagging,” he reasoned. The sound of her saying his given name while at the office was exhilarating… moreso than he’d like to admit. “Worst is we’d get interrupted by some piece of shit alien invasion, which is frankly what would happen even if we were with other people, and we’d discuss policies as our pillow talk.”

“Is that really what you want?” she questioned. “This isn’t something to take lightly.”

“You read my dossier—you know about how short my marriage was, but I’ve read it too and it says fuck-all about why it was as abrupt as it was,” he said, voice low. Malcolm held out his hand, glad that it was both behind the desk and too far from the window for anyone in the atrium to see. “If I took something like this lightly, then I’d be a very different person than I am now. I don’t fuck around… not on the things that really matter.”

Kate stared at his hand before taking it. “I’m not sure,” she muttered. “I can see myself with you, but… I’m not sure if it’s appropriate.”

“Fuck appropriateness, love,” he scoffed lightly, running his thumb over hers. “I think we’re adult enough to know that we can disagree and call one another out here and still go to bed together on our own time. It’s called our jobs.”

“Can you give me some time?” she asked. “It’d be nice to be with someone again, but…”

“No, take your time,” he offered. He lifted up her hand and kissed her fingers, hoping to spark a reaction whether it be good or bad. All he got was a slow blink before she carefully took her hand back. He was about to reach out to touch her hair when his mobile rang, shattering the moment into tiny shards all over the floor. Swiping the call through, he scowled as he answered. “The fuck, Rajit? This better be good considering I’m literally a floor above you.”

“You still with Director Stewart?” she asked. Her voice was panicky, making his frown go from irritated to worried.

“Yeah; what’s the matter?”

“Put me on speaker, please,” she requested. He did, placing the mobile down on the desk.

“Okay, you’re on.”

“We just got word in that there’s a junior minister that’s threatening to completely defund UNIT from both the United Kingdom and United Nations’ pocketbooks, as well as run us into the ground for being a bunch of tin foil-hatted nutbags.”

“…to be fair, that is what we are,” Kate said. “What makes this threat any more credible than others?”

“This man’s grandfather was in the British Army during the Operation Golden Age Incident,” Aparajita explained. “He has enough insider knowledge to take down everyone.”

Kate’s face when pale at that news. She leaned back in her chair and stared into nothingness, focusing on her breathing.

“Kate? What’s that mean?” Malcolm asked, not liking her reaction. “Rajit, what’s this all about?”
“There was a big uproar in the mid-Seventies that caused the evacuation of all Central London; do you remember?”

“Kiddo, I was too worried about acne, passing my fucking exams, and me Mam finding the skin mag collection in the wardrobe in the mid-Seventies to concern myself with the shit going on down here,” he said. “Save the details and give me the gist.”

“General Finch told his grandson incriminating stories that pegs a Shoreditch politician, Director Stewart’s father, the Doctor, one of the premier investigative journalists of the past forty years, and Captain Benton for direct roles in an event that brought dinosaurs to London… not to mention all of the other things we’ve had to do in the past.”

“. . .and something tells me I don’t want to hear any of it,” he frowned, scratching his chin. “Finch, you said? Victor Finch?”

“That’s the one,” she said. “His grandfather was part of the scandal, but the story he just forwarded to me completely clears him of any blame whatsoever. The man is serious.”

“Then we have to make sure we take him down before he can act,” Kate decided resolutely. “Malcolm, you know this Finch?”

“Had a couple run-ins with him over the years; cocky, but an effective lawmaker.”

“Then we need to go now,” she replied. “Morton? Cancel the four o’clock, please; Tucker and I have got to make sure we keep the shop in business.”

“Yes, ma’am,” her PA answered from her desk. She came in and brought Kate some folders, which she immediately began to go through.

Malcolm picked up his mobile as he stood, turning off the speaker and putting the device to his ear. “Okay, Rajit, we’re off. Keep me informed of what’s going on. Text me anything that might help.”

“Okay, I’ll try,” she replied. There was an awkward silence before she continued. “Daadaajee was mixed up in that mess, since UNIT was how my mum’s family came to the UK. He’s old-guard, Malcolm; any whiff of his name attached to a scandal and his heart won’t take it.”

“Don’t worry—none of us are getting fucked for this. That’s your granddad, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“The old coot won’t go down because of this, I can guarantee it. Talk to you later.” Malcolm hung up the mobile and stuffed it in his pocket as he followed Kate to the lift. He stayed quiet as they power-walked through the compound and entered the chauffeured car. Once it was certain that the driver couldn’t hear them, he cussed gruffly.

“Cursing now won’t solve anything, Tucker,” Kate stated. Fuck, she was back to his surname.

“Aparajita’s worried about her granddad,” he said. “In fact, I’m beginning to think that this place is a whole hell of a lot more a family business than is let on.”

“. . .what?” she wondered.

“I met Gordon today—he introduced himself since he’s going to work down in Security. Your son, you, and your da worked at Mainframe UK; Aparajita and her granddad; I’ve heard a Scarfy mention her Uncle William. . . . what have you declined to tell me?”
“Nothing major,” she replied coldly. “Mainframe UK has employed multiple generations of families because UNIT recruits where there is the best potential. Sometimes it’s because someone is open-minded to the universe, or because they have encountered some of the species we deal with, but there are times when an individual’s family background is enough to help them in. Trust me, Tucker: I’d much rather have Gordon become a maths teacher in the countryside than work with us, but it’s what he chose.”

“Then who are those other people Rajit was mentioning?” he asked. “A politician? A journalist? Shit… I don’t even know who your da is, so part of me is just lucky I know Benton.” He thought back to the month before when he was introduced to a wrinkly old man who seemed like there was more to him behind his white hair and crisp military kit.

“One of the councilmen in Shoreditch, Yates, is an old UNIT member from back when my father and Captain Benton were still serving,” she explained. “The journalist is Sarah Jane Smith, who was just starting out when she was roped into the mess. She’s been tied with the Doctor and UNIT ever since.”

“Sarah Jane Smith? Marcia loathes her; same age. I think they got into a spat once.”

“Knowing Miss Smith, it wouldn’t surprise me. My father, well… remind me another time.” The car stopped in front of Number 10 and the two passengers got out.

“Mick, hey, good to see you!” Malcolm immediately grinned, walking up to the door guard. They shook hands like old friends. “Been a while; how’s Wee Lily? Started Grade One by now, yeah?”

“Yeah, can barely keep track of her,” the guard beamed. “You have an appointment?”

“Yes and no; I’m with the UN now and my boss and I need to speak with MP Finch.”

“Oh, that mess about funding? Heard about that earlier when some aides were going by.” Mick hit a button on the side of his radio and the door opened from the inside. “Give ‘em Hell.”

“You know it.” Malcolm escorted Kate inside and took a deep breath. This was it; he was in his natural habitat after being told he’d never need set foot in the building again. The cunts were wrong.

“The two of you sure were chummy,” his coworker said as they navigated the building. Every now and then someone would stop and stare at them, whispering about their worst nightmare having risen from the grave.

“I’m not a fan of treating guys like Mick poorly—they’re the ones who help run the place,” he replied. “When you think about it, it’s better to be nice than pretend they’re not there, let alone be rude, because that’s the kind of shit that made the aristocracy crumble upon themselves, when it wasn’t due to fucking inbreeding and being complete twats.”

“Somehow your enthusiasm doesn’t surprise me,” she deadpanned. They reached Finch’s office and found it unguarded by any sort of secretary or personal assistant of any kind. This gave Malcolm the freedom to barge on into the office, slamming the door open and making Finch jump. He was a small-ish, almost scraggly sort of man with a permanent frown on his face.

“I’ll have to call you back; riffraff found the office,” he said into the desk phone before hanging it up. He then glared at his visitors, clearly perturbed at their presence. “Well now, I never thought I’d see the likes of you in here again, Tucker. Even with good behavior I imagine the next time you’d breathe free air would be in 2038.”

“Save the formalities, Finch. I’m here under the command of the United Nations Intelligence
Taskforce,” Malcolm snapped. “You have been unfairly pressuring us into bending over and asking for more; now why is that? What sort of beef do you have that warrants complete defunding and mockery?”

“...because you are the United Nations, not the United Kingdom,” the junior minister replied dryly. “You and your lot have been eating up all of Her Majesty’s precious funds for too long with nothing to show for it. We could be using that money to keep Britain safe, instead of pouring it into whatever hijinks you like to pull. Then there’s the United Nations front, which I’m sure is absolutely ecstatic that their precious budget is being used for gallivanting about, poking at meteors and downed weather balloons or whatever it was you deployed troops to Caistor for.”

“We’re keeping the entire fucking world safe, and you’d know that if you looked at the reports we’ve given in compliance of transparency laws,” Malcolm snarled. Kate put a hand on his upper arm and gently pulled him away from the desk.

“Save it for someone who’s worth it,” she said. He immediately backed down, his lip still curled into a sneer. The mobile in his pocket buzzed—Aparajita, with good news.

“I didn’t think you took orders anymore, now that you bit Murray on the tit like the rabid dog you are, or were you neutered while penned up in D Cat,” Finch snickered. Kate set her glare and took a step forward, staring the junior minister down.

“If I were you, I’d watch my tongue,” she warned him. “I do have express permission from both the Queen and the UN Secretary-General to do whatever I see fit to keep this planet from being destroyed at any moment. If you don’t like it, you can either shut up, or you can land on my list of terrestrial belligerents.”

“Instead of what? Being on the list of extraterrestrial belligerents?” Finch stopped at saw that neither of his guests’ faces had changed in severity, causing him to laugh nervously. “Wait a second… you can’t seriously say that you’re preventing an invasion of space-aliens?! Tucker, what sort of drugs did they pump into you?”

“The truth,” he replied quietly, sliding the mobile back in his pocket. “Now I understand the reason of why I needed to make up stories at certain times while the PM’s Director of Communications—if the public knew the truth it would be mass fucking hysteria, and every cunt that can weasel alien tech into their hands would be the next supervillain splashed across the tabloids because they’re trying to do good and cocked it all up.”

“God, you are serious…” Finch marveled. He pushed his chair back and tensed, as if he needed to dash out of the room at a second’s notice. “I wonder how it will go over when I tell everyone else that the PM’s pet project is actually a bunch of loonies, not just people we don’t like.”

“Correction: the PM is our pet project. We were first, after all,” Kate replied coldly. The fax machine on a table began spitting out paper, a page of which she took and placed it on the desk. “The overall goal of UNIT is to keep Earth safe, as well as competitive. Few interstellar communities are able to be completely transparent with their citizens and not risk either havoc or looking like asylum escapees, and unfortunately we’re not one of them. By the end of the day you are going to retract your statement about cracking down on our spending habits and never mention a word of this ever again.”

“What makes you think that?” Finch asked. He glanced quickly at the paper, then back up at Kate. “Is that the statement?”

“Your formal redaction as well as an apologetic resignation to make amends for causing such a
benign and worthy group such hassle,” she explained. Finch’s eyes went wide and he stood up defensively.

“You can’t do that!”

“I already have,” Kate said.

“Just go down graciously,” Malcolm advised. “I’ve helped along a number of resignations, and the best thing to do is just go by the script.”

“You can’t bully me—you can’t touch me!”

“Oh, I’m worse than a bully … far worse than I’ve ever been in my life,” Malcolm warned. “I’m her guard dog, and I’m glad for it. Just take the little speech I wrote for you and go out to meet the press. They should be here right about now.”

Finch blinked, unsure of what to do, before storming over to his window and looking down onto the street. Sure enough, there were press hounds standing there, waiting for someone to come out the door, and chances are it was him they were waiting for.

“I’m not going to go down quietly,” he hissed. “Once I get all the dirt on you two, it’s going to be everywhere that you’re just a bunch of X-Files nutbags. We already have CCTV of this meeting.”

“Those cameras haven’t worked since the Thatcher administration; most of the replacements are just props to cut costs,” Malcolm scoffed. He pointed at the camera in the corner of the office with a shit-eating grin. “Ever take a good look? Not even plugged in.”

Finch narrowed his eyes as he peered at the device. To his horror, the little light in the corner of the box wasn’t lit and there was no cord connecting it to anything. His nostrils flared in anger as he snatched the paper from the desk and stormed out the room, slamming the door behind him.

“Looks like that’s that,” Malcolm chuckled. He looked at Kate, who was still in bollocking mode, and frowned. “You alright?”

“I just can’t stand men like him,” she replied. “They’re only concerned with who has the bigger stick and because they’re in government they can do whatever they want. Thinking like that is never going to get anyone anywhere.”

“We don’t have to worry about him again, so don’t worry,” he said. “We’ll make it work; the underlings are easy to mop up and issue gag orders against.” Malcolm gently placed a hand on Kate’s back, careful not to startle her. “We’re fine, love. Your first resignation is difficult, but it gets easier after that.”

“It’s not about forcing him to resign… it’s something more than that, but I can’t put my finger on it.”

“We’ve got the advantage, as we’ve got the keys to the future in our hands—he only thinks he does.” He waited until she looked at him before he leaned down slightly. She didn’t back away, or scold him, or anything of the like. Instead, she leaned into him, letting him support her as their faces drew closer.

“Ms. Stewart? Mister Tucker? I have instructions to lead you out, now that your meeting has concluded,” an intern said as she opened the door. She found the two standing close together, looking over some papers from the fax machine that Kate still held in her hand.

“Ah, thank you,” she said with a polite smile. Go with the flow—it was better to be escorted out
instead of thrown out, since chances are she could always come back without a problem due to the former.

Kate and Malcolm followed the intern out, not giving her any opportunity to guess what she had just prevented with her impeccable timing. With another nod to Mick, they got back in their car, heading straight back to Mainframe UK.

“I still can barely believe you wrote that entire letter out on your phone while we were there,” she exhaled. “How the fuck did you do that?”

“A combination of doing it before and having a decent chunk already typed out and saved in a file,” he admitted. “I’m just glad Aparajita was able to coordinate that while she was so worried. That Operation Golden Age business would have created more than just tabloid headlines, wouldn’t it?”

“It very well could have destroyed us,” she said. Kate leaned over and rested her head on his shoulder, holding onto his hand. “Everything Dad and I worked for could have been gone in an instant.”

“Who was your da? You never did tell me,” Malcolm murmured, squeezing her hand.

“Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart; I dropped the first part so that I’d work my way up the ranks by myself.”

“He was your father…?” he marveled. He glanced over at Kate, completely flabbergasted. “The way people talk about him, it’s like he’s the patron-fucking-saint of Mainframe UK. I’d think that you’d be a bit more open about the relation now that you’re the one in-charge…”

“No,” she replied. “There’s no point in tossing about his name while I can get things done with my own abilities. Dad wanted it that way, so that’s how it’s going to be.”

“Well, I didn’t have the honor of meeting him in real life, but at least I can glean from the stories around the watercooler that he was a good man,” he said. “You’re lucky—you knew your da your whole life growing up; I still have no clue who mine is and probably never will. Mam’s just that kind of woman.” The vehicle then pulled into the underground car park and stopped, idling so that the Director and PR Head could get out. “Hey, erm, are you doing anything after work Friday?”

She picked her head up off his shoulder and slid towards the door. “Picking up my daughter from the station—she’s away at school, but comes home on weekends she’s not with her father.”

“Are you sure? Maybe I can…”

“Another time, Malcolm,” she said. Kate gently gave him a pat on the knee, getting out before he had a chance to react. He reached out to touch her shoulder, just barely missing as she left. Getting out of the car himself, he watched as she got in the lift that brought her back into the fray of work. He slowly strolled over to the lift, making sure he put enough time between him and Kate. At least there was progress made, he thought as he finally pressed the button to go down. Maybe a cuppa with Glenn would be alright. Yeah… it probably would.
It was Sunday. Ah, Sundays: usually held in high regard thanks to how many office-twats were able to use it to have a lie-in and sleep off whatever it was they did on Saturday night to make them forget they were, well, office-twats. Even Malcolm Tucker, who was considered at the very least an office-cunt, was attempting to use the morning for that very purpose, except his mobile had decided otherwise.

As the device began screeching the Commodores in tinny, shitastic tones, Malcolm rolled over in his bed and attempted to reach for it. He’d toss it across the room had it not been for who the ringtone belonged to, and after some fumbling he was finally able to pick it up and put it to his ear.

“This better be good, love,” he mumbled sleepily. “I was about to get laid by Jane Leeves and I don’t want to miss it.”

“Let’s talk about your wet dreams later—it’s time to get to work,” Kate replied. “I’m headed to the Mainframe right now and I think you better be there yourself.”

Malcolm turned his head towards his alarm clock: 04:18. “Kate, it’s ball-fuck early. Who’s the cunt that decided to wake us up this fucking early in the morning?”

“His name is the Master and it doesn’t look like the Doctor’s anywhere in sight,” she said. “Luckily for us, it only seems like one of his previous incarnations, one we’ve fought numerous times and know his methods. If it was a new face, you would have been called almost two hours ago.”

“Whoever this Master is, he’s gonna be fucking dead when I get done with him,” he growled, throwing his sheets back. He’d been briefed on the Master before, in full detail, and between the information on him and the Doctor combined, Malcolm had decided he fucking hated Time Lords. Such illustrious dick-heads—it made him want to vomit.

Skipping the shower part of his normal routine, Malcolm dug around half-blind for his clothes. Trousers… no, trousers without the new brown sauce stain the previous night’s steak happily provided him, a shirt that smelled acceptable, and a fleece jumper. Yes, good, he could deal with that at the early hour. He left the flat no more than ten minutes after he hung up the phone with Kate and half an hour after that he was walking into Mainframe UK, poster-boy for all beings sleep-deprived, over-worked, and caffeine-charged.

“Scarfy, status report,” he muttered through his takeaway coffee as he approached an Osgood. Though she was not the one with the scarf this time (that Scarfy was nowhere in sight), she handed him her clipboard and shrugged almost nonchalantly as the molemen were manning their stations.

“Classic Master take-over-the-world gambit, except this one involves some lupine extraterrestrials and test cricket,” she explained. Malcolm blinked heavily at her, unsure he heard correctly. “Yeah, I know—apparently he thinks it’s 1971 out there, so he’s roaming around in a Nehru coat and flared trousers.”

“So this is what Saint Alistair and the lot dealt with back then? Cocksuckers got all the fun, didn’t they?”

“I think you’d be hard pressed to find one of us other than Yates to have sucked a cock, sir,” came a chuckle. Malcolm glanced over his shoulder and saw Captain Benton, one of the last remnants of the days when UNIT was little more than a laughingstock and not quietly shushed aside as “a necessary
internationally-and-domestically-funded entity”. The old soldier’s hair was nearing snow-white and looked thinner than the PR man the way his uniform hung on him.

“I told you, Old Man, don’t call me ‘sir’—I’m an untitled civilian—now what are you doing here? Isn’t it past your bedtime? The nurses know you cracked your way out of the care home?”

“I was on an evening shift, but things got out-of-hand to the point where I had to call Director Stewart in,” Benton said with a grin. “I actually should have left four hours ago.”

“Then fuck the fuck off and get some rest, get felt-up by an orderly, something that involves not being here.”

“Now where’s the fun in that?” Benton replied. It was then that Kate strutted into the atrium, a frown on her face as she stormed about, with Jac and the missing Scarfy trailing her.

“Benton! Why are you still on the premises?” she shouted from across the way. “Go home! You’ve done enough!”

“Not yet, Tiger,” the old man smirked. “I’m sticking around until I can see that joker’s face again. Call it ‘being sentimental’.”

“I call it ‘lunacy’,” Malcolm snarked. By then the others had reached them and he was being passed a series of folders.

“Here’s the information you’ll need for your press releases,” Jac said as she went through her paperwork. She handed Malcolm the last of his things and gave him a pat on the shoulder. “We’re off to bag the nutter now.”

“Give ’im a fucking smack for wakin’ me up this early,” he replied. “A morning, day, and afternoon shift is no longer my idea of a normal stint at the office.”

“It’s not ideal for any of us, but here we are,” Kate deadpanned. “Benton, since you’re so eager to see your old friend, come with Jac and me. Osgoods, stay as you are. Malcolm, I want not a peep of this on the mid-morning newscasts, got it?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said before walking off. He went up the lift to his office, which was dark and quiet and decidedly devoid of Aparajita. Placing the folders on the table, Malcolm turned on his desk lamp and got straight to work, reading through the papers and tapping out excuses and half-truths on his laptop. Sure enough, he was able to shush the commotion before his personal assistant even walked into the room carrying a tray with two large coffees.

“Heard you got in a bit early, so a peace offering,” Aparajita said, placing one of the takeaway cups on the table. He took it with silent thanks, draining a third of the cup in one go. “That beat?”

“They should have finished with this clown back before Wee Malcolm started getting sweaty and tight in the trousers staring at the mags the lads were passing around the bog,” he scowled.

“That sounds gross,” she grimaced.

“That sounds like Wee Rajit never had to deal with the clusterfuck that is when lads approach the onset of puberty,” he replied after another draught of the sweet life-nectar. “Cousin keep you safely away from that?”

“Raj is still fairly protective, so yeah,” she admitted. “Need me to do anything else?”
“Bring me a sacrificial intern every hour and I’ll be fine,” he joked half-heartedly. “Actually, can you get me Corporal Lethbridge-Stewart? He should be coming off his midnight soon, yeah?”

“If I call Security now, I might catch him before he leaves,” she said, backing up and turning around towards her desk area. Five minutes later and Gordon came into the office looking rather confused.

“You wanted me, sir?”

“Again, it’s Malcolm, and would you mind doing an errand for me?” the older man asked. “I’d sent Rajit, but I need her here in case that lunatic your mam just tag-and-bagged decides high-security prison isn’t his cup of tea.”

“Yeah, no problem,” the young man smirked. “Nothing too dangerous, is it?”

“Going to a flat in a nice part of town doesn’t sound too fucking dangerous,” Malcolm replied. He took the key to his flat off the ring and handed it to Gordon, giving the instructions to his flat. “I need proper clothes—nothing’s in my cupboard and the only reason I’m in these trousers is because they don’t have fucking HP on them.”

“Being woken up for work’ll do that,” Gordon said sympathetically. “Got anything over there I should worry about? A pet or a nosy neighbor or anything the like that might attack?”

“A niece, but she should be at class by the time you get there,” Malcolm said. Gordon gave him a confused look and he couldn’t help but laugh and shake his head. “Nah, she’s your age and a grad student. Either she’s going to attend class today or teach it—never can figure out which it is with her—being a workaholic’s in the sodding family.”

“Okay then; should be back soon.” Gordon then left the office, with Aparajita sliding her chair into view soon as the lift doors shut.

“You sent Gordon to your place? Might as well be shouting after him to snog your poor niece while he’s at it.”

“If anything, she’d snog him, though I doubt it—she’s gone most mornings when I get up,” he shrugged. “Lad’s got a good survival rate otherwise.”

Aparajita cocked an eyebrow. “You setting up your niece with him because his mum has been avoiding you?”

“No,” he scoffed. “I trust Lex to find her own beaus to snog and Kate has nothing to do with it.”

“Are you sure?” she asked, using her foot to propel herself into the office. There was a cheeky smirk on her face, prodding him into elaborating. “You and Brigadier-Director Stewart have been rather stand-offish lately…”

“We have not been stand-offish and you are going to take your nose and stick it elsewhere, because while it’s in my business it’s at risk to get chopped off and then what’ll happen? You’ll go paler than me and become a female fucking Voldemort, that’s what.”

“You’re sour.”

“Aparajita Khan, return to your post,” he growled. His PA scowled and stood, rolling her chair back behind the wall and leaving him be. He didn’t need this sort of flack from the coworker that he was supposed to work closest with, especially not this early in the morning with over four hours already clocked in. Malcolm stood and jammed his hands in his trouser pockets, storming towards the lift.
“Going for a walk,” he growled as he walked past Aparajita.

“Do you want me to call when Gordon gets back?” she asked calmly.

“Yeah.” He hit the button for the lift and waited patiently. A weight dropped in his gut and he knew he had to apologize, though doing so now would feel contrived. “Please.”

“Not a problem—walk off some of that steam, okay?”

“Will do.” The doors opened and he walked in. Malcolm stared at the lift buttons as he decided where to go. Dare he hit the one for the floor above?

Fuck it.

Half an hour of wandering the halls of Mainframe UK avoiding people that he’d rather not talk to, Malcolm found himself in the Raven Room, tinkering with one of the out-of-commission birds to calm his nerves. He’d always liked tinkering, even as a young lad. His mam always blamed him and his sister’s tendency to take shit apart and fuck it all up on the fact their fathers were scientists. Which scientists, she never said, but her kids always took that as a good thing and never stopped despite their mother’s insistence otherwise. Besides, politics had always felt like tinkering on a large scale, and it was something that comforted him no matter what.

As he soldered a circuit board with his pen, specs sitting on the tip of his nose, he heard the door open and shut. Malcolm didn’t look up to see who it was, instead keeping his focus honed on the bird. The stool next to him moved and someone sat down. It wasn’t until a whiff of perfume caught his nose did he know who it was that was there.

“Kate.”

“Malcolm.”

“Do you need something?”

She picked up part of a raven beak and studied it. “You know we have techs to do this, yeah?”

“Don’t care,” he muttered. “Always been good with this stuff.”

“That doesn’t matter—it’s been too long since we properly talked,” she said. “I only want to make sure we’re on the same page here…”

“…which is…?”

“…that’s what I need to know. What page are you on?” she wondered. Malcolm glanced over at Kate and saw her sitting there, back straight and shoulders square. She had her hair pulled back and in a blouse that looked cute on her. Yeah, he was aware enough to admit it: she looked fucking cute. He leaned towards her and pressed their lips together, pulling away to go back to work on the out-of-commission robot.

“That’s the page I’m on,” he elaborated, as if it hadn’t been clear enough. “I’m surprised you don’t have men tripping over themselves for a chance to be with you, ‘cause you’re one of the most bloody gorgeous women I’ve ever met, and that only covers how you handle yourself in a work emergency.”

“Then how about dinner tonight?” she asked. She gently put her hand on his wrist, stopping his
soldering. “Nothing fancy, I swear.”

“Let’s do takeaway at my place,” he offered. “Don’t have to bother Gordon while he’s sleeping; I’ve already delayed his getting home with an errand, so it’s the least I can do.”

“You sent my son on an errand? For what?” she asked incredulously. “What on earth did you need him to get?”

“A fresh change of clothes, though I haven’t heard that he’s gotten back yet.” He checked his watch and raised a brow. “It’s nearly three—he should have been back hours ago.”

“I’ll text him,” she offered.

“Thanks—tell him to not bother if he hasn’t gotten to it, but if he’s on the way back to leave the stuff with Rajit.” He watched as she typed the message out and sent it. “I would have sent her, but her talents are much better served here and there aren’t many here I’d trust with the key to my flat.”

“Will we still be able to get in?” Kate asked. “I can get the emergency key from Security if you want.”

“Naw; Lex should be home by now—we can have her let us in and we can kick her out immediately after. She’d want to meet you anyhow.”

“You know Gordon, so it’s only fair,” she agreed. The two then stood and left the dismantled raven for another time, going out the doors together after checking in with their respective PAs.

Malcolm then led Kate towards the Tube, getting off at a station not even a five minute walk to what he claimed to be the best curry place he had since uni. It as his treat, and not long after they walked out of the shop with their orders, they were riding the lift up to his flat. They approached the door and knocked, hoping that Lex would hear.

To their complete surprise, however, it was Gordon who answered.

“Help me,” he said, not letting either his mother or coworker get in a word. He looked ready to cry, as though he’d been on the losing end of several failed escape attempts, not to mention as though he hadn’t been allowed a wink of sleep since arriving earlier.

“What are you still doing here?” Malcolm wondered, pushing his way through into his flat. He glanced over at the television and saw that it displayed a DVD menu, while his niece was on the couch navigating the various options. She glanced over her shoulder, face lighting up at the sight of her uncle.

“Hey! You’re home early!” she said cheerily. “I see you’ve met my new best friend, Gordon.”

“I’m telling Kanda you said that,” Malcolm fired back.

“Already sent her a selfie and a couple Snapchats—she approves of his addition to the group,” Lex replied. She then noticed Kate and her brows arched. “Uncle Malc…?”

“This is Kate, Gordon’s mam; now behave, because we’ve both had a long-ass day and are fucking beat.”

“Fine, fine—I won’t interrupt you two and your date… or whatever it is you’re doing.”

Another knock came at the door and it was a pizza delivery, which Malcolm and Kate ignored in
favor of sitting down at the kitchen bar with their curries. Lex and Gordon began the movie on the sitting room couch with the pizza box between them and cracking open a couple beers, completely ignoring the older couple now sharing the flat with them. He was quiet, but when Malcolm finished off his food he leaned over and took Kate by the hand.

“Want to go have a lie-down? Sitting on stools all day has been murdering my back.”

“I thought you’d never ask,” she snorted. “These things might as well be classified as torture devices.”

“Remind me of that when we’ve got some piece-of-shite extraterrestrial that needs interrogating and all the usual drudgery just turns ‘em on,” he joked. They cleaned up after themselves and went towards his bedroom, holding hands, breaking contact as they entered the room. Malcolm once again loaned Kate some pajamas and let her change in the ensuite, while he quickly shed what he wore to work in favor of flannel trousers and an old t-shirt. He laid down in his unmade bed just as she was coming out of the bathroom, her other clothes folded in a neat pile that she placed atop the dresser.

Sliding into bed, Kate let herself be enveloped by Malcolm’s arms as she settled in. His body pressed up against her, his legs curving along her own and his nose in her hair, while he let out a content sigh.

“I’d suggest a shag, but I woke up too early for that shit.”

“Shagging on the first lie-in is for teens,” she teased. “It’s better this way, what, with the kids in the room over.” She thought on that for a moment, her lips pursing in a frown. “Did Alexandra really recruit Gordon into being her best friend, or should I be worried?”

“When my Lex says they’re friends, she means they’re friends—you don’t have to worry about a thing,” he assured her. He pressed a kiss to her hair and shimmied in closer, rubbing up against her.

“Maybe a shag later?”

“We’ll see, Tucker,” she replied. “We’ll see.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kate woke up to her mobile buzzing on the nightstand, a panicked series of texts from an Osgood about an explosion in the labs. A follow-up message from the other Osgood said they were fine and not to worry. She let out a grumble from her throat as she replaced the mobile, rolling her eyes, and settled back in the bed. One of Malcolm’s arms was laying on her waist, having been along her arm before she moved it, while his body was flush against hers. She could feel his breathing, soft and slow, and his hard prick jutting out against her leg. It felt good to feel someone in bed with her again, not simply sharing a bed—like she had done many times with her children while holidaying with limited budgets—but actually being with someone… it was satisfying.

After laying there a while, simply enjoying the moment, Malcolm took a deep breath and stirred, pulling her even closer and smiling against the back of her neck. “Morning,” he hummed.

“Morning,” she echoed. Kate rolled over and looked him in the face. His eyes were unfocused and his hair a mess, but his grin was genuine as he pecked her lips with his. “You seem terribly satisfied.”

“I woke up with you in my arms; how can’t I be?” he replied. Hazily, he leaned in and began to kiss her. It was sloppy and clumsy from not being fully awake, yet she reciprocated, finding the whole thing amusing more than anything else. She shifted him onto his back and settled herself atop him, relishing how pliable he was making things.

“Enjoying the view, Tucker?” she asked, straightening so she was sitting upright and on his hips. He gazed up at her dreamily before nodding.

“I’m fucking dead, aren’t I?” he chuckled. He placed his hands on her hips, allowing his fingers to splay out along her waist and arse. “One of the ravens pecked me to death and this is me fantasizing on the way down to Hell.”

“I wouldn’t say that now,” she laughed. She leaned back down, pinning his shoulders with her elbows, continuing to kiss him. “I could be an angel and you’re on your way to Heaven.”

“That’s a fallacy if I’ve ever heard one,” he said, taking one hand and running his fingers through her hair. “The only part of that shit I believe in is that there’s a Hell, and we’re all either living in it, or headed towards it.”

“Remind me to leave you out of the group attending Christmas Service when the time comes,” she replied. They kept on kissing, letting their hands wander about, when Lex opened the door, having forgotten there was a guest other than hers.

“Hey Uncle Malc I—oh fuck!” she gasped, immediately wrenching her eyes shut. “Sorry! I didn’t mean to…!”

“Fucking hell, Lex, we’re decent,” Malcolm groaned. “What’s going on?”

“I just wanted to know if you wanted eggs, since I’m scrambling some,” she said, refusing to open her eyes. The young woman fumbled around until she found the door frame, backing out into the hall. “Would you like some eggs too… erm…?”

“Call me Kate,” the older woman said, “and yes, please.”
“Okay, see you in a bit!” They could then hear Lex scurry off, not even bothering to close the bedroom door. “Shit… it’s like she never expects you to have anyone over.”

“That’s because I haven’t for a long time,” he admitted. They both began to get up and ready for the day, with Malcolm stretching and Kate heading to the ensuite with her clothes. “You read my dossier; divorce wasn’t easy on me.”

“Divorce isn’t easy on most people, but I had assumed you at least dated afterwards… get a decent shag in every once in a while… but that it ended before the Inquiry or wasn’t noteworthy enough to dig up.”

“Fuck naw; not all that interested in women after that and never had been interested in men aside from the odd thought. It took me a while to get rid of the ring, but once I did I never even bothered looking.” He pulled off his shirt and began rummaging around his closet for a fresh one. “It was easier that way with the job and all.”

“Sounds lonely.”

“You have no idea, love.”

Kate came out of the bathroom, fully dressed and ready for the day, and kissed him gently on the cheek. “Actually, I have a very good idea, considering Fiona’s father left when she was three, and I did plenty without anyone by my side.”

“Your daughter, I take it?”

“My daughter, Gordon’s half-sister,” she elaborated. “Gordon and Fiona don’t have the same father—you can say I’ve had awful luck with men.”

“Hopefully I break that streak,” he said. “I’m not the best, but I like to think this old dog still has a bit of good in him.”

“Besides being a good guard dog? I imagine so,” she said, chuckling quietly. Kate then left the room and headed towards the kitchen, which allowed Malcolm some time to think.

‘This better be a good move, Malc,’ he thought as he switched pants. He tried to psyche himself up with a pep-talk, getting into the right headspace. ‘You’re both damaged, but she’s smart enough to pull out when it’s a wash. This is a career to retire from, fucking satisfied with a job well-done, or die in, and fucking this up would mean hellish work for the rest of your days.’

He finished dressing and shuffled his way into the kitchen to get some coffee. Kate was sitting patiently at the breakfast bar, scrolling through her mobile, while Lex was scrambling eggs. Gordon was also there, sitting next to his mother and looking as though he had been run over by a train.

“You alright there, lad?” Malcolm asked as he poured some coffee. “Need some of this?” Gordon grunted unintelligibly in reply.

“Yes, and he always looks like this,” Kate said dully, not even glancing up from her mobile. “His father is the exact same way.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Malcolm replied, placing the mug in front of Gordon. The young man made a thankful noise and sipped it slowly. “So I take it you stayed over too late as well?”

“Watching movies, honest,” Lex assured with a laugh. “I think when Kanda comes for a visit, the three of us need to have another marathon. Wouldn’t that be neat?” Gordon gave her a silent thumbs-
up and she started to divvy up the eggs between the four plates she had sitting on the counter.
“Good; when you’ve woken up a bit, we can start planning.”

“Don’t throw too much on him right off, or he’ll run the opposite direction, and I won’t fucking blame him,” Malcolm teased. He sat down on the other side of Kate, letting their shoulders and thighs brush against each other. “Anything happen while we were asleep?”

“An Osgood almost burned Research and Development to the studs; nothing out of the ordinary.” She glanced over at Lex, raising an eyebrow. “How much about our work do you know?”

“You’re funded by the UN with supplements from the Crown, Granny says you’re a bunch of dangerous wanks, you seem to have a scientific division along with a military one, and when weird shit goes down you tend to pop up like the Ghostbusters or something like that,” she shrugged. “I tried looking into what UNIT does for sure, but I can’t get very far by regular sources online.”

“Think of us like the Ghostbusters, but for extraterrestrial life and everything sentient and non-human on Earth,” Kate clarified. “I would think now that your uncle and I are dating and you’ve adopted my son into your friend-group, you should be entitled to know.”

“…but I still can’t tell Mam and Granny, yeah?”

“Marcia can’t know, ‘cause she’d cock up somehow, but no one can hide a damn fucking thing from your granny,” Malcolm muttered through his eggs. “It wouldn’t surprise me if she worked with UNIT before she went into journalism.”

“Lex was telling me about Missus Tucker last night,” Gordon mumbled, finally able to form actual words. “She sounds like she was the lady version of James Bond.”

“Almost, but don’t let her hear you call her Missus,” Malcolm warned. “She was very proud of the fact she raised two kids by herself while still holding down a full-time job back when it was unheard of.”

“Where was your dad then?” Gordon wondered.

“Fucked if I know,” Malcolm scoffed. “Never had one; don’t even know his name. My sister found hers a couple years ago out of curiosity, but I’ve never been inclined to search.”

“You mean… you didn’t grow up with your granddad around?” Gordon frowned. He stared at his friend in concern. “Once I met my granddad, I could barely be parted from him.”

“Considering he didn’t know Mam and I existed, I’m not that bent out of shape about it,” Lex said casually. “Besides, he was East German—would’ve had to defect to help raise Mam.”

“Almost did too, just to be with Granny,” Malcolm chuckled. He sighed inwardly, enjoying the feeling the conversation was giving him. It was like they were a family already.

‘No, don’t count on that,’ he reminded himself. ‘Concentrate on her, Malc. The kids are incidental.’

“I think,” Malcolm said aloud, “that Kate and I should probably head on down to work. You about ready, love?”

“Just about,” Kate replied. She knocked back the rest of her tea and kissed her new beau on the lips before headed towards the flat door. “Better not go in together after the first night—don’t want there to be a riot.”
“What; the Scarfys might discover there is a better love than science?”

“Down, boy,” she said. Kate closed the door behind her and she was gone.

“So you’re… dating?” Gordon wondered. “Since when?”

“Since yesterday afternoon, and I think we’re in the ‘trying things out’ stage,” Malcolm admitted. “Are you alright with that?”

“If it means Mum’s happy, then yeah,” the younger man said, completely nonchalant. “It’s my sister you have to watch out for—she doesn’t really like sharing Mum.”

“You have a sister?!” Lex gasped happily.

“She’s almost fifteen and no, you can’t invite her over too—chances are she’ll either be at school or at her dad’s,” Gordon replied defensively. Malcolm smirked as he sipped his coffee and watched the two youngsters bicker over the breakfast bar. At least get-togethers weren’t going to be awkward when it came to them.

Twenty minutes of Lex and Gordon sniping at one another like a pair of actual siblings was all Malcolm could take before he left his flat to head towards Mainframe UK. London congestion seemed fairly normal and no one either noticed nor cared when he veered off into the nondescript building that contained the entrance that he utilized. Everything was positively routine as he walked in and navigated his way down into the Mainframe, though he tried hard to make sure to not reveal the extra pep in his step, for Malcolm Tucker was head-over-heels with his boss and she was reciprocating.

“Tucker! There you are!” Kate’s voice carried through the atrium as he crossed it, leading him over to where she was standing next to a stout, balding, Indian man in a military kit. “I need to introduce you to the new brass that Geneva transferred over; this is Colonel Ahmed. Colonel, this is Malcolm Tucker, our Head of Public Relations. He’s often referred to as Head of Communications, and holds the honorary rank of Lieutenant Colonel during military distress.”

“How badly did you fuck up to get sent to this shithole?” Malcolm grinned as he shook the man’s hand. The newcomer stared at him in an attempt to read the stranger.

“I put in for a transfer,” Ahmed replied stiffly. “Mainframe Gujarat was getting a bit crowded for my tastes. The United Kingdom works well for me, as the visa didn’t need to have too many strings pulled.”

“Welcome aboard, Ahmed. You got a first name?”

“Mohammed Jan ibn Tariq Ahmed,” he said, purposefully laying a thick accent on, “but you can call me ‘Colonel Ahmed’, or ‘sir’.”

“Point made,” Malcolm said, scrunching his nose in defeat. “If you have any questions regarding how to address the media here compared to Gujarat, let me know.”

“Thank you; I plan on it.” Colonel Ahmed then turned towards Kate and bowed his head slightly. “Now if you excuse me, Brigadier-Director, I’d like to get some work done.” He walked away, which allowed Malcolm and Kate to head into the lift together.

“Fucking tit—I was only trying to be friendly,” he muttered soon as the doors shut. “Am I not allowed to be friendly?”
“Back off—it’s probably due to how things were run in Gujarat more than anything else,” she replied. “I hear the Brigadier in charge there runs a tight program and chances are Ahmed put in for the transfer just to get away from it.”

“If that’s the case, I’ll give him a month. If he doesn’t let up and show signs of a brain by then, he’s on my shit list.”

“Don’t bully your superiors, dear.”

“I didn’t ask for the rank, and if he cocks up, then I’ll treat him like the rest of the cock-ups.” The doors opened and he stepped out, spinning around to watch her. “That’s why you broke me out of fucking prison, yeah?”

“I’m starting to wonder,” she snarked, allowing the doors to shut. Malcolm spun back around and saw Aparajita sitting at her desk, a highly satisfied expression plastered all over her face.

“Your place or hers?” she asked.

“Mine,” he beamed. “Too beat for a shag by the time we got there, but that’s alright; her and I are on the same page now.”

Aparajita grinned and raised her arms, looking at the ceiling in relief. “Mum’s advice finally worked, for once.”

“…and what advice is that?”

“‘Pray to Mother Kali and she will help her children as all mothers try to, destroying the bad so that good may happen’,” she recited. “The woman is super-old-school, but it pays off now and then.”

“Hey, at least that means plenty of good food at all times,” Malcolm chuckled. He then paused for a moment, raising an eyebrow at her. “You talk about my personal life with your mam?”

“…I have to talk to her about something that goes on around here—she doesn’t want to hear about the aliens and shit.”

“Wasn’t her dad the one in UNIT?”

“…and now all he babbles on about is the missions and things he had to go on, or at least the less normal parts of them,” she shrugged. She then tapped the side of her head, continuing, “Daadaajee’s pretty conked out, but he’s physically fit enough to outlast Mum if he tried.”

“Your granddad and my mam would be excellent friends; should introduce them sometime,” Malcolm joked. Aparajita laughed and they commenced with their workday, which went incident-free until the last ninety minutes of the day…

…the monthly staff meeting.

Malcolm sat sourly in his chair to the left of Kate’s spot at the head of the table. He felt lucky that had been his chair the entire time, which meant he could casually start casually touching her from underneath the table. He had the toe of his shoe idly running up and down her left calf unseen as she conducted the meeting, all the while on his mobile, pretending nothing was out of the ordinary.

Things were going about as well as he would have expected. Glenn was there, not making waves if he could help it, as well as the new Colonel Ahmed, which was odd to him considering the other colonel assigned to Mainframe UK barely ever bothered to show up. There were a few others there,
most of whom he didn’t know that well on account of them not being total cockups, though that was still up for debate. Sometimes it took a while for one to reveal their true cuntish nature (or twatish, considering there was a decent spread of ladies amongst the Mainframe staff whom Malcolm credited with the facility’s general efficiency), and the PR Head knew that the over half a year he’d been there at that point wasn’t even close when it came to ferreting such people from dropping their facades.

Captain Blythe, Mainframe UK’s senior-most naval officer—whom Malcolm was still trying to decide on whether she killed a man or merely cut bitches during her decades of ladder-climbing—was giving her report when a shrill noise interrupted both her and the meeting. The Head of Security and Surveillance’s mobile was ringing, causing everyone to stare at him.

“We’re waiting, Frank,” Kate said, urging him to answer. He did, almost immediately jumping at the sound of whoever it was on the other end.

“Whoa, whoa, hold on there, boyo,” Frank said. “I’m puttin’ her on speaker.” He placed the mobile down on the conference table and activated speakerphone. “Alright now, go on.”

“Mum! I’ve got bad news!” It was Gordon, who sounded panicky beyond belief. Kate cleared her throat in disapproval, glaring at her son through the device. “I mean, bad news, Brigadier-Director.”

“What is it, Corporal?” she asked.

“I’ve got a man down here who’s demanding entry to the Mainframe and the Black Archive. I don’t know how he got here, but he even has one of the PM’s cards.”

“Did you put it under the nanoscanner?” Frank checked.

“Twice—it’s one of the ones that mean business. We don’t have anyone scheduled to come down from Whitehall, and if they did, none of them would mention the Archive by name. What do I do?”

“I can take care of him if you want, Brigadier-Director, ma’am,” Frank offered. Kate contemplated it for a moment before shaking her head.

“No, leave him to me,” she ordered firmly. “If he’s from Whitehall, then I’ll keep Tucker with me to spook him, but otherwise I think this is one of those instances where I have to mindwipe someone myself. Escort him to my office.”

“…but Mum…”

“Escort him to my office, now, Corporal,” Kate demanded. She stood and reached across the table, ending the call. “Meeting is in recess until I can sort this out; Tucker, come with me, and the rest of you can return to your posts until I send word to reconvene.”

Dead silence fell over the room as Kate stormed out of the conference room and into the corridor, Malcolm on her heels. He waited until they were out of earshot before he began hissing in anger.

“I don’t know who the PM sent, but whoever it is I’m going to make them piss their pants begging to be let free before I toss them at the Scarfys and their burned-down torture chamber.”

“Be a silent menace at first, okay?” Kate suggested as they entered the lift back to the office. “You are capable of that, aren’t you? Or is it just loud Scottish noises that occasionally form foul phrases?”

“Kate, love, have some faith in me,” he replied, giving her a charming grin. “I’ve got eyebrows that are their own independent state of crossness and I’m a fucking savant at whisperboarding—you
haven’t even *seen* my full arsenal.” They entered her office and had her PA stand guard in case the visitor wasn’t going to behave while so close to his goal. The waiting was tense, only broken by Morton poking her head in.

“Ma’am, Corporal Lethbridge-Stewart and the guest have arrived.”

“Show them in,” she replied, voice firm and raised for the benefit of the visitor. Malcolm hid behind the door and watched as Gordon led in a familiar mop of black curls atop a rumpled suit and pair of specs. While the Security lad saw the PR Head, their visitor had his eyes directly on Kate.

“Hello there Ms. Stewart; I’m Oliver Reeder, Director of Communications for the Opposition,” he said cordially, holding out his hand. When Kate didn’t shake it, preferring to stand with her arms folded across her chest, he took it back with a nervous laugh. “Thanks for taking time to see me. You’re probably wondering why I’m here—”

“Get on with it; I’ve got a staff meeting that’s on hold because of you.”

“Right, well, I’m part of this multi-party committee that is investigating all of the paramilitary and scientific organizations in the UK that are not responsible for the wellbeing of the Crown or Commonwealth. Since I’ve heard a bit of rumbling about some… *interesting tech* UNIT has locked away, I’d like to discuss it with you, you know, make sure everything is on the up-and-up.”

Kate raised an eyebrow. “You don’t think I’m being loyal to the best interests of my country and planet?”

Another awkward noise came out of Ollie and he shrugged, clearly spooked by her cold stare. “Of course not! It’s just, you know, what, with the Americans shouting about ‘weapons of mass-destruction’ and the tense situation we have right now in the Middle East…”

“You’re not in a multi-party committee, are you?” Malcolm asked, stepping out from behind the door. Ollie blanched, eyes going wide and entire body rigid, at the sound of his voice. Malcolm casually walked up behind Ollie and rested his arm along his shoulders, leaning into him. “So, how’s it been as Dan Miller’s fuck-boy? Was it everything you wanted and more?”

“I didn’t think the rumors were true,” Ollie said. He was attempting to keep his cool, but Malcolm saw the sweat begin to bead on his temple. “If you were back, I would have seen you by now.”

“Meaning you missed my press conference on the ‘downed paper lantern’ that everyone thought was a meteor destroying a farm? For shame.”

“Your release on parole wasn’t scheduled for years yet.”

“…a benefit of having international overrides and it actually being beneficial to the Crown to place him in my care instead of Her Majesty’s,” Kate smirked. “I get a seasoned government worker, truly talented and knowledgeable in his career field, while at the same time he’s not only being rehabilitated, but is a productive member of society and not needlessly leeching precious funds from elsewhere.” Malcolm pushed himself off Ollie’s shoulder, making the younger man stumble in the process, and stood behind her to glare at their visitor from just past her ear. “You know I was handling this perfectly fine on my own.”

“Yeah, which is why I interrupted; still want the satisfaction of getting the Poxbridge twat to piss his pants, and it smells like I succeeded.” He chuckled lowly, nearly pressing himself up against her back. “I really do miss that smell.”

“What, the smell of piss?” Ollie grimaced.
“Fear,” Malcolm corrected. His old coworker swallowed hard, his face clearly in panic mode.

“Now, we’re going to start this again,” Kate cut in. “Why are you here?”

“I… uh… wanted information about what you store in the Black Archive.”

“What do you know about the Black Archive?”

“With a name like that, it can’t be good…?”

“Would you believe us if we said it was named after the first archivist, whose name happened to be ‘Black’?”

Ollie took a deep breath, steadying himself. “No.”

“How about we color-code our archives, dependent on dating protocol?” Malcolm offered.

“…no…?”

“Then I don’t know what we can do for you,” Kate said. She slid her hands in her pockets, discreetly palming a small device. A smile crept across her face as Malcolm placed her hands on her waist, which Ollie caught, cringing in disgust.

“Fuck… you’re together too? I didn’t take you as someone who’d sleep his way to the top, Tucker.”

“Don’t compare me to you, fetus-child,” Malcolm growled. “Not only am I actually able to reach and keep my position with my own abilities, but it would be an insult to my wonderful lady-friend, let alone any woman, to consider her little more than a wet cunt and a ladder rung.”

“You put things so eloquently,” Kate purred. She took the device and began tapping out the settings with her thumb. “Malcolm, for fuck’s sake, you’re hard off this?”

“Oops, you’ve got me,” he replied. “Could never keep it to myself when someone truly dangerous and competent swaggers her way into my life.”

“…and to think you never shagged any of your government cohorts over the years. I would have thought your personal assistant, what was her name…?”

“Sam, and she was never on my radar due to her disposition of a wee, hyper-competent, lamb; I was the dangerous of the duo.”

“Not that I want to interrupt your lovers’ tiff, but what are you going to do with me?” Ollie wondered.

“I’m going to tell you precisely what the Black Archive is,” Kate said dully. The Black Archive is a tech storehouse featuring devices of nonhuman make and design. There is not a single Black Archive, but actually several of them across the globe in the hands of other UNIT Mainframes varying in size and allegiance. I may have a nerve gas to wipe out the entire Zygon population on Earth, but I’m not going to use it unless absolutely necessary, considering the fact that I know Moscow alone has human genome marker-based superviruses… and the Americans… don’t get me started on those hoarders.”

“Wait… what’s a Zygon?” Ollie asked. He took a couple steps forward and squinted, as if it would help him hear better.

“A Zygon is an extraterrestrial sentient species whose home planet has been destroyed; we have
some refugees here on Earth, registered with Geneva of course, living out their daily routines right under your overeducated nose. Now if you want something terrestrial and sentient non-human, my main suggestion would be to contact some Silurians.”

“He wouldn’t fucking know a Silurian if she smacked him in the face for ripping off her veil.”

“It’s a *niqab*, Malcolm, and we’re *very* lucky that we have such good friends in North Africa who are willing to help resettle refugees in places not only warm enough, but where someone can walk into their village and not know they’re talking with an ancient reptile.”

“Fuck this—I’m leaving,” Ollie said. He spun around to leave, only to have Gordon step in front of him.

“Not so fast; forget I’m here?” He forcibly turned Ollie to face his mother, holding him in place. “Don’t think you’re getting out of this that easy.”

Before Ollie could protest, and he really did want to, Kate was done programming the device in her hand and pointed it at him, hitting the intruder in the dead-center of the forehead. Ollie’s body went rigid, his mind placidly being wiped by the tiny piece of tech.

“Good shot,” Gordon nodded, impressed. “Sure you don’t want to come to target practice with me?”

“I’m sure,” Kate smirked. She then broke into an outright giggle when Malcolm pressed his body closer to hers, kissing her neck. “Malcolm, please, I’m still in a moment.”

“Oh, and I loved how you were in that moment,” he replied against her skin.

“I’m still here,” Gordon reminded them. Malcolm simply flicked one of his middle fingers at the lad.

“Escort the vegetative state off the premises; your mam and I have a few things to settle first.”

“*Enough,*” Kate demanded, pushing him away. She crossed the room to where her son was and walked with him and Ollie to the lift doors. “I need to have a chat with Tucker about both his behavior and this Reeder character, *then* I think the meeting can finish up. I’d give it about half an hour.”

“Alright Mum—I’ll make sure Frank knows.” Gordon flinched when he heard her clear her throat. “I’ll make sure to pass the word along, Brigadier-Director.”

“That’s better,” she said with an approving smile. Kate then told her assistant that she was not to be disturbed and closed the door behind her, making her and Malcolm the only two people in the room. She locked her line of vision with his, walking towards him with a steely expression that he couldn’t read.

“Aww, fuck… I did something wrong, didn’t I?” He grimaced as she took hold of his tie and led him towards the far wall. She stopped about a foot away and turned around.

“One: behave yourself in front of my children. We’re all adults here, but Gordon is still my child.”

“Noted.”

“Two: I know it was in the moment, but try to behave yourself at work, because believe it or not, I actually want us to be able to get stuff done without our coworkers staring at us, trying to unsee something we let slip.”
“Prick stays soft—got it.”

“Three,” she continued, “If you can’t keep it in your trousers…” She hit a spot on the wall behind her, triggering a mechanism that opened a door hidden discreetly within the wall paneling. “…I guess we’ll have to take care of that the old-fashioned way, won’t we?”

“Okay,” he replied, voice cracking.

Behind Kate sat what was technically a panic room, but it wasn’t uncommon for those who had them to sleep there overnight instead of at the barracks in case of an extra-long work day. Malcolm already had done so a couple times in his, which was situated inside the cupboard where he kept his spare suits and whatnot, though it was clear that Kate had made sure she was comfortable as possible for such nights. Gone was the IKEA shit with names unpronounceable that furnished his, but there was shit made of real wood, with everything around that made it look more like a studio apartment than anything. The door closed and he felt compelled to take off his shoes and set them to the side of the area rug that covered most of the concrete floor.

“Fuck,” he said as he glanced around. There was a desk with computers and paper files both, with a filing cabinet next to it, a kettle perched happily on top. Bookshelves sat to the side next to a hutch, which had dishes and everything for a decent cuppa. A couple tasteful lamps and tables (with and without lace doilies) and chairs were throughout the rest of the room, though nothing did quite catch his attention like the bed. It was a real mattress—not the standard-issue slab of thin foam in his room—and the linens made him want to lie down and actually take a nap.

“One of the perks of having been at my post for a while: I’ve had the time to decorate,” she smirked. “You like the setup?”

“The bed’s a fucking single-sleeper; you couldn’t ask them to upgrade for the lady in charge?”

“Oh, I think we can make do.” Kate eased Malcolm down to sit on the bed and settled herself in his lap, straddling him and draping her arms around his neck as she leaned in to kiss him. He kissed back, cupping her arse. She eased her hands underneath his jacket collar and slid it off his shoulders. He leaned back and hit his head against the metal wall, nearly biting both their tongues.

“Alright, we’re doing this properly,” he announced, voice low and throaty. He pulled his jacket out from under him and hung it on the bedpost, sliding himself so that he was laying down lengthwise on the mattress. Kate kept up with him, going straight for his belt.

“I’ll admit, I was pretty impressed with how you made him cower with the sound of your voice,” she murmured. “It was clear you stepping in saved plenty of hassle on my end.”

“Conditioned the shitstain during my time in politics,” he said. His nose was buried between her breasts as he tried to work a rather difficult button loose. “Fucking Pavlov would’ve been proud.”

“Good boy.”

He smiled against her skin—things were good alright.

Kate walked into the conference room, confidence overflowing from how she held herself. She took her seat at the head of the table and watched as everyone else sat down in imitation. “Is everyone here?”

“It looks like we’re just missing Tucker,” Jac Forrest, Head of Technology and Maintenance, said. “We thought he was with you.”
“He said he needed to do something before coming back and that was five minutes ago,” Kate bluffed. She then turned towards her son’s supervisor. “Did Gordon tell you what happened?”

“Yeah—he handled the situation well, calling up when he couldn’t get the guy to leave on his own—followed all the proper protocols,” Frank replied. “He’s a bit of a wreck some days, but he’s got what it takes, I know it.”

“Excellent. Now, Captain Blythe, do you remember where you left off?”

“Yes, I did, thank you,” Blythe nodded. She was about to continue where she’d been cut off when Malcolm walked through the door, looking terribly disheveled and a distant expression on his face. “Son, what happened to you?”

“Hmm…?” He glanced down himself, noting that his tie was loose and crooked and his shirt still rumpled. “Oh… bog.”

“You ruined your hair in the toilet too?” she gently sniped. He felt the top of his head and realized that it was all sticking up, which he attempted to flatten on his way back to his seat.

“Bored, is all,” he replied. Malcolm sat and allowed Captain Blythe to continue. Glenn, who was sitting on the other side of him, leaned over and whispered in his ear.

“Do we want to know?”

Malcolm turned to him and grinned impishly. “Nope… not one bit.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: While many people around the globe are familiar with feminine head coverings in various forms (Islamic hijab, Christian habits, those plastic rain caps old ladies wear to protect their perm, etc.), sometimes we forget that there are men’s coverings as well even in the modern day. The Silurians Kate and Malcolm mentioned during Ollie’s bollocking were relocated to an area in the vicinity of the Sahara (remember that reptiles aren’t warmblooded) where men cover their faces as well, some purely to keep sand off them, some for religious/modesty purposes. Often sweat from the wearer leeches dye from these turban-scarf-combo pieces of headgear, altering one’s skin color. This means that a community of Silurians clad in dark greens as a “traditional color” can potentially get away with living semi-openly without compromising their identities using shimmers (think Madam Vastra and her Victorian veil, but the North Africa version). Compare that to the Zygons and… well… we all know how that went.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Walking into Mainframe UK together, Malcolm and Kate didn’t bother hiding the fact they were officially dating; it was not as though they flaunted the fact, though they had also decided that avoiding one another while at work would be worse. A quick kiss in the lift before Malcolm exited into his office, and they were ready to start the day.

“Looks like your date went better than mine,” Aparajita joked as she held out a stack of papers.

“What about that one guy… what was his name…”

“Sid? Dropped him like a fucking ton of bricks when I found out he changed it himself from Sidney to Siddhartha to be ‘more worldly’… and on the night I was getting ready to finally shag him too.”

“Let me know when I need to have Lex start keeping an eye out amongst the postgrads for you,” Malcolm offered. He took the papers with him into the inner office and flopped down in what should have been too comfy of a chair for his desk. Most of it was inter-Mainframe memos, which he would gladly take over calls for emergency press conferences and damage control. There was one in particular that happened to catch his eye, however, and it unsettled him.

Geneva.

“Uhh, Rajit…?”

“What’s wrong? You sound like it’s an emergency,” she replied, rolling her own chair into view.

“Why the fuck are we getting a general in from Geneva next month?” he wondered. “I thought we just had someone sent over.”

“…oh, you mean General Bambera,” she said, breathing a sigh of relief. “Colonel Ahmed was just someone Geneva transferred—General Bambera likes to pop in now and then since this was her old assignment… her home base, if you will. We like to go all-out when she does, make it special, you know.”

“You had me shitting my pants there for a second,” he scowled. “Make a memo for the memo next time something like that’s gonna happen, alright?”

“Sorry; thought you knew.” Aparajita shrugged noncommittally before rolling back to her station, Malcolm flipping her two fingers along the way. “She’s really no-nonsense—you’ll like her.”

“I better after she scares me like that.”

“Jealous.”

“Fuck off.” Malcolm was about to let off a string of foul yet hollow threats about giving Mister Worldly her personal work number when his mobile started chirping—Glenn. “Shit; what does he want now?” He swiped the call through and turned around in his chair, looking out onto the atrium below. “Men’s Hairloss Helpline.”

“Don’t give me that fucking crock—you and the boss have been acting weird all week and now I
“…because nothing major’s been happening since that backstabbing little cunt drip tried to work his way in here and it’s getting boring?”

“You two walked in together and she was wearing the same clothes as yesterday,” Glenn said accusingly. “She has multiple dark pantsuits, but that was the same one. You are shagging the boss!”

“…and what if I am…?”

“Jesus fuck, Malcolm! Do you have a death wish?! She can put you right back into prison if you fuck this up!”

“…and it’s a good thing the only thing that’s getting fucked up is me, by my wonderful lady-friend as she rides me so hard I can’t see straight afterwards,” Malcolm smirked. He knew the look of horror that was spreading across the other man’s face, judging by the silence on the other end of the call. “You know, I get that sex is a power trip for some cunts, but there’s really something to be said about letting the woman do what she does best.”

“You’re fucking disgusting.”

“…and you’re a nosy fucking busy-body of a granny who needs to know all the gossip or else she might keel over.”

“I’ve made it my business to not get my nose dirty—not since I resigned from those cocksuckers’ payroll.”

“Looks a little brown with a hint of yellow to me; did someone eat sweetcorn for dinner last night?”

“If you’re shagging her, then the least you can do is treat her right,” Glenn sighed in resignation. “Any of your shenanigans and I’ll come up there and kick your arse myself.”

“She’s got kids to defend her honor for you—besides, the only shenanigans I’m going to get up to are the kind you are not going to want to hear about… or you do… I don’t know, you could’ve become a fucking pervert in your advanced age. Listen, got to do some actual work before the long weekend of sin that lies ahead of me—some of us get paid for more than making tea you know—so ta!”

Malcolm ended the call and slid his mobile back into his pocket, turning his chair around to face his desk again. Aparajita then came in with some coffee and set it on his desk with a smirk.

“Making the Head of IT question life again?” she asked.

“You know me,” he replied, lifting his cup in a salute. “Wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Stop fidgeting,” Kate ordered with a smirk. She turned the car down a lane while Malcolm sat uncomfortably in the passenger seat. It was Friday afternoon and he had an overnight bag in the boot—territory long-gone uncharted within his personal life.

“I can’t help it; going to a woman’s place for the first time isn’t always an easy thing for a man, you know?” he replied. He tried to keep occupied by staring out the window, but it was no use. “How much farther do you live, anyhow?”
“Not very—it was my father’s place, once upon a time, and now it’s mine.”

“Wasn’t aware he was the kind who liked living in the middle of fucking nowhere.”

“It’s nice enough… ah, here we are,” she grinned. Kate went into the drive and parked in front of a large-ish house, one with pristine landscaping and a carefully-maintained exterior. Putting the car in park and killing the engine, she glanced over at her beau. “Well, this is it.”

“Makes my flat look like a shitty little hole in the wall,” he snorted. “Your da got a nice pension, didn’t he?”

“A nice pension, plus he taught maths at the local school after retiring from UNIT,” she said. They both got out of the car and she opened the front door while he fetched his bag from the boot. “My father and his second wife were in assisted living together, meaning I took over things here informally until he passed. It really is a nice place, once you can stay around long enough to appreciate it.”

“…and that doesn’t happen often in our line of work,” he finished. He followed her in, noting that the inside was just as well cared-for as the outside, if a little dusty, much like his house from before the Inquiry fucked everything over tended to look. Up the stairs and towards the master bedroom, where he deposited his bag just inside the door before making a beeline for Kate’s hips and lips, ready for action.

“Whoa, hold on there,” she laughed, gently pushing away. “Gordon’s picking up Fiona and I thought we’d have a nice evening in, then get to the good stuff.”

“…while your kids are here…?” he frowned. They walked out of the room, heading back down the stairs.

“Their bedrooms are on the other side of the house and it’s well-insulated. You could murder someone in one of these places and still not have anyone hear the room over.” She led Malcolm over to the sitting room couch, where they sat down snugged up together while she put a black and white movie on the television. “You seem to be the sort of man who knows that good things happen to those who have patience.”

“Yeah, but I’d rather be as well-fucked as a randy teen if I can help it,” he joked. He kissed the side of her head and held her close, paying more attention to the perfume she wore and the feel of her waist underneath his hand than the movie. It was one he’d seen before, so it didn’t matter much to him; all he cared about was making sure he didn’t fuck up his first time over at her place.

Time had passed—Malcolm wasn’t entirely sure how long—when he could hear the front door open and the sound of extra people coming into the house. Kate stood as a teen girl came into the room, the two of them hugging tightly.

“How’s it going, Mum?” the teen asked, having not noticed the visitor on the couch.

“Well enough—you know how it is,” Kate replied. She then turned towards Malcolm, extending her arm towards him as he also stood up. “Malc, this is my daughter and youngest, Fiona.” He wrapped his arm around her waist while she mimicked the motion, it all seamless. Fiona’s eyebrows shot up almost instantly, seemingly impressed.

“You’re seeing someone? Finally?” the teen marveled. “I thought Gordy was just joking… it’s been a while since what’s-his-face…”

“You mean your father? Yes, it has been a bit since him, now hasn’t it?” She glanced at Malcolm,
who was attempting to not burst out laughing. “Watch this one—she’s nearly fifteen and not afraid of
anything.”

“Wonderful age,” he commented, “and I hope she’s having as much fun as I did back then.” He held
out his hand towards the teen. “With any luck we might even be able to get along.”

Fiona shook Malcolm’s hand with an amused expression. “So then very Scottish; Granddad would
have approved, even if you were one of those political jockeys back in a past life.” Her grin only
widened as his face darkened and he took his hand back. “Oh, don’t worry—I don’t care about that.
It only makes things more interesting.”

“…except why would a young teen know or care about what some duffers down in Whitehall are
doing?” he asked.

“Mainly because the school my father sends me to is full of those duffers’ kids and grandkids,” Fiona
said. “You terrify them, and for the right reasons. Ten years and they’d be the ones getting verbally
torn to shreds because they’re just as dense. Some of my classmates were glad when you got locked
away… but I guess that was something UNIT didn’t find all that convenient, was it?”

“I do better work when I’m breathing free air and allowed to eat as many Yorkie bars as is legal,” he
replied. “Everything else is just incidental.”

“Then I think we’ll get on great.” Fiona then saw the movie on the television, perking up
immediately. “Oh, can I join you? I haven’t seen this in ages!”

“Take out the trash like you were supposed to do two weeks ago but then Gordon had to do it, and
then we’ll talk,” Kate said. Her daughter rolled her eyes and left, allowing the adults to sit back down
again. “I think she likes you.”

“She goes to a fucking twit factory?” Malcolm sputtered, completely baffled. “Sounds to me like you
got divorced for a good fucking reason.”

“He didn’t like me leaving the kids with Dad while I would get called in to work or had a long day,”
she shrugged. “Loris knew what sort of job I was getting into and said he was fine with it, but I
guess he really wasn’t deep down.”

“His loss,” Malcolm scoffed. He leaned in and left a quick kiss on the corner of his lady’s mouth,
humming in satisfaction. “A powerful woman does taste good.”

“Save it for tonight—you’re going to need to save plenty of room for dessert,” Kate teased.

“Trash outside and hands washed,” Fiona announced as she walked back into the room. She plopped
herself onto the couch on the other side of Malcolm, shocking him by curling up into his side.

“Umm… what the fuck do you think you’re doing?” he wondered, trying not to panic.

“She’s a cuddler—gets it from me,” Kate said. She didn’t even need to take her eyes off the
television to know what was going on. “Fiona, be nice.”

“Malcolm, didn’t you ever watch TV with your kids?” the teen asked, ignoring his discomfort.

“Don’t have any nips of my own, but my niece stopped this when she was eight,” he replied. When
Fiona didn’t budge, he exhaled heavily in defeat. “Get thrown straight into the fire, I suppose.”

“That’s the spirit,” Kate chuckled, patting his leg.
Malcolm simply gritted his teeth, keeping his eyes on the television and the hand not occupied by his lady-friend along the back of the couch, ignoring all else… even if that included Gordon trying not to cackle as he passed on his way towards the kitchen.

It was the following day as Malcolm stood upright and cracked his back, groaning at the stiffness he was magically experiencing there. He and Kate had been out in the garden most of the morning weeding, of all things, and it was more physical activity than he’d had all year combined, sex aside.

“Come on now—we’ve got one bed to go, then lunch,” Kate said cheerily. She patted his rear end affectionately as she walked past him, trowel in her other hand.

“I wish you were talking about the mattress sort of bed and not flowers,” he groused. “I’ve sweated off all the sunblock and this heat is roasting me alive. Are you sure we’re in a Home County and not the fucking Mediterranean?”

“A shower and a nice long nap awaits us as well… how about that?” she teased.

“Then there may be a God after all,” he muttered. He got down on his hands and knees next to her and began picking at the small shoots coming up between the flowers, angered that they even existed.

“Hey, Malcolm.”

“What…?”

When he turned his head to look at her, Kate poked him in the nose with a gloved hand, smearing dirt on his face. She gave him a playful glance before he took that as his cue and pounced, tackling her into the grass with naughty hands and kisses to her neck. They rolled about on the lawn for a moment, feeling like giddy teens, until the mobile in Kate’s back pocket began to ring, bringing them back down to Earth.

“Let me get that,” Malcolm murmured against her chest. He got in a decent grope before answering. “If this is R&D, then it better be the Head Osgood because I have no time for Heckle and Jeckle today.”

“Sorry, did I call the wrong number?” It was the Osgoods’ uncle, the one who officially headed Research and Development, and he sounded rather confused. “Mister Tucker, what are you doing with Director Stewart’s mobile?”

“Gardening.”

“Uh-huh. Is that the new euphemism these days?”

“…not technically…”

“I know you’re dating, Petronella told me—I just need some verbal confirmation on a couple things before I can pass it off to Alessandra’s department. Please?”

“Yeah, hold on.” Malcolm passed Kate her mobile and rubbed his face in her chest while she talked to the Head Osgood. A few minutes later and she tapped him on the back of the head with the device, tutting in disapproval.

“Be nice to the other heads of staff, dear,” she scolded.
“How can I if everything keeps on getting in the fucking way?” he scowled, face still decidedly between her breasts. “Couldn’t do anything last night with the kids around and so we fell asleep on the couch, we’re gardening instead of having a proper Saturday-morning lie-in, and now work keeps nagging us.”

“You agreed to be here the same weekend as Fiona, the garden has been ignored for over two weeks now, and work would have found us at your flat anyhow.”

“Yeah, but I’d rather be laying down like this starkers.”

She considered that for a moment. “True, but this feels naughtier, out in the open like this.”

“I like the way you think,” he grinned devilishly. They began to kiss again, rather turned on by the smells of earth and sweat that permeated the air around them, only stopping when they heard Fiona’s far-off voice.

“Mum? Malcolm? Are you alright?” The couple looked towards the house and saw that she was staring at them from her opened bedroom window. Malcolm flipped her two fingers high in the air, which gained his bottom a firm smack in punishment.

“Not the teenager,” she hissed.

“Yeah, yeah, roll over to the hedge if you’re gonna shag, okay? Don’t do it where the neighbors can see,” Fiona shouted back.

“Fiona Francesca Ferrero, don’t make me come up there!” Kate warned. Her daughter simply vanished from the window, presumably going back to whatever it was she had been doing.

“Much of a cockblock as she is, I like her,” Malcolm admitted. “Ever need to put her up for adoption and she’ll have not only a home but a positive influence in her life.”

“You are not a positive influence,” Kate deadpanned.

“I was talking about Lex, but hey, you went there, love,” he said. He then rolled off her, laying face-up in the grass and staring up at the bright sky above. “Hey, can we just… stay here for a bit?”

“Can’t move either?”

“There’s a reason why I never did yardwork—I’m stiffer than a dick in a porno for fuck’s sake.”

She held his hand and simply laughed.

Chapter End Notes

The Seventh Doctor story Battlefront features the Brig being called as an advisor of sorts while he is living at this house. It looks like a nice house in the countryside, so it’s gonna be a really nice house in the countryside.
Mainframe UK had really gone all-out. General Winifred Bambera was going to be arriving in less than six hours and everything was shaping up to be a splendid homecoming. The entire base had been given a thorough cleaning, the molemen were all in order, and they had even dusted off Captain Benton for the occasion. He was wandering around the mainframe in a fit of nostalgia, watching as the finishing touches were being placed on things.

“It always feels good to be here,” he told Malcolm, who was the one geriatric-sitting until Kate came back from the loo. “It was so difficult in the old days… almost like we were the laughing stock of the military ventures. Now… a proper base, proper equipment, mostly-proper funding, and a direction to go in that’s not necessarily war-like… UNIT has come so far.”

“Wish I could take some of the credit, but Kate’d kill me,” Malcolm chuckled. “It’ll be a year for me next month… saved some shitstains from blowing this place’s cover sky-high, but that’s not enough to take credit for much more.”

“It has been nearly a year since you arrived, hasn’t it?” Benton mused. “Been in the free and clear, with your own flat, and you’ve been dating Tiger how long now?”

“Nearly four months,” Malcolm said. Benton was fully-aware of what was going on in Kate’s life, sort of as though he was watching out for her in Saint Alistair’s stead, and it made the media man almost jealous of his lady, in a way. “Makes me feel on top of the fucking world being with her and to give that up would mean I’m dead. I’m such a sap that I have to remind myself to not propose, since it was around this time I popped the question to my ex-wife.”

“That sounds a little hasty, don’t you think?”

“It was, but I learned from it; in the end, she was only after my connections. Not only does Kate have a conscious, she listens to the damn thing. In retrospect, my ex never did that… it was all being hungry for power.”

“…and since Tiger’s at the top of her game, right where she wants to be, you don’t have any reservations over her intentions,” Benton concluded.

“Tuckers fall hard and fast; at least one marriage needs to occur in my family since my great-grandparents’ time that actually succeeds, and I’d rather not all the pressure be on my niece if she decides to get hitched,” Malcolm shrugged. “What do you think… ask her nips permission first? They don’t mind me, and I’m pretty sure Fiona’s fond of having me around, but I can’t marry a woman whose kids are against the idea.”

“I’m sure the Brigadier would have wanted you to talk to them first anyhow,” Benton assured. “Take them out for lunch or something the next weekend Fiona’s home and Gordon’s off work and explain your situation then. Maybe they could give some sort of insight as to when you should ask Tiger about taking things further.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“What’s a plan?” Kate asked, having finally approached the two.

“Oh, just figuring out how to bust Johnnie here out of the war museum and over to the titty-pub next week,” Malcolm replied. He gave her a playful wink, at which she rolled her eyes.
“I give up; I don’t want to know,” she said. “Malcolm, I just got a call from Morton and she’s come
down with the flu—do you think you can pop over to the station and pick up Fiona and Zuri in a
couple hours?”

“Can’t—put off a meeting with my department for too long now,” he frowned. After pondering for a
moment, he perked up at an idea. “Lex is off school the week—I can get her to do it.”

“Then I’ll get her some temporary credentials into the system,” she replied. “The girls have wanted to
meet for a while now, but never have had the opportunity. This’ll be good for them.”

“...to co-babysit an advanced ten-year-old? An excellent bonding experience; I’ll ring her now.”

“Aren’t you an evil uncle, volunteering her like that,” Benton chuckled. Malcolm flipped him a V as
he walked off towards his office, mobile to his ear. He was just inside the lift when his niece picked
up.

“What’s up?”

“Lex, what’cha doing this afternoon?”

“I was planning on Skyping with Kanda, but she’s got a family thing to go to that her mam refuses to
let her skip. I think it was a cousin’s wedding shower, which would be weird considering it’s the
middle of the week, but you know Mrs. Keng.”

“Well then, how would you like to do your ol’ uncle a favor and pick up some people at the train
station? Kate’s PA was supposed to do it, but she’s puking her guts out, and Rajit and I need to be at
a meeting.” He exited the lift and found that Aparajita was not in her usual spot—probably off
causing hell somewhere. “I’ll make it worth your while.”

“Living rent-free in this classy-ass dump is worth my while,” Lex laughed. “Who am I chauffeuring
in Britain’s tiniest and cheapest limo?”

“You know how we’ve got this general coming in from fucking Geneva? Kate was able to arrange
to have the woman’s daughter brought over here from her school as a surprise so they could spend
some time together,” he explained. Malcolm sat down in his desk chair and glanced out over the
atrium, seeing Kate and Benton talking over on the far end. “The nip’s a bright one—in secondary
school a year early—and is arriving today with an older student as a chaperone.”

“Ah, so this isn’t something you can exactly trust any of the molemen with, and the rest of the higher-
ups are preparing for the pomp and circumstance of General Mam’s arrival.”

“Right on the nose; besides, the older student with the lass just so happens to be a young lady named
Fiona Ferrero, otherwise known as my ladyfriend’s daughter.”

“Finally! I was starting to wonder if you guys were afraid I was going to kidnap her or something if
we ever met!”

“I still don’t put it past you, but I think we can take our chances if a third party’s involved,” Malcolm
snerked. “I’ll text Fiona your number, let her know the change in plans, and the two of you can take
it from there. You can handle a teenager and a preteen for a little while, yeah?”

“Fuck you.”

“That’s the spirit—thanks again, kiddo.”
“Alright; see you in a tic.”

Malcolm ended the call and fired off a text to Fiona explaining the situation. She replied with a “K” and a winking face, which allowed him to begin to get his notes together for his impending meeting. He was going to have to go over the past two months’ worth of departmental performances and he was not looking forward to it. Too often he simply got those big, about-to-be-roadkill, eyes; he’d clear out the staff and replace them if he could, but too many were just useful enough to not sack, not to mention the fact that most of the people he’d want to hire wouldn’t even pass the background checks.

He was nearly done when Aparajita finally came out of the lift looking terribly shaken. She went and silently sat down at her desk and stared at her computer, which made her boss stare at her in concern.

“What’s the matter?” he wondered.

“Just… have you talked to Glenn Cullen lately?”

“Not within the past week—I know he’s been out for a bit. Why?”

“I was just having a chat with him in the canteen; he was out because a friend of his died,” she said.

“Oh, well, when you’re as old and crusty as Glenn is, you end up going to a lot more funerals than you care to admit.”

“He wasn’t that old though,” Aparajita said. “Two years older than me—Raj’s age—and he’s just gone. Survived being deployed overseas a couple times and everything.”

“What’s Glenn doing hobnobbing with ex-soldiers half his age?” Malcolm frowned. He stood and went to his assistant’s desk to make sure she was alright.

“They met in a pub a while back and Glenn would offer him advice since he didn’t have a dad to ask things. He was ready to set up a date between us, but dropped that idea when the guy started dating a coworker.”

“Ach, that’s too bad. Did he say what the lad died from?”

“Hit-and-run; was on his mobile with his girlfriend when it happened. He’s never seen someone that upset… like it’s just numbed her into nothingness…”

…and you can’t stop thinking about it being your cousin instead of that lad.”

“It’s silly, but yeah,” she admitted.

“Hey, go make yourself a cuppa and take a moment on the couch in my office,” he offered. “I’ll head down to the meeting by myself.”

“You sure?”

“Positive—if I can’t handle those goddamned legacy hires and twatballs for a few hours, then I might as well hand over the job to Shaw like the shitstain wanted to begin with.”

Aparajita laughed at the notion. “Sounds like a plan.”

Taking that as an appropriate response, Malcolm patted her shoulder and went back to his desk to finish up gathering his things. She had just finished making her tea when he was ready to leave.
“By the way,” he said on his way to the lift, “I got Lex picking up Fiona and Miss Bambera in Morton’s stead—try not to scare the poor lass.”

“That’s not specific enough,” she chuckled. He gave her a grin and entered the lift—she was still a little shaken, but at least she was going to be alright.

Meeting over, Aparajita’s nerves back to its steely norm, and a Double Decker in his system; Malcolm was ready for the general to make her appearance and leave. It wasn’t that he had anything against her, yet because people were making such a big deal of it, nearly everyone around him seemed to be on the edge of their seats. He didn’t think General Bambera sounded like a particularly nasty person, so he simply shrugged it off and decided he’d make a judgement himself after he met the woman.

It was finally time for General Bambera to arrive and thank fuck she was right on schedule. Kate, Benton, and the Scarfys had greeted her on the helipad and brought her underground, showing her everything that had changed within the time she’d been away. Malcolm waited impatiently in the atrium with the remainder of the heads of staff, bouncing his leg as he sat perched atop the railing by the molemen’s pit.

“This is going to make me go fucking nuts if Bambera doesn’t get here soon,” he scowled. If he was being completely honest, the only way things could have been worse was if he was made to wear the UNIT military kit that was stashed up in his office cupboard for true emergencies. “What’s keeping them?”

“Who knows?” Glenn shrugged. He, Malcolm, and William, the Scarfys’ uncle and technical head of Research and Development, were grouped together while they were waiting for the word that Bambera was coming. The male Osgood was only a little older than Glenn, though to Malcolm, seemed much more in-touch with things than the old political aide.

“It’s not like she asks for the show or anything,” William said. “I just hope my nieces don’t embarrass the mainframe again by asking about the Carbury Incident.”

“Ah, she’ll behave,” Glenn assumed. “Hey, you figure out which one is which yet?”

“Nope—whichever is the Zygon is a perfect replica. It’s like Petronella found her long-lost twin or something. Having an extra niece isn’t that bad, so I’m not concerned about it.”

“I don’t know; two of mine might be a bit of trouble,” Malcolm chuckled. “You can meet Lex later if you’d like. She’s a bit on the sarcastic side, but that’s how I fucking raised her.”

“Still can’t see you as a father-figure, even to a niece,” Glenn said, shaking his head. “The mental breakdowns you’ve caused, the threats you’ve made…”

“…and not a single one of you fuckers didn’t deserve it,” Malcolm replied. “Threats for no reason are one thing, and making jokes like that aren’t funny in the slightest, but neither of them compare to the shit I had to clear up back then, and not a single one listened to me until I was threatening the worst. You all had it coming.”

“My nose didn’t have it coming.”

“C’mon… I apologized over that one.”

“Okay, everyone!” the Head of Security shouted, pressing his mobile’s earpiece into his head. “I just got word that they’re coming our way! Attention!”
Everyone scrambled to their positions, falling into impeccably-straight lines, and saluted when General Bambera and her entourage came through. They came to a stop by the departmental heads, who all thankfully stood at-ease.

“Not the exact same line-up as the last time I was here, but I’ve heard that everyone has been doing a brilliant job and for that I congratulate you,” she said with a grin. She scanned the group of them, taking note of Glenn and Malcolm both. “So, you two are the new guys in from the government. How’s life in the international and interstellar circuit treating you?”

“It’s better than I could have ever imagined,” Glenn replied.

“Me mam thinks I’m off my rocker, but considering I would have taken ‘unemployed’ compared to what I was, I’m in paradise,” Malcolm added. General Bambera tilted her head at that, narrowing her eyes slightly.

“I hope it’s just that she doesn’t believe in aliens.”

“Actually, she knew about UNIT long before I was born, ma’am,” he explained. “She wasn’t a wee, meek housewife for even a moment and has participated in more government operations than anyone’ll ever know.” It was killing him to not cuss in front of the general, but he promised Kate earlier to not unless it was called for, and it was nowhere near that yet.

“Ah, I see,” she nodded. “Well then, I’m glad that the two of you are excelling at and enjoying your new roles. Geneva appreciates it.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Malcolm and Glenn said together.

“Alright everyone, DISMISSED!” the general ordered. Everyone relaxed and most people went back to their stations. As she watched the dispersal, Bambera turned towards Kate. “I know it sounds like favoritism, but I honestly believe the UK mainframe is amongst one of the better stations in the organization. It makes me proud to say this was my home mainframe.”

“It’s an honor,” Kate replied. “Actually, General, we have a surprise for you.”

“You do…?”

“Yes,” Kate took the communicator from inside her jacket pocket and spoke into it. “Corporal, escort our guests into the atrium.”

“On it,” answered Gordon’s static-marred voice. Moments later and he appeared out a door with Fiona, Lex, and a small girl who resembled a heavy-browed, pigtailed, light-skinned version of the general, who lit up at the sight of her.

“MUM!” the girl shouted from across the atrium.

“Ah, there’s my little Zuri,” Bambera grinned. The girl ran up to her and they hugged, holding one another tight.

“I miss you, Mum,” the girl whined. Her voice nearly broke Malcolm’s heart, as it was the tone of a child close to their parent. “I don’t want to go to the stupid English school anymore. Why can’t I stay with you and Dad?”

“We went over this: you are going to a school with an advanced curriculum, and although Dad and I miss you too, we know it’s for the best.”
Young Zuri had clearly heard that answer before, as she made a sad noise and clung to her mother. In the meantime, Fiona and Lex had reached them and hugged Kate and Malcolm, while Gordon resisted, seeing that he was still on-duty.

“This girl really needs to be in Geneva,” Fiona told her mother lowly. “Cried almost the entire way here.” Lex on the other hand…

“Whoa, Uncle Malc… how come you didn’t tell me this was where you two worked?!” she marveled. She was still looking around everywhere, a bit in-awe at her surroundings.

“I figured you’d get here eventually, so I chose to wait for the surprise,” he grinned. “Fiona, how’s the gilt prison life going?”

“Well enough; how's being Mum’s current foreign-blooded boy toy treating you?” the teen snarked back. Kate elbowed her sourly in reply.

“Behave,” she hissed.

“Gordy’s dad is half-Polish, my Dad’s Italian, Malc’s Scottish… you definitely like them not-English.”

“If you don’t stop you are going to be grounded until you go off to university.”

Fiona chuckled, not believing her mother for a moment, instead turning her attention towards Malcolm and Lex. “Shock wear off yet?”

“She still can’t believe the flat we’re in, so no,” Malcolm teased. He then noticed that Zuri had approached them, staring at the three timidly. “What’s the matter, kiddo? You alright?”

“Thank you, Miss Lewiston, for driving me and Miss Fiona here, and thank you, Miss Fiona, for accompanying me,” the girl said. It was enough to snap Lex out of her daze, instead becoming enamored by the child’s politeness.

“You’re welcome, sweetie,” she replied, patting her on the shoulder. “Just be good to your mam, okay?”

“Okay.”

“That’s a good girl,” Bambera said. “Can’t forget our manners; don’t slip just because your classmates don’t remember.”

“Some of them are nice, but a lot are rude,” Zuri told her mother. She went back to her side and hugged her around the middle, glad to be there.

General Bambera was nearly about to start thanking everyone herself when one of the molewomen over at a scanner station grabbed a printout and ran up to the group. She held it out towards Kate, a terrified look plastered on her face.

“I’m sorry to interrupt, ma’am, but we’re picking up the Master’s psychic signature alongside a different bioread. He’s regenerated… and he’s in London.”

“Put a tracker on him—watch out for any suspicious activity,” Kate ordered.

“Hey! Looks like we’ve got company!” a moleman shouted from his station. “I’m getting hits over by St. Paul’s that are off the charts!”
“Give me CCTV, now,” Kate instructed. Everyone in the atrium watched as a camera feed was put up on display across the monitors. Familiar-looking suits of what almost could have passed for armor were standing in the street, the sight of which sent a chill down the employees’ collective spine.

“Shit, it’s Cybermen!” Bambera growled. She held her daughter closer, glaring at the screens.

“Alright, men! I need battle stations!” Kate shouted, immediately jumping into action. “Just how we drilled! I need Boat One prepped, an undercover squadron down in the epicenter along with outfitted backup, and I need it now!” She then turned around to address the other officers. “General, ma’am, I request that you take your daughter back to Geneva with you and stay there; get her with Ancelyn and brace for the worst.”

“That is an excellent suggestion,” Bambera nodded. She took Zuri by the hand and led her off towards some soldiers, figuring out a way to get back to headquarters.

“Ahmed,” Kate continued, “I need you on Boat One, along with an Osgood, as representatives of the international community and the Human-Zygon Alliance.”

“Yes, ma’am,” both Ahmed and an Osgood saluted before running off.

“Tucker, as temporary Lieutenant Colonel, you are in charge; Benton, help him out with the more military aspects while I’m gone. Fiona, Lex, go up to my office and stay there, no excuses. I need everyone else at their stations. That is an order.”

“Kate…” Malcolm started, though she began to walk off before he could continue. He nearly had to run to catch up with her, finally able to get hold of her arm in a corridor. “Do you have to go?”

“Yes, I’m the Brigadier-Director, and the Brigadier deals directly with the Doctor,” she replied.

“You don’t tell someone to prepare for the fucking worst and then expect everyone else around you to act like it’s some casual, shitty drill. I’m genuinely terrified—you know how much it takes for me to admit that.”

Stepping forward, Kate kissed Malcolm on the lips without the privacy of one of their offices at work for the first time that he could recall. It didn’t matter that a bunch of people were running about in a panic or that it didn’t get past their lips—she kissed him.

“Do a good job and you might get something extra later,” she teased. With that, she patted him on the chest and walked away, this time, allowed to go where she needed to be. After watching her go down the corridor for a few seconds, Malcolm turned back around and returned to the atrium, finding that a couple of civilians were still hanging around that shouldn’t have been.

“C’mon, you hear what the lady said: to her office you two,” he told Lex and Fiona. The younger of the pair simply glared at him in concern, knowing the gravity of the situation.

“Mum doesn’t just leave like that,” Fiona stated. “Why’d she leave?”

“Because your mam’s the Brigadier-Director, and the Brigadier deals directly with the Doctor,” he repeated. Glancing over his shoulder at Gordon, he whistled to get the young man’s attention. “If you could please make sure the civilians find the appropriate office, then we can make sure they stay safe.”

“Yes, sir,” Gordon replied. He escorted his sister and friend out of the atrium, leaving the room purely filled with UNIT personnel. Malcolm gave Captain Benton a grin and shoved his hands in his pockets, turning towards the molemen that were already frantically working.
“Right then, you bunch of bent sods! I’ve only seen footage of these Cybercunts and I want to keep it that way! Let’s make the Brigadier-Director proud and make sure nothing happens on this end that we can’t fix! Time to fucking earn that paycheck!”
Here’s the next installment for what might be a while, thanks to holidays coming up. If there is more before the new year, then it’s a bonus, but for now this is it (though I do have some of the next chapter written).

“First protocol is implemented—we are good to go,” Kate said. “I’ll let you know when we’ve reached the next stage.”

“Good luck, love,” Malcolm replied. The call ended, he shoved his mobile in his pocket and looked out on the pit that had the molemen in it, watching mercilessly as they scrambled to keep their stations working smoothly. It had been less than an hour since Kate had left him in charge of the place and he certainly wasn’t about to walk away and allow the chaos devolve into anarchy; this was his post now, as temporary as it was, and it reminded him of Cabinet reshuffles and surprise elections. He was more than qualified for this.

“Lieutenant Colonel, I just got a text—we’re to ‘guard the graveyards’ according to the Doctor,” Scarfy frowned, standing next to him. She stared at her mobile and loosened her scarf idly. “That doesn’t make sense... why the graveyards?”

“Cybercunts might use them as a gathering place since there’s no one in ‘em that can hold a torch and pitchfork,” he shrugged. “I though you and the other Miss Level know what one another’s thinking at all times.”

“The psychic link works best when we’re physically occupying roughly the same space; it’s easier to simply text instead of waste mental energy attempting to keep in sync long-distance,” she replied.

“Fair enough,” he shrugged. “I just wish the Doctor wasn’t involved. It’s bad enough the Master is, but to have two of those lunatics putting their cosmic dicks in the biscuit tin… though one of ‘em doesn’t exactly has a dick anymore, does she?”

“She’ll get sick of peeing sitting down eventually, trust me,” Scarfy snarked. She excused herself to take a call from her uncle and Malcolm was left alone, overseeing his subordinates quietly.

That was certainly something: observing quietly. It wasn’t often he got to merely watch without shouting at the top of his lungs in the process—even his direct staff in Communications occasionally needed a decent bollocking to keep in line—and to stand there with no one to actually need to shout at… it was an odd feeling. Then again, UNIT was rather well-stacked when it came to competency.

Out of the corner of his eye, Malcolm saw Glenn knelt down aside an unmanned moleman station, recognizing it as the project that he had been working on the day before, put on hold because of General Bambera’s arrival. He attempted to walk over casually as possible, something that still caught the attention of his former political colleague.

“Before you start shouting, if someone out here has an issue, which I’m sure will happen, at least I don’t have to break a sweat running to get up here,” Glenn said.
“I don’t believe it—we’ve worked together for fucking decades and I’ve never seen you run a single stride even once.”

“Better than whatever that is you call running—I hope for your sake the Brigadier-Director isn’t fond of participating in 5ks.”

“Touché.” He watched Glenn poke and prod the station innards with different devices, most of which he’d never seen before, and scowled. “Hey, you alright?”

“Out of all the decades we’ve worked together, I think you’ve asked me that all of once, and that’s just because I think you felt guilty about my nose.”

“Well, it’s not like you’ve missed nearly a week of work before because a pub mate half your age died,” Malcolm mentioned. Glenn stared at him, not entirely sure how to respond. “Rajit told me and I didn’t want to bring it up around everyone earlier.”

“Thanks,” he said. “Danny… he was a good lad—deserved the flack he got for being a soldier less than I did when I came back from ‘Nam. Hard worker, knew what he wanted, straddled that line between the guy you want to be your younger brother and the guy you nearly see as a son. It’s an odd thing to say, but you’d understand if you were in my position…”

“…which is why your hands are still shaking.”

“For fuck’s sake, Malcolm—don’t you have anyone to bollock into submission?”

“Not yet, but I don’t want it to be you… not because of this,” he replied. “Listen: Morton’s out sick and there are a couple civilians up in Kate’s office. Can you stay with them for a bit, make sure they’re alright? It’s just up the lift if you need to get back.”

“Alright,” Glenn relented. He put the otherworldly scanning device back in the tool tote and left the bag there. “I’ve met Miss Ferrero, but the other one’s your niece, right?”

“Yeah, that’s my Lex; careful, ’cause she’s got the Tucker Temper worse than me. She’s me mam’s granddaughter through and through.”

“Noted.” Glenn then walked away, headed over towards the lift that would take him to Kate’s office. Malcolm went back to his post, only for the Biomedical Head, Alessandra Sullivan, to walk up to him brandishing a complicated-looking readout on a tablet.

“It’s spreading,” she said gravely. “Cybermen are exploding in the sky all around the world. I’ve got my team attempting to figure out what precisely is going on, but we’re stumped.”

“This is the Master’s doing—who knows what sort of shit she’s got up her parasol,” he replied, examining the data. He could make sense of it up until a point, but afterwards it was just a bunch of fucking gibberish. “You send this to the Brigadier-Director?”

“It’s being compiled now for upload. So much for this being a localized event, eh?”

“Why else do you think we went to fetch His Sodding Presidency?” Malcolm scoffed. “So the cybercide is what’s causing this freakish rain?”

“There’s something special in the rain that’s reacting with the deceased’s organic matter; before this we’ve only had records of live-cyberconversions, so this is definitely new to us.”

“…then Mister President better get to presidenting or there are going to be rent boys less fucked than
“You always have a way with words, don’t you Tucker?” Sullivan chuckled. She took back her tablet and sighed while swiping through the rest of her data. “We’re stuck worried about Cybermen, thanks to a what-if that has no precedent, while I’d rather have a crack at decoding Gallifreyan gender fluidity and its role in regeneration. Feeling repressed and rebelling when it comes to gender norms is one thing, and confusing the mental for the biological is another, but this is purely biological… you don’t just change your base biology on a whim.”

“Say that now and it might get treated like a death sentence,” Malcolm warned. “I thought Time Lords swapped faces now and then, yeah? Who’s to say they want to trade their balls for some tits and vice versa every now and then?”

“We’ve never been in contact with such an individual before—this is brand-new stuff that could help humans with their own gender-specific problems should we crack the code. If the Osgoods and I can get just a bit of time…”

“I told ya: be careful what you wish for. It got me fucked over more than once. Got visuals on the Doctor’s new mug yet?”

“Right here.” Sullivan pulled up a scan of the Doctor from the shoulders up, showing it to Malcolm. “Ugly bloke,” he scowled. “If these bent space-tits can change appearance and gender and all that shit, you would think they’d try to look like they weren’t run over by a train.”

“Who knows? Probably got sick of looking like a Beatle and moved on.”

“Fucked if I know.”

Glancing up at the monitors above the molemen, he watched as the convoy carrying his lady and the Time Lords were being tracked on their way towards Boat One. There was an uneasy feeling in his stomach as he did so, hoping that everything was going to go according to plan.

Peeling a satsuma up in Kate’s office, Malcolm tried to keep a shell of composure in front of Lex and Fiona. He had relieved Glenn of his civiliansitting duties after a few hours and was now briefing the young women with what he could. They were over in the sitting area, with him in a chair and the two civilians sitting on the couch.

“These Cyberpricks, how dangerous are they?” Lex wondered.

“You must’ve had fun living up in Scotland, not getting the crazy shit we do down here,” Fiona said. “Their primary objective is the destruction of humanity as we know it, though it’s through things like eliminating emotions and attachments… stuff like that. They use what can be considered positive concepts in a negative way. When priests and gurus tell someone to let go of their emotions, this is the furthest thing they mean; controlling is not the same thing as straight-up deleting.”

“Not sure if I see Gordy doing it, so are you planning on taking over the family business from your mam?” Malcolm asked. “You’ve got the brains and know-how for it.”

“Maybe, if I get bored enough,” the teen shrugged. “I had been thinking about business and banking… you know… be where the funds come from.”

“Sounds like a good goal to have,” he said, popping a section of fruit into his mouth. “The less we have to rely on the fucking Crown the better… and even the UN doesn’t always admit that we’re
“Hence why I’d like to make sure that we rely on public funds less and less—it’ll be a challenge, but it’s one I’m up to tackling.”

“Do you know if Zuri and her mam are back in Geneva yet?” Lex asked, changing the subject. “The nip seemed pretty nerve-wracked.”

“They touched down just before I came up,” Malcolm replied. “Wasn’t a long ride at all. It looks like they’re going through the exact same things in Switzerland that we are in the UK… it’s happening all over the world.”

“…but Mum has the Doctor, yeah? He’s President of the World, dumb as that sounds,” Fiona mentioned.

“I don’t trust a Time Lord as far as I can toss him, but this is fucking lunacy.” He ran his hands over his face and exhaled heavily. “For that shit to be the only hope we have, we’ve got to be desperate.”

“Umm… Malcolm…?” The three glanced towards the door and saw Aparajita standing there, looking rather unnerved. “Captain Benton wants you.”

“No rest for the wicked,” he sighed. “Hang tight, ladies—I’ll be back when I can.” Malcolm went over to his PA and closed the office door behind them. “You look as though someone told you that Finch prick got back out and attacked your granddad personally.”

“No, but you better get down there,” she replied.

Not wanting to waste time, Malcolm went into the lift and down to the atrium level. He went towards where Scarfy, Benton, and Sullivan were standing, the both looking at something on the latter’s tablet.

“What’s going on?” he asked, attempting to keep his voice down. “Rajit looked genuinely scared.”

“Heat scans on cemeteries and graveyards all over the UK and Ireland are correlating what’s beginning to happen around the rest of the world: the graves are active,” Sullivan said. “Cyberconversion is happening despite everything we know saying that it shouldn’t.”

“Is there anything we can do?”

“Other than tell the Brigadier-Director? Nothing,” Benton said. The old man looked weary, as though he was in need of a good, long rest.

“Lieutenant Colonel!” a molewoman shouted. “We have reports of Cybermen popping out of graves and wandering around cemeteries! What do we do?!”

“Send the information to Boat One—monitor the situation and prep reaction squadrons,” he ordered quickly. “Any reports of them acting out?”

“None, sir.”

“Then proceed as planned.”

The alarm lights across the atrium deepened from bright orange to a red-orange, heightening the threat level slightly. It had been varying shades of yellow and orange since Kate left and it was now the closest to red the media man had ever seen it outside of drills, exercises, and that time the
“Lieutenant Colonel,” Scarfy said, bringing his thoughts back, “do you want me to get Corporal Lethbridge-Stewart and have him escort the civilians in the Brigadier-Director’s office home? They’ve been here a long time and if we move them now, they’ll miss the Cybermen’s activation.”

“Good idea, but not yet.” Malcolm nodded. “I’d rather keep them here for a while yet if the Cybercunts are starting to pop up like metal-plated zombies. Hobbling about or not, those corpses are going to start attacking without a fucking notice.”

“Oka…a…y…”

Scarfy’s eyes went wide and she dropped to the floor, visibly shaking. Benton and Malcolm both jumped back, while Sullivan immediately put down her tablet and began checking her over.

“What the fuck is happening?!” Malcolm asked.

“It looks like shock, but I don’t know from what,” Sullivan replied. “I need to get her down to medical, now!”

While it did not take long for someone to appear with a gurney, it was just enough time for Scarfy to start convulsing. Sullivan got some help from Malcolm in holding her down so that she didn’t hurt herself. They lifted her onto the gurney and strapped her down, with Sullivan immediately rushing her over to the medical bay.

“Shit…” Benton marveled. “I didn’t know that the younger Osgood was prone to seizures.”

“I dunno… that doesn’t look like one to me,” Malcolm scowled. “I’ve seen ‘em before and they don’t happen out of nowhere like what Scarfy’s going through. Alessandra probably thinks that’s it because she’s panicking.”

“How do you know that?”

“Used to work with a lass who was susceptible back in my newspaper days—clever woman, but we had to keep her away from photographed major events or she would be the one making headlines.”

“Sounds like quite the task, considering you worked in news,” Benton said, shaking his head. He caught the stares of nearby molemen out of the corner of his eye and made them get back to work again with only a quick look. Returning to the conversation, he stood close to Malcolm so that no one else could overhear. “Do you think it’s because she’s the Zygon?”

“I don’t know—even with the Zygons working for us allowing medical exams, the last time I checked the file we knew fuck-all about their physiology, and that would do Scarfy no good anyhow considering she’s currently Human, whether that’s what she was originally or not.” Malcolm picked up Sullivan’s tablet from the floor and whistled, urging the cluster of soldiers not far off to send one of their number over. Gordon answered the call and trotted over. “Can you take this down to Medical Officer Sullivan?”

“Sure. Do you think Osgood will be alright?”

“If she’s not now, then she will be eventually—Alessandra’s a good medical doctor,” Benton assured. The young man was about to walk off when a moleman shouted over at his temporary commanding officer.

“We’ve got a message coming in from Boat One!”
“Play it,” Malcolm said. The moleman hit some buttons and brought up the audio, which played on a loop via the overhead speakers.

“Message to Geneva: tell them Boat One is going down. We don’t anticipate survivors.”

Kate… that was her voice. Malcolm’s chest became tight as he listened to her words, the fact they were her last ones hitting him hard.

“Message to Geneva: tell them Boat One is going down. We don’t anticipate survivors.”

Fuck, she sounded terrified. A monitor began to flash—the plane had exploded… she was gone.

“Message to Geneva: tell them Boat One is going down. We don’t anticipate survivors.”

No.
Chapter 12

The entire atrium grew quiet aside from some sporadic beeping on panicked sensors. Everyone stared wide-eyed at the screens, most trained on the largest monitor that declared in big, bold, capital letters BOAT ONE DOWN.

“No…” Gordon breathed. His breath became progressively quicker and shakier while he clenched the railing bars in an attempt to steady himself. Benton went and put an arm around the young man as a comfort for them both, while Malcolm stood frozen, staring at the screens.

‘It… can’t be,’ he thought. A lurch in his stomach broke his daze and he composed himself. He glanced around only to see that eyes were now on him, waiting for orders. ‘Fuck, that’s right—I’m the superior officer… I’m it.’

“Benton, get Corporal Stewart up to… where we’re keeping Lex and Fiona and have Rajit call up Glenn Cullen from Data Management; he’s good with situations like this,” he said quietly. “Come back when everything is stable there.”

“Yes, sir,” Benton nodded, leading Gordon away. Malcolm waited until they were in the lift before addressing the atrium, his voice cracking just enough for him to be conscious of it.

“Allright, listen up,” he announced. “This is supposed to rattle us, shake us to our fucking core, but you want to know what? As often as you molecunts fuck shit up and make my life excruciatingly annoying, you are a group of some of the most talented men and women I’ve ever had the privilege of working with. There’s a reason why UNIT fucking recruited you and don’t ever forget it!

“Brigadier-Director Stewart, Colonel Ahmed, and one of the Lieutenant Osgoods are gone, however this does not mean we’re down for the fucking count! As of this moment, I am temporarily in-charge. My first order as Acting Brigadier-Director is to tell you to get back to your fucking jobs! Mourn the dead later; we have work to do, now! I don’t care if we’re the last fucking holdout of humanity after it’s all said and done!”

The molemen immediately went back to work, attempting to shake the shock from their systems. It wasn’t long before Benton returned and was standing dutifully at his side, his own eyes a bit red.

“Gordy’s up there and Cullen’s on his way,” he reported.

“Good—now I need you to go down to give this to Sullivan and stay the fuck there,” Malcolm ordered, picking up the tablet that was dropped in panic yet again. “If we need to get Scarfy out of here last-minute, then I’d rather you lead that charge.”

“…but…”

“…it doesn’t matter if she’s the original or the Zygon because of what she represents—keeping her safe without knowing which she is will do wonders for the interspecies relations.”

“That’s assuming we make it out of this alive, sir.”

“…and we’re going to do our fucking best to make it look like that’s what we think will happen.” He handed the tablet to the older man and nodded solemnly. “I’ve got things here.”

“Do you, sir?”
“I have to, don’t I?”

With that, Benton took the tablet and went off towards a corridor. Malcolm glanced up towards where he knew his niece was to find that the glass had been turned opaque to conceal those inside—likely a move made by Aparajita. It was probably better he didn’t see any of them anyhow. He watched the molemen scramble instead, silently analyzing the situation as they acted the communications hub.

Maybe this was where he should have been after all.

“Brigadier-Director, sir, I’ve got a call from Geneva on the line; it sounds like General Bambera.”

Malcolm took the phone—a fucking corded phone attached to a base that he also snatched from the terrified man—and scowled into it. “What’cha got for me, Your Exaltedness?”

“I need a status report; who am I speaking with?” He gave her the benefit of the doubt considering they had barely spoken to one another given the emergency, but made note to hand it to her should she quickly forget a second time.

“Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm Tucker, Director of Public Relations and Acting Brigadier-Director; Boat One went down not long ago and we’re rightly panicking.”

“Shit; it’s worse than I thought.”

“If it’s a decoy, it’s fucking convinced me.”

“Watch your language, Tucker, and be their strength,” Bambera commanded. “I’ll keep this line open, since London is Ground Zero—check in if something major happens.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The call ended and he tossed the phone to the ground, not caring what happened to it. He glared that the monitors again in spite, for the information going across the screens was something he never, ever wanted to repeat again. The words echoed through his brain, hollow and perverse.

*Boat One is going down.*

Fuck.

*We don’t anticipate survivors.*

His stomach lurched, forcing him to take a deep breath and reach for one of the hard candies in his pocket Aparajita always kept him stocked up on like some wrinkled old fart. He knew he needed something harder than that—harder than coffee—but he wasn’t in a place to do any of that now. Maybe later under his niece’s understanding and watchful eye, but definitely not now, for these were the times that people remembered, and they were going to remember that putting him in charge was the right call to make, even if it meant that they were the last speck of non-cyberconverted life remaining as the world came crashing down.

Sod it all… as though it fucking mattered anymore.

Clutching the sides of the toilet, Malcolm’s entire body shook as he waited for another potential round of vomit to forcibly expel itself from his intestinal tract. Tears dripped off his nose and *plip-plip-pliped* into the water inches from his face while he knelt there, trying to steady his nerves that
were already so fucking frayed. He hit the lever and watched everything get rinsed away. Deceptively-clear water replaced it, showing him a pale ghost of his reflection that he did his best to ignore.

Shakily, he figured he could risk it and put a hand on either wall of the stall, using it for support as he stood on wobbly knees. When it felt like he could stand of his own volition again, Malcolm opened the door and hobbled towards a sink. He leaned into that as well, cursing his body for not doing what he wanted—he was shutting down, which was the last thing he needed to fucking do at this point.

A glance at the mirror showed the sharp reality of what his reflection in the toilet had wanted to convey. Puffy eyes, snot and tears and specks of vomit all over his face, clothes that were in desperate need of a wash, and the signs of exhaustion that he knew how to recognize after pulling too many all-nighters at Number 10; he was going on thirty hours with little rest and it was beginning to show.

Malcolm ran the water and pumped some soap into his hand. At least the threat was gone—Cybermen self-imploding after their scanners caught a rogue one causing a chain reaction in them all—and everyone was allowed to relax to the best of their abilities. He washed his face and hands and wet his hair with some ice-cold water to help keep him awake.

*We don’t anticipate survivors.*

Kate’s last words rang through his consciousness as though it was the refrain to the worst fucking song he’d ever had the displeasure of hearing. He sniffled, realizing there was nowhere for his snot to go thanks to clogged sinuses, and tried to shake it off. There were still others to think of… a pair of siblings that had been on his mind since before he started heaving his guts up in the bog…

…and all of this could have been avoided had he stuck to his self-enforced code of no longer dating in the workplace.

When he finally felt as though he was stable enough to walk around, Malcolm exited the bathroom, dismissing the soldier who was standing guard to make sure no one else entered during his indulgent moment of weakness. He then made his way through the mainframe, nearly spooked by how calm and quiet it was, and went up the lift into Kate’s office. The only sounds were Glenn fussing over tea in the corner and Fiona’s soft snores as she slept on the couch using Lex’s lap as a pillow. Everyone stared at Malcolm as he entered, including Aparajita and Gordon, who had been talking lowly in the corner.

“Ship didn’t sink,” the acting brigadier-director said. Lex gently removed herself from her spot next to Fiona and went to hug her uncle. He gently squeezed back, knowing she was almost as shaken as he was, only in a different way. “Rajit? Glenn? Can I have a moment with the nips?”

“I’ll go check on Captain Benton then,” Glenn replied solemnly. He unplugged the kettle and made for the lift, though Aparajita lingered by her boss for a moment.

“We all need some food, so I’ll see what I can scavenge,” she said.

“Super Assistant thinks of everything,” he replied.

The two exchanged smiles and she left with Glenn, allowing Malcolm to silently motion to Lex and Gordon to sit with him at the table in the corner… to sit down with his kids, no matter how broad of a definition that might have been.

“How are you holding up?” Malcolm asked Gordon. The younger man nodded slightly, though it
“Was clear his heart wasn’t in it.

“What’s going to happen to Fiona?” he wondered, voice strained and rough from tears. “I know Loris never really liked me that much, but he can’t keep me from seeing her, can he?”

“That’s what I wanted to talk about,” Malcolm replied. “I’m going to need Lex’s help when it comes to arranging things during the day, but I think I’ve got a favor or two left that I cash in with the correct departments so that you can petition to take over your mam’s half of the custody agreement while it’s still in effect. It’s not much, but it’s what I can do. Keeping Alistair’s house in the family might be a long-shot… though I can at least promise this.”

“Tell me what to do and I’ll do it myself; it’s alright,” Gordon said. “You didn’t raise either of us, just dated Mum. You don’t need to do anything.”

“…and that’s where you’re wrong,” Malcolm said. He took a breath and held it, not wanting to break down again. “You’re both good kids and I don’t want to see you two torn apart by this. Kate… I feel like she would have done the same for Lex, in her own way. I… I never married her, but I want to make sure everything’s done correctly for her sake.”

“…but, you don’t have any obligation—like you just said: you didn’t marry Mum. We’re not your problem.”

“Except I would have, had she asked, which makes you the furthest thing from a problem in my eyes,” he insisted. “I’m not just going to drop you now that she’s…” He fiddled with his hands awkwardly, not knowing how else to make things better. This wasn’t something he could cuss at until it went away—it was a real problem involving actual people, not to mention the gaping hole in his own gut. He cleared his throat, gathering himself. “Loris won’t get the chance to dictate when and where the two of you get to be a family or for how long. Siblings are all each other truly have—parents leave us, kids need to live their own lives, but I would have been damned if I was separated from my sister as a nip. Much as Marcia and I don’t get along, I still wouldn’t trade her for anything, and something tells me that you feel the same way about Fiona.”

A long silence permeated the office, making the sleeping teen sound like a roaring bulldozer. Her brother stared at her for a moment, contemplating his answer.

“Thank you,” Gordon finally said. “I appreciate it.”

“Good—now wake up your sister, ‘cause it looks like my sainted assistant has returned,” Malcolm said. Aparajita had indeed come back, a precariously-stacked pile of boxes and bottles in her arms. He and Lex went to help relieve her of most of the load, while Gordon made his way to Fiona’s side.

“Did Glenn find Captain Benton?” Lex asked, keeping her voice down so that only the three of them heard. “He looked pretty shaken too.”

“Yeah, they’re down in the medbay right now,” Aparajita replied. “Luckily he has experience knowing how to handle burying the ones that are supposed to bury you, or whatever the fuck it was he was muttering. I say as long as everyone stays buried that should be at this point, we’ll pull out of this.”

“I hope so,” Malcolm added. They brought the box lunches and water bottles over to the table and distributed them evenly. It took a tremendous amount of willpower for all of them to eat, but they knew they had to… keep strength up and other such bullshit that they were sure Glenn would soberly feed them had he been around. A cold, bland meal and napping at the office was simply going to have to do.
With everything done, everyone decided to split up and get some rest. Malcolm and Gordon went down to the former’s office and each took a couch along with a blanket and pillow, neither wanting to take the bed in the panic room away from the other. It didn’t seem like very long after Malcolm closed his eyes, however, before he was being woken up again, this time by a breathless Lex.

“Uncle Malc! Get up! You have to come quickly!”

“I thought I said ‘a bloody fucking emergency’,” he growled back, not even bothering to open his eyes. He half-expected his niece to snap back something about the nature of “a bloody fucking emergency” and how it pertained to whatever situation it was, except it was Fiona’s voice that answered.

“Mum’s back.”

Bolting upright, Malcolm’s eyes went wide as he stared at the teen. She was crouched down next to her brother on the other side of the room, who also seemed to be genuinely shocked beyond belief.

“What the fuck?!?”

“Doctor Sullivan just called Ms. Khan—the TARDIS appeared in the middle of the medbay and the Doctor came out carrying Mum.” Even though she was the one saying the words, Fiona didn’t seem as though she didn’t believe them herself.

“That motherfucking cocksucker of a prick-arsed…!” Malcolm sputtered as he swung his legs over the edge of the couch and put his shoes back on. He didn’t even bother to tie them, instead tucking in the laces so that he would not trip. “Fiona, Gordon, let’s get you two down there.”

He had to control himself so as to not break out into a full-on run, but Malcolm was able to rush along with the kids down to the medical wing. It was a mess of people being brought in from the field after having fought off the wayward activated Cyberman, only one of which was needed to remorselessly destroy any sized unit of men that came their way. The carnage reminded the media man of how much work he had ahead of him in spin alone, yet none of that matter when they made it to the last room in the corridor, the one where Sullivan stood by waiting for them.

“You lot were quick,” she said. “I’ve got the Brigadier-Director under sedation right now, but wow, we are lucky.”

“What happened?” Gordon asked. Fiona instead went directly into the room, Lex close behind.

“The Doctor keeps on insisting that it was one of the Cybermen that saved her, but I don’t know how that could be, considering all we know about them. It should be impossible.”

“When it comes to the Doctor, you only have improbables,” the young man said. “What does she have?”

“Bumps and bruises mostly, though she is going to be very achey for a few weeks, two months maximum,” Sullivan replied. “There are a couple hairline fractures, but it’s difficult to tell whether or not those were there previous to this incident or not, since those sometimes occur and heal undetected by doctor and patient alike. It’s enough for me to want her not doing anything much while recuperating… even being careful with light exercise.”

“She won’t do a thing, I swear it,” Gordon said before slipping into the room himself. Sullivan and Malcolm then stared at one another, unsure of how to continue.

“How’s Scarfy?” he asked, the thought popping in his head.
“Stable now, but the mental link between her and the other Osgood was violently torn from her consciousness, causing her physical shock. We’ll know soon enough if it’s the human or the Zygon we’ve got in our care.”

“Long as she’s safe.”

“You know,” she added, voice quiet, “what I told Corporal Lethbridge-Stewart is only considering the Brigadier-Director’s physical trauma. Just like with Osgood, we have no idea concerning the mental impact of what just happened.”

“Sons are for doing extra chores, beaus are for getting nightmares to bugger the fuck off,” he replied. “I’ll let you know if she needs more than what I can give.” Sullivan gave him a nod and walked away, allowing him to be the final person to walk in.

The sight of Kate lying in the hospital-style bed socked him directly in the gut. She was hooked up to a bunch of different machines, all calmly working, while her son and daughter stood next to her, wondering what to do. Malcolm stopped next to Lex, who wasn’t that far into the room.

“Can you bring ‘em home?” he asked his niece. “I need to stay here for the job anyhow—I’ll let you know when she wakes up.”

“Home first, then the flat—closer to you both that way,” Lex nodded. “Be careful, Uncle Malc; you’re not exactly in good shape yourself.”

“I’m in a fucking hospital ward—if there’s any place I should be, it’s here.”

Understanding, Lex went over to Gordon and whispered the plan in his ear. The young man muttered something in agreement and they led his sister out of the room. Malcolm waited until he could no longer hear their footsteps before claiming the chair next to the bed as his own, keeping watch over his lady exactly as he promised.

Hours passed. Aparajita brought him food, coffee, a fresh change of clothes, and even his mobile charger once she realized he was still there. He conducted business from Kate’s bedside, slowly going bonkers from the calm environs he found himself in. Work was the only thing that kept him sane, glad that his PA also had the foresight to bring along his laptop computer. It kept him so busy, in fact, that it allowed Kate to open her eyes unnoticed, not catching his attention until she turned her head towards him.

“Malcolm…?” Even though her voice was thin and raspy, it was the most beautiful sound Malcolm had ever heard. Abandoning the press release he was working on, he picked up her hand and kissed the knuckles, careful not to bend it near where the IV needle was stuck. “What… what happened…? How’d I get here?”

“What do you remember?”

“The plane was surrounded, we were going down,” she recalled faintly. “I was separate from the ship, but, Dad saved me. He caught me… and that was it.”

“Timelord tit said it was a Cyberman,” Malcolm frowned. “We don’t know how, but it was one of those damned things.”

“I know it was him, though,” she insisted. “He called me Tiger.”

That sort of evidence, well, there was no arguing it. He chuckled lightly and shook his head, knowing he had lost.
“I’m glad—telling the Timecunt to fuck all with her orders all the way to the end,” he said. “Now there’s a da right there.”

“I… I…” Kate sighed heavily, her mind elsewhere. “Can you please let me be for a bit? I need to think.”

“Of course… but can I at least leave you with a question?”

“Sure.”

“Kate? Love? Will you marry me?”
Malcolm woke up twenty minutes before his alarm, staring at the ceiling in self-defeat. That was now twenty precious minutes of rest lost; he had learned how to cherish rest since coming to UNIT, but never so much so within the past two weeks. He laid in bed until the alarm went off and smacked it into submission—at least it was the alarm and not his mobile.

He trudged into the bathroom and took a shower, indulgently letting the hot water pour over him until his skin was scalded-pink. Only fucking thing of his mam’s he regretted inheriting was her nearly porcelain complexion and he knew it would haunt him until after he was at work. Sure enough, his hands and face were still reddish by the time he was dressed and headed towards the kitchen in search of coffee and a to-go cup.

“Surprised to see you,” Lex said from the breakfast bar. She was the only other one there, as Fiona had been put on a train back to school over the weekend and Gordon had enough of camping on their couch to go back home to watch over his mother’s house. “You’ve been gone two days and left before I got up for the three before that.”

“I know—it’ll slow down soon enough.”

“That’s a lie and you know it.”

“Fucking wish it weren’t,” he scowled. He took the coffee and the black leather messenger bag that had been haphazardly discarded on the couch the night before, pausing only to pat his niece on the back. “It’ll slow enough to get in dinner one of these days—that’s not a lie.”

“Got me there—say hi to Kate for me.”

“Will do, kiddo.”

With that, Malcolm left the flat and began making his way towards Mainframe UK. While the Cybermen over St. Paul’s and popping out of graves was nearly excised from the public’s mind, things were still fucking insane at work. There was no amount of swearing that he could do to make the situation any better, which was admittedly scarier than he preferred things to be. 3W, the corporation that the Master had partially used to commit her freaky-arsed scheme, had already been under investigation by UNIT for suspicious activity by departments not under his reach, but no one could have predicted this level of pandemonium. UK was the only Mainframe that suffered any amount of substantial damage, and by fuck it showed.

By the time Malcolm arrived at work, he tried not to look at the portraits hung on the wall as he walked down the corridor. They were all of people that had been on Boat One when it had been attacked by Cybermen… people now gone. He didn’t want to forget their loss through not looking, but he didn’t want to feel that pang that struck him when he was reminded of the one person that did make it out alive. It brought a lot into perspective over the past several days and he didn’t like it one bit.

He was such a fucking cunt—finally worked up the balls to propose to his lady after she had nearly died and the answer was that she’d “think about it”. Fuck fuck fuckity fuck fuck fuck fucking—she didn’t want him. He had finally found himself with a decent woman at his side and he blew it; never
should have opened his mouth, let alone looked at her from the beginning. Should have kept his nose clean, but no... he had to get hard the moment she crooked her finger. Glenn probably pitied him, which was the fucking kicker if anything.

A bagel and more coffee was waiting for Malcolm upon his return to his office. Aparajita was nowhere in sight, probably off napping somewhere. He didn’t blame her, if that was the case, or could he blame her for any reason to pop off for a bit considering their workplace was so ragged. Opening up his email, he saw all the numerous things that he had been CC’d and BCC’d and tacked onto that had come in during his commute alone—he was handling Kate’s work as well as his, and shit was not draining well.

For one, the Zygons were downright livid. At least two of Boat One’s staff, not including the Scarfy that went down (if that was the Zygon, no one knew for sure except the Scarfy that was left shivering in the medbay, completely unwilling to talk), were concealed Zygons. It didn’t matter that the human casualties had not been recovered amongst the nasty, absurdly-long wreckage line that stretched from Ipswich to Wycombe—their immediate Cyberconversion caused rapid cellular degeneration that made telling the freshly-dead from wandering grave-busters impossible—but the fact that the Zygon dead had not been retrieved for burial was causing contention. Their leaders understood at least, though it still didn’t mean Malcolm felt as though it would merely go away.

Second was all the flack that was coming his way from Geneva. Blackbox records from Boat One were damaged in the explosion and subsequent return to the ground, causing the higher-ups to pitch a pretty fit. It did not matter that he had no control over what Boat One did, nor did it matter that Major General Bambera fucking vouched for Mainframe UK’s leadership, because they needed to come down hard on someone in charge and it seemed as though the Acting Brigadier-Director would do since the actual Brigadier-Director was incapable of remembering anything from after the attack began, let alone sending the distress signal. Malcolm was damned if he was going to bend over and beg; they could sod the fuck off for all he cared, because it was only going to be a priority until some other Mainframe had a catastrophe on their hands. He only answered the most recent messages in what were often chains of replies, being as courteous as possible without needing to call Aparajita to write them for him, and filed the remainder away, figuring he would read them later if it was absolutely necessary—he had more to do that day than read poorly-composed gibberish sent by bent wanks too proud to admit they needed personal assistants with more than two brain cells.

Third, and possibly worst of all, was simply a combination of the fact he was doing two high-profile jobs at once and whose job he was moonlighting in. He fucking hated having to wade through Kate’s things and do the job she was normally capable of, because it meant that she was currently incapable, and that worried him more than anything.

Aparajita showed up after a while and things continued as normal until it was time for lunch. Malcolm left his trustworthy PA in charge and made his way down to the medbay for what was his temporary daily ritual. Sullivan met him and gave an update on how Kate was coming along (today it was “steady” and “no change”), after which he took the food cart containing both their lunches that was sitting outside his lady’s door and wheeled it in.

Every time he saw her though, it broke his fucking shriveled heart. No, maybe it broke because she unshriveled it, made him not so much a shitty-arsed cunt, but it broke all the same. She was staring at the wall, as usual, at the 3D imagery that allowed her to view any scene she wanted to on Earth—a gift from the Doctor to help her and the other patients not feel like they were a few stories underground. Most of the time the wall showed different breathtaking vistas interspersed with her father’s house in the countryside; today it was a shabby-looking little park in Glasgow he recognized as one he would occasionally haunt in his early journalist days.
“Don’t tell me you want to go back to that piece of shite—can’t even walk around that neighborhood without a can of mace these days,” he joked as he sat down in the chair next to her bed.

“It’s Glasgow; it’ll change again.”

“Not exactly the cheeriest today, are we?”

“Not really.” She kept staring at the park while Malcolm set up the tray above her lap. “My father would take me here sometimes when I was little, and I’ve taken Gordy and Fiona.”

“It’s not far from the shitty office Jamie and I worked out of back when we were first starting out in journalism,” he added. “’S how we met—all the odd jobs the Herald wanted but didn’t want to waste one of its precious actual reporters on, we picked up. Don’t knock a friend made while at the bottom when they could have been poking around the top instead.”

“Yeah.”

“Talked to Fiona last night before she had to have lights out—the gelatin-brained offspring have stopped asking her questions, and the ones with actual brains have gone back to their business.”

“Hmm.”

“Scarfy’s still a wreck and her uncle doesn’t know what to do without either of them there.”

“That’s nice.”

“Kate, love, stop it.” He snapped his fingers in front of her face to no reaction. “You’re scaring me.”

She turned her head and faced him, expressionless.

“Sorry Malcolm, I just…”

“…just…?”

“I had a dream about Dad again last night—it wasn’t good,” she admitted.

“Those never are… not since you’ve been stuck in this fucking dungeon.”

“Malcolm, it’s not like—”

“I’m going to ask Sullivan if we can get you transferred to someplace where there’s at least some natural fucking light coming in through the windows instead of this sterile, idealized, spacecunt bullshit—”

“Malcolm,” Kate hissed, ire quickly building. “Stop it.”

“You’ve been here two weeks with a couple bruises; what you need is to see the bloody sun.”

“They’re watching over me.”

“Clearly not well enough if you’re still down here.”

“Are you questioning Sullivan’s ability?”

“I’m questioning everything, Kate.” Malcolm scowled, making it clear as possible that he was not in the mood to argue. “I’ve been coming down here every fucking day, watching you stagnate while forgetting what the sun looks like, while Geneva’s been taking me and the Mainframe up the arse
dry, the Zygons are pitching a fucking fit because how dare we not be able to tell one
cyberconverted corpse from another despite the fact that’s the fucking point of those brushed
aluminum cyberpricks, and the Osgood that survived is acting stranger than usual, which makes shite
even more ominous, and this doesn’t even mention us…”

“Wait, us? What about us?”

“What, did you fucking forget already? You know, the thing I never thought I’d ask anyone else
while there’s breath in this fucking pathetic sack of bones? That thing where asking should only
really be a formality?”

“Malcolm Petair Alexander Tucker…”

“No—only me mam can do that,” he sniped. “You said you needed time, and considering the
circumstances, I’ve been going around, pretending that I never opened my gob, and the only thing
it’s gotten me has been crickets, Kate. Crickets. Rotten bugs are so loud I’ve had to stroke myself off
a few times while waiting for you to think; I’m dying here.”

“Except you said that I should take my time, which I am more than interested in doing at the
moment.”

“…which I will wait out, but I’d at least want some sort of fucking timetable on when you’ll say
something, or just a confirmation that it’s even on your mind—never been against women’s lib, but
I’ve also never exactly been against putting a great thing out to fucking dry. If you insist that you’re
not going nutters in this hole in the fucking ground, then I’m sure you’ve had time to do whatever
soul-searching rigmarole that needs to happen.”

“Then here’s your answer: I’m not going either way until we’ve put the 3W Incident far behind us,”
she said firmly. “I’ve been married once, and had a child in a relationship before that; I’m not exactly
eager to rush down to the altar.”

“If that’s your way of turning me down, just fucking say it.” Kate simply stared at him, mind
completely blown.

“Why are you being such an arse?! I’m in the hospital!”

“I don’t know—why are you insisting you’re fucking fine and dandy down here when you’re not?!”

“Leave, Malcolm,” she said, pointing at the door, “and don’t come back until you’ve returned to
your goddamned senses.”

“Fine, then I fucking will.” He stood and left the room brusquely, leaving his lunch behind. Almost
running over Sullivan as she made her way to see why the monitors in Kate’s room were going nuts,
Malcolm stormed all the way back to his office and glowered towards his desk, only to immediately
get up again and head towards the lift.

“Is everything alright?” Aparajita wondered cautiously.

“I’m out for a bloody walk,” he growled. He saw her arch an eyebrow in curiosity. “Need to get out
of this fucking subterranean dungeon before I get chained to the walls and bricked in alongside
Fortunado.”

“When will I say you’re coming back? If I’m asked?”

“Whenever I fucking feel like it.” The elevator closed before she could get another word out of him.
Malcolm Tucker had left the building.

It took him until after the sun went down, but Malcolm walked the entire way to his flat. He felt sick to his stomach—he shouldn’t have lost his temper like that, but there was no taking it back now. With his self-appointed vow to never date in the workplace shattered, he was more humiliated and ashamed than he had been in a very, very long time. It was all fucked—piss down the leg—and he had no idea if he’d even be able to repair things at the office enough to be congenial. Fucking fuck him.

Entering his flat, he saw that there was no sign of his niece. Wait, what day was it? Thursday… yeah, Thursday; she had a lecture-study she managed at the university on Thursdays, meaning she wasn’t likely to be back for a few hours yet. He flopped face-down onto the couch, lying there long enough to make his lower back sore, using the silence to reflect on his shitty behavior.

Yeah, there was no way around it: he had been a right tit earlier. If Kate didn’t want him after this, then so be it—not that he’d blame her. Women had left him for less umbrage caused before, and her ditching him would make sense. Fuck, she could even dump him back into the cold, dank prison she found him in, and then maybe his trouser ties would be less of a fucking joke and more of a sweet, inviting form of an early release.

Fuck that—that was the sort of self-minded bullshit that made media martyrs and he was done with martyrdom. Steel himself… that’s what he was going to do. Piss and vinegar nothing; Malcolm Tucker would figure out how to turn his blood into straight-up acid. It was the only way he was going to get anything done without distraction now.

Getting back up, he wandered into the kitchen to see if there was anything to eat. There wasn’t much, but what there was happened to catch his eye more than it should of: a bottle of whisky, already opened. The label was one which he hadn’t seen in a long time, from before he was married, even, and the sight of it brought him back to another time…

Might as fucking well; he grabbed the bottle and a glass for himself and sat down at the breakfast bar, pouring himself a large one that he knocked back with ease. Malcolm could feel the warmth pooling inside of him and his head grew fuzzy as he poured another. He remembered this all too clearly—the eternal self-loathing, the pain that ebbed with each sip and the despair that replaced it, and the nerves that were sparking because the last thing you expose a live wire to is anything flammable.

It was all he fucking deserved.

He had poured himself a third glass when the front door opened and closed, making him grimace. His niece was now home and he was busted.

“You’re out early,” she noted. A few steps closer and she noticed the drink. “Fuck, Uncle Malc…”

“I know, it’s not good.”

“That’s mine.”

“I’ll replace it—it’s quicker at the moment than anything else.”

Lex approached him cautiously. “Do I need to call Clayton?”

“No, I need you to tell me what happened—your words,” he said. Malcolm sipped slowly as his niece sat next to him, pouring a glass of her own.
“Granny put me on a train down to London,” she began, immediately understanding what story he wanted her to tell. She had told it to him several times, the only easy part being hiding how much it hurt. “It was exciting because it was the first time I got to go anywhere by myself. There was a car of us—all kids that were traveling alone that the conductor watched over—and I was the only one not going to a parent or grandparent. I also had the coolest person picking me up, because no one else’s adult was a senior press officer for Number 10, in line to be Director of Communications if Major got kicked out. No one knew what I was talking about, but that’s okay.

“When we got to the station, though, you weren’t there. I waited an hour in an office with the station manager before calling your mobile, because you said that work might keep you late and a call directly from me would be enough excuse to get away. You didn’t answer, so I called Uncle Jamie instead, because wherever you were, he was usually right there next to him. He was there in half an hour—you weren’t. The station manager almost didn’t let me go with him, and I think only did because I was so insistent.”

Lex paused to watch her uncle contemplate the remainder of the dram before continuing. “It was okay for a bit—Uncle Jamie was really good at hiding that he was boiling-cross—and we even found a place to eat. That was the first time I had chicken biryani, actually, and it’s still one of my favorites…”

“I know you’re fucking stalling.”

“I’m getting to that.” She poured herself another, finishing off the bottle, and put the empty on the far side of her, away from Malcolm’s reach. “We got to your place and found you passed out on the sofa with a bottle of Lauder’s, and that was only because all the Glennfiddich was empty in the recycling bin. You and Uncle Jamie got in a huge fight and he threatened to take me back to Mam and Granny, since you were in no position to have me over for the week.”

“He should’ve.”

“No, because I told him I was staying, and I made you hand me all the remaining bottles in the house so we could put it down the drain.” Lex emptied the whisky in her glass and frowned. “When did this all happen, Uncle Malc?”

“1996.”

“How old was I?”

“Eight—your birthday was in two months.”

“…and what does Clayton, your sponsor who I should have really called by now, tell your stubborn arse?”

“To think about that, about my wee niece pouring my lager in the kitchen sink, every time I go to drink, and how she stayed by my side while I sobered up that weekend, taking care of me how a kid should never have to care for an adult until they’re an adult themselves,” he replied. “It usually keeps me at one, should I need to blend in, if I have any at all. You’re the best weapon this pisser can have against his demons.”

“I know, but it’s obviously not working tonight. Are you that stressed over work? It’s not that long until you can hole yourself back in your office and not come out for a fucking week.”

“Not just work.” He finished his glass and scowled. “I was an idiot and fought with Kate.”

“She out of the medbay?” When her uncle didn’t reply, that was the answer she needed. “Fucking
“Because I’m a piece o’shite that really should know better on a lot of fronts—I’m done for.”

“No, you’re not, because you’re going to go talk to her,” she ordered.

“I can’t just do that… not after what I said.”

“If you could fuck it up, you can unfuck it,” Lex then stood, towering over her seated uncle despite the height he normally had on her. “You’re not some raggedy cunt that can’t wipe his own balls—if you go back and apologize, she’ll understand that it’s just because you’re an irritable shit who temporarily has too much on his plate from forces he can’t fucking control.”

“Lex, she knows my methods and I just treated her like she’s an air-headed twat from the old days. Even if I’m sincere she might not believe me.”

“If she doesn’t, then just keep your head down until you can retire, for fuck’s sake. You know it’s bad when I’m swearing more than the Caliph of Cuss, High Priest of Piss.”

“Fuck, yeah, you’re right.”

He ran a hand through his hair and exhaled—how the fuck was his wee niece more level-headed and foul-mouthed than him? How the fuck did he let the pressure snap his judgement? Fucking hell…

“I don’t deserve you, I hope you know,” he muttered. She sat down and put a hand on his shoulder, comforting him.

“Yeah, yeah,” she said teasingly. “Don’t make me call Uncle Jamie and have him kick your arse. He can’t risk being seen with you… not yet.”

She was right; Jamie still being at Number 10, trying to be an inside man under the pretense of “cross-party employment” or some bullshit like that, was vulnerable soon as he darkened a pap’s lens frame. Another year or so and the collective memory of those he was torturing himself with would completely forget the Tucker name. There would be a new bogeyman, if their luck hadn’t all been spent on getting him out of prison, and the old friends could bond over a pint of some kid-friendly ginger beer once more.

Not yet though.

“Gimme a sec,” he mumbled. Malcolm stood and went into his room, shedding his jacket and tie while unbuttoning the topmost buttons of his shirt. He fished his mobile from his trouser pocket and rang up Kate’s personal number, not entirely surprised that she didn’t answer.

He waited for the line to click over to voicemail and braced himself. The mobile let off a shrill tone and he stood there, contemplating hanging up anyhow.

“Kate, love, this isn’t me apologizing, because I shouldn’t do that over the phone while drunker than I have ever been the past fifteen years,” he said, “but this is me admitting that I’m a cunt. I’m a cunt who doesn’t have any fucking business being in this game, who’s abso-fucking-lutely mad about you, and yet doesn’t even deserve to have the luxury of being out of D-Cat. You have every right to turn me away if you never want to hear from me ever again unless on business matters, and even then we can talk through Rajit and Morton if you wish. Just… you’re not going to get me much rawer than this. Kate, I l—”

The phone in his hand beeped and the voicemail cut him off. He let his mobile drop on the
nightstand as he crashed into bed. Within moments, Malcolm was passed out and sleeping off his whisky, found a half an hour later by Lex. She dragged him to the bathroom and sat him next to the toilet, waiting for his body to begin the self-purging process. It took ten minutes and a crick in his neck to form, but he did eventually wake up and begin vomiting, the only things being left behind when he was all done was self-loathing, despair, and a throbbing headache that was not willing to go away any time soon.

Kate sat up in her hospital bed, tapping away at the laptop computer she had convinced Sullivan to allow her to have. It was early in the morning, right before the night shift was ready to be relieved, though with the wall projecting a cheery day at the seaside, it didn’t seem like it at all. She was wading through her emails from the past couple of weeks, getting a feel for the scope of shit she’d be throwing herself back into soon—it was clearly cracking Malcolm taking on both their jobs and the sooner he was no longer Acting Brigadier-Director, the better.

Yes, Malcolm. The fucking moron made everything go tits up less than eighteen hours beforehand on the one thing she had been confident he wouldn’t, even on accident: the two of them. Instead he acted with his dick, reminding her of why she hadn’t exactly been keen on dating after her divorce from Fiona’s father. Men were always too pushy and self-absorbed in the end, she had found. Loris had grown jealous of, not to mention angry at, her career, while Malcolm had just joined Jonathan in the Marriage Pusher category. At least she could say that there was no baby caught in the mix this time, as menopause had been mercifully short and well-timed, and a repeat of being walked out on while caring for a toddler wasn’t even possible. The one thing she and Jonathan had been almost less-prepared for than marriage back then was being parents, and it was pretty much a given that Loris never demanded full legal custody so as to prevent a high-profile mud-slinging session that could stain the names of his businesses as ones led by a serial adulterer…

Fuck, why was she always shit when it came to her men?

Time passed and the door to her room quietly opened. Instead of Sullivan appearing, it was Malcolm. He looked like Hell spat him back out—his clothes were clean and fresh, yet his hair was a mess, his eyes sunken and red, and his skin paler than usual. His shoulders drooped as he crossed the room and sat down in the chair next to her, his back to the false seaside.

“Hey,” he said. His voice was raspy and dry, just as awful as how he looked.

“I got your message,” she said, pretending to have not so much as glanced at him. “I didn’t think you were that much of a drinker anymore.

“I’m not.” He fiddled with his hands, unsure of how to continue. Blunt-force bollocking wasn’t king here. “Can I ask something of you?”

“Possibly.”

“Please forgive me,” he said. “Don’t excuse me, because I was being inexcusable, but I do regret snapping at you earlier. I’m sorry and I want to you to know that it’s genuine Malcolm Tucker talking—Malcolm Petair Alexander Tucker, the tit who owes you his entire life and freedom. I should know better than to talk to you like that.”

“I’m glad we agree on something.”

They sat there for a moment, one longer than it probably should have been, the two of them simply sharing one another’s company. Kate could feel Malcolm wasn’t trying to play her—he was genuine—and the silence was speaking to her louder than actual words ever could. Malcolm Tucker never
groveled and the only other thing he could do more was get down on his knees.

This was still the medbay though, and hospital floors were no place to grovel on one’s knees.

“I’m… I’m just really sorry,” he continued. “If you don’t want to see me anymore, I understand. Say the word and I’ll go.”

“Lucky for you that I don’t think I’m ready to hang my libido out to dry just yet,” she replied. She took his hand in hers and held it tight. “One of the things I admire in you is your passion, but getting married right now would be allowing our emotions to take control and get the best of us. I’m not ready, neither are you or our kids, and we need to remember that. I do see us getting hitched one day, but when our heads are clear and the time is right.”

“Good, thank you,” he croaked. Malcolm brought her hand up to his lips and kissed her knuckles. “Just promise me you’ll let me know when that time gets here; I’ll be waiting.”

“Come here,” she requested. He went from his chair to the bed, laying down so that his head was in her lap and his feet were comically dangling off the end despite scrunching up his legs best he could. Kate ran her fingers through his hair while he kept his breathing controlled despite his watery eyes soaking her blanket. He fell asleep there, snoring softly as she continued skimming through her email.

They were going to come out of this better, she hoped. It certainly was a fight neither of them had wanted to have, but it would make them both stronger, and that was at least something to look forward towards.

Chapter End Notes

Just wanted to say that I am deliberately taking liberties with alcoholism and how it works for the sake of the story. For an alcoholic, one drink can put them back on the path they worked hard to stay off of, and shrugging it off like Malcolm does here takes almost inhuman amounts of willpower. Don’t fuck around with alcohol issues and be responsible when they do arise. I’m not saying omg the Drink is Evil or things like that, because I occasionally have some myself, but I am saying please remember that this right here is a potential best of the best case scenario and not necessarily realistic for the average person’s ability.
Chapter 14

Kate scowled as she stared out her office window over the atrium below. Leaning on her cane, she surveyed the molemen and the others that were milling about, taking careful note of their movements. Nothing had really changed since before Boat One went down and she was unsure if it was comforting or unsettling. They had lost so many in that plane—military, science, office people—it was a testament to the Mainframe that the transition had been smooth as it was. No one deserved what they had just been through, not even her worst enemy. She didn’t move as she heard the lift door open, nor when her assistant announced that she had a visitor.

“Thank you, Morton,” she said, too lost in her train of thought to even register what the poor woman had told her. Kate didn’t even need to know who it was, since it was apparent when a pair of arms snaked around her waist and lips found her neck.

“Been dull without you here, love,” Malcolm murmured against her skin. “The molecunts need Mam around and being authoritative or they stop listening to Da.” He glanced down and saw her cane. “Dig that out of the Black Archive, I hope? Please tell me it’s an interstellar torture device.”

“It was my father’s, and his grandfather’s,” she replied, a hint of amusement in her voice. “Sullivan says I should use it for at least a week or two, just to be safe. I wasn’t even aware that the fractures were that bad.”

“Keep Alessandra happy and walk around with it for a bit—at least it was just your da’s cane, not the one he used on you when you misbehaved.”

“Hate to disappoint, but my father wasn’t like that; didn’t need to be.”

“…and yet you still turned out fucking perfect.”

“Good thing your mum wasn’t like that, or else we’d have a very different situation on our hands, wouldn’t we?”

“Yeah.” Malcolm pondered quietly as he stole as much time with his lady as possible. “Hey, this Master twat…”

“What about her?”

“Do you think she’d do something like that again? Try to fucking eliminate all of humanity to get off on it?”

“I don’t put it past her—the Master has always fluxuated between sociopath and psychopath, but now that he has regenerated into she, it only appears as though their brain has become even more unhinged. Sullivan thinks it is a combination of having gone through so many regenerations prior to this one and the female hormones going through her body for the first time.”
“We can stop it though, yeah? We have that power?”

“We are one of the most powerful mainframes in all of UNIT, with experience, personnel, and technology on our side. Remember: the Doctor has been our scientific advisor more than once.”

“That doesn’t mean he gave you the correct information in any of those times, let alone all of it.”

“Malcolm, if there is one thing you need to know about dealing with the Doctor is that you should trust him,” Kate said firmly. He was not convinced due to an almost rote quality to her voice; she must not have completely trusted him either. “The Doctor lies, and lies often, but he would never do something to endanger this planet. If there is any truth, it is that.”

“Love, I come from nearly thirty years in an occupation where lying not only cost someone their job, but it fucked over hundreds, thousands, millions, billions of people due to the ripples in the national and global communities. Not being wholly transparent until after the deed is done I get, because someone can use that wisely, but none of the shit he pulls. You may trust him, your da might have trusted him, but if he’s old mates of the Master’s, then I have no choice but to believe he’s bad news. Trouble follows him.”

“…and he gets out of it.”

“So far—one day he won’t and I don’t fucking know what it will be like when that happens.”

“You will still have me, and I will not do anything that would endanger our planet.”

“…which is this organization’s only saving fucking grace,” he murmured against her shoulder. He clutched her a bit firmer, feeling as though he never wanted to let her go again. They both knew it was due to her near-death in Boat One, especially since Fiona was also ramping up the cuddling factor when she was over at her mother’s house, but it still was interesting having Malcolm purposefully and publically hold Kate more often.

If only it hadn’t taken what it did to get to that point.

“I should really get going,” she said after a while. It was no use to attempt to keep the subject up; her beau had his opinions and they weren’t likely to change soon. “I have an appointment in the medbay to look over some of my injuries from the fall. Do you think you have the time to change a couple of the ravens’ batteries?”

“Any time,” he replied. They kissed and walked together towards the lift, taking it down to the same floor. A second peck and the two split to go the opposite directions down the corridor. Malcolm found another lift and took it further down until he was in the forsaken lower bowels of UNIT’s scientific network.

Walking along towards the Raven Room, a thought came to Malcolm: he hadn’t seen the remaining Scarfy in days. Before the 3W Incident, he would see one, the other, or both several times a day. Now he had no idea where they were… well, where the remaining one was. He passed up the Raven Room temporarily and went straight down the corridor to the main of R&D. There, he found the Head Osgood—the Scarfys’ uncle—giving orders to his staff. Malcolm waited until the man was free, not wanting to scare him off by going in Full Tucker.

“Hey, Will, seen your niece anywhere?” he asked once the coast was clear. William simply shrugged.

“Petronella should be in her office,” he said, “but I don’t know how much good seeing her will do, no matter what Director Stewart wants.”
Malcolm raised a brow at that. “What do you mean?”

“She’s not talking much,” William explained. “Ever since the other died, the one who’s left has been too quiet for the Petronella I know. It’s like she cannot listen to anything anyone else says, even if she tried.” The tone in his voice and the look on his face spoke volumes more: he was frightened beyond belief as well as worried.

“Doesn’t change the fact I need a couple details out of her for a press release later this week,” Malcolm said. It was a lie—if it were Glenn he’d be caught, but luckily the Head Osgood was none the wiser. “Her dungeon, yeah?”

“Last place I saw her; just don’t be too rough, please. You have a niece… you understand…”

Malcolm nodded and navigated the labyrinthine halls of Research and Development until he came to Scarfy’s office. He entered cautiously, having only been there a few times before and one of those times nearly being subjected to an accidental booby trap. It was a cluttered, fucking gloomy place in his opinion, filled to the ceiling with boxes and half-finished experiments, all made worse with dim lights that screamed *mad fucking scientist*. Scarfy was hunched over a workbench, not paying him any heed.

“Oi, Scarfy, where’ve you been?” Malcolm asked jovially. “The molecunts are beginning to think they’re no longer your test rats and can start mouthing off. Tante Petronella needs to make an appearance every now and then, you know.”

“I’m busy,” she replied plainly. Her tone irked him, prompting him to turn it up a notch. “Listen Doublemint: what the fuck would the other one say if she saw you acting like this? Or is this how Zygons deal with shit?”

“Osgood,” she said sternly, turning to face him. “I am not Human or Zygon, but Osgood.”

“I don’t care whichever the fuck you are! It doesn’t matter! What matters is that you’re acting creepier than usual and you need to fucking stop it.”

Scarfy stood and went on her tiptoes, glaring at Malcolm and completely missing the fact his rage was quickly building at an almost record pace. “You didn’t lose your sister.”

“Cut the fucking martyr act—we all lost someone.”

“Director Stewart is still alive.”

“…and that’s where you’re wrong,” he hissed. Temper now in shreds, he leaned in towards Scarfy and put on his best bollocking face, all eyebrows and flared nostrils. “She may be alive now, but for thirty cuntting hours, she was dead. What was I going to tell her mam? She lost a loved one to UNIT already when she divorced Alistair, but burying an empty casket for her only daughter?! That doesn’t even take the nips into consideration!” Malcolm watched as Scarfy stared blankly at him, unsure if the words were sinking in as the Head Osgood had warned him might happen. “I was even preparing to pull the last of my government favors so that her children could be guaranteed to stay together when they would need one another the most! Kate fucking died that day, alright?! Get down from your moral high horse and act like a fucking adult!”

“She was my sister… my other half… the only one who understood…”

“Yeah, well, people like Director Stewart don’t come alone every day either. I’m not some randy shit going through women quicker than pants—if she were gone, I’d likely die alone. Living with the
hole she was leaving me with… I don’t wish that on my worst fucking enemy.”

“It’s still not the same.” She took a puff on her inhaler—he was getting to her. Now to drive it home.

“Yeah, well, we live in the real world, Scarfy,” he scoffed. “This is where shit fucking sucks a mutilated dick by the hour, and if you think people will be nice because of some garbage idealized concept of empathy and sensitivity, then you’re wrong. Nowhere is truly ‘safe’, no one is the perfect sounding board, and certainly no one is worth more than someone else when push comes to fucking shove. This loss doesn’t make you fucking special and allow you to pity yourself into depression, nor should the rest of us bend over backwards to cater to you and wait until you’re feeling better or whatever the fuck. Life moves on. Deal with it.”

“You are nothing but a foul-mouthed bully,” she snarled.

“I’m no bully—I’m worse than a bully.” He took half a step forward, which caused her to take a full step back. “I speak the truths no one wants to hear, in words so outlandish they are impossible to ignore. Yeah I swear and threaten and make people cower, but it’s so that they listen, and when they listen, sometimes they even learn.”

“What am I supposed to be learning other than that Director Stewart should probably be warned that she’s dating a psychopath?”

“That no matter what, all of us have a certain amount of ‘sucking it up’ and ‘stiff upper lip’ shite that we have to do, regardless of what we feel is appropriate, because that’s what mature fucking adults do if they want to be treated as such,” he said. “You want to be treated like an adult, yeah?”

“I am an adult.”

“Then get out of this fucking dungeon and at least make it so that you interact with more people than the ones who poke their heads in to make sure you’re still alive.”

“Why should it matter to you?”

“…because Petra would be fucking disappointed to know that Nella shut the fuck down and gave the fuck up after she was murdered by some bent spacecunt!”

Malcolm’s words hung on the air heavily. Silence fell in the room, which was honestly louder than anyone could have yelled at that point. Scarfy sat back down on her stool slowly, her eyes glassing over, and leaned on the work bench shakily. Malcolm knew he finally hit the mark, pulling another chair up so that he could sit down next to her.

“The two of you were really close, yeah?” he asked, purposefully making his voice softer. She nodded in reply. “Listen: I know how sisters are. I got an older one, and although we fight and do stupid shit to annoy one another, I still wouldn’t trade her for anything. Her daughter Lex is the closest thing to a legacy that I’ve got—I mean, fuck, she’s named after me, which is really saying something—and someone has to be around to keep me in line when Mam finally ascends into space or whatever the fuck’ll happen because I know she’s not going to do something as common as dying. Sisters are sometimes all we got, you know?”

“She was more than a sister though… she was like my other half…” she explained quietly. “It’s like a part of me is missing. When we found each other, it was like waking up from a bad dream where your best mate’s not around and there’s this weird hole in your life where they normally are. Now…”
“Hey, don’t think you’re the only one who’s going to miss Petra,” Malcolm assured her. Scarfy looked at him incredulously, unsure how to take his gentler change in tone. “Yeah, the both of you drove me up the fucking wall sometimes, but when push came to shove, you two were the most competent scientists I’ve ever known. I’m used to shouting at cunts and twats for cocking it up left and right, but you two… there was always an effort at the very least, and you don’t know how much I yearned for that in my past life.”

“…probably more than I can ever figure.”

“Yup, and now even though we got just one twin, we still have an Osgood on our team.” He watched as she dabbed at her eyes with her scarf, wiping tears that were stubbornly forming. If having a family was something he had wanted to do while young, she was almost the age a daughter of his could have been, and she was certainly the right age range to be another niece. Seeing her like this was awkward and unsettling compared to how he knew her before, and part of that made him dislike the Master even more.

Once she was done composing herself, Malcolm put a hand on Scarfy’s shoulder and had her look him directly in the eyes. “I’m still going to yell at you, okay? If you fuck up even the slightest bit, I will not be kind, and I may even make you want to break down right then and there. What you need to do is remember this conversation and know that I’m on your side.”

“If you’re on my side, then why shout at me?” she wondered. “Why make me feel awful when I already have problems beyond what’s here?”

“…because we all need to feel like that every once in a while, be reminded that our actions have consequences, or else there won’t be a future because we accidentally shat so big that there’s no way to clean it up,” he explained. He took away his hand and rubbed his hair, exhaling heavily. “If I bothered to come in here, just when my life was beginning to look quiet for once, then what about all the fuckers who are too scared to come in and see what’s going on because they liked the chaos that came with the two of you? Moving forward isn’t disrespecting Petra, not one fucking bit. Keeping on mostly like before is actually honoring her, if you’ll believe it.”

“Thanks, Malcolm,” she sniffled. Scarfy wiped a tear from her face and sighed. “Not often a bollocking has ended with a thank-you, huh?”

“Not very often, no,” he admitted. “Marcia always thought I’d be better off as a motivational speaker or something of the like instead of getting into journalism, but what are you gonna fucking do? Survive off a pittance? Fuck naw.”

“Is that your sister? Marcia?”

“Oh, yeah; she’s a businesswoman up in Greater Glasgow, just as much a workaholic as I can get. She started on the ground floor of the organic cosmetics market and isn’t doing all that bad for herself these days.” He chuckled to himself before shaking his head. “She was eight when I was born and actually got into scraps for me as a nip. No one fucked with Wee Malcolm because his big, scary sister was ready to throttle anyone who tried.”

“That’s almost cute,” Scarfy snickered.

“Yeah—fucking turned it around on her when I grew bigger and suddenly I was the protector,” he remembered. “That bent tit that she had married got the raw end of that deal the day they split up, so really it’s amazing I didn’t go to prison when I was thirty for assault and not fifty for something soft as perjury.”
“That’s what having a brother’s like?”

“That’s more or less. I imagine it’s the same as having a sister too, just a more likely chance of having testosterone bursts getting the better of us and one less person in the monthly sync-up.”

“I don’t even want to know what you know about monthly sync-ups,” she shuddered.

“It’s not pretty, I’ll tell you that much.” Malcolm then stood and began to walk over towards the door. “Oh, and Nella?”

“Yeah…?”

“Get your fucking shit together, or you’ll wish you were the one the Time Tit murdered in cold blood!” he snarled, the sudden noise making her jump. He gave her a grin and wink; he was covering their tracks.

“Get out of here before I have you replaced with a Zygon!” she shouted back. She gave him a silent nod in affirmations of their understanding. “Director Stewart would probably be more satisfied that way anyhow!”

“Nice one,” he chuckled lowly. Malcolm then put on his best bollocking face and stormed from the lab, slamming the door behind him. He glowered his way through R&D until he found the Head Osgood at his desk. “She’s still a fucking wreck, but I think I got through.”

“You did…?” the other man asked hopefully.

“Probably; can never tell with the weepy sort. Your brother’s daughter is fucking softer than a bowl of melted marzipan, shit… don’t tell me your daughter’s just as emotional.”

“My younger son, yes. My older son, not as much.” William frowned at Malcolm. “You said you’d go easy on her.”

“I did—never had a true bollocking before this, from the looks of it. Give her a couple days to recover and she should start looking more like wee girlie you used t’ bounce on your knee on holidays,” Malcolm claimed.

He then made his way off back towards the Raven Room, to where he knew that the birds were still waiting on him. A mangled bird comprised of false feathers and exposed wires hopped off a shelf and cawed at him affectionately as he entered, rubbing its chipped beak against his sleeve as he sat down at the table.

“Never thought I’d live to see the day when one of my verbal beatdowns did someone a lick of fucking good, but here we are, Junior,” he murmured. “Just don’t let Mam know—she might get jealous.”

“Mam! Mam!” the bird mimicked. Malcolm scratched its neck and picked up a screwdriver, using it to peek inside its mouth without cutting himself on the sharp metal.

Just another day at the fuck-office, apparently.
Chapter 15

Winter was quickly approaching as life continued inside UNIT’s Mainframe UK. Personnel found themselves easing into the Christmas spirit and by the time December actually rolled around, it felt as though they might have recovered from the 3W Incident for good. Final protocol preparations were being put into place for the holiday season, with Malcolm and Kate gearing up to attempt taking an entire week off together.

“This is never going to work, love,” he scowled at his mobile. It was sitting on the desk as he tapped away at his computer, correcting some grammar in a fill-in-the-blanks press release that he wanted his staff to use if he could not be reached, which was something he fully planned on. He still wanted to talk to Kate, however, which meant that the speaker option was coming in good use.

“Something’ll happen and we’ll be dragged back here by our fucking ears. This is the year you’ve got Fiona too—it’ll be a disaster.”

“She’s supposed to visit Marco at some point during her break, so if worst comes to worst, we can always have Gordon drop her off there a bit early,” she replied, voice echoing from having him on speaker as well. “Just because he’s Loris’s spawn doesn’t mean that I’m going to keep her from seeing her other brother.”

“Considering he seems like a good enough lad, my guess is that whatever genetics made the crusty gnocchi a complete fucking tit was squashed by Angela’s contribution to things.” Malcolm recalled meeting Fiona’s half-brother through her father the previous month and chuckled at the memory—the lad was doing well for himself for nearly being thirty, with a flat in a quiet neighborhood and a live-in boyfriend and a stable job that he had earned on his own merits. Fuck, Malcolm would personally trust Marco with plenty of things, the most important of which being watching over Fiona if the situation demanded it.

“I’d still rather have my daughter the entire time I was promised her,” Kate said.

“No, I understand, and I’m sure Marco does too.”

“I was referring to Fiona understanding.”

“Fair point,” Malcolm nodded. He then saw Aparajita walk in, a large stack of papers in-hand, and groaned. “Talk to you later—Rajit just brought me a steaming pile of bad news. Love ya.”

“Love you—five o’clock, remember.” The call ended and Aparajita plopped the papers on Malcolm’s desk unceremoniously and looking more than a bit disgruntled.

“Not enjoying the fuckfest as much as you’d thought?” he asked.

“I’m about to stab Shaw until he bleeds out and deliver his giftwrapped severed head to his auntie in Cambridge with a note saying she owes me a new, preferably not-incompetent, employee.”

“You do realize that would mean she’d send back the giftwrapped severed head of a first-year student of hers, saying they’d both deserved it, yeah? Don’t fuck with Thin Lizzy; she probably doesn’t even think her brother’s grandson is worth the effort.”

“Yeah, well, still doesn’t mean I’m not completely, utterly done with him,” she scowled. She then pointed at the papers with one hand, ticking off topics with her other. “In there is the staff Christmas schedule, an overview of the Tripartite Earth Residency Accord and the proposed amendments, the
card we’re all signing for when Hart goes on parental leave at the end of the week, and that
information you wanted on UNIT’s past dealings with the Master.”

“What are the Harts having?” he asked, searching the pile.

“Twin boys.”

“Ha, good.” Malcolm found the card—a pale blue thing with something sappy on it—and opened it
to write on the inside. He was the first one… excellent.

‘Good luck not getting pissed all over. At least it’s not only work-related anymore. –M’

He handed it back to Aparajita and picked up the top paper on the stack. The last few months had
shown the governing treaty concerning Human-Silurian-Zygon peace being hacked at thanks to
increasingly radical demands from the Zygon populace despite their more moderate rulers’ opinions.
Malcolm felt he needed to memorize the treaty and the proposed amendments, just in case, because
there was something in his gut telling him he needed to be able to quote it verbatim at a moment’s
notice if things were going the way he thought. He glanced up at Aparajita, his eyebrow raising
when he saw her giggling silently at the card.

“What…?”

“Your note—it’s cute. Didn’t think you did cute.”

“Ask Director Stewart; I can do cute on command, even.”

“Uh-huh… her command.”

“Don’t you ever fucking forget it.” He put the treaty printout down and straightened the stack before
reaching for his bag. “Leaving a bit early to drop off some things at my place and get Fiona from the
station. Call me if all hell breaks loose and you can’t control the shitstorm.”

“On it,” she chuckled. Aparajita carried the card out of the office, which allowed Malcolm to shove
the papers and his laptop in his bag, double-check the things on his desk, and leave without any fuss
directed towards him.

It was interesting, he thought as he walked out of Mainframe UK and towards where his car sat in its
elevated carpark, that he was taking off of work early. Sam would have thought he was dying had he
done so during the government days. Ah, Sammy, his Sammy, kept at-bay thanks to the same shite
that prevented him from seeing Jamie, and even that wee fucker Cal now that he thought about it. At
least it wasn’t that long anymore before he could see them all, maybe invite them over to the flat to
meet Kate, pretend to hate them for actually fucking listening when he said to not see him in that
shitty-arsed prison—still, he was very interested with not only what was happening with them over
the past year and a half, but he could nearly bet they’d be thrilled at the changes that had occurred
with him. Fuck… he felt like he was going to pick up Lex from the station, not a child with no
genetic relation to him whatsoever, and that was a feeling he wouldn’t trade for fucking anything.

Into the car and off he went, winding through the annoying London roads until he found the station
Fiona was scheduled to arrive at. He parked and found the platform, waiting patiently as the train
decided whether or not it would arrive on-time. It ended up being only twenty minutes late—fucking
miracle if anything—and he was soon waving down Fiona as she searched the crowd for him with a
large duffel bag in-tow. She nearly tackled him at first sight, glad to have someone to greet her.

“There you are, kiddo,” he muttered, returning the hug. He patted her on the head and held her by
the shoulders at arm’s length. “Fucking hell; I thought girls were done growing by fifteen.”
“Lex might’ve, but I started a little later than my classmates, so I’ve got hope.” She was a bit taller than his shoulder now, right around where Lex topped off. “Any plans for over the holidays?”

“Not many. All I really want to do is lay down and go into a fucking coma for two weeks.”

“That good, eh?”

“If it were up to me, I’d tell certain people to fuck the fuck off until further notice and they can act like fucking adults, but unfortunately that’s not how this bleeding world works.” They walked out towards the carpark and deposited the duffle in the boot before getting in the car. Instead of turning right, however, Malcolm turned left onto the street. “Gotta pick up a couple things at my place before heading on over to the house, if you don’t mind.”

“No, not really.” Fiona watched the London traffic for a little bit before turning her head to glance at her mother’s beau. “You and Lex gonna visit your sister and mum at all?”

“Lex has Kanda coming down here to get away from Scotland in general for the holiday, while my sister is preparing for an expo in America next month and Mam’s got this thing she’s doing with her friends from back when she worked freelance,” he explained. “I might get a visit from Mam if she’s feeling like it, but I rang the other day, so it’s not that bad if I don’t see her.”

“You really don’t get together with your family much, do you?” she frowned.

“Never have; we’re a bunch o’ lone Scottish wolves, tearing up the countryside as we go and not looking back.” He chuckled at that, for whatever reason, and turned onto his street. “Next year I might have some old mates of mine over, but that’ll be a long ways off yet.”

“Why not now?”

“They’re Whitehall friends—can’t get into contact for their sake until around the summer. Shake the bloodsucking paps off our backs, make sure no one’s ready and waiting for a story to bleed dry… you know the drill.”

“At least it’s just that; they could’ve disowned you for what all went down in the Inquiry.”

“Not this lot.” He gave her a grin and parked the car in its spot. “After the shitstorm that the government tried to pass off as them actually working for once, I figured out who my friends were real quick, and there’s not many that’d I want to even fucking look at these days. They made the shortlist, which is more than I can say for most people I used to run with at work.”

Up to the flat, overnight bag rid of dirty clothes and refilled with fresh ones, and a couple recipe books snatched from the shelf; errand complete and Malcolm and Fiona were back on the road again. It wasn’t until they were out past the bustle of Inner London did the teen finally decide to broach a topic after pondering it the ride to that point.

“Why don’t you just move in at our house?” she wondered. “It’d make things easier… or are you and Mum not there yet?”

“To be honest? I’m not sure where the fuck we are when it comes to that,” he said. The conversation stopped for a moment before he braced himself and started it back up again. If not now, then never, he supposed. “You know we had a row after you went back to school, yeah?”

“Yeah—Gordy and both Lex told me,” she said quietly. She fiddled with the hem of her uniform skirt, unsure what to do with her hands. “I didn’t know that about you.”
“Know about what?”

“That time you didn’t pick Lex up from the station.”

“…fuck. She told you that?”

“Yeah, but only because she wanted to give me background. I mean, I don’t care because that’s in
the past, and you seem to be pretty great at picking people up now all things considered, but it does
explain a bit.”

“What does it explain?” he asked, genuinely curious.

“Why you’re so hard on yourself and keep close watch on what you’re drinking… amongst things.”

“…and what doesn’t it explain?”

“Why you and Mum still haven’t shacked up. You have past problems, so what? Who doesn’t?
Make the leap.”

“We’re not there yet; the fight woke us up a bit, made us realize we were letting ourselves get
cocky,” he replied, a bit frustrated with her persistence. “It’s not as simple as you like to make it
sound. If I’m taking that step, then I’m going to be fucking positive that your mam and I are doing it
for the right reasons. It makes me feel like a fucking cunt in a lot of ways, yeah, but at least I’m a
fucking cunt who is just trying to do the right thing, and your mam knows and understands that about
me… about us.” He glanced at the teen quickly, seeing that she was staring out the window in
thought. “Do you want us to be there?”

“Kind of… I mean, it’d be nice,” she shrugged. “A proper family would be nice for a change.”

“You do have a proper family, Fiona,” he insisted. “It’s just that there’s no real mold that counts for
one anymore. Don’t let those twatbubbles at school get you jealous. Their parents are probably all
cheating on one another when all’s said and done, and if anything, that is not a proper family.”

“I guess.”

Silence hung in the vehicle until Malcolm decided it was safer to change the topic to gossip in and
around Fiona’s school. He was able to glean enjoyment out of much of it, since he knew and knew
of many of her classmates’ parents and could elaborate on some of their eccentricities and sins. It
kept the two busy until they arrived at Kate’s house. Fiona dashed from the car and bolted in, rushing
directly up to her room to change, while Malcolm meandered in at his own pace, dropping his bags
in the foyer and flopping down on the sitting room couch.

He was nearly asleep, the cushions lulling him and his sore back towards what he imagined was
going to be a fucking stunning dream, when Fiona appeared again, dressed in trousers and a jumper.
She poked his stomach, making him squirm.

“Fuck! What’s that for?!”

“Do you know when is and what’s for dinner?”

“You could have fucking asked instead of stabbing me with your fucking fingernail!”

“I didn’t know if you were asleep yet, and I want to have a snack if it’s far enough away.”

“Dunno; text your mam,” he grumbled crankily. Malcolm rolled over and faced the back of the
couch, scrunching his legs into the space leftover on the other end. “Sorry Fiona, but I’m fucking whipped all of a sudden.”

“You’re old is what this is,” she teased. “If you’re gonna nap, can you do it where there is no Bluray player?”

Instead of a verbal reply, Malcolm simply laid still and refused to move, pretending to not hear the teen’s request. She eventually slunk into the kitchen and left him be, figuring that the effort would not be worth it, and let him rest. It felt as though he had barely closed his eyes when he felt the cushion shift and a hand rest along his arm, suggestively squeezing it.

“This better be someone who won’t get me thrown back in prison,” he mumbled. A kiss landed on his cheek and the end of Kate’s hair—which was significantly shorter than her daughter’s—brushed against his ear.

“Thank you for picking her up, Sleeping Beauty,” Kate said. “The conference call I had with Geneva went smoothly, by the way.”

“Did it? Good.” He shifted so that he was on his back, giving her just enough room to lay down half on top of him, using his shoulder to rest her head while he put an arm on her shoulders. “Bam-Bam got through to them, I take it?”

“Barely, but only enough to make it so that no one looked like a moron on our end. It sounds like the Secretary-General insists on forming a special committee to go over the accord amendments, but other than that we’re in the clear. All I want now is to have a peaceful holiday.” She wrapped her arm around his torso and hugged tightly. Cuddling wasn’t just good after a long day; it was fucking great. “What was the shit Ms. Khan delivered?”

“Things I wanted, mostly; nothing to be worried about.”

“Are you sure?”

“I want you to ride me like a fucking bike tonight—of course I’m sure,” he laughed. “Just some personal research.”

“Sounds like a plan,” she hummed, kissing his neck.

“Speaking of things we shouldn’t do where the nips can walk in on us: where’s Fiona? I needed a kip, so I don’t know.”

“She and Gordon are off to get some dinner.” She grabbed at him playfully and nuzzled his chin stubble. “They just left, meaning we’ve got time.”

“Oh yeah, that reminds me: I was talking with Fiona on the way here,” he said. The quiet was palpable in the sitting room, the seriousness of his tone weighing down upon them.

“What was it about?”

“She… fuck, Kate, love… she wants me to move in here so we can be a ‘proper family’ or some shit like that; said it would make things easier. Even though she knows about my fucking downfalls, she still wants me here full-time, and I’m not sure how to take it.”

“Crap.” Kate groaned as she pressed her face against Malcolm’s shoulder. “I was afraid of this.”

“Don’t get me wrong: I’m fucking ecstatic that she cares and is comfortable enough around me, but
it’s making me shit my pants thinking that she’s that fucking attached already. Gordon isn’t like that, is he?"

“Gordon’s just glad that I’m with someone who doesn’t seem to want anything out of the relationship that I can’t give,” she said. Kate clung a bit closer and shifted slightly so she wouldn’t roll off the edge of the couch mid-conversation. “He’s used to the idea of me dating since I’ve done it before, but now… let’s just say he’s not as wary of you as he was of Loris.”

“She’s a good lad, looking out for his sister and mam,” Malcolm stated. “It’s not easy being the man of the house while so young, with strange men calling after Mam and a sister who wants to play by her own rules. I can definitely relate to that.”

“I’d say I should’ve listened to him when he said he wasn’t sure about Loris, but then I wouldn’t have Fiona and…” She exhaled heavily in frustration. “Sometimes I wonder what things would be like if I married his father, or if I stayed with Loris, and I don’t know what to think.”

“I wonder sometimes what it would have been like had we met earlier than we did,” he confessed. “We could be married already, given the kids another sibling, I could have helped you while they were growing up… could’ve been that proper family like Fiona wanted…”

“Don’t dwell, Malcolm,” she warned. “Thinking is alright, but you sound close to dwelling and dwelling is dangerous.”

“I know.”

“We might not have even worked out had we met earlier than we did.”

“…a depressing thought if there ever was one. If anyone thinks I’m a cunt now, they should’ve seen me when I was younger.”

“Well, the way I see it, this cunt,” Kate kissed Malcolm’s cheek, “needs to be in my cunt soon before the kids get home, or we aren’t going to be able to get proper time alone for days. We’ll talk about it later, yeah?”

“I couldn’t agree more,” he muttered. The two disentangled themselves and quickly made their way up the stairs to Kate’s room, getting a quick shag in that beat Gordon and Fiona’s arrival by a mere two minutes. Pretending to have been only upstairs to put away Malcolm’s bag was useless, yet they tried anyhow.

“Malc’s bag is still in the foyer and you two look exhausted—no sale,” Fiona chuckled.

That little shit.

It was Christmas Eve in the Stewart Household. Fiona and Malcolm had been baking biscuits all evening, while Kate insisted on doing a few prep things for the following night’s dinner by herself. Lex had long-brought over Kanda, her childhood best friend who decided to take her holiday with people who actually celebrated Christmas instead of her family, a group still too emotionally attached to Thailand for celebrating all Western holidays all the time. The young women were talking with Gordon, the lad simply thankful he was able to get some scheduled time off that roughly correlated with his mum’s. Things were quiet, peaceful, and definitely too good to fucking last.

“Got any extra egg nog?” Lex asked as she entered the kitchen with three mugs in-hand. “We’re out and I think if I spike it a bit more, we might get Kanda properly over the arse-weed who ditched her in the middle of Aberdeenshire.”
“Alexandra, what are you doing?” Kate warned from the stove.

“Getting my best friends properly pissed so I can shove them together and hope for the best,” the younger woman replied. She put the mugs down on the counter and went into the fridge, fetching the last of the eggnog from the carton. “She was dumped hard and is ready to move on, and I’m getting vibes that Gordy has his mum’s tastes in significant others.”

“Kanda is a woman,” Kate said. “I wasn’t aware I swung that way.”

“I think she mean not-English, Mum,” Fiona interrupted. She and Lex mime-high-fived from across the room, despite their adults’ frowns.

“Hurt them and I break you; Marcia will help me hide the body,” Malcolm added. Lex took the refreshed mugs out of the kitchen, sticking her tongue out at her uncle, her mission still going strong. He used the rolling pin in his hand to beat the mound of dough in front of him as a form of release. “That girl is going to get herself into big trouble if she keeps this up.”

“Gordon wouldn’t try anything while here,” Fiona scoffed. “He needs to get a leg up, but he’s not stupid.”

“Fiona Francesca Ferrero,” Kate scowled. “Do not talk about your brother that way.”

The teen twirled a plastic biscuit-cutter around her finger. “It’s true though.”

“I don’t care if you find it to be the only truth in the universe: don’t talk like that. You should be lucky you even have a brother to tease right now. Not everyone has them, or even knows the ones they have.”

“Marco’s over at his mum’s, so who else do I have to make fun of?” Fiona said. “Lex? She’s my partner in crime when it comes to this shit. Kanda? Just met her and that’d be mean. Malcolm? I’m lucky if the two of you fuck only twice a day, and…”

“Fiona, sitting room, now,” Kate ordered, pointing the spoon she was using towards the door. Fiona put the biscuit cutter on the table and shrugged before leaving. “I swear, that girl is the one who is going to get herself in trouble.”

“One of her brothers is happy, and she just wants to see the other one happy as well,” Malcolm said.

“I meant her talking about us like that.”

“Oh, that.” He put a couple biscuit dough shapes on the tray and frowned. “She’s a kid, Kate; kids say shit.”

“They don’t joke about who their mum is sleeping with, while both parties are right there.”

“Maybe Gordon didn’t, but he was near eight when you and Loris got married—I would have been more concerned if it was him back then. What Fiona’s doing now is natural for her age.”

“What makes you an expert on teenaged sass?”

“I got a fucking niece I looked after as a nip, don’t I?”

“You do, but that doesn’t make you a parent; being a parent is different.”

“I’m not a moron—I think I know what parenting is.”
“Then please stop pretending that you know what my daughter should and shouldn’t be saying,” she demanded. Kate took a deep breath and leveled her voice, attempting to excise the irritation from it. “All I want is for this Christmas to go well, okay? Please just remember that although we are a serious couple, we’re not married, you are not her father or stepfather, you did not raise her, and when it comes to my children, I make the rules. There are minimal rules for Lex levied by me when she’s here also, and the ones that are there are simply because it’s my house, not because I forget that she’s not my actual niece.”

“That’s a fucking harsh way of looking at it.” A statement, and nothing said of spite.

“I know, but that’s how we have to be at this point, in order to keep our minds clear. Malcolm, I—” She was then cut off by her mobile ringing on the table, Glenn’s name popping up on the caller ID. “Wait, what…?”

“Better answer that,” he frowned. “He knows better than to call unnecessarily on a day like today.”

“Yeah.” Kate swiped the call through and put the device to her ear to listen. “Cullen, this better be good.” She paused to listen, her face turning grave. “Shit, really? Alright; kids are in charge of dinner and Malcolm and I will be right over.” Ending the call, she put her mobile in her pocket and turned the stovetop burners off. “Fuck—the Doctor’s showed up.”

“For fuck’s sake,” Malcolm hissed, depositing the mixing spoon in the batter bowl. “Doesn’t the crusty cunt know that sometimes we don’t need to be reminded that he exists?” He followed Kate out the door and down the corridor towards the front door, although their quick, definitely not-horny gaits caught the attention of Gordon as they passed the sitting room.

“Mum…? What’s the matter?” he asked, getting up and following them.

Kate grabbed her coat and continued towards the door. “Gordon, I need you to stay here. Malcolm is coming with me; sounds like the Doctor brought the mainframe a Christmas present, and thanks to precedent I don’t know if you’ll be better served at work or watching the civilians.”

“Don’t tell me he believes in all that shite,” Malcolm scoffed. “He’s an alien… from outer space.”

“Apparently the Season appeals to him in a secular manner—let’s go.”

“Call me when you know what’s happening for certain, Mum,” Gordon said. After promising, she and Malcolm left, getting into the car and speeding off as fast as they were willing to risk it.

Once down in London, it was almost eerie how quiet and desolate things had become in the late night. Whereas there were always people bustling around the entrance to Mainframe UK during regular hours, there was only one lone policeman on a bicycle making his way down the street. Kate and Malcolm went into the building and down the designated lift, popping out almost right atop Glenn.

“There you are!” he gasped. “I had been talking to Petronella when the Doctor showed up, and we didn’t know whether or not to call you, but the man insisted.”

“It’s alright; I respect your desire for discretion,” Kate replied as they walked along. “If the Doctor’s involved, I don’t mind being called.”

“I hope so,” Glenn said. They made it over to the desolate R&D department to find the Doctor standing there with Scarfy, the latter appearing very wary of the former, with a cloth-covered object on the table.
“Ah, there you are, Kate,” the Doctor said. He noticed Malcolm and frowned. “I thought I said this was to be extremely private.”

“I’m Director of Communications, if you already forgot, meaning I explain away the shit that your pasty space-arse brings to my planet,” Malcolm scowled. “What’cha got under wraps there, cunt-face?”

The Doctor hesitated for a moment, staring at Malcolm, before taking the cloth off the container on the table. Underneath sat an enclosed plexiglass beaker containing what looked like a cross between a brain and a very large bug that was attempting to eat the side of its containment unit as it floated in liquid. The humans looked at it in varying levels of caution and, in Scarfy’s case, delight, all except for…

“Wait, are we not going to mention that Malcolm and the Doctor look exactly alike…?” Glenn marveled. He was the only one not staring at what the Doctor had brought with him, instead staring at his coworker and the alien in horrific realization. No one seemed to hear him, however, and instead his attention was diverted when he saw a familiar woman step out of the TARDIS, clad in only her nightie, a robe, and slippers. “Clara…?”

“Glenn…?” she gasped. “You work for UNIT?”

“Wait, the two of you know each other?” Malcolm asked. Glenn nodded solemnly.

“I used to be good friends with her lad, Danny. He was like a nephew to me…”

“…and now he’s gone,” Clara finished. Malcolm looked from her to the Doctor and back again.

“You go from a strapping young lad to this tit?”

“I was travelling with the Doctor for much longer than I was dating Danny,” she explained with a frown. “This is actually the first time we’ve seen one another in months.”

“He was an ancient, crusty cunt back when he had less wrinkles and brown hair—why?”

“He brings me things no one else can: stars, planets, adventure.” She narrowed her eyes at him, steeling herself for a fight. “It’s not like you would necessarily understand.”

“What is this thing?” Scarfy asked, resisting the urge to tap the glass of the container now sitting atop the table. The Doctor scowled fiercely, though not at Osgood, and flicked the side of the container with his nail.

“A Dream Crab,” he said, voice low and gravelly. “Clara and I were just involved with a group of them—they sucker themselves onto your face and attempt to eat your brains. We were able to kill the ones that attacked us, while this was the only one able to succeed in eating its host.”

“There’s more of them?” Kate asked.

“I made a scan of the planet—looks like there was only the lot we dealt with. The ship they were on collided with an artificial satellite and disintegrated in the atmosphere, scattering them over a sizable area. My theory is that we could all communicate during the pacifying hallucination they put us in because they were from the same genetic cluster. Once the hallucination wore away and we were aware enough to tear them off, they crumbled into dust and poof—dead.” He mimed an explosion with his hands, which seemed odd considering his grave face.

“This is the only survivor? Good.” Kate narrowed her eyes at the Dream Crab, folding her arms
across her chest. “What do you want us to do with it?”

“If the ship was close enough to be hit by an Earth satellite, then that means they’re monitoring the planet,” the Doctor theorized. “It could be that this was a scouting campaign and any sort of invasion would be sidelined when they don’t return, or they mean to arrive anyhow. Either way, giving you a specimen is more than generous when it comes to preparation and prevention.”

“So we’re essentially turning the Mainframe into a POW camp?” Malcolm asked. The Doctor shook his head.

“Prisoners of war are made when the two parties involved are fully sentient and capable of complex thought. This may be a scout, but its highest capable thoughts are for food and survival; it’s more a pet than anything.”

“…and any sentient species that keeps these around as pets have to be dangerous,” Clara added.

“Still don’t know if I like the sound of all this,” Malcolm replied with a frown. “Keeping Alien Rin-Tin-Fucking-Tin here could attract whatever sent it, and then we’d be up Shite Burn with nothing but a halfway-inflated raft and a slotted fucking spoon to paddle. Alternatively, it could attack and kill again.”

“Whatever advantage we can find, we must exploit it,” Kate said. He touched his arm gently, making sure he didn’t simply storm off. “None of the choices are good ones, Malcolm. You know this.” He grunted in reply; just because he understood did not mean that he approved of the fact.

“We have to get Sullivan here,” Scarfy decided. “Between the two of us we can get most of this creature figured out, but we’ll need some time. Any sign of the mothership in our vicinity, Doctor?”

“It would probably be a fleet, and no, nothing that I can tell,” he replied. He gestured towards Clara, a nearly besotted look in his eyes—something that Malcolm couldn’t help but notice. “Since we just had dealings with them, we’re going to patrol around for a bit and make sure that there’s nothing of note in the immediate area other than what’s allowed.”

‘Two millennia old and he’s fucking his equivalent of a housefly,’ Malcolm thought critically. ‘At least she’s plenty removed from being a teenager; don’t care what he’d look like, at least he knows to stay the sweet fuck away from nips.’

“…and what, may I ask, is allowed?” he then asked aloud. The Doctor curled his lips into a smug grin; he was getting too much fucking enjoyment out of this. Sometimes it was a miracle it was the same man that picked up him and Kate in Regency London.

“I thought you were the man who explained everything away,” he mentioned. Malcolm opened his mouth to volley an insult back, yet was cut off by the sudden sound of the plexiglass actually shattering.

“I didn’t do it!” Scarfy cried in a panic. The Dream Crab sat writhing on the ground, seemingly attempting to get its bearings.

“Alright, everybody! Stay back! Get behind me!” the Doctor ordered. He spread out his arms and took a giant step towards the creature. Everyone but Scarfy was able to shuffle behind him, the Dream Crab between her and the others. “Osgood! Don’t make any sudden moves! Now come towards me…”

Nodding, Osgood attempted to give the Dream Crab a wide berth as she slid the soles of her trainers across the floor. She was nearly there when the Dream Crab pulled itself together and hurled itself at
Scarfy, aiming for her head. As she screamed, Malcolm acted on instinct, lunging forward in an attempt to hit it away.

Everything went black instead, and all he could hear as his body crumpled was Kate screaming his name.
Chapter 16

Malcolm woke with a start, his skin clammy from his nightmare. He tried to calm his breathing in the dark room, just barely lit by the impending dawn, only for Kate’s arm to wrap around his and ease him back to the mattress. Yes, that was right—he was supposed to be having a lie-in with the wife, taking advantage of the fact that she had the day off.

“There’s no alarm today,” she moaned sleepily. “Let’s enjoy it while we can.”

“I just had one of the worst fucking nightmares in a long time,” he admitted. He settled back down so that she could use his shoulder as a pillow and he wrap his arm around her. “You know how some dreams can take place over years?”

“Yeah…?”

“I dreamt that I never gave you my number after finding Fiona in that park—we didn’t get married when we did. I had stayed with the Party so long that I was tricked into perjuring and went to prison…”

“Nonsense,” she murmured. “You were too horny to not give me your number. At least it was only a dream.”

Holding his wife a bit closer, Malcolm scowled at the ceiling. Imagining years without her was fucking absurd. Being with Kate was what had kept him sane all that time, even if it was only stolen nights away from the office… what allowed him to escape that hellish fucking career while he had the chance…

…well, she was part of that, anyhow. Nearly as though on-cue, the bedroom door opened and a six-year-old child catapulted herself onto the bed, landing squarely across the adults.

“Mum! Da! Wake up!” the girl giggled shrilly. “It’s Christmas! It’s Christmas and Granny and Grandfather are coming today!”

“Flossie, what have we told you about jumping on us?” Kate groaned. There was no way they were going to have a lie-in now.

“I’m getting too big,” the girl mumbled. She sat up and played with one of her long, blonde curls quietly. “You weren’t up though, and we need to make sure we’re ready.”

“They aren’t coming ‘til afternoon, pet,” Malcolm explained. He got out of bed and let Flossie jump on his back for a ride. The girl squealed happily as her father carried her out of the room and back towards her bedroom, where she slipped off and ran towards her dresser. “Be sure to dress nice for Granny, okay?”

“…or she bollocks you, I know,” she replied. Malcolm left the room and went back towards his own, crossing Fiona’s path as she exited the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her head and a cloud of steam following her.

“Hey Chips, your sister’s up,” he warned. “Can you make sure she’s not a disaster, please? I’m apparently not allowed to after the fashion-fuckfest that was her birthday.”

“Got it, Dad,” she replied, giving him a kiss on the cheek. “When are Granny and Grandfather getting in again?”
“Late afternoon—they probably started the drive a couple hours ago, knowing them, in order to make it here by lunch,” he said. “We have until then to bring everything up to code. Can’t rely on your brother either; it’s not fair after an afternoon shift turns into a night while he’s there.”

“Didn’t Auntie Marcia teach you that’s what sisters fucking do?” Fiona joked. She then disappeared into her room, Malcolm going into his. He found Kate getting dressed and wrapped his arms around her from behind, gently kissing her bare shoulders and neck.

“Why can’t we just put a lock on the door?” he murmured against her skin. She pushed him away long enough to put her blouse on.

“Because I said so,” she answered firmly. “The kids need access to us in case of emergency, and a lock would impede that, especially since Flossie is still very young.”

“…but not having one impedes my access to you,” he whined needily.

“I guess you’re going to have to live with that.” She finished the last button on her blouse and turned around to kiss him teasingly. “Better get a move-on; the kids need breakfast and I was banned from the stove, if you recall correctly.”

“Shit!” Kate growled. She threw a glare towards the Doctor as she knelt down and picked up Malcolm’s head, placing it in her lap. The Dream Crab was plastered to his face, making him pay for the reflex reaction to one of his colleagues being in real physical danger. Seeing the creature wriggle and settle onto his face made her stomach churn—they were already running out of time. “How do we get his bloody thing off him?!”

“We have to defeat it from the inside,” the Doctor replied. “When a Dream Crab latches onto one’s face, they proceed to feed off of the person’s brain. It takes between six and eight hours to get through the skull at the temple without much more than a numb ache to warn them, which not only kills the victim, but is apparently the tastiest location as well.”

“…hence why they don’t go through the ears, eyes, mouth, or by way of the Ancient Egyptians,” Scarfy surmised. She looked at Kate, who was nearly cradling Malcolm in her grasp, and frowned guiltily. “Why’d it go after me?”

“It goes after the most complex brains that are available,” the Doctor said. He ran the sonic screwdriver over the Dream Crab and examined the readout. “Sometimes the choices are less than exemplary, but being in UNIT means that it has access to more than a few morsels worth the hassle. Since Clara and I just encountered some ourselves, it probably figured we weren’t worth the effort, but you…” He stood in front of Scarfy and tapped her forehead. “You have remnants of that psychic link with the Other Osgood atop your scientific mind, Malcolm played political speed-chess for many years with few faults, Kate’s knowledge of extraterrestrials and odd happenings go back to her nursery stories, and Glenn’s surprisingly handy with a kettle if what I hear is true. Even one of you is a treat too tasty to resist.”

“…but what do we do, Doctor?!” Kate repeated. The Time Lord gnawed on his pointer finger in thought, unsure what to say.

“We found ourselves in layers of dreamscapes, and therefore had to escape by finding where the lies were,” Clara explained. “They made the dreams tempting, though; even people who are gone aren’t safe.” She glanced over at Glenn and the older man understood. “The only way we managed to beat them was our shared dream and the Doctor’s psychic abilities.”
“There’s only one Dream Crab now though,” Kate said. “Can you still reach him?”

“I can try,” the Doctor said. “It will be difficult, as Clara mentioned, because of how crafty the Dream Crabs can be within the world they create. They may not have much experience with Earth, but they are clearly designed to feed into a person’s deepest desires, figuring out what would placate them the best, even inventing history for their false worlds if it would be what their victim needs to stay compliant.” He knelt down again next to Kate and held Malcolm’s wrist, feeling the pulse point just beneath the skin. A sniff of the air and he set his face into a stern glower. “The two of you are in a sexual relationship, correct?”

She raised an eyebrow at him. “Why?” He took that as a yes, nodding as he fiddled with Malcolm’s wrist in order to hold it more securely.

“Then you’re as close as I’m going to get in the amount of time we’ve got; do I have permission to go inside his mind, potentially doing things that he will not like and make him uncomfortable, all for the sake of saving him?”

“If you don’t I’ve got an entire Archive of intergalactic torture devices I can use on you.”

The Doctor cracked a smile at that before closing his eyes, whispering a faint, “Geronimo.”

Eggs, bacon, some beans—Malcolm worked on getting breakfast together for his family. Lex had made her way down at the first whiff of food, which meant that the only one left was…

A car pulled into the drive and Gordon got out, trudging towards the house. Flossie immediately stood when she saw her brother, running across the kitchen to jump into his arms and nearly barreling him over in the process.

“Floss, you silly thing, you gotta stop this,” the young man laughed tiredly. “One day you’ll break me, and then what’ll happen?”

“…but you’re younger and stronger than Da! You won’t break!”

“…but even I have my limits.” He patted his baby sister on the head and gently shoved her back towards her seat, just in time for her food to be done. “Oh, Malc, I was talking with Glenn before I left and he says hi and Happy Christmas.”

“Good to know the relic’s still lucid,” Malcolm nodded. “Breakfast?”

“C’mon, there’s always room for Dad’s bacon and eggs,” Fiona teased. Gordon fetched himself a plate and a mug of coffee, sitting down between his cousin and mother.

“Osgood wants you to read this before you come in tomorrow afternoon,” he said, setting a memory stick next to Kate’s plate.

“Which one?” Lex wondered. “There’s so many of them, like the Claw Aliens from Toy Story.”

“This one was wearing cricket whites,” he shrugged into his coffee. “How anyone even begins to tell them apart is beyond me.”

“Easy: we all stopped bothering a week in,” Kate deadpanned. She then turned towards her youngest and frowned. “Florence, chew with your mouth closed.”

“Yes, Mum,” the girl said around her food. Not even two seconds passed and the front doorbell rang,
causing her to quickly swallow her food and gasp. “They’re here!”

“Fucking early,” Malcolm mused. He watched as Flossie jumped up from her seat and ran towards the front door. He could hear the reunion from down the corridor within moments, making it clear it wasn’t simply someone soliciting on the weirdest of days.

“Granny! Grandfather!”

“Ach, there’s my wee lassie!”

“…and have you been behaving, my dear girl?” Flossie dragged her grandparents into the kitchen with a huge grin—his mam, her petite and lithe stature hiding her years of espionage and Jamesina Bonding, and his da, still freakishly fit for his age and horrifically out of touch with fashion—it made Malcolm smile to see them again.

“Florence, Sean, not that I’m not happy to see you, but I would have thought you’d be entering England about now, not entering the kitchen,” Kate said, greeting her in-laws with a hug and kiss on the cheek each.

“We pulled Johnny away early last night, so we figured might as well,” Florence said.

“Granny, Grandfather, please tell me you brought Bessie,” Fiona asked hopefully. “I want to go driving around the backroads again!”

“…and please tell me you didn’t ride all the way here in that ancient heap of fucking junk.”

“Malcolm, my boy, I’m, hurt,” his father gasped in fake indignation. “Bessie has been a faithful mode of transportation for longer than you’ve been alive.”

“Yeah, and Johnny and I both were conceived in that fucking shag-jalopy, don’t lie,” Malcolm scowled. “Bringing that thing here is like Mam showing Lex the labs she shagged that German bloke in to get Marcia once they were decommissioned.”

„Es tut mir leid, Onkel Miesmacher,” Lex laughed. “You’re just jealous that you can’t get away from Bessie, whereas Mam doesn’t have to go anywhere near the labs if she doesn’t want to.”

Instead of dignifying that with an answer, Malcolm proceeded to burn Lex’s food before slapping it on her plate while greetings were being exchanged. His parents came to him last, with Kate standing close by. His mam hugged him and his da patted him on the back while he kept on cooking.

“This is going to be an excellent holiday, I can feel it,” Sean said confidently. “Thanks again Kate, for you and Malcolm to take up hosting duty.”

“I keep telling you, Sean: we have the biggest house,” Kate interjected. “Besides, Dad would have wanted this place used as such… hosting you in particular.”

“What a good man, Lethbridge-Stewart was; just a pity we kept our friendship a workplace one, or the shock of you and Malcolm would have been more an anticipated event than a welcome surprise.”

“Then Gordon and Fiona might not be here, and no one here would admit to wanting to trade either of them for fucking anything,” Malcolm said. He cracked some eggs into a pan and watched over them as they cooked. “Say, speaking of: where’s Johnny? I thought you said he was coming with you.”

“He said he was going to figure out the luggage,” Florence said. She leaned in towards her son and
nodded resolutely. “I think he’s fighting with that girl of his—been quiet all night.”

“Well that’s a first,” Malcolm snorted. “I thought he finally found The One.”

“Now, now—stop teasing the poor boy when he’s not even here to defend himself,” Sean chuckled. He gently pushed his son aside and took the spatula from his hand. “Here, let me do that. Go help your brother.”

“At least fucking take off your coat before cooking, for fuck’s sake, Da,” Malcolm groaned. He peeled the Inverness cape off his father and deposited it in the front cupboard on his way to the door. There was no one outside when he went to the drive, however, the only out-of-place thing there being his da’s old canary-yellow car that probably should’ve been in a motoring museum. He went to the boot and grabbed one of the suitcases, figuring he might as well start since he was out there.

“Malcolm!” a voice whispered. He turned and saw a familiar face and shock of wild, grey hair crouched down near the corner of the house, attempting to stay hidden. “Malcolm! Get over here!”

“Fucking hell, Johnny,” he laughed, walking towards his brother. “What are you doing? Hey, please tell me Clara’s gonna make an honest man out of you soon—I need Mam to stop her conspiracy theories on your love life…” Malcolm watched as his brother’s face grew dark, his brow furrowing and a scowl spreading until it enveloped him. “Wait, what the fuck’s wrong now?”


“Uh-huh, yeah; just because you have a bunch of fucking doctorates doesn’t mean you’re a medical doctor,” Malcolm replied. “Now help me get the luggage inside.”

“Do you have a headache? A slight one, like after eating ice cream too quickly?”

“You’re fucking daft.”

“Well, do you?”

Malcolm paused and thought; he did have a slight headache, but that was normal in the winter after all the years he had smoked to calm himself down had fucked with his body. “Fine, I’ll take it all in myself. What Clara sees in you I have no fucking clue.”

“…Clara…?”

“You know, the lass you’ve got atop you on a nightly basis, fucking you into oblivion,” Malcolm said, a bit unnerved. It wasn’t like his brother to be like this… not in the slightest. He seemed to be reaching a new level of crazy, which he was certain was due to his life holed up in academia, speaking into the echo chamber that was children fresh out of fucking sixth form and haughty enough to think they know the world already yet still insisting on being coddled, going out into the real world long enough to buy himself some crisps and Irn Bru before holing himself back up. “I know you’re the younger brother, but you need to be a fucking adult sometimes. There’s only a couple more years between your gap and the one between your eldest and youngest nieces—are you sure this is what she wants?”

“Clara is an adult and can behave how she sees fit,” Johnny replied. “As for you—you need to wake up.”

“Uh-huh, yeah, because having a wife and kids and a house in the English fucking countryside isn’t real life for Weegie cunts such as us. What are you on about? Did a student give you laced brownies before you left?”
“You’re in this deep,” Johnny realized. He glanced over Malcolm’s shoulder at the yellow car and his brows shot up in surprise. “Bessie…?”

“Fuck, you did get hash brownies from a student for Christmas; that’s what you, Mam, and Da came in, you fucking nutter.” Malcolm turned around and began to head towards the car and finally fetch the luggage. “I have to make sure that Clara knows what the fuck she’s getting into, then maybe she’ll never put a ring on you and dump your pasty, sorry, pervert arse instead.”

“Now listen here, I—”

The moment Johnny went quiet, Malcolm turned around to look at his brother. He saw him standing there, gnawing on his finger in thought, and looking very, very irritating. “You done being a fucking tit or are we going to make it to the fucking new year a bloody dys-fuck-tional wreck?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, sure.” Johnny crossed the gravel drive and went to help Malcolm get the bags out of the boot. “Clara won’t be here, unfortunately; she’s with her father in Blackpool for the time being. He fell down the stairs thanks to that cat of his last week and it was a miracle she didn’t go down to see him immediately after getting the call.”

“Right, then let’s go,” Malcolm said. He led his brother into the house and began to haul his parents’ shit up the stairs, knowing that somehow this was going to be a weird week.

Later on that day, long after the sun had set for the night, Malcolm was sitting comfortably on the couch as everyone sat around and chatted about the time that had passed since their last meeting. Presents had long been exchanged and the resulting paper-themed carnage cleaned up, which meant that it was now time for what truly mattered. With his arm resting against the back so that it draped over Kate’s shoulders, he paid particular attention to his brother, noting how incredibly quiet he was acting. For a man whose lectures were over the top in dramatics, he was behaving rather oddly.

“Uncle Johnny, let me sit with you,” Flossie said, climbing up into her uncle’s lap. She snuggled against his chest and continued reading her book—a present from him that even he seemed shocked was in his luggage—which forced the man to wrap his arms around her to keep the child in place. “Mmm… you’re warm.”

“Thank… you…?” he replied, voice nearly stiff.

“It always has made me glad to watch you with the wee nips, Johnny,” Florence grinned. “Gives me a bit o’hope that you might eventually have a family of your own.”

“…but…”

“Come now, son,” Sean chuckled. “Someone has to take care of you when we’re no longer around. Marcia has Lex, Malcolm has Kate and the kids… will Clara be that for you? There’s no harm in it.”

“I’d rather not talk about this,” Johnny scowled.

“Yeah, lay off,” Lex said, coming into the room with Gordon. The two were brandishing trays of cocoa that they distributed to everyone. “It’s like Mam trying to demand grandkids out of me and I’m not even in a relationship.”

“I’m in a relationship, though,” Malcolm justified. He took a mug from Gordon’s tray and held it up in a mock toast. “Just both of you learn from this and make sure that the moment you start navigating the dating scene, keep whomever you find as far away from us as possible.”
“The advice is appreciated,” Gordon said. He allowed Kate to take the last mug from his tray and glanced over at Lex giving his youngest sister the last mug of cocoa from her tray—a tiny blue one covered in purple flowers. “Still think we should just be hermits together and avoid all this.”

“Being eternal roomies would be nice, but we’d still have to put up with them being eternal nags,” Lex said, narrowing her eyes at Malcolm. He gave her a shit-eating grin as the two young adults retreated into the kitchen, where no one was there to give them grief about anything.

“I know when I was young I swore to never harass kids like a typical parent,” he said, “but now that I am where I am in life, it seems like they all fucking deserve it.”

“As long as you don’t decide that our Flossie should be kept away from all endeavors romantic and maternal in nature,” Kate said.

“She’s our wee miracle-child—of course I am,” Malcolm replied, kissing his wife’s neck. “Did you expect anything less?”

“So all those years you’re spending being Overprotective Stepdad will be like a walk in the park?” Fiona wondered. “Shit—I’m gonna have to rely on Marco for nieces and nephews at this rate.”

As everyone had a chuckle at Fiona’s expense, Malcolm decided that it was a decent chance for a topic change. There wasn’t much to go on as far as a segue but that didn’t matter—it was something that he had to tell his family, and there was no easier way than to tell most of them at once.

“Well, now’s a good a time as any to let everyone know, I guess, but I’m considering going back to work once Flossie’s in secondary,” he said. “I thought about it for a while now, and I know I’ll be pushing fucking sixty when I do, but the cunts that run the PR and Communications in UNIT are in need of some prime bollocking and Kate’s given the all-clear.”

“Malcolm, you’re dying,” Sean laughed. The younger man snapped his head in the direction of his father, confused.

“Wait, what…?”

“You’re lying,” Sean said with a grin. “Now why would you want to go back to work after Flossie’s in secondary? Retiring into being a house husband has been the best career move you’ve ever made.”

“Got him away from those fucking parasites in Whitehall, at least,” Florence frowned. “Why you went into politics, I still have no fucking idea. You are better than them… Jamie and Cal are better than them—Kate’s at the top of her game and your being home all this time for her and the kids has been great for them. Risking that would be too dying.”

Malcolm blinked and knuckled his ear. “What…?”

“I said: risking that would be too trying,” Florence repeated. “Do I need to wash out your ears like a wee fucking brat?”

“No, I was just saying…”

“In five years, Gordon and Fiona could be out of the house, Lex’s path could take her elsewhere, and then who would be there for Flossie like you were for her siblings?” his mother posed. “She’s a good lass, but secondary’s a rough time on a nipper.”

“Thank you!” Fiona groaned, attempting to flop into the back of the couch without spilling her
cocoa. “Dad, sorry, you’re stuck. Granny has spoken.”

“I told you she wouldn’t buy it,” Kate said. She patted Malcolm’s knee in sympathy. “The moment
she saw that her son was taking after his father, she was dead set on keeping it that way.”

That was true: his father had stepped down from his position within UNIT to care for him and his
siblings once his mother was assigned increasingly dangerous missions when they were children…but that was beside the point. Something did not feel right about this conversation…

“Oh, it looks like someone is a bit tuckered out,” Sean noticed. He motioned towards Johnny and
everyone looked to see that Flossie was fast asleep in her uncle’s lap. Johnny placed Flossie’s book
and empty cocoa mug on the table while Sean plucked the girl from his grasp, smiling when she
made a soft, content noise as she rubbed her face against his velvet jacket. “Kate? Help me get her to
bed?”

“Oh, it looks like someone is a bit tuckered out,” Sean noticed. He motioned towards Johnny and
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made a soft, content noise as she rubbed her face against his velvet jacket. “Kate? Help me get her to
bed?”

“Alright,” she said. They then left, headed up the stairs to Flossie’s room, and discussion topic
changed yet again.

A couple minutes of listening to his mam and stepdaughter talk about the dishy lads at Fiona’s school
was about all Malcolm could take before he excused himself and went upstairs himself. He saw Kate
leaning on the doorjamb to Flossie’s room, which he joined her at, putting his arm around her as they
watched grandfather and granddaughter contently.

“Grandfather?” Flossie squeaked. “Can you sing me a lullaby? My favorite? In Irish?”

“Why certainly, darling,” Sean chuckled. He tucked her in and made sure she was settled before
gently singing. “Klokleda partha menin klatch; haroon, haroon, haroon. Klokleda sheenah tierra
natch; Haroon, haroon, haroon…”

“It still amazes me how good he is with the kids,” Kate whispered. She hugged Malcolm’s arm and
shifted her weight so that she slightly leaned into his chest.

“He had to be in order to jump right into fatherhood like he did,” he murmured in her ear. “Shit…
adopter Marcia, with me and Johnny popping out of mam within a year and a half… he had his
hands full.”

“At least I know where you get it from,” she replied. The two watched as Sean finished the lullaby,
Flossie having gone to sleep, and met the man’s grin as he walked towards them at the door.

“Down and out, such a good lass,” he said. “That old chap Alistair doesn’t know what he’s
missing.”

“Good thing he left us in your care, then,” Kate said. The three then chuckled and shut the door, with
Sean headed towards the stairs, while Malcolm and Kate went towards their own room, ready to get
in a quick go before everyone else headed off to bed.

It all seemed so right, yet as Malcolm grunted into Kate’s breasts, he couldn’t help but feel that it was
all wrong.
“How long do you think it’ll take?” Kate wondered. She was sitting on a chair now, staring at Malcolm and the Doctor as one laid and the other sat on the floor of the laboratory, both a few meters away. Clara was sitting next to her, a mug of tea in her hands.

“It depends on how much is going on in there,” the younger woman replied. “At least we know it could be worse.”

“It could…” Kate frowned at Malcolm’s still form, his head supported by a pillow, and an uneasy thought came over her. “What if this Dream Crab… achieves its goal?” She did not want to say “kill”… not yet.

“Chances are it won’t with the Doctor around,” Clara said. She took a sip of tea and shrugged. “The man this one killed wasn’t exactly the highest quality mind, if you get what I mean. If Malcolm is anything like you, Osgood, and Glenn say he is, then I wouldn’t be too worried. It’s only been half an hour.”

“I still cannot help but worry…”

“…because you have a duty to do so. I have one too, a duty of care, because rare is the idiot that doesn’t need caring for, and these two are a couple of right idiots.”

“I don’t know if that’s the exact word I’d use,” Kate said.

“It’s definitely the word we should use, if only because they are ours and no one else’s.” Clara smiled as she saw Glenn and Osgood return, brandishing the kettle and a tin of biscuits, as well as a bunch of scientific-looking equipment. “What would you say, Glenn? Are the Doctor and Malcolm our idiots?”

“They are whatever you want them to be,” he replied, setting the tin down next to them. “Just remember that we’re not dealing with ordinary men here.”

“My chance at having ordinary in my life is dead,” she told him. “There are only two people, two men, whom I could have ever spent the rest of my life with, and now it seems I’m down to only one option.” She accepted Glenn’s offer of more tea and stared down into her mug, watching the lighter tea from before mix with the fresher, darker stuff, and exhaled heavily. “The Doctor knows that… Danny knew that… and I’m glad that I had both, even for a little while. Malcolm will get out of this, Kate. The Doctor is planning on it.”

“He better, or I’m not entirely sure what I’ll do,” Kate frowned. “I’ll threaten to defund him.”

“You know that’ll never work,” Osgood snickered. Going through her collection of stuff, she went and scraped some of the slime oozing from the Dream Crab into a series of petri dishes. “He doesn’t work here anymore… hasn’t for quite some time.”

“He doesn’t know that,” Kate replied. She held up her cuppa in a silent toast before drinking some more, eyes fixed on Malcolm and the Doctor.

It still didn’t feel like they were going to make it, yet she had to keep her hopes up.

As the end of the year approached, the Stewart-Tuckers were doing their best to enjoy themselves. It
was difficult, given that the Tucker Brothers kept on having petty rows, but they soldiered on as they
normally did; just because Malcolm and Johnny kept on arguing did not mean that the holidays were
going to be ruined. They had been in an argumentative state before and they would likely be in one
again before they were too old and senile to remember past five minutes. Life went on as usual, with
the family behaving exactly as such—a family.

It wasn’t until it was just before New Year’s Eve when the balance began to tip. Florence had taken
Lex and Gordon to the store to procure supplies for their miniature Hogmanay celebration, while
Fiona was out with Sean learning how to drive in faithful, ol’ Bessie thanks to some ill-patrolled
country roads. That left Malcolm and Kate alone with Flossie and Johnny, the latter of whom had
barely come out of his room for nearly two days.

“Da…? Has Uncle Johnny always been a tit?”

“Not always, pet,” Malcolm said. He and Flossie were curled up on the couch, watching the news as
they did the year’s retrospective. Kate was in the kitchen, out of earshot concerning their
conversation. “You know, you shouldn’t use language like that when talking about your uncle—you
only got one o’ them.”

“Yeah, but Mum’s not in the room to be cross at me for cussing.”

“That’s true, but you still shouldn’t be too harsh on Uncle Johnny,” he replied. “His job is a rough
one, and it doesn’t surprise me that he has the tendency to act odd.”

“Teaching…?” Flossie scrunched her nose and shifted so that she could look her father in the face.
“It doesn’t look that hard. You just have to know stuff.”

“Trust me: it extremely difficult at times,” he assured her. “Uncle Johnny has to attempt to teach
dozens of people with brains like pudding stuff that a pudding has no reason to learn. If he even
reaches one person, he did his job above and beyond the call of duty. Some people are really good at
it, but others aren’t, and one day you’ll find that out yourself.”

“Why?”

“You’ll be smarter than a teacher, eventually. If you’ve got any of your mam’s smarts, which you do,
then you will find yourself dealing with a teacher with whom you can wipe the fucking floor with
before you reach sixth form. Shit, even I was smarter than most of my teachers before uni. The trick
is to make them think you respect ‘em, or else it’s all for naught and suddenly you find yourself in
detention constantly, nearly failing because you’re on the staff’s bad side, and Granny’s shouting and
arguing with you every day about the stupidest shit.”

“She yelled at you and not Uncle Johnny?”

“Auntie Marcia and me, yeah, but your uncle…” Malcolm trailed off as he thought—no, he couldn’t
remember his mother and brother ever having a row. In fact, he couldn’t even recall their father
having a shout at them.

Huh.

“Time for some nice cuppas,” Kate announced. She walked into the room carrying the tea tray, laden
with mugs and a plate of biscuits. Flossie spent little time reaching for her mug and some Jammie
Dodgers, slipping off the couch to kneel on the floor between the couch and low table. Her mother
and father used the opportunity to sit close together, nearly atop one another, settling in with their tea.

“Da? What do you think it would be like had you stayed in politics with Uncle Jamie and Uncle
Cal?” Flossie asked, mouth full of biscuit. She cocked her head at the television, watching the stuttering buffoon that was being replayed from an epic disaster of a PR scandal that May.

“I try not to think about it, pet,” he said. He slid his free arm around Kate’s waist and held her a bit tighter than normal. “I’ve got me my wife, my wee bairn, a few other not-so-wee bairns of varying origins running about… it’s all I need.”

“Well, I think you would’ve been brilliant,” the young girl said.

“You’re saying that because I’m your da.”

“No, I mean it.” Flossie shuffled around and glared at her father. “You could have made it so that man would have been a hero. You could even be helping Mum now.”

“Don’t get too carried away, pet,” Malcolm chuckled. “I’m just your old, worn-out da—there’s nothing heroic about me.”

“You’re dying.”

“Flossie, dear, don’t tease your father,” Kate chuckled. She kissed Malcolm on the cheek and the small child gagged, returning her attention to the television. “Only I’m allowed to do that.”

“Uh… yeah…” Malcolm warily agreed. He felt uncomfortable as they went back to watching the television, wondering if he genuinely did need his hearing checked.

It was then that the doorbell rang, pulling the three’s attention from their cuppas and telly. Malcolm cocked his head and stared in the direction of the front door, knowing that they weren’t expecting anyone that wouldn’t have just walked right in.

“Stay here while I see who it is, yeah?” he said as he stood. He handed his mug to Kate and patted Flossie on the head before walking away. After making his way through the house, he opened the front door to see his brother’s girlfriend standing there, an awkward grin on her face.

“Hi, Malcolm; sorry I’m just dropping in like this…”

“No, no, you were invited, now get the fuck inside, it’s fucking cold out there,” he insisted. He took her bags from her and helped her out of her coat, which he put in the cupboard. “Johnny know you were on your way, Clara?”

“No, I wanted it to be a surprise,” she replied. Before either could continue, Flossie came dashing into the foyer to interrupt them.

“Miss Clara!” the girl gasped. She ran up to the woman and hugged her around the waist. “I thought you were in Blackpool!”

“You’re right, I was, but I’m here now,” Clara chuckled. “Have you been good since I last saw you?”

“Yes! I grew too!”

“Well, that was a given.”

“Flossie,” Kate said as she entered the fold, “please go use the electric kettle and put on some of our new chamomile tea for Miss Clara. I’m sure she needs it after coming here all the way from Blackpool.”
“Oh, yes!” With that, the girl dashed away, leaving the adults to themselves.

“That’s a relief,” Kate smirked. She gave Clara a hug and attempted to lead her into the house. “You have to tell me what’s going on with your father. He must have had a worse fall than expected…”

“I’ll get to that in a bit,” Clara said. She looked at both her guests and bit her lower lip in slight hesitation before continuing. “Can I talk to you both first? With John?”

“Of course,” Malcolm said. He picked her bags back up and the three went up the stairs and over towards Johnny’s room. Arriving at the door, Malcolm knocked before raising his voice slightly.

“Hey, can I come in, or are you still being a raggedy cunt that can’t behave properly at family gatherings?”

“I’m busy,” Johnny replied sourly. Malcolm attempted to open the door anyhow only to find it locked.

“Hold on,” Clara whispered. She then stepped between Malcolm and the door, a knowing smirk on her face. “What if it was me who wanted to come in?”

The door swung open almost instantly, revealing a shocked Johnny. Clara clung to him tightly as Malcolm walked by, placing her bags next to his, the entire scene apparently confusing him. Once Kate had entered the room and the invasion complete, Clara closed the door quietly and locked it.

“What’s with all this secrecy?” Kate wondered. “You’re not normally like this.”

“Well, I have something I want to discuss with all three of you, and I need to get it all out at once or else I am going to become a nervous wreck that won’t be of any use in the slightest.”

“That’s more our Clara,” Malcolm deadpanned.

“Hush,” Johnny said, holding out his hand towards his brother, “this shouldn’t be. Clara, why are you here?”

“Don’t you hush me, you fucking—!”

“Boys, stop it,” Kate snapped. “You’re only making things worse.” She then turned to Clara and placed a supportive hand on her shoulder. “Now what did you want to talk to us about? Is it something back home?”

“It’s not that,” the younger woman said. “First, I have to apologize to you all: I wasn’t in Blackpool the entire time I should have been here. It is true that Dad hurt himself because of that cat, and I did stay with him and Linda through Christmas, but the rest of the time I was back in Glasgow in order to make some appointments.”

“Clara…? What are you saying…? Why are you here…?” Johnny wondered. He was staring at her intently—brow furrowed and eyes intense—as though he had never expected her to show up, let alone so suddenly.

“Just shut up and let me do the talking, yeah?” she said. Clara took hold of one of his hands and took a deep breath, steadying herself. “Kate, Malcolm, you are going to be the only ones who know this for a while, but only because if I don’t tell you both immediately I will burst: Will you both be the godparents for our child?”

The brothers’ eyes nearly bugged at the question. Different versions of shock settled over them,
which made Clara more than slightly nervous, which meant Kate stepped in and took over.

“Why of course,” she beamed. “It will be an honor. You know how Malcolm is when it comes to that stuff, but if he can back off making remarks around my children then he certainly can behave himself around yours.”

“I only imagined he’d be one in a secular manner to begin with,” Clara nervously laughed. She glanced up at Johnny, who was still attempting to process the situation. “Are you alright, John? You did say you were ready to start trying, and we did agree that your brother and sister-in-law would be the godparents…”

“You’re pregnant,” he stated. “You’re going to have a baby.”

“Yes, your baby—I’m eight weeks along—that’s what the appointments were for,” she explained. “I know it’s still not a sure thing at this point in the game, but I know it’s what we really wanted and…”

At that, Johnny let go of Clara’s hand and briskly walked out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Clara’s eyes grew wide and watery, her face twisting in silent, barely contained rage.

“Clara, sit down,” Kate offered, softly pushing her towards the mattress. “Malcolm, give him Hell.”

“I plan on it,” he scowled. Malcolm left the room and carefully closed the door behind him, not wanting to make too much more noise. He went down to the bottom of the stairs and saw Flossie standing there in confusion.

“What’s wrong with Uncle Johnny?” she asked in confusion.

“He’s being a tit again, pet,” Malcolm grunted. “Which way did he go? The lad needs a bollocking.”

“The back garden,” Flossie said. She pointed towards the rear of the house and stared up at her father. “Is everything okay?”

“It will be; I promise,” he assured her.

After patting her on the head, he went outside to find his brother skulking about by the gazebo. Gone were the days when it was a freshly-built project for him, Alastair, and Gordon; the wood was now weathered and in desperate need of some sanding and a coat of paint come springtime, though that was neither here nor there. Malcolm stormed up to Johnny and landed a fist right on his nose, causing the other man to hold his face and cuss under his breath.

“What the fuck was that?!?” Malcolm snarled. “You stuff the lass and then you act like you want nothing to fucking do with her?! I expected better from you!”

“That’s not Clara!” Johnny sniped back.

“She’s more than just Clara now—she’s the mother of your child, you fucking waste of space! What the fuck are Mam and Da going to say when they come back and see you acting like this?!”

“Those are not our parents!”

“What the everliving fuck are you talking about?!” Malcolm said, abso-fucking-lutely stunned. “Florence and Sean, our parents, are going to come home from their respective grandnip outings and find that not only there is another on the way, but that you are being a disgrace to the Tucker name. Last time you phoned, you couldn’t’ve been more in love with her—ready to marry and settle down and dash the hopes of all your student admirers—and now look at you. It’s a good thing Marcia ain’t
“Malcolm,” Johnny frowned. He wiped the blood from his nose on his sweatshirt sleeve and stared him down. “Who am I?”

“What the fuck…? What’s this about?”


“You’re me brother, who is being a massive tit right now, and…”

Before Malcolm knew it, Johnny had him by the front of his jumper and slammed up against a beam. His pale eyes, the same as his, were nearly wild in anger.

“What is my name?!?” he bellowed. Malcolm shoved him off, watching his brother stagger a couple feet away due to the force.

“Madison John Basil Tucker,” he said. “We call you John and Johnny because you never liked Madison, ‘specially after that fucking mermaid movie made all the girls laugh at you. You know, the one that came out right after uni?” Johnny narrowed his eyes at him, setting him off even worse.

“What the fuck is this about?! You’re scaring Clara—who I would have expected you to sweep off her feet and carry down to the courthouse before it closes for the holiday—you scared Flossie… you’re scaring me! What is going on?!?”

“You are dying.”

“I thought we went over this…”

“No, Malcolm, it’s the truth,” Johnny said gravely. “We are not here, not really. You and I are in the bowels of UNIT at this very moment; this right here? It’s why you’ve got that headache. An alien is boring into your skull, killing you with pleasantries and an ideal world for you to believe in.”

“…an alien…?” Malcolm scoffed. “Kate’s the one that handles those bent gits, not me. What are you on about?”

“We are in UNIT right now because I brought in the alien for Osgood to examine and it escaped from its container. I am in your brain to help you fight this, not to be a nuisance.”

Malcolm raised an eyebrow at his brother, not believing him. “If you’re in my brain, then how the fuck are you managing that? You’re only human.”

“That’s where everyone in this dreamscape is wrong, including you,” Johnny said. “I am the Doctor, a Time Lord of the planet Gallifrey in the constellation Kasterborous. I travel in a space-time ship and am basically an idiot who tries to help out, but the thing is that I have established a telepathic connection in order to save you, because if I don’t Kate is going to have my hide.”

“There’s only one part of that I believe, and it’s that my Kate will likely be the one to murder you and make it look like an accident.” Malcolm went and began walking back towards the house—his brother’s mind was truly shot. Something had happened within the past three weeks to make him like this and he needed to figure out the whens and whys of the matter. It would involve calling up some old mates, especially some of the old crowd from his days clawing for devolution, but he would definitely get to the bottom of this.

“Malcolm, you have to listen to me!”
Fuck… he and Kate would have to make sure that Clara didn’t leave their sights. She couldn’t go back to Scotland, nor could she go to Blackpool, not with the way things were. She might even need to have the baby before everything’s settled and that wouldn’t be until the damned summer…

“We don’t have much time, Malcolm! The clock is ticking!”

…at least Flossie would be thrilled, until she learned to change a nappy…

“Malcolm!”

“Don’t you try to fucking talk to me, you fucking mental waste of cum and skin!” he screamed, spinning around to meet his brother face-to-face. “Your girlfriend is up the fucking duff and you’re raving on about being an alien and other shit I don’t even want to try to fucking pronounce! Can’t you see you’ve basically told us all that you’re dumping her?! Kate and I are going to have to clean up your mess, so don’t you think you’ve got an iota of claim to anything now.”

“That is not Clara, nor is it Kate, nor is this our lives!” Johnny insisted. “The only reason I am here is because coming into your consciousness via the telepathic connection made it so that my past and current desires blended with yours during the creation of the false environment we’re in!”

“Then what the fuck is yours, huh?” Malcolm spat lowly. “Fucking a woman half your age until she’s pregnant and then walking away?”

“Having a family again,” Johnny replied. His voice was level and grave, with a tone that sent a shiver down Malcolm’s spine. “Back on Gallifrey, I was married. It was a beautiful union, one where our family could only grow in size, to the point where when I ran away, I did so with my granddaughter in tow. I did so many things wrong back then—from the way I thought to how I acted—and starting over anew with Clara—my Clara—would be a way to salvage myself and do things right.”

“You have a granddaughter?”

“She was by my side until she fell in love and I had to let her go on her own. There isn’t a day that goes by where I don’t miss her, and she would want me to try to do better by Clara and any children I have with her… if we even can have children.”

“So let me get this straight,” Malcolm grunted, pinching the bridge of his nose. “You are an extraterrestrial alien from outer fucking space old enough to have a granddaughter and your being here means that another alien is picking up on the fact you want to shag a lass until she pops out a kid?”

“Not in such terms, but yes,” Johnny said. He averted his eyes from Malcolm, his neck and cheeks beginning to blush red at the thought. “That’s not all though.”

“Whoop-dee-fucking-do; what a surprise. What else is there?”

“You had wanted not only a father, but a family of your own,” he said. “Sean is an invention of the dreamscape, as is your marriage.”

“You take that back,” Malcolm snarled. “Kate is the best thing that has ever happened to me, and I’ll be damned if she’s just a wet dream!”

“She is not the dream, but the marriage is,” Johnny clarified. “The dreamscape had you two meeting earlier than you actually did, facilitating you not only becoming a father figure to her children while they were young, but the creation of a third child who doesn’t actually exist…”
“…and how do you know all this? Tell me quick, before I bust yer balls and the bairn Clara’s carrying is the only one you’ll ever have.”

Just then, cutting them off, a familiar honking noise came from around the house and Bessie drove around the bend with Fiona at the wheel. Sean was grinning giddily as the teen came to a stop and put the vehicle into park a few meters away on the lawn.

“That’s me,” Johnny said. “I have different faces, and that was one of them. The dreamscape used it because it made us being brothers more plausible.” The two watched as Sean and Fiona got out of the car and came over to them, their excitement bursting at the seams.

“Did you see me Uncle Johnny?! Dad?! I should be able to pass my driver’s exam easy when I turn eighteen!” Fiona’s voice kept going higher and higher as she talked. “Grandfather says I’ll be more than ready at this rate!”

“I am not your grandfather,” Johnny said, his own voice level and calm. In an instant, Sean melted into a puddle and sank into the ground, not fazing Fiona one bit.

“I know you didn’t want me to take the car out, but see? I can drive it by myself with no scratches or dents or anything!”

“Fiona?”

“Yeah Uncle Johnny?”

“Who was driving with you?”

“No one,” the teen said guiltily. “I know I really should have brought someone along if I was going to go out… but I really wanted to, and…!”

“Fiona!” Flossie shouted, running out of the house. “Where were you?! Mum and Da were worried!”

“ Took Bessie out for a joyride,” the elder sister grinned. She was pulled along by Flossie into the house, which left Malcolm stunned.

“See? Now do you believe me?” Johnny asked. Malcolm looked at his brother—no, the Doctor—and swallowed hard.

“What do we need to do?”

“Something’s happening!” Osgood gasped, stepping back from the Dream Crab. She pointed at the Doctor’s face, where his nose was beginning to drip blood. “Clara?! Is this normal…?”

“I don’t know,” Clara said. She and Kate both put their tea down and went over to where the Doctor and Malcolm were on the floor, both looking at the Time Lord’s face. Clara accepted a handkerchief from Glenn and dabbed at the blood, noting that it had stopped just as suddenly as it came.

“Is the strain too much?” Glenn wondered.

“No, it can’t be—the Doctor’s mental capacity is much higher than ours,” Kate frowned. “Do you think something happened in the dreamscape?”

“Possibly,” Clara said. She stared at the Doctor’s face, attempting to decipher his lack of expression. “Come on, Doctor. I know you can do it, you clever boy, you.
“All you need to do is run.”
As the two men walked into the house, an uncomfortable air began to settle on them. Malcolm and the Doctor were both now on the same page when it came to the situation they currently found themselves in—they were both in the recesses of Malcolm’s mind, inside a dreamscape meant to kill him. They watched from afar as Flossie jumped on Fiona’s back and was carried out of sight, knowing that the job ahead of them was liable to be a difficult one.

“Remember: we have to do this little by little,” the Doctor warned. “Otherwise the dreamscape will likely collapse on itself and then I might never get you out of here.”

“That’s a fucking comfort,” Malcolm snorted. “How do we do this? By loudly acknowledging that this isn’t reality?”

“We have to go around and figure out what’s tying you here,” the Doctor stated. “You cannot be tied by someone who does not exist, nor one who never existed, so that narrows it down slightly.”

“Your old face and Flossie.”

“Correct. Additionally, I’ve been doing some analysis of this particular Crab’s tactics while stuck up in that room and have figured that only vast amounts of change in a relationship can ultimately get you out of here. When it was Clara and me, we were released by acknowledging that we wanted little more than to remain with one another. This, coupled with some plain honesty, was what kept us alive.”

“…and applying that here rules out Mam, Gordon, and Lex, who already act little different than they do normally.”

“Also correct. Now the question is to figure out who out of the two remaining is the anchor…”

“There you two are!” Kate said as she came down the stairs. She approached Malcolm and the Doctor, slapping the latter across the face. “What the bloody hell has gotten into you?!”

“Kate, I…”

“That poor girl is upstairs sobbing while you’re down here doing… I don’t know what… just making her more upset! Some father and husband you’re turning out to be!”

“Kate, that’s not Clara, and you’re not real either,” the Doctor said gravely. The woman instead curled her lip and sneered at him.

“That does it; I want you out of my house and away from my family, do you understand? I am not going to tolerate such behavior, especially out of my husband’s own brother. You have crossed several lines, John, and I am not going to stand for it.”

“If you will just listen to me…!”

“You have no room for an argument! Malcolm will bring your stuff to the pub with Gordon when he gets back. Until then: good bye.” She then began shoving him towards the back garden door, setting the lock once he was outside. Spinning around, she faced her husband and growled, “Don’t you dare let him back in, not until I say.”

“Okay, but I…”
“Make some tea and bring it upstairs; we need it badly if we’re going to get through this.” At that, she stormed back up the stairs, presumably to comfort Clara some more. Malcolm waited until he no longer heard footsteps before going to the door and cracking it open a wee bit.

“Doctor…?”

“Yeah, I’m here.”

“What the fuck are we going to do now?!”

“See if you can talk to Fiona since she’s not livid with me; remember that breaking the hold on your consciousness involves explicit understanding and statements as far as what’s going on.”

“Gotcha. See you on the other side.”

Malcolm closed the door and began to creep around the house. Reminders of a life he should have had met him at every turn, making the situation all the more unbearable. Family portraits done in a studio, keepsakes from holiday trips that never happened, clutter from school work and projects and visitors strewn about everywhere… it was nearly unbearable.

Finally, Malcolm gave up and went into the kitchen to at least put the kettle on. He kept his hands busy with preparing tea, nearly not noticing that the teen he had been searching for had come into the room, her hands full of paperwork. She sat down at the table and spread her things out.

“Oh, tea? There enough for me?”

“Yeah,” Malcolm nodded. He took a deep breath and steadied his nerves; it was now or never, you tit. “Hey, Fiona, I need to talk to you.”

“You read my mind, Dad,” she said, flipping through papers.

“…I did…?”

“Yeah, I need to know if you were planning on going to the school play next month during the first weekend or the weekend after,” she replied. She found the piece of paper she was searching for and began writing on it. The man she believed to be her stepfather stepped slightly closer; it was a list of things he did not understand at first, but then remembered the dreamscape’s invention: she was in the drama department. “We need ushers and Flossie would be perfect if you brought her in the dress she wore for the old headmaster’s funeral. You know... the white with black fake-lace.”

“You don’t want me to do it?” he asked.

“It would be easier, but Floss is cuter,” the teen said frankly. “Not a lot of room for cute when doing the Scottish Play, after all. It’ll help offset the inevitable gloom.”

“…and I wouldn’t? You’re doing the Scottish Play. I’m Scottish.”

“…and that would play into things, unless you ditched the Weegie for the night, and it would still not work. You’ve just got this face, Dad…”

Malcolm sighed and steeled himself for the worst. He did not want to do it, but if it got him out of the death-trap he was in, then so fucking be it.

“Fiona, lass, I’m not your da. I never have been.”

“Dad... we’ve been through this,” Fiona groaned. “I know you're not always comfortable with me
calling you that when Gordy doesn't, but it is what you are to me. You helped raise me, so you're my dad. Fuck anyone who doesn't believe otherwise, because they can't understand what a real family is if it bit them in the bloody cock.”

“No, they wouldn’t…”

“Then what are you so glum over? Not a single person questions that we’re related, even when I should have that beaky nose of yours but don’t, so why start here?”

Fuck, this was difficult. Malcolm knew that the teen before him was not the Fiona of the real world. They looked the same, yeah, but this was a Fiona that grew up under different circumstances as the real one. It was faint, but he could nearly envision the one who actually existed instead—the one whose rich-fuck father sent her to a posh school where she was surrounded on nearly all sides by the spawn of Whall’s worst and dullest, destined to repeat their patents’ incompetencies and sins. She was not Fiona Tucker, nor Fiona Lethbridge-Stewart, but Fiona Ferrero, and she had only known him since partway through the year, not long as she could remember.

That still did not make denying the girl in front of him any easier.

“I am not your da,” he repeated. “Your mam and I never met when you were a child, I have not married her or adopted you, and you don’t go to the village school because your da Loris is a tit. You are not the real Fiona.”

A worried expression swept across the teen's face before she dissolved and melted into the floor, just as the Doctor's other form had outside. The papers she had brought into the room dissolved as well, removing all trace of her existence. Now the kitchen was empty aside from him and it left a sinking feeling in his gut.

“It's not her,” he muttered to himself, ”and it can't be Mam, Gordon, or Lex—they aren't treating me any different—so it's got to be... Kate.” He swallowed hard; if denying Fiona was bad, then he wasn't sure what he was in for.

“Hey, did you do it?” Malcolm turned towards the kitchen window and saw the Doctor popping his head in through the window above the sink.

“Fiona’s gone, so that leaves Kate,” Malcolm stated. “If this doesn’t get us the fuck out of here, I am going to fuck you over so hard, you’ll wish you stayed by your granddaughter’s side, wherever the fuck that is, because it will not be pleasant.”

“Less posturing, more action,” the Doctor said. He was about to say more when he ducked out quickly, having seen something that spooked him. Malcolm turned and saw Clara standing in the entryway to the kitchen, her face red and puffy from crying, and tried not to cringe.

“Was that John?” she asked.

“Clara, lass, I…”

“That shit—” she hissed. Clara went out the nearest door and Malcolm carefully watched the scene that unfolded from the window. He could not hear a thing, yet watched as Clara and the Doctor had an argument. It ended when the Time Lord grabbed her and planted a deep kiss on her lips before she dissolved in his arms.

Suddenly, a pair of arms wrapped around Malcolm from behind, making him jump. Kate laughed, gently spinning her beau around so that they were face-to-face.
“Skittish today, aren’t we?” she teased. When he didn’t answer, she merely chuckled. “Hey, Flossie has a DVD in; do you want to get in a quick one before the house is full again?”

“I… um… are you sure, love?”

“The other kids are out, as is your mum; nothing is stopping us for at least half an hour.”

Well fuck, she had the entire pregnancy debacle with the imaginary Clara wiped from her consciousness. Malcolm tried to protest, but Kate put a finger to his lips, effectively silencing him.

“You’ll feel better once we’re upstairs,” she promised. She took his hand and led him through the house. Up the stairs, to their room, and she gently held his shoulders as she eased him into sitting on the bed. She straddled his lap and rested her arms on either side of his neck. Her nails scratched the back of his neck and her perfume filled his nose. “Was I right?”

“Well, you weren’t wrong…”

“Then there’s nothing to worry about.” She kissed him tenderly, one hand on his back and the other ruffling his hair, her fingers grasping the greying strands. “I’d like my house-husband to remember me fondly after I leave tonight for my shift at work. Is that too much to ask?” She leaned him back and used the hand not in his hair to grope his quickly-bulging cock fondly through his trousers. “Does this mean we’re in agreement?”

Every single fucking fiber of his being wanted her to shag him into euphoria, except the one single part of him that could ignore her partly-buttoned blouse and invitingly warm thighs.

“There’s something I’d like us to talk about first,” he blurted. Kate frowned at that, her brow furrowing into a scowl.

“You’re turning down sex; the last time you did this was because you didn’t want to shag while I was so close to Flossie’s due date…”

“That’s… that’s what I want to talk about. Sort of.” His prick softened almost instantly as she rolled off him, sitting upright on the bed with her face set in a stern glare. “How long have we been married?”

“You know that perfectly well.”

“I want to hear you say it, though.” He sat up and faced her; his stomach twisted at her irritation.

“It will be ten years in June,” she replied. “Is this about that?”

“Kate? What if this wasn’t real?”

Her face was stone as she considered his words. “What do you mean?”

“I’m mad about you—you know that—but, what if… what if this wasn’t real? If we weren’t real? Fucking… Kate, this is going to kill me.”

“Oh, Malcolm…” Kate shifted her position on the mattress and brought his head down so that he could lay down with his head between her breasts. “Listen, I know you’ve been having a hard time coping with Flossie getting older and needing you less, but now’s not the time to be existential.”

“I’m not being fucking existential; if I wanted to do that, I’d go to work.”

“Then maybe you shouldn’t take that job at UNIT, but get some sort of unrelated hobby,” she
suggested. “Maybe get into that woodworking course you’ve been wanting to take down at the village hall; I know you’ve said you wanted to be able to make your projects with Gordon have a bit more character.”

“No, that’s not it…”

“…then how about we see about expanding some of the flower beds in the spring? Gardening has always been something we’ve done together…”

“No, love, I…” He swallowed hard and leaned up to kiss her, hard, before murmuring against her mouth, “I don’t want to die and then never get the chance to turn down sex again.”

“What are you..?”

“You’re not real, Kate; the real Kate is in UNIT, watching over me as I fight an alien attempting to eat my mind like some sort of demented pudding, while the Doctor is attempting to save me from the inside. You are not real, this marriage is not real, and although my love for you is most certainly real, this life we have is far from being the real deal.”

In an instant, the woman caressing him melted away, leaving only himself in the bed. Malcolm curled up atop the bedspread, covering his face in a pillow to hide his tears.

Why couldn’t his life be this? This world, this life that he had here, was so beautiful it was making him nauseous as he dismantled it. He had a quiet existence here, though a meaningful one, and it was cruel to deny him.

Yes, it was cruel to deny him, but it was crueler to deny others the chance to build the closest thing they could to this life. Now he just needed to figure out the final way to get out.

“Did you find Kate?” the Doctor asked, barging into the room. He saw Malcolm and tilted his head, attempting to figure out what was going on. “You aren’t ill, are you?”

“No, dipshit,” Malcolm muttered from underneath the pillow. “I found Kate.”

“Where is she?” The Doctor lifted the pillow from Malcolm’s face to see the other man glaring at him. “Did you tell her?”

“Yes, I told her, now let me go back.”

The Doctor dropped the pillow and began to pace around the room. “We really should be back in UNIT right now.”

“Wait, you mean it wasn’t Fiona or Kate?!” Malcolm stood and squared his shoulders in an attempt at intimidation. “You said it was one of them!”

“It was only logical!”

“Fuck your logic!” It was then that realization spread through him, weighing heavy on his shoulders. “If it’s not my wife and it’s not my stepdaughter, then that can only mean it is my non-existent daughter. Fuck!” He turned towards the Doctor and scowled. “I thought you said that Flossie can’t be it!”

“Clara and I were what were keeping one another in our dreamscapes, along with another man who died earlier in the year,” the Doctor said. “It makes sense that only a hint of reality can keep one grounded in fantasy.”
“Well, obviously it didn’t work, you bent space-fuck! Now what am I going to do?! I can’t exactly bring anyone back!”

“Why would you want to bring them back?!”

“So that I can die in peace; is that so wrong?!” To Hell with it—fuckall to this entire shitty fuckfest of cuntastic proportions. He was done. “My life has been shit, Doctor! Utter shit! I got mocked from the schoolyard to university for anything and everything; my accent, my family, my brains… you pick it, they picked with it. My careers in journalism and government were supposed to be used to make shit better, make things work that weren’t, and then it got derailed. I was dragged through the mud and hung out to dry. Now my life’s work is down the drain, and even though I’ve found a new purpose at UNIT, I can’t even hang onto the peace I find there!”

The Doctor stayed silent, staring at Malcolm from behind a steely mask.

“This life,” Malcolm continued, “is the best life I could have had. My career was not in complete tatters when I retired, I have a bairn of me own and had an actual hand in raising others, and I’ve settled into a stable sense of purpose here! Can’t I die on my terms?”

“Not this time,” the Doctor said. “If you die here and now, in this farce of reality, then not only will Kate find a way to make me regenerate at least five times over, but Osgood will be mortified to the point of drastic measure. That doesn’t even include what your family would do…”

“What would we do, Uncle Johnny?” The two men turned their attention over towards the door and saw Flossie standing just outside the bedroom door. She held a toy close to her chest—a stuffed wolf that was a present from her Auntie Sammy—and appeared as though she was about to cry.

“Floss, kiddo, we’re talking.”

“You’re not talking, you’re shouting. What’s wrong?”

“Just adult stuff.”

“Tell her,” the Doctor frowned. “You have to tell her yourself, or it won’t work.”

“You have to tell me what, Da?” Flossie wondered. She came up to him and hugged his leg, not wanting to let go. “Tell me.”

Malcolm’s heart broke as he looked down at his daughter’s face. If he said nothing, then she would grow up to look like her mother, though with the curls and eyes he inherited from his mother. A whole lifetime of milestones lay ahead of her, ahead of him as her father. Did he really have the right to take that away? Could he end it all with only a few words instead of die having watched her grow?

Yes, he had to, because he was Malcolm Fucking Tucker, and he was not going to die in a fantasy.

Bending down, Malcolm knelt in front of Flossie, holding her shoulders so that she would look at him. She hugged her toy wolf as her brows knit together in worry. It shattered her father’s heart, making him bite the inside of his lips as he braced himself.

“Flossie, darling, you’re not real.”

“What…? Da, why do you say that?”

“…because as much as I want you to be real, you’re not,” he replied. “You are a figment of my
imagination, existing only because an alien is tricking me into dying.” He choked back a sob as he prepared himself. “I have never had a daughter, and I never will because I met the love of my life after she could no longer have children. You have never existed and you never shall.”

“Daddy…”

Flossie stepped backwards, putting distance between her and the men. Her eyes grew wide before she shut them and screamed. The room shattered around them, the three then standing in the middle of nothingness. Malcolm tried to reach forward to console her, yet girl and toy both burst, dissolving into the inky black surrounding them. He turned towards the Doctor, eyes rimmed in red from tears old and fresh alike.

“Look at what you made me fucking do!”

“Yes; now, wake up.”

In an instant, Malcolm was falling.

Down, down, down…

I’m sorry.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for waiting patiently with me for this chapter's scheduled posting day. Enjoy!

Malcolm gulped down air as he sat straight up, eyes gone wide in horror. Kate, Clara, and the Doctor all jumped back at the sudden movement—eyes on the Dream Crab—relief washing over them as they watched the alien dissolve into dust. Sitting there shaking, Malcolm stared at the remains in his lap, barely registering what had happened before Kate grabbed his face and kissed him.

“Fuck, I was worried about you,” she said, choking back tears. She took a handkerchief out of her pocket and began to wipe blood from his temple where the now-dead alien had attempted to bore its way through to his brain, having begun to scrape past the skin. His eyes remained watery and distant, which caused her to gently shake him back to her. “Malcolm? What’s wrong? What happened? What did you see?”

“Give him some time to recover,” the Doctor said. Although he too was shaking, he stood and took a step towards Clara, the woman quickly closing the physical gap so that he could lean on her. “They attempted to rewrite his entire life… gave him family he never had… it will take a bit to shake that off.”

“…so like mine, in a way,” Clara nodded. She looked at Malcolm sympathetically, watching as Kate fussed over him in his nonresponsive state. The only reason that she hadn’t been the same way earlier in the evening was due to all the varying layers to her dreamscape, and at least where she had the Doctor, he had Kate. “He won’t be bad for long—it’ll pass.”

“Thank you,” Kate said. Glancing at Clara and the Doctor, she saw that the Time Lord was still in a definite state of confusion and panic, which did not sit well with her in the slightest. “Doctor…? What happened in there?”

“It looks like my diving in caused some melding of my consciousness with his while under the hallucination’s grasp, shoehorning different versions of myself as not only a father for him, but a brother as well,” he replied. “Things were a bit trickier that way, making it so I had to do a bit of fighting myself. It’s a side-effect; nothing to worry about.”

“…then why are you so scared?” Glenn asked. “Is it because you actually do look like you could be brothers?”

“We look nothing alike,” the Doctor snapped. At that, he removed himself from Clara’s shoulder and huffed into the TARDIS, ready to run soon as she followed.

“They really don’t even look similar,” Clara said, a hint of understanding in her voice. She then went into the TARDIS and it wheezed out of view, its thief catapulting it into the time vortex.

With the space-time ship gone, attention was once again focused purely on Malcolm. He was still sitting on the floor shivering, non-responsive as his head was pressed to Kate’s chest and her arms clung to him. She stroked his hair soothingly, attempting to bring him back to her.
“It’s alright now,” she crooned. Slowly rocking back and forth, she comforted him, the response to which was him reaching up to her arm with both hands and holding her close, despite the fact his expression never changed.

“Kate, I think it’s time to get Malcolm back home,” Glenn said. She looked up at him and nodded.

“Help me get him to the car?”

“Of course,” he replied. “Petronella, dear, get the doors please.”

“Yes! Right!”

With that, Glenn and Kate each took one side of Malcolm as they guided him through the near-desolate Mainframe UK, with Scarfy going and making sure none of the other staff bothered them as she cleared the way. There would be whispers to smother later, though one glance at the group and nearly all molemen not only kept their distance, but their mouths shut as well. The three were able to get Malcolm out to Kate’s car and securely strapped in before a silent goodbye and promise that everything was going to be fine.

After a long and disturbingly quiet car ride back into the countryside, Kate pulled into her drive and killed the engine—it had been over five hours since they had gone to work and now the scene they had left seemed so far away now. What had they left? A spat about something, yeah, but the children, the warmth, the domesticity… and something she wasn’t entirely sure was still there, let alone knew what it was to begin with. She pulled out her mobile and called Gordon as she walked around to the other side of the car.

“Yeah Mum?” The answer was immediate; he had stayed up for them.

“I need you in the drive; Malcolm’s not in a good state.”

“Coming.” The call cut and moments later, he appeared at the door. He came outside with frost on his breath, first going straight to his mother and giving her a tight hug.

“We’re both all alright, but just barely,” she assured him.

“I didn’t hear from you for so long. I was worried.”

“We’re back now. It’s okay.”

“What happened to Malcolm?” Gordon wondered. He saw the older man sitting in the passenger seat of the car and frowned at his lack of any sort of expression. “He looks like he’s seen several ghosts.”

“In a way—an extraterrestrial that the Doctor brought in attacked him psychologically as well as physically. He was completely unprepared for the experience and it did a number on him.” She opened the door and allowed her son to heft her beau out and onto his feet. They both were able to drag the man into the house, where they found Lex and Kanda waiting for them at the foot of the stairs.

“Oh fuck,” Lex cursed when she saw her uncle. “No wonder you didn’t call before.”

“He’ll be alright,” Kate promised.

“Are you sure?” Kanda asked, not visibly convinced.

“I’m certain.” Kate then watched Lex as she stepped closer and looked up into her uncle’s blank
eyes, attempting to read something.

“Uncle Malc…? Are you alright…? What happened…?”

“I…” He looked at his niece, her expression full of concern, and attempted to brush it off. “It’s nothing.”

“It doesn’t look like nothing,” Kanda said. She too looked up into his face and her brow knitted in worry. “I’ll make some tea; he needs it.”

“Decaf,” Kate requested. She passed her side of Malcolm to Lex and let the younger backs support him. “To our room; I’m going to prep him for bed.”

“Gotcha,” Gordon said. He and Lex brought Malcolm up the stairs, Kate close behind. They sat him down on the bed and left the room, closing the door behind them. Now it was just the couple and their inner sanctum.

Getting straight to work, Kate began to carefully peel off Malcolm’s clothes. Once he was down to his pants, she started to dig around in the chest of drawers and found some soft pajama bottoms and a worn t-shirt he had from what appeared to be an outing with Lex’s primary school. Slipping the clothes on him, she could feel the lack of resistance in his limbs, worrying her even more. She knelt on the floor in front of him when she was done dressing him, taking his face in her hands so that she could look him in the eyes.

“How do you feel?” she asked.

He did not answer.

“Speak to me, Malcolm. What happened back there…?”

Nothing.

A knock on the door broke the silence, with Kanda and Lex coming in with a tray in the former’s hands. There was a mug of sweet, milky tea for both Malcolm and Kate, the sight of which made the latter breathe a sigh of relief.

“Thank you, girls,” she said. “I have it from here.”

“Are you sure?” Lex wondered cautiously.

“I’m sure,” Kate nodded. She watched as Kanda put the tray on the nightstand and ushered her worried friend back into the corridor. They were such good kids, she knew, and it was comforting to know she had them around.

After carefully putting Malcolm’s mug in his hands, Kate began to drink from her own cuppa. It was warm and soothing, with the relaxing quality she knew only tea had. She noticed that her beau was not moving as she drained her mug, so once she was down to the sugary bits at the bottom, she put it aside and helped him lift the drink to his lips.

“Come on,” she insisted. “It’ll do you good.” She was able to get him to drink about half the mug before he pulled it away again. “Alright, now let’s just go to bed and we can talk about this in the morning.”

“Yeah,” he answered. His voice was quiet and strained, the sound of which tore at his love worse than anything she had ever heard. He laid down of his own accord, facing his edge of the bed instead
of hers, eyes still open as he rested his head on the pillow.

Attempting to not let this get the best of her, Kate continued her routine the best she could. She put on an old pair of pajamas—the new number she got as a surprise for Malcolm would have to wait until he was up for it—and climbed into the bed, wrapping her arms around her beau. Keeping their bodies close together, she kissed the back of his neck and rubbed her forehead against his hair.

“Good night,” she murmured.

Ha. Wishful thinking.

With a shiver and a gasp, Kate woke up hours later to a pre-dawn world. She was alone in her bed, and a glance around the room told her that no one else was there either. Her heart skipped a beat or two as she realized what it possibly meant.

“Malcolm?”

There was no answer.

“Malcolm…?”

Kate put on her robe and, after a quick stop at the loo for practicality’s sake, went to look for her beau. The house was silent and still, with the kids all sleeping and any outside noise muffled by a light dusting of snow that was lazily falling. She eventually found him in a spare guest room, sitting dejectedly on the bare mattress. His elbows were resting on his knees and his hands clasped together as he sat in thought.

“Malcolm, come back to bed. It’s late and we all should get rest.”

“She was so real,” he said quietly. “So fucking real I can barely stand it…”

Now that piqued her interest.

“Who was real?”

“Flossie.”

She sat down next to him, putting a hand on his shoulder. “Your mum…?”

“No.”

Malcolm fiddled with his hands until Kate put her other hand atop them. It was quiet, bearing down on the couple with all the weight it could manage.

“She was about yae-high, at about six years old,” he eventually elaborated. Using his hand, he visualized himself patting her on the head, stroking her hair. “Blond curls, your smile, Mam’s eyes…”

“In the dreamscape?” He nodded. “You dreamt we had a daughter together?”

“Yeah, and she was the best wee terror we could have ever created to boot.”

“Malcolm, we can’t,” she sighed. Her hand went from one shoulder to the other, wrapping him in a partial hug.
“I know, but…”

“That time has long passed us by.”

“But she was so perfect, love. She was a last-ditch effort baby, yeah, but she was ours…”

Kate stared at him, looking at the tears welling in his eyes began to be too much and dripped down his cheeks. “Do you really want a child that badly?”

“It was what she represented that I want, and I know we can never have thanks to time being a fucking prick,” he admitted, sniffing. He knew for them to have a child was physically impossible at this point in Kate’s life and he would be damned if he gave her any opportunity to feel bad about the fact. “Flossie existed because I had met you when Fiona was a wee thing; we had dated and married and right before the fucking elections when I got sacked, I decided to just stay at home with the kids. There was no fucking Inquiry, no empty husk of a man, none of that—Florence Katherine Tucker was born in a world where we were together, yet none of the shit that tore me up happened.”

“Oh.” She kissed the side of his head and held him a bit tighter. “A world where you grew up with a father and brother as well as your mum and sister, where we were already married with a child of our own to add to mine...”

“Shit—I’ll do without the fucking Doctor butting in on it,” Malcolm scowled. “The da, the brother, it was all him; something about the face-rapist picking up on how he misses his own family at times. I never missed what I never knew because it wasn’t a possibility—what I do miss is shit we should and could have had all these years. We deserve a world where Flossie could have happened, because that is the world where we had more time together.”

“That’s a dangerous world,” Kate admitted. A pause. “At least we know that though.”

“No shit.” He gestured to a corner of the room, a sad smile on his face. “There was one of those large, overstuffed cushion-chairs where we’d sit as I would read to her—it was while you were working, naturally. Next to it was the bookcase, which was fucking stuffed with all the stories a kid could want, and the toy chest on the other side.”

“You mean… this was her room?”

“Her dresser was there, a mirror there,” he continued, pointing everything out, “and a wee desk her size was there. Gordon and I made it for her when she started school—apparently we built shit with your da to fuck with Doris and continued the tradition after he passed.”

“What color was the paint?” she asked. She rested her chin on his shoulder, listening to him release all the things the Dream Crab had burdened him with.

“A very light sort of lavender-grey,” he replied. “Lots o’ deep blue everywhere though—her bedspread, the rug, her furniture, all painted the same blue as that half-bent space-tit’s time machine.”

“The man may be a half-bent space-tit, but he knows how to pick a shade of blue,” she chuckled. He smirked at that and turned his head so that he could peck a kiss to her brow.

“Whose nightmare was this?”

“Yours.”

“Fucking right; the changing table was where the desk was when we needed it, and the cot was here, except longways against the wall. Pretty much had to ditch that soon as she began crawling and
climbing around, because once she could escape, there was no stopping her from finding us in bed attempting to make up for lost time.”

“Sounds about right,” she said. “I take it she was a happy child?”

“Yeah.” Malcolm nodded at that, attempting to not let tears return. “She adored me, admired you, was always there to make her siblings and cousin smile… we all would have done anything for her, and she fucking knew it. The wee thing had your da’s affinity for maths and yours for science and was already gearing up to be the second coming of you, me, Mam, and Alistair all at once. We had her enrolled in the village school, which was where we sent Fiona after getting full custody of her, and my life had become one of errands and play dates and making sure dinner was cooked by the time you got home and nothing burned in the oven.” He exhaled heavily, knowing full-well he was merely reliving a fever dream and that it would never come, potentially only making things worse in the end. “It was a bloody fucking mess of a life, but one I’d give me left ball to actually live if I got to live it with you.”

“Malcolm Tucker, you are a sentimental old fool where and when it counts, and I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Kate said. She stood and helped him up, hugging him suggestively once he was standing. “I’m just impressed it sounds like you and Dad got on.”

“I always like to think we would have—we’d have one very particular lady’s interest to bond over, anyhow.”

“You would have had to clean up your language.”

“Nah; you’d think that, but I can promise that he would have known how to fling them with the best,” he smirked. “Maybe we should ask that skeleton Benton for the dirt next time we gotta dust him off. He was the one who served with your da the longest.” Malcolm bent his neck and nipped playfully behind her ear, feeling ready to get back to normal again.

“No sale—Dad has secrets that Captain Benton is taking to his grave,” Kate reminded him. She led her beau back to their bed and crept back underneath the covers, with him nearly jumping in ready to go. “Down, boy; no more time for that tonight.”

“I know we can’t have Flossie, but I’d like to get a few shags in as though we were trying to have her,” he replied. He reached down between her legs and began massaging through her clothes, knowing exactly what could get her going. His efforts were in vain though, for she gently smacked his hand away.

“Another time, Malcolm,” she promised. He buried his face in her chest in protest, mumbling poetic obscenities while they drifted off towards sleep.

Crisis adverted, survived, and done with; UNIT and Mainframe UK’s job was done.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

The following has a very specific event referenced (the announcement of the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum), which dates this chapter at mostly March 21/22, 2013. Like I said before: I’m doing what I want to the shows’ timelines, because that’s the only way I can actually fit them both together.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The remainder of winter passed without much to think about. The chunks of ice that floated down the River Thames melted away as spring came to rear its damp, dreary head in a fabulous display of typical London weather. By the time the spring thaw became the spring-summer hybrid that its residents knew was merely a step in the correct direction towards that fantastically short blip of decent weather in the middle of the calendar year, most of the populace had their hopes up (internally, at least) for something meteorologically decent soon.

Not that it was obvious to those who worked within Mainframe UK, however. Being far underground, it was immune to the cold and rain and anything else that nature decided to throw at the rest of the area. With that blessing came a whole lot of fucking downsides, such as the shitastic condition that people commonly referred to as ‘Mainframe Madness’. The distinct lack of sunshine and overabundance of four walls, along with a floor and ceiling, was constantly driving some into depression, some into a thing akin to functional insanity, and others, well, it was simply good to not ask.

“No Mum, I’m fine.” Aparajita droned into her mobile. She glanced over at Malcolm as he walked by her to get a drink of water, her face one that signaled she was ready to murder at a moment’s notice. Mainframe Madness was taking her solidly this year, a fact that made much of the staff that worked with her (sans direct boss) absolutely terrified. “Would you like to talk to my boss? I’m sure he can straighten things out and make you feel better about how my career is impacting my personal life. I do make sure he’s updated.” He held out his hand and waited for her to pass over the mobile, only to back away when she growled into the device. “Mum! I just turned thirty, not sixty! Give me a break! It’s really busy at work right now—I’m not ignoring a thing!”

Malcolm backed into his office and closed the door until it was open just a crack. Mrs. Khan was a firecracker when it came to things she cared about, and unfortunately one of the things she was caring about more often as of the past two weeks and three days, give or take a few hours, was the fact that her only child was not yet married and reproducing. He knew what sort of pressure that was, being how his own mother had treated him for a couple of decades (single, married, divorced; none of it mattered to her as long as there was not yet a wee bairn of his bouncing on her knee), he allowed his PA to shout at her own nag in peace. Nearly ten minutes passed and she burst into the office half in tears.

“Permission to leave so that I can go to mum’s and shout that busybody out of existence,” she requested, whipping her mobile at the couch. Malcolm waited until she flopped own in an armchair before speaking.

“You’re not leaving, and if I hear on tomorrow morning’s news that an Indian woman died of grief
overnight, I’m turning you in for abuse of the elderly.”

“She needs to back the fuck off.”

“…and you need to shut the fuck up and take it—she’s only concerned about you. It’s what all parents do, whether they cock it up or not. Unfortunately, you got the cock-it-up sort. What she do this time?”

“She set me up on a blind date for tonight,” Aparajita grumbled in irritation. Ah—that would explain what would otherwise be considered overreacting. “One of her friends from some Indian nationals’ club she goes to has a single son and of course the first thing they decide after figuring this out is that we need to get married and have at least three kids for them to care for while we work. Don’t tell me that your mum never did anything similar or I’ll get Director Stewart to bust your balls.”

“Mam wasn’t too bad, but she did hound Marcia and me to give her grandkids,” he recalled. “It calmed down a wee bit once Lex was born, but I know that I’m still pretty high on her shit list for not having at least one of me own.”

“…one of the most selfish and aggravating things someone can do to their adult children, honestly…”

“Not entirely.” Malcolm opened a desk drawer and pulled out a wrapped chocolate, which he threw at Aparajita and watched as she ate it. “In my experience, yeah it seems like parents are just being a bunch of tits and cocks for being like that, but that’s because they can tell it’s one of your goals and want to make sure you don’t let that chance pass you by on accident.”

“Okay, so even if this was her just being worried about me and not selfish in the slightest, then what if she’s wrong? What if I don’t want to get married or have kids? What if I go on that date and the man she tried to shove me off on is a total arse? I don’t have the time or inclination to go on wild fucking goose chases just because she’s worried.” Aparajita popped the remaining chocolate in her mouth and munched on it pensively. “Is there anything I need to do here urgently? Something that can keep me busy so I can’t possibly leave for the next three days?”

“No sale,” he said. “Go to the date, be colder than you were when we first met, and you’ll be golden. I know you’ve got it in you to be a top-form bitch.”

“At this point, I’ll take that as a compliment and chalk this all up to karma,” she muttered. “This fucking shit needs to go away.”

“Can’t choose your parents,” he shrugged. “Now get back to work before I give this guy security clearance and let your date start here due to all the work you stalled on.”

“Traitor.” Aparajita flipped Malcolm two fingers before trudging back to her desk; there wasn’t much left to do, but she’d be fucked if she didn’t drag it out long as she possibly could.

As the day continued, things seemed as though they were going towards positively dull. Malcolm enjoyed dull in this particular position, as it meant that the world was no in potential danger, nor did he have to try to convince said world that they were not in said danger. In fact, it was such a dull day that when the phone at Aparajita’s desk rang, his first thought was that it was her mother at it again. Instead, it led to an interesting surprise.

“Uh, Malcolm…?” The concerned tone in her voice prompted him to glance up, seeing that she was indeed unsure of whatever had happened once she had picked up the phone. “I’ve got a Mister MacDonald on the line who wants to talk to you, but I have no idea how he even got this number.”
“Does he sound cross, Glaswegian, and swearier than me?”

“He sounds like a bloody psychopath.”

“Bust me balls—wee Jamie’s not lost his touch,” Malcolm grinned. “Patch him through, Moneypenny.”

“You’re getting Daadaajee’s navel lint collection and a slotted spoon for your birthday.” Aparajita deadpanned. She went back to her part of the office and moments later Malcolm’s desk phone rang. He happily picked it up, grinning into the receiver.

“Yeh wee bastard, what’s shakin’?”

“Save the fucking pleasantries for later, Malc; I have an emergency I need handled first.”

“Well lah-dee-fucking-dah,” Malcolm scoffed. “We don’t talk for three years and the first words out of your mouth are those? I’m disappointed, James.”

“Stop sounding like Mam and take this seriously, cunt-face,” Jamie replied. “Listen: I’m up in Glasgow and need your help.”

“What, you visiting your folks?”

“Naw; I came back last year to open me own PR firm—less tits and twats that way—and I’m in a bit of a bind. Yeh know the indyref? The solid date was announced earlier.”

“Yeah… almost want to move back for a bit just so I can vote in it.”

“That was five hours ago; two hours ago, I’ve got these fuckers in North Lanarkshire blowing up fucking Twitter and Facebook over some Midas-looking shites that say they’ve got the secret fucking weapon to make it possible without so much as a minor post-independence recession.”

“This sounds like it’s no concern of ours,” Malcolm said cautiously. “Why are you calling me about it? Can’t wrap your head around how to spin it appropriately? Do you even need to pay attention?”

‘Course I fucking do—one of m’clients is some muckity-fuck from Coatbridge and this is taking place right to the north of his interests. He wants me to figure out shit about him so I can spin it favorable to him, but everything I’ve been able to find’s been scrubbed cleaner than Ol’ Baldymort’s pate.”

“Have you thought about spending more than two hours on your dirty work before calling someone else to do it for you?”

“Fucking… Malc…” Jamie groaned in frustration, which meant that Malcolm could easily visualize his old mate grimacing. “I’m calling because none of this smells right. Lexie told me you’re in that cloak-and-dagger department in the U.N. and might actually know something about shit now instead of just how to spin it. You’ve always been a deft hand and brilliant at it, don’t get me wrong, but you know better than I do how little facts we’ve been given.”

Fuck—he had him there.

“Alright Jamie,” Malcolm sighed, running his free hand through his hair. “What’cha need me to look up?”

“Anything and everything on what a fucking Axon is—I’m not talking about nerves or consultants or
those fucking Midlands cars. All I’ve got is that they’re dressed like some shit European glam-band from when I was a kid and somehow were able to build some popup resource center in the middle of a rural village field without anyone noticing.”

“That’s disturbing enough to warrant a search through the files.” He brought the phone away from his face and leaned in his chair so he could see his PA. “You got this number?”

“Yeah…?”

“Good.” Malcolm then held the receiver back up, addressing Jamie. “I’ll contact you soon as I get something. Stay frosty up there, yeah?”

“Easy with it being so fucking cold—didn’t miss this weather, that’s for cunt’s sure.” Jamie hung up his end of the call at that, leaving Malcolm to open his computer and begin clicking around.

“Alright, what was that about?” Aparajita asked.

“Jamie MacDonald and I go way back and he needs a favor, is all,” he replied. Malcolm didn’t even look up as she came back into his office, continuing to click and type in his search. “Know anything about Axons that doesn’t involve biology?”

“Sounds familiar, but I’d need to look it up. Is that what you’re doing?”

“Yeah; apparently everything he can find on them’s been sanitized and he’s hoping I can find the dirt.”

“Depending on what it is, you might not have the clearance for—”

“Ha! Got it!” Malcolm began scrolling through the file on the computer, quickly skimming it. “Fuck, this shit is from Benton’s prime. Should we take the ol’ bastard out of cryo and let him thaw out overnight?”

“Let me see that,” Aparajita said. She came around to his side of the desk and continued reading. “Shit—it says the Doctor had to get involved.”

“I’m not calling the fucker unless absolutely necessary,” Malcolm scowled. “He can go shag his lass in that creepy snogbox of his and leave us the fuck alone.”

“We might have to call him if necessary—it looks like he had to trap them in a time loop before. It could be our only option.”

“Yeah, no, fuck that. Our non-Time Lord resources have strengthened a bit since the Glory Days and I plan on using it.” He stood and whipped out his mobile, prepping a text as he began to walk towards the lift. “You still got that number?”

“It’s on my desk.” Aparajita watched as her boss copied the number off her notepad and sent the text off before entering the lift. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Upstairs; can’t go on a trip without a goodbye shag, now can I?”

It was the following morning when Malcolm put his foot down in his hometown for the first time in years. After an overnighter on a sleeper-train—thank whatever fucking deity came up with that idea—he felt refreshed and ready to go, despite the fact he still had babysitting duties that needed attending.
“It’s bloody freezing,” Benton hissed. The elderly man was standing just outside of the car door, shivering severely. “How do people survive this?”

“Why do you think we all drink so fucking much?” Malcolm deadpanned. He moved Benton out of the way of other riders, glad to see when Scarfy emerged with both her bag and the old man’s. “You doing alright there?”

“Packing light’s a specialty of mine,” she said before wrapping her scarf a bit closer. “I was hoping that your contact would be here already though. When is he coming?”

“He should be out by the entrance,” Malcolm said. He took Benton’s bag from Scarfy—alien or human, she was still a lady and he still had cunting manners—and led them through the station until they were accosted by Jamie right near where he said he’d be. Jamie had changed very little since they had last seen one another; still cross and sloppy-looking, only with a few more greys strewn about his curly hair. The two Scotsmen hugged in greeting, not caring that they had an audience.

“Good to see you, Malcolm,” Jamie said. “Don’t you ever do that to me again.”

“I’ll do my best, but I make no promises,” Malcolm chuckled. He then motioned towards his coworkers. “Benton, Scarfy, this is my old pal Jamie MacDonald; we were struggling journalists together, both making it all the way to Whitehall. Jamie, this is Captain Benton, from UNIT’s military wing, and Nella Osgood from the scientific wing. Between them, they have not only experience in dealing with the Axons, but the knowledge to put the fuckers in their place.” He then looked at Scarfy, knitting his brow curiously. “Now that I think about it, I don’t know if you’ve got a doctorate or are just an egghead with a bunch ‘o A-levels or some shit like that.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Scarfy shrugged. “What does matter is the fact that we’ve got Axons on the loose, despite the fact that they’re supposed to be trapped in a stable time loop.” She took a tiny device out of her pocket and fiddled with it. The thing whirred to life and began beeping incessantly, the pitch nearly too high for the men to hear. “My readings are off the charts—there are definitely time-displaced beings within a twenty-five mile radius.”

“Time-displaced?” Jamie scoffed. “Malc, I thought you were bringing me people with government orders, not fucking tin-foil hats.”

“Bring us to where the Axons are, son, and we’ll see whether or not we need a court order or our resident scientific powerhouse,” Benton said. Jamie glanced at the old man and saw that he was chilled to the bone, at which he shook his head.

“Fine, but if this ends up being some sort of hokey shite, I’m tossing all of your corpses in the Kelvin,” he said, holding his hands up in defeat. He then led them out towards his car, stuffing their luggage in the boot and them in the rest of the vehicle, before driving off into the winter storm that was raging outside.

It took nearly two whole hours thanks to the snow, but eventually the four were out in the suburbs and headed towards the small village of Glenboig. Once they got there, they wrapped Benton in a blanket before they began the trek from the road to the field where the Axons were supposed to be located.

“The fuck is up with this weather?!” Jamie snapped. “I don’t remember shit being like this all the time in bloody fucking March! A dusting I can deal with, not this crap!”

“It’s the Axons,” Scarfy explained. “Their presence last time they were here caused erratic weather phenomenon to occur, except then it was in the Home Counties.”
“Is that so?” Jamie scoffed. “Well, at least it’s kept the rest of the morons from coming out. All I need is my mug plastered all over the internet—Jeanette’d kill me.”

A few more feet of trudging through snow, however, and the skies cleared. The air was warm around them and the sun shone merrily, tending to the green grass beneath their feet. They were in an eye for the storm—so to speak—despite the fact that the snow system that was currently slamming into the rest of the area was not the sort to have an eye, let alone something like this.

In the middle of the clearing, the small group saw what looked like a crashed spaceship. A lone figure stood outside it, seemingly composed of gleaming gold—even its hair of tight curls—staring at them with unblinking, metallic eyes.

“Okay, that’s definitely an Axon,” Benton said. “I’d recognize those eyes anywhere; looks like a prick’s tip, those things.”

“Then let’s get to it—oi! Yeah, you! What’cha doin’ here yeh bent fuck?”

“Mister MacDonald!” Scarfy gasped. She pulled Jamie back before he could stomp more than three paces towards the Axon. “Don’t get too close!”

“What’s Cuntu Barada Fuckno gonna do? Stare at me with his dick-eyes?”

“I WILL GIVE YOU POWER, IF YOU WISH IT.” The four glanced towards the Axon and saw its arm was now extended, palm upwards, holding something in its hand. “OUR SHIP CRASHED AND WE ARE HUNGRY, BUT THE ONLY FUEL WE HAVE IS FOR THE ENGINES. IN EXCHANGE FOR FOOD, WE CAN GIVE YOU THIS FUEL, AXONITE, WHICH CAN POWER YOUR FLEDGLING COUNTRY AS IT BREAKS FROM HER OPPRESSORS.”

“We’ve seen you before; you played this tune back then,” Benton said. “Don’t think we’ll fall for any tricks.”

“THIS IS NOT A TRICK, NOR HAVE WE BEEN HERE BEFORE,” the Axon replied. “WE HAVE BEEN TRACKING A ZYGON SHIP THAT HAS BEEN PASSING THEMSELVES OFF AS US, WREAKING HAVOC IN THEIR WAKE. THOSE SHAPESHIFTERS ARE NOT TO BE TRusted.” Malcolm heard Scarfy inhale sharply; Zygon or Human, he knew that the Axon’s words cut her deep. “WILL YOU PLEASE HELP US?”

“Don’t trust them,” Benton said, tone hushed. He put himself between the Axon and the rest of his group. “The Brig and the Doctor would want them destroyed.”

“It’s not like the Doctor to destroy something without good reason,” Scarfy said, eyes narrowed in anger, “but I can understand why for these creatures.”

“Brig? Doctor? What sort of fucking group are you that you all need codenames?” Jamie snorted.

“The Brig is Brigadier-General Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart, formerly my commanding officer and a dear friend who is no longer with us, and you shall refer to him with respect,” Benton said firmly. “As for the Doctor… that’s just what everyone calls him, even himself.”

“Okay, so then how do we destroy it?” Jamie asked.

“I’m not certain anymore—it was a few decades ago—but that’s why we have Our Osgood here,” Benton said. He patted Scarfy on the shoulder and gave her a nod. “Have a go, Peg.”

“Alright—Malcolm, hold my bag, please.” Scarfy took a couple things from her shoulder bag to put
in her pocket before handing it to Malcolm, who held it without a fuss. She then began to cautiously approach the Axon, crouched and ready to sprint away at a moment’s notice, concentrating on keeping her cool.

“Look at you, yeh fuck,” Jamie hissed quietly at Malcolm. “Holding bags and being nice and shit? What’s this UNIT place done to you? How much do we need to catch up on?”

“More than you know, but less than you realize,” Malcolm said, eyes locked on Scarfy. He watched as she came within a few feet of the extraterrestrial and stopped. “Benton? What’s wrong?”

“I’m not sure, sir,” the older man frowned. “Osgood? Dear? Why aren’t you doing anything?”

“…because I know how to get them out of here,” she replied. She turned and slid her sleeve up, revealing a bulky watch underneath. As she tapped the face of it, the Axon closed its hand around the Axonite, letting out a horrid, blood-curdling screech. The Axon’s ship door opened and tentacles shot out of it, one spearing the Axon through the back of the chest and the others surrounding Scarfy in a warning, the tips stopping inches from her body.

“YOU CANNOT!” the Axon shrieked.

“Osgood! Get back here!” Malcolm shouted. “It’s not worth it!”

“I’ll be back,” she smiled sadly, “…maybe, I’m not sure. Just give me some time. Take care.”

The Axon screamed once more and attacked, wrapping Scarfy in its tendrils. With her forearms still exposed, she pressed the final button on her watch and she disappeared, taking the Axon, ship and all, with her. The three men stared in disbelief at the empty space in front of them, only for the storm to overtake the clearing now that the weather disturbance was gone.

“What the fuck was that?!” Jamie yelled over the wind. “Where’d they go?!”

“I’ll tell yeh later,” Malcolm said. He grabbed Jamie with one hand and Benton with the other, bringing them both back to the car. Once Benton was safely secured in the back, Malcolm commandeered the driver’s side and the three men slumped in their seats, absolutely dumbfounded.

Nearly a whole minute passed before Jamie broke the silence.

“What the fuck was that?” he asked.

“I thought Kate got rid of that thing,” Malcolm breathed.

“What thing? Fuck, Malc, this doesn’t make any sense!"

“Lemme get us back to your place before I start explaining anything,” he replied. Malcolm glanced in the rearview mirror and saw that Benton was shivering almost violently, and he wasn’t sure if it was due to cold, shock, or a combination of both. “We need to get some tea in the fart back there or I’m going to be handing his wife a block of ice instead of her husband.”

Jamie relented at that, allowing Malcolm to drive the way back to his house in Motherwell, clear on the other side of North Lanarkshire. They were even stopped by the police at one point for being out in the storm, lying to the officer that they were bringing their father from his blacked-out house to one that was still heated. Sure enough, most of Jamie’s neighborhood was in whiteout road conditions and blacked-out electric. Power had seemingly been restored halfway down the block, with his house being on the lit side of the divide.
“Kennethia! Kendall! Which one of you are home?!” Jamie shouted up the stairs soon as he and Malcolm finished hauling Benton and the luggage inside the house. A young teenaged girl came down the stairs and saw her father’s guests, eyes going wide in confusion.

“Jesus fuck, Dad,” she cursed. “I thought it was just Uncle Malc coming. You didn’t hit this one, did you?”

“No; he’s just a bit stunned,” Malcolm explained. He let Kennethia hug him, giving the top of her head a kiss and her back a pat. “I know Older Twins are at uni, but where’s the other half of your set?”

“Kendall went with Mam to work in case the car needed a shove, not that he volunteered or anything,” she explained. She then helped her father put together tea and sandwiches for their guests, along with copious hot water bottles to help unfreeze Benton. By the time she had retreated back to her room, all three men were fully settled in, no longer shaking, and clear-headed.

“Okay, now are you two going to tell me what the fuck I just saw?” Jamie asked over his mug. It was chipped on the rim and covered in a sloppy scowling face and “World’s Fecking Best Dad” in a shaky child’s scrawl. “That lass just vanished in front of us, and that was after that tit did some freaky shite like out of an alien horror flick. Are you going to tell me, or are you going to be a cunt and keep avoiding it?”

“It’s a long story, but to make it short: Osgood just space-and-time-travelled herself and the Axon with a vortex manipulator, which I could have sworn got destroyed back when I first started at UNIT after getting out of prison,” Malcolm explained. “UNIT is an entity that exists to deal with extraterrestrial, non-human terrestrial, and space-age shite that doesn’t fit in our time and space. According to the public, we’re a scientific paramilitary group at best, and at worst we don’t even exist.”

“Malcolm and Tiger had a mishap with a vortex manipulator that sent them back to the Regency era, if I remember correctly,” Benton continued. “The Doctor took it, yeah?”

“Yeah, he did.”

“Tiger?”

“Oh, apologies—Tiger is actually Kate, the Scientific Director and honorary Brigadier of Mainframe UK, the local UNIT subdivision, so to speak. I was under her father when he was Brigadier-Director, and knew her growing up.”

“Is that the Kate that Lexie was talking about?” Jamie wondered. “I was a bit distracted, so I didn’t catch all of it.”

“Kate Stewart is, yeah, the Brigadier-Director, and my new lady-friend.” Malcolm tried not to grin as Jamie choked on his tea.

“You’re dating your fucking boss?!” he gasped. “I know we joked about it when that Jones bird took over the Party for a bit and you were actually nice to her, but for fuck’s sake, Malcolm, what are you doing?!”

“Getting a leg-up on the regular.” Malcolm shrugged and took another gulp of tea. “She’s got a daughter a year younger than Penny and Percy, and her boy’s same age as Lex and Kanda, just about—I think you’d all get on.”

“If it wasn’t for the fact Lexie was my initial source, I’d say you both went bloody mental and need
to be dumped on North Rona,” Jamie scoffed. “Aliens and shite? Plasticine foreheads and gibberish and whateverthefuck that was back in Glenboig? Fucking disappearing women with no answers as to why? Getting in your boss’s bed? What did you get roped into?”

“Son, are you still insisting that what you saw in the village was made up somehow?” Benton wondered.

“Come the fuck off it yeh English wank—I’m Bruce MacDonald’s son, not yours.”

“Jamie, fuck, Benton’s not here to patronize you,” Malcolm groaned. “You can trust me that this is all real—I’m not gone off the deep end—and just accept that all those times we had to spin weird-arsed shit, it was because of UNIT needing to control some fucks that thought they could get the better of us. When it comes to Kate and me… well… it wasn’t love at first bollock, but it took a wee bit to figure out and we’ve got boundaries.”

“Alright then Mister Spin-the-Alien-Bottle; what am I going to tell my client?” Jamie asked. “I just can’t take a call from him and say that it was nothing. You know it doesn’t go like that.”

“Tell him it was some bent fringe group that all lost their balls once the snow started flying,” Malcolm said. “The fact is that everyone thinks they were people in fancy dress, and since no one has been arrested or anything, it’s not like there’s some trail to follow.” He thought for a moment and shrugged. “What’s the tit’s platform?”

“Wants out of the UK, though still in the EU, with a heavy emphasis on local diversity in backgrounds and workforces to drive the fledgling nation forward… if he can get a nomination, that is.” Jamie pondered that momentarily and nodded. “I can say it was a nationalist group—you know, the kind that eats pizza while complaining that we need to get rid of immigration. At least on the surface, he’s not the type to buy into that brand of hypocrisy, though give him enough time and I can find something. How’s that sound?”

“…like you still got it,” Malcolm nodded. He then noticed Jamie’s daughter standing in the door of the kitchen, an open laptop computer balanced in one hand. “What’cha need, pet?”

“I was putting the bags upstairs and this started beeping,” Kennethia explained. “Is it yours?”

“That looks like Peg’s computer,” Benton observed. “That’s right—we do still have her bags.”

“A coworker of ours had to leave suddenly while we were out; we’re watching over her stuff,” Malcolm lied. He stood and took the laptop from Kennethia, closing it immediately.

“Just one question though,” she continued.

“Yeah?”

“What’s an Osgood Box?”

Kate finished watching the video for the fifth time, her lips pursed in a taut frown. Benton and Malcolm sat on the other side of her desk as they awaited a reply. It had been a tense few minutes as she had played the video from Osgood’s computer over and over, analyzing it best she could.

“…and there was nothing else?” she asked. “No sort of indication that she might do anything like that?”

“She’s always been one of the last people I would think to abandon UNIT,” Benton replied.
“Fuck—Scarfy’s been nothing but normal… at least, normal for since the Other Scarfy died.”

“I’ll tell William about this, but otherwise I don’t want a word about this spoken, do you hear me?” she ordered. “If MacDonald or his family say anything to anyone, I don’t care if they are your friends, they are getting full mind-wipes and you three were never there.”

“Jamie’s got ‘em all trained to be gossip’s equivalent of a black hole,” Malcolm said confidently. “You can be sure of that.”

“Good—now you’re both dismissed. Benton, please give my regards to Nancy, and Malcolm, I will see you when work lets out.”

“Yes ma’am,” both men said in unison. They both vacated Kate’s office quickly, knowing that she was going to call the Head Osgood up and neither wanted to be around when the news about Scarfy was broken to him. Malcolm exited the lift at his office, finding that things were still as quiet as when he left.

“Rajit, any news?” he asked, stopping at her desk. She kept typing on her mobile as she held up one finger, signaling him to pause for just a moment.

“No, not really,” she said once she was done. “The stuff you sent me while in Scotland went over well; nothing’s made waves at all.”

“Good—you survive Thursday night with or without killing your date?” he teased. “I need to know if I should worry about breaking my own PA out of prison after a manhunt’s done.”

“Jabril and I are fine; turns out his mum is just as crazy as mine, so we’re just friends,” she said, waving him off.

“His name is Jabril, okay, I’ve got you.” Malcolm used the tone he had conjured when harassing Lex about her first boyfriend, which was a pen-throwing offense according to his personal assistant. She assaulted him with the writing implements as he retreated into his part of the office, taking refuge behind his desk. A strange feeling came over him as he sat down, however, as his thoughts immediately went back to Scarfy.

“Malcolm? You alright?” she asked. “I didn’t get you for real, did I?”

“Huh? Oh, no, just in fucking la-la-land for a tic,” he said. Really, it was the fact that a guilty pang was sitting in his gut, telling him that he should have fucking seen Scarfy running away coming… but then again, no one really did, did they?

Fuck—they weren’t paid enough for this shit.

Chapter End Notes

I know that, like Malcolm’s family, there’s lots of speculation as to Jamie’s family in the TTOI fandom. Here, I have him happily married to Jeanette, a librarian five inches taller than him, with whom he has two sets of boy-girl twins. This doesn’t mean I don’t like other interpretations, but I like the idea that he’s got himself a lady with whom he’s at perfect standing-chest-level.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Not a very plotty chapter, but methinks we needed some breathing space and fluff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hurry up and finish getting ready—there’s plenty to do in the kitchen yet.”

Kate pressed a kiss to the corner of Malcolm’s mouth and left the shower, grabbing her towel to dry off in her room. Malcolm was left to clean himself up and continue prepping for the day; fuck, this was easily topping the list of best domestic days he ever had, and that list had only been growing since he began dating Kate.

Fuck… Kate. He tried to ignore the hopeful twitch of his cock as it requested more attention. If this was a glimpse into married life, Malcolm was more than ready to pop the question again, yet something in his gut told him that it still wasn’t the right time. He turned the water to cold in order to force himself out quicker instead, making record time with the soap and shampoo. Within five minutes he finished showering, was dressed, and had made it down the stairs to the kitchen, where he was immediately put to work on arranging a tray of cold cuts.

“What, was the store too occupied to do this for us?” he frowned.

“I went in yesterday and they wanted a week’s window,” Kate replied dully. “Good thing that nothing was stopping me from ordering everything we needed right then and there, clogging up the queue because there was only one person behind the counter.”

“There’s the woman I know and love,” Malcolm smirked. He pecked lips with Kate and kept on working, rolling meat and arranging it with cheeses.

“I’d say that’s gross, but I don’t want any retaliation once I start dating,” Fiona teased, walking into the kitchen. She plucked a grape from the fruit bowl on the counter and idly munched on it.

“There was never any question as to if there would be retaliation,” Kate said, her voice dripping with idle sarcasm. She smiled sweetly at her daughter, the act undercut by her tone—of course there would be teasing once she began dating, always and forever.

“Malc, can I share Lex’s room at the flat?” the teen asked.

“Wait until we won’t have Signore Pizzoccheri slapping us with court orders and claims of kidnapping, and we’ll see,” he replied. Fiona shrugged, not able to argue that, and glanced around.

“Anything need doing?”

“Make a sweep of the house and see that nothing’s out of place,” Kate requested. “It’s not many people, but we’re still having guests over and I don’t want the first time they see the house to be it in disarray.”

“Right-o,” the teen replied. She left the kitchen without fuss, which allowed a very deliberate goosing of her mother to go on in private.
A few hours went by as Malcolm and Kate prepped the food for that afternoon’s party. Well, they referred to it as a party, yet it was simply having a few people over from Malcolm’s Whitehall days, just to let them know he was still alive and far from shunning them. He had originally wanted to have it at his flat—making curry and chips like he used to back in his bachelor days—though Kate insisted, saying that she was the one with the most room to work with. As her argument was solid, he had to update his group-message and receive some interesting responses after there had been enough time to look up the new address.

Yes, his new lady lived in a fairly nice house in a Home County and none of the old crowd was prepped and ready to fuck him over once again, despite the fact they last saw him bracing to potentially live out the rest of his life in prison. Fate was a fucking amazing thing sometimes.

There was not much left to do when the doorbell rang, pulling Kate and Malcolm’s attention away from their prepwork. A quick glance at the clock confirmed that whomever it was at the door was precisely on time.

“I’ve got it,” he said. “It’s probably Sam—she’s good for this sort of thing.”

“I should hope so.”

Malcolm took the apron off his waist and put it back on the peg before heading over towards the front door. He opened it to see his former assistant standing there, just as he predicted, a smile spread across her face.

“Hey Malcolm,” she said. He knew she didn’t think she’d say those words to him for a long time and the relief in her voice all but proved it. “I have someone I want you to meet, remember?” She motioned with her head down, bringing his attention to a small child that was standing next her. The boy was looking around in awe, only to duck behind her soon as he noticed that a stranger was looking at him.

“Ah, and who might this young lad be?” Malcolm smirked. He sat on his haunches and grinned at the boy hiding behind his former PA. “Don’t believe we’ve met.”

“David, this is Mister Tucker,” Sam explained gently. She attempted to coax the boy into the open, something he was not having any of. “I used to work for him at Whitehall. He’s very important to me and I want you to behave while we’re here.”

“Why didn’t we see him before if he’s that important?” the boy asked skeptically.

“It’s my fault; I apologize,” Malcolm said. “When I left government, I didn’t leave my job in the best way, so in order to not hurt your new mam here, I had to not talk to her for a while. Now I work at a new place, with a new assistant, and while she’s amazing, she still isn’t My Sammy.”

The boy considered this and nodded in agreement. “I just got her last year—I can’t have my new mum hurt.”

“There’s a good lad; there’s a Wii in the living room if you want to play one of those race game things. If you can’t get it to work, ask Miss Fiona—she’s the teenager in yellow. Give her Hell.”

“Thank you, Mister Tucker,” David said, a look of relief sweeping across his face. He bolted inside the house and out of sight, which only made Malcolm chuckle.

“Look at that,” he marveled, “Mammy fucking Sammy… that’s a change.” He hugged his former PA and patted her on the back before leading her further into the house. “I remember you talking about adopting back before the Inquiry, but I thought you’d be shoved further down the list thanks to
all that shit.”

“If anything, my composure during that time pushed me up on the list,” she said. “Once I was able to land my current job I looked like a model citizen, scraping together what was left of her life after a stint in government went wrong through no fault of her own. I can’t even tell you how many times I was offered an interview about working for you, the reporter in complete awe.”

“. . . as they should have been.” By then they had reached the kitchen, where Kate was chopping some veg for the spreads—the last thing that needed doing. “Kate, love, this is Sam Cassidy, or Rajit Version One-Point-Oh. Sam, this is my new lady and boss, Kate.”

“It’s an honor,” Sam said. She reached over the table and shook Kate’s hand, the older woman’s relaxed demeanor putting her at-ease. “Thanks for taking care of him—he can be pretty lousy by himself.”

“No kidding; we’re going to have to get together so you can tell me all about the shit he got up to before I came into his life,” Kate replied.

“Let’s just say I left once for two weeks and came back to the office in shambles and the cleaning crew having been told to not enter.” Malcolm scowled as the two snickered and he wondered if bringing the two of them under the same roof was a good idea.

“You hadn’t even been working for me for a month at that point and there was an international crisis going on, if you recall correctly.” The tips of his ears turned red, his only saving grace being that the doorbell rang. “I’ll be back. Again.”

“Take your time, dear,” Kate smirked. She and Sam shared a laugh before he left the kitchen—it was his worst nightmare, and he hadn’t even known it until fifteen fucking seconds ago.

After quietly poking his head in the family room to check on Fiona and David —the latter having climbed on the former’s shoulders as they attempted to play a tennis game as such—Malcolm went to the door and opened it to see the two faces he wanted to visit with the most.

“Jamie! Cal! You wee shits! Get the fuck in here!” He stepped aside and let his two friends into the house. While Jamie was rumpled and scruffy as ever, Cal seemed to be doing better than ever. “Where’s the gals? I thought Jeanette and Veronica were coming too.”

“Naw; the Younger Twins had a bit too much fucking schoolwork to be left alone this weekend, because of course it’s bad enough that they’re not doing any shitting learning anymore, but they have to spend all their time doing too much bloody useless shite,” Jamie scowled. “I’d like to take that headmaster of theirs and stuff him full of those fucking essays they have to write and see how well he digests tha—”

“Meanwhile,” Cal interrupted, clearly having heard the rant on the way over, “Veronica is headed over to her parents’ with Emily for a visit, as they’re getting a bit batty in their old age and need near-daily reminding that they have to do things like shower and not try to kill the neighbor’s Devil-spawn of a cat.”

“…a bit batty?!” Jamie scoffed. “Your in-laws are fucking mental!”

“I’m married to their daughter; you don’t think I don’t fucking know that?” Cal replied. “Anyhow—where’s this lass I hear has turned you loose on civil society again? I thought that the next time we’d be able to see one another, we’d be shriveled and soft and gone back to shitting out own pants.”

“Kate’s in the kitchen with Sam, which is where we are not going because it’s not safe,” Malcolm
said. He led his friends out to the back patio, where there were chairs and a cooler with some bottles of beer. Once both his friends had a drink and he had a bottle of water, he continued. “It’s better to let them talk themselves out; they’ve got plenty to discuss before they are going to be ready to join us.”

“Fuck… you wanked yourself to a higher plane of existence, or what?” Cal laughed. “I don’t remember you ever being this at-ease about anything.”

“I was shagged there, my friend,” Malcolm said, raising his bottle in a toast. “Let’s face it: we thought the last time the three of us were together like this was the last fucking hurrah. Now look at us; Jamie’s got his own firm, you’re still surviving with enough time in to get a gilt pension once they’re done with you, and I’m not only out of prison without so much as a pap resplattering me name, but I’m working for the United Fucking Nations of all things while my lady has her way with me on a near-nightly basis—it’s just about made me a believer.”

“Christ—I thought you gave all that up after Kelly…” Jamie marveled. “Well, not like you were ever solid on the stuff before…”

“Still can’t take a fucking joke, can you, yeh pint-sized failed priest?” Malcolm snarked. Jamie shoved him with his fist, making the other two chuckle.

“When lost souls find their way, it’s nothing to fucking joke about,” he scowled. “I’m telling Kate you wanted to keep her and Sammy in the kitchen.”

“Yeah, and she’ll punish me appropriately later,” Malcolm grinned. Jamie choked on his beer, spitting it out on the pavestones. “What? Suddenly have virgin ears?”

“Fuck you.”

“Kate plans on it.”

“Hey, Malc, can you get me one of these?” shouted Fiona from inside the house. She then appeared into view, holding David’s ankles tight against her shoulders, letting the boy dangle upside down while giggling up a storm. Upon seeing the other two men, she waved, not letting go of her captive. “Hi, I’m Fiona—you Malc’s mates, I take it?”

“This wee fucker’s Jamie and the other wee fucker’s Cal; three of us shared a flat back in Glasgow,” Malcolm explained, pointing out his friends with his water bottle. “Now, what’d you want me to get?”

“One of these,” she repeated, holding David forward. She let the boy slowly sink to the ground as her wrists tried to not give out, not used to needing the upper body strength necessary to hold a six-year-old aloft. He ran away, after which she gestured in his general direction. “A little brother, maybe? The way you are with Mum, I wouldn’t be surprised you had one or two of them hiding around Greater London, ready for a custody battle.”

“Watch over him for a few more hours and then tell us if a wee brother’s such a great fucking idea,” Jamie muttered into his drink. “I got two sets of twins, lass; take it from an expert on kiddie hijinks. Love me kids, don’t get me wrong, but they’re a handful for even the best of us.”

Fiona shrugged an “okay” at that and then left the men alone again, heading into the house. Cal narrowed his eyes, looking through the family room window with little effort, where he could see Fiona and Michael prepping a racing game.

“I’ve seen her before…” he frowned. “I don’t like this feeling… not about her, but something
“Her da’s a fucking hotshot banking tit, and she resembles him slightly,” Malcolm said sourly. “You’ve probably had to give him a dressing-down at some point. I know I probably have, the fucking waste of cum. If I had met Kate ten—fuck, fifteen—years earlier, then I would’ve been able to help raise her properly, been a decent da for her.”

“It would’ve given you something to do after the Fucking Fleming Fiasco, that’s for sure,” Jamie mused. “Then me best mates wouldn’t’ve had to have a showdown on the national fucking stage.”

“…a paid showdown, mind,” Cal reminded him, “and shit Malc, you could have even retired after the election and not have wasted all that time. You talk like this girl’s cut from the same cloth as you.”

“She’s us, Cal… us if we had every resource out there available back then and more,” Malcolm explained. “Kate’s sperm-donor of an ex isn’t just any fucking hotshot banking tit—he’s a fucking minted hotshot banking tit with fingers in cookie jars we can’t even think of touching anymore. He’s got her going to some haughty public school, speaking Latin, French, and Italian, rubbing elbows with the kids and grandkids of the shits I used to put in place on a daily basis.” He then leaned back in his chair, taking a large gulp of water. “She’s better than that though.”

“Not to be an ungrateful pisspot of a guest, but how are you sure?” Jamie asked. “That sort of thinking has a funny way of rearing its head in shitty ways. We had a classmate in uni who was amongst the best until we got into a row about fucking Thatcherism, of all things.”

“She notices,” Malcolm said, not missing a beat. “She noticed that Kate’s son never got the chance to get out of his state school until graduation, that her other older brother fucking disappeared from their da’s family once he was an adult, that none of the women she’s around at his place seem to stay very long… and that doesn’t even take into account their personalities…”

“Let me guess: none to fucking speak of?” Cal cut in.

“Yeah; she knows that a cunt with money is still a cunt, and that, unfortunately for her, her father’s one of them. Fuck—the only reason they’re in this house and not a flat back in London is Kate’s da having worked for one of those poshness factories after retiring and wanting to make sure she and the kids were set up after he was gone.” Malcolm turned his head and looked out over the garden, which caused him to frown slightly. “There’s so much I wish I could have been here for, but I got fucked over daily instead.”

“Don’t beat yourself up over it, Malc,” Jamie said. He patted his friend’s shoulder and gave him a supportive smile. “I know it’s not your bag, but I’m confident that the Lord put you here, at this time, for a very specific reason. You can think it’s the cosmos or sheer luck or whateverthefuck, I don’t care, it’s up to you. The only thing, no matter what you think, is figuring out what the reason is and what we can do with it is why we were given such a fucking large amount of smarts and shit.”

Malcolm took another drink of his water and shoved Jamie’s hand off his shoulder, no malice in the action. “Still don’t mean I don’t fucking think about it.”

“Hey, it’s worth a shot.”

“What’s worth a shot?” Kate asked. The men glanced towards the door and saw her and Sam coming out to join them with wine glasses in-hand. While Sam took the fourth chair, Kate decided to sit on the arm of Malcolm’s.
“Nothing much, love,” he replied. “Rest of the party’s here; this is Jamie and Cal. ‘Gizmo and the Nuggets’ is what they used to call us back in the day; stayed with them until they started getting hitched and I made the first move down to London.”

“Well, it’s good to meet some of Malcolm’s old journalism friends,” she said. “I don’t have many friends left myself thanks to what work has done to my personal life; it makes me feel much better that at least one of us still has some of their old gang around.”

“If you’re marvelous as Malc says you are, then you’re most certainly one of us now,” Cal said, raising his beer. Everyone else raised their drink and they silently toasted, all taking a sip at once.

-KTHUNK-

The adults’ attention all turned towards the house, out of which David scurried in a panic. Seeing cover, he took refuge under the nearby gazebo via a hole in the lattice along the bottom. Fiona appeared soon as David was out of sight, teenaged rage across her face.

“Where is he?!?” she hissed. “He got into my room and knocked over my bookcase!”

“In his defense, you’ve needed to bolt that thing to the wall for ages because of how wobbly it is,” Kate frowned. “He’s a child—I’m sure he didn’t mean it.”

“Yeah sure,” Fiona then turned to Malcolm, “and I take it back: get me one of them and it’ll be dead within the week. If anyone needs me, I’ll be cleaning the mess David made.” She then stomped away, the sound of slamming doors being heard as she stormed through the house. A quiet moment passed and David crawled out from underneath the gazebo, knees full of dirt and hair covered in spider webs.

“…am I in trouble…?” he asked timidly.

“Not this time; just be careful,” Sam said. She put her wine down and took a handkerchief from her purse to wipe off his hair. “Miss Fiona’s just being grumpy because she knows her mummy’s right.”

“Oh.” The boy let himself get fussed over as Sam cleaned him up. He could see Fiona glaring at him from the upstairs, which made him back down slightly. “Can I have my juice box now? I’m gonna look at the garden.”

“Go ahead,” Sam nodded. She watched as her son took the drink from her bag and wandered off towards a flower bed. “I guess it’s too late to ask if there’s a babysitter in the house, isn’t it?”

“Just a bit,” Kate smirked. “Now tell me, boys, what is going on in your lives?”

Chapter End Notes

For anyone confused by Cal’s inclusion in here when The Fucker, as he is known in-universe, had been hired by the Opposition during the election shitshow, there is a bit in The Missing DoSAC Files tie-in book that shows a transcript of a voicemail that Malcolm left on Cal’s cell phone. It’s adorable and proves that Malcolm has… odd friends in the workplace, to say the least, though his full relationship to our favorite Caledonians is completely my invention.
Sometimes I forget that UNIT is pseudo-paramilitary due to the nature of Kate not being a career soldier… which is why I have this chapter. Apologies in advance.

Waking to a pair of fucking frozen feet sticking out from the blanket, Malcolm scrunched his legs up and shivered, livid that this was his shit of a wakeup call. It was just his fucking luck that once the leaves had begun to turn the previous month in October, things picked up at work to such an extent that he did not have the basic human right of getting to sleep with his lady going on the third week. His feet were cold, his balls ached, and he was about ready to stab something in the eye with a rusted spoon for so much as the offense of looking at him.

That was fucking life, he supposed.

Malcolm scowled under the covers until his mobile went off. The alarm silenced, he walked across the cold wooden floor to the even colder tile of his bathroom, loudly repeating “fuck” over and over until he found the bathmat to stand on.

“Wear your slippers, for fuck’s sake!” Lex shouted from her room.

“Not the ones you got me!” he shouted back. “They’re fucking staring at me as we speak!” It was true, as there was a pair of overstuffed, very fluffy-looking slippers sitting by his bedroom door. They also, as it happened, had a pair of giant googly-eyes slapped on each one, making them each an expressionless, lime-green, furry demon primed to eat his feet.

“Then don’t blame me when you lose a toe to frostbite!”

Grumbling, Malcolm shut the bathroom door a bit too harshly and began getting ready for the day. Blistering hot shower? Check. Shave? Nah; leave it for a while and possibly drive Kate wild enough for a panic-room shag. Socks and pants waiting for him in a vanity drawer? One of the best ideas he ever had. He still had to brave the cold of his bedroom proper in order to reach his trousers, a shirt, and a jumper, but that was alleviated by the fact he at least had some socks on and not those bloody monster-slippers.

“Someone looks like they need to get a leg up,” Lex observed as her uncle made his way into the kitchen. He poured himself some coffee and raised an eyebrow at his niece—she was remarkably unrumpled that morning, with an actual blouse and skirt and her hair pulled back into a (to Malcolm) disturbingly large barrette that kept it out of her tea and off her face.

“Fuck off,” he grumbled, reaching for the sugar. “Why the fuck do you look so proper today? Audit at work?”

“Going out after hours with some of the other Scottish expats,” she said. “The last lecture any of us has to give ends at eight, and with it being Friday and no one has weekend sections, we all decided it would be fun to the uni’s local.”
“If you looked any nicer, I’d say it was a lad you were after.”

“Uncle Malc…”

“Hey, it fucking takes one to know one, and after that comment about me needing to get a leg up…”

“You are terrible.”

“…and it’s only been three weeks for me when it’s been, what, three years since you were with that raging tit and his wee doodle-flap…”

“Now you’re just being a shit.”

“…and you still won’t admit that I called that puss-lord soon as I laid eyes on him.” He took a sip of his coffee, grimaced, and tossed another sugar cube in. “His doodle-flap was tremendously wee, wasn’t it?”

Lex closed her eyes and nodded her head in irritation. “He was rather wee with a bit of stage fright, yes.”

“There, now was that so hard?” Malcolm took a large gulp of coffee—ah, perfection—and moved towards the front door to put his shoes on. “Come on now, I’m your dear ol’ uncle, and I want you to have as thick and heavy a cock as they come if that’s what’ll make you happy.”

“This conversation keeps on taking weird turns and I don’t know if I appreciate that.”

“You’re twenty-six; we’ve had weirder since you first started coming to me about lads back when you were sixteen…”

“That doesn’t mean I want to talk about the doodle-flaps of Exes Past during breakfast.”

“Then don’t tell me what I don’t already know.” By now Malcolm had on his loafers, finished his coffee, and was getting his coat on. “So then you won’t be home tonight?”

“I’ll be in late, but I will be picking up Kanda from the station tomorrow afternoon, since she has an interview with one of the schools the Education Department does clinicals with on Monday. I keep telling her that the fuckers are just trying to hire as many checkboxes as possible at once so that they can keep their prestige, but a job’s a job, apparently.”

“Couple years suffering in a place like that and then she’ll be able to easier court a place that can appreciate her skills. Pay won’t be good at either, but at least they’ll be forthright about their budget constraints and racist parent population at the latter.”

“True, but does she want, let alone deserve, the shit?”

“We all do, Lexie, at least a wee bit,” Malcolm said. He kissed the top of his niece’s head protectively, grabbed a couple satsumas from the fruit bowl, and off he went.

Traffic was light, meaning that Malcolm was able to make it to Mainframe UK with very little to irritate him. It nearly seemed as though he had a complete turn-around in mood, thank fuck, by the time he checked in with Aparajita, only for it to curdle soon as he exited the lift in front of Kate’s office.

There were two versions of Kate’s secretary standing there, yet no Kate herself.

“Morton, where’s Director Stewart?” he asked, attempting to not scowl her into submission. The
secretary shrugged, whilst her copy turned itself back into a Zygon form.

“She’s with Ms. Forrest and Mr. Cullen right now, checking on some cold-room systems,” Morton said. “I want you to meet Themba, my Zygon duplicate out of the newest recruits. Themba, this is Mr. Tucker, our Communications and Public Relations head.”

“Pleasure to meet you, sir,” Themba said, voice in the same low growl as other Zygons tended to have. Once they shook hands, however, Malcolm saw that he was staring at himself. “This feels much more comfortable.”

“See if you can get a transfer down to my floor and we’ll see about that,” Malcolm replied. He let go of the Zygon’s hand and watched his face ripple before catapulting back into the magenta alien from before.

“That’s odd,” Themba mused. “Your genetic coding seems more difficult to hold onto than Miss Morton’s. Has your coding been altered somehow? Gene therapy? Maybe prior substance use? I’m not trying to pry, only curious.”

“Tried a couple things as a lad back in the ‘80s, mainly because it was the ‘80s, but not sure if that’s the answer you want to hear,” Malcolm frowned. He then turned back to Morton. “When’s Director Stewart going to return? I wanted to talk to her in-person.”

“She didn’t say—should I phone her for you?”

“Nah, I’ll do it,” he said. He watched as Themba shifted back into a copy of Morton and shifted uncomfortably. “So… erm… are you two like the Scarfies were when you do that? One person in two bodies?”

“The Osgoods were a rare anomaly,” Themba explained. “Their mental capabilities were able to fully fuse, whereas most sapient beings are able to have some sort of autonomy when copied, whether it is consensual or not. It made it so that there were no tells, no nothing, that could allow even the most skilled to differentiate between them. Is that answer to your satisfaction?”

“Yeah, thanks,” he said. Malcolm then went back into the lift and out towards his office, dialing his mobile as he did so. He went straight into his office, ignoring the fact that Aparajita had already left to do… whateverthefuck she tended to do when he wasn’t around.

“Ah, just the man I wanted to hear from,” Kate said as she answered her end.

“Love, where are you?” he asked. “I just went to your office, only to find Morton and her Not-So-Mini-Me, yet none of whom I wanted to see.”

“Doing some systems checks with Jac and Glenn for the moment,” she replied. “Listen: I need you to head on over to U.N.B. Kernow in my stead. Captain Blythe has some things she needs signing off on within the next thirty-six hours, or Geneva’s going to give her shit.”

“The woman outranks me.”

“And I not only out-rank her, but can send someone trustworthy in my stead to sign off on her stuff. These system checks are coming during the perfect storm of everything needing to converge on my office. Will you?”

“I guess I have no choice if I ever want to get a taste of you again,” Malcolm sighed. He scratched his scalp as he listened to Kate chuckle on the other end. “How long will it take?”
“The flight is a bit over an hour—Gordon’s taking you by helicopter, doubling as your security. Not sure what all Captain Blythe has for you once you’re there though. It could be a few things, it could take until tomorrow. Whatever it is, if there isn’t security footage of someone inspecting and signing in-person, the mainframe could be in deep shit.”

“Do we at least have enough time to duck into a cupboard before I go?”

“I wish.” There was a sort of irritated sound to those two words, though Malcolm could tell the irritation was not directed towards him. “Maybe when you get back—you’ll surely have some nice stubble by then.”

“Might be a full-fledge beard; didn’t shave this morning, just for you.” There was a grumbling sound—Kate wasn’t in a place where she could talk too dirty in order to counter that. “Fuck you later, love.”

“I look forward to it.”

Malcolm ended the call and tossed his mobile into the couch—his cock needed to not be so, well, needy.

Nearly ninety minutes later and Malcolm found himself dressed in his rarely-used military kit, sitting in the passenger seat of a helicopter and holding on tight as Gordon piloted the damned thing over the ocean towards their destination. UNIT Naval Base Kernow was a desolate wee speck off the northern shore of Cornwall, well into the Celtic Sea and not officially on any map. While he knew that Gordon, being former RAF with some flight hours under his belt, was more than capable of operating the craft, it did not mean that the winds were cooperating for them any.

“There it is,” the lad said, pointing at the base. Malcolm had to squint against the sun reflecting off the water, cursing his eyes for getting old. “It shouldn’t be more than twenty minutes now.”

“Good; I need to take a piss,” Malcolm scowled.

“If you could let go of the seat for two seconds, I wouldn’t look as you went off the side,” Gordon deadpanned.

“…and get pitched into a briny fucking grave? You wish.”

The younger man rolled his eyes and continued on. Only a couple minutes passed before the two could hear a radio transmission in their headsets, coming from shore.

“This is UNB Kernow ATC: please state your name, rank, and flight designation.”

“This is Corporal Lethbridge-Stewart from Mainframe UK; the code I was given for entry is Golf-Bravo-Sierra, One-One-Zero-Fiver, stop,” Gordon replied, patching himself into the communications channel. He waited for a moment, keeping the helicopter at a hover, as the air traffic control checked it over. The skies seemed completely clear, with them being the only ones en route either to or from the base.

“You are cleared to land in Helipad Two, Corporal.”

“We fucking better be,” Malcolm growled. Gordon chuckled at that, glad that he was the only one who could hear him. He continued on towards the base, holding his pace steady until he slowed right over the small island. Lowering the aircraft, both men watched as the small details became larger ones, the moving dots morphing into Humans and Sea Devils both, and a reception committee came
out and began to watch their descent…

…that was, however, until they stopped moving.

“What the heck…?” Gordon hissed. He fiddled with a couple switches before he noticed something extremely important: the helicopter blades were completely still. “Shit—what is happening?!!”

“Corporal Lethbridge-Stewart, what is your status, over?” air traffic control asked.

“I’m just sort of… hovering… up here…? All systems aside from communications have stopped functioning, over.”

“Including gravity?!” Malcolm panicked. He glanced down towards the ground and saw that they were probably still fifty meters above ground.

“ATC, I need some advice on what to do. This situation never exactly came up in training, let alone in my weirdest dreams. Over.”

“How long is your ladder, over?”

“I don’t think it’s long enough to reach the ground, and my passenger’s not exactly trained for any sort of physical maneuvering. Over.”

A rustling sound came from the air traffic controller’s end and a new voice came over the channel. “Corporal? This is Captain Blythe. I am giving you a direct order to lower your rescue ladder and descend. We are prepping the fire truck to meet you at the end point.” Gordon and Malcolm then heard a sound that indicated that she put the headset down, followed by the original voice meekly adding “over” at the end.

“Alright, you stay put until I say, then,” Gordon said as he unbuckled his harness. Malcolm gripped his seat even tighter and closed his eyes, trying to keep his breath even as the lad rummaged around. “Stop panicking or you’ll make it even worse.”

“What the fuck do you think I’m trying to fucking do?!?!” Malcolm snapped. “This shit wasn’t in the cunting job description!”

“What does Mum see in you? I really wonder sometimes.” Gordon finished hooking up the rescue ladder in the back and let it unfurl over the side. “Alright, looks like they’re almost in place; time to get you down there.”

“Fuck… okay…” Malcolm opened his eyes and began to undo his harness with shaky hands. His knees nearly felt as though they were going to give out as he joined Gordon in the back of the helicopter, and he felt it was a miracle he didn’t piss himself when he looked out over the side to see where the fire engine was setting up its turntable ladder. “Shit! I’m gonna fucking kill whatever is that’s behind this bending of the laws of physics and nature and crap.”

“Just climb down already,” Gordon groaned. “Just pretend you’re five feet up; it helps.”

“Fuck off.”

“If you slip, I’ll at least tell Mum you love her.”

Deciding to not dignify the lad’s cheek with an answer, Malcolm wrinkled his nose and began to go down the ladder. He then blacked out momentarily, for the next thing he knew, he and Gordon were standing on the ground, confused members of UNIT forces surrounding them. There was a part in
the crowd and Captain Blythe found her way through the throng of people, her authoritative air pressing all about her.

“Alright, I want the helipads immediately evacuated aside from fire personnel,” she ordered. “This did not happen by accident—this is a preternatural occurrence and I am not going to have us caught off-guard when whatever’s holding that craft in the air lets go.” The crowd began to disperse, leading her to nod at her visitors. “Corporal, Lieutenant-Colonel, thank you for coming.”

“Thank you for your quick leadership, ma’am,” Gordon said, saluting sharply. Malcolm floppily brought his hand to the side of his head and let it drop again; he still wasn’t fully with the military side of UNIT, nor did he want to let anyone think he was on accident.

“Yeah, thanks, now let’s get inside and away from that thing,” he scowled. Malcolm then whipped out his mobile and sent off a quick text to Kate: “fucking helicopter froze on us; hanging midair like a toy on a string”.

“fuck not those too,” she replied. He then pocketed his mobile—let the lady do her work.

“I couldn’t agree with you more, Lieutenant-Colonel,” Captain Blythe nodded. She led the two into the main building and towards her office. “The Brigadier-Director told me you were coming in her stead, Tucker. Did she brief you on what needs to be done?”

“I have to inspect and sign off on shit, which is bullshit.”

“Geneva’s bullshit, so we must respectfully carry out orders as though it was no problem at all.” They made it into her office, and after a quick pause to let Malcolm relieve what he did not out of terror, began to go over the minutia of what it was they needed to accomplish that day. The full briefing was nearly complete when there was large, crashing explosion that could be heard right outside the office, shaking the entire room. One look outside onto the helipads and it was clear that the twisted, smoldering wreckage that the fire squad was attempting to put out was none other than the helicopter Malcolm and Gordon had just arrived in.

“Are you harmed, ma’am?!” shouted a Sea Devil as he slammed the office door open.

“No,” Captain Blythe replied, “but I want you to get me a report soon as you can. What happened out there?”

“I might be able to shed light on that,” Malcolm scowled. He was looking at his mobile, watching as texts from Kate came flooding in. “The Master froze all aircraft in order to get UNIT’s attention and has since let them go. Brigadier-Director Stewart says that not only were all aircraft put on hold, but most of the proactive long-distance communications related to the event were as well, because of course the Master wants to sow nothing but discontent and fear, the loony bitch.”

“…hence why we got no word until now,” Blythe frowned. “It’s always the Master when things tend to go disastrously wrong, isn’t it? Feels like it has been since I was fresh from the Academy.”

“More or less,” Gordon added. He kept his eyes on the wreckage outside, flinching when another—though smaller—explosion flung further debris everywhere, including towards the window. “I, eh, don’t think you would happen to have a spare helicopter we could borrow to get back to London, would you, ma’am?”

“Get the Lieutenant-Colonel to sign away, then I’ll see what can be managed,” Blythe said. She then sat at her desk once again, remaining unperturbed when some nuts and bolts flew up and made contact with the window. “It’s designed to handle much more than a downed aircraft spitting up its
A heavy pause of silence and Malcolm and Gordon realized that, yes, they had no choice.

Chapter End Notes

I know Blythe is a Captain here (roughly same rank level as a Colonel, but with ships), but in her introductory story The Sea Devils has her as “Third Officer Blythe”, a member of the Women’s Royal Naval Service of equal rank to the modern sub-lieutenant of the gender-integrated Royal Navy. Her rank then would have been fairly junior as far as commissioned officers go, yet some period between 1972 and ~2010 involved her ladder-climbing and switching to UNIT and going from the Resident Competent Secretary in A Skirt to Resident Badass With A Sea Lizard Secretary. It’s actually fun for me to look back on it post-changes I’ve made to her character in the fic, mainly because everything is so delightful that there’s almost whiplash. (Also watch for Jon Pertwee being thrilled at vehicles, Roger Delgado hating water, and Donald Sumpter playing DWverse Role 2 of 4, most recent of which was Rassilon.)
Chapter 23

“April showers bring May flowers, but do you know what May flowers bring, Mister Tucker?”

Malcolm stared at the unnaturally cheery moleman sharing the lift with him with a scowl. Up until that point, it had been a particularly stormy April. There had been no gentle rains, or even misty, dreich days where it was simply that the air was a soggy, chilly mess. Both men were soaked through their clothes after having been caught in an especially heavy downpour between the Tube station and the front building. He recognized the moleman and his specific accent from across a specific ocean, and was internally thankful when the lift opened up on their floor.

“I dunno; England’s village idiots?” He left the moleman in the lift without another word passed between them, Malcolm walking briskly through the mainframe corridors ready to start another day. His shift was an early one, making him the only person in his department there at five in the morning. It meant he could make himself some tea in peace, sit down to the sounds of silence, and check his email without anyone barging in on him. It was nearly six o’clock when he was finished and ready to move onto actually following through on the messages that were more than simple memos and announcements, keeping silent and on-task the entire time.

Every so often, Malcolm would glance over at the collection of photos that were gathering on the corner of his desk, becoming lost in thought. Gone were the days now when he had to leave photos at home in order to protect his family, giving thieves and enemies room to snatch up the ones he held dear; sure, it had been a bit over-the-top as far as paranoia was concerned, but at least he had been fully receptive to the concept of bringing Lex’s drawings in, as they both kept him company and confused people who were ushered into the office for a bollocking. Now he could have multiple photos—in the office proper and in the panic-room-slash-barrack—of him with his mam, sister, niece, and now, him with Kate. He even had been gifted a photo of Fiona recently, as she was getting ready to sit her A-level exams and move into whatever Oxbridge college her father had found a spot for her in, and she had been made to sit some portraits (he had to thank Nona Ferrero someday) to commemorate the occasion.

It was a photo of him with Kate, however, that was the one he cherished the most. It was of them at Christmastime, which had been a quiet, blissful few days off without anyone to bother them, with Fiona at her grandparents’ place in Italy, Gordon at his father’s, and Lex in Glasgow. They had been having a lie-in when photo was taken—sleep was still clearly in their eyes and blankets covering their bare chests as they were snuggled up together—and it had been a split-second decision to take the picture as Malcolm had just picked up his mobile to answer a text from Aparajita. The photo’s twin was up the lift and on Kate’s desk, reminding the couple of what awaited them both when their schedules aligned.

It kept his spirits up, knowing that they would both one day retire, and that it would be lie-ins and peace and fucking quiet for the rest of their days thereafter.

Getting back on-task, Malcolm continued to work until his staff began filtering in, nearly all of them on the day or afternoon shifts. He shouted at a couple, though his words were purely empty, and generally let them be as he typed up a couple of high-level speeches he sent over to Miller in the off-site branch of his department (which was a cupboard of an office with a camera and podium in one of the rooms in case an impromptu video statement needed to be published). Despite Zygon leadership being cautious as a MP promising actual results to their constituents, things were still growing tense between pro-naturalist activists who wanted to live openly and freely as extraterrestrials and the UNIT enforcers who were upholding the Tripartite Earth Residency Accord,
and Malcolm needed to be ready. He had just sent off the last of the potential speeches (“only use if I fucking tell you to under pain of death via public castration”) when a now-familiar Zygon came out of the lift and came directly through to his office, as Aparajita was not there.

“What do you need, Themba?” Malcolm asked as he lifted his third mug of tea for the day. He took a sip and watched as his visitor stood awkwardly by the doorway. Scaring the Zygon felt about as wrong as scaring Morton, meaning that Malcolm made an effort to soften his edge whenever they talked. “What? Did you rethink something again?”

“I have an issue,” the Zygon said. “It concerns Miss Morton.”

“Then come on in,” Malcolm offered. The human stood and ushered the Zygon in before quietly shutting the door to keep their conversation private. “What’s the matter? I didn’t think anyone had an issue with Morton.”

“It is not an issue with her, simply one concerning her,” Themba explained. “My six months as her shadow has nearly expired, yet I do not want to leave after training is complete. How do I explain this to her?”

“Ask for an extension…? Lie and say that you need more time mimicking her movements; we both know you’re one of the fucking best, but…”

“That is not the dilemma.”

“…then what the fuck is the problem here?”

“I have been inside her mental processes and it is different than any of the beings I have impersonated as part of my training,” Themba said. “It is a feeling I do not want to end. I do not understand it.”

“So… you want to be like the Scarfies with her…?”

“No. I want to continue to be Miss Morton, as well as please the original. She deserves to be pleased.”

“…and why ask me for advice?”

“You are able to maintain a personal relationship with Director Stewart while still ethically working together in close conjuncture. If my calculations are correct, then you are the one who knows most about pleasing a human female coworker and how to make it appropriate.”

About a dozen switches flipped in Malcolm’s brain at once and he had to stop himself from recoiling. What the absolute fucking…?! Deciding that it was not his job to shrink the overly-sized magenta cone that constituted the Zygon’s head and unpack everything that was being asked of him, he simply decided to take and tackle what he felt to be the most pressing part.

“You’re not really in tune to gender dynamics in the workplace, are you?” he asked.

“I understand that in order to successfully be part of an Earthen society, one must acknowledge the local community’s expectations for not only its inhabitants as a whole, but the differing ways in which the biologic genders are treated cosmetically, as it assists both Humans and Silurians in preferential mate-finding for propagation and recreation.”

“Yeah, well, I can’t speak for Homo reptilia, but most members of Homo sapiens do not go to work in order to find a mate unless it’s the just-friends type. Director Stewart and I developing a romantic
relationship was a complete accident—a good accident, but it was still a fucking accident. Morton’s just here to work, far as I know.”

“How is this relevant?”

“It’s fucking called ‘workplace sexual harassment’, and if she doesn’t appreciate your advances, you could get fired for it, because it’s the farthest fucking thing from being appropriate. Then the past six cunting months would go down the fucking leg as it gets pissed away via a sacking and maybe even a court order.”

“I have been inside her mind; she would be receptive.”

“Don’t think women are that easy to read, lad,” Malcolm said. Was Themba younger than him? Like it mattered; no one could tell how old a Zygon was after they had matured, even Zygons themselves. He heard the lift open and poked his head out of the office to see Aparajita walking towards her desk. Keeping his hand on the doorknob, he swung the door wide open so that she could see who he was talking with. “Isn’t it true that women are impossible to read, even if you get inside their heads?”

“You should be asking Jabril that, and the answer would be ‘yes; a thousand times yes’,” she replied, mimicking her boyfriend’s Subcontinental accent. Malcolm closed the door again, bringing privacy back into the conversation.

“Does that help?”

“Is the ‘Jabril’ with whom Miss Khan mates also a Zygon?”

“No, Gujarati.”

“Is that another species residing on Earth? I thought, other than the Zygons, it was just Humans and Silurians.”

“Fuck no,” he said, instantly regretting his choice of wording. “Jabril being Gujarati means that his family ultimately comes from Gujarat, a place on Earth, like my being Scottish means I have roots in Scotland.”

“You do not have roots—you are not a plant.”

Having enough of the conversation, Malcolm opened the door and let it swing wide open, gesturing towards the corridor. “Don’t ask Morton anything; I’ll skin you alive if you do. Now leave.”

“…but how do I…?”

“Go.”

Looking as ruffled as magenta-ly possible, Themba left the office and disappeared back into the lift. Aparajita took some papers from her bag and handed them to Malcolm, a slightly confused look on her face.

“Should I even ask?”

“Best not,” he replied. Silence passed between them, with him still staring at the door and her organizing herself for the day. “How does someone get to a position like his without knowing that Gujarat is a place on Earth and not an extraterrestrial species?”

“How does someone get into Parliament without knowing a single thing about how the world
"operates, from public policy to economics?"

"Touché," he nodded. "Rajit, you ever think about getting into government? You’d do remarkably well for someone who didn’t spend their entire career thusfar up to the crotch in it, and it’d likely be safer."

"Not less weird?"

"Nope—I traded balding lords and brain-dead MPs for extraterrestrials and scientific cocking anomalies. Nothing about either’s less weird." He raised an eyebrow as he looked at her. "Why would you ask that?"

"Jabril wants me to think about looking into something else, something less weird and dangerous," she shrugged. "Even if we’re wrong about our relationship and break up in a couple of years, he at least wants me to be living to my best potential, and he’s not convinced it’s here."

"That’s fairly presumptuous for someone who thought they were going to just be friends this time last year."

"It’s complicated, alright? He has his reasons, and they’re legitimate, so don’t think you’re going to scare him into submission when I finally get to bring him to that garden party you’ve been promising."

"Don’t call it a fucking garden party—you’re making me sound like a limp-dicked ponce with an accent crisper than a wrapper of well-done chips."

"If it’s at Director Stewart’s house, which I know it will be since it has the space and the patio, then it’s a ‘fucking garden party’, you Colston-come-Kent cunt." She then pointed towards the door that led over towards the rest of the department, alerting Malcolm to the fact that Sanchez, their baby-faced lowest-rung, was standing there uncomfortably. "I think you’ve got a shout coming on."

"For fuck’s sake, Iria, can’t you shitstains go two whole days without needing to consult me on something?" he groaned. "I thought you were fucking a secondary-school teacher."

"Yeah, but I…"

"…obviously are not getting any of her smarts transferred over during said fucks, so I don’t see the point."

He jammed his hands in his pockets and began to glower his way into the main department; curse his job for still making him do actual work every once in a while.

A quick stop at the flat to grab a change of clothes (while saying hi to Lex, Kanda, and Gordon), and Malcolm was off towards Kate’s house for a quiet evening in. He picked up some groceries on the way—mushrooms, garlic, linguine, white wine, and shrimp for the dinner he was going to surprise Kate with—as well as some fresh-cut flowers, attempting to juggle it all into the house himself. She was not home yet, being that she had some late work to do regarding some protests against the Tripartite Earth Residency Accord that was off-Mainframe, which meant that he was alone for dinner prep. He was nearly finished when his lovely lady walked in through the door, wearing her weariness for only him to see.

"Evening, love," he said, greeting her at the door with a kiss. She merely returned the kiss and silently began shedding her rain-soaked outer layers. "That bad, eh?"
“They have Osgood.”

Malcolm went paler than normal at that, quickly turning off the stovetop to prevent the food from burning. “They what…?! Osgood, as in the remaining Scarfy?”

“Yes,” Kate affirmed. “It was only a couple hours ago when I got the communique, well after you left for the day. Nothing’s happened so far, and the press releases that you composed earlier cover most potential situations that need covering.”

“Shit… how did she even get out of the pocket dimension or whatever the fuck it was she zapped herself to?”

“I don’t know, but all I do is that the remaining Petronella Osgood is being held by a faction of Zygon rebels in Turmezistan, presumably against her will, and they’re not about to negotiate for her release.” Kate sat while Malcolm poured her two fingers of scotch, putting it on the table in front of her. It was barely set on the wooden surface before she picked it up, downing it all in one go, making Malcolm wary of what was to come. She held the glass once she set it on the table again and leaned back in her chair, slumping slightly and her closed eyes tilted up towards the ceiling. “We’re at the edge of a storm and I cannot tell how much damage it will do after it passes.”

“Why Turmezistan?” he pondered aloud. “It’s in the middle of its own civil war; not much there other than rocks, sand, and people with guns.”

“My guess is that’s precisely the point,” she said. “The stronghold is in the middle of a neutral ground, evacuated of all civilians, most of which are being housed in international refugee camps; they’re ready to either have their demands met or die trying.”

“…a suicide mission, so to speak.”

“That’s what it looks like to us.”

“Fuck.” Malcolm ran his fingers through his hair and exhaled heavily. “How did it get this bad?”

“We’re not entirely certain, but there’s a large number of the Zygons at the Mainframe who are certainly conflicted over the matter. This needs to get resolved. Soon.”

“Just do what you need to and let me know what information’s off-limits,” he replied. Malcolm stood and kissed Kate’s forehead before going back to the stove and continued with dinner. They were eating within ten minutes and upstairs in her bed half an hour after that. The night was merely one for cuddling, with both of them flopping onto the mattress in pajamas.

With Kate curled up against his side, Malcolm stared at the ceiling as he lay on his back. He could feel that her breathing was not the slower pattern she gained in sleep, but more the sort from when they were watching a tense movie.

“Go to sleep,” he insisted. “You can’t go back to work tomorrow and function properly if you don’t get at least a bit of rest.”

“I don’t know if I can,” she admitted. “Every time I try to clear my head, more things move in. My brain doesn’t want to stop.”

“I know—it’s not fun.” A part of him wanted to settle her mind by asking again if she wanted to marry him after the storm had passed, so that he would always be there to prop her up, be the reason why she could sleep content at the end of the day, yet it stuck in his throat, telling him not yet. He shook the feeling once again; it wasn’t the first time he silenced himself, and he—as always—hoped
it was the last.

“Malcolm…?”

“Yeah?”

“I likely won’t be around for a bit; Mainframe Plano has given me a lead on potential Zygon insurgent activity involving their jurisdiction and is allowing me access to investigate.”

“…why won’t they do anything about it?”

“…because they are too busy scrambling with Mainframe Pacifica, trying to make sure militiamen and irritable ranchers don’t stumble upon a colony of Zygons and Silurians that actually live as themselves in the middle of the desert. It makes more sense if I go, as anyone they send could be snatched up by dealing with the colony at a moment’s notice.”

“I see.” Malcolm let go of Kate and slid further down on the mattress, low enough for his hand to easily reach between her legs. He stroked the inside of her thigh, making his intent clear. “Would you like to have a go anyhow? To brace ourselves for the coming drought?”

“I’d rather shag you stupid when the floodwaters recede and the damage is tallied,” she said. She positioned herself so that he could nestle his head on her chest and held him there. “It’ll be the reward for keeping things afloat while I’m gone, Lieutenant Colonel.”

“Yes, ma’am, Brigadier-Director, ma’am,” he said, nuzzling his face between her breasts. “I’ll try to keep the kids alive, but I make no promises for out-of-body experiences and the supremely-stupid.”

“There’s a good lad,” she teased. She silently played with his hair—freshly shorn from only about a week prior—and stayed awake terribly long after he was asleep.

It was not going to be a fun couple of days ahead of her… she could feel it in her bones. Her father, once long ago, had told her that was “the Lethbridge-Stewart Intuition” and that it would rarely fail her. The man on her chest let out a snort and hugged her tighter, muttering something unintelligible as he slept on, her worries unbeknownst to him.

She needed to get a hold of the Doctor and Clara Oswald. Quickly.

Despite the break in weather above ground, things were tense in Mainframe UK as Malcolm walked around, attempting to see if there was anything that needed doing. It felt as though everyone already knew that the mainframe was in full military mode and that he was made the one in-charge soon as he entered the building. All the saluting made him uncomfortable, but it couldn’t be helped.

“Have Walsh do it,” he had told Kate earlier that morning over breakfast. “She outranks me anyhow.”

“Her unit’s been assigned to the Turmezistan situation,” Kate explained. She sipped her tea, finding it was still too hot, and put it down. “Gordon’s probably going along as well, as his department’s liaison, to be Hughes’s ear where he cannot go since it is involving Zygons—and therefore potential security threats—and Bismuth denied herself the chance to go since her cousin’s one of the rebels out there and she wants to reduce the risk of conflicts in interest. They’ll be leaving in a few hours, soon as the Turmez factions agree to the idea that we are a neutral party and will operate a ceasefire in our presence.”

He had seen Gordon and Walsh off within minutes of arriving at work, fielded phone calls from
Benton, Captain Blythe, and Group Captain Arwell about military protocols, and even played some
digital tennis via a couple classified emails to an actually-intelligent individual who answered directly
to Cameron in Number 10 while taking a dump (thanking *fuck* that he didn’t have to explain shit to a
worst-of-either-world member of the coalition instead). With the Cybercide of 2012 under his belt
and the experience he had commanding the mainframe because of it, very few had any doubts about
his fitness as a temporary Acting Brigadier-Director anymore…

“If you keep that up, you’re going to give yourself a coronary from just worrying.”

…though that still didn’t mean that the jokes were far from absent.

“I’m not in the mood,” Malcolm scowled. The Data Management man—Malcolm was *still* confused
and slightly enraged as to how someone incompetent enough to lose immigration data was actually
tech-savvy enough to be the DM/IT head—smirked from his spot at a computer terminal, completely
emboldened by the fact he knew his coworker couldn’t shout at him for long thanks to the extra
duties he was currently carrying.

“All I’m saying is that you have more than a couple factors working against you: Scots temper, the
fact men from Glasgow die young, not to mention that most of what I’ve seen you eat are sweets…”

“Glenn, I will fuck you so hard and thoroughly that your granddad’ll feel it if you don’t shut the fuck
up,” Malcolm snarled, flipping the older man a V. He stormed up to his office and took refuge there,
waiting for news from Kate to whether or not she was coming back home soon. With his staff mostly
out for the day—keeping staffing situations and potential security breaches to a minimum—he
relished in the quiet that was formed by just him and Aparajita there.

“Hey, I’m getting ready to go downstairs and nab something for lunch—want anything?” she asked.
Instead, her boss went right by her, straight to the window overlooking the atrium below. “Malcolm?
Hey, I was talking to you.”

“Huh…? Oh, yeah, sure,” he replied. He sat on the edge of his desk and watched the goings-on
amongst the molemen, confident that at least if Glenn followed him up there, he would not only be
able to see him coming, but could kick him off the floor as well. Aparajita leaned on the window and
raised an eyebrow at Malcolm, which caught his attention. “What…?”

“You’ve been acting odd since you got here,” she said. “What’s the matter?” He shook his head, yet
she did not relent. “Come on, what’s wrong?”

“I almost asked Kate last night.”

“…asked her what…?”

“To fucking marry me,” he clarified. He pulled the chair out from underneath his desk and sat down
hard, allowing himself to lean back as he spun slightly. “Every time I get up the balls to do it,
something stops me from getting the words out. They’re only a couple simple words, and I’m one of
the best wordsmiths this side of the Channel, but I just keep on cocking it up like some schoolboy
trying to ask his first date out.”

“Maybe she’ll get tired of waiting and ask you herself,” she shrugged.

“Wouldn’t that be lucky?”

“Yeah, but—”

Suddenly, Aparajita’s eyes went wide as she slowly stepped away from the window, her attention on
the atrium. Malcolm spun his chair around and saw that the molemen were beginning to panic. Red warning lights started to flash, along with “SECURITY BREACH” written in bold letters on most of the visible screens.

“What the fuck is going on?!” he scowled. “Is this some sort of drill we weren’t warned about?”

“Get in the panic room.”

He turned his head, seeing that his PA had gone pale.

“Rajit, what’s the matter?”

“Malcolm, get in the panic room, now,” she ordered, voice wavering uncertainly. “Protocol states you need to get in there and stay there.”

“Hey, don’t you—” Malcolm was cut off by the sounds of screaming and laser-fire down in the atrium. He turned his head back towards the atrium and looked, seeing Zygons opening fire on the molemen. Soldiers—Humans, Silurians, and Zygons alike—all attempted to contain the hostiles with very little success. A metal curtain then slid between Malcolm and the window glass; this was not a drill.

Shit in a shower, this was far from any drill. Fuck… where was Kate? He pulled out his mobile and saw that he had no signal to call her with, signaling that their communications were being jammed. Gordon? That’s right, he was deployed and couldn’t be contacted anyhow… crap… Lex and Fiona were at their respective schools and with no way to get a hold of him. Were they even safe? Tears stung at the corners of his eyes as he realized he had no idea.

“Get your arse in the panic room,” Aparajita repeated, ignoring his emotions. She shoved him towards where the entrance sat and nearly punched the panel that opened the door.

“Then come in,” he said. “I can’t leave you to that shit, Sammy.”

“It’s only designed to support one; I’m staying here.”

“You can’t do that.”

“Yes I can.”

“I’m your boss, and I’m telling you to be safe!”

She did not move, nor make a sound, which caused Malcolm’s shoulders to sink.

“Rajit…”

“Don’t make me do it.”

“Aparajita Khan, put aside whatever the fuck has gotten hold of your common sense and get in there!” He took a step towards her in order to pull her in with him, yet she caught him off-balance and shoved him onto the cement flooring of the panic room.

“Goodbye, Malcolm. It’s been an honor.”

The door slid shut half a second after the lift bell chimed; she was gone.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Part of me thought I’d never really get to this part in the fic because of how much ground there was to cover in the story, but the fact I’ve made it and I’m still going just makes me really happy, even if this is what I’m doing to these poor characters.

“APARAJITA!”

Beating his fists on the door, Malcolm bellowed at the top of his lungs for his personal assistant to assure him that she was alright. He couldn’t hear on the other side of the brushed steel hiding a soundproofed door, causing his stomach to lurch in nerves. Before he could realize, the sounds coming from his mouth weren’t even words—just a series of angry noises that strung themselves together. He didn’t know how long he shouted, how long he went developing bruises on his fists… let alone when it was he started crying.

His throat was sore, his hands hurt, and there was a dull ache beginning to build in the back of his skull. Malcolm leaned against the door and attempted to stop his tears; he failed her.

“Fuck,” his hissed. “Fuck, fuck, fuck!” He let his shoulder rest against the door as he slid down to the floor. “You should’ve listened… you should’ve fucking listened… why didn’t you listen…”

More time passed than he dared keep track of before Malcolm staggered his way back to his feet again. He glanced around and took an inventory of what was there at his disposal. The space was mostly as he had left it from the last time he used the place as temporary sleeping arrangements a week prior, except now he was unable to leave the room, let alone contact anyone outside of it. There was his bed, a desk and chair, some cupboards, a bookcase, wardrobe, small sink, and a curtain rod hung in a circle around what was both shower and toilet. His Christmas presents to himself of a decent mattress and linens for it made the room appear more livable than it had in prior months, yet it was still a tight fit that nearly reminded him of the cramped barely-a-flat he had during uni.

He checked his mobile—still no signal—no way of contacting anyone on the outside.

Putting his mobile on the charger atop the desk, Malcolm went to a panel on the wall and began to use the keyboard. He inputted a precise location and hit enter, hoping it would show him what was happening in the outside world, and with any luck, what was going on in it via the scenery screen technology that had recently been added to the walls. Nothing; again. Again. Again. Again. All the places he ended up trying were calm and quiet… maybe they hadn’t gotten too far beyond UNIT yet.

Finally settling on making the room mimic a place similar to the small cabin in the Trossachs he wanted to bring Kate one day, Malcolm sat down in the desk chair and pondered his situation. He had plenty of food, water, and things to keep him busy for a long time. There were books, a few puzzles, and some DVDs along with a portable player sitting on a cupboard shelf, though he knew that they were not going to properly distract him from the possibility of what was going on outside. This was not going to be like the drills, when he merely delegated from his mobile for a couple hours while protocols were being tested; it was the real thing, something that left a sagging feeling inside his chest and innards, making him wonder about how long he would be stuck, if he could ever get
out at all.

His heart sinking, he thought about the ones he wanted to talk to the most. Kate, across the ocean and likely to be ambushed by Zygon insurgents while the Americans picked at their fucking arse-cracks; Lex, a possible sitting duck, depending on what sort of targets the rebels were to go after and whose path she crossed; Fiona, amongst the sort of people who were least qualified to make decisions and most likely to endanger her to save themselves; and then there was Gordon, possibly walking into a trap in Turnezistan, possibly amongst the only survivors equipped for what was happening. That didn’t even count his mam and sister, his two best mates, Sam…

Fuck, he called Aparajita “Sammy” while they had been arguing. It was the last time he might’ve ever spoken to her and he called her by the wrong fucking name. He folded his arms and rested them on the desk, propping up his forehead with them. He was such a fucking tit, a fucking fuck-up, that he couldn’t even give her that simple fucking dignity in the end. It made him feel sick to his stomach, so much so that he nearly made the move over towards the toilet.

Instead, he went to the bed and laid down, jacket and shoes and all, and went to sleep.

---

You’re a failure, Malcolm.

No swearing to bring things away from the severity of the situation; you’re a failure. Plain and simple.

All the work you have done has been for nothing. You will die, alone and helpless, precisely the opposite of what you set out to be. Everything will fade and the world will be worse off despite all your futile efforts.

This is your punishment; you know you got off lightly.

Wake up.

Malcolm shakily rose from his bed and sat up, not knowing how long it had been since he first went to sleep. Checking the desk clock, he saw that only a couple hours had passed. Grunting, he shrugged off his jacket and draped it over the back of the desk chair. Shedding his shirt and trousers, he changed into fresh clothes—a more casual one of the spare sets he had hanging in the panic room for barrack’s use—and sat at the desk once his shoes were back on. There was paper there, as well as pens and pencils both, and he began to write.

‘23 April

‘I have been in here for almost four hours now, though it feels like four days. There’s been’—he checked his mobile—‘no word from the outside. Nothing is better than bad news, which is how I need to take it. The best thing is that I’m glad that I’ve used this room as a studio flat during bad weeks in the past, or else I would be going fucking bananas from not knowing what to do.’

He tapped the end of his pen on the paper and frowned, knowing that there was so much to write down and get out of his head, and that doing so by hand would take up time that would otherwise be spent staring at the walls. The only real questions were how to get it out, and what to write first.

‘I have regrets,’ he continued. ‘Aparajita Khan deserved a better boss, as she shouldn’t’ve sacrificed herself for a pathetic government castoff. My family deserved a better man than what they’ve dealt with over the years, so patiently that it actually hurts to think about. They should have had so much more, and instead they got me.'
‘Kate, love, if you’re alive when this is read and I am not, then please know how shit I feel sitting here, doing nothing, not able to help you out the slightest bit, even if it’s holding your hand to let you know I’ve got your back. I did not go down willingly, nowhere near content, and if there are such things as ghosts, I hope that I am able to haunt the cumsucker who did this to us, to the mainframe, to everyone, until the end of their miserable days.’

Shifting in his seat, Malcolm decided that he needed to stand and move the fuck around. He got a glass from the cupboard and filled it with water from the sink. After gulping it all down, he stared at the tap and wondered what sort of dangers were still capable of reaching him in there. Were Zygon rebels able to shift small enough to enter through the ducts or pipes? Were they able to find where entrances to the ducts and pipes were, or were the systems he was benefitting from on a completely separate, secret network from the rest of the mainframe? Were the Zygons who were nominally loyal to Earth and the protocols forged by UNIT’s negotiations vulnerable to giving up secrets under pressure to protect themselves and others? Would the rebel set coerce them into violence? If there was violence, how many Tripartite Zygons would stand aside and how many would stand their ground? Could he blame any of them for any action—or inaction—they took? There were scores more Zygons in the mainframe than he had seen in the atrium such a short time ago… it was all such a mindfuck that he leaned against the sink, needing the support.

It would be a good thing, he decided, to keep at least one pencil sharpened in a perfect point at all times just in case he needed it; no fucking conehead extraterrestrial was going to get him that easily.

Something caught Malcolm’s attention from the corner of his eye and he jumped, ready to fight back at any moment. When he looked, he saw that it was only the projection on the wall, showing him a thrush that sat itself on the supposed cabin’s windowsill. He put the glass down in the sink and slowly approached the bird, ending by putting his hand directly on the wall. It was not perturbed by his actions, fluffing its wings and fussing about as it would when completely alone. The feeling of the paneling underneath his hand was unnerving, as it was an entirely different texture than the glass or vinyl windows he was used to encountering. Chirping, the thrush flew away, leaving Malcolm to wonder if the bird was even real, if it was a computer program and not a feed from somewhere just north of the Highlands border. Would the feed go on a loop, and if so, what was the length? He sank back to the chair and felt a churning in his stomach.

This was going to take a fucking eternity.

Fucking fuck it.

...

Why?

...

...

He needed to be out there.

...

What was going on?

...

...
Three weeks.

Malcolm glanced at the calendar on his mobile and saw that it was now over three weeks since he had been locked away inside the panic room. He scratched his beard in thought, too much for him on a normal day, yet still one of the least pressing things that lay before him. While his rations were able to sustain him for three months, he was already seeing that his days were numbered in there thanks to the dent he’d made in said food. His clothes were beginning to feel in need of a wash, his body sore in places, and there was not a hint as to when he could go back to anything resembling his normal routine. Things were quiet… therefore things were maddening.

While he wrote for much of his waking hours, Malcolm was bouncing off the walls in an attempt to not go mad. There was not enough room to run, let alone any other civilized type of sport, so he had to make do with crunches and push-ups and awkward stretches that had him bumping into things in the room. He needed to meet Cal on a proper tennis court, Kate’s garden or his neighborhood to do laps around, and was even beginning to envy the soldiers that had been trained in Silur-kwon-do, the mainframe’s nickname for the martial art whose name was really a bunch of hisses and spits that some of the Silurian soldiers were more than willing to instruct their Human and Zygon counterparts in. Overcoming his lack of movement was nearly as bad as his lack of shouting, and it was nearly torture to combat both at once.

When he wasn’t attempting to stay sane and not-atrophied, however, he was staring out the “window” of the cabin that the walls projected, wondering what was really, truly happening outside. He saw nor heard no sign of Tripartite life—Silurian, Human, Zygon… nothing—and the thought was unsettling, as he knew that the cabin the feed was coming through (let alone a spot in the middle of the woods that was merely falsified to look like a feed from a cabin) couldn’t’ve been on private property, and even then there had to have been the odd person passing through. Sometimes he made the walls look like other things—a Parisian apartment, a park warden’s outpost in the Serengeti, an earthen abode carved out of a mountainside, the town hall of a rural community nestled along the base of the Andes—and everything he tried was devoid of people. With people having been natures biggest pests from time immemorial, he knew that there was no way that of all the places he tried and their global reach, there was no way that over six billion people avoided every single fucking one.

Maybe, had it been thousands of years prior, when humanity was still emerging as a power species in the void the Silurians left, but not now. To be devoid of humans for three weeks in 2014 was spooky shit. He sat there wondering why this was happening, yet couldn’t think of a reason he wanted to put on the table.

He put down his pen and stared at the ceiling. It was of the night sky, cold and clear, showing him the view directly over Christchurch. If he were there, would it even be night? Too tired to figure it out, he closed his eyes and attempted to clear his head—all he was doing was waiting to die.

Just then, a loud thump came from over by the door. Malcolm jumped in surprise, staring at the door waiting for another sound. There was another and he reached for his pencils, all five kept at pinpoint-sharpness. He stood and readied himself, anticipating the next thud and what it would bring, ready to strike and take whatever cunt was on the other side down.

The door opened and fresh air wafted in.

“Malcolm…?”
He dropped the pencils, sending them clattering on the floor to snap their points off.

It was over.
Shakily, Malcolm stepped forward and attempted to process the situation he was now in. After three weeks of isolation, he found himself staring at the love of his life as she stood in the doorway to the panic room. She seemed completely unscathed and fully functioning, giving him a gentle smile as though she was soaking in the sight of him.

“Kate? Love? Is that really you...?” he marveled. His voice was rough and his throat hurt from all the days he hadn’t talked paired with all the screaming he did in the beginning.

“Yes, it is,” she replied. She took a step towards him, only for him to close the remaining distance and cling to her. “It took us more than a few passes to settle everything, but it’s me.”

“Fuck, I thought you were gone,” he whispered hoarsely. “I thought you were dead and that I would die in here. I... I...”

“No, save your words for later,” she insisted. She patted him on the back consolingly, soaking in the feel of his touch. “God, this place smells like shit.”

“It smells like I’ve been here for too long,” he joked. He then held her at arm’s length, attempting to put his work-face on. “What do I need to do? Who do I need to fuck over?”

“Nothing—I phoned Jamie and he has the spin job for you—we just need to get you home.”

“I've been waiting so long for you to say that,” he said. They walked out into the silent main of his trashed office together and his heart skipped a beat. His desk and a couple of chairs were broken, photo frames were scattered everywhere, and the scene was generally one of havoc, punctuated by the cracked-open Zygon pod that was hanging in the corner of the ceiling and its fragments littered everywhere. The window overlooking the atrium was clear and he could see the sparsely-populated floor below, only adding to the eeriness. “Where is everyone? What happened to Rajit?”

“Ms. Khan is fine, or she will be,” Kate explained. Motioning towards the cracked pod, she gave a satisfied noise, as though she was remembering encountering and destroying it. “She's recovering from the shock of being kept prisoner by the Zygons; they attempted to use her and her memories to get more access to UNIT secrets. Alessandra has her in the medical ward and will let me know when she wakes up.”

“She was the reason I was safe in there,” Malcolm said. “I need to see her before we go, please. I fucking need to see her with my own eyes.”

Kate nodded and took his hand, leading him to the lift. Their fingers remained entwined as they walked through the chaotic medical wing, being dodged and saluted and ignored as they found the ward where Aparajita was being kept. She was laying on the bed unconscious, the only of the patients in the six-person room who was quiet and not sobbing or watching telly at an obnoxiously-
loud level. Attached to a bunch of tubes and needles, she looked deathly pale and much skinner than Malcolm remembered, let alone was comfortable with.

“Can she get her own room?” he asked Kate quietly.

“Not now,” she replied, “because we’re dealing with all of the Insurgency-related casualties and need all the space we can afford. Maybe, if we can transfer some of the lighter injuries to local hospitals under the guise of accidents, but that will take some time if I’ve been told correctly.”

“Who are the fuckers in the private rooms, then?”

“People with significant-to-live-threatening injuries who would benefit most from the quieter environments,” answered a voice. Malcolm and Kate turned to see Alessandra, who appeared to be standing purely thanks to copious amounts of coffee and energy drinks. “Honestly? I’m just glad that we’ve moved everyone out of the corridors at this point; was beginning to think we never would.”

“How is she though?” Malcolm asked. “What happened to her? Will she recover?”

“The most I can tell you is that Ms. Khan is very lucky that she was in your office when the Insurgency began—the Zygons who invaded the top offices took her as a potential identity instead of killing her. From what Virthar and Carla have been able to tell, the extents of her injuries are only mental and directly related to her lack of nourishment.”

“Thank fuck,” Malcolm exhaled. He ran his fingers through his hair and glanced back at his assistant. He still felt guilty beyond all reason, knowing that he was the reason she was even laying there, yet there was still that bit of relief knowing that she was not only going to be alright, but that she had been one of the lucky ones. “Have you contacted her mam? Her lad?”

“Yes; she was extremely relieved and he should be here within the hour,” Alessandra replied. She exchanged glances with Kate before putting a hand on Malcolm’s shoulder. “Go home, decompress for a bit, and I’ll let you know if anything happens.”

“Sounds like solid advice,” Kate said. She gently tugged on her beau’s elbow, trying to snap the trance he fell into while staring at Aparajita. “She’s fine; let’s go.”

“When will we be back?”

“Soon enough—let’s get you home.”

There was no more resisting as Kate led Malcolm through the mainframe again, eventually bringing him outside to where a car was waiting for them. They got in and the driver slowly began to navigate the Inner London streets.

“Shit; this went on for much longer than it should have, didn’t it?” Malcolm muttered, watching his mobile finally accept a flurry of texts and voicemails. There were so many that he did not know where to begin. “Is everyone else alright, first off?”

“It seems so, yeah,” Kate nodded. “Most of humanity went unaware of what the real situation was despite the disruption to normal life and emergency services, with most thinking that there’s been a rash of coordinated attacks within the past few weeks that resulted in the loss of life. While the Zygons that committed the murders were acting as terrorists, the Human population believes that other humans were the ones behind the violence. There are even some terrorist groups of Human origin who are claiming responsibility thanks to the fear it’s caused.”

“They can suck my lonely dick,” he scowled, typing away on his mobile. He was sending out texts
to just about everyone who had asked where he was, with apologies and concerns to some and
cautious ambiguity to others. The only thing that made him stop was the feeling of Kate’s hand on his
thigh, the touch nearly burning him through his trousers.

“It’s not about what’s right or wrong right now, but what’s about keeping the peace,” she reminded
him. He picked up her hand and brought it to his lips, holding it there as he gazed into her eyes.

“They fucked the peace until there was nothing left but a sniveling mess, then blamed it for looking
so gorgeous in the first place,” he said quietly. His eyes flicked quickly towards the driver and back
to his lady. “Can he…?”

“Not through the glass, no. He cannot hear us.”

“Good.” He locked his mobile’s screen and set it down on the seat, leaning in so that he could
murmur in her ear. “I am ready for you to fuck me blind, making me yours for all of fucking eternity;
tease me, deny me, hold me down and back until I fucking beg for your mercy. Make me feel alive
again, love. Let’s fuck like randy teens who don’t know that there are fucking consequences to
fucking with no hesitation or reservation.”

She gently squeezed his thigh before moving to entwine her fingers with his. “You certainly do
know how to get on a woman’s good side,” she half-purred. “That tent in your trousers better not be
the only part of you that’s aching to see me.”

“Don’t you know it.”

The two spent the remainder of the ride trading filthy words and engaging in text threads with their
respective civilian families concerning their well-being. Gordon was the only one to have not
checked in so far, which was something that Malcolm let sit once he saw how much it worried Kate;
if he hadn’t checked in for recon and a debriefing at that point, it was likely that she needed to have
the fact far from her mind until there was something concrete. At least, as he discovered, Fiona was
faring better than even she expected, thanks to an increase in security at her school; Lex weathered
out all three weeks inside a coworker’s office, only leaving to search for food; and Malcolm was able
to learn that his mam, sister, mates—everyone he had contacted—was able to text back. He felt
thankful that the weights that were crushing him during his time inside the panic room had been
lifted, and just in time for the car to pull into the country drive. They dismissed the driver for the
evening and went into the house, both happy to see the place once again.

Soon as Kate closed the front door, however, Malcolm was on her. He took her face in both his
hands and kissed her aggressively as he pressed her into the door and his raging erection into her
thigh. She gasped in surprise, feeling her own body react and begin to prepare for what was going to
be a night well-deserved on both sides.

“Mmphf, Malcolm, hold it,” she said as she wrenched her mouth free. His hands instead found her
waist, his lips traveling to her neck. It was difficult to not melt in his arms and come right then and
there, but they were in the foyer and the foyer was no place for anything resembling a shag. “Come
on; bed first.”

“It’s too far,” he whined.

“...and I am not having your bare arse and prick on the freshly waxed hardwood floors,” she stated.
He stopped his advances and breathed deeply in the crook of her neck.

Malcolm stepped back, without a word, and his eyes went from nearly feral in their hunger to almost
sheepish shame. He allowed Kate to lead him up the stairs and to her room, where she let go of his
hand in order to drape her arms around his shoulders.

“There,” she purred. “Now we have a better setting. Wouldn't you agree?” She saw the nearly defeated look in his eyes and she frowned. “Hey, what is it?”

“What will it be next time?” he asked. His mind was now the furthest away from fucking he could possibly imagine, the rapid pace at which he was thinking absolutely killing the mood. “What the fuck is going to happen to us the next time the world is narrowly saved from some shitty apocalypse? What if we don't make it? What if only one of us makes it?”

“Don't think about that” she requested, brushing the backs of her fingers against his cheek. “Concentrate on the now. We’re here now. We’re safe.”

“Yeah, but all I know is that I am sick and fucking tired of always being worried about us when we are doing our jobs properly. It’s one large smear of shit, going and going and going, and it makes me feel sick to my fucking stomach. Our lives are just going to be a string of these shit events, so it’s now or never for revisiting this.”

“Let's get you to bed—that'll help.”

“No; this will.” Malcolm got down on a knee and held her hands in his, gazing up at her face in hope. “Kate... Katherine, love, will you please marry me? I'm just a washed-up old cunt, fit for nothing aside from the occasional shout, but that doesn't mean I don't want to make the best of the little time we might have left.”

“I thought you'd never ask.”

Grinning madly, Malcolm stood and grabbed Kate on the way up, lifting her into the air. She laughed merrily as he carried her to the bed, laying her down and climbing in atop her. He rutted against her leg as he fumbled with his belt and started using his teeth to tug at the buttons on her blouse. Her fingers—more steady and nimble—helped him with his shirt and trousers, both of them laughing as they struggled to free themselves of their clothes.

There was a surprise, however, when Kate began to make the move that would normally result with her mounting Malcolm while he lay helpless beneath her: he resisted. Holding her shoulders firmly, he gently eased her back down to the mattress and pressed her into the bedding with his body.

“I've wanted to do this for so fucking long,” he murmured in her ear. “You can do everything we discussed in the car later, just please, let me do this first.”

“Then show me what you've been fantasizing about,” she replied. “I know you'll make it more than worth our time.”

He nodded and began working on her; grabbing and touching, stroking and teasing, he brought sinful noises from her as she writhed in pleasure beneath him. The very act of working her up did the same for him, as his cock hardened in the slick space between her legs and his balls quivered as she whispered his name. By the time he finally edged himself into her, it was easy and smooth, as though all their parts were made to fit one another.

It was only right for a couple who would soon be wife and husband, after all.

Malcolm took his time, doing much as he could without pushing himself over the edge too early, and made it clear that he unequivocally, undoubtedly, was dedicated to her. He thanked fuck she came before he did so that he could pull out and bring himself down before he popped off and was useless for half the night. Cradling her in his arms, he whispered sweet curses while littering her body with
tiny kisses and gentle bites.

No one, nothing, was going to keep them apart now. There would be no insurgency, no apocalypse, no fucking bullshit, to stand in their way forevermore.

Morning came and both Kate and Malcolm discovered that instead of feeling refreshed and relaxed, they were still sore and weary from the previous night’s activities. They got ready together and decided to have a low-key, quiet breakfast before starting their day—with her car there and their workplace destinations only being a lift ride apart, there was no need to rush.

They were nearly through their instant porridge and tea when another car pulled around the house and parked itself next to Kate’s. She stood the moment she saw it, running out of the house soon as she saw it was Gordon getting out of the vehicle. Malcolm watched as she hugged her son tightly, fussing and fretting over the scrapes on his face and the spot on his head where it looked like his hair was burned off. She kissed his forehead and cried at the fact he was home despite all odds.

“Mum, don’t be like that,” the lad insisted as he led her back into the house. They both sat down at the table as Malcolm made sure they all had fresh tea. “Just because Walsh’s unit was stupid enough to fall for a trap doesn’t mean that I’m going to follow behind them. Someone had to make sure she got out of Turmezistan safely, and it sure as hell wasn’t her after the trauma of losing all her men in one swoop.”

“Where did you go?”

“We waited until it was clear and walked to the nearest Turmez refugee settlement overnight,” Gordon explained. “The Red Cross had been there recently and there were supplies to spare. They are a very warm and welcoming people, the Turmez, and they treated us as their own until a squad of Blue Helmets came through and picked us up, thinking we were just some stranded special ops.”


“I doubt we’ll see her for a while—dropped her off with her sister, who’s taking her for as long as she needs to get better. Bit batty, the sister, but she has Walsh’s best interests first, therefore I trust her.”

“Then we’ll wait a while before the debriefing, to let her decompress,” Kate nodded. She was putting herself back together now, preparing for what was likely to be a long day ahead. “What about your father? Have you told him or Erica that you’re alright?”

“It was either drive in this direction or in his, so I gave him a ring while on the road and a promise to come over later,” the lad said. “I’m mostly here to sleep, and I can’t exactly do that at the house where my bedroom has long been forfeited to a twelve-year-old. I love my brother, but…”

“Go to bed,” Kate then said, cutting his rambling off. She made him drink the rest of his tea and then shooed him out of the kitchen, ordering him up the stairs. When she returned to the kitchen, her composure was already decaying, prompting Malcolm to wrap his arms around her and allow her the comfort of someone else’s strength for a while.

A pang went through Malcolm as he held Kate, knowing that this was what he had wanted to offer her during the Insurgency. There had been no real opportunity for him to do so before, with her refusal to talk about Gordon’s status beforehand, and the feeling of it all crashing down was something he knew he could weather this time. He definitely knew that there would be other times, when he would be the one without the wherewithal to keep the charade up, but he knew that the
woman in his arms would be there for him then. That, he now knew, was an integral part of marriage—a husband or wife taking turns with their husband or wife in supporting each other the best way they knew how—and he was willing to start right then and there in fulfilling his duty.

They stayed like that, standing in the kitchen holding one another, until the alarm on Kate’s mobile went off. It was now the latest they really could have stayed before getting caught in too much of the day’s traffic and it was all they could do to pull away from one another and rush to get to the car. It was Kate’s turn to drive and Malcolm’s to field calls on the way in—their teamwork was only going to be more feared in the coming months.

Soon as they got near Mainframe UK, however, Malcolm asked to be let out of the car, claiming that he had an errand to run yet. Kate did, giving him a quick kiss goodbye, dropping him off in front of a florist. Twenty minutes afterwards, Malcolm was walking out of said florist with a small vase of flowers, and half an hour after that he was headed through work on his way to the medbay. Checking in with Sullivan’s assistants, he found that Aparajita had been transferred to her own room only an hour beforehand, despite the fact she was still unconscious and hooked up to several contraptions. He walked into the room silently, noticing that there was already another visitor—hunched over as he sat in a chair, not paying attention to anything other than Aparajita, there was only one other person who Malcolm thought this newcomer could be.

“You must be Jabril,” he said, closing the door behind him. He saw the young man looked like hell, with a face swollen by tears and having very clearly not done anything from sleeping more than two hours at a time to taming his beard since the Insurgency. “Malcolm Tucker; it’s an honor to finally meet you in person.”

“Same with you,” Jabril replied, his broad Indian accent close to what Malcolm had imagined. He watched the older man as he put the flowers down on the false windowsill and took the spare chair, moving it so that they could sit next to one another. “You look well.”

“I won’t lie—I’ve been having a lot more fun the past twelve hours than you have,” the older man shrugged. “Doc didn’t tell me much, but she did say that Rajit will be alright. She’ll be back up and bossing us around before we realize it.” When Jabril did not answer, Malcolm leaned back in his chair and slumped slightly. “This is what being selfless got her—fuck, if I could have traded spots with her, I would have done so in a heartbeat.”

“She did her duty.”

“She did more than that. Our Rajit’s a part of UNIT just as UNIT’s a part of her; just took until now for us to realize the full extent of it.”

“I keep on telling her she should quit this job before it kills her… and now this…”

“It’s her choice, lad; as much as we don’t like it, it was all her choice.”

Jabril remained silent for a moment, reflecting on Malcolm’s words. “I just don’t want to lose another person I love to the cause of UNIT.” The older man raised a brow at that.

“Another person?” he wondered. “It’s not like me to pry like this, but I never heard about you having a prior UNIT connection.”

“My father,” Jabril explained. “He was military and got a transfer here a few years ago, being able to leave Gujarat behind. Mammi was devastated when he died, which was why I moved here in the first place.” He looked directly at Malcolm, showing the tears in his eyes. “The plane he was on just… exploded—there was no body to bury—and less than two years later, I get a call saying that
another of my loved ones has nearly fallen prey to the same agency’s mistakes. It makes a person so very tired, you know?”

It only took a second before Malcolm connected the dots. “Fuck… you’re Colonel Ahmed’s boy.” Jabril nodded silently, reaching for Aparajita’s hand to hold.

“Don’t feel bad; Bapa was not the sort to talk freely about home while at work,” he chuckled awkwardly. “He is under Allah’s care now—so that is at least a comfort—though I am selfish and wish he could still be here. I think he would have liked Rajita.”

“I wouldn’t blame him if he did—she’s one of the most competent assistants, let alone coworkers, that I’ve ever had,” Malcolm assured. “The only other one that’s come close cannot hold a candle to her, and that’s because of all the UNIT-related knowledge we need here that tends to be useless elsewhere. She is the perfect one for her job.”

Cold silence stretched itself across the room again. Soft beeping from the monitors was the only noise, occasionally punctuated by someone talking as they walked down the outside corridor.

“Rajita…” Jabril said, his voice barely above a whisper, “I had told her a couple weeks ago that she is my Padmavati. I didn’t mean for it to be too true.”

“Okay, you lost me,” Malcolm said. “Forgive me for not sitting classes on Indian literature as a nip, but you make it sound almost as tragic as Romeo and Juliet.”

“In a way; Padmavat is a Sufi poem about the most beautiful woman and the world and how she ends up the desire of a sultan. The story ends with her having died, while he is left to think about how Man’s desires will never end.”

“Bit depressing, if you don’t mind my saying.”

“As if your Romeo and Juliet isn’t?” There was no rancor in his voice, only observation. Malcolm simply nodded, unable to refute the claim, and allowed the younger man to continue. “I told her she is my Padmavati as she is worth sieging all of Chittorgarh for, or at least this place, and I would do it as many times as it took to hear her laugh and see her smile again.”

“That is the tragic flaw with us shit-arsed men: chances are we’re either all-in or can’t be fucking bothered. Why they even put up with us sorry cunts is beyond me.”

“…because sometimes, a Padmavati is glad to see her Alauddin Khalji, for she knows she is not destined for the pyre, that she has a choice whether she will survive the tale or not. She is worth more than what she has been led to believe and realizing that brings her more joy and satisfaction than anything in her old life. Alauddin Khalji is not always a man in this sense—maybe another woman, or a career opportunity, or even moving to a new place—because even though the men were real in the poem, she and the situation were not. I’m sure there are many who would argue with me, but that’s alright. They can argue. The Padmavat is… allegory…? Is that the English word? It’s been a long time since I sat that class.”

“Sounds about right, and it’s been longer for me, I guarantee it.” Malcolm nodded at Jabril, seeing that he was beginning to wince at the lights above, the first signs of the raging headache that he knew was going to torture the lad. He stood and began to search through the cupboards; didn’t fucking matter that he wasn’t a member of Alessandra’s staff or not, ‘cause he wasn’t a cruel man… at least not in this case. “Sometimes I can’t even keep the shit straight, so don’t worry; your accent may be different than a lot of people around here, but so is mine. You’re not a total fucking idiot—Rajit’s not into idiocy.”
“This is true, yes.” Jabril then suddenly found himself holding a paper cup of water and three pills, put there by Malcolm, who was already sitting back down. “What is this for?”

“If memory serves me right, you’re about to feel like you’re getting fucked through the eyeballs here pretty soon, and it won’t go away until the cack in your face clears—that’s two for the pain, one for the sinuses.”

“Thank you.” He took the pills and placed the empty cup on the side table before holding Aparajita’s hand again. She still slept on, the slow, steady beeping of her monitors both a comfort and a maddening force all at once. “Have you been in love, Mister Tucker?”

“I’ve thought I was plenty of times, maybe even was once or twice out of those, but I am in love now… and yeah, she’s worth sieging Chittorgarh for, whatever the fuck that is,” he admitted. Malcolm drew a hand over his face, ending the motion in a way that he held his mouth and chin. “Your mams are fucking nosy, but I’m glad they were just nosy enough to get you two together.”

“I am too.”

“Continue to treat her well and I may just have your back when she decides to get scary.” They laughed weakly at that, knowledge that they both would likely deserve every future shout as an unsaid agreement between them. Silence, and then Malcolm stood, stretching languidly. Being in the panic room for so long had made him antsy, unable to sit for very long without moving, and he was beginning to notice it. “Let me know when she wakes up, yeah? She’s got a scolding coming about not following the lieutenant colonel’s orders.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Jabril nodded. Malcolm left the younger man to his devices and walked off towards the exit of the medical wing.

Time to get in another day at the fuck-office.
“I’m telling you: this is not going to work very well,” Glenn said. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat and idly touched the large scab on his forehead, the reminder that he was one of the lucky ones. “You and I all know that we need to replace Frank, and that I accept Fajr, but I don’t think most people in mainframe staff will accept her after what happened.”

It was a heads-of-staff meeting—the first one since the end of the Zygon Insurgency—and it was already shaping up to be the most important one they’d had in a while. Of the many department heads that had been taken captive during the mainframe’s occupation, Jac Forrest from Technology and Frank Hughes from Security had to be replaced. With the former drained to within an inch of her life and still in the medbay and the latter flat-out dead, it was their nine coworkers’ unfortunate task with figuring out who would succeed them. While both had their own pool of assistants and go-to-subordinates that were being groomed as eventual replacements, it was Hughes’s role that was causing the most stir and for all the wrong reasons.

“Fajr Bismuth is the reason half of the surviving mainframe employees are alive today,” Kate reasoned. “I don’t see why she cannot succeed Frank despite the fact she would have without question had he simply retired.”

“Yet there’s still the fact that she’s a Zygon, after we were just nearly wiped out by a Zygon faction,” Glenn reasoned. “Maybe in a year or two, but I’m thinking about how difficult it would be for the people who watched their friends and coworkers get murdered by someone who is of the same species as she. It would not only be traumatic for them to have that happen when they’re still healing, but it would be frustrating for her when no one listens to, and possibly might even attempt to circumvent, her at every turn. I know she’s who Frank would have wanted, and I’ll be glad when she is in charge over in Security, but I can’t see it working at this precise moment. Humans can’t bloody trust one another if they look different—why would her being a Zygon create an exception?”

“Who do you expect us to appoint then? My son? Gordon is far from being ready to take on an entire department, even if it’s only temporary…and that doesn’t even include the demotion that would occur when he would give up the chair to Fajr—no, she must take Frank’s place.”

“He has a point, ma’am, even if it’s a reality we don’t wish to acknowledge,” the HR lead said. She shrugged uncomfortably, gesturing to a piece of paper she had on the table in front of her. “Our staffing levels in Mainframe UK, despite making plenty use of Zygons loyal to UNIT and the Tripartite Accord, is overwhelmingly Human with a significant Silurian minority. To have either species be commanded by the one that just committed a long-term terrorist act, shows a distinct lack of sensitivity and I’m certain that Bismuth would understand a delay in her confirmation because of it. We’re talking about the Zygon that kept herself here instead of going to Turmezistan, ensuring not only that she’s alive, but that she was able to negotiate for the lives of her surviving coworkers. She knows the position she’s in, that we’re in, and that force won’t solve anything.”

“…and I respectfully disagree with you all. We need a Zygon as a head of a department now more than ever and to not give Fajr the chance she full-well deserves is worse than any fallout that would otherwise occur.” Kate frowned as she sized up the atmosphere in the room. “I shouldn’t have to remind everyone that I would be well within my rights to pull rank and establish Fajr Bismuth as a leading force within this mainframe without anyone else’s approval. The fact I normally allow us to appoint via committee is a luxury not all brigadier-directors give their mainframes and I would like to keep ours intact for as long as is necessary.”

Malcolm chewed on the end of his pen and remained silent. In the days since he was released from
his panic room, he had proposed to his now-fiancée, watched his personal assistant go from near-
comatose to something akin to her sarcastic self, and even witnessed the most spectacular mental
breakdown his niece had ever experienced when they saw one another for the first time since the
Insurgency. Coaxing Lex through a tub of ice cream and the fact that he was still in her life was now
looking easy compared to the job they had before them. Jac’s replacement had been simple—her
lieutenant of sorts had long-established herself as more than qualified and able to take the position
without controversy—yet now the discussion had him back in something akin to his Number 10
mode, when he would spend entire meetings diffusing tensions if he wasn’t silently sizing up the
opinions in the room. Instead of cracking jokes with Tony and glaring in Harriet’s stead, or even
biting his tongue as Nicola stumbled through policies, he was keeping on the sidelines, seeing where
lines were drawn and who stood on which side.

It didn’t matter which side he was on—Kate was going to have her way and he needed to figure out
how to toe the line of neutrality. It was his job to spin and not appear to take much of a side, now so
more than ever thanks to the engagement they were staying silent on. They needed to settle
everything at work and home first before announcing something as dangerous as a wedding. Until
then, his utter silence was key and he was not going to cock it up for anything.

Without a definitive conclusion, Kate eventually called a quick recess, where she stormed up to her
office to cool her temper and the rest of the meeting attendees dispersing towards their respective
departments for the time being. It did not take long back at his department—where everyone was still
there and as incompetent as ever—before he wandered off towards the direction of the cafeteria,
deciding to snatch up a couple sandwiches and coffees and haul them over to the medbay. Just
because he was unable to allow his assistant to fully go back to work without Sullivan’s supervision
did not mean that he was barred from bringing her something with actual taste for lunch and an earful
of prime bitching to unload.

Malcolm was in the middle of hunting down where Aparajita’s favorite flavor of creamer was hiding
by the condiments when he saw them: the Osgoods. Not one Scarfy, or Scarfy and her uncle, but
two fucking Scarf-obsessed Osgoods whose presence was putting everyone on-edge. He hurried and
used the plain creamer for his assistant’s coffee so that he could catch them as they went into the lift,
each with their own quick meal. It was only the three of them as the doors closed, both Osgoods with
the same exact uneasy expression as they noticed who was there.

“Shefry, Shefry,” he said flatly. The Osgood with the bowtie and braces quickly looked at the lift
buttons, which Malcolm quickly stepped in front of. “R&D?”

“Uh… yes.”

Balancing the coffees and bag of sandwiches in one hand, Malcolm pressed the buttons for their
floors, afterwards hitting a third that made a panel pop out of the wall. He scanned his thumb on the
pad and knew that the lift gears were now frozen.

“Why did you stop the lift?” the Osgood wearing a floor-length scarf asked.

“…because we need to talk, and even though I’ve put the lift on hold, it’s still very clear on the
CCTV that all we’re doing is precisely that,” Malcolm replied. He leaned against the wall,
completely blocking the button panel while giving the two women all the space he possibly could
give them. “I don’t know which fucking one of you is which, and you both know I’m not going to
bother figuring it out because it doesn’t fucking matter, but we need to get some things straight
before I let you pop off and vivisect a moleman or whatever the fuck you were planning on doing
today.”

“There’s nothing that needs straightening,” Bowtie said.
“We are here and that’s what matters,” Scarf added.

“Yeah, and one of you is harboring a terrorist while the other is the terrorist,” Malcolm scowled.
“Second chances happen, I’m not a fucking cold-hearted wank used to buying their way out of trouble, but that doesn’t mean that I’m not watching the fuck out of you both.”

“No one has anything to fear from our existence,” Scarf-Scarfy said. “If anything, the Earth Residency Accord is now back to its original terms since there are two Osgoods again.”

“Listen, you two—make it more than good, be fucking brilliant,” Malcolm warned. “It’s bad enough we have to replace Frank because Trona and her cronies blasted him away and Jac because she was two days from death when we found her. One of you did that, and that’s not something that people easily forgive.”

“Would you forgive that?” Scarf-Scarfy posed.

“That’s not the point,” he snapped, “because it’s this: just because there’s two of you now doesn’t mean that Petra’s back, and as fucking thick as people act, they know that much. It’s no longer Petra and Nella, but Nella and Trona, and people will remember that. No matter what happens from here on out, be on your best fucking behavior.” He reactivated the lift and let it bring them to the medbay floor. “Do not make me need to spin this away if we realize down the line this was a fucking cock-up of Parliamentary levels. You hear me?”

“Perfectly,” the Scarfies said at once.

The door opened and Malcolm went out into the medical wing, leaving the Scarfies to their business.

He walked into Aparajita’s room to see that she was sitting up reading and looking very much like she was the most relaxed since hitting puberty. The wall was projecting the inside of a nondescript flat, with noise from the street below just barely audible—her place, give or take a couple bits of decoration.

“Thought you might want a bite,” he announced. She bookmarked her page and set the novel down and laughed.

“How did you know I was about to die from lack of flavor down here?”

“It’s still English-levels of flavor, but at least it’s better than the nutrition-conscious things they want to feed you.” He handed her a coffee and sat down in the chair next to her seat, using the side table to rest his drink while he got out their sandwiches. “I’d rather feed you a fucking pile of chocolate-covered ants than some of that shit Alessandra says is food.”

“She is a highly-trained medical professional.”

“…who is also an imperfect Human, just like the rest of us Humans, so fuck that.” He took a bit of sandwich and washed it down with coffee. “Go off the deep end yet?”

“I’m trying to relax, but knowing that you’re running around loose is making me lose sleep at night,” she deadpanned. He rolled his eyes and waited until she was drinking her coffee before talking again.

“Kate’s arguing for putting Bismuth in as Frank Hughes’s replacement.”

The spray of coffee that went everywhere was truly glorious to watch, even if it meant that he was going to clean it up afterwards.
In the end, Malcolm was right—it ended up being Fajr Bismuth.

Using her established rank bestowed upon her by Geneva HQ, Kate had assigned the Zygon to head Security and the grumblings immediately began. The entire mainframe knew by the end of the afternoon and that evening the two new departmental heads were sworn in amongst a mixed reaction. Brigadier-Director Stewart went home alone that night, her Lieutenant-Colonel left to mop up a mess left by one of the lingering cumstains that still believed they were going to revive the insurgency movement. The tit looked like a moron in a rubber suit to most folks by midnight, leaving Malcolm to turn off the telly with a smile as he knew that there wouldn’t be a peep on the nightly news that would put UNIT or the Tripartite peace in danger.

Not wanting to head into the panic room to sleep just yet, nor wanting to wander around too much, he went through his department until he found the kitchenette. He made himself a whole pot of tea and found some satsumas and biscuits, hauling everything back to his office on a tray. The quiet of the overnight shifts was permeating in an almost gentle way, he noticed, and it allowed him to settle himself down from how tightly he felt himself wound from work.

Malcolm was peeling his second satsuma while scrolling through a jewelry website on his mobile for a decent ring when he heard the lift door open and someone walk up to his office door. The soft knock against the wooden surface sounded like a fierce pounding in the dead of night, which didn’t surprise him in the slightest.

“Malcolm? You still up?”

“Come on in, Gordon,” he replied, “I’ve got some tea if you want.” The younger man came in and, after following through on getting directions to where a spare mug was, sat down on the sofa across the table from Malcolm. “I thought you worked an afternoon shift today.”

“I did, but then someone didn’t show up for their night shift and I’m staying over until the morning crew gets here,” the lad explained. Malcolm could see the weariness in his face, knowing it was not the first time he’d done this. “I’m just glad that there’s barracks here I can use—can you imagine going all the way to Mum’s and back just to get back in time for the evening slot?”

“Fucking awful, but at least it’s doable under normal circumstances.” Malcolm finished pouring Gordon some tea and shoved some biscuits his way as well. “How long’s your break?”

“Bismuth wants me on-call right now, that way I can wander and not make it nearly as hard a shift,” Gordon said. He shook his head wearily, as though admitting defeat. “I don’t know how to tell Mum, but I think I’m going to move out if this stuff keeps happening to my schedule.”

“Well you’re, what, twenty-six? There’s no shame in staying or leaving, as long as you’re doing it for a reason. You’re not being fucking teased about still staying at home, are you?” Malcolm raised an eyebrow, lowering it again when Gordon shook his head again.

“No—I just really want my own space. Mum lives pretty far into the Green Belt, and I’m considering moving into Greater London proper, maybe even just on the outskirts.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course; besides, you and mum are getting married soon, and you need the space from me as much as I’d need the space from you.”

The penny dropped hard and loud, ringing in Malcolm’s ear as he digested the young man’s words. “Ah… you know about that.”
“She told me a couple days ago while we were out to lunch. I haven’t mentioned it to anyone else in case it’s supposed to be a secret.”

“…for now. We need to finish shit up here before letting loose that we’re engaged. Rajit and Lex don’t even know and I tell them fucking everything.”

“Fiona doesn’t know either; Mum’s waiting until after she graduates to say anything, so she doesn’t take away from it.”

“Good—I’m glad.”

Silence settled over the office, awkwardly edging its way around the two men as they drank their tea. Seconds crawled by, announcing their departure from the clock on the wall, punctuating the quiet with sharp, methodical measurement.

“Why are you marrying Mum?” the lad asked after a while. Malcolm shrugged, wanting to keep the conversation as calm and casual as possible.

“Well, her and I both fucked up in the past, and now we want to do it right,” he said. The younger man, however, did not appear terribly convinced.

“It’s not like you half live at our house anyhow,” Gordon frowned. “You could simply move in and not that much would change. Wouldn’t getting married just complicate things for you at this point?”

“Listen Gordon, I’m thinking about the future here. Your mam and I are going to get old before you know it, and it will take the strain off you, Fiona, and Lex if we’re taking care of one another. Part of that is occupying the same physical space, yeah, but it’s also legal aspects.” Malcolm sighed and ran his fingers through his hair, finishing the motion by pulling his hand over his face. “Fucking forbid, but say in a couple years your mam was in an accident—you could be in a communications blackout while deployed on UNIT business and Fiona’s off taking a semester abroad to visit her family in Italy and the power grid’s down from Sicily to the Alps. Who would be able to approve an operation that could save her life while coordinating getting you two back here? What if the roles were reversed and it was your mam signing off on me while hauling Lex over here from some teaching job overseas she doesn’t even hear about until next year?”

“That’s a fairly drastic thought.”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean it’s a worthless thought. “

“I guess I’m just not used thinking like that,” Gordon admitted. “You sure there’s not a chance this’ll end badly? Both of you are divorced already.” Malcolm exhaled heavily, realizing full-well how awkward of a position Gordon was putting himself in.

“I’m not Loris and she’s not Kelly—we’ve upgraded so drastically we’re riding into this in first fucking class. All I want is to be able to refer to the love of my life as my wife. You understand that much, yeah?”

“Yeah…” The younger man took another biscuit, eating half of it in one bite. “Dad and Erica are happy together, and I hope that you and Mum would be too if you got married, but it’s not like you’ll have kids or anything like that at this point. It just seems like a lot of show for little reason.”

“Would it be a lot of show if you got married one day?”

“Probably not.”
“Then what’s keeping it from being so for me and your mam? She can’t have kids anymore and I don’t have any children of my own to bring into the mix, but the show shouldn’t be a thing just if kids are in the future. If you love someone, really truly love them, then don’t fuck around by playing pretend without anything concrete and legal to back it up. Why do you think I’ve kept my flat this entire time instead of moving in once we started getting serious?”

“…so that Lex can live there rent-free while in uni…?”

“Lex is only an accessory in this situation, not a cause.” Malcolm poured the both of them some more tea before getting up to raid one of his desk drawers for a new sleeve of biscuits he kept for emergencies. “We’ve kept separate homes because we’re still separate people. When we get married, yeah we’ll still be physically two different people, but we’ll lawfully be one and that will be when keeping our things separate will mostly become redundant.”

“Dunno… I guess I just think about the fact that my parents weren’t ever married, yet Mum’s been married and divorced. You’ve been divorced… it doesn’t seem like something that everyone has the knack for.”

“We’ve learned,” Malcolm said firmly. “There won’t be any name-taking or anyone referring to me as their da, but we’re still ready to do this right.”

“Good—I don’t think I can call you ‘Dad’ at this point,” Gordon chuckled. “Maybe if I’d been a kid, but not now.”

“I don’t care what the fuck you call me, so long as you don’t think that this is all for nothing. You know more than I do how special of a woman your mam is, and I don’t want to go a minute more than I have to without being her husband.”

“Bit old-fashioned of you.”

“It’d be even more old-fashioned of you, but if I know you well enough—and I believe I do—there’s a lass out there that’ll catch your eye one day. She’ll drive you so fucking mad that you’ll proudly be her husband, aching from the moment you get engaged until well after you exchange vows.”

“Yeah,” Gordon said. He began to blush, his thoughts going far-off. “I want to end up more like Dad and Erica one day though, not like Mum and Loris.”

“…and I hope you get there.” He finished off the tea in his mug and let out a sort laugh. “You worry a lot for someone so young; I plan on taking good care of your mam, I promise.”

“Thank you,” Gordon nodded quietly. Malcolm put down his mug and went to sit next to Gordon on the sofa, putting his hand on the young man’s shoulder in a show of support.

“I remember what it was like being the man of the house at a young age, with a sister and mam who did whatever the fuck they damn well pleased whether it was dangerous or not,” he said. “My mam had beaus, and I hated every single fucking one of those randy tits that walked through our front door, so don’t feel guilty about thinking I’m some piece of shit edging in on what you worked so hard to keep together.”

“I appreciate it.” Gordon was about to continue when his mobile rang—his new boss—and he answered it immediately. “Yeah?”

A pause.

“Okay, I’ll be down in five.” Ending the call, he stood and stretched the sleepiness that was
beginning to settle in his limbs. “The midnight shift’s starting to come in and Bismuth’s getting a bit of resistance from them. Why the heck did Mum do this?”

“To explicitly make us suffer,” Malcolm joked. He stood and offered his hand to Gordon, which the lad shook. “If you ever have an issue with me, know that we can talk like adults about it, yeah? I am the one ready to pull the remainder of my government favors for you and your sister before we knew what happened after Boat One, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember.” The memory of the one good spot of the Cybercide from a year and a half prior made Gordon smile, pulling Malcolm’s hand in so that he could give him a one-armed hug. “One wrong move and I’ve got an entire department that’ll help me hide what’s left of your body.”

“It’s a deal.” Malcolm returned the hug and let the lad walk off, basking in the good end note to what was otherwise a shitty day. The fact Gordon was not protesting the incoming marriage was proof enough that it was going to be a good thing for all involved, and it was the thought that was able to keep him relaxed as he drifted off to sleep, knowing that all was now going well.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

One more before the end-of-year holidays! Hope everyone has been having, is having, and will have, a great end to the year! See you all in 2019! (If I don’t slap something together outside of TTOU, of course.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The soothing, slow sound of Malcolm’s heartbeat was what Kate first knew as she woke up Sunday morning. They were at her house, both with the day completely off, and had planned on putting aside all they could for the two of them. Things were already off to a wonderful start, with her beau in her bed and the sun shining through the window. She woke him up by gently fondling his lower bits, both still starkers from the previous night’s activities.

“How’s that?”

“I was dreaming that we were cuddling and getting frisky; now I wake up and here we are.” She could feel the weight of his cock as it bulged in his pants and his teeth as he grinned against her skin.

“A shag to start the day, maybe?”

“Let’s get some things done first, then we can see about being unproductive.”

Elated, Malcolm whispered sweet curses in Kate’s ear before kissing her and getting out of bed. Once they were dressed and ready for the day, the two went downstairs into the empty house, with him making his way towards the kitchen and her stopping in her office first to fetch a pad and pen, along with her laptop computer. She found him already making omelettes, his mobile discarded on the kitchen table so as to not distract him.

“Everything doing alright without us headed in to work?” she asked, setting her things down before heading towards the coffee maker.

“Rajit’s been given the go-ahead to get started on her return to form as the department’s regular babysitter for when da’s away, and if it is a true emergency she’d know what to do,” he assured her. Ah yes, that was correct… his PA was cleared from the medbay the previous day. “Themba can handle a day with you away from the office, yeah?”

“We can only hope.” Kate poured herself some coffee and sat down at the table, setting her station up. She had sent off a couple emails from her work account and brought up some websites by the time Malcolm came to the table with their omelettes, setting the plates down carefully. “Themba is already panicking—without Morton around, that Zygon has lost all backbone.”

“The torch Themba carried for Morton was, and still is, fucking creepy,” Malcolm shuddered. With Kate’s assistant having died during the Insurgency, her Zygon duplicate shouldn’t’ve been able to keep using her as an available alias, but everyone’s expectations were shattered when he kept on being her, long after the funeral and when other duplicates were unable to keep their fallen
coworkers’ forms. He shoved some omelette in his mouth and began talking around it. “Overreacting to something, I hope?”

“As always—if the panic is not from second-guessing. Everything will be fine.” As she ate and drank her coffee, she began a quick list on the pad of paper, ready to begin. “Alright: where do you want to have the service?”

“The back garden’s fine,” he said. “I was thinking late September—it’s usually fairly nice in late September.”

“Fairly nice? Do you really want to settle for ‘fairly nice’?”

“Okay, fine, it’s fucking fantastic around then—not too rainy yet and neither too hot nor too cold—and I was looking at airfare seeing where we can get a decent honeymoon to without much hassle and it seems like it tapers off around then as long as we’re not headed towards Pisstoberfest.”

“That’s better,” she chuckled. “Now what sort of flowers do you want to plant in the garden beds? What we plant now will determine what people see in September.”

“Fuck… erm… let’s look at the store first and see what’s there. Can’t believe it’s already fucking June and the flower beds are emptier than an MP’s skull.”

“Cute; thought about a color scheme?”

“Love, this is the second wedding for both of us—I don’t care what the fuck color scheme we use as long as it’s not a fucking rainbow. That’s too much color at once for anyone or anything.”

“Fair enough; a monochrome theme it is. Before we get into too much designing, do you know who you want to invite on your side?”

“Yeah, give me the pad.” She did and he scribbled on it quickly before giving it back.

‘Lex, Mam, Marcia,’ it read.

“This is it?” Kate wondered as she stared at the list. “I thought you were going to write down the members of your extended family that you want at the wedding. There’s no inappropriate relative hiding on my side, but I didn’t think there were nothing on yours as well.”

“Just me niece, mam, and sister,” he shrugged. He downed some coffee and continued to eat his omelette. “There’s only Mam’s side to start, and with her sister having died back when the fucking Luftwaffe came ‘round, I’d probably have to go back to granddad’s granddad before I have a link to any surviving connections, and they’re likely in whatever county he left behind, completely unaware of the back-and-forth our two islands have had over the centuries.”

“…and what you said about not knowing your father’s side was serious by the look of it.”

“Mam saw a scientist she thought was worth the higher degrees and a decent shag; nine months later I plopped out.” He shook his head before shoving the last of his breakfast in his mouth. “Marcia was old enough to remember him, but she can’t recall anyone coming around then, so I guess either they weren’t together for that long or it was a workplace fling that accidentally had more consequences than Mam first thought. Her da—an on-loan East German scientist back when that was a big cunting deal—was a workplace fling if I remember correctly how she pieced it all together.”

“Your mum lived life dangerously in more ways than one, didn’t she?”
“Considering most of the people who called her a fucking whore back then have single mams for granddaughters now, I think we both know who won in that bit of social evolution. At least I know she had a type.”

“Don’t you even know his name though?”

“No—Mam never learned his name because she never really needed it, so she put down a false name and the first place in Ireland she could think of that wasn’t Belfast or Dublin on my birth certificate—she always said it’s completely made up, put there so me Granny and Granddad didn’t fucking pressure her into leaving Scotland in order to find him after the mess that was bringing Marcia into the world on her own. She didn’t even know I was coming until well after they parted ways and she forgot who he was, so the urge to hunt him down was nil, and that’s not even getting into how he never attempted to contact her after that. I played it safe and never looked into him; didn’t want what I found to bar me from anything career-wise.”

“…but family medical history, other potential siblings, a father figure…? Didn’t you want to know about any of that?”

“Not really,” Malcolm said. He took both their plates, now empty, and put them in the dishwasher before getting them more coffee. “He never knew about me, at least to my knowledge, so why bother? For all I know, I’m the secret bastard of some former lord disenfranchised by the Free State, whose heirs would be horrified to know I even exist, tarnishing the otherwise spotless reputation of their dearest dad and granddad who they remember as the next closest thing to Saint Patrick.”

“With your attitude, more like the love child of a teen participant from the Easter Rising, always challenging the authority a bit much for his own good,” Kate chuckled, “…and to think that your lack of definitive parentage never came to bite you in the arse while in politics.”

“Say two words about Mam’s honor and she’s the one executing gag orders,” he smirked, sitting back down at the table. He ran his stockinged foot up her calf, which brought out a smile from her. Bringing down his voice, he allowed his gaze to lose focus, remembering days long past. “Wee Malcolm might’ve thought about wanting a da once or twice, but he figured early on that it was better not knowing instead of having a father like was normal in the neighborhood. Me lack of an arse is lucky I never grew up terrified at the sound of a belt.”

“Didn’t stop at regular punishment, did it?”

“Some deserved every hit they got and more, don’t get me wrong, but most didn’t. It’s those that didn’t deserve the belt back then—or just the amount they got—that made it so that the kids who deserve it now don’t even have the threat of the very thing they need the most.” He shuddereded at the very thought, then going and shaking his head. “If the nips’ stories are true, then there’s some raging arseholes that could have been lessened to just mild annoyances had they learned properly.”

“Alright, alright, I digress,” she said. Kate held her hands up in defeat, figuring it was best to put the topic aside for the time being, as they were currently getting nowhere with the things she actually wanted to cover. “Less depressing subject: how about surnames? I take it you have no objections to me still being a Stewart?”

“We can’t have kids anymore and yours are both grown—we can informally be the Tucker-Stewarts or Stewart-Tuckers as a single entity, but we’re both too entrenched in our lives and careers to be anything other than Mister Tucker and Missus Stewart, don’t cha think?” He gave her a flirty wink, which caused her to laugh unexpectedly.

“Is this you admitting you might’ve been Malcolm Stewart in another life?” she teased.
“Love, I likely would have become *Malcolm Lethbridge-Stewart* if that’s what you wanted.”

“Doesn’t have the same ring to it.”

“It would if you were wearing one.”

They both laughed, taking delight in the daft joke. Kate leaned in and kissed the back of Malcolm’s jaw, sending a jolt through him that made his hair *and* cock stand of their own volition.

It was time to get seriously unproductive.

The following day felt much like most others as the couple went into work. Traffic was fucked, their mobiles were blowing up every other cunting minute, and things were in a general state of shit as they walked into Mainframe UK and saw how tired everyone seemed. They were going to catch back up to pre-Insurgency levels one day, yet neither saw it as being any day soon.

“Alright, see you later, love,” Malcolm said, pressing a kiss to Kate’s cheek. “I’m on Raven Room today.”

“Enjoy yourself, and don’t forget we’re on for tonight.”

“Lukewarm delivered pizza and Fantas at my place—got it.” Malcolm then split off from Kate’s path and disappeared amongst their coworkers.

Now that she was unencumbered by needing to allow for walking with someone else, Kate was able to get to her office quicker than if her fiancé had gone with her to the lift. She went straight up to her office, seeing signs that Themba was in, but not around, and sat down at her desk. After double and triple-checking her messages and overall work load to see if she was free, however temporarily, she opened her computer and brought up the access page to the UNIT employee database.

*Search: Tucker, Malcolm Petair Alexander*

It was difficult to remember everything about Malcolm that had been in his dossier the first time they met when she broke him out of prison—it felt so long ago—though it appeared as though everything was there in the computer file. They had a brief synopsis of every single thing he had done nearly since primary school, done with disturbing precision that was only fitting for an agency like theirs. She could see there was information on everyone in his family going back to varying clans from Scotland and Ireland alike, exposing familial relationships Kate wasn’t sure even Malcolm knew about, yet when she clicked on the singular file for his father’s family… nothing.

*Name: UNKNOWN*

*Place of Residence: UNKNOWN*

*Occupation: UNKNOWN*

*Place of Birth: UNKNOWN*

*Age: UNKNOWN*

*Other Family: UNKNOWN*

*NO EVIDENCE OF CONTACT, MEANINGFUL OR OTHERWISE; PRESUMED DEAD*

Her stomach churned guiltily as she stared at the screen. There truly was nothing there, at least
nothing that was more than what she already knew, and the thought of it made her uneasy. Kate knew that although, yes, she was aware of precisely what she was getting when she accepted his proposal, she couldn’t simply allow this to linger more ominously than their ex-spouses. She accepted that they were in love and that, yes, there was never going to be a level-headed time for them to get married and they might as well get it over with, but there was this thing—this nagging, ugly feeling—that if this was not taken care of, something related could threaten their marriage down the line more than either of them could fathom.

Besides, there was mainframe protocol to consider.

It took about twenty minutes, but Kate eventually gathered together the necessary information—everything she had gleaned about Malcolm’s origins—and put the page’s worth of scant intel in a folder that she took up to the door to her office.

“Themba?” She watched as the Zygon approached from the empty lobby’s desk, using Morton’s borrowed face to exude trepidation. “I have a project for you.”

“Yes, ma’am?” Kate held out the folder and waited until it was in her assistant’s hands.

“This is a secret project, one with utmost confidentiality,” she explained. “Malcolm’s background check is incomplete and I need you to finish it up for me.”

“…but ma’am, how has he been working here for years, after he worked all that time in Number 10, without it being complete?”

“That’s part of what I need to know,” Kate said. “I’ve been able to get some generalized information about the missing components; everything I have, as well as what I require, is in there.”

Themba glanced at the inside of the folder, frowning. “Ma’am? Are you sure I can do this?”

“I don’t see why not; you have the appropriate clearance and it keeps me from having a conflict in interest.”

“This isn’t related to your impending marriage to Mister Tucker, is it?”

“Nonsense—that would be misuse of UNIT funds and faculty. The fact may have been brought to my attention during wedding planning talk, yes, but I cannot knowingly have a departmental head that has not passed the full background check. My assumption is that Moore’s staff went by the government’s check, not probing further as would have been normal had Mister Tucker been hired in from the private sector, and although that should be satisfactory since the base check was provided by the government, there is also the fact that he’s the only one of my departmental heads whose history has not been investigated through all eight great-grandparents. I can’t let this fact potentially leak in the future, with the rumor being that he only got away with it by sleeping with me. Do we need that, Themba?”

The Zygon’s head shook slowly. “I guess not.”

“Then please complete the search so that we can gather whether or not there needs to be more digging or if what we have there is a complete dead-end that satisfies protocol.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Themba closed the door and Kate sat down at her desk again, turning her chair so that she could see out into the atrium. It was going to be tricky, getting things in place so that Malcolm could investigate his paternal origins, though it was also going to be risky above all else. She had no idea what had
kept her fiancé from looking into his background, but at least she knew that it was not entirely a sore subject amongst Tuckers due to the simple fact that Marcia had went and looked into her own father. With any luck, she was doing the right thing, giving Malcolm access to something he avoided before due to untold consequences.

There was nothing to fear now, she knew. The only thing there was to do for the time being was wait, and considering how long it took Malcolm to propose, she was exceptionally good at that.

Chapter End Notes

For anyone who’s not here because of TTOI, I should probably explain that Malcolm’s family situation is all over the place when it comes to what fanon dictates. We know that he’s at least close to his mom based on the Missing DoSaC Files tie-in book, and somewhere out there’s missing footage that involves Malcolm ripping into whomever it was an ex-wife left him for, but most other things tend to be up in the air. This includes siblings, whether a father was in the picture and if said father was a decent man, any sort of nieces and/or nephews... it’s established by the end of s4 that he’s either got nothing or he’s pushed everyone away enough to be estranged to the point of any familial relationship being meaningless. All of this lends itself to a multiple choice past sort of deal that ends up being very interesting to sift through. It is common in fanon to give him an abusive dad (so as to give an explanation for his verbal tirades and posturing, especially if said fic also interprets Malcolm as gay/bi (adding a whole other layer to things)) and at least one sister. I personally have done at least three different versions of his family backstory now (and likely am nowhere near done), and if you haven’t gotten into TTOI fic in general, it’s kinda fun to see how other people utilize this freedom they have to write whatever the frick they want. Some don’t even touch it, and that’s perfectly fine (sometimes I don’t either), but those of us who do usually put a ton of thought into it and then accidentally end up showing off said work in chapters like this one.
Chapter Notes

It feels like I've been working on only TTOU so far this year, writing and planning and whatnot, and hopefully it means I can get to a bunch of neat things this year! Enjoy, and have a good 2019!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To say that Malcolm was irritated was an understatement if there fucking was one. He put the cardboard box down atop Gordon’s bed and gave the younger man across the room an exasperated look—the mobile in his pocket was shrieking horror-violins whilst buzzing more furiously than any vibrator he’d had the pleasure of coming across.

“Just don’t answer it,” Gordon suggested.

“It’s Scarfy—I give her fifteen minutes to call back with a real emergency, and that instantly gets settled while we’re on the phone,” Malcolm replied. He rotated his upper body at the waist, back and forth, in order to loosen it up again. The violins stopped and he sighed in defeat. “Fuck, don’t tell your mam but I think she’s turning me into an old man.”

“Consider her told,” the younger man teased. The two took their boxes downstairs and out to the hired van that was waiting for them, partially filled with other boxes of Gordon’s things that had slowly accumulated over the years. They looked at the room that was left in the van and attempted to gauge if they needed to make another trip.

Ultimately, they decided to fuck it and got in the van, heading over to the cozy cottage that Gordon had just bought the week before. The young man had enlisted his father to assist him in finding the house in a leafy neighborhood in Sutton, while his future stepfather had volunteered to help move in during their unexpectedly coordinated two days off. With Kate and Fiona in Italy playing nice with the latter’s paternal grandparents, it was the two of them in the middle of the work week, right on the cusp of July, moving the house of one so that the other could move in later without guilt.

“Not that I’m being critical or a fucking prick or anything, but this is not what I imagined you getting by far,” Malcolm said as they pulled into the drive. It was nowhere near as grand as Kate’s place, yet the “cottage” was more of a proper house—still rather large for a single lad without so much as a dog to run around the garden.

“It’s a future investment, mostly,” Gordon shrugged. He parked the van and the two got out to begin checking on the cargo. “The way I see it: I lucked out in the job department and can afford it, I’m close to Dad in Surrey for when he starts to go, Mum’s not far either, I should be able to write off a hefty bit of what it will take to modernize the place, and the schools around here are supposed to be really good to boot.”

“Schools? What does a lad like you care about the catchment he lives in?” Malcolm took a medium box while Gordon took a smaller one under one arm, using his free hand to unlock the house. They put the boxes on the empty kitchen table and began to open the windows in order to combat the house’s musty smell. “You thinkin’ about this being where you plant roots?”
“It’s a very good possibility, yeah,” Gordon nodded. He moved into the sitting room and continued opening windows. “I’ve considered asking for a transfer up to the mainframe’s Glasburgh branch, but I’m not going unless I get a direct order from higher-ups. No one can deny the fact we’ve got a lot more UNIT-related issues that pop up around here than there.”

“That’s truer than we all care to fucking admit,” Malcolm shrugged. He put his hand on the wood of a doorjamb, able to feel how terribly old it was, and furrowed his brow in thought. They were out of the range of many an urban renewal project—so far it was absurd they were still in Greater London—and the thought Gordon now owned a potential piece of history instead of a modernized flat was eerie. “When was this place built?”

“Best guess the realtor could give me was Late Victorian at the latest—there were some houses around here that were built then, but there were a couple boxes of records lost during World War II and one of them had a bunch of deeds and other legal work…”

“…and this was one of the affected properties.”

“Yeah.” Gordon pointed towards the mantel and the photos that sat atop it. “Earliest picture’s from the 1930s—the kid there is the last owner.” Malcolm looked, seeing that there was indeed a small child standing outside the house with what appeared to be his wizened grandparents; the hedge that towered alongside the garden’s edge was only knee-high, distinctly showing the passage of time. There were other photographs sitting on the ledge, along with some small painted portraits, a couple of which caught the older man’s eye via the bright tartan the subject was wearing.

“They were Scottish,” he noted. He picked up a small painting of a boy barely out of his teens that felt more haunted than he would ever admit. After looking it over for a few moments alone, Gordon came over to see which one it was. The younger man nodded—he knew the story.

“That’s an earlier version of the old man in the photo, Colin McCrimmon. He moved to this area from around Sutherland in… I think they said right after World War I… could have been right before. Anyhow, the photos and small paintings came with the house and it’s in the will of his grandson, Robert, that they stay.”

“Huh. You figure out if they’re a relation to the McCrimmon?”

“Not sure yet, but it wouldn’t surprise me,” Gordon said. They both knew the surname via briefings of associates of the Doctor, as well as stories from the Brig’s days about the Highlander in-question, and no more needed to be said between them.

Speak of the fucking Devil.

Out in the back garden, a wheezing, grinding noise caught the two men’s attention. They looked and, sure enough, the TARDIS parked itself on the lawn, not too far from where a broken-down wooden swing sat. The door opened and the Doctor walked out, floppy hair and braces and that disturbingly young face and square jaw, followed by both Scarfies in their scarf-wearing best.

“Fuck,” Malcolm grumbled. “What now?”

“Might as well at least humor them,” Gordon said. He opened the back door and they went outside, greeting their guests. “Doctor, what a surprise; it’s been a while.”

“Not for me, but this face isn’t very good at doing things in-order,” the Doctor admitted. “Malcolm, yes?”

“Yes.”
"I need to borrow our young Lethbridge-Stewart for a moment here, if you don’t mind."

"Actually, I do mind. Considering this is our day off and we’re in the middle of—"

"What is it?" Gordon asked, cutting Malcolm off. He ignored the glare he got, as he knew that he was in a tight spot no matter how things played out.

"I need a Lethbridge-Stewart because I’ve run into an old mate and thought it would be nice to take him around for a spin through time and space like the old days. We were wandering around for a bit without trouble, but now he won’t go back to his point in the timestream."

"That sounds like your problem," Malcolm mentioned. "What’s the lad got to do with it?"

"This particular mate of mine will listen to a Lethbridge-Stewart. He respected Alistair immensely, not to mention has Stewarts in his own family, but I can’t seem to get a handle on the Brigadier himself’s timeline."

"We tried to help, as a representative of UNIT," Left Scarfy said, with Right Scarfy finishing, "but it was no use. He won’t budge."

"Really…?" Gordon groaned. The Doctor clapped his hands together and rubbed his palms.

"Does that mean you’ll come?"

"Fine… just let’s bring Malcolm so that I know you won’t stall when it comes to bringing me back here," Gordon said. The Time Lord shrugged at that.

"I’ve kidnapped people against their will before…"

"Not those who need to be on-call to report back to UNIT at a moment’s notice at all times, who need to be in a specific point in their timestream in order to do their job properly, who also don’t like being outside of their proper time-and-space coordinates."

Knowing that Gordon had him there, the Doctor nodded and motioned towards the TARDIS, wanting his guests to head in before him. Once they were all in, he went straight towards the console and began scurrying around in order to pilot the craft.

"Let’s make this quick," Malcolm hissed at Gordon. "I wanted to have dinner ready for your mam when she gets home tomorrow night… and that’s after the two-day job that’s moving most of your stuff from her place and your da’s basement."

"I’ll do my best," the lad replied. They touched down and the door opened on its own, inviting the occupants out.

"Doctor? What year is this?" a Scarfy wondered.

"It’s not 2014, but it’s not that far off," the Time Lord replied. "We’re not going to stick out, if that’s what you’re worried about. Things have looked much weirder."

"How reassuring," Malcolm deadpanned. He and Gordon then followed the Scarfies out of the TARDIS, the Doctor close behind. They seemed to be in the residential area of a normal, contemporary British town, nothing too extraordinary about it, if only off by a few years. They eventually found a park where there was a lone man sitting on a bench, looking out on the pond. He was so deep in this thoughts that he did not see the TARDIS contingent approach him.
As Malcolm saw the man close up, something in the back of his head knew that something wasn’t completely normal. The man’s presence felt supremely old—fucking ancient if he had to venture a guess—despite the fact that he only looked a bit younger than his mam, and was dressed as though he was going to a local Highland Games, the same tartan pattern used in the portrait in Gordon’s new house as the basis for his belted plaid. He was leaning forward, resting on the pommel of a sword, looking so very worn and emotionally spent that it was enough to twist Malcolm’s stomach.

It was his eyes, though, that caught Malcolm’s attention for the fucking worst. They were the eyes of a man who had seen horrors beyond countless imaginations, who was in mourning for everything and everyone he ever held dear. Those eyes knew more than he would ever fathom and it shook him to his fucking core.

“Jesus fuck,” he swore quietly. “He’s the fucking spit of the man from the photos.”

“What man?” the nearest Scarfy wondered.

“Talking to m’self—fuck off.”

“Jamie…? Jamie, is that you…?” Gordon knelt down in front of the old man and looked in his eyes.

“I don’t know anymore,” the man muttered. Malcolm felt an odd sensation in his head, as though the words he heard were not the ones that were spoken. He turned towards the Doctor and scowled.

“What the fuck’s happening…?” he asked.

“Oh, that must be the translation microbes kicking in for the first time for you,” the Doctor said. “Jamie speaks Gaelic natively, as well as some Scots. Even if you knew their modern forms, it still wouldn’t be the same thanks to linguistic evolution and the microbes would kick in—they certainly are handy little pieces of tech.”

“He’s speaking Gaelic right now? That’s fucking insane.”

“Then you wouldn’t be able to believe what I’m speaking right now.” Malcolm cringed inwardly and turned his attention over towards the old man, who was looking as though he was trying to not cry.

“They’re all gone,” he said. “Just up in a flash.”

“Who’s gone?” Gordon asked.

“They all are.”

“Jamie, that doesn’t tell me anything.”

“Constable at two o’clock,” a Scarfy said. Sure enough, there was a police officer approaching the group, looking very concerned as to why there was a small crowd in the park.

“What’s going on?” he asked. The Scarfy who had noticed him stepped forward, putting herself between the officer and the group.

“Please excuse me, but we’re attempting to handle the situation,” she said. “This man is suffering though severe dementia and has run away from his care home thanks to the nurses having their backs turned at the right moment—his son and grandson are here to assist us in the situation.” The constable eyed the sword nervously, causing her to let out a fake laugh. “Don’t worry—it’s not sharp, let alone real. It was a wall-hanging piece, just for decoration, though we have no idea how he
“unbolted it…” She was able to lead off the constable, allowing the remainder of the group to continue.

“Why don’t we discuss this in the TARDIS, hmm?” Gordon continued. “We’re upsetting the police while sitting here, making it look like we’re trying to mob you and make a scene. Don’t want that, now do we?”

“I’m glad that Kirsty’s gone; she’d be crying so hard she’d die of grief,” Jamie said.

“Jamie, come on,” the Doctor insisted. “We can get you some tea and—”

“Why should I listen to you?!”

“Will you listen to me?” Gordon asked, his voice level.

“Not if I don’t know who you are, laddie.”

“I am Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart.”

“…Lethbridge-Stewart…? You the Brig’s lad?”

“He’s my grandfather, and he always spoke highly of you, Jamie McCrimmon, piper and warrior for Clan McLaren.” Malcolm could just barely hear it, but he could hear Gordon apply a soft lilt to his voice, enough to give the impression that he might’ve had just as broad an accent as the man at one point. “Now let’s pop back in the TARDIS, yeah? Get you back home.”

“That’s a tall order.”

“Now why is that?”

There was a long pause, where Jamie was unable to answer. He held back tears as he attempted to find his words, all while glaring at the Doctor, disgusted by his presence.

“You get away from me, you imposter,” he spat. “You’re not the Doctor.”

“I’m the same man, just a little bit down the line…”

“No, you’re not!” Jamie stood, using his sword to prop himself up. “The Doctor wouldn’t want to put me back there! Put me in that… that… mess!” Malcolm could feel his brain twinge again—Jamie had definitely not said anything analogous to the word “mess”.

“The world’s a giant mess, more terrible than we’d like to admit,” he said, stepping forward. Jamie looked at him, confused.

“Who are you?”

“That doesn’t matter—what matters is that we get you out of here soon as we can,” Malcolm replied. He saw the expression on Jamie’s face change slightly as he talked, curious at the newcomer.

“Who are you then, lad?”

“My name is Malcolm and I am not only going to be Gordon’s stepfather soon in our timeline, but I’m also a coworker over at UNIT,” he explained. “I’m not keen on doing this, but what I do know is that this right here is not your place in time, meaning we’ve got to get you out of here.”

“My place in time is dead,” Jamie said bitterly. “My house, where my wife and I raised our wee
bairns, is burned to the ground. When we wouldn’t leave, they took my youngest daughter and defiled her in front of me, and we were told we were the lucky ones, being related to the chief. My children are scattered, my home is ashes, my wife long-passed on; I’ve got nothing to show for the years I spent both at home and through time and space… barely even a memory! I’m a bloody ghost! It’s not just me being old because I’ve had trouble remembering traveling with the Doctor, and Victoria, and Zoe, and Ben and Polly, and even the Brig and all the lads over at UNIT, ever since I was put back in the Highlands, and now even that’s barred from me.”

No one said a word, Jamie’s tirade washing over them. For them, the Highland Clearances were a long-done, historical thing that could no longer be pinned on a living face, yet for Jamie… it was different. He had just lived it, and not only that, but it broke him to witness it. His life was in tatters and there was nothing now any of them could do about it. The only sound that occurred between them was the beeping of a device in Osgood’s pocket, which she took out and glanced at.

“Mr. McCrimmon, we have to return you back to your timestream now, or else your molecular composition is going to begin deteriorating,” she said. “There’s been too much done to your body and mind over the years to keep this up for much longer.” Jamie stared at her, the words she spoke having no real effect on him. “If you stay here, then you will die.”

“Then let me, lassie,” he replied. “I’ve got nothing to live for now.”

“…but doesn’t your daughter need you?” Gordon asked. “Even if your other children had long-moved away, she was still there at least, right?”

“What good of a father am I if I can’t even protect me own bairns from those jerks who think they can take and evict us from the very land that we bled for and died protecting?!” Another off translation.

“Mr. McCrimmon, please control yourself.”

“I don’t care what you, or anyone else, thinks about me,” he snarled. “I’m done dealing with those Anglo devils and the Scots fools they bought for my land and livelihood.”

“Jamie, this isn’t like you,” Gordon gently scolded. He tried to hug the man to get him to calm down, yet the distraction he caused allowed the Doctor to sneak a hand in and tap Jamie on the forehead, putting him into a deep sleep, which allowed his body to crumple into the younger man’s arms.

“It’s a pity that’s what it came to,” the Doctor said.

“What the fuck did you do?” Malcolm wondered.

“I’m a touch-telepath, and that allows me to flip the switch in people’s brains that put them to sleep, essentially,” the Time Lord replied. He and Malcolm helped maneuver Jamie so that Gordon could carry him on his back, them finishing just in time for the Other Scarfy to return.

“I give it about another five minutes before he realizes I wasn’t telling the truth and we are in bigger trouble,” she declared.

“Good thing we’re ready to go then,” Gordon replied.

The group quickly made their way back to the TARDIS and put the spaceship into drive, navigating through the time vortex until they were where Jamie had last been in his timestream. All four UNIT employees went with the Doctor as he exited the ship, walking into a barn that appeared to be straight off the top of a biscuit tin. It was light outside, showing that they were in a bustling town
rather than the country, and there was no one there save for a woman around Gordon’s age who was brushing one of the many horses. She saw them and her eyes went wide.

“I’ve gone mad as Papa,” she said to no one in particular.

“Are you Kirsty McCrimmon, daughter of James and named for your mother?” the Doctor asked.

“Who wants to know?”

“The ones who need to know where to put him,” Gordon chimed in. The woman then noticed her father resting on the stranger’s back and came out from behind the horse in order to rush over to his side. They could now see that she was well-pregnant, enough to strain her gait into more of a quick waddle than a run.

“Papa, what happened?!” she asked, holding his face in one hand as she brushed his hair away with the other. “Papa, wake up, please!”

“He’s only sleeping,” the Doctor assured her. “He had a bit of a mishap, nothing more. A few hours and he should be well again.”

“Then bring him here,” Kirsty said. She tugged at Gordon’s elbow and brought him into one of the stalls, where there were blankets laid out over the hay and what appeared to be their scant personal belongings.

“You live here…?” an Osgood realized aloud. Kirsty made sure that her father was down and covered in a blanket before answering.

“We’re in Alloway trying to find one of my brothers—we lost our home to a fire and none of the addresses survived, so we don’t know where to look. I’ve been searching in my spare time, but as you can see that’s not very often thanks to how we’re living.” She looked at the visitors and began to tense up; there was something that told her that they knew she was not telling the complete truth.

“Where has my father been this past week?”

“It’s all my fault, I’m sorry,” the Doctor apologized. He started to bow, only for the TARDIS to make a whirring noise, one that could only have been interpreted as irritated. “Oh, what is it now…?” He walked back into the ship, no one else following him.

“Nella, Trona, are we able to use Wifi via the TARDIS?” Malcolm asked.

“Of course,” one Scarfy said. “It will adjust the temporal coordinates to compensate for our home era, but it should work all the same.”

“Good; your mobiles are better than anything on the market… get a census listing for the area as close to this year as possible.” The Scarfies whipped out their mobiles and immediately went about their work. Kirsty stared at them, wondering what it was they could have possibly been doing.

“We’re going to help you find your brother,” Gordon explained. Kirsty blushed as she tried to look at the two men in front of her, but was unable to do so.

“You would do that?”

“You’re searching for your brother after recently losing your home, while caring for your senile father, and are about to pop from the looks of it,” Malcolm shrugged. He could clearly see she was smitten with him and Gordon both—they were likely the first men aside from her father to treat her with any sort of decency since her home was destroyed, the thought of which made him want her to
be with her family even more. “Are you certain he’ll be able to help you?”

“Jem was always fond of me, and as the eldest, he should know about what happened to our family home, and Papa, and is likely to have the addresses for the rest of our brothers and sisters. His eldest should be about marrying age too, so this little one might not be lonely in the family after all.” Her hands found her stomach and she rested both atop of it, her expression growing dark and worried. “It’s been hard these past months…”

“We can’t do much, but we can at least bring you to where you need to go,” Malcolm said.

“I got it!” a Scarfy gasped. “There’s a James Colin McRimmon who lives in Kincardine with his wife and some children, the oldest of whom is a girl who should be around nineteen…”

“…and it appears that we’re able get there in about an hour if we leave now,” the Other Scarfy finished. She then squinted at the screen, took off her glasses, and rubbed them on her shirt before putting them back on. “My mistake—more like two, maybe three, hours of a walk, assuming we can navigate the streets decently.”

“Good,” Malcolm said. He then snapped his fingers as he pointed at Kirsty. “Is anything in this barn yours aside from the things in this stall?”

“The horse I was brushing, and a small cart in the back behind the barn…”

“C’mon then; let’s get it loaded up,” Malcolm said. He and Gordon then went outside and got the cart, pulling it into the barn when they realized it was light enough to pull between them. The Scarfies helped Kirsty gather her belongings from the stall, working around the sleeping Jamie, who barely stirred at all.

Everyone worked quickly and, before long, Gordon and Malcolm were placing Jamie in the cart while the Osgoods were helping Kirsty up atop the horse. She had just been given the reins when the Doctor walked back into the barn; his sleeves were rolled up, his face smeared in grease, and goggles now resting atop his head. He blinked at the sight, seemingly attempting to remember how long he had been gone.

“I see you found a lead while I was taking care of the TARDIS,” he noticed.

“My sister and I are going to walk her to her brother’s house,” a Scarfy said. “Take Malcolm and Gordon back to where we got them and we’ll call you with the pen.” She took what seemed like a normal pen from her coat pocket and pressed a button on the side—the end of the pen and the light atop the TARDIS glowed in unison.

“Sounds like a plan,” the Doctor nodded.

“Thank you, everyone, for bringing back my father and using those thin bricks to figure out where my brother is,” Kirsty said. “I caught Miss Nella and Miss Trona’s names, but you gentlemen are…?”

“Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart.”

“Malcolm Tucker.”

“The Doctor.” He stepped forward and took her hand in his, kissing the back of it. As he did so, her eyes glazed over and she turned her attention forward, now completely silent.

“What did you do?” a Scarfy asked.
“She won’t remember us after she sleeps tonight,” he said. “Jamie won’t either—with any luck, they will be able to live out their lives and never think of us ever again. If she tries to remember this, everything will be too muddled for her to recall properly, and she will assume that it was from the excitement over her father figuring out where her brother lives.”

“I hope you’re right,” Scarfy said. The two then began to lead the horse and cart out of the barn; once they were out of sight, the Doctor turned on his heel and walked straight into the TARDIS. His two guests followed him back, though things immediately took a turn as Malcolm took hold of the Doctor’s lapels and slammed him up against the TARDIS wall, his brow furrowed in rage.

“What the ever-living fuck did you do that for?!” he snarled.

“Do what?”

“You knowingly dropped that man in a future personal Hell and then take that approach to putting him back when he didn’t want to go?! I thought we were along to convince him, not distract him long enough to wipe his memory! Now it’s not only his, but hers as well!”

“Jamie has always told me that if we ever met again in the future, that I was to erase his memory and all trace of our adventures,” the Doctor explained.

“…and it doesn’t take a genius to figure out that he doesn’t speak for his daughter,” Malcolm replied.

He let go of the alien’s jacket and stepped away. “Get me the fuck out of here, you cunt.”

“No shit; I wonder how much time we lost on that fucking time-sink,” Malcolm scowled. They went inside and checked their watches against the clock on the wall.

“Fuck—all ten minutes went by after all that?”

“I don’t agree with what we just did either, but you have to admit that sometimes he’s able to get things done properly… like bringing us back within a reasonable time frame.”

“It was all the fucking ship’s doing and you know it.” His mobile buzzed again and it was a Scarfy, letting him know that not only were both of them back in the correct time and place, but that they also had just finished having the.. distinction of being impromptu midwives for Kirsty. “Looks like we’re all back, and Nella and Trona got the short end of the stick.” He showed a photo to Gordon of what he assumed was the Scarfy not sending the text, her shirtsleeves rolled up and blood all over the front of her sleeveless jumper, looking more exhausted and terrified than either man had ever seen.

“Sweet Lord, do I want to know…?!?”

“No really; now let’s get moving if we’re going to get another trip in before the roads are fucked.”

They then hurried to unload the rest of the van and drive it back to Kate’s; the sooner they were able
to go, the sooner they could avoid the afternoon traffic and the better off they’d both be.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: So you know how Donna Noble was left by the Doctor unable to remember her adventures with him, and that Clara Oswald nearly went through the same thing? They’re not the only characters that have had that happen to them. Zoe Heroit and Jamie McCrimmon had that happen to them back in the 1960s so that they could be placed back in their original time streams because womp womp Time Lords are dicks.

HOWEVER, Jamie’s time stream involves being a Highlander during the Clearances, something that Scotland still deals with the effects of to this day (especially in rural areas), so even though there was a chance his particular community wouldn’t’ve been affected until after he was gone, it cannot be completely ruled out and if you’ve seen Jamie McCrimmon then you know something like the Clearances would fucking devastate him (the wholesale evictions (not just relocations) mostly didn’t occur until later in the Clearances, but I imagine Jamie would have been amongst the few that rebelled/resisted and got the boot early). This story has him being from around somewhere north of the span between Callander and Crieff, the former in Stirling Council area and the latter in Perth and Kinross Council area, putting Jamie right on the boundary of the two, as well as on the southeast edge of the Highlands. Why? Purely because I like a particular MacLaren tartan better than the MacCrimmon from Skye (and, alternatively, it’s about where this map (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/78/Scottish_clan_map.png) puts the MacLarens, even though I know this is far from comprehensive, but whatever).
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

I've had this written and sitting in the wings since about mid-December. Having chapters prewritten makes me itchy, even though I've got at least a month's worth after this ready.

Kate paused, allowing Fiona and Lex time to process the news. Both her daughter and niece took no time at all to gasp excitedly as they heard of the engagement, the rest of the busy, distracted restaurant paying them no heed.

“Wait, really?! You’re getting married?! Finally?!”

“I’d prefer if you didn’t put it that way, but yes, I am,” Kate said. She and the girls were sitting on the patio roof of a café that was more or less central to their day’s business, enjoying their lunch. While she and Lex were on break from work, Fiona was there waiting on an interview at the university her father had gotten her a spot in, making it so that they all could meet up and gave Kate the opportunity to break them the news together.

“Since when was this?” Lex wondered. “Uncle Malcolm hasn’t told me anything about the two of you getting married; I thought he was acting stupid just by being happy the two of you were still alive.”

“That’s part of why we’re getting married, so you aren’t totally off the mark,” Kate replied. “It won’t be a big show—he and I are past all that—and we didn’t tell either of you until now because we wanted you to enjoy your graduation and you to not ruin the surprise on accident.” She looked from Fiona to Lex, glad they were taking it so calmly. “So? What do you think?”

“I think it’s the best graduation present that I’ve ever gotten,” Fiona said. She took a sip of her coffee and shook her head in near disbelief. “I’ll finally have a proper dad, not Gordy or Nonno or Granddad attempting to fill the void.”

“Stop talking about your father as though he’s dead,” Kate scolded.

“I have to side with her on this one, Aunt Kate,” Lex cut in, getting right into using the new honorific. “The words we use matter here: to say that someone is one’s dad is to imply familiarity, adoration, and a mutual form of respect. Mister Ferrero might be Fiona’s father, yes, but the time for him to step in and be her dad is long past. The same can mostly be said for mine, though at least he can say that he was aware of his limitations and left before things became too messy…”

“…whereas my father never really was a proper dad and just sort of saw me as a trophy—visitation right as a way to stick it to you,” Fiona finished. Kate stared at the girls and furrowed her brow.

“Where in the hell did you scrounge up that sort of thing?”

“I took more than a couple pysch and sociology classes before I realized what I wanted was to go into political science,” Lex shrugged. “It helps with my field more than most would think, and I made enough friends to be able to get second opinions easily.” She chewed idly on a chip, shrugging
in disinterest. “Uncle Male is sort of like a dad to me, and my actual dad knew that he was leaving me in better hands than his thanks to Uncle Male being around and involved, so it was ultimately him getting out while he was ahead because he knew he’d be redundant before long. Mister Ferrero never really knew what to do with either of his children, nor did he try to find a way to connect with them other than legal obligations.”

“It’s still a rather cold way to look at things; Loris is still Fiona’s father.”

“Yeah, and the best part about that is Nona, Nonno, and Marco.” Fiona then put down her coffee cup and allowed a grin to creep across her face. “You’re getting away from the topic: when are you and Malcolm getting married, or don’t you know yet?”

“Late September, from what it looks like,” Kate said. “The ceremony will be rather small, in the back garden; not a lot of fuss.”

“Does Gordy know?”

“It was what prompted him to look for the place in Sutton—he felt it was a sign he should start living on his own.”

“Do the people at work know?” Lex asked. “It’s not like you’re a couple of low-level supervisors in a mega-conglomerate where there being a married couple on the payroll is the least of the company’s issues.”

“We’ve informed our assistants, mainly, who in turn are allowing the news to spread organically via rumor and hearsay,” Kate said. “By the time September rolls around, everyone should have at least heard it, if not remember, and any concerns can be taken up with HR, the head of which has informed me that nothing will be amiss as long as we file things properly after the service is completed. There’s nothing to hide as long as we’re transparent about what we’re doing and do not purposefully flaunt anything.”

“Suit yourself,” Lex said, poking at the remainder of her chips.

“Alexandra…”

“No, really; it’s not like I want it to happen or anything, but… don’t say I didn’t warn you.” Her mobile then buzzed and she took a cursory glance, which turned into a grimace. “Shit—I’m needed at lecture a bit early. Keep me informed of what’s happening and what I need to do to help.”

“Just go, go!” Kate insisted. She shooed away Lex and settled the bill, all before shoving the last of her sandwich in her mouth and walking out the door with her daughter. They had gone a couple blocks together before it was time for them to part.

“I’m really glad you are finally getting married to someone who appreciates you,” Fiona reiterated. She hugged her mother, still a bit short thanks to height inherited from her Nona, and resisted crying happy tears. “You deserve it—don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”

“The fact both my children approve is the best wedding present a woman could ask for,” Kate replied. She squeezed Fiona before breaking the hug and wiping away a tear that was trying to escape onto the teenager’s cheek. “Will you be home tonight or are you staying with Lex?”

“I should know by four; I’ll text.”

“Alright then. Love you.”
“Love you too, Mum.”

Mother and daughter then went their separate ways down the street, with Fiona keeping straight and Kate rounding the corner to get onto the Tube. She went back to work in nearly record time—there seemed to be somewhat lighter traffic than usual, which she attributed to football fans having already descended to the pubs to watch World Cup quarterfinals. Granted, there was a downturn in people skiving off work in favor of the day’s matches since England was knocked out, but London was, indeed, a cosmopolitan city with many secondary allegiances… not to mention possessing the underlying desire to see France and Germany go through a bloodless, ninety-minute war so that the entire United Kingdom could tease the loser.

Despite the fact there had been a partial shift change, the mainframe that Kate walked into was deathly silent. There were not many people about, and most of the ones that were there either were multitasking thanks to absent coworkers or simply multitasking in order to watch World Cup commentary and analysis while still being clocked in. She went up to her office and settled in for a quiet afternoon of catching up on paperwork. As long as Scotland wasn’t called to fill in for a team, she wasn’t planning on allowing football to distract her.

Nearly an hour passed in peace, with Kate working on various emails to other heads of mainframes, her heads of staff, Geneva officials, and filling in and signing off on forms for everything from monthly budget adjustments to the prepwork involving forming a committee on team morale down in Tech and Maintenance… it was the minutia of being between alien invasions, and there was something almost comforting about it.

Then, suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Kate looked up and saw her assistant coming into the office, a tea tray in-hand and a folder tucked underneath an arm.

“I have the report you wanted, ma’am,” Themba said. The Zygon put down the tea on the edge of the desk before holding out the manila filing folder. Kate took it, placing it to the side of her computer that was not where Themba was unloading her afternoon cuppa. “The results were fairly inconclusive. There was no one who met the specific criteria you gave, but I was able to track a list of similar individuals who fit in a more generalized manner. I cannot go further unless release forms are signed by Mister Tucker himself, as it is well past his initial hire date and going without them would not comply with transparency protocols otherwise.”

“That’ll suffice,” Kate said. “I will bring it up with him and see about getting him to sign off on additional investigations. Thank you, Themba.”

“You’re welcome, ma’am.”

The Zygon then left the office, allowing Kate to browse through the new file with ease. There was nothing in there about Gabha—as that looked to be the online translator’s equivalent of Smith—yet there were other names that were similar enough, around the right age, and even having held jobs that might have aligned his path with Malcolm’s mother somehow. Most of the men on the list were dead, however, with only a few still living, making it so that the most reliable way to conduct an investigation would be with DNA from next-of-kin—potential half-siblings, nieces, nephews, or an uncle by the looks of the one option. It was a long-shot, but at least the information was there in front of her.

They had the ability… now all she needed was for her fiancé to agree to the follow-through.

Later that night, after the sun set but before it was time for bed, Malcolm and Kate were drinking some decaf coffee and going over the guest list alongside a rough outline of the back garden. It had
been very easy for them both to keep the list under fifty people, though now it was about attempting to figure out where to put everyone during the service and reception.

“I still say we can go and fix up the gazebo in the garden in time for the service,” Kate said. “It can definitely be the center of attention if it just gets a couple boards replaced and a decent coat of paint.”

“It still doesn’t seem right, since we can’t fit everyone in there,” Malcolm replied. “We’re on a fucking time crunch as it is—leave it for the fucking photographer to ogle. Their kind love shit that looks like it’s about to fall apart despite being structurally sound.”

“You’re no fun,” she winked. Under the table, she could feel his foot travel up her calf; he had been getting friskier since Gordon moved out and it wouldn’t surprise her if she found him rock-hard and half-gone at that very moment. The way he looked at her was as though she was the water in his life—it was such a change from other men she’d dated that it risked driving her mad every time she acknowledged it, silently or not.

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“Then do you want to get an arched trellis, let some flowering vines grow over it between now and September?” he offered. “It won’t be the gazebo, but we can keep it as decoration and let the vines come back year after year.”

“That actually sounds nice—then we can adjust the seating arrangements based on where we put it… unless you want to physically move it after the ceremony.”

“It was now or never, Kate told herself.

“Speaking of, I’ve got something you might be interested in,” she said. She took the file folder Themba had given her out from the bottom of the paper pile and put it in front of Malcolm. “It’s not much, but it’s a start.”

“What’s this…?” he asked hesitantly. He took a sip of coffee and tried to read Kate’s face, which was disturbingly immutable.

“There was no Gabha, but I was able to have a list compiled of every Sean Gowan, MacGowan, MacGouren, and MacGabhann from the correct age range and general occupation to have met your mum when and how she did,” she replied. She was about to continue when Malcolm slammed his mug back down on the table, cracking the handle and spilling coffee.

“Why the fuck did you do that?!” he snapped, standing up. Gone was the cheerful, horny man who had been going over wedding preparations, all his positivity instantly replaced by spite.

“…because we are getting married soon and I want you to be able to know who you are! Haven’t you ever wondered?”

“I know who the fuck I am! I am Florence Elspeth Tucker’s son!”

She stood in turn. “…and you mean to tell me that there’s never been any desire for even some closure when it comes to the half of you that’s not your mum?”

“There’s nothing to close because there’s nothing to open!” Malcolm spat. He glared at Kate, furious that she had gone so far without his permission or knowledge. “I am the bastard son of some rotting corpse, who fled a woman’s side before he could figure the fuck out there were consequences to fucking her! Why would I want to know about that selfish fuck?! My sister and I were raised in a poor neighborhood because that was where the least amount of people cared that there was just Mam
in the house! We would lie when we got accepted to schools where such shit mattered, saying our father died when I was small, just so that there was one less reason for them to turn their noses up at us! How the fuck do you think it felt, knowing as a wee nip that the kids with unmarried parents had it better, simply because they were both there?! Or that one parent had moved on and there was at least someone to look towards in the absent one’s place?!”

“Malcolm, I never meant…”

“Of course you ‘never meant’, and I’m drawing the line here and now! I might as well be the Messiah come again, born of only woman, because I am not interested in seeing the life I could have had, that Marcia and Mam could have had, by looking into whatever randy fucking lout contributed his genes to the making of this cunting cumstain! You want to know the only button you cannot fucking press when it comes to me? It’s this one.” Tears welled in his eyes—this was hitting him harder than it ever had before. “He never gave a shit, so why should I?”

“…because he’s your father.”

“Fuck that,” he snarled. “People who say shit like that are only opening themselves and others to unnecessary pain and anguish, all in the name of some fucking depraved sense of civility. We never knew one another and I’m way past genealogy projects for school and shit like that. Why bother?”

“…but the background check protocol at UNIT…”

Malcolm’s eyes went wide and his nostrils flared; his face hardened, hiding himself behind a mask of barely-contained rage and fury.

“You used UNIT to poke into my fucking personal business?! Without my permission?! Even though that’s a flagrant misuse of information and fucking power?! Despite knowing that was the very shit I had to navigate around so much that it ruined my fucking career and life’s work the moment it saw an opening?!”

“You’re not listening, only reacting!”

“Big fucking words for someone who isn’t listening herself!”

“…and how am I not listening?!”

“When I said I didn’t want to know about me da, that meant that I didn’t fucking want to know a bloody fucking thing! Then you go and pull a fucking selfish stunt like this because you’re curious and don’t even fucking take anyone else into consideration!”

“I am not being selfish!”

“Yes you are! I said I wanted to just leave this the fuck be, but you didn’t listen and did it anyway! That sounds pretty fucking selfish to me.” He shoved his chair into the table, making it clear he wasn’t going to calm down anytime soon. “You’re just as selfish as my slut-arsed parents.”

Kate’s expression warped in disgust. “You need to rephrase that right now.”

“No.”

“…and why not?”

“…because my slut of a father and slut of a mother were only thinking about themselves when they fucked hard enough to make me. Selfishness is what separates sluts from regular people, even the
regular people who are fucking stupid about sex and shit, and you know it’s not a matter of one gender over the fucking other because that’s not how it is in the real world whether it’s called that way or not. I know the words I’m using and it’s because I’m trying to get you to listen in private, not shame someone I don’t know in fucking public. What kind of fucking moron do you take me for?!

“The kind that just called his fiancée a slut.”

“Only acting as selfish as one—I’ve got enough words coming out of my mouth without you putting more in.” He stepped backwards and inched closer to the door. “I thought you understood, having had issues with your da despite him being some sort of fucking saint.”

“You leave my father out of this—you never even met him.”

“I don’t have to: look at what he left you, the stories people tell at work, the stories you and the kids tell… your da was at least around—and I thank fuck for that, truly—but even though he was in your life, you cut him off for a while, let him stew on his own, because sometimes parents fuck up so bad the kids know they have to back off until someone gets their act together.

“Think about that; you didn’t just get to meet your father, but you knew him, and he loved you, and he loved your kids, and even you had to let him go for a bit. You two did your best, and that’s fucking fantastic in the most genuine sense, but I don’t need to look into me da and open up that can of metaphorical fucking worms by figuring out who he was and if he has any surviving family to contact about my existence. We never needed him, and I don’t have children asking me where he is, which means I never want to even think about the fact he existed ever again.”

“You are being a real arse, Malcolm, I hope you know that.”

“Good. Now keep your nose out of my fucking business; not even being married to me gives anyone the right to fucking snoop around this shit.” He turned away and left the kitchen, storming through the house.

“Where do you think you’re going?!” Kate asked angrily.

“Out!”

“What do you mean by ‘out’?!”

Exactly what it fucking means!” Kate jumped when she heard the front door violently slam shut—he left.

Fuck. He left.

She stood there, listening to the silence of the house long after the car drove away, her nerves still sorting themselves out. Putting one foot forward, then the other, eventually she found herself back in the kitchen, where schematics of potential seating for the wedding lay forgotten and the beaker Malcolm was using had finally lost its handle to gravity working on the crack. It wasn’t one of the ones he’d brought over from his flat, nor was it any of the ones with much sentimental value—simply a plain, white, cheap mug she had bought back when she and Gordon lived in a houseboat and couldn’t seem to find a reason to pitch. Amazed it had even lasted as long as it did, she dumped out the remaining coffee, binned the fragments, and cleaned up the papers, pens, and her mobile. Now there was no evidence of the fact they had argued, or even had been planning something that was supposed to be a wonderful event that was now an entirely uncertain thing.

Not knowing what to do, Kate brought all the stuff upstairs with her as she went to her bedroom. She
put them on Malcolm’s side of the bed while getting into her pajamas and simply stared at them once she was beneath the covers. Never could she remember anyone react so strongly about someone they never even knew, a relative they were unaware of, that they left the conversation—let alone the building they were in—in a fit.

Kate closed her eyes and knew that she wasn’t going to fall asleep anytime soon. Her mind raced with the possibilities of where they were going to go from there. Would they be able to mend this? Was this a punishment for wanting something so normal and average as a husband in her bed? Had it been the cosmos? God? Something else? Why couldn’t he see that what she had done was for him? How come he felt it was a selfish thing on her part, let alone lash out at her like that?

Eventually, her mobile began to buzz, pulling her mind from the ever-deepening pit it was becoming. Picking up the mobile, she saw that it was a text from Lex: “what the fuck did you do O_O”

Shit—Malcolm must have gone back to the flat, a place that the younger woman had gotten used to being alone in. She bit her bottom lip and replied immediately.

“let him settle down. i tried to help him find his father and he reacted poorly.”

There was a long pause before a single word appeared as Lex’s reaction: “FUCK”.

Kate put the mobile back down on the mattress and rolled onto her back, staring up at the ceiling. It was probably safe to say that she might have cocked this one up too royally to fix.

Now what?
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

I was GONNA post this over the weekend, but my time and energy was magically zapped, so now here’s midweek edition instead.

Mainframe UK, being much like most other workplaces than anyone would be willing to give it credit for, was a buzzing rumor mill early that August. While most had seen their Brigadier-Director in-person and some had seen the Director of Communications and Public Relations skulking about, only a few had seen them together—let alone show one another affection—despite wide-spread rumor of their romantic entanglement. Yet when it was heard that Directors Stewart and Tucker were going to get married, the whispers exploded into full-on speculation and awe. Terror and unease. Disapproval and, well, at least this meant they were getting a bit of something-something on a regular basis, which none could really blame them for, and so no one really complained too seriously.

That did not stop the rest of the Heads of Staff from noticing a completely different side of things as everyone sat down for the monthly staff meeting. On the contrary: it made the fact that the Brigadier-Director and the man who was increasingly her right hand were dead-cold towards one another all the more apparent. They barely spoke towards the other directly and there wasn’t even so much as a flirty glance; none of the affection that they had shown during meetings before was evident and it was frankly terrifying.

“What the fuck happened?” Glenn asked. It was after the meeting, when he had invited Malcolm down to his office for tea.

“I don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.”

“Up there, with Director Stewart,” the older man clarified. He poured tea into two mugs and brought them over to the coffee table where Malcolm was sitting. “Do I need to text Lex to figure out what’s going on? Because I will.”

“Why would you fucking text my niece?”

“I gave her my mobile number ages ago when we were down here during the 3W Incident and we still send each other memes now and then—it’s how she knew what to do when the Zygon rebels were going nanners and she couldn’t get a hold of anyone else, you included. I’m sure if you asked her about me, she’d say the same thing.” Glenn took a biscuit from the tin sitting on the table and frowned, not allowing Malcolm time to realize that he understood the concept of a meme and subsequently sidetrack the conversation. “Back to business: there’s not a pre-marital tiff going on, is there?”

“I don’t know; something being ‘pre-marital’ assumes there’s going to be a ‘marital’ stage.”

“Then what Miss Khan told me wasn’t true…?”

“I don’t know what you and Rajit talk about.”

“She said that you had finally proposed to Director Stewart, that you were going to be getting
married in September. Fuck, Malcolm, why aren’t you talking to her, let alone over the fucking moon? These past couple days have been more painful than watching a vasectomy with a rusted axe and no anesthetic.”

Malcolm silently drank his tea, scowling at nothing in particular, as he attempted to gather together his thoughts. What could he tell Glenn? There was so much that he had kept from him before that the idea of opening up to him about something this deep was unnerving. Seeing that there was no real way to get out of the conversation without explaining something, he quickly conjured a bare-bones narrative.

“Kate used UNIT resources to look into my business after I told her it was nothing worth the effort,” he said. “All these years and suddenly it’s like I never left fucking politics.”

“What did she look into, if I might ask?” Glenn wondered. Malcolm glowered and he held up his cuppa and biscuit in defeat. “Alright, alright; she misused resources. How bad of a misuse do you think this would be in our old workplace context, if you were able to think about it objectively?”

“The time for objectivity is long fucking gone.”

“What did she do, Malcolm? What the bloody hell did Kate do?”

Putting down his cuppa, Malcolm rested his elbows on his knees and palmed his eyes. There was a massive headache coming on, and if he didn’t watch himself, it would follow him for much longer than that conversation. He exhaled heavily and drew his hands over his face before leaning back, flopping tiredly into the seat.

“Promise this stays here? Between us?”

“I swear what you’re about to tell me will stay between us, provided there’s no life-threatening and legitimate emergency, on the pain of getting my nuts bit off by a rabid dog.”

It would suffice.

“Kate had my background check files opened. She justified it by saying that it wasn’t complete, but I know better.”

That confused the older man. “What was she doing with your background check of all things?”

“. . .being a nosy shit about my father. I never knew him—the government and Party’s multiple checks on me back in the ‘90s proved that—but she did it anyhow, all because I know nothing about him and that wasn’t enough for her.”

“Really?” Glenn took another bite of biscuit and raised an eyebrow. “I never would have known that you had an incomplete background check and still were able to work in Number 10 unrestricted. How did that even work?”

“It worked because the only thing I know about him for certain is that he existed—he could’ve been an officer in the IRA for all I fucking know and it wouldn’t’ve mattered, because it’s not like I’ve had a single shred of contact with him or desire to know who he was. For having an estranged parent, it worked out amazingly well, and now Kate had to dig all this shit up again because he’s my father. The fact she even considered doing that makes me wonder if I really know her, if I really should get hitched. Can I even trust her after this?”

“She must have thought she was doing you a favor . . .”
“…except we had a conversation not long ago where I flat-out said that I didn’t want to fucking know about the bastard. That’s selfish, yeah? Trying to figure it out when I said I didn’t want to? I’m not high off my gourd about this, am I?”

Glenn considered that quietly, his head bobbing in thought. “That was a fairly reckless thing to do, but it’s not the worst thing she could have done—not by far—and I’m sure if there was some sort of internal investigation into her actions, that would be the only time she ever did something of the sort. Considering her record and the nature of what she did… I can easily say that she was only acting—or at least thinking she was acting—in good faith and with everyone’s best interests at heart.”

“Whatever the original intent is does not absolve someone from potential crimes, you know that,” Malcolm scowled. He ran his fingers through his hair, pulling at the ends; fuck, he was overdue for a shearing. “How the fuck did I not see this coming? I could predict the Second Coming of whatever-the-fuck you wished if I wanted, but this completely fucking blindsided me? How?”

“For one, love blinds, and if there’s anything that neatly describes what you and Director Stewart has, that comes the closest,” Glenn said, “and for two, it’s because you are so polar-opposite on the topic of your respective fathers that I don’t think there was a way for either of you to know what would have happened until it did.” He looked at Malcolm, seeing how torn he was as he stared at the rug, and sighed heavily. “Neither of you can fathom how the other feels, simply because your experiences were too different.”

“…and who made you a professional shrink?”

“Age, mostly, but I’ll admit, I met Alistair once.” Malcolm glanced up and saw Glenn was furrowing his brow, attempting to recall the event as accurately as possible. “Right after I first started, she brought him in for what ended up being his last visit. He was still sharp and well-versed in everything we do around here, and seeing how he interacted with his daughter… that was a bond that once faltered only to recover stronger. You can’t have that and properly imagine what it’s like to never even have a face to refer to, nor can the opposite be done. Neither of you are thinking this through.”

“I thought I came here for tea, not a fucking lecture on life advice.”

“You wanted to talk about it, so I’m talking about it.”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t make this a Very Special Episode of Dr. Fucking Glenn.” Malcolm’s mobile began to buzz and he glanced at the name. “Hold up; Rajit’s calling. He swiped the call through and held the device near his ear. “You’re on speaker.”

“Malcolm, get up here, now.” His frown changed from irritated to concerned as he listened to her. “Why so?”

“The aliens figured out about football.”

Returning to her office immediately after the meeting, Kate shut herself off from the rest of the mainframe, continuing her paperwork in peace. She was quickly nearing the bottom of the pile, the backlog having been nearly eradicated thanks to the fact that she was taking great pains to avoid Malcolm the past couple of days. Low-priority minutia was not how she had imagined herself dealing with her time a week prior, but at least it could have been worse.

Okay, it couldn’t’ve gotten *that* much worse, but that was only because things were fucking blasted
at that particular point. With Malcolm still livid with her, there was barely enough cordialness to survive the Heads of Staff meeting, and she knew that it was obvious that they were being scrutinized by their coworkers. It was mostly her fault for bringing the subject of his father back to the forefront—there was little doubt about that, even if he owned his reaction as being beyond rational—and so she stayed with her nose to the grindstone until he was ready to figure out what was left to pick up… if they could even pick things up again.

Maybe, she thought as she went over a budget alteration request, it was better that they had the row a couple nights before instead of after they were married. If it was that they simply needed their own spaces to calm down from this before continuing on, then so be it, but if it was that the line she went over could not be uncrossed… she was glad that it was before they had consolidated their lives so that now there was nothing to tear apart in the aftermath. If it was to end badly, then let it end before it threatened to even begin.

“Uh, Director Stewart?” She glanced up and saw Themba’s head poking in through the door. “Group Captain Arwell’s here to see you.”

“What does he want?”

“I’ve just been informed of suspicious activity that may be extraterrestrial in origin, ma’am,” the man in-question said over the disguised Zygon’s head. “One of my contacts in the RAF is requesting permission to engage and I need your approval.”

“Extra…? Fuck, let him in, Themba.” Her assistant stepped aside and Group Captain Arwell—a trim, fit man in his mid-thirties—quickly came into the room. “What are they saying’s out there, Reg?”

“We know it’s no private or military project, that much is for certain,” he replied. “Sounds vaguely like Rutan, possible Rutori, craft being sighted over Essex. Am I allowed to tell them to stand down?”

“Rutori?” Themba asked, nose scrunched in confusion. “Apologies, but I was never good at other extraterrestrial lifeform identification.”

“Genetic cousins of the Rutan, still in possession of their bipedal forms and technical neutrals in the Sontar-Ruta War,” Kate explained. She then turned her attention back to Arwell. “Inform the RAF that we’ve got things from here, then go and see if you can scramble a couple jets and get them out of our atmosphere. If not, report back to me ASAP.” The man saluted and quickly left the room.

“Should I initiate any protocols, ma’am…?” Themba wondered.

“Alert Bismuth and be ready to send word to Benton—I’m not calling him unless it’s absolutely necessary. I’ll call Tucker’s office and make sure he’s aware of the fact there might be some fallout that’ll need mopping up. If Arwell’s jets cannot scare off the Rutari, then it’ll be likely that I shall be taking a quick trip to Essex.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Themba left and Kate immediately dialed her phone.

“Yes?” It was Aparajita.

“Is Malcolm in?”

“No, he’s still having tea with Cullen down in DM/IT. Something the matter?”

“Rutari over Essex, I’m afraid.”
“Fuck, and the day of the Final Match too…” Both women fell silent as they immediately came to the same conclusion. “They wouldn’t know about World Cup, would they? It’s not even like any Isles teams made it to the Finals!”

“No, but when does that stop football fans?” Kate frowned. “I need you to summon Malcolm from the bowels of Cullen’s domain and make sure he’s prepped and ready to accompany me over to what I infer is going to inevitably be a crash site. Everyone in the vicinity shall likely be occupied with football, but I need his silver tongue and Scottish charm at the ready just in case; he handled the fallout from an extraterrestrial crash before and he can do it again.”

“Yes, ma’am,” she said before hanging up. This was it—the test to see if she and Malcolm could at least keep it together while at work long enough to get something actually accomplished. The meeting, as on-edge as it was, could be seen as insignificant next to this, as this was more work-work than reporting on work, and their ability to cooperate would actually be tested.

Gathering up her things, Kate waited on news of the situation by watching the molemen in the atrium below her window. She saw that most were still preoccupied with other duties, and knew that something had happened when one of their screens filled with red.

Her mobile rang and she knew who it was without even looking. “Report.”

“We have a landing site just north of Ongar; it crashed,” Arwell replied. “I can be there in twenty minutes by air.”

“Tucker and I are coming; hold the helicopter until we get there.”

“Understood.”

Kate grabbed her bag and quickly went into the lift. She stopped on Malcolm’s floor to pick him up, noticing that his icy demeanor from earlier had not subsided.

“Temporary truce?” she offered once the doors were closed.

“We’ll talk later.”

Of course; they couldn’t fit it all in fifteen seconds. The lift opened up and they silently walked together towards another lift, which brought them up to the helipad. They both got in one of three waiting helicopters, accompanied by Group Captain Arwell and a trio of armed soldiers, while twelve more troops divided themselves between the remaining two.

A fraction of what the normal drive time would have been passed and the helicopters all touched down in a field, smoldering wreckage about fifty meters away. Malcolm stayed towards the back of the group while Kate went towards the front, putting herself between the soldiers and the extraterrestrial ship’s remains. She was nearly halfway there when a panel popped out of the side, emitting steam as a figure plopped onto the ground. A few more steps and she stopped, allowing the soldiers to fall into formation behind her.

“I really don’t appreciate this,” she said sternly. The figure crawled out from underneath the steam and she could see it was clearly Rutari—milky-green, nearly featureless, rail thin, and eight feet tall as it stood erect. The soldiers probably thought it resembled some of the aliens from Close Encounters, though she knew it was more the other way around. “You have made an unfortunate mess that will take more effort to clean up than should be necessary. Most of my species are not prepared to understand what just happened here and I thought that was a fairly well-known fact in Rutarian circles around this sector.”
The Rutari opened its maw—a gooey, sticky-seeming void—and words came out without any other movement. “They say this planet is under the protection of the Time Lord called The Doctor, yet you seem to have at least rudimentary weapons technology and primitive flight capabilities. Your kind can be utilized.”

“I don’t particularly care for the sound of that.”

“Let our Rutan cousins continue their pointless war with the Sontarans—it simply leaves the remainder of the galaxy for us to pick and choose our own strongholds and assets.”

“Earth is an asset to only its own peoples,” Kate insisted. “You are not of this planet, nor do you call it home; with that sort of talk, I am justifiably able to presume that your presence is not one of peace and friendship.”

“What lies—peace and friendship—there is only war and partnership, useful until they are no longer beneficial.”

“Pity.” She then turned her back to the extraterrestrial, walking away.

“Do not ignore me, Earther!”

“Treat our guest appropriately, Arwell,” she said as she passed him. He gave the order to fire and Kate could hear the sound of guns firing and smell the Rutari’s flesh crisping under the auspices of the taser-munitions. She found herself at Malcolm’s side, looking out at the edge of the tree line with him. No one else was within earshot and it made her more confident to talk. “We should be able to bring it back to the mainframe for safekeeping momentarily.”

“Film set and dress rehearsal—some bullshit about alien invaders.”

Ah, the cover story for anyone who happened upon them. She glanced back to see that the soldiers were gathering the Rutari into a large metal box, easily transportable in the back of one of the helicopters. Turning back to him, she saw that he was still refusing to look at her. “I’m sorry, by the way.”

“Save it.”

“No, I mean it. I went too far.”

“How did you go too far?”

“I let my own relationship with my dad cloud my perception of how someone should react to the concept of someone finding their own absent father. Your vocal refusal to know should have been enough for me. Icocked it the fuck up.”

Malcolm looked at her and exhaled heavily, scratching the back of his head. He watched as the helicopter took off, the sound of the still-flaming wreckage crackling temporarily drowned out by the blades. “Everything behaved during the fucking Olympics, even the blasted fucking Cybercide had enough decency to wait until afterwards, so why the fuck now?”

 “…because we would have expected something during the Olympics; World Cup’s distraction was almost an ideal scouting opportunity” she replied. She waited until the Rutari-laden helicopter was gone before she stepped closer to him, touching his elbow. “Malcolm…?”

“Do you promise?”
“Promise what?”

“Do you promise to never do anything like that ever again?”

“…to cross that line…?”

“Do you swear on what you had with your da?”

“I promise with all my heart,” she said. It was only then that he looked at her, his eyes red-rimmed and watery. “You can trust me—that’s a big part of what a marriage is supposed to be about and I don’t want to risk destroying that again.”

“Good, because watching you lecture that Rutari was beginning to make my cock ache,” he admitted. Leaning into her touch, he quickly scanned the area to make sure that no curious locals were anywhere before looking back at her. “Thank Glenn; he was the one who reminded me that misuse of resources isn’t usually your thing. The more I thought about it on the way over, the more it made sense. It was an honest mistake, but one I don’t want you repeating, because if you do, then it would mean much more than you and I having a row at home.”

“I’ll have to make a note of that—all of it.”

“You’re better than they are, Kate, remember that.” They stayed silent for a while, enjoying the stillness of the wood before she began musing out loud.

“What if we do get someone who stumbles across the fact that half of your familial background check isn’t complete? I didn’t think that HR had left it as it was, nor did I think that the government would have; that’s a lot of information to simply be missing.”

“Bastard’s better off faceless, is all,” Malcolm shrugged. He and Kate both stepped aside as UNIT trucks finally came down the nearby road, turning off into the field so that they could salvage what was left of the Rutari craft. “I guess this means we’re still on for September?”

“I think so,” she replied. “I say we celebrate; my panic room or yours?”

“Fuck… let’s at least get back to the fucking mainframe first; don’t make me beg in front of the troops.”

“If you insist.”
“It’s been a couple months now—don’t you think you should talk with Colonel Walsh?”

Kate glanced across the table at her son, who was dutifully in the middle of note-taking. He had accompanied Fajr as she and Kate met for their monthly one-on-one security meeting—a thing her predecessor never found necessary—and was brought along due to the simple combination of already knowing how sensitive the information was, text-to-speech technology being imperfect for accurate note-taking, and the fact he took some courses in shorthand while still in the RAF.

“Colonel Walsh is on leave until the trauma of losing her men has faded enough to hold a conversation about the events she experienced in Turmezistan,” Kate replied. “You were there—wouldn’t you agree it was something that she will not recover from easily?”

“Yes, but…”

“…but what…?”

“It wouldn’t hurt to look in and see how she’s doing. It’s been almost five months; she might be ready to talk now, which could help her along the healing process.”

“He has a point,” Fajr shrugged. “If she’s not ready, then we’ll leave her be for a while longer. How about the three of us heading over there if she is?”

“We’ll take Malcolm over as well—he needs to hear from her mouth what might be useful in writing up a report should the need arise, since he’s the best judge of what’s useful and what isn’t. Should we phone Walsh now while we’re thinking about it?”

“Here’s the contact number, Mum,” Gordon said, holding out a slip of paper. Kate took it and dialed the number on her desk phone—he certainly was nothing short of prepared, that was for certain—keeping it on speaker for the others to hear.

“Hello?” It was a man who answered. “Who is this?”

“Hello; my name is Kate Stewart and I am looking for Colonel Rebecca Walsh. This was the number I was given to reach her at; with whom am I speaking?”

“Her brother-in-law, James. My wife and her sister are out right now—what is it that you need Beck for, Ms. Stewart?”

“I want to know if Colonel Walsh is ready for her debriefing; we’ve been giving her time to recover due to the trauma she’s endured, and we would like to extend the opportunity first, so that she is aware that we have not forgotten.”

“Who is we? You can’t mean that all of UNIT will show up on my doorstep, can you?”
“If Colonel Walsh agrees to it, there would be four of us coming to your house to hear her speak: my Head of Security and Surveillance, her assistant who also happened to be with Colonel Walsh during the Turmezistan Incident, my Director of Communications and Head of Public Relations, as he has been long-tasked with the official write-up, and myself, her commanding officer.”

“If you’re her commanding officer, then what is your rank?”

“I’m nominally the Director of Mainframe UK, having risen through the UNIT ranks through non-military means, but for the sake of chain of command my rank is Brigadier. It was my father’s rank when he retired from UNIT, so don’t think I am around simply as a bureaucratic stopgap who knows nothing about military measures, nor am I here as merely a legacy hire. No one knew of our family ties until I was of a fairly high rank proven to be of my own merit; anything less would be unbecoming.”

There was a noise on the other end of the call and the man grunted in resignation. “Hold on—Beck?”

The call muffled and the three in the office glanced at one another, remaining silent as there was rustling, then a new voice.

“Yes, ma’am?” It was Colonel Walsh.

“Hello Walsh. I was wondering if you felt up for your debriefing on Turmezistan. It’s only a formality at this point, so if you need to postpone further, that’s fi—”

“You’re in luck—I have good stretches and bad, and right now I seem to be in the middle of a good one. Is tomorrow doable?”

Kate glanced at Fajr and Gordon, who both nodded. “Tomorrow’s fine.”

“Good.” Walsh gave them the address, which Gordon hastily wrote down. “See you at two?”

“Two it is; see you then.” Kate then ended the call and leaned back in her chair. “Now, what was it that you said about the camera upgrades?”

“fucking hell. looks like we wont need new passports mate”

Malcolm looked at Jamie’s text and fired off a reply, thankful that he was in the back of the car and not the one driving. “at least this means we cant stop complaining.” He noticed Kate glancing at his mobile and pocketed it. “Jamie’s a bit miffed the indyref’s failed. I’d let him cool off for a couple days without a mobile if I were his Jeanette.”

“How about you?” she asked. “Independence for Scotland was something you wouldn’t’ve minded, yeah?”

“It’s a wee bit more complicated than that, love,” he replied. Looking out the window, he could see that they were in a posh part of the commuter belt, the suburban chic wanting to absolutely choke him. He held his fiancée’s hand and it made him feel infinitely better. “Fuck, I’m glad your da’s house isn’t in a place like this. I’d insist you move into the flat if that were the case.”

“Walsh’s sister is in government and her brother-in-law was private-sector for a long time,” Fajr explained from the front passenger seat. Gordon was driving, leaving her free to talk without the fear of distraction. “I don’t remember precisely what either did, since I’m not well-versed in those parts of Human society, but it’s been able to help them afford this neighborhood without an issue.”

“No one needs to be that well-versed in Human society,” Malcolm assured her. “Her sister’s
probably a high-ranked civil servant, impossible to get rid of no matter the government, and he’s
probably some energy-sector or banking fuck. I met so many back in my former life that they all
blended together after a while. You don’t need to worry about them.”

“I might, but that would all depend on what happens during the debriefing.” The satnav instructed
Gordon to turn and he did so, pulling into the drive of a house more grand than what was likely all
four of their salaries put together. Once the car was parked, they got out and went to the front door as
a group, where they were greeted by Walsh herself.

“Thank you for coming on such short notice,” she said, ushering them in. Looking over her shoulder,
she then shouted into the house, “They’re here, Nick! Four of them!” An unintelligible shout
answered her and Walsh brought the guests into an elaborate sitting room, where tea was already laid
out. “Sorry about the pretenses, Kate. Nick’s place isn’t exactly what most people would call
humble.”

“You’ve been able to recoup here—that’s what counts,” Kate replied. “Oh, you remember Fajr
Bismuth? She’s now our Head of Security and Surveillance.”

“I thought Frank still had a few years left on his contract,” Walsh said, pouring tea. “What’d you do
to convince him to step down?”

“He didn’t,” Fajr said. She tried to keep eye contact with Walsh, but couldn’t. “Frank Hughes was
one of the first people the insurgents killed upon capturing Mainframe UK. I… I couldn’t save him.”

“You saved others though, from what I’ve heard, and we can’t fault you for doing all you could,”
Walsh said. “He’d be proud to know you’re his successor.”

“You think so?” Gordon asked, relief in his voice. “There are some people who are upset that it’s not
me.”

“Do you want the position?” Walsh asked.

“Not yet; eventually, but Fajr was next in line.”

“Then let it be Ms. Bismuth.” Walsh saw as Malcolm stood by the fireplace with his tea, observing
the vase that was on the mantle. “Our nan’s—her father was obsessed with China. Never did get a
straight answer on whether or not he was there during the Boxer Movement.”

“Sorry to hear that; bet you weren’t allowed to run around the house or nothing with all those
antiques.”

“We strongly suspect they’re forgeries, but you are correct.” While Malcolm was distracted, another
woman walked in, who very strongly looked like Walsh, putting an extra plate of biscuits on the
table. “Everyone, this is my sister, Nick Murray.”

Malcolm turned around and nearly spat out his tea.

“Nicola?!”

“Oh fuck,” she swore, instinctively taking a step backwards. “I thought they put you away for good.”

“Wait, what’s going on?” Fajr wondered. “Forgive me, but this seems like a Human thing.”

“A… wait… what…?! What do you mean by that?!” Nicola looked at her sister, silently begging for
an answer.
“Hold on; I think I have the answers everyone needs,” Kate said, holding up her hand to make sure everyone was silent. “Nicola knows Malcolm because before he came to work for UNIT, he was Director of Communications when she was a government minister and Leader of the Opposition for their Party. Malcolm is out of prison because the Crown and UNIT came to a quiet agreement that he be released into our care so that his talents may be further used for the betterment of the planet, which he has more than done to-date and shall continue to do. Most people who know that he’s no longer in prison are keeping their mouths shut either out of wisdom or out of fear.”

She took a sip of tea and nodded; Walsh’s sister kept the good stuff. “Finally, Ms. Bismuth says ‘Human’ and I say ‘planet’ because UNIT is not just a paramilitary organization kept separate from the Blue Helmets based on how funding is raised and allocated and the research sciences that are involved, but because UNIT is the UN’s interstellar first responders of sorts, handling things that most other Humans are unable to cope with. Ms. Bismuth is a member of a highly advanced extraterrestrial species that has largely made Earth their new home, while we also have individuals working for UNIT that are, in actuality, members of the sapient, dominant species from around when dinosaurs were supposedly ruling the Earth.”

“Lizard-people from the dawn of time—not well adjusted, them,” Gordon cut in.

“I don’t pay that much attention to Human politics, mainly because I have no need for it, so believe me when I say that I didn’t know that about you,” Fajr shrugged. “To be honest, I had to be told about Tucker and the Goolding Inquiry fallout, because I just didn’t pay that close attention.” She saw that Nicola was staring at her, and she sighed. “Let me guess: I don’t look that alien to you?”

A nod.

“Okay.” She then allowed herself to transform back into her Zygon self, immediately going back when their hostess’s eyes went wide and she let out a screech.

“Jesus fuck!” she shouted. “What the bloody hell are you?! Where do you come from?!”

“We’re called Zygons, and there is an ever-increasing amount of us that are from here,” Fajr replied. “Many of our elders are from nowhere in particular, as our planet of origin has long-been destroyed into cosmic dust and we have been living for several generations in search of a new home—they’re from space instead of a planet, if you will.”

“Zygons…? Wait, you’re the lot that put my sister through all that shit!”

“Disgruntled individuals within her species,” Gordon explained. He pulled out his mobile and Fajr nodded at him to continue, a couple short taps on the screen and a readout of Zygon-related information came up. “Bismuth is actually more typical of Zygon-kind, laying low and helping the native species when they can. Their shapeshifting and mimicry developed from millennia of needing to lay low while larger, more powerful predators hunted them on their native planet. It has only been within the past three or four that they’ve been able to become a more prototypical dominant species.”

“Okay, so I’ve got an alien from outer space and a political demon in my sitting room, now who are the two of you?” Nicola motioned towards Kate and Gordon, the latter of whom shrugged at that.

“I’m Gordon, a regular Human and Bismuth’s assistant. I was with Colonel Walsh in Turmezistan as an attaché from Security and Surveillance. My experience wasn’t nearly what the colonel’s was, so I was able to return to work sooner.”

“And I am Kate Stewart, Director of Mainframe UK. My rank in times of need is Brigadier, I have a soft spot for the sciences, and am from a military family myself. Whatever concerns the mainframe
concerns me, hence why I am here.”

“Alright, but I need to talk to you right now,” Nicola said, pointing at Malcolm. Kate nodded at him and he put down his tea, following Nicola out into the corridor. He saw that she was still very uneasy; why wouldn’t she be? “What the actual fuck is going on here, Malcolm?!”

“I’m just doing my fucking job,” he replied. “I’m here because I am Director of Communications and Head of Public Relations in Mainframe UK—if your sister has information that might be beneficial to have out there, I need to know, and I’d rather hear it from her own mouth.”

“That’s it? That’s really it?”

“I swear on my fucking freedom, Nicola. I’m not here to fuck anyone over. Shit, I didn’t even realize that Walsh is your sister. You’re safe.”

Silence passed over them, the grandfather clock in the corridor ticking away slowly, punctuating every single second that faded into the moment. Malcolm decided to be the one to pick conversation up again—they had worked together for too long to simply drop everything.

“So… how have you been?” he asked. “I notice you’re no longer Leader of the Opposition.”

“I think you were treated the best out of us all by the Goolding Inquiry—you might’ve gone to prison, but I got several demotions, have been relegated to backbenching, and I only just squeaked by when I was up for reelection in my riding.”

“You still stayed out of prison.”

“Yeah, but you got out of politics.”

Well, he had her there.

“What about you and James? The kids? Everything alright with them?”

“For the most part; I will say that all began to get better once I was shuffled off to the side politically. The kids are all at uni and the eldest might be getting married soon, if things are going the way I think they are.” She looked at him, studying his face, before continuing. “How about you? Is working with aliens doing wonders or did misery follow you?”

“It’s not bad—I only served a few months before I got busted out. The most I usually do is clean up after my staff, after when some extraterrestrial shits all over Westminster, after this fucking cock with a police box that keeps on poking his nose in our fucking business…” He saw her raise an eyebrow at that, which made him chuckle. “Long story, but it has to do with the aliens fucking about and getting on my last fucking nerve, you remember the ones. If it was hush-hush on an international level, a decent portion of the time it was UNIT-related.”

“…but you’re doing alright otherwise, yeah? Get something of a personal life back?”

“Yeah.” He shrugged almost bashfully, his face tingling with blush. “Kate and I are getting married next weekend—taking time off and everything.”

“Malcolm Tucker taking a proper holiday? Now that’s something we didn’t see very often. His words then really hit her and Nicola glanced back towards the doorway, then back at Malcolm. “Wait, you mean Director Stewart? In there? That Kate?”

“Wouldn’t joke about it; I’ll be a husband and stepdad by this time next month. “ He laughed as she
attempted to squash her horror at the idea. “No, no; one’s a full-fledged adult and the other’s just starting uni. You don’t have to fear for any wee nip suddenly running around my place.” She remained unnerved and he grew puzzled. “What’s wrong?”

“You could be a granddad before the decade’s out.”

“Don’t get your hopes up—neither of her kids are dating anyone and I doubt they’ll feel comfortable referring to me as that. I mean, Gordon’s da isn’t that bad—he and I could almost be friends, dare I say it—but Fiona’s is a cunt if I’ve ever seen one, though so far she herself doesn’t seem like the type to have kids herself…”

“Wait, the Gordon that’s in there? That’s her boy?”

“Due to the nature of UNIT—aliens and shite of that ilk—it sort of accidentally became a family business, as it helps keep the secrets better.”

“Anything else I need to know about this new life of yours?”

He shrugged at that. “You remember that fossil Glenn Cullen? From DoSaC?”

“The policy aide that made being around Olly Reeder nearly tolerable?”

“He’s running Data Management and IT.”

“You’re fucking kidding me,” Nicola deadpanned. “Wasn’t he one of the ones who fucking lost a bunch of citizen data in that one DoSaC kerfuffle? He’s in charge of Data Management and IT? You’re trying to make a fucking fool of me.”

“We have tea twice a month in his office and I’ve actually seen him fix the hardwiring on some of the older machines they’ve got there. You know, the sort of shit that was the latest fucking thing when we were nips. He’s much better with technology when his brain isn’t attempting to focus on launching fifteen different government programs and policies at once. One might say that he’s nearly cunting competent where he’s at.”

“It’s a fucking miracle.” She then began to grin. “Speaking of Olly—he know you’re out? I thought he would have told me in a panic if he did… little rat would’ve smelled it.”

“Had a run-in with him couple years ago; the fetus shat himself, as is customary. Long as he’s anyone’s fuckboy I’d still stay far away from him if you haven’t figured it out already.”

“I don’t ever hear good things coming out of that office; he’s going to crack soon enough.”

“At least we know he’ll get everything he has coming to him, the backstabbing, wank-starved little prick.”

Nicola attempted to stifle a giggle. “Come on—I think we’ve kept them waiting long enough.”

“Is this a truce?”

“For now.”

He would fucking take it.
Chapter 32

It was Thursday.

Everything was in a panic. Centerpieces lay half-completed throughout the house. Linens sat in various piles, waiting for Saturday morning. There was—luckily—enough as far as chairs and tables hidden away in the basement for the couple to utilize, yet they were all still in storage, covered in multitudes of old bedsheets and waiting for the day before the Big Day to get hauled out by the currently-absent Millennials. Nothing was finished, little was prepped, and it was weighing down on Kate and Malcolm both as they attempted to play catchup.

“I’m gonna kill her,” he growled as he looked through a box. It was full of utensil sets, though they were all jumbled and missing several pieces if his running count was correct.

“Don’t murder my niece before she’s officially my niece,” she warned idly. Kate was on the other side of the sitting room, examining a wine glass for imperfections before placing it back down to move on to the next one. “What happened now?”

“She got the wrong box,” he replied, setting it down on the table. “This is all the mismatched flatware, and she was supposed to bring the good ones—she knew she was supposed to bring the good ones.”

“It’s a box from a storage unit—you can easily have it fixed.”

“There is too much to do in two days for something as stupid as this to throw a fucking wrench in the plan.” He stepped away from the box and placed his hands on his hips. “I’m gonna have her bring the right box over and she’ll have to wash it all herself.”

“What were you even doing with a set of ‘bad flatware’ anyhow?” Kate asked. Malcolm bristled at that.

“I had been planning on either selling it or giving it to Lex as some startup stuff for when she first moved out on her own, but you see how well that’s panned out,” he replied. “It was just part of the shit I collected back when I was starting out, and haven’t needed because the flat UNIT moved me into was mostly furnished.”

“Then you can get rid of it.”

“You sure?”

“It’s either we have enough with our sets of good flatware, or we hire enough of the same set for uniformity.”

He couldn’t argue that, instead finding himself making his way to his fiancée’s side. No, soon, she would be his wife and he was ready to start thinking about them in those terms. Husband and wife—wife and husband—a married couple… it was so very surreal that he wasn’t entirely certain it was really happening. He gently put his hands on her shoulders and allowed her to lean into him, resting her head against his body.

“Want to take a break?” he wondered.

“Not now—there’s still work to be done.”
“That’s true, but that doesn’t mean we don’t deserve a break. We’ve worked almost through lunch.”

“I’ll break for a sandwich, but not a shag. Not yet, anyhow.”

“Then I’ll make us some tea,” he said. Malcolm left the chaos of the sitting room for the chaos of the kitchen. Groceries were everywhere, no place for them to hide in the cupboards until Saturday, and it was enough to drive him mad. It was alright though, he thought, as it would all be gone by this time next week.

This time next week, he would be married, and to the right fucking woman too. He filled the kettle and let his mind wander—despite her temporary lapse in judgement, she was the most incredible woman he could have ever imagined himself being with. The world that the Dream Crabs had invented for him all that time ago now… it was the perfect sort of scenario. They would never be able to have a child together—the fucking gut punch if there was one—but they could be there for one another when times got rough. There was a reason why vows normally included “in sickness and in health”, after all. He put the kettle on and knew that he would take whatever he could get at this point, and right now was better than anything he’d ever had.

“You better be making enough for everyone.”

Malcolm turned and saw this mother standing in the kitchen doorway. He blanched at the sight of her—how the fuck did she even get in the house? When the fuck did she get into England? Where was the car she… okay, it was better to just stop fucking stupid questions to which he was never going to get a fucking answer.

“Fuck, Mam, don’t scare me like that,” he swore. “I thought you weren’t coming in until late tonight.”

“Naw; apparently traffic was smooth enough to let me cut all the hours off the trip that would’ve normally been spent sitting stiller than Parliament in a crisis. It’s a fucking miracle if there’s one. Won’t happen again in my lifetime, that’s for damn certain.”

“You’re being dramatic.”

“The English can build the fucking tracks but it’s not like they can keep their trains on fucking time. Some of us have sons to give away at the altar, you know, and we’d like to know we’ll be on time, neither early nor late.”

“Mam, please...”

“Malcolm, who are you talking to?” Kate wondered as she went towards the kitchen. She opened the door and her heart skipped a beat as she saw her fiancé’s mother standing there. “Oh, Florence, it’s good to see you... and so soon too...”

Florence approached Kate and stared her dead in the eyes. “So you’re the lass that changed m’boy’s mind and has him bothering to go through marriage again. I don’t know what it is with m’nips and insisting on getting hitched...”

“Just because you don’t understand it doesn’t mean it’s bad,” Malcolm argued from across the kitchen.

“It’s a fucking scam that doesn’t work,” she fired back.

“You’re getting bonus grandkids out of this—shut the fuck up or we’re putting you on the next train to Glasgow.”
There was a wooden spoon sitting in a container on the counter; Florence grabbed it as she crossed the kitchen and began to whack at her son’s shoulder. He cowered and lifted his arms to protect his face.

“Don’t you sass me, laddie!”

“Don’t come to my wedding just to bitch nonstop about it!”

“Please don’t fight in my kitchen,” Kate said, raising her voice slightly. The two Scots turned their attention to her and she was in control of the situation. “Malcolm, this seems like a good opportunity to bring your mother’s bags up to her room. Florence, why don’t you come with me while he takes care of that and finishes up tea?”

This satisfied Florence, who put the wooden spoon back and approached her son’s fiancée confidently. “You have to be a competent one to catch Wee Mael’s attention and still operate that nutter squad.”

“UNIT’s a bit more complicated than a ‘nutter squad’, Florence...” Kate led the old woman from the kitchen and shot Malcolm a glare before disappearing herself.

You owe me one.

Following Florence to make sure that she didn’t vanish on her, Kate led her back to the sitting room, where they would at least be able to look out on the back garden through the French doors. Once she was certain her visitor was seated and comfortable, she dared start conversation.

“Your trip was good, I take it?” she asked.

“Speedy, but still fucking dreadful. I hate traveling.”

“Is that because of your previous jobs? I heard you had to travel a lot, with the government and as a journalist.”

“Probably; lost its appeal back in the fucking 90’s.” The older woman looked out the doors to the back garden and frowned pensively. “This is a really nice place you got.”

“Thank you—it was my father’s.”

“Passed on?”

“Not too long before I met Malcolm, actually,” Kate explained. She gestured towards a photo frame sitting on the end table. “Mum’s still alive, but she cannot travel too far from her care home on account of a weak constitution and severe dementia and won’t be around this weekend. That was them on their wedding day. They divorced when I was a girl, but at least it wasn’t messy.”

Florence picked up the photo and raised an eyebrow. “Al?”

Kate’s heart skipped a beat.

“You knew my father?”

“We were well-acquainted in my journalist days, asking for an official comment on one of their fucking ‘military exercises gone wrong’,” she said casually, replacing the frame. “Nice arse, though too prim and proper for my liking. Never forget an arse like that.”

“I’m sure he’d be… honored…”
“No, we can be honest: he hated me. Al never liked it when I showed up. He’d actually be mortified if he knew you and my Mael were getting married, that I was staying in his house, because we didn’t get on in the slightest.”

“Odd as this might be for me to say, but that is a relief,” Kate said. She then grew quiet as she heard Malcolm come back down the stairs and return to the kitchen. “May I ask you something?”

“No, we can be honest: he hated me. Al never liked it when I showed up. He’d actually be mortified if he knew you and my Mael were getting married, that I was staying in his house, because we didn’t get on in the slightest.”

“Odd as this might be for me to say, but that is a relief,” Kate said. She then grew quiet as she heard Malcolm come back down the stairs and return to the kitchen. “May I ask you something?”

“Possibly.” Florence regarded Kate carefully, attempting to read her. “About what?”

“What did you mean when you said I changed Malcolm’s mind? I have an idea, but I want to make certain we are in the same page first.”

“After he divorced that venomous hussy, my Mael swore he was never going to get married again, saying that I was right and that everything was a fucking scam and that he’d never remarry long as he lived. Is that about right?”

“It’s the general idea.”

“Good, though I am still curious as to how you did it. What did you do to make him change his mind? Threaten to leave him? Fire him?”

“Neither,” Kate explained. “I change Malcolm’s mind as often as he changes mine—he came to the idea of marriage on his own. It was so much his own idea he had to propose twice before I agreed to it.”

Nodding, Florence took the information and stewed on it, her silence feeling something between approval and pride. Malcolm then came into the room with a full tea tray and balanced it on the one speck of coffee table that wasn’t filled with decorations and stemware. “Guess what I just learned?”

His face fell at his fiancée’s flat expression and his mother’s nonchalance. “What…?”

“My father knew your mother.” He almost dropped Florence’s cuppa on the floor.

“For fuck’s sake, Mam!”

“I didn’t shag Mister Double-Barreled Military Toff, if that’s what you’re so fucking worried about,” Florence growled, grabbing her tea. “Fucking stuffed shirt, that one. I’d’ve had better luck with that bent Captain of his… Bates, was it?”

“Yates, who is only half-bent, and he’s gonna be at the wedding with his husband, so behave yourself, Mam,” Malcolm warned. “You just can’t do and say shit and think everyone’ll be too fucking stunned to call you on it anymore.”

“You may have been the Wolf of Whitehall, but I was the one who raised you, and I will take you out if necessary, wedding or not.”

“And the reason why we don’t get together often, right here,” he deadpanned.

“So who else is gonna be there?” Florence asked, leaning back into the couch. “The poof and his hubby, and…?”

“Do you remember a man named Benton?” Kate asked. Florence nodded. “He is conducting the ceremony.”

“I thought he was a used car salesman, not a vicar.”
“He’s an officiant, nothing more,” Malcolm clarified through grit teeth. “Mrs. Benton’ll be there too, Sammy—from m’old job—is bringing her son, Jamie and his wife, Cal and his wife…”

“…some people from work, a couple old friends of my father’s who may or may not be there…”

“Oh, and your auntie.”

“No, mum’s sister can’t make it after all—I can’t tell if ‘bad gout’ is a legitimate reason or she simply can’t be bothered to move more than five steps from her front door.”

“I can’t meet the bint at her funeral, love…”

“Then you take it up with her.”

“Fairly difficult when I’ve never even met her.”

“She’s cranky, but she’ll listen to reason.”

“She lives in fucking Yorkshire—why would she listen to reason? It’s not even like she can use the excuse of being with your mam…”

The couple then noticed that Florence was watching them silently while sipping her tea. Malcolm’s face fell into a scowl and he bit into a biscuit.

“What now, Mam?”

“Getting hitched, hmm?”

“Don’t give me that…”

“All I’m saying is don’t get rid of all your things or you’ll be moving onto our Lexie’s couch in a couple of months while the prenup’s getting executed.”

“We don’t have a prenuptial agreement, Mam,” Malcolm stated flatly. His mother almost choked on her tea.

“That’s how you lost your cat in your last fucking divorce, and nearly the house; lay that shit out now before it all goes to actual shit. Can’t predict needing it, so you better be safe than sorry.”

“Florence, I understand your concern,” Kate said, “but Malcolm and I have thought and talked this through plenty more than you realize. Both of us are going into this with much clearer heads than our previous marriages—I have been married and divorced once before and, I’ll admit, it’s not something I want to go through again.”

“I didn’t expect this wasn’t your first time through,” Florence shrugged. “If Al divorced your mam, chances are you’re more likely to divorce—it’s just something that happens.”

“So if you were unable to build a lasting relationship, it makes it more difficult for me to as well?” Malcolm threw at her.

“O’course,” she said, completely unfazed. Malcolm put his cuppa down and began to rub at his temples—only his mother.

The trio could hear the sound of the front door open and moments later, Lex and Fiona walked in, the former carrying a cardboard box almost identical to the one with Malcolm’s “bad” utensil sets. Florence grinned from ear to ear at the sight of her granddaughter, standing up to approach them.
“There’s my wee Lexie,” she tutted, bringing her in for a hug.

“Good to see you, Granny,” Lex beamed. “I miss you too much when I’m down here.”

“It’s still good for you to be out and in a new environment,” Florence said. She then turned to Fiona. “Who might you be?”

“I’m Fiona, Kate’s daughter. Lex and I are now roommates in Malcolm’s old flat. It’s good to finally meet you, Miss Tucker.”

“I’m your granny now—call me as such,” Florence insisted. “What’d you bring?”

“It better be my good flatware,” Malcolm frowned. Lex winced—she was caught.

“Hey, at least you didn’t have to tell me it was the wrong box…”

“I wasn’t the one who shoved all my shit in storage, nor was I the one who volunteered to get it,” he reminded her. Yeah, definitely caught. “Well, is it?”

“Yes, it is…”

“Good—go wash it now, and don’t put it in the dishwasher because it’s not good for the finish.” Malcolm pointed towards the kitchen and his niece reluctantly obeyed. Fiona followed close behind and soon as the young women were out of sight, Florence smacked the back of her son’s head. “Ow! What the fuck’s that for?!?”

“Don’t be so hard on her,” she scolded. “She’s the one picking your care home, remember that.”

“…and who’s to say I won’t be picking yours?”

“Behave, both of you,” Kate warned calmly, “or there’s no saying what’ll happen if my father decides to come back to see me get married again and decides to do a full-on haunting instead. This was his house, after all, and you did say he didn’t like you… was that correct?”

Both Tuckers fell silent, for the first time the entire visit, and Kate knew that the moment was to be a rare one.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

It took thirty-three chapters and almost four years, but we finally have the wedding chapter. Thank you to everyone who has read this, whether you’ve been around since the beginning or just recently started, as it has been your continued support and readership that has kept this bizarre crackship AU going strong.

Saturday morning and all Hell had broken loose.

The only thing that really could have made things worse was a thunderstorm parking itself over the house. A decent rain had passed over the night before, making it so that the lawn was part-marshland and the hired tent was going to need drying; Marcia’s flight in from Canada had been delayed due to engine failures and she wasn’t going to be on another plane into the UK until late that night due to overbookings; and, to top everything off with a steaming pile of con-shat-ulations, the wrong cake had arrived from the bakery, violently pink and covered in Peppa Pig figurines.

“…and it better be here in one hour or you are going to wish you had never woken up this morning!” Malcolm shouted as the deliverymen hauled the cake out of the garden. Once they were out of sight, he went to check on how the water was draining in the back, only making it halfway through the yard before his mobile rung.

“I’m not in the mood right now,” he warned.

“Mum just wants to know how things are coming or if we should be prepared to stall for time.” It was Fiona, fucking bless. She had Kate and Florence at the flat, the thing still being kept up by her and Lex because the former’s rich-cunt father gave her more than enough housing allowance to cover it. Shitty as Loris could be, the least Malcolm could give him was that he made sure the lass was financially well-off… then again, what was money to a man who made more in one shit than most people did in half a year?

“It looks like what’s left the sun’ll take care of,” he noted, taking a careful look at the miniature swamp. “I never realized we have a fucking off-season turlough back here; thought this was the wrong island for it.”

“Hasn’t done that in a few years; don’t know why it did so last night. The rain wasn’t that bad…”

“I’ll text in about an hour and let you know.”

“Gotta.” The call ended and Malcolm shook his head—leave it till now for things to cock up that hadn’t in a while. He trudged back to the pile of folding chairs and began setting them up near the flowering trellis in the middle of the yard, only getting through three before he saw Kanda and Gordon come around the corner; Lex was almost deliberately lagging behind, talking with a man he’d never seen before.

“Reporting for duty,” Kanda announced as they approached. She then caught sight of the standing water in the back of the garden. “Is everything alright?”
“It’s draining, so we should be good,” he replied. An eyebrow raised and he motioned towards his niece. “Who’s that?”

“Her date,” Gordon deadpanned. As he watched Malcolm’s eyes nearly pop from their sockets in surprise, he shrugged noncommittally at Kanda. “Told you she hadn’t warned him.”

“Then Gordon and I are going to finish setting up the chairs while you go say hi,” Kanda said, giving the two of them an out. They retreated towards the pile of unfolded chairs, leaving Malcolm to begin approaching his niece. As he got closer, he tried to hear what they were talking about, only able to pick up that the man’s voice was rather deep.

‘Fuck, how old is this cumstain?’ he wondered. What was this lad? Ten years older than her? More than that? Lex had never dated anyone with more than two or three years’ difference, making the sight jarring. Showing up with a surprise date on her arm was one thing, but this was an extra level that made his Overprotective Uncle Mode kick in almost immediately. How many people were in his life before Lex? Fuck, try not to think about that. Could he already have kids? Teenaged kids? His stomach did a flip at the idea. He was tall too, nearly two whole fucking meters if he had things right, and looking like he even exercised once in a while—not a lot, ‘cause he was still a skinny fuck, but enough to be an accidental threat if things came to blows. Malcolm knew it was time to do his duty and see if this man-boy was worth keeping around.

At least he could say the lad had the decency to look scared shitless at the sight of the Bollocking Shark, coming in for the kill.

“There I was thinking that your date was Kanda,” Malcolm smirked, finally within earshot. Diffuse with a joke, then strike.

“No—Kanda’s here all on her own as your not-really-but-niece-in-spirit,” Lex replied. She then motioned towards her date, a blushing sort of nervousness plastered all over her face. “Uncle Malcolm, this is Euan; Euan, you’ve seen photos of Uncle Malc…”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir,” the younger man said. Malcolm took note of the lad as he shook his hand—a firm grip and a country brogue so strong that he nearly expected comically unintelligible Scots more suited to an End Game character to come out his mouth next—and let the strange man on his niece’s arm do the talking. “I’ve heard so much about you… good things though. Lex really admires you more like a father than an uncle.”

“Got to do something while hers wallows his life away in fucking Perth,” he nodded back. Lex then caught his eye, noticing that she was glaring at him crossly. “What? What did I do wrong this time?” His niece then pulled him away from her date, leaving him just out of earshot.

“You disapprove,” she hissed lowly. Fuck—caught; she knew him too fucking well. Did his eye twitch or something? “What is it?”

“I know love doesn’t ask for the middle-aged uncle’s permission first, but isn’t he a bit old for you?” he wondered.

“No, he’s not; there are thirteen years between us, but they don’t exactly feel as though they’re all there.” She rested her hands on her hips and gave her uncle the most irritated face she could muster. “It feels like I’m dating someone around my age. Honest.”

“So he’s not just trying to find a new mam for his kids or a bit of something else now that the divorce is final?”
“Never married and never had kids; he’s a clean slate.”

“Fuck, what’s wrong with him?” Malcolm recoiled as Lex punched his shoulder, surprised at the reaction. “What?! Even your da was married and divorced at his age, and that’s one of the most pathetic sacks I’ve ever had the misfortune of dealing with. It’s just a good thing you’re also a Tucker, or else you’d be damned by the gene pool…”

“So his not getting up to anything because he hadn’t found the right person yet is reason to ask what’s ‘wrong with him’?”

“I’m just saying that usually the best men are snatched at least once by the time they’re forty—some of the worst too, but it’s the ones that can’t figure out how to fucking adjust themselves in public that don’t even get touched.”

“You’re a fucking idiot,” Lex scowled. “Your goddamned wedding day and you’re cocking up meeting my boyfriend…”

“Whoa, you only said he was your date! Where the fuck this boyfriend business come from?!”

“May I please interject here?” Euan asked as he cautiously approached. “I can still hear you, you know.”

“Right, man-lad; how’d you meet m’niece and why is it a good idea to date her? If I’m more like her father than an uncle, then give me the story.”

“We met at work—through the other Scottish expats—and we’ve felt close for a long while,” the younger man explained. Malcolm kept eye contact, though noticed how he reached towards Lex, with her grabbing his hand. He was silently asking for strength and she was giving it, which was more than he could say about other relationships she had been in… fuck, more than he could say about his first marriage if he was honest. The lad was bashful as he seemed to recall memories that were better left unshared. “Besides, being shut up in an office during a temporary alien takeover puts a couple things into perspective, and for me it was the fact I want to get to know Lex more than as just a colleague. Our first actual date was after that Zygon stuff and since then it’s felt so right that I don’t want to go back to what we were before.”

Malcolm’s glare softened and his shoulders relaxed at that, instantly drawing the parallel. He nodded as he felt blood rush up to his cheeks in embarrassment. “Yeah, I guess it’s not that much different than Kate and me.”

“See? Now was that so hard?” Lex exhaled in exasperation, finally able to breathe freely now that the chore was out of the way. “At least now you’ve got four extra sets of hands today instead of three; Euan can more than pull his weight.”

“What do you teach? Do you teach?”

“I’m a mid-level lecturer specializing in Europe from the Fall of Rome to, roughly, the English Civil War,” he explained. “It’s a bit broader than I’d like, but there’s so much that the time period influences in today’s world that it’s actually more difficult to stick to just those centuries in just Europe, and I—”

“Less talk, more setup; chop, chop,” Malcolm said, pointing at the shrinking stack of chairs. “I need these set up and covered before we get started on making sure the tent’s dry and the tables set up underneath, and that I want done before those cunts come back with the right cake.”

“What did they deliver? A bat mitzvah cake?”
“I wish it were that nice,” Malcolm snarked, adopting a generic English falsetto momentarily. With a snort to end it, he made Lex burst into hysteric laughter that only proved to confuse Euan and grab Gordon and Kanda’s attention. He patted Euan’s back and, going back to Weegie, said, “Having read her bedtime stories has its advantages—I can get her to laugh in six words or less.”

“You’re a scarily good mimic, sir,” Euan replied. He watched as Lex breathlessly went towards Kanda and Gordon to explain what she found so funny. “Um… can I ask you a question?”

“What?”

“Did you… erm… ever try mimicking like that while you were in politics? I mean, since you moved down here from Glasgow… to make things easier…?” The older man shook his head.

“Only on the phone in order to throw people off the scent; nothing more.” He looked the man-lad square in the eyes and made sure he was paying attention. “Don’t apologize for being Scottish, and certainly don’t be ashamed of whatever wee glen you were brought up in. Where was that?”

“…Darvel…”

“That in South Ayrshire?”

“East, actually.”

“Figures; it’s been a bit. Anyhow, I don’t care why you left or who you the fuck were leaving behind, because that place made you, and if you’re going to get anywhere with my Alexandra, it will behooove you to accept yourself—all of yourself—and don’t compromise.” He shrugged and glanced over at the nips, seeing that Lex could nearly breathe again. “As long as you’re not a cunting prick about it, there’s no harm.”

“Are you sure?”

“Aye.” Malcolm gave the man-lad a (genuinely!) friendly grin and began to walk away. “Now I meant it on the setup! It’s nearly nine and we need to be all set, with half the food prep, by the time the earliest birds arrive at eleven-thirty! And no flirting! Do that on your time, not mine!”

Seriously, what fucking good was he if he couldn’t have at least a bit of fun?

As he expected, the first arrivals showed up at eleven-thirty, nearly exact, despite the fact nothing was actually done. It was Jamie and his wife Jeanette, and they immediately began to help put hors d’oeuvres together as instincts kicked in and the three of them seamlessly began to move about the kitchen as they began to channel days long gone. By the time Cal and Veronica showed up closer to noon, Jamie had dropped enough pans to get all three men kicked out while “the competent and married” of their number could take over while “the competent one and the married two” could make final checks on the outdoors parts.

“Was this bit really a swamp when you woke up this morning?” Cal wondered, poking his toe against the now-dried grass. Malcolm scowled as he looked out at the horizon and the clouds looming northward.

“It was fucking dreadful,” he replied. “I was out here up to m’ankles, you two probably to your shins.”

“Alright, just because I look shorter than I normally do next to Jeannie today doesn’t mean I’ve fucking shrunk,” Jamie growled. “She’s the one in the heels from Hell that have her breathing the
fucking stratosphere.”

“It’s what you get for marrying a woman taller than most fucking men,” Cal teased. “Veronica and I being the same height makes things that much easier to manage.”

“You bent tit—my lass is the perfect fucking height for a cuddle and you’re just jealous because I saw her in the school local first.”

“Lads, you’re both wee, randy shits that give me hope for a long and active marriage, alright?” Malcolm snarked. He glanced back towards the house, staring at where the kitchen was before shaking his head. “If it weren’t for the two of them, I wouldn’t be kicked out of my own kitchen—despite the fact I’ve got culinary competency falling out of my cunting arse—and you’d both still be eating curries and pies and munchie boxes back in that filthy flat, with only your own right hands and a single heated blanket for comfort.”

“Not that flat—we’d at the very least be in Ruchill,” Cal replied. “Now, tell me again: who’s that lad with your Lex again?” The men turned their attention to over by the patio, where the younger four were tacking streamers around the doors and windows, still having not changed into their nicer clothes.

“Another instructor at her university; seems harmless enough.”

“He looks like he could be fucking twice her age,” Jamie chimed in.

“He would be if she was closer to Fiona’s,” Malcolm shrugged. “She’s not a fresh face at uni anymore, lads. We’re the ones getting old.”

“Fuck that, mate; we’re fucking Highlanders.”

“You two might have Highlands in you, but I doubt for me,” Cal groused.

“Yeh wee fuck, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but I think yeh just missed the joke,” Jamie said, voice nearly grave. Malcolm shook his head and perked up at the sight not that far away: Benton and his wife coming around the drive, accompanied by two men that he could only fathom a guess were Mister and Other Mister Yates.

“Lads, behave; the Old Guard’s here. This is the closest we’re gonna get to Kate’s da attending and I don’t want either of you fucking this up.”

If there was anything in particular that Kate didn’t like, it was sitting around waiting.

Now granted, she was particularly good at it, being that it was partly how she was able to make her way up in the UNIT ranks—waiting for the precise moment to strike—but that did not mean that she enjoyed it by any stretch of the imagination. Now she was sitting at the breakfast bar at Malcolm’s old flat, in an elegant pale blue dress, drinking tea while listening to old stories about the man she was about to marry, as his mother regaled her and her daughter of tales that were likely lifted from a spy thriller.

“You really gave up being James Bond for Malcolm and Auntie Marcia?” Fiona marveled. She had, so far, been completely entranced by Florence’s stories, enamored by the sheer amount of thrills they contained. Her mother, on the other hand, was not nearly as impressed.

“I know history hasn’t been kind to the likes of us, but I highly doubt things were as exciting as you claim,” Kate deadpanned. She took another sip of tea and watched as her new mother-in-law
scowled.

“It’s the fucking truth—I wouldn’t lie about being Special Ops like that,” Florence defended. “I was one of the absolute fucking best the Crown had at its disposal and don’t you forget it. Getting into reporting wasn’t easy either, but at least I wasn’t risking making me kids orphans quite as often.”

“Did you ever take them along?” Fiona asked, unfazed by the potential tension.

“A couple times; if it is frowned upon today, trust me in that it was severely fucking frowned upon back then. Most of the time if I had to take them though, it would be that Marcia took care of Mael while they stayed by me desk. I could start leaving them home alone together once Mael was about six, and by the time Marcia started uni, the lad was good enough to be home on his own for a couple hours.”

“What about before Malcolm? When it was just Auntie Marcia?”

“Our neighbors at the time, the Lewistons, were very understanding and would take her when me parents couldn’t; it was actually their boy that Marcia married, and I doubt that sorry sack has done anything of note since they split. If there is a God, he better be taking good fucking care of Jack and Bernice or else he’ll have another think coming by the time I get there.”

It was just then that Fiona’s mobile rang, cutting off all other conversation for the time being.

“Yeah?” The teen paused. “Good; see you.” She then ended the call and grinned triumphantly. “That was Lex—Thunderbirds are go.”

“Everyone isn’t waiting on us, are they?” Kate asked, worried.

“Nah; we’re about halfway there, but it should be a full house by the time you get here if traffic is what I think it’ll be,” Fiona reported. “Let’s just get you ready to go.”

One final check of her dress and makeup and Kate was ushered out the flat and down to the underground carpark where Lex’s wee car was waiting for them. She was shoved into the back and Fiona happily got behind the wheel, exercising her newly-laminated driver’s license with the sort of zeal only one could have while rather young and reckless (or, in Florence’s case, old and still reckless).

Despite the semi-harrowing ride, relief came just as Fiona stopped at the double-mini roundabout that they needed to take to get onto their street. There was no one else on the road, allowing the young woman to idle where she would’ve otherwise been in the way.

“Last chance, Mum,” she said, looking at Kate via the rearview mirror. “If you don’t want to go through, I’m sure we’ve got Granny’s permission and the entire United Kingdom we could run to.”

“If you don’t go home and bring this car trip to an end now instead of prolonging it, I will make certain that your license is stripped and you put on a permanent do-not-drive list.”

“Good enough for me,” Florence shrugged.

Fiona then drove the car up to the front of the house, from which they could see that there were plenty of other vehicles parked along the side and on the lawn. Lex greeted them, allowing Florence to head into the back garden by herself and pulling Fiona and Kate into the library where there was a bouquet of flowers waiting and they were still cut off from everyone. The young women only left when Gordon came in, having recently changed into his UNIT military kit.

“Oh, Gordon, you look just like Granddad,” Kate sniffled, overcome by the sight of her son. Of
course, they only looked vaguely alike, but it was the uniform—the way he held himself—that made her begin to tear up at the very sight of him.

“I’m sure he would’ve loved to be here—Gran too, if she could’ve been lucid enough.” He hugged her, holding tight. “I love you, Mum.”

“I love you too,” she replied. “Thank you for doing this for me.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Everyone’s seated, Lex is set with the camera, and Mister Benton’s ready to go!” Fiona whispered as she opened the door a crack. “How about you two?”

“Ready as we’ll ever be,” Kate said, grabbing the flowers. Her daughter gave her a thumbs-up and disappeared. A minute later and they could hear music—their cue was coming.

Kate and Gordon hooked arms and waited for their signal to begin making their way through the house. They heard the correct note and left the office, slowly heading towards the sitting room doors to keep in-time with the music.

Once they stepped outside, however, the crowd of guests and the accompanying decorations and fuss seemed to melt away. Kate saw Malcolm standing between Jamie and Benton and she instantly began to focus in on him and him alone. She had seen him in some rather nice suits before, and he had definitely seen her in nicer dresses, but when she locked eyes with him, she could see that not only was she the most beautiful person he had ever seen, he was the same for her. Before either could get their bearings, they were standing directly in front of one another, close enough to whisper quietly.

“You ready?” he asked.

“Only if you are.”

He smirked—of course they were.
I apologize to the Australians in advance. All of them. Just in case.

The party had lasted well into the evening, many older attendees falling asleep where they eventually congregated in the sitting room to trade old war stories (uncomfortably, as certain… *details* of the UNIT years were brought up by Florence and her sweary phraseology) and the younger ones dispersing well after one in the morning. Few people left until the party officially ended, with Euan being the first to leave thanks to a work emergency after a couple dances and Sam ushering her sleepy son out at around nine-thirty. The newlyweds saw off a majority of their guests and made certain those asleep where they sat were properly covered in blankets before heading up the stairs to their room to get a quick one in before they passed out and slept through the remainder of their wedding night. They were so content and thoroughly tired by the time they fell asleep that they ignored the soft plinking of rain against the window, threatening to douse the chairs and tables that were still outside. The speakers and stereo and all other sensitive things had been brought in before Kanda and Gordon hauled away the staggering Lex, so what did they need to worry about?

Fuck it—leave it for the morning.

One week, three layovers, and a distinct period of being passed out from jetlag later, and Mister and Missus Tucker-Stewart found themselves waking up in Perth. Not the one on the way to Inverness on the A9, no (that was reserved for a time when his sister’s ex was guaranteed to *not* be flopping about like a castrati in a convent), but the one in Australia, on the other side of the fucking planet, because if they were going to take a fucking honeymoon, then the least they could do was make for damn certain there was no work to be fucking found whatsoever within a few hundred mile radius. With the closest Mainframes being Manila, Gujarat, and Rēkohu, they were calmer and more relaxed than they could remember, waking just before the warm Spring dawn and with no molemen to harass them.

“Now this is how to live,” Malcolm sighed as he maneuvered in order to stretch his back. He and Kate were still in bed, the pair not yet wanting to leave the cozy sanctuary. “What do you plan on doing today?”

“The quay is sort of a mishmash; I think it is better we save that for an anniversary,” she said, scrolling through her mobile. One quick glance out the window and she could see the tip of a construction crane in the distance, despite sunrise not being for another half an hour, around where the aforementioned quay was in-progress. “We’ve got plenty of parks on the docket, including a couple nearby, and there’s the beach, and the island, and some museums, and it seems like there’s some vineyards not terribly far away…”

“We’ve got a car while we’re here—why don’t we just take a drive,” he suggested. “What were they? The 203? 204? I wasn’t paying that close attention.”

“More than just those, but it could be a start.” She looked at her husband as he lounged seductively in the sheets and shook her head. “You made your career out of paying attention; don’t tell me that
you’ve gone soft now that I’ve put a ring on you.”

“First off, there’s nothing about me that’s ‘gone soft’,” he said matter-of-factly. “Second, I’m on holiday… and not just any holiday, but my honeymoon. We are miles away from our jurisdiction, let alone any jurisdiction, so I think I’m allowed to be a slight tit about a couple of things.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Of course I’m sure—it’s what these trips are fucking designed for, yeah?”

“I mean about none of you going soft.” Kate gently poked Malcolm’s stomach, his slightly squishy belly exposing his lie. He quickly curled in response, grabbing hold of her hand and elbow so that he could leave kisses along his wife’s forearm. “Your time in the panic room was the closest thing you got to one of the bad stretches while in government and it shows. My Malcolm at least has time to eat.”

“It’s difficult to not be ravenous while around you,” he claimed. He snuggled up against her and pressed himself against her leg, letting her know that he was ready for more when she was. “I thought I saw a café on the way in yesterday; get a go in and grab a bite after? Decide what to do over some coffee and… I dunno, eggs? Chips? Eggs and chips?”

“That’s definitely a plan I can get behind,” she purred. Kate put her mobile on the nightstand and slid back down into the covers, getting into what she knew was one of her husband’s favorite positions. Raking her nails over his skin, she hummed in satisfaction as he shuddered underneath her—right where she wanted him.

It ended up being a drive after all, the couple deciding to enjoy the scenery before it was supposed to rain for the following couple of days. They got in the rental and found the nearest Tourist Route, driving until they almost needed more petrol. The station they found was thankfully just in time, as they were edging on the boundary of what both assumed was more typical Australian bush than the rest of the Perth area (as it certainly wasn’t the Outback) and they didn’t want to be stuck walking back for fuel. After the tank was full again, they continued wandering and stuck to the leafy roads, feeling better that they also had a new emergency tank sitting full in the boot.

“This certainly is peaceful,” Kate mused. They were having lunch on the Darling Escarpment, overlooking Perth as it sat in the distance, their spot away from the bustle of towns. Every so often, a vehicle would pass back on the road, though they were still sheltered by nearly half a kilometer of jarrah trees.

“Almost makes me think about retiring,” Malcolm snorted. He took a sip from the takeaway cuppa they got in-town and let his gaze wander over the landscape before them.

“You’re not pensioner material yet,” she smirked.

“I know—it’s more hypothetical, really. It’s never really been something to cross my mind seriously, because I’ve always been too busy trying to keep the country from fucking itself over, and then trying to not get left in the dust at UNIT. Have you thought about it?”

“Not really,” she replied. She leaned over and rested her shoulder against his, both tilting their heads until they gently met. “Probably should’ve had this discussion before we got married, yeah?”

“Probably, although I don’t know if I’d be able to retire here… the bizarro seasons would just fuck with me too much for me to enjoy it.”
“I don’t think I’d want to be too far from the kids anyhow. Gran and Granddad can’t live on the opposite side of the world as the grandkids… not me, anyhow.”

“Get one of them in a relationship first, then we can talk about small children visiting Gran and Malcolm,” he chuckled weakly. He sat straight up again and popped the final corner of his sandwich in his mouth. “Fuck… I don’t want to be a fucking granddad; makes me feel like a goddamned fossil just thinking about it.”

“Chances are that the man shagging Gran ends up being called ‘Granddad’ whether he likes it or not, I hate to say,” Kate replied. She patted him on the knee and then stood, stretching before reaching for the paper bag that once held their lunch. Holding it out, she waited for Malcolm to put his sandwich wrapper in it before crumpling it up. “What about if Lex has children? Euan seemed like he was pretty good with David at the wedding, and it wouldn’t surprise me if he wants to have kids sooner rather than later if they work out.”

“Don’t make me think about that man-boy and my Alexandra procreating,” he shuddered. He followed her back towards the car, carrying the remainder of both their cuppas. “I still don’t know if I want to encourage them or murder him and leave the remaining bits across nine different counties in all the UK’s countries.”

“You’re cute when you’re protective.”

“I’ve got almost six decades of practice, love.” He put the cups in the car before getting in himself, glad that at least cars and driving were the same as back home. Turning the vehicle on, he waited until they were both buckled in before driving off, as it was now time for the next leg of their outing.

Not long after they left their picnic spot, they pulled into a car park and got out again, heading straight for the nearby trail. It had a gentle slope and stretched for longer than either could discern thanks to the thick forest ahead.

“Is this it?” Malcolm wondered. He glanced over at Kate and saw her nod while staring at the map on her mobile.

“That it is,” she affirmed. “Nothing like a walk in the woods, now is there?”

“A walk in the woods with you.” He took her hand and laced their fingers together as they began to walk along.

“I don’t know if I should be turned on or worried by all this mushy stuff coming out of you.”

“Would some choice words now and then make you feel at ease?”

“Probably not, but it’s worth a try.”

Malcolm leaned in and murmured in her ear, “How about a promise to put my tongue to better use when we get back to the hotel? Should I shout it loud enough for Manila to hear me? The Kiwis?”

“We’re in public.”

“We’re in the middle of arse-fuck nowhere.”

“No, this is a public trail and that means there could be other people on it even if we don’t see them; behave.”

“They’d just be jealous.”
“…even the children?”

“They’d just finally have a good example, is all.”

“Uh-huh, sure.” She gave him a flirty smile, letting him know she would hold him to said promise later that night. He hardened at that—stiffening at the bat of an eyelash on this trip, he was—and returned the grin, as there was little that could have brought him down from the high he was currently on…

…but of course, dear readers, there’s always something to butt in and fuck shit up.

Half an hour into the walk, when there was nothing but them and the bush, a low and rumbling sound oozed across the forest. It made the couple stop and listen, as it was unlike anything they’d heard, especially out on the trail.

“…the fuck was that…?” Malcolm muttered. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a device a bit like his mobile, but slightly squatter, wider, and thicker in shape. Flipping off the cover with his thumb, he held it towards the forest, hoping to hear it again and hit record.

“Didn’t sound like machinery; definitely organic,” Kate surmised.

“Of course it’s fucking organic. Did you hear the bastard?”

She deigned to not respond to that. “Is the Database picking up anything other than us?”

“It doesn’t look like it.” He checked the screen on the device’s upper half—blank. “I thought R&D said these things could pick up and identify shit from half a mile out.”

“They said that it could ‘in theory’; remember, they’re Research and Development, not Technology and Maintenance.”

“By the time this shit makes its way up to Ji-Yu, it’ll probably take stuff from ten miles ou—fuck!”

Malcolm dropped his Database and took three steps backward, pulling Kate with him. Crossing the path about thirty meters ahead of them was one of the ugliest things he’d ever fucking seen. It was a dusty grey in color, with short fur covering its entire body. While it could have been a dog at first glance, both of them knew that not only were dogs nowhere near seventeen hands tall, with a long, crocodile-like snout, a slender and elongated neck, a tail like a horse, and tapir’s feet. The creature opened its mouth and the odd sound returned, cutting viciously through the pair. It turned its head and noticed the pair…

“…and began walking their way.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck; what do we do?!” Malcolm cussed. He had his arm in front of Kate, ready to push her if that’s what it took to keep her safe. They kept pace with the creature, trying to keep the same amount of distance between them and it.

“I don’t know. The Database is down there.” She cringed as she watched the creature’s hind foot step on it and the plastic casing cracked open. “I guess we’re winging it now.”

“Then what do you suggest we do?!”

The creature growled again and crouched down, ready to attack. Before Malcolm could even consider acting, Kate had pulled a small device out of her jacket pocket and pointed it at their attacker. She hit a button and it collapsed on the ground, completely still aside from noticeably labored breathing.
“What the fuck did you…?” he marveled. She held up the device so he could see clearly: the mind-wipe thing that she hit Reeder with what (thankfully) felt like another lifetime ago, as well as a number of molemen since. “It does more than wipe minds?”

“You don’t want to know everything this capable of,” she said. They both approached the creature cautiously, with Kate digging through her pockets the entire time. “At least I know it’s not in pain from this—numb, yes, but pain, no… shit; I think I left my Database back at the room.”

“I know the stereotype is that everything in Australia is freaky and tries to fucking kill you, but this is a bit too much,” Malcolm growled. He glanced over at Kate and saw that she was looking at her mobile. “What are you doing?”

“I’m calling Gordon,” she said, “and he can get some intel on this thing right away.”

“Scarfy’s gonna lecture us until the end of the fucking year,” he scowled. He poked the creature with his toe—it remained immobile.

“Osgood and Kistane, most likely, as I think those were his idea.” She found her son’s mobile number and called it. “He needs to get up anyhow; it’s nearly four-thirty back home.”

“Aren’t you cruel?” Malcolm pressed a kiss to her cheek and began to walk around the creature, taking careful note so that he could describe it as precisely as possible if the need arose.

Finally, the signal connected and Kate heard the dialtone as she waited for her son to pick up. The tone cut and she was met with a voice she definitely did not expect.

“Hello? Just a moment; Gordy, stop, I’m on the phone; if they’re calling, then work’s cancelled, and then we’ll have the whole day. Sorry—hello? Miss Breckinridge? Please tell me there’re no classes today.”

Kate paused for a moment and pursed her lips as she processed the situation.

“Hello…?”

“Kanda, dear, why did you answer Gordon’s mobile?” The silence on the other end of the call was not only deafening, but extremely telling as well. Kate glanced over at Malcolm, who was now staring at her in horror. “Kanda? Where’s Gordon?”


“Everything’s fine, but I need three things.”

“Anything.”

“One, have either you or Kanda change your ringtone, effective immediately; two, be ready to have a long talk when I get home, and thirdly, I need you to look something up for me—Malcolm’s Database broke and mine’s at the hotel.”

“He broke his Pokédex? How’d he do that?”

“That’s not important—what’s important is that you look at the photos I’m about to send you and cross-reference them in the UNIT database. We might have an extraterrestrial on our hands and I need to know if I have to call it in or if doing so would be wasting another Mainframe’s time and resources. Call me back when you do.”
“Yes ma’am, Brigadier-Director, ma’am.”

The call dropped and Kate began taking photos of the creature, sending them to Gordon almost immediately. When she was done, he sent a thumbs-up emoji and she put away her mobile, satisfied.

“What the fuck was that?” Malcolm asked. “Were you talking to Kanda?”

“She was the one who answered, yes; it appears that something happened right under our noses. Chances are we’ll be Gran and Granddad before we realize it.”

“No, don’t talk like that.”

“If my son is anything like his father—and trust me, he is—then he only started their relationship believing that he has found the future mother of his children and that he has discussed this matter with her to ensure full disclosure of his intentions.”

“Doesn’t he fucking know that’s incest now?”

“You might think of Kanda like an auxiliary niece, but it’s clear that to him, she is not his cousin. If Euan were not in the picture, could you see Gordon and Lex being together?”

“Fuck naw.”

“Precisely, because they were cousins before we were even married. Kanda, however, I imagine has been the wild card in the trio this entire time.”

“Well, fuck…” Malcolm scratched his head, mussing his hair. “Now it’s not even like I can have a shout because I don’t like who they’re with…”

“Don’t worry—I’ll take care of the lecturing,” Kate said. Her mobile chirped and she answered it. “Yes?”

“It’s a bunyip,” Gordon said, getting straight to the point. “By-and-by they’re mostly semi-aquatic cryptids from the other side of Australia, but not only have they been ‘sighted’ out in the Western part of the country, it also looks like there’s a Silurian community not far off from your location that raises them as livestock of sorts. Says here they’re descended from one of the Silurians’ favorite delicacies, and that it’s only recently that they’ve been able to wrangle them back up and mostly domesticate the species again. Before then, it’s been just absolute havoc when those things try to get a hold of a Human, hence the cryptid stories. You both are very lucky.”

“Should we alert them that one of the herd got loose?”

“Sending the information now.” Kate’s mobile gave a quick buzz—she got a text. “They’re probably already looking for it. Think along the lines of Kobe beef cattle wandering off.”

“That is impressive. I’m almost curious.”

“Oh, and Mum…? I’m, erm, sorry. I have a different ringtone now. It’s almost always on silent, so I didn’t know, and…”

“Save it for our talk. Love you—treat her well.”

“Only because you taught me right—love you too.”

Kate ended the call and checked her messages; sure enough, there was phone number zoned to a
local community.

“So do we have to kill him?” Malcolm asked as she copied the number.

“I told you: I’ve got the lecturing under control.” She gave him a wink and waited for the new call to go through. “Yes? Hello? This is Kate Stewart, normally of UNIT’s Mainframe UK; with whom am I speaking?”

As Kate spoke on the phone, Malcolm walked around the bunyip again, checking to make certain the stun-device wasn’t going to wear off any time soon. He could see that the creature’s fur was mechanically uneven—clearly shorn artificially—and had a sigil branded on one of its lower back legs he did not recognize. Even an idiot outside of UNIT’s tendrils could tell that it was livestock if they got over the mix-and-match-critter-ness of it all. He went over to the busted Database and picked up the pieces to shove in his pocket before retracing the bunyip’s steps; it appeared to have come from the nearby stream, so there were minimal tracks to destroy, and now it was just a matter of waiting for reinforcements.

“Get all the bits?” Kate asked as she pocketed her mobile.

“The less we leave behind, the less of a fit they’ll pitch.”

“This is true.”

“At least we have more than one; that’d be fucking Shite Creek if there was such a thing.”

“This is also true.” The bunyip began to wiggle around and Kate caught it with the mind-wipe device again.

Wherever the Silurians were, they couldn’t get there fucking fast enough.

Chapter End Notes

I have no idea what a bunyip is supposed to look like, but no one else does either because the descriptions are so varied, so that’s okay.
When Brigadier-Director and Mister Stewart-Tucker made it back to their posts inside the central mechanisms of Mainframe UK, they mostly carried on as before, with only a few slight differences. The main one—the most obvious and terrifying thing to the molemen and other varying underlings—was that they were now most definitely prone to kissing at work. After a meeting, the middle of a shout, simply going to get some lunch; every time the two parted ways, there was a quick, calm, and rather loving peck of their lips, which was not something that was commonly seen otherwise. More than a few quietly made mention of the terror that Tucker had caused both in his past life and current one, making them all wonder what Stewart truly saw in him if it led to things like kissing and marriage and none of it being a fucking joke. A bizarre rumor they could take, even them dating (and leaving that at the door) was almost enough to swallow, but this was flat-out spooky-arsed shit and it sat well with very few despite their reluctance to actually say anything about it.

It was lunch, early in November, with Malcolm and Kate eating their sandwiches in her office—consistently-shared lunches being another development that was noticeable to the rest of the Mainframe. Themba was stationed outside the door with orders to not disturb them unless absolutely cunting necessary, which both Humans figured would be overridden by something or other eventually. They were finishing up their Fantas and crisps, relaxing on the couch as they did so, he with his suit jacket draped over the armrest and she with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows.

“I swear, that child has impeccable timing,” Kate grumbled. She took the buzzing mobile from the tabletop and checked the message; of course, Fiona.

“Told you she should’ve taken a gap year,” Malcolm mumbled through a crisp. “What’s it this time? You weren’t exactly that specific earlier.”

“By now, it’s almost easier to list what it isn’t,” she replied, firing off a reply text. “Loris’s business ventures keep on following her, making it so that too many people try to get to him via her while she’s trying to study, which is far from how she wants to go through this part of her education. She doesn’t have to go to school where he tells her anymore… with her grades, she can get into any university she chooses without a problem.”

“She is a screaming-clever lass, after all,” he said.

“Clever or not, she’s worried about her allowance; her father gives her a decent amount and she doesn’t have the means to adjust to living without it.”

“So? I wouldn’t mind fitting a bit of something into our budgets if that’s what it took; whatever the soggy pappardelle gives her now, I’m sure she doesn’t spend it all. Chances are she’s got a nice savings, just knowing how she is.”

“No—there’s a better way to do that without cutting Loris’s funds out of it. We can afford to give her
an allowance, but we’re making use of her father for as long as possible.”

That piqued his interest. “How…?”

“I’m trying to get her to finish out the year and transfer once she can get another university to accept her instead of quitting right now, which she can easily twist in his mind to make it seem like it was his idea from the start,” she explained. She thought for a moment and shrugged. “Do you think that Lex and Euan’s has a decent business program?”

“Whether they’d do or not, they’d probably be salivating at the fucking mouth if they have someone who wants to transfer in from an Oxbridge school knocking at their door.” He took their empty crisp bags and lazily went to the wastebasket to bin them, not surprised when he felt his wife’s arms wrap around his middle and her press her body into his back. “We’ll help her, you know that.”

“I know.” She rested her forehead on the back of his neck and he could feel the front of his trousers tighten. Was there time to inappropriately utilize the panic room? Probably, but he wasn’t entirely sure if that was her point. “There’s going to be an explosion between the two of them sooner rather than later, and I’m afraid we’ll be stuck in the middle whether it is our fault or not.”

“Don’t worry about that,” he said, placing his hands over hers.

“…but he’s her father and she has to genuinely deal with him…”

“…and sometimes fathers fuck up and need to pay the price, no matter how involved they are,” he gently reminded her. He was about to continue when he was cut off, a new voice entering the conversation.

“Ma’am?” Malcolm and Kate, not even bothering to disentangle themselves, glanced over towards the door and saw a concerned look on Themba’s face. “You have a visitor.”

“I have no scheduled visitors—tell them to leave and return after they’ve gone through proper protocol.”

“I tried already, but she won’t take that for an answer.” Sliding into the room and shutting the door, the Zygon clearly attempted to keep the conversation more private, setting off all sorts of mental alarms. The borrowed face was clearly uncomfortable with the situation and the Humans knew it. “There’s something in Miss Morton’s memories that tell me I should let her in, but I cannot check further without the original here, so I wanted to run it by you first.”

“What’s her name?” Kate asked.

“Miss Clara Oswald; she claims to be an associate of the Doctor.”

Both Kate and Malcolm froze when they heard the name escape Themba’s lips. If Clara Oswald was there without the Doctor—which it sounded like she was—then it was likely that the world was soon to be in plenty of danger, and for some reason she came to them first. Kate let go of Malcolm and quickly gathered herself, leaning on the front edge of her desk.

“Send her in,” she said. Her assistant was about to exit the office when Kate cleared her throat to bring attention towards her again. “Oh, and Themba? Discretion is key whenever Miss Oswald is in the mainframe; no one is to know that she’s ever been here. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, ma’am.” The Zygon disappeared behind the door, giving Malcolm and Kate a moment of privacy before their guest came in.
“That goes for you too,” Kate warned. “Don’t be too harsh on her until we know all the facts. Oswald is a companion of the Doctor—she often has insight that the rest of us would genuinely kill to have in our possession.”

“Has he had many of these ‘companions’?” Malcolm wondered as he pulled on his jacket.

“He’s been around for a long time—longer than any of us can fathom—and he, like most of us, requires mates. There have been mates that are friends, like my father, and mates with whom he has a sexual relationship, such as Miss Oswald, and many more where the relationship cannot be pinned down due to the multiple facets involved. Hopefully, the news she brings is good… or at least better than we fear.”

A couple minutes passed and Themba led Clara Oswald into the office. She was just as Malcolm remembered her from that Christmas, only in clothes more appropriate for being outside her bedroom. Wearing dark blue jeans, wedge-heeled sneakers, and a dark grey jumper, she seemed to be primed to blend into a crowd if need be… ready to disappear.

“Clara, how good of you to visit,” Kate smiled. “Please, take a seat.” She saw Clara eye Malcolm cautiously, not knowing whether or not he should have been there. “Don’t worry about Mister Tucker—he’s not only our Director of Communications and Head of Public Relations, but he’s also recently become my husband. Whatever secrets you have, he knows not to repeat them. You are perfectly safe here.” He silently waved, making certain to flash his wedding band as he did so to add credence to her claim.

“Thank you,” Clara said. Her voice was scratchy and small as though she had been recently crying, and her large, irritated-looking eyes did nothing to dispel that notion. She sat down in a chair and began to pick at her fingernails, not entirely sure how to continue.

“Is everything alright?” Malcolm asked. He knew that he might as well at least act like he was capable of being kind, recognizing the need to soften his tone and weaken his scowl. “Last time I saw you, I almost had m’fucking face eaten off; I hope this is a better occasion.”

“Kind of, in a way…” Clara’s eyes began to fill with tears and she averted her gaze, choosing a spot of the rug instead. “I’m here because the Doctor… because I… oh, this is useless.” She palmed her eyes and attempted to rein in her tears, which caused Kate to take her weight off the desk and kneel in front of the younger woman.

“What did the Doctor do?” she asked. “I will make sure he pays for hurting you if that’s what it takes.”

“No!” Clara gasped, taking her hands away from her face in panic. “He didn’t hurt me! It’s the opposite, really! I just sent him away and now I don’t know who else to turn to!”

“Sent him away? For how long?”

“I dared him to stay away for two years, betting that he wouldn’t be able to stay in sync with me as well as away from me for that time,” she said. “It hurts, but it’s what has to be done to make certain everyone is safe. Please say you’ll help me… that you’ll help us.” Clara placed a hand on her stomach and Kate’s eyes immediately widened in realization.

“Really…?” she marveled. Clara nodded in response.

“I don’t get it,” Malcolm frowned. “What’s this about?”

Kate stood and began to pace around the room in contemplation. “Miss Oswald is pregnant by the
Doctor, a man of extraterrestrial origin, meaning that she cannot simply go to any hospital she pleases and give birth—there are too many variables that could potentially occur with a species hybrid such as theirs. How many weeks along are you?"

“Three or four months, actually, from what I can tell,” Clara replied. “I realized it in September, which was when I made the bet. The reason I waited was because I knew it could have been a false alarm due to stress—those happen to me a lot—and then I’d call the Doctor and lie that I gave up and he won so he could be insufferable and we would be on our way, but…” She shook her head sadly. “It looks like I’m in this for the long-haul.”

“Why go through all this trouble?” Malcolm wondered. “You could terminate and then the entire matter would be solved.”

“No,” Clara replied icily as she stood, “because this child is a living testament to the Doctor’s love and compassion. I shouldn’t even be able to have children by him—he shouldn’t be able to become a father after having gone through not only the Time Academy, but all his regenerations—but here I am. Do you have any children, Mister Tucker?”

“None that I’m aware.”

“Then I wouldn’t expect you to even begin to fathom the actions of a mum who is ready to be one, but knows she cannot keep her child safe and happy as it should be.” She then turned towards Kate, her face falling from irritation to exhaustion. “Will UNIT help me?”

“Yes,” Kate nodded. “I am a mum, and I know the lengths we go through for our children, whether it involves us being in the picture or not. This is a very brave and selfless thing you’re doing, and it’s impossible for me to turn you out.” She stepped towards Clara with her arms outstretched, bringing the younger woman in for a hug. Clara broke down into tears and clung to Kate, allowing herself to be consoled, for it seemed as though the universe was crashing and she was the epicenter. After Clara was done crying, Kate held her at arm’s length and looked her in the eyes. “How do you feel about staying here for the duration of your pregnancy?”

“I can’t just abandon my job…”

“We can send a Zygon in your place, with access to enough knowledge of your workplace and other life details to keep things quiet, but not so much that it is a complete invasion of privacy,” she offered. “In the meantime, you can be here, under the best of care and supervision, and when you’re ready to go back, you can rest easy with the knowledge that your child shall be safe and cared for without anyone else being the wiser.”

“I’d like to stay a couple months after the baby’s born, please, so that I know them for just a little while,” Clara requested quietly. “I also want to know which family my child will be with.” She looked at Kate, frowning at her lack of response. “We are going to find a family, yeah? Children aren’t subjects for laboratories.”

“Your child will be in the best care possible—mine.”

Malcolm’s heart skipped a beat and his brows arched at his wife’s words. He swallowed hard in order to stifle himself; this was the last place for him to go on a tirade.

“Yours…?” Clara marveled. Her wide, water-logged brown eyes blinked in confusion. “Are you sure…?”

“I am,” Kate assured. “He or she will grow up with a mum and dad, older siblings, a cousin, and all
the love it cannot find in a lab. If they ask, when they’re old enough to ask, I will say that they were a welcome surprise, after I thought I could not have any more children—that much is not a lie—and as an adult, they will know all about their actual genetic heritage. They will still have a mum with an English accent and a dad with a Scottish one, so you can breathe easily. For all we know, there might even be a family friend who comes over to visit on occasion—one who teaches in Shoreditch and wanders the galaxies on Wednesdays.”

“Thank you,” Clara sniffled. Her head began to bob slightly as she attempted to find words. “Thank you so much.”

“Now I want you to go home and pack a bag; if you need anything else from your flat, we can have the Zygon duplicate fetch it for you,” Kate said. “We should have something in place by the time you return. Once you’re settled, I will introduce you to Alessandra—our Head of Biomedical—and she can run some baseline tests. Gallifreyan biology is of great interest to her, and it will make her life to know that she will have the privilege to observe a child that’s even partly so…” It was then when Kate began to lead Clara out of the office, leaving Malcolm alone to stew.

A baby?! They couldn’t possibly look after a baby, not full-time playing Mam and Da like she was suggesting. It pained him to think of it, but that time was past, and he knew full-well. Then again, Kate was not the one who had imagined a daughter for them both in an idealized world, the lingering memory of which continued to pain him. He waited in silence until his wife returned to the room alone, silently shutting her office door behind her.

“Not a word of this unless I say so, you hear?” she requested. “We can’t have the reason behind Miss Oswald’s existence persisting as a rumor around the office—it will keep us on our toes as far as mind-wipes to begin with by her staying.”

“Why are you doing this, love?” he asked, voice low and level. “Why are you cleaning up his messes?” He didn’t need to mention any names—they both knew.

“I am a Lethbridge-Stewart and my family is irrevocably tied to the Doctor,” she replied, her tone steadfast. “It only makes sense that if his child were to be fostered in a family on Earth, it would be with us.”

“Without asking me first?”

“You saw her: Miss Oswald needs support now like no other time in her life. There was no time to pull you aside and conference separately, as doing so would have made her begin to rethink her actions.” She sat at her desk and exhaled heavily as the weight of her decision pushed down on her. “We will get through this; I wouldn’t have said anything if I didn’t have faith in you and your ability.”

“That’s nice and all, but I don’t know one fucking thing about being a father, I hope you realize this,” Malcolm scowled, emotion edging back to his voice. “I’m an uncle to Lex, Mam’s bed-warmer to Gordon and Fiona, but not a dad! We can’t raise a nip that’s young enough to be our grandchild! We’ll be ancient before they even make it to secondary school, let alone uni!”

“…and here I thought you would have jumped at the opportunity…”

“Yeah, if we were ten years younger and had this child on our own! You’re fifty-two, I’m fifty-six, and you’re saying we’re going to adopt a bairn that shouldn’t even exist on the laws of biology and the cosmos, simply because some space-cunt stuffed a human woman?! This is for someone Gordon’s age to handle, not ours!”
“I’m sorry I pulled this on you, Malcolm, but there is no other option,” Kate frowned back. “Miss Oswald’s child is going to need constant attention from UNIT, being what its heritage is, and it won’t be any easier for anyone else. You knew going into this marriage that UNIT affairs control a vast section of my personal life and that someday it could control yours in the same manner. I cannot put this on anyone else. It would be cruel to demand my son become a father when he is still shaping his own family goals, or to have my daughter become a mother while she is still finding her way, all simply due to my sense of duty. My mind's made up.”

“...and I just get absolutely no say...?!”

“That's right, because if I were having this child myself, there would be no discussion. Miss Oswald needs to know that her child will be safe and well-cared for in a way she and the Doctor can't provide between them. Be on the adoption paperwork if you want to, but I know that I am going to be that child's mum whether you like it or not.”

“Why are we cleaning after his fuckups though?!” Malcolm sniped. “You and I did nothing that means we should be resigned to always cover for him! I don't want to turn away a child, but why does it have to be us and only us? This isn't the bairn we had in that fucked up dreamscape, it is an actual child that is liable to run our old bones ragged thanks to its parentage and our ages. I'm a stepdad to adults—let them be the ones to bring new children into this mess.”

“They still can, but this is an entirely separate matter.”

“No, it's not. What will happen to the nip if suddenly we can't care for it? We'd be saddling the kids with a baby anyhow, and then they'd really have no fucking choice in anything.”

“It's the risk we take; no one is better equipped than us to care for Miss Oswald's child, and if I don't do this, I will go to the grave regretting it.” She looked out the window, down at the atrium below. “Nearly anyone in this Mainframe would take a baby in if asked, though how many would be constantly scared of what their new little girl or boy would or could do, knowing of its parentage?”

Oh…

Malcolm shifted awkwardly on his feet. “Everyone, I imagine.”

“Precisely—I am terrified of what this child means to the universe and the damage that it could do, but I’ll feel much better knowing that it will grow up under optimal circumstances.” She glanced back at Malcolm, seeing that he was avoiding eye contact as he was becoming increasingly lost in thought. “I wouldn’t agree do this so quickly if I didn’t think you were capable of it.”

“I don’t know if the Gabha or MacGowan or MacGouren or whomever the fuck’s genes’ll kick in,” he replied quietly. Her attention was caught… that. “Will you hate me if I turn out to be like m’da… a void in his bairn’s life because he couldn’t be bothered? I don’t even know if he was a good man to any spawn he did know about…”

“The very fact you’re worried about it makes me certain that you will be perfectly fine as a father, if a bit unconventional.” Kate hit the button on her desk to make her window opaque and crossed the office to hug her husband. He leaned into her, burying his face in her shoulder and holding her high on her waist. Tears began to soak through Kate’s blouse and she knew this was what he needed. “I know of plenty of men who turned out to not be like their fathers.”

“Who?” His voice cracked against the fabric of her shirt, tugging at her heart.

“My ex, Jonathan, for one,” she said. He lifted his head, his reddened eyes staring at her curiously.
“His parents were never married, were always off-and-on in different stages of fighting, and eventually separated for good when he was a teenager. He didn’t even see him after secondary school, because the man moved back to Poland and then died. It’s why when we were expecting Gordon, he wanted to immediately get married, because he didn’t want his child to grow up in an uncertain environment like he did.”

“…why didn’t you…?”

“I knew although we both wanted Gordon, we weren’t right for one another in the long-term, and that’s been proven now that he’s been very happily married to his wife for over twenty years and I’m here with you. He and I both did our best to make sure the differences we had affected none of our children while they were growing up… I know it’s possible.”

Malcolm sniffled and nodded silently. He shifted so as to hold Kate closer, not wanting to let her go.

“I won’t be like Sean,” he choked out. “I promise.”

“You already are.” She held him close as he breathed slow and heavy, rustling her hair. “Do me a favor, okay?”

“Anything.”

“While she’s here, let Miss Oswald know that you are more than willing to help raise her child. Even if she doesn’t realize it, she needs to hear from both of us that we’re ready for this. It will put her mind at-ease more than either of us can fathom.”

“Alright, I promise.” He kissed the side of her head and squeezed before letting go. “Do me a favor, okay?”

“ Anything.”

“While she’s here, let Miss Oswald know that you are more than willing to help raise her child. Even if she doesn’t realize it, she needs to hear from both of us that we’re ready for this. It will put her mind at-ease more than either of us can fathom.”

“Alright, I promise.” He kissed the side of her head and squeezed before letting go. “I guess we have some work to do, yeah? Getting ready for something this big takes effort when it comes to not letting it leak all over the office.”

“Shit, you’re right; I’ve got to catch Sullivan before she decides to take off for the day. It would be just our luck…” She pressed a kiss to her husband’s lips and gave him a wink. “This time next year, we’ll be parents. Not Mum and Malcolm, but Mum and Dad… it’s a little bit exciting, don’t you think?”

“Aren’t you used to it, though? You’ve been Mam for twenty-six years…”

“That doesn’t mean a new arrival is boring,” she replied. A tap to his rear and she left the office, headed straight down to biomedical. Themba then approached Malcolm, the borrowed face looking terribly confused.

“Sir? What just happened?”

“It was a good idea to let Miss Oswald in, is all,” he over-simplified. “Things are going to be very interesting around here soon, to say the least.”

Three hours later and Clara returned to Mainframe UK with a dimension-defying overnight bag packed full of clothes and books and other things from her flat. With Kate in the hospital wing with Alessandra, it was up to Malcolm to meet the younger woman at the front of the building, taking the bag from her as they walked towards the lift.

“Is everything set?” she asked as he swiped his keycard to get the Mainframe’s level buttons to emerge in the lift.
“Mostly,” he replied. “Our Biomedical Head is over the fucking moon, but she’ll get over it in time.” He glanced at her taking note of the resolution emanating from her expression and body language. The heavy weight of guilt bore down upon him and he took little time to rectify that, knowing it was out of his normal realm of being. “I’m sorry that I hit a nerve earlier when we were in Kate’s office; it’s more natural an occurrence than I want to admit.”

“Will you be fine with it?” She didn’t even need to say what “it” was.

Fuck—it was now or never.

“Yeah… I, erm… can we talk for a moment? Alone? Would you be alright with that?”

He glanced at her taking note of the resolution emanating from her expression and body language. The heavy weight of guilt bore down upon him and he took little time to rectify that, knowing it was out of his normal realm of being. “I’m sorry that I hit a nerve earlier when we were in Kate’s office; it’s more natural an occurrence than I want to admit.”

“Will you be fine with it?” She didn’t even need to say what “it” was.

Fuck—it was now or never.

“Yeah… I, erm… can we talk for a moment? Alone? Would you be alright with that?”

Clara raised her eyebrow at the admission, though silently followed him out of the lift and towards an empty conference room. She remained standing, noting that he kept a few paces away, very clearly and intentionally not crowding her. He put her bag down on the table and leaned against one of the high-backed chairs, rubbing his face in frustration before letting his fingers rest in his hair.

“How much did the Doctor tell you about the face-sucker from when we first met?” She stayed silent for a moment, giving it some thought.

“It tried to rewrite your life, giving you the perfect scenario so that your consciousness wouldn’t rebel against it,” she recalled. “Him going in altered it a bit, but it was still tailored to your dreams, desires, and fantasies. Why bring this up now?”

He paused for a moment, taking a deep, steadying breath. “I never had kids—was always too busy with work to bother with them—but in that dream, I had a daughter… Kate and I had a daughter, and the fact she will never exist still haunts me. Now, after I’ve long become comfortable with the idea of being married to a woman with adult children and that’s it, you walk in and practically fucking hand us your unborn child on a silver platter… a child that only the two of us are capable of raising.” He looked to make certain he still had her undivided attention—he did.

“Why tell me this?”

“…because I want you to know I won’t hate your child, nor will they be held to the standard of a hallucination,” he clarified. “No one can replace the daughter I thought I had in that shitty fever-dream, but the idea that I’m getting a second chance for real this time… I’m beyond words. You don’t know how rare it is for me to be beyond words…”

“Everyone deserves a second chance.”

“Except, I don’t… not really. I don’t really know what being a father’s like… my own wasn’t in the picture and most of the ones I’ve been exposed to were either fucking frightening or impossible to see as dads even if I watched their bairns grow up. Being honest… it scares me… no, flat-out terrifies me, because I’m going into this fucking blind.”

“It’d be a bigger problem if you weren’t just a little bit scared,” Clara said. She touched his upper arm lightly, his admissions allowing her to relax somewhat. “I don’t think Kate would have accepted responsibility so readily if she wasn’t confident in you. Like she said: my child will still have a mum with an English accent and a dad with a Scottish one… it means you’re going to be fine, if a bit frazzled, and what parent isn’t at some point?”

“I guess you’re right,” he chuckled weakly. He then noticed that she was looking at him funny, in an almost amused sort of way. “What…?”

“You said that Kate has adult children. Does that mean you’re a granddad before being a dad?”
“Fuck no,” he snorted, trying not to laugh. “Her son’s the only one who’s gone on anything remotely close to a date and we’ll be lucky if that lad survives his current girlfriend.”

“She a bit crazy?”

“Not in the slightest—she’s just my niece’s best friend and surviving that entire situation is a feat unto itself.”

“Surviving whom? The Best Friend or the Niece?”

“Just surviving, that poor lad…” Malcolm laughed it off—it was fucking hilarious when he really thought about it—and smiled at Clara. It was a genuine smile, and the one that crept onto her face in return showed that she understood. “Just to warn you: I’m gonna say some shit while you’re here, maybe even do shit, that you might not like to hear or see, but know that it’s because someone has to, and that someone has been me for so long that I just cannot stop. It doesn’t mean that your bairn won’t be in good hands.”

“Thank you; I don’t doubt that you will raise my child well.”

“I meant Kate, but I appreciate the vote of confidence.” He then checked his watch and cussed under his breath. “Fuck; Sullivan’s probably wondering where the fuck we are.”

“The Biomedical head? Not your wife?”

“Hey, Kate knows she can cut me loose and I won’t stray far enough to land with someone else—always has and always will. What sort of a marriage would be have if she has to keep color-coded tabs on me constantly?”

“…one where she married someone who went to prison?” He cringed as he picked up her bag and hefted it to his shoulder again.

“You know about that?”

“You were one of the highest-profile government officials to get a prison sentence in a very long time; some of my students have political science and current events, after all.” She went to the door and held it open for him, both headed out into the corridor and back towards the lifts. “I read up on you and that perjury business; don’t worry. You don’t seem like a bad man, simply a pragmatic one.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

They stepped into the lift and went down towards the medbay—this was going to be far from easy, though at least now they understood one another.
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

I was gonna post this a bit later, but I’m a little down from being in the middle of a bad five-day stretch at work and posting fic is a great personal pick-me-up.

As it happened, there was not much when it came to adjusting one Miss Clara Oswald to her new accommodations. Malcolm passed Clara and her bag over to Kate and Alessandra, who then proceeded to bring her over to a private room inside the medbay. It was more of an entire small ward than anything else, with plenty of room to move around and create more of a studio flat-type of feel in the case of a long-term patient like her (the likes of whom were thankfully few and far between). There was both a treadmill and stationary bike facing an “open window” that they programmed to show the Blackpool Promenade (amongst other locales), an old couch and armchair set from one of the offices, a television that was more than big enough, various bookshelves, a kitchenette… nobody knew how long she would be under UNIT’s care, her most of all, and it was important she was not going to snap and try to escape in a fit of cabin fever.

Even so, she had some surprises when her baseline examinations were complete. It was just the three of them in the room and the new mother was shocked beyond belief.

“Seven months?!” she gasped, eyes going even wider than normal. She was sitting up on the bed, the exam now over, covering her lower half with a blanket. “How do you know I’ve been pregnant for seven months and not even realize it?! You just said that you’re not even a gynecologist!”

Sullivan took off her gloves and shrugged. “Not only do I need to be a jill-of-all trades to run Biomedical, but my instruments don’t lie,” she replied. She handed Clara the diagnostic device, the readout simple and clear despite the more esoteric graphs and charts that also adorned it. The younger woman stared at it, not entirely sure she wanted to believe what she was seeing. “R&D and I have been developing this device to measure the age of fetal cells and more accurately date the day of conception in all Tripartite life, and we’ve been able to pinpoint things very closely. My guess is that you became pregnant shortly before or after the Insurgency, giving room for the metabolic stasis you were in during that time. Would that make sense?”

The younger woman thought about that for a moment and her face went red. “It does. There’s, erm, a lot of opportunities.”

“No reason to be embarrassed,” Kate said. “Plenty of women before you have been caught off-guard by a pregnancy and its duration, and there will be many more after.”

“…but the soreness, the nausea, the needing to use the bathroom constantly, it all started nearly four months ago! It doesn’t align!”

“That would only mean that you were pregnant with a Human child, but as it seems, Gallifreyan genetics are a completely different matter,” Alessandra said. She tapped on the corner of the readout screen and a diagram of the fetus appeared. “This is your baby, having grown to about the size a Human would be at fourteen weeks old, at the beginning of the second trimester. With our instruments, however, we can tell that it instead has many molecular patterns indicating it has been
developing for at least thirty-one, which should be well past the start of the third trimester and
dangerously close to being not just a viable preterm but a normal, though still preterm, child. The
thing is though is that it’s not undersized, merely developing at a different rate. Normal gynecologists
and obstetricians would, and should, be completely baffled by this—in fact, I can probably name
more than a couple I’ve worked with that would call me cracked for even talking like I am.”

“So even though I haven’t felt the baby move or can even see it’s there in my figure, it still has been
around long enough to make me start waddling if it was a regular human being?”

“Essentially, yes,” Alessandra said. She glanced at Kate as Clara leaned back into the pillows and
began to silently cry—they knew it was going to be a long few months for Miss Oswald’s stay, but
this long was going to be brutal. Kate took a kerchief from her pocket and handed it to Clara, who
dabbed at her eyes with it as she sniffled.

“We’re here for you, remember that,” she assured her. Clara nodded in silent understanding. “You
knew this was the best place, and now it’s even clearer that you made the right choice by coming
here. We will make sure you and the baby are alright no matter how long it takes.”

“How long will that be?” Clara asked, voice cracking. “Can you tell?”

“It’s difficult to say,” Alessandra admitted. “Our understanding of Gallifreyan biology is limited to
samples taken from an adult Time Lord displaying male physiology. For all we know, the fetus’s
growth will greatly pick up in speed tonight and will only require a normal Human’s nine months,
maybe just ten.”

“That sounds like you think it’ll take longer.”

“It could, but you also exhibit signs of possible delayed implantation, which does not occur in
Tripartite species. This might mean that fertilization occurred well before the Insurgency and the
zygote, utilizing its paternal genetics, simply did not start to develop into an embryonic stage until
after certain conditions in your body were met and—”

“All I want to know is how long I’ve been pregnant!” Clara snapped angrily. “When did I get
bloody knocked up so I can prevent it from happening again?!”

“Being honest, I’ve already given you the closest dates I can,” Sullivan said. “Your baby is part-
Gallifreyan; without knowledge of what their reproductive cycle is like, there is no way I can
determine that, even if I make my best guesstimates through your part of things.”

“Shit, I need a drink,” Clara groused. A thought then crossed her mind: “Are Gallifreyan fetuses
more resistant to alcohol? I hadn’t exactly been abstaining for all seven months…”

“Adult Gallifreyans are, yes, but as far as we can tell, nothing has adversely affected your child yet,”
Alessandra said empathetically. She then began to pack up, not wanting to keep going in the circular
conversation she feared was occurring, as well as letting the pregnant woman calm down. “I’m going
to let you take the rest of the day off, relax and get adjusted to your temporary home, and we’ll
continue our tests tomorrow.”

“There’s more?”

“We are going to be testing almost every day in order to make certain that nothing is wrong with
either you or the child; worst case scenarios include your body attempting to self-terminate thanks to
the child’s wildly different genetics making the allograft impossible, or it could end up parasitic and
we would need to induce labor what is technically early for it, though late for a Human. I honestly
have no idea what we are going to encounter from here on out. One of my equivalents over in North America might be of some help, but she doesn’t come back from maternity leave until next year. I’ll contact her then.”

“Great.”

Clara sulked as Sullivan cleaned up the remainder of her things and wheeled her supply cart out into the corridor. Kate remained behind, however, turning around so that Clara could have some semblance of privacy while she put her trousers back on before heading over towards the kitchenette.

“Tea?” the younger woman asked.

“No thank you; go ahead if you want some.” Kate sat down on the couch and waited for Clara to join her, a mug of decaffeinated tea in-hand. “Is there anything you would like us to keep on the lookout for while doing the shopping?”

“I’d say stronger tea than this, but where there’s no pint—”

“It’ll be over soon enough,” Kate said. “Both of my children felt like they took them two years to be born; feeling anxious and frustrated at this point is normal.”

“Yeah, but you not only had Human children, but you had your—I assume ex—husband as well,” Clara muttered into her tea.

“Not entirely. I never married my son’s father and he wasn’t around during the birth because we were in the middle of a row. My daughter’s father… well… I married him, but let’s say that we rushed into things a bit too quickly and having a baby only showed how terrible we were for one another faster than normal, though not fast enough.” Kate looked at Clara and frowned slightly.

“You’re doing the right thing, even if the Doctor isn’t here.”

“I know, I know—still doesn’t mean I don’t want him here. This is as much his child as it is mine. It’s not fair to keep this from him.”

“In a perfect universe, maybe, but this one we live in is far from perfect, as much as I hate to say.” She put her hand on the other woman’s shoulder and made sure she looked her in the eyes. “He’ll find out one day, and he will understand, and if he’s cross with anyone over it, it would be the universe for even making this an option for you.”

“Thank you.” Clara took another sip of tea and put it down before drawing her knees up to her chin, hugging her legs. “Speaking of Scottish accents, Malcolm and I talked on our way down.”

“Did you now?”

“Yeah. I didn’t know that about him.”

“Know what?”

“…about what happened that Christmas, when he saved Osgood from the Dream Crab,” Clara clarified. “I guess he wanted full disclosure about everything—the invented memories, the fact he has no idea what he’s doing, that he’s more than just a bundle of nerves—and before today I never would have thought he was capable of having such a frank and honest conversation.”

“I didn’t marry him for the accent alone,” Kate laughed.

“Admit it: that is a plus though.”
“No denying that.”

The two women chuckled over that for a moment before Kate’s mobile buzzed. She took a quick glance and saw who the text was from—Bismuth.

“Shit, duty calls,” she grumbled. A quick glance at the message and she stood. “Everything’s an emergency these days.”

“Let me know if there’s anything I can do for UNIT while I’m here, yeah?” Clara offered. She watched as Kate walked towards the door, a weight dropping in her stomach. “I don’t want to feel like I’m coasting on nothing.”

“You’re far from it,” Kate said, “just know that Sullivan is going to be seeing a lot of you over the next however-many months. Your cooperation allows us an attempt at understanding a sentient species of extraterrestrial origin that we did not before; I wouldn’t call that coasting.”

“Still, I don’t want to go insane from lack of work.”

“Duly noted.”

Kate said goodbye and quickly made her way through the Mainframe, coming to a stop outside of Fajr’s office. Gordon was nowhere in sight, nor were any other members of the Zygon’s staff, and she decided to simply walk in unannounced. Sure enough, there was Fajr, sitting at her desk while looking as though she had seen a ghost.

“Good, you’re here,” she said soon as she saw Kate. “I know you were with Miss Oswald, but this is almost more urgent… actually, it’s related, in a way.”

“Should I sit down?” Kate wondered. Fajr motioned towards a chair and Kate sat in it. “What’s the matter, Bismuth? What sort of news do you have that relates to Miss Oswald?”

“She has bred with the Doctor, correct?”

“A more Human turn of phrase is that ‘she is carrying his child’ or ‘having his baby’ or just that she’s pregnant and he is the father.”

“Is this a desirable act?”

“What do you mean…?”

Fajr exhaled heavily, “Reproduction and mating are not pleasing acts to Zygons—both are very uncomfortable and cumbersome, but it doesn’t look like it is that way for others.”

“I cannot speak for Silurians, but in my experience, Humans tend to perform sexual acts for fun as well as for reproducing… which can also be uncomfortable and cumbersome, by the way.” Kate looked at Fajr, seeing that the Zygon was embarrassed. “You mean you never caught on to all that? I thought you had to study Human culture as part of your training. You’re one of the best we have—you can create unique disguises instead of mimicking, for goodness sake.”

“Sexually-driven relationships are usually an enigma to my species, even the ones most talented at blending into local species, given our lack of pleasure from such activities in our natural states. I digress though; reproduction is a thing to be celebrated, yes?”

“In theory, yes.”
“…and yet Miss Oswald sent the Doctor, her mate, away despite all this? Did I understand that correctly as well? You were whispering into the mobile.”

“Yes; we have a window of around twenty-two months without his interference anywhere. With any luck, Miss Oswald shall have her child under our care and he shall be none the wiser in the end.” She raised an eyebrow at the Zygon. “Why do you ask?”

“Before my monitoring team left for the day, a chatter-tech gave me some very interesting intel: the Doctor is not out in the vastness of space, but in Bristol, lecturing in a small university. I fear he might know something is wrong regarding his mate and child and is instead laying low until he can take us by surprise.” She watched as her technically-commanding-officer’s face went pale, her own nerves not comforted by the wide eyes and alarmed expression that Stewart was now wearing.

“Wait, he’s where…?”

“Bristol,” Fajr repeated. She took a manila file folder from a drawer and placed it on the desk within Kate’s reach. “It appears as though he’s deliberately kept a low profile, and that he’s been able to manipulate records to make it seem as though he has been a string of different people instead of one. He’s been thorough and is well-practiced. My team doesn’t know about Miss Oswald yet, as per your orders, making the conjecture all my own.”

“I see,” Kate frowned

She opened the paper file and glanced over it—there was a list of false names the extraterrestrial had used over the years, as well as his list of accomplishments and accolades. He had been there for nearly the entirety of Bristol’s history; through plague and war, trade and industry, growth and death, the Doctor had been there for all of it. For a being whom was unable to properly sit still in the most exciting of times, the idea that he had stayed in place for nearly a thousand years throughout the tedium of history was an incredible stretch of the imagination.

“Have you been able to independently confirm this?”

“We’re working on it, but it’s leaning towards that we will be able to say with confidence that the Doctor has been in Bristol throughout its entire history from burgh to city.” The Zygon furrowed her Human eyebrows and leaned back in her chair. “I don’t like this; how can someone as conspicuous as the Doctor get through nearly a millennium of staying put and not being discovered? We should have known, your father and his guard should have known, his successors should have known… someone should have known…”

“It’s neither here nor there anymore,” Kate said. She closed the file and placed it on her lap. “Not a word of this to Miss Oswald, clear?”

“It goes without saying, ma’am. You give the word and I’ll head over to Bristol and monitor him myself.”

“No, keep at a distance and observe; let me at least have a chat with him before we put our resources into something that can be perfectly benign. For all we know, he needs a part for the TARDIS and it’s easier to sit around and wait instead of synthesizing the entire thing himself.”

“It’s still suspicious to me,” Fajr said. “The coincidence is enough to be unnerving.”

“Monitor him from here—don’t make contact until I say so,” Kate ordered. “May I keep the file?”

“Go ahead; I made a copy in case you wanted as such.”
“Good. Let me know immediately if there is any change in his status or why we think he might be in Bristol.” Kate stood, put the folder under her arm, and paused pensively. “This will likely get messy. I’m counting on you and your department to keep us all safe.”

“Do you think the Doctor would become dangerous if he knew Miss Oswald was… carrying his child…?”

“He has likely tortured and killed for far less over the years, I imagine, and for people he cares for in far less romantic ways,” Kate warned. “Remember that we are dealing with a Time Lord and that Time Lords are fickle, insane beings who easily view themselves as mighty gods with the galaxies as their playground. The entire time we are dealing with the Doctor, we are potentially one shade away from dealing with another Master.”

“That is… less than comforting.”

“Hence the caution; share this with Arwell, Blythe, and Bell, but strict orders not to spread it to anyone else unless absolutely necessary, do you hear? Once I’ve figured out an appropriate time to give him a visit… then we can start to see what’s going on with our esteemed Mister President.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The two then decided on a follow-up meeting the next morning, with Kate leaving afterwards. After dropping the file off at her office, she went to the Raven Room and found Malcolm attempting to pry a mechanical beak open with a screwdriver, half a dead mouse dangling out of the other side.

“I got bored in the office,” he claimed, as though it would justify his presence there. Malcolm glanced towards his wife and noticed that she did not seem entirely there, as though her attention was still in another place. “What’s the matter, love? Everything go alright with Miss Oswald?”

“Oh? Yeah, she will be fine for now. I just came from Security, is all.”

“Security…? I thought you were supposed to be getting Oswald settled.”

“I was.”

He arched a brow as a flag went up in the back of his brain. “What did Bismuth have to say?”

“The Doctor’s in Bristol.”

“Well, fuck…” He finally got the beak open and pulled the mouse corpse out with a pair of tweezers, binning it immediately. “Any word on why, or…”?

“We don’t, so we have to be careful, or risk him discovering what we’re doing.” She put her hands on his shoulders and leaned against his back, gently kneading his muscles as she thought. “I need you to be aware of it, just in case things explode and we need an excuse for the masses.”

“Having all this knowledge almost makes me feel bad for some of the more regularly mind-wiped.”

“Almost…?”

“Yeah, almost.” He leaned back until he was pressed against his wife, her hands now still upon his shoulders. “You ready to go? We’re edging in on fifteen hours.”

“I am fully aware of that.” She looked at the ravens on the table and frowned; there was one that was more wiring and steel than feathers, hopping around as it snapped at other, more bird-like, ravens.
Letting go of Malcolm, Kate reached out towards the bird, quickly bringing her hand back when it snapped at her.

“Junior, don’t bite Mam,” he scolded, smacking the thing with the end of a screwdriver. “Be nice.”

“Mam! Mam!” the robot bird mimicked. It fluffed its “wings” and tilted its head at the Humans.

“This is the only thing you are naming ‘Junior’ by the way,” Kate deadpanned.

“Wasn’t planning on anything else,” Malcolm replied. He stood and landed a quick kiss to Kate’s lips before taking her hand in his. “Let’s not name the kid just yet; we don’t even know what we’re getting other than a baby.”

“Just a reminder,” she said. “Now let’s go home.”

And they did.
A few weeks went by and Christmas loomed ever closer. The Stewart-Tucker Household attempted to get as many of their family members to agree to be together as possible for their first holiday season while married, though it only ended up being Gordon, Fiona, and Lex; Florence was laid up with a cold, Marcia was taking care of her, and both Euan and Kanda independently figured it was best to return to their respective parents’ and save the first Christmas together for another time. That was perfectly fine, however, as it meant that it created the perfect opportunity for Kate and Malcolm…

“We’re not going to get another chance like this,” he said quietly. It was Christmas Eve and the couple was cleaning up after dinner. “I know we’ve been putting it off for as long as we can in case something goes wrong, but this is important.”

“I didn’t say it wasn’t important, but I don’t know if it’s the right time,” she replied. “Oswald could still lose the baby at this point and then what?”

“She’s at a very flat eight and a half months—far as I know, that doesn’t sound like she’s losing anything but her lunch when the kid begins kicking her fucking stomach.” He scraped the last of the dinner remnants from a plate into the garbage disposal before putting it in the dishwasher. “It’s them we need to talk to, and who knows when we’ll get them all together and not with any other halves milling about? I say we do it now.”

“What if they don’t agree with what we’re doing?”

“Then I guess they’re just going to have to grow the fuck up,” he replied. Waiting until she closed the dishwasher door, he pulled her in close and buried his face in her neck for a moment, leaving a kiss against her skin. “They’ll handle it better than you think. Now come on.”

With the dishes now being done, the pair crept out into the corridor, stopping just before the sitting room. Malcolm poked his head around the corner and saw Gordon, Fiona, and Lex calmly debating over what movie to watch by the DVD shelves. He glanced back towards Kate and nodded to confirm they were all present. Holding out his hand, he waited for his wife to take it before leaning in to peck her on the lips.

“Now or never, love,” he murmured.

“It’s now or when we bring the child home,” she corrected. She then walked into the sitting room, guiding him alongside her. “Kids? Can we have a minute?”

“What’s the matter, Mum?” Fiona wondered. The other kids’ attention was caught as well, all three now looking at them. “You look like something bad happened.”

“Oh, nothing bad happened at all,” Kate replied. “It’s just that Malcolm and I have decided on something rather important that will change things around here, and we want to make sure that you three are well-aware before it happens.” She sat down in an oversized armchair while he sat on the armrest, at such an angle that she could reach her hand up the back of his jumper without the kids seeing from their new vantage spots on the couch and other armchair; it was an action normally done to unnerve the younger ones, yet now was merely for the contact.

“Are you selling the house…?” Lex guessed cautiously.

“No,” Malcolm chuckled. “We’re actually going to be redoing a bit of it, to be honest. Fuck, no, now
that I think about it, a shitload has to be done to make sure it’s all in order.”

“In order for what?” Fiona asked.

“For the baby we’re adopting,” Kate said frankly, a smile on her lips. She knew that going right in for the kill was precisely what needed to be done, as all three young adults sitting before her were in complete and total shock. They stared at the couple, disbelief slapped across their faces, completely silent until Lex choked out a question.

“How…? Why are you two going to adopt a baby?” she sputtered. “Uncle Malc, you could barely handle me as a wee thing—if you really want to adopt a kid, wouldn’t you two be better off with a tween that you can leave home while you’re both working?”

“Yeah,” Fiona agreed, “you’re not old now, but you could be in shit shape when a baby’s my age. Christ, you could be like Gran, too addled to travel more than a block away from a care home without becoming dangerous, before a baby heads off to uni. Are you sure about this?”

“We’re absolutely certain,” Kate said. “This is why the three of you are very important when it comes to this child—if something happens to us and we cannot take care of it, then it falls on the three of you as its brother, sister, and cousin to take care of it in our absence. Our wills shall reflect this once we gain custody in a few months and I don’t want it to take anyone by surprise.”

“Why, though?” Fiona asked. “You’ve said nothing that would have lead up to this the entire time you’ve been together… why now?”

“Does it have to do with Clara Oswald?” Gordon asked quietly. Everyone in the room turned towards him, wondering what it was that led him to the conclusion. “Not many know she’s living in Mainframe UK right now, but I do, and I’m actually one of the fewer that has seen her thanks to taking rounds for Fajr. She’s not far along, and I haven’t gotten the chance to really talk with her, but there’s no mistaking it—she’s pregnant and the only one she would be pregnant by is the Doctor, putting the two of you on the very top of a rather short list of people who could possibly raise it and raise it safely. Is that the baby you’re adopting?”

“A regular Lethbridge-Stewart to make your granddad proud,” Kate replied, a thin smile on her lips. “Miss Oswald wants the child to grow up in a family that can love and take care of it, but knows that she and the Doctor cannot keep it safe. Malcolm and I are going to adopt it, as we both know about its extraterrestrial heritage and have access to UNIT in case of any unusual happenings during its upbringing.”

“The Doctor…” Lex marveled, her mind clearly boggled. “You mean the tit in the police box from space? The one that hijacked Gordy and Uncle Malc that one day? You’re adopting his kid?”

“He is a raging tit, yeah, but he’s saved our lives on more than one occasion, sometimes even directly, and it’s the least we can do to keep his kid safe from harm and under the radar of the most dangerous fucking beings in the galaxy,” Malcolm said. “The ugly cunt’s one of said most dangerous fucking beings in the galaxy when push comes to fucking shove, so don’t think this is going to be all a bunch ‘o quaintness and sunshine when the shoe drops, because it will, and it won’t be pretty.”

“Wait… he doesn’t know…?” Gordon gulped, horrified. His mother and stepfather shook their heads and his jaw dropped. “He doesn’t know his own child is about to be born?!”

“Miss Oswald wants it quiet; she knows how easily he would go and cause havoc in order to keep her safe and the baby in their custody… a child of theirs would be a target bigger than anyone can imagine,” Kate explained. “This baby shall believe that we were simply miraculously old parents
until it is mature enough to process the fact that it was adopted and what that means. After that, we
are not telling them anything about their parentage until they are an adult, provided such an action is
feasible and it does not learn otherwise earlier through alternative means. It’s a risky path, but it is
one that we will gladly take.”

“Mum, I’m in uni and Lex and Gordy are just starting out themselves; neither of them have been
dating a year yet, but they’re dating good people who would understand,” Fiona stated. “You don’t
have to do this alone—we’re capable of helping out more than just being the backup.”

“We don’t have to, yes, but we are,” Kate said kindly. “You’ll understand one day, maybe if you
become a mum yourself. I can’t leave this up to chance.”

“Yeah, don’t volunteer Euan until we work on his parents a bit more,” Lex said, playfully nudging
Fiona. “That is one thing he and Kanda have in common: their parents aren’t exactly thrilled by me,
or at least Euan’s won’t be when we finally get together.”

“I know that Lawan is just being a homesick shit who didn’t want to move to Glasgow to begin
with, but what about Euan’s family?” Malcolm asked. “Do they think you’re too young or
something?”

“No; his parents don’t like Poles,” she pointed at Gordon, “Italians,” she pointed at Fiona, “and
probably even need some time to convince themselves that a wee bit of German,” she pointed at
herself, “is alright to have in the family. I love Euan, and he doesn’t think like that, but those two are
nuts.”

“They sound it,” Gordon said. “We should almost do a joint Meet-the-Parents, so that any
disapproval directed at us gets repurposed into disliking each other.”

“That’d be nice, but I actually want Euan to not get immediately disowned,” Lex frowned. “Mrs.
Keng is enough to drive away anyone and—”

“Can we go visit Miss Oswald?” Fiona wondered, interrupting the verbal sparring. Attention was
now directed towards her, at which she shrugged. “What? I thought it’d be nice, since she’s trapped
in the Mainframe, yeah? Give her some real visitors? No one’s really been to see her, have they?”

Malcolm and Kate looked at one another and nodded—what harm could it do?

“Miss Oswald’s father and remaining grandmother unfortunately died earlier in the year during the
Insurgency, and her mother and other grandparents have been deceased for a long while,” she said.
“Malcolm and I pop in from time to time, as does the Head of Data Management, since he is an old
friend of hers, but you’re right in that she doesn’t get many visitors.”

“Then I want to go and meet her,” the teen said. “If her baby is going to be my little brother or sister,
than it’s only right.”

“Are you sure?” Kate asked.

“Positive.”

“Then what about you other two?” Malcolm asked. Gordon and Lex both shrugged noncommittally
—they were fine no matter what. “Alright, then I think we should call up Fajr and see if the girls’
credentials are still in the system.”

“Shit; let me change into another jumper!” Fiona cursed, bolting from her seat and out of the room.
Her mother chuckled slightly and took out her mobile.
“I’ll go check in on those credentials,” Kate said. She left the room much more calmly than her daughter, headed towards another room where she could talk without interruption.

“You two are still fucking bonkers,” Lex said soon as her aunt was out of earshot. “Didn’t you move out of Mam’s because you couldn’t handle how loud I was as a bab?”

“There are two differences between now and when you were small,” Malcolm frowned. “One: I was in a different place in my life back then. Don’t necessarily judge an old married man’s family plans based on when he was single and just starting out. Second: one of the reasons why I moved out was because I was sick and tired of watching your father being pathetic and boring as fuck, with my sister wasting her time on him. I’m glad you came out of it, and nearly as glad that your da isn’t a bad man, but I’d much rather you have been born a Tucker after a one-night stand like your mam and I was than watch that tit flounder about as the most boring cluster-cunt I’ve ever seen.”

“You’re really fucking bonkers,” Lex deadpanned. “Lex Tucker? Where’s the alliteration?”

“Of all the things, your biggest hang-up is about allite-fucking-ration?”

“Not the biggest, but it’s one of the more obvious…”

“You know,” Gordon chimed in, purposefully changing subject, “what Fiona said earlier was correct. I can take care of Miss Oswald’s child if push comes to shove. I know she volunteered because of ties the Lethbridge-Stewart family has to the Doctor and… well… I’m still a Lethbridge-Stewart.”

“Wait, just like that?” Lex said. “Not going to ask Kanda—your very serious girlfriend—what she thinks?”

“Knowing Mum, she didn’t ask Malcolm what he thought before promising to adopt the baby.” He glanced at the man in-question, who nodded through a shrug. “See? It’s not just me.”

“If you do end up with Kanda though, you know… for good, then what if the two of you had kids?” Lex wondered. “They wouldn’t look anything like their ‘older sibling’ and that might cause problems.”

“You forget: I might be my mum and dad’s only kid they had together, but I’m technically the second of five. I know what being part of a blended family’s like and it’s not that difficult if you just act like everyone belongs together.”

“Simple as that?”

“Yeah—simple as that.” Gordon paused as his mother came back into the room. “Did Fajr clear it?”

“Both sets of non-emergency visitor credentials are still active,” Kate confirmed. “A bit buried since it was Frank who put them in, but they’re there. We can come down whenever we find the time.”

“Non-emergency?” Lex blinked. “You mean, if there was something that went down at the mainframe, we’d be able to get in no matter what?”

“Yes and no,” Gordon said. He moved his hands around as he talked, following his cousin as they all went towards the foyer. “You see, we have a variety of different security protocols that encompass a great number of potential scenarios that the Mainframe might encounter, Tripartite, terrestrial, and extraterrestrial in nature. Fajr, Frank, and their varying predecessors have long been building the foundational levels, which we add to every so often, and…”
“Stop boring her!” Fiona shouted from the top of the stairs. She quickly descended to the main floor, now wearing a different, nicer jumper. “Your job is so boring!”

“Says the one studying business,” Gordon scoffed. “I don’t know how you can stay awake in those classes…”

“Kids, behave,” Kate warned. “We don’t have to go, you know.”

“Mum…! Gordy’s the one being a tit!”

“I mean it.” She waited until Fiona began to pout in defeat before opening the door. “Alright, now let’s go.”

Traffic into London was surprisingly light, easily linked to the holiday having finally settled itself in and no one wanting to do anything but stay put on the rainy evening. Since the above-ground front was already “closed” for the end of the year, Gordon went and disabled the lock on one of the side doors, allowing them access to the building anyhow. His mobile rang immediately after they were all in, which he answered.

“Yes, it’s just us,” he said, not even bothering with a greeting. They got into a lift and the young man grinned. “Yes ma’am.” A pause. “No ma’am.” A smirk. “I’ll check in later, ma’am.” He ended the call and put the mobile back in his pocket. “Looks like I’m taking the Oswald-part of the round she’s on.”

“Is your boss cross or something?” Lex asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No—just panicking a little. Don’t blame her, really; not with the way things are right now.”

The lift opened to reveal that the Mainframe was packed, all hands on-deck. It was easy for the family to slip around everyone else unnoticed, with most of the attention—if there was any to spare—concentrated on saluting Kate. By the time they reached the lift to go into the medbay, Fiona and Lex were completely baffled.

“Why all the commotion?” Fiona asked. Her stepfather simply shrugged.

“We’re overdue for an invasion attempt,” Malcolm explained as they stepped into the new lift. “Christmas, like clockwork, every year for a couple years, UNIT had to be on the defensive; the fact people barely remember anything is all because of my office coupled with UNIT’s efforts and old fashioned Human resilience, because we didn’t want to look like we were the softest fucking target on the entire planet. It’s been a while since a proper attempt, hence the precautions. Your mam and I don’t feel like there’s anything to worry about though, hence why we decided to mostly just stay the fuck at home.”

“Yes; the closest thing we have had to an invasion on Christmas in a long while was two years ago when a scout pod of Kantrofarri broke up in the atmosphere and held several people hostage, killing one before being eliminated themselves,” Kate said. The young women glanced over at Malcolm and Gordon for a translation, which they gave by the latter miming grabbing onto the former’s face—the Dream Crabs.

The lift opened up onto the eerily silent medbay floor, letting the family off near their destination. Kate knocked on the door to Clara’s room and poked her head in, seeing that the unfortunate test subject was sitting on the couch with a book and cuppa. Wearing joggers and a sweatshirt that was clearly borrowed from the Doctor, she was just starting to appear as though she was pregnant, with a rounding stomach barely visible under her clothes.
“May Malcolm and I come in?” Kate asked. “We brought a few more visitors with us as well.” She watched as the other woman put down her book and looked at her quizzically.

“Yeah, come on in,” she replied. She raised an eyebrow as she watched the family enter the room, curious about the occasion. “What’s all this?”

“Miss Oswald, I’m sure you’ve met my son, Gordon, but this is my daughter Fiona and my niece Lex—Malcolm and I informed the three of them of our plans today and they in turn wanted to visit with you.”

Understanding swept across her face, leading Clara to smile. “Thank you,” she said. “I’ll go make —”

“I’ve got tea, you handle introductions,” Malcolm insisted, gently putting a hand on her shoulder to prevent her from standing up and heading towards the kitchenette.

“Alright, Glenn,” she joked.

“Much more of that and the only tea you’ll have available is that fucking South African stuff I hear you love so much,” he threatened with a laugh. He went in the direction of the kettle, only to be hit by a pillow off the couch that was rather conveniently flying in his direction.

“You don’t like rooibos?” Lex asked. “I hear it’s getting popular.”

“It makes my stomach flip these days,” Clara explained. She watched as most of her guests sat down, amazed at how many people were in there and not in order to prod her experimentally. At least she knew the UNIT employees, which left her to sort out the other two via previously told stories and inference. She turned towards the eldest of the younger women and reached back into her memory. “Then you’re… Lex…?”

“Alexandra Lewiston, yeah; I’m Malcolm’s niece and work as a poli-sci lecturer and assistant at the university level.”

“…and I’m Fiona Ferrero, Kate’s daughter and a first-year business major,” Fiona cut in.

“That sounds about right, from what Kate and Malcolm have told me,” Clara nodded. She then turned towards Gordon and attempted to recall a conversation from the other day. “You are Corporal Lethbridge-Stewart, correct? I hear you are Bismuth’s protégé?”

“Yeah—though mostly I’m the son of Kate, grandson of Alistair, and brother to this thing,” he said. He ruffled Fiona’s hair and she flailed in an attempt to brush him off, though the damage was already done and her hair was completely out of sorts. “It was my sister’s idea to come over.”

“I appreciate the company, thank you,” Clara chuckled. Malcolm brought over everyone’s tea and passed it out, though the accidental hostess noticed her youngest visitor was still staring at her.

“Yes…?”

“How far along are you?” Fiona wondered. “You don’t look very pregnant.”

“Thirty-seven weeks, from our best guess,” she replied. “I just felt the baby move for the first time a few days ago.”

“Wait, that’s…” Fiona quickly did the math in her head and looked to her mother. “That’s not right, is it?”
“Not if it was a Human child, no,” Kate said. She sipped her tea and glanced over at Clara. “Are things still the same since the last time we talked?”

“Still miserable, if that’s what you mean—all these tests and ultrasounds and experiments are going to drive me completely bonkers.”

“Welcome to life with Alessandra Sullivan as your Head of Biomedical,” Kate quipped.

“Do you know if you’re having a boy or a girl?” Fiona asked. Clara shrugged at that.

“So far? Just a baby—it keeps on changing, which is freaking me out a whole lot more than it is Sullivan.”

“…your baby keeps changing gender…?!” Lex wondered, completely baffled.

“Ha! I wish it was just that!” Clara took a large gulp of tea and groaned. “It only had one arm the other day and now it has two as though nothing was off. Shit, even today it had extra fingers and toes at the start of the exam and by the end those had vanished.”

“You mean, that face-changing stuff… it’s happening now…? To the unborn nip?!” Malcolm asked, trying to not cringe. “ Fucking hell, this must mean that Alessandra’s wetting herself in excitement.”

“Well-put,” Clara grimaced. Her hand unconsciously found her stomach and rested atop it. “I just wish there was a universe where this wasn’t a thing, where the Doctor and I could have this baby and not have to worry about anything else than what color the TARDIS will paint the nursery.” She noticed Gordon sitting quietly, nearly sizing her up. “Yes…? What’s that face for?”

The young man removed himself from his thoughts and shrugged. “Sorry; it seems a bit odd, not because I think it’s this thing or that, but because you’re a couple years older than me and I guess I’m more used to the idea of giving a kid up for adoption being what people my sister’s age do.”

“You’re not alone in that—actually, there are times when I seem to forget what’s going on, and then I remember.” She began gently rubbing her stomach—as though she was soothing the child inside—and she smiled before shaking her head. “If there was any way to properly care for this child myself, I would take it, run, and not look back… but it won’t be safe growing up with me or the Doctor, and what sort of parents would we be if we couldn’t keep our own child safe?”

“Well, considering I think they made child leashes as a response to kids like me, probably a normal one,” Fiona shrugged. Kate gently backhanded her daughter’s shoulder, which only made the teen chuckle. “It’s true! You were always looking for me until I was what, seven?”

“This doesn’t sound like this is the sort of conversation that will make Miss Oswald feel better about things.”

“At least she’s honest,” Clara laughed. “The fact you’re all here makes me feel better than anyone can possibly fathom. To know that this is the family that my child will grow up knowing… it’s comforting. You seem much more like a family than I’m certain a lot of others are here in the Mainframe.”

“It’s not like we have a lot of fucking choice falling out of our arses,” Malcolm scoffed. “One hint of something definitely not Tripartite in origin and I can almost guarantee you that the babe’s pants won’t be the only soiled ones that day.”

“Such a way with words,” Clara said rather flatly. She glanced over at Kate and pointed at Malcolm. “You married this? Willingly? No ulterior motives?”
Hey, what can I say? Best sex I’ve had in thirty years.”

The older three watched in amusement as the younger three nearly choked on their tea and went red in the face, groaning in mortification. Regret over making the visit was beginning to set in, the younger ones hoping it was merely a ploy to get a rise out of them. Unluckily for them… it worked. Well.

Works inspired by this one:
- Three Times Malcolm Tucker’s Old Life Collided With His New One by DaraOakwise
- The Year We Fell by DaraOakwise
- A Christmas Carol by TARDISApparates221
- Of Becoming by DaraOakwise

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