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Pack Of Lies

by Robling_T

Torchwood, Being Human | R | mystery; Gwen/Rhys, Andy/George | 21,000 words

Rhys Williams is helping his wife to rebuild a working line of defence in the wake of the visit of the 456. But when PC Andy Davidson tangles himself up in a very spooky do, Torchwood's fragile reconciliation with the government may not be all that's in jeopardy.

Betaed by: tearoseandhoney, Carole B

Warnings: contains dark themes including: masturbation, domestic violence, reference to suicide, unfortunate implications, unreliable narrator, Unexpected Naked Rhys, theoretical bestiality, and gratuitous abuse of furies

Spoilers: spoilers for Being Human season 2, passing reference to DW 5.13 ["The Big Bang"]

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Art by sparksel (sparkselrose@gmail.com)

It wasn't weevils. Rhys could have *done* with something almost that normal right round now; a weevil he'd know where to start with, aye, some idea of proper Torchwood-tested tactics in place (as if there was much they'd be able to do even so but give it a good reason not to come back up top) -- even the guess that a bloody human weapon would be able to *scratch* the target, really. Give him a weevil any night, not something like this unfamiliar prick-eared creature strolling along the tarmacked jogging-path through a city park like it had as much right and more to be there than even Cardiff's sewer-dwelling nuisances dared --

Yellow eyes looked down from a long-jawed face at the plump morsel that had appeared in its path with only the most casual regard for Rhys's drawn gun, a pelt of shaggy fur striking the odd fair glint in the moonlight as it drew in deep breaths of chill night air. Rhys tried to steady his wavering aim at the beast, telling himself Gwen's hand would be shaking in the face of that carnivore's smile as well -- prepared to die for his planet he might be, just the bit where it wasn't the laverbread this tourist might be thinking to sample as a native dish had him a touch nervous, aye? "Oi, not a bloody plate of rarebit, you can just stop picturing me covered in cheese, yeah?"

He could have sworn that it grinned at him. Do I have a go shooting you then, would Gwen say that's bad alien relations even if he's resisting arrest? Bigger it, sodding thing looked hungry -

Alerted perhaps by the shift in his weight as he steadied himself for the shot, the creature lunged forward to sink those wicked teeth into the nearest conveniently-sticking-out bit of

him: Rhys's gun-hand. His pistol clattered uselessly to the pavement. Desperately Rhys pummelled at the hairy muzzle with his left hand until the jaws slackened their hold enough to pull free, a snatched visual check that no fingers had got left behind all he had the moment for as the beast drew back and snarled deep in its throat. *Going to bloody smart when I get the chance to think about it. If* --

Those frightful yellow eyes shifted to look at something over Rhys's shoulder. *Please be Gwen. Please be Gwen.* (He could even do with seeing Johnson right about here, let her never give him the end of needing a rescue on her



night off if it meant living to be wound up about being rescued --) *Or, well, do I want her to watch me get eaten in front of her then -* Carefully Rhys turned his head far enough to see --

Right. Bigger.

Second one, smaller (the female? oh, erm, obviously no), short dark fur on this where his mate Ginger needed a bit of a trim, and baring the same snarl of glistening canines as it sized up the threat from Rhys. Which was currently, well, not much of one. How much did they understand? Slowly, Rhys crouched towards the fallen gun, shifting his gaze between the baleful yellow stares. Where was Gwen in all of this, why was it the *monsters* got the bloody backup --

The one who'd already had a taste of him tensed, predator preparing to spring. Rhys scooped the gun off the ground with his off-hand and pulled at the trigger blindly, only hoping the barrel was clear of his own feet. Both creatures startled wildly at the bang like scolded dogs. A second hasty shot spooked them enough to bolt, scampering gracelessly for the cover of the trees. Rhys took something closer to a proper aim and fired after them, rewarded this time with a disturbingly human scream.

But they were away, off back to some comfortable lair to recuperate and lick their wounds, and he'd be half the morning stuck at his grotty desk with paperwork to explain how he'd lost the one that would turn up next week raiding the bins along Caroline Street, no doubt. *Now* his wife turned up, jogging towards the sound of gunfire with her own drawn, though she made to holster it as no target presented itself. "Oi, did you lose it?"

"Ran into the trees. Where *were* you?"

"Round the other side down the bridle path, I couldn't see where it'd gone up this way. Oh, and you're *hurt*, ah, sweetheart, I'm sorry --"

Rhys shook out his wrist, making sure that he still had a right hand, and let her take it up for a look, nerves flaring awake into bright stabs of fire under her delicate touch as the surge of adrenaline that had carried him this far flowed away all in a go. "Were *two* of them, second one helped the first get away. Think I clipped him though."

"That's all we need, something that's smart enough to hunt in packs." Gwen turned his hand over to probe gently at the bloodied palm

now, checking was it through-and-through or just the nearly -- "Come on, A&E, I'm driving."

One side benefit of working for Torchwood, even in its reduced circumstances, was that one generally got mangled in ways such that the gatekeepers of care took one look and had you up on a treatment table right smart. "My fault really, should have known better than to keep trying to take his stick away," Rhys explained the injury to a largely indifferent medic, trying to put on a look to say *this sort of thing was bound to happen sooner or later, that dog's had it in for me for years.*

"We'll have to report the dog to the police," the young doctor said, doing her best to look as if she was sorry but it really wasn't her decision. Rhys couldn't help wincing at the light pressure as she finished up cleaning out the punctures and started mummifying his hand in layers of gauze. "It might have a history of violence."

Gwen snapped her mobile shut on what had been a cleverly coded conversation with Lois back at the office, where *it went fine* meant *it didn't exactly go as planned but we're alive, back in a bit* meant *we need to find a bloody medic for the team already, and did you remember to give the baby her bottle* meant *did you remember to give the baby her bottle.* "Right, thanks, sorry, I'll see he remembers about changing the bandages... Get you a cuppa?"

The doctor's look of habitual hard-done-by-ness softened a bit. "That'd be lovely, thanks."

Gwen ducked out a moment to fetch one from somewhere and then stood watching as the doctor took an absentminded sip. "Right, that's that, then, that sheet has some instructions for

after-care, and basically try not to go about harassing strange animals, yes?" (Hah, strange animals, if she knew the half of *how* strange --) "Someone will want to see you again in... a bit, anyway, check on your way out what's available." The doctor made a vague gesture towards the exit and picked up a clipboard to stare at it with an abstracted frown as she took another sip of her tea.

Gwen let her pasted-on professional smile fall away as they stepped out of the treatment area and heaved a deep sigh. "Sorted, then, let's get back and pick up the baby, Lois will be wanting her bed as much as we are by now."

The penny dropped as Rhys heard what sounded like a clipboard falling to the floor behind them. "Hang about, you didn't retcon the doctor just there?"

"It wasn't *much*," Gwen protested. "Won't even put her out, she'll just be a bit fuzzy on reporting it in about the dog. Last thing we need is coppers coming round to ask Mrs Evans about her bloody dachshund." She started rummaging through her bag for the car key, heels tapping on tile as she strode purposefully away from the scene under discussion. "Having to cut what's left of the pills in half now as it is, unless we can work out how Jack was having it made we're just going to have to stop doing stupid things. As if we could. Speaking of pills?" Rhys handed her the list of medications they'd need to pick up from the chemist. "Hm, well, I suppose anything compatible enough with our biology to infect you with something, it'd be compatible enough our antibiotics and all would do for it."

Rhys flexed his right hand, testing the range of motion that the gauze and the dulled ache of the wounds allowed him. "'S a comfort, least I

won't have to be quarantined for space-rabies." *Again*.

"We really need to find a bloody medic, yeah. Oh, and it's gone *morning*," Gwen observed as they came into an area with windows out to the car-park. "This is so unfair on Lois, we're going to *have* to find a proper nanny."

"Who works our hours but us, love?" And not enough of *us* as it was -- if she'd only hire on more agents he could stay home like they'd been planning, even one Torchwood appropriation was generous enough to keep a family and it would save them the aggro of --

"She's Heddlu, that's a service-dog," someone was arguing at the Casualty entrance. Rhys turned towards the voice, thinking he knew it: tall bloke, stumbling between two helpers as a porter tried to urge him away from the black dog in the doorway --

Beside him Gwen gasped. "-- Andy?"

Andy Davidson was in a right state, holding a tea-towel to his shoulder under a bloodied dressing-gown that wasn't quite on him, as if whatever the matter was it had caught him out completely undressed. He made the oddest face at Gwen, almost as if for once he was anything *but* happy to see her, murmuring something that sounded like *bollocks* as one of his mates got him down into the chair a second porter was wielding at them. "What's all this?" Gwen demanded in her best *copper* voice. "And who the hell are you?" she added as both of the blokes who had brought Andy in jumped.

The porter had already whisked his new patient away down the corridor. The two men exchanged a look, and then the one with the

ears to rival Andy's offered nervously, "Erm, George, we, we live across the road?"

"They're not dating," the other put in with a look of mischievous piety.

"Mitchell!"

Gwen gave them both an irritated look. "Right, never mind, I can see this is to me --" She stamped off in the direction that the porter had taken Andy, back towards the section of A&E where Rhys had just been treated. Rhys gave Andy's mates a shrug and went after her. "-- Andy Davidson, yes, he's an old friend of mine?" Gwen was enquiring brightly at the station by the time Rhys had caught her up. "About so high, sort of ginger, dressing-gown --"

"Oh, the GSW?" The sister looked down at her tablet. "They've taken him to radiology to see where the bullet's gone."

"*Bullet?* ...Andy? What in the --"

"Someone broke into his kitchen," George said from behind Rhys, making him jump. "We, erm, Mitchell has a car, it seemed better not to wait about for 999?" The man did look as if he'd thrown on the first clothes to come to hand when he'd heard a commotion, bedroom slippers that didn't match and too-long trackpants spotted with psychedelic bleach-marks. Pale blue eyes blinked nervously at Rhys from behind rimless spectacles. "I'm not sure of the entire story, he was lucid enough to say that much but he's just been *shot*." George still had the tea-towel. He ran his free hand through short dark hair, eyebrows drawing together in an anxious frown. "And he'll be off his head worrying about Sadie now as well --"

"Sorry, *Sadie?*" Rhys had thought Andy lived alone, well, he hadn't known about this George bloke either come to that, but the name conjured up thoughts of an elderly aunt needed close minding, be just like the copper to be --

"His partner. The dog?" George elaborated when Rhys continued to stare blankly at him.

"Ah, right?" Gwen *had* said something about Andy putting in to transfer to the canine division, Rhys had had a time of not making the obvious jokes about the new partner being a bitch in front of her. "Sadie, didn't know her, erm, good name, bit old-fashioned though?"

"Mitchell came up with that for him. 'Sexy Sadie'. Mitchell's a bit... out of his time, sometimes, yeah."

"At least it's not Glenn Miller," Gwen said absently. "Who would have a bloody gun and why would they want to break in on *Andy*? He doesn't even have a good telly."

"Don't know that we'd find out, even if there's a bullet to recover from the wound they could only match it if they get the weapon," George said, looking as if he hadn't much confidence in seeing any useful outcome. "There's a database that has *some* test-firings on file, but it would have to be a gun that they'd already -- But that's all coals-to-Newcastle for you coppers, I suppose," he trailed off under the look that Gwen was giving him.

Rhys was more surprised that he knew that much of Andy's old mates' business, actually. "No, no," Gwen said, giving herself a tiny shake, "it's, erm... You were reminding me of someone I used to work with. Always seemed to know everything about everything. Can't

believe it's been more than a year," she added, more to herself than to them.

She was going to be asking if George had any computer experience on his CV in a moment. Or introducing him to Lois for a date. The sister had gone back to shuffling through the papers around her station, clearly hoping that they'd get the hint and shove off somewhere away from her to wait. Suddenly her head snapped back up: "I'm sorry but you *can't* have that dog in here --"

Rhys turned to see the other bloke from the entrance leading in Sadie. "Having her in here a minute or two won't hurt anything," Mitchell said, an Irish accent pocketing some of the H's before they could make it into his words. "She just needs to see her partner's all right. Once she's happy you haven't *done* anything with him I can run her home, and the neighbours won't be ringing about her howling all night and trying to get out to go look for him."

"You let dogs in the hospital if they're working, yeah?" Gwen offered as the sister still looked sceptical. "Guide dogs, explosives dogs --"

"The therapy-dogs that visited at St Jude's," George put in with a hopeful look to Mitchell, who nodded agreement.

"And she's a potential witness," Rhys added on a sudden inspiration. "Officer comes to talk to him might need to have a word with her as well, aye?"

The sister's resolve was clearly wavering. "Well, if she's *quiet*."

Sadie gave them all a look of wide-eyed innocence that she had to have picked up from her human partner and settled herself down primly at Mitchell's feet. The sister shook her

head and took herself off about her business, leaving them to stare at one another in the awkward diffidence of acquaintances-once-removed who weren't sure how to bring up asking how it was they knew their mutual mate under these circumstances. George was worrying at the bloodied tea-towel, rusty-stained terry puppies wriggling in and out beneath his fingers. He perked up as one of the other nurses approached them with, "You're all waiting on Andy Davidson, yes? He's not badly hurt, the doctors will be wanting to keep him under observation for a bit and of course we all have to wait about for the police to take information, but might not even be in overnight. See him now if you like?"

They'd found a securable room to put Andy in, whether to keep him safe from the assailant or under suspicion of something himself Rhys couldn't make out. He could see Gwen giving herself an absent pat as if to confirm to her subconscious that her own weapon was properly lockered in the boot. (As was his, all checked in and accounted for under the computer latch that logged automatically to Torchwood's records. *Bloody nanny state*.) The patient was sitting up in bed and alert, one arm in a sling and a bruise coming up across his cheek where he must have struck it going down from the force of the shot. He pulled a face at Gwen's entrance but brightened immediately he saw the dog; "How did you get Sadie in?"

He'd directed the question to his new mates, but naturally it was Gwen stepped in to answer: "Rhys told them she was a witness."

"That's mental even for Torchwood," Andy said, but gave Rhys's wife an appreciative look as the dog laid her chin on the edge of the bed. He patted Sadie's head with his good hand, IV

tubing dangling. "Sssh, *chwaer-fach*. Why were you here, Gwen?"

"Neighbour's dog bit Rhys," Gwen said smoothly, with that little grin that was meant to reassure when the world seemed to be going to shit. Rhys held out his bandaged hand before Andy could give that grin too close a look. "You'd have had better manners than that, yeah, Sadie?" Sadie ignored her, gazing rapturously up at her partner. Well, at least someone was happy now. "Andy, what *happened*?"

Andy shrugged, or tried to, screwing up his bruised face in a wince as the injured shoulder shifted. "Home invasion. Dunno if it was personal, didn't get a look at them."

"Can't have been after you *specifically*, love, you haven't an enemy in the world," Gwen said. "Or at least I know where Rhys was all night."

"Oi!"

"Seem to be down a pint," Andy went on, waving the hand connected to the saline drip. "Lucky though, said a bit one way or the other and I'd have been in it for arteries and all. Could have gone straight through but the collarbone stopped it, had to dig it out before they could strap me up here."

George pricked up his ears at this. "So they've recovered something for ballistics tests?"

"They've rung the police, it *has* to be reported," Andy said, giving his mates a look. "Dunno how you lot get away with running about all guns blazing," he added with a sour face to Gwen.

"Dispensation from the Crown," Gwen said, a scowl settling onto her face that had to be for the thought of how hard she'd needed to fight her own government to get them to trust her again at the work she'd already been doing for them. Then again, it could just as easily have been wistful consideration of how relatively simple the pursuit of some stupid muppet with an illegal *terrestrial* lead-projectile weapon would seem if only the ordinary authorities could be let to know it. "No different from an Armed Response unit really, we're probably having to fill out *more* paperwork for it."

Rhys had seen that look on Andy's face before, it was the one that came right before he got stropo about how the *surrounded by armed bastards* approach was no way to conduct a modern policing operation and Gwen was supposed to know it. "Paperwork's not going to help when someone gets hurt," the constable said. "And you with a little baby --"



George turned his head sharply towards the window, as if someone had called his name. *Bloody jumpy*, this bloke was. Well, not unreasonable if he lived across the road from goings-on like *this*. He returned his attention to

the rest of them with a look of puzzled guilt as someone rapped at the door.

In stepped a policewoman in sergeant's shoulder-numbers, her face twisting in disapproval to see the crowd round the patient's bed. The nurses were going to be getting some stern words about letting people trample in and out of the middle of an investigation in their muddy boots talking to witnesses, if Rhys didn't miss his guess. Nodding acquaintance of Andy's, apparently: "Constable Davidson... Special Officer Sadie. And the rest of you are...?"

Oh, that was just an invitation to Take Charge, Rhys almost pitied this copper now. "Gwen Cooper, director of Torchwood? And this is my husband Rhys. Andy was my partner when I was with the Heddlu, we're still mates."

The moment she'd said *Torchwood* the sergeant's eyes had narrowed, perhaps recalling the organisation's arrogance towards the properly constituted authorities in days of old. "What about you, then, are you with her as well?" she demanded of George with a scowl.

"No, what, I've never seen her before in my life, Andy and I... we're... erm..." George was going bright red under the sergeant's steady stare. "Yes, all right, we're in a... *relationship*, we were in bed at his, he went downstairs to see what a noise was and it was over before I'd found some trousers. Which are... his trousers," he added, plucking at them as if he'd only just noticed. "Is that enough, or do I have to air my entire personal life *and his* for the benefit of the South Wales police?"

The copper had also gone a bit pink at this declaration. "I think that was more information than she was asking for, George," Mitchell said.

Gwen was gaping at the look of anything-but-denial on the alleged relationship-pee's face. Rhys would never have thought it either, from all her indulgent accounts of the way Andy trailed after her like an awestruck puppy, but if Constable Unlucky-With-Birds had decided to give it up and play for the other side it wasn't really any of his business, was it. "I'm sorry, but I'll need you out so I can take his statement," the sergeant finally recovered herself enough to say.

"We'll look after Sadie," Mitchell said, as George leant in to murmur some private leavetaking to his... partner... that ended with a curious little brushing of noses instead of a kiss. "-- Okay, I've actually heard you *shagging* each other and I wasn't convinced by that."

"Piss off, Mitchell." But Andy was smiling as he said it, nervous little *not all of my mates here knew about that but I suppose now there's bugger-all -- erm, sod -- erm, not much to be done* look of someone who might not be as done wrestling with it as they'd thought. George had gone red again. Relationship, in-bloody-deed. "Oi, *parents*, best to little Jenny from her Uncle Andy, aye?"

Gwen gave her old partner a warmer grin this time. Andy had taken to the baby instantly the first time they'd been introduced, perhaps seeing in her some vindication for nearly giving up his career to fight for the children with them. Well, who knew really, maybe he'd been thinking... *None of your business, Rhys Williams, yeah. Even if now you think you know why he was asking about Ianto.* "We'll bring her round to visit if you're in a while, otherwise

catch you at home, yeah? You're going to be off with that for a bit."

"Month at least, they said," Andy confirmed with another glance over at his departing mates. "Going to be a bloody nuisance."

The sergeant was glaring at Gwen now, tapping a pen against her evidence notebook. Rhys took his wife by the arm to show that they had the hint and tugged her out into the corridor. Where Mitchell was comforting George, who was shaking his head and murmuring disbelief that he'd just outed himself. "I can't even, this is *always going to happen* --"

"He'll be *all right*, look, Annie can keep him --"

Mitchell fell silent as he saw them, dark human eyes tracking their passage as keenly as the dog's. Out came Gwen's *copper's best* smile again. "Oi, you two, give us a ring if you need a hand with Andy, yeah? Seen him with a bloody man-flu, be a right terror now he's *really* hurt."

Mitchell and George gave each other a wary look, but nodded grudging assent. "We'll see he lets you know when he's done here," Mitchell said, as George went into his wallet for a card that said *George Sands, private language tutor* over a number on Andy's street. Rhys wondered what sort of money was in that. His own cards still had Harwood's on, Gwen had firmly vetoed the idea of running up a lot that went anywhere near suggesting he so much as knew where Torchwood's offices were even in jest. (Let him carry a few with just the public contact-number, though, said it looked less suspicious when half of Cardiff could lay hands on *that* as it was. Lois answered it as a complaints line.)

Gwen flashed the pair one last grin and turned on her heel, marching smartly for the doors.

Rhys spared a thought to marvel that half of Torchwood was actually walking back out of a hospital without a stop down to the mortuary to play *little dude inside the big dude's head* worked in somewhere so long as they were there. (Just as well, never came off as well without the suit really.) She slackened her pace after the first few strides, though, muttering to herself. "Leave it to Andy to get himself shot in his own house and he's not even on duty." His wife had well slipped into copper mode, Rhys could see the gears whizzing away behind green eyes: "Couldn't be a domestic? -- No, that George looks as if he'd wee himself if you handed him a water-pistol."

Rhys had thought that of the two Mitchell might seem a bit of a rough character, but George was the one *he'd* have fingered if something was doing, actually. Then again, that might just be him projecting ill-will onto the nearest Sais. Poor bloke was probably just mental with worry over his... bloke.

Lois was yawning and distinctly unchuffed with her employers by the time they'd swung round to the office to reclaim the baby. Rhys didn't blame her for that face, poor woman had another hour's paperwork to sort about the night's futile chase yet, whilst Gwen could claim a boss's privilege and go straight to fall across a bed. Well, as straight as could be when it involved putting the baby down properly first; her to the kitchen to make up a bottle, as Rhys set Jenny into the cot and went back down to collapse on the settee in front of the telly, fumbling at the remote with his left hand. Bloody awkward this. Least he could move it round, though, poor sod Andy had his whole arm bugged up on him and the left his good hand at that. Not a laugh being shot, Rhys could have told him that if Gwen'd let him, and

to break the bone as well -- reminded him of how rubbish it had been the summer he was ten and broke his own collarbone the first day of hols, well, had it broken for him, Banana-Boat had been a git back then and he was still a git. Harder on a grown man, even so, month not properly able to -- but maybe this George would be helping with *that*, aye?

Oh, lord, he'd just gone there, hadn't he.

Word of Andy's break-in had made it onto the breakfast shows. The editors hadn't anything better than the photo from his warrant-card, all eyes and earnest scowl that only made him look even younger. Rhys was a bit surprised that the swarm of reporters hadn't managed to bother an interview out of George yet. Aye, well, sensible to be camera-shy, even if it *was* his... whatever. Maybe especially then, depending if their Mums knew. He'd met Andy's Mum once, wouldn't be at all surprised if Constable Davidson was just as happy if Detective Inspector Davidson didn't know *every* minute of her son's business. Bad enough all of Britain had to see that picture of him.

Gwen sloped in from the kitchen, holding Jenny's bottle. "How's the hand?"

"Itches." Rhys poked at the gauze, wondering if it would be best to change it now or wait till he'd had a bit of a lie-down first. Like to end up rebandaging the wrong sodding hand, done-in as he was.

Instead of proceeding up to the nursery Gwen flopped down beside him, staring foggily at the babbling heads on the telly. "Andy's gay," she said as if this had only just sunk in.

Rhys took the bottle from her hand. "Go to bed, love, I'll get it. Maybe he won't be gay in the morning," he prompted when she didn't

move, and this startled her into a weary little snort of laughter.

"Bloody night of it, yeah." Gwen hauled herself off the settee and shuffled for the stairs, pausing at the first step to shake her head. "Oh, my god, Andy. Suppose he'll be all right, but... Just as well I never did set him up with Lois."

"Never have worked, she'd have colour-coded his pants." Gwen gave him a thin smile and plodded up to bed. Rhys lingered a few minutes longer, flipping past Andy's warrant-card photo a time or three more, then switched off the telly and went up to the nursery with the bottle.



There was a woman in a grey jumper leaning over Jenny's cot, dark curls bouncing as she made funny faces to the baby within. Rhys nearly lost his left-handed grip on the bottle. "Oi! Who the hell are you and how did you get into my house?"

The woman whirled around at his shout, brown eyes comically wide. "You can see me?"

"Course I can see you, why would --"

"But this is... this... *Shit*."

And just like that she... *wasn't* there, anymore, Rhys left gaping stupidly at a line of pink wallpaper ducks. *Hallucinations, right, wasn't that on the list about the drugs? Or maybe he*

was thinking of Torchwood's regulations about working hours, as in the part where one was technically supposed to go down for a certain number of hours out of every forty-eight lest the mind begin making up aliens to shoot at. Just now he couldn't recall what precisely that number had been, which was probably a good sign that he was well past it. Rhys scooped Jenny out of her cot and sat in the rocker to give her the bottle, needing suddenly that small touch of the rituals the rest of the world would consider normal to offset a mad night's dragging long past dawn. Be next for the medical leave, he would, clapped-out body or clapped-out brain whichever.

Not that Torchwood could have spared him even if he'd been as bad off as Andy, though, and a mere wrapped-up hand barely worth taking the late morning but for the warnings on the drugs labels about how soon after not to drive; Rhys soon found himself being set right back to what passed for the minor tasks on the organisation's rota, anything that didn't involve manual dexterity or the ability to punch something threatening in the face if need be. This was surprisingly little if you discounted the filing. After several near-disasters with rogue office supplies he managed to convince Gwen that his talents were better spent in putting to use his background in transport routing by going round to look into the patterns behind a rash of OAPs ringing the police to complain of a bear loose on their street.

Considering this was Cardiff, this sort of thing was more common than you'd think. Might not even *be* the rift, city got the odd pony wandering into a Tesco's now and again. Or could be a bloody bear, all they knew. Although bears, as a rule, tended not to bark. Or howl. Rhys's bet in the office pool was that it was a

Great Dane, although Gwen had plumped for the old-standby of 'weevil' and Johnson seemed convinced that they'd uncovered a terrorist cell. Given her CV, that probably wasn't surprising.

Lois said it was a wookiee. Right about now, as Rhys dodged his fifty-seventh cup of oversweetened tea and made a diplomatic escape, he would have been just as happy to see Chewbacca turn up in someone's garden just to have a better accounting of his afternoon than *met some nice old ladies, ate biscuits, admired several manky cats without justification*. There were moments when special-ops could be far, far more boring than driving a lorry. He paused just out of hallooing range to sort through the notes he'd been relaying back to the office with his phone, trying to see if switching round the coloured spots on their map according to who'd said *barking* and who'd reported *smelt of fresh blood* made any new connections suddenly leap out to his eye.

And who but PC Davidson should come strolling out of a pedestrian shortcut through the middle of the long row of terraces, Sadie's lead in his good hand. Well, medical leave or not *she'd* still need to make her rounds, Rhys supposed. Andy's slung arm was tucked up inside an oversized Cardiff Blues hoodie, the empty sleeve pinned up like some veteran of a bygone war. "Oi, Rhys, come round to look in on your famous mate, then?"

"Yeah, you've been all over the bloody telly, you posh sod. But, erm, no, I was just about checking on one of our drivers who's been out, sort of thing." They'd been maintaining the fiction that he'd be going back to Harwood's to their friends, 'cos it wasn't as if anyone who knew Rhys would credit anything *remotely*

resembling the real story. "Small world though, innit?"

"You're just round the back of mine from here. See the crime-scene tape caught in the trees," Andy added bitterly, nodding towards the straggling flags of yellow tangled in the skeletal branches clawing their way over a garden wall. "At least the sodding reporters have cleared off and I can get out to my bins."

Rhys gave a considering look to that high wall, lichen-spotted stone giving way to a plain wooden gate halfway along and all of it right above his head. A tall man like Andy might have been able to get enough of a handhold on the tree to pull himself over and slip into the gardens beyond, but even for him it'd be a stretch, and Rhys would have needed a bit of something to stand on to get up *that* high. Not much for anyone getting in round this way, no, unless someone had been careless about locking the gate, of course. Quiet enough area, and who'd break in on the Heddlu? (If they'd known he was, at that, and it not just some yob looking to nick something from an unlatched house --) "Aye, erm, your police mates found anything yet?"

A one-shouldered shrug that already looked well-practised. "No, but they're worried it might be someone going after coppers, so they're throwing themselves into it proper. Feels a bit, dunno, don't like being so much *trouble*. They've already been back round to get shirty at George for doing my washing-up after he thought they'd finished."

Rhys found himself picturing a copper having to write down into an evidence notebook *partner that spontaneously does his washing-up*. More bloody suspicious than the bullet-wound, that. Sadie was sniffing curiously at

Rhys's shoe. "Oi, don't even think about it." He started to reach down for a pat, then caught himself at the sight of his bandaged hand: "-- She on leave too then?"

"Learnt your lesson about teasing strange dogs, have you?" Andy managed a small smile. "Being walked in a civilian capacity, yeah, go on."

Rhys gave in to the impulse to tousle the black ears. "Hullo, Sadie." The dog grinned at him, pink tongue lolling. "Pretty girl. What is she, lab mix?"

"Near as they could make out." Bit of a short answer, that? Rhys would have thought him a man to bang on about his dog the way some blokes'd talk your ear off about their kids. But Andy seemed to be working something else out in his head. "A dog, bit you."

"Yeah?"

"What *sort* of a dog?"

The alien sort that runs on two legs, Rhys didn't say. Best not to encourage Andy to go looking, hard enough seeing he stayed out of trouble even when he had the use of both arms.

"Dunno, just a *dog* dog? Weren't your Sadie, if you were thinking I was --"

"No, no, Sadie's a copper, she wouldn't bite anyone who didn't deserve it. Was here all that night, anyway. I... Rhys, I need to talk to you about something."

"Not about you being gay is it?" The copper's usual look of blank gormlessness deepened, if that were possible. "Mean, I'm all right with that, Gwen reckons you were just trying to work out who you --"

"What? I'm not *gay*!"

Rhys couldn't stop himself smiling, rude as that felt; "Your boyfriend know that?"

"Will you *shut it*? I need to --"

They were apparently right on the direct path to the spot everyone on these streets liked to walk their dogs, here came a woman with a ball of fur on a bright pink lead; Andy's attention snapped down to Sadie as the puppy yipped and trotted up to say hello. Sadie eyed the puffy intruder quizzically, perhaps wondering if it was meant to be a dog under all the hair. "She's well-behaved," the woman remarked as her puppy tried to climb up Sadie's back.

"Police training, she's my partner in the Heddlu." Sadie made a curious little noise, as if to correct Andy on who was looking after whom in this relationship. And oh, that *was* a bit useless of him there, trying to point a disapproving finger at the dog with the hand had her own lead wrapped round; "Don't start -- don't -- *shut it* --"

They were going to be down on the pavement biting at each other's muzzles in a moment, Rhys thought, wondering why the image seemed so vivid. "Always get a partner who likes to give you the grief, eh?"

"I don't tell her how to do *her* job." The dog -- *coughed*? "All right, that once, but you were --"

Rhys sniggered. "Like a ruddy stand-up act, the two of you. Should chuck it and go into dog-whispering."

The puppy tried once more to get Sadie's attention with a clumsy shove. All of a sudden it spooked at a low rumbling growl and shied away, its owner scrambling at the straining lead. Rhys realised as she dragged her puppy away that it wasn't *Sadie* who'd made that

peculiar noise; "You just have to speak their language," Andy said, a light sparking gold from his eyes for an instant as he turned to watch them pass. "Look, I have to, erm, *we really* need to talk --"

Rhys glanced down at his watch. "Sorry, mate, said I'd meet Gwen to pick up the baby twenty minutes ago, she'll be going spare by now. Give us a ring, we'll grab a pint next time I can get away from the job *and* nappy duty?"

"Not *too* long though, aye?" Andy said, with a twitch of his sling. "Mean, dunno when they're going to want me back on..."

He could see a pepperpot lurking in her doorway a few houses down, waiting for the opportunity to drag her handsome young neighbour in for the cuppa Rhys had just fled from himself. *Good luck with that, mate*. "Aye, well, yeah, got to run anyway, try not to get burgled at gunpoint again, yeah? Anything happens to me and Gwen Jenny'd need her Uncle Andy. Not that, mean, we're not going skydiving, yeah, just... the roads, you know?"

Andy nodded, as if this rambling dash into cloud-cuckoo-parent-land had either made perfect sense or so little that it was safely shrugged away. "Hope they get any of it sorted soon. Copper's worst nightmare, someone waving a gun at you."

Suppose it would be, at that. Rhys wondered if he should be *worried* how normal the insane demands of Torchwood had come to seem to him, anymore, all the guns and the hours and the expectation that at any moment something far worse than some chav with a knife might jump out at him from the --

He paused, considering the car-keys in his hand as a thought struck him: the keys in his

bandaged hand. Would he have described his furry mates in the park as *bears*? Hadn't heard anything of them since that night, Torchwood had been assuming they'd taken the point and cleared off for wilder spaces, but maybe they'd been denning in the city for a bit before coming to Gwen's notice.

Rhys cast about for pawprints or something, some evidence of whatever it might be that alien bears did to mark out their territory (scratching on trees maybe, thought he'd seen something like that on a nature programme once), but nothing stood out to his uneducated eye as unusual against this urban landscape, save perhaps that it smelt a bit of wee in some way that his mind was wanting to associate more with horses than humans, too musky and wild for a pavement in the city. Maybe alien bears left each other messages on every fencepost just the way a dog would. Come round later with Mrs Evans's dachshund maybe, see if the little bastard had any advice to offer about running down a trail?

Couldn't be anything too odd occurring round here, though, else Andy'd have been ringing it in to Gwen himself, he could barely let them alone for mere spooky lights at highway accidents as it was. Probably just somebody's lost sheepdog getting talked up over the back fences. Or, this was Cardiff, somebody's lost sheep. Down the street the copper was being inveigled into losing the rest of the afternoon to a particularly aggressive OAP with the offer of a biscuit for Sadie thrown in. Rhys hurried for his car before he could get sucked back into the vortex of well-meaning neighbourliness.

Gwen was home already when he got in, sat in front of the telly in her dressing-gown with Jenny in her lap as if they'd just been about a

feed. Rhys dipped down to nuzzle at her neck. "Smell nice, you do. New perfume?"

Gwen's brow wrinkled. "Not got any on, I just came out the shower."

"Must be you, then." Rhys kissed her ear and straightened back up, turning for the kitchen. "Spag bol all right for tonight, love? I'm knackered."

Knackered they both were, truly, straight into bed as soon as the baby could be dealt with and out as solidly as a nursery-monitor and a rift-monitor would allow till Rhys groped the alarm off far too early of a still-dark winter morning. Gwen hadn't even stirred, sawing wood down the bottom of a well too deep for anything but her Jenny's cry to rouse her. Rhys lifted a newly-unbandaged hand to give her a little shake, then let it fall; no, let her sleep a bit longer whilst she could. Seven month old baby, neither one of them should have to be working all hours like this on top of that.

But when there was no one else to do the job... Rhys kissed his wife lightly on the forehead and braced himself to the dull commute over to the dreary business park in an inconvenient end of town where Torchwood had been reduced to renting offices after the loss of the magnificent base beneath the Plass. Gwen made jokes that a proper converted warehouse would only have tempted them to take up welding their alien scrap into artistically distressed lawn-sculptures, but Rhys could tell that she hated *settling* for what the government had been willing to appropriate the funds for. Just like she hated having to drive their rubbish little Astra instead of some tarted-up Batmobile like the one that had gone missing when... like the one that had gone missing.

Well, spilt milk, aye? They were alive, they had each other and the baby, and a lot of Mums and Dads could say the same thanks to his Gwen, so who was Rhys to go moaning over the specifics just 'cos it didn't line up to something he'd barely known about anyway. He rang the bell and waited for the early shift to let him in, shifting nervously in front of the camera. *Can't have Rhys having his own keys, oh, no, not safe if someone finds them on him and works out where they're to --*

Rhys startled at a shadow at that receptionist's desk that they were too short-handed to man most hours. Shadow in a suit and tie -- Rhys turned to face it full on, but there was no one there, there never was, just his own reflection in a window beyond. His own guilt putting faces to his regrets, aye, remembering how it *had* once been. Come in through the front way a time or two near the end, that pompous secret door at the back of Ianto's "tourist office" led down into damp corridors and creaking service-lifts till you came to the great rolling cog with all of its noise and lights announcing you; nothing near that flash here, just an ordinary fire-door with its ordinary blue roundels warning *keep shut*, half a warning to close it behind and half a metaphor that you'd be best off getting shut of what was beyond it altogether.

Although, to the eye it might have been any other office in any other building much like this anywhere in Britain, unassuming nest of generic cubicles in the main space giving little hint what was in *some* of the plastic storage-tubs stacked casually about here and there. Rhys sat down at his paper-choked workstation and paused for a moment to stretch his right hand over the keyboard: mending but stiff, a bone-deep ache that he suspected would

persist long after the garish arc of scabs had faded. With a sigh he settled in with the usual mountain of paperwork on what the rift had dragged in lately and what they meant to do about it. Which was often *nothing*, since there was so often little that they *could* do. They hadn't any nick to shut belligerent victims in, or much left in the way of fancy James Bond gadgets to ease over the spots where plain out-of-the-box Earth technology was lacking, and forget trying to *predict* the next visitation on the laptops Her Majesty had been willing to put out the dosh for. What they had, mostly, was their own brains and their networks of contacts, and he still wasn't convinced that Johnson took any of this seriously enough to have shared *everything* that she could have been contributing to the effort. Probably find out years from now that she could have got them a student-discount on better computers, or something.

The hell of it was, Rhys kept circling back to as he sorted through the endless churn of folders, that they needed more help so badly Gwen had been at the verge of extending an offer to *Andy*, since they knew he was a hard worker, cared about the people details that Johnson was so crap at, and wasn't nearly as big a nutter as the last three possibles had turned out to be. And thinking too that to bring him into the fold for some proper training might be safer than letting him wander about getting into trouble all on his own, yeah... Suppose now that'd be on hold till he was well enough to come sniffing round begging for it again.

Maybe someone was taking out the competition.

Or just as like Johnson had decided to preempt the possibility of having to work with Andy and put out a hit on him, as long as Rhys

was spinning fairy-stories. He'd *been* thinking it was the sort of poisonous mistrust between them that would have led to comedic shagging once they'd been forced together on the job, if this had been crap telly, but that was probably unlikely now for some other reasons as well as that it was completely mental. Would have been fun to watch though.

He looked over to Lois's station as the bell for the reception rang, wondering if someone had already rung for take-away this early. Fisheyed on the grainy vid of the CCTV was what looked quite a lot like a copper, scowling round as if he suspected the visible security camera of being a front for some reality-telly gag. Lois went out to fetch him in whilst Gwen motioned the rest of them to give a hasty look to whether the scattered debris of a *Torchwood* workday could pass for ordinary business rubbish on this short notice. Rhys saw Johnson tipping something shiny into the bin under her workstation just as the door from reception swung open again.

They'd rated an Inspector this time, sombre in full uniform; the man fetched up against the edge of Lois's station and waited to see which of them would rise to greet him, though he had to know where he'd walked into. *Seeing how seriously we're taking you, eh, mate?* Well, Rhys couldn't blame him for *that*, drove him spare to be passed off on under-staff himself. As it was, Gwen saved him the embarrassment; "Good morning, Inspector, what can Torchwood do for the Heddlu today?"

Do *to*, more like, by the copper's persisting look of distrust, but he was as much the professional. "Sorry to trouble you, Director Cooper, but it seems NABIS has flagged a firearm registered to Torchwood in a recent incident."

Rhys couldn't help glancing at Johnson. But the woman looked as baffled as any of them, eyebrows rising higher and higher as Gwen flipped through the clipboard of papers the officer had handed over for inspection. "Sorry, you're telling me that the bullet the doctors took out of Andy Davidson came from *Torchwood's* P99?" Gwen finally said.

"I told you submitting *all* of our weapons for testing was a mistake," Johnson murmured.

"Well, excuse me for not being *Jack* enough to negotiate our relicencing without it," Gwen snapped back, and ran a shaking hand through her hair. "Right, sorry, this isn't helping anything. Lois, which guns did we log out to who on the calls that night, were we even using the P99?"

Lois was already tapping away at her keyboard to sift through the appropriate records, excruciatingly detailed paperwork for every last sneeze and fart they made one of Her Majesty's conditions for Torchwood's continuing existence in the absence of Jack Harkness's reality-distorting charisma. "Morning of the twenty-second, that was..." She looked up, eyes wide: "Rhys had the Walther."

It took him a moment to register her words. "But *I* didn't bloody shoot Andy Davidson! Couldn't have done, you were with me all night, Gwen, when would I have had a moment free to go break into his ruddy kitchen?"

The copper was giving him a sceptical look, as if pieces were falling into an order that Rhys would end up having to dispute from the opposite side of a small grilled window. "And can anyone besides your wife corroborate your movements on the date in question?"

Lois and Johnson exchanged looks. "I signed them out at half three to investigate a disturbance, the nature of which I'm afraid would be above the Heddlu De Cymru's level of security clearance," Lois said. "If you want more precise details regarding the operation you would have to apply through MI5."

Which he would, or Rhys wasn't any judge of a man's face at all. Lois went to show the inspector out as Gwen sank into the nearest chair. "Bloody hell."

"It *would* be Davidson," Johnson said.

"He does have a talent for wrong places and times, yeah." Gwen sighed and spun round to face her crew just as Rhys managed to paste on a look of denial that he might have been thinking that as well. "Well, we know Rhys can't have shot Andy, I was with him every moment from the time we walked out of here until we came back to sign out. And I'm positive he fired all of the rounds we accounted for on that operation at the aliens. Which were obviously *not Andy*."

"Unless he's a shapechanger of some sort." Johnson (Rhys never *had* discovered if the woman actually had a given name) looked entirely too intrigued by this notion, tiny smile turning up the corner of her lips. "Perhaps a... werewolf, or something -- Habiba, could you start looking into what would be involved in having some silver bullets manufactured?"

"Oi, come on, Andy isn't any more a werewolf than I am," Rhys protested.

Johnson lifted an eyebrow. "And see what we have on transmission of lycanthropy as well. After all," she continued as Rhys spluttered, "You *were* injured by a direct biological contact

with the offender in that encounter. Maybe you're infected."

"I would say that this sort of thing never happened when Jack was here, but that would be a lie," Gwen said wearily when he looked to her for support. "No, Johnson, Andy's not a *werewolf*. We were partners, I think I'd have noticed if he was always asking for the full moons off."

"It *was* full on the twenty-first," Lois said, ducking her head with a murmured apology when Rhys glared at her.

"Will you *listen* to yourselves? There can't be any such bloody thing as *werewolves*, yeah? Or Andy ruddy *Davidson* being one? Make more sense to say he's one of those nutters likes to dress up as Scooby-Doo to have sex in the park and he was meeting them in the bushes when the bullet hit him! And before you say it those weren't any comedy teeth, either. *Rather* been bit by a bloody weevil."

Johnson was giving him a right proper *look* now, that hint of a suggestion that they all knew how far out of his depth Rhys was at this and it was only because he was married to the boss that no one dared say it aloud. "He baulks at the notion of werewolves but *aliens* he's perfectly all right with?"

"*Seen* aliens, haven't I. But I never saw one could be one of my wife's old mates one minute and a man in a gorilla suit the next, aye? How could a man you've known for six years suddenly change his bloody *shape*, for christ's sake?"

"The alien at our wedding did," Gwen reminded him, a thoughtful frown appearing upon her brow. "But you're right that that was something different, that was something

looking like our friends, not our friends turning into something themselves." She heaved a sigh. "This was so much simpler when Jack was here..."

For once Rhys was inclined to agree with her. Johnson had gone rummaging through her bin to retrieve what turned out to be the device they'd found last week that appeared to be the alien equivalent of a cheap iPod. (Although he had his own private theories about the 'vibrate' setting.) "I do seem to recall that Harkness's idea of 'simpler' was what got the lot of you in dutch with the Crown in the first place," she said.

"Least it was never that someone could have got along in the police being a *werewolf*," Rhys said stubbornly. "Bloody *Andy* we're talking about, he'd have been first in the queue to tell us about it, yeah?"

"I suppose we *are* discussing the man who rang us in all seriousness to report that a seven-year-old schoolchild thought they'd seen a vermicious knid pretending to be a bit of equipment in the play-area," Johnson acknowledged, looking a bit deflated.

"Andy *means* well," Gwen said. "Honestly, I don't know why you always have to suspect him of doing it to wind us up."

Johnson's eyes narrowed at her superior officer. "I question his motivations because he's demonstrated a willingness to act against his government," she said, and then after a moment, greatly subdued, "Even if he was right to do it."

It was the closest thing to an admission of the possibility of human fallibility on her own side that Rhys had ever heard from her. (And anyway Andy weren't the only one with

cousins that rang him up claiming to have been abducted by aliens, Rhys had one in Gloucestershire kept sending him blurry cameraphone snaps from his honeymoon on Venus.) With a deep sigh Gwen turned to lose herself deep in the bowels of Lois's filing system, pulling up the records regarding their weapons and recent operations and medical histories and for all Rhys knew Andy's last part in the policeman's chorus, trying to make sense of the ridiculous data. The rest of that day and then the next went by in a sort of tense haze, waiting for the other shoe to drop about it.

But this was Torchwood, always something new catching on fire to distract you. By the afternoon that a copper *had* turned up with the appropriate paperwork to have a rummage through some of their less critical files as her mate took them one by one off to the bench in the ladies' loo to take down statements, it was almost a surprise again, far more to worry over keeping the pair of them away from the pile of rift-borne rubbish that they'd been sorting through when the bell went. The coppers had finally cleared off with some puzzled looks about Lois's impeccably kept data, which showed beyond a doubt that Torchwood's P99 had been where they'd said it was all night, which was to say nowhere near being free to wander about taking shots at coppers in their houses, and never even seemed to notice the two-headed goat.

Back to the usual this workweek though, if you'd stretch usual to cover where someone, quite possibly Johnson, had left a sheet in the printer where they'd photoshopped Andy Davidson's head onto the trunk of a relaxing Disney-mascot dressed as a giant dalmatian. Whether this had been generated as part of a genuine attempt at fact-finding or for a

pointless personal jab was anyone's guess. Rhys wadded it into the recycle before Gwen could see and went to settle himself in for his turn on the rota to trawl through the online sources for odd news that might ultimately end up as Torchwood's concern. (Which idea he suspected Gwen had nicked *straight* from the films, but it was an hour or so where he could reasonably predict that nothing was going to eat him and he wasn't standing about looking into a hole in the freezing rain, so he'd take it most any day really.)

Even in the absence of much new information the media couldn't seem to stop worrying at the mystery of who could have taken a shot at a copper. One of the less reputable tabloids was trying its best to flog a 'GAY LOVE TRIANGLE SHOOTING' angle, but didn't seem to be getting much of anywhere, all of the pair's neighbours staunchly defending both men as quiet and respectable about it. Curious that his mates just across the road had still managed to duck the reporters even after that -- one article did have a photo with George in the background, head turned as if he were speaking to someone just out of the frame, but it must have been snapped before anyone would have connected him to the case at all or there'd surely have been more fuss made over it. As it was, he wasn't even identified in the caption.

Just as well no one seemed to have got onto the mix-up with Torchwood's P99 or *they'd* not be hearing the end of it for reporters into their bins, Rhys supposed. He printed out a few of the better accounts of it for archival purposes (well, to be strictly honest, for the scrapbook he kept at the back of one of the cabinets where Gwen wouldn't find it) and tried to settle his mind back onto the business of the

rest of the day, the records upon records upon records needing cross-checking and the occasional fact-checking against what available *ordinary* sources of information they'd been able to put to their disposal. (Which, Rhys gathered, weren't the resources Gwen had been used to enjoying before, as clever as Lois was she was still only keep-your-clocks-from-blinking clever and not that phenomenal technical mind who had once commanded Torchwood's tentacles deep into any database the organisation cared to infiltrate, but still quite enough to keep one humbled about one's intellectual capacities.)

Wasn't long, though, before the mind-numbing chore of scanning through page after page of haystacks for some imaginary needle had his mind wandering and Rhys found his fingers straying into the pursuit of research rather different than what Gwen had originally set him to: *While the idea of a shape-shifting figure is found in many cultures, the presence in premodern Europe of the wolf as a powerful and predatory rival to human activities provided a strong focus for such beliefs. Traditional signs of the wolf include thicker body-hair or a lack of definition between the eyebrows like Jennifer Brownling who has no boobs either. Other sources suggest that a werewolf in human form retains an increased sensitivity to the supernatural, possibly based on the belief that dogs can see ghosts, which means that if you're seeing people who aren't there, Rhys Williams --*

Rhys blinked uncomprehendingly at the nonsensical words, willing them to fall into some sort of logical order. "You're not believing anything you read on Wikipedia again, are you?" Lois said, pausing behind him to glance in at his screen. "People vandalise

those things, you wouldn't believe what the page for the Home Secretary said yesterday before someone sorted it."

He'd seen it, actually; the picture of the baboon in place of the official photo had been in particularly poor taste, if deserved. At a second look the paragraph had reloaded into a reasonably well-edited and bland account of hairy palms and foul breath. Rhys shrugged and dismissed the site in favour of the records he'd been supposed to be filing. "What about you, turned up anything interesting about, erm," he lowered his voice as Gwen passed in the background: "werewolves?"

Lois considered. "Michael J Fox is fit in that one film."

"Meant anything we didn't already know, aye?" She grinned at him.

"Sort of weird how things come round again, though," she continued with a thoughtful look. "I mean, Torchwood was *founded* because of a werewolf. The Charter says -- surely you've read it?" she prompted to what must have been a conspicuously blank look from him.

"Well, not supposed to be working here at all, am I? Should still be on bloody parental leave from Harwood's. Not really time to read through the handbook when your wife is asking you if you can shoot a pistol because something's about to eat the baby."

"Not much point in reading the *rest* of the handbook anyway, really," Lois said, pulling a face. "It starts out 'Congratulations, you are now a fully accredited Handmaiden of Satan' and I'm afraid it rather goes downhill from there. Gwen says Jack must have been drunk when he wrote it."

That Rhys would believe. "Didn't write the charter, though?" he hazarded.

Lois shook her head. "Not unless he was running about in the days of Queen Victoria. I know Gwen has her stories about him, but... that'd just be absurd, even for this place." Rhys held his tongue; whatever Gwen had or hadn't briefed her new hires on regarding Harkness was her own lookout, and seemed like being a moot point anyway, since he doubted Torchwood's welcome would be particularly warm if the man ever did come slinking back. "Anyway, supposedly, the Queen had an encounter with something alien that behaved just like a traditional werewolf -- turned into a monster by the light of the full moon and all -- and after 'Sir Doctor of Tardis' helped to sort it, she decided that an institute should be founded to deal with unusual threats to the realm in the future."

It just bloody well figured that that Doctor would have been at the heart of this nonsense. "But that's still *aliens*, not some bloody supernatural Lon Chaney rubbish, yeah? Like the ghost always turns out to be some posh arse wearing a sheet to scare people into selling their land cheap. Oh, bloody hell, I've just made myself into the naff one in the spectacles, haven't I."

"You have, a bit, yeah." Lois hesitated. "I keep wanting to ask, this... *Doctor*... I know when Gwen's mentioned him it hasn't sounded as if she thinks of him too highly, but... she's never said why really?"

Rhys thought back to a certain strange string of days, and a video neither of them had ever been able to bear looking at again after. "Because he thinks he can pick and choose when to help us," he finally said.

She gave him a disconcerted shrug, clearly wanting to argue the point and not sure just how. "Maybe he wants us to learn to sort our own problems when we can."

"Aye, well, almost didn't that last time, did we. Could be overrun with more alien-werewolf-things *now* and I don't know he'd be in any hurry this go either. And that's not just me being bitter this one had a nip at me. Is it?"

A pragmatic look crossed the young woman's face. "You *were* pointing a gun at it. Could you tell was it going after *you*, or was it trying to stop you waving the funny thing at it?"

Rhys gave her a look. "See now, that's you trying to use earth-logic for something that weren't even *human*. Dunno it knew what *I* was, let alone the gun."

Lois still had that trace of a stubborn look about her, sort of thing the cabinet-that-was must have found itself looking at when she'd stood up to them at that last. "I'm only saying that it *could* have been self-defence, is all. You had a weapon, so it reacted."

"By bloody *biting* me." Rhys paused to consider this. "This space-werewolf, though, did it say how that *worked*? I mean, did it go about biting people to make them like it was? Or would it have been too posh for that, used a ray-gun or something?"

Lois looked chagrined; "Dunno really, that it existed at all was all that the Charter has to say about it. There are notes referring to further information that Torchwood used to have, but it looks as if most of it must have been on papers that weren't ever scanned into the system."

So unrecoverable now, blown to flinders with the rest of the old base. Rhys was already well used to the odd gaps in the organisation's records, such as the long stretch round the nineteen-fifties when what little documentation there was regarding the medical officer's duties and activities mostly existed in the form of glosses from Owen Harper speculating upon the man's character and apparent lack thereof. It seemed Gwen wasn't the only Director who found that the most difficult position to fill. Hard even to say, though, whether it was the destruction of information they'd once had access to or its seeming absence altogether that was the more frustrating. *Had* there once been a musty old book in those archives that could have put his worries to rest, or at least given him some clues what to be looking out for at the worst? Lois was giving him an odd look, and Rhys realised suddenly that he'd been sat rubbing his right hand for the last while. "Still aching a bit," he said, letting it drop into his lap again.

Lois was a sharp one, she was. "You know, I *could* have a go out in the field, it isn't right to put you and Gwen both at risk at the same time so often."

Gwen would appreciate the offer, Rhys knew, and she'd turn it down for all the reasons it made sense. "You're not expendable, love, better it's the wally like me can't even remember how to set the microwave to half-power without checking the book every time. Mean, you can *ask*, sure she'd think about it," he offered as she started to protest that her technical skills weren't anything worth shuttering her up at the office as an invaluable asset over.

Lois picked up her bag from beneath her desk. "Anyway. See you tomorrow, I have to get

home before Temper tries to start the wash again."

"Temper?"

Lois... blushed. "Temperance. Johnson? We, erm, she... Sort of a thing now, I suppose, she moved most of her kit in a few weeks ago and she's already broken the telly and shot my toaster! Worth every pound though."

"Oh." Rhys was really beginning to feel left out of the loop, lately. "Erm, well, good luck?" She gave him a little wave and turned for the exit.

Rhys leant back in his chair as the doors closed behind Lois. Werewolf in the bloody Charter -- he'd wager Johnson knew about *that*, aye, any excuse to wind her new mates up about their questionable pedigree when they handed her a chance like this all wrapped up in a shiny bow. Sometimes Rhys suspected she'd never given over her original mission to discredit Torchwood, only decided that they were better undermined from within. (Not that it hadn't been tried before, according to the garbled anecdotes from Harkness that Gwen had been setting down as best she recalled them. The best reading was the one where she claimed something had goaded Torchwood into opening the rift over Rhys's own dead body, which had to be rubbish 'cos, well, looking at the file now, yeah?) Her and Lois going at it, were they? Rift couldn't throw them anything much stranger than the thought of, well, of Johnson getting that close to anyone at all, really. Or having a life outside of her work.

And... *Temperance*? He kept rolling that round in his head the rest of the day, and still hadn't worn down any of its sharp corners by the time he'd gone to curl up alongside his own partner

for the night. "Johnson's first name is really Temperance?"

"You named your daughter after your great-aunt Iphigenia," Gwen pointed out.

"Aye, but her it bloody *suit*ed." Gwen snorted and tucked one leg up against his hip. Rather... invitingly, yeah. Hadn't escaped him either that they were in bed and both still awake for the once... "Thinking maybe we could practice for a little Orestes?"

"We were going to name a boy for my Dad," Gwen said. Rhys noticed that this hadn't exactly been a refutation of the underlying premise. He nipped at her shoulder, feeble human teeth only dimpling the pale skin; right, been a while for all the workload but he still had some thoughts about it, and suddenly Rhys wanted the view of that lovely round arse, urging Gwen up onto her hands and knees to go after it hard and deep and loud, tumbling down into a sprawl of tangled limbs, oh, *yes* --

After a long pause Gwen lifted a hand to scoop the dark hair away from her eyes. "That was... enthusiastic."

"Sorry, didn't mean to... Dunno what came over me there --"

"Didn't say I didn't *like* it," Gwen assured him, rolling herself over to snuggle closer. "Maybe next time I can find those old cuffs, yeah...?"

Sort of a shag carried you on through teatime the next day thinking back on it, that had been. And he *was* catching himself mooning off over his keyboard thinking back on it, yeah, not much use to the Secret Organisation in the state like this. Maybe take a run out for something to eat before he tried to drag his mind back onto the endless, endless filing...

Andy's mate Mitchell was sitting on the wall round the feeble excuse for landscaping at the edge of the car-park, smoking a hand-rolled fag. Rhys wondered why Lois hadn't seen him on the CCTV and come out to scold him long since. "Oi, how's Andy doing then, all right still?"

Mitchell flicked the fag-end to the ground from fingers left bare by tatty gloves and blew out a last plume of mingled steam and smoke before he slid down from the wall and nodded that Rhys should walk along with him, out of the range of the eyes he must suspect were watching from inside the building. The skinny bloke was bundled against the wind blowing in off the channel until he almost looked fit, pale and squinting as if he didn't think much of even Cardiff's rubbish idea of winter sun. Probably had a Warcraft habit worse than Daf's and hadn't seen daylight in yonks. "Mending, yeah. Been over at ours, George is looking after him. Police keep coming round with new questions," he added, stopping to look square at Rhys. "Supposedly they think they've found the gun."

"Aye, been round here as well. Dunno I believe it, I mean, there's no way it *could* have been, yeah? You saw Gwen and I were already at that hospital when you brought him in."

"Yeah, that dog that bit you, how's...?" Rhys offered his hand for a look. "Looks like it's healing," Mitchell said, examining the lines of angry punctures. "Big fucking dog, there," he remarked with a raised eyebrow, drawing out several extra vowels into the expletive.

Rhys shrugged. "Could have been worse, could have been some little mite you'd be embarrassed to get bit by?" Mitchell cracked a lopsided grin. "Supposed to have our own medic on staff, see, only Gwen's not been able

to hire one could manage the, erm, caseload, 's a bit daft round here sometimes."

A shadow crossed Mitchell's eyes. "Used to know a good nurse. She... would have loved an opportunity like that."

From the look on his face this nurse was worse than told him to shove off. "You and George medical men then? Seem to have been about it a bit and all."

"Nah, we were just staff at a hospital for a year or so. Not really my game, though, afraid I get a bit useless at the sight of blood. T'other night was... interesting, trying to drive Andy in and he's getting it all over my car. And all over George. But I don't think *he* minded it," he finished with a sly look.

Mitchell reminded him of Harkness, somehow, less the air of easy lechery than something darker behind eyes that didn't match a young face. "Are Andy and George really...?"



"Oh, yeah, getting on like a pack of wolves," Mitchell said, and shrugged. "Wouldn't have reckoned George for it, but it's good to see he's getting back into *something* after... Well. Not the luckiest when it comes to his

personal life, our George."

"Andy used to be off his head for Gwen," Rhys said. "Funny old world sometimes. Still, found each other, 's good and all, aye?"

"Not when they're in your lounge making Bolognese jokes about him getting shot until you want to take the vid away," Mitchell said. It was hard to tell if he felt left out of something, though, or just wanted the telly to himself once in a while. "But they're sweet. They're... *twelve*, but they're sweet."

Rhys's mind supplied him an image of the duo flopped together on a settee like a pair of hounds who were well-used to each other, Sadie sprawled across the one's long legs like a third member of their pack. Or fourth, he supposed, depending how it really was with Mitchell -- No, he wasn't going to go *there*, bloody weird enough thinking about this as it stood. *GAY LOVE TRIANGLE SHOOTING*. Bloody Torchwood was one thing, but the ruddy daytime telly melodrama could just go be its own lookout, yeah?

Still. Mitchell *was* the victim's boyfriend's flatmate... "Listen, I was just on my way to get something to eat, you want to --?"

Mitchell shook his head. "Ta, but I have to run, just dropped round 'cos your wife was saying let her know what's been doing our end. Oh, and Andy says he still wants to get together for that pint?"

"Be a bit before I could get a night yet, still mad around here," Rhys said. "Might come round with the baby for a quick cheer him up though, yeah?"

Mitchell nodded, as if recognising that it wasn't really his point to press. "Wouldn't leave it too long, he's been starting to make noises about getting back to work. Week or two they might be wanting him behind a desk, I'd try to catch him before that."

Which probably translated to Mitchell desperately wanting the man off his settee for a night if he could arrange it without having to nudge George out as well, Rhys surmised, reminded too readily of how spare flatmates could drive you when their mates turned up and wouldn't leave. Banana-Boat had had a particularly bad eye for women who inevitably in turn let *their* not-so-exes quietly move in. Still did, actually. Rhys watched as Mitchell walked off to his car, somehow unsurprised to see that he drove the sort of period-piece that those blokes on the telly would find some arcane reason to wax lyrical about, a mid-century Volvo nothing special to Rhys's lights but well-kept for its age if you didn't mind the bent wiper. Rhys stood looking after it and decided that he had a sudden craving for steak-and-chips. Or maybe just steak.

Day didn't go much better afterwards either, three calls that turned out to be the same weevil failing to catch on as quickly as they'd rather, and Rhys was all too happy to see a bed by the end of it. As if he was going to get an uninterrupted night for, oh, the next sixteen years at least; "Your turn to give her the bottle," Gwen groaned, rolling over onto her face.

With some difficulty Rhys levered himself out of bed and cast about blearily for his dressing-gown; probably shouldn't walk about in the altogether anymore, baby and all. All he came up with, though, was a vague recollection of having put it in the wash. *So, when she's old enough to complain, aye?*

And just as well he hadn't found it, or it'd have gone in the wash anyway when Jenny spit-up all down his back at a gentle burping. "Oi, not any happier about being awake at this hour, am I," he told his daughter, deciding that the

situation warranted a shower before he'd try to get back into bed with Gwen. He sloped into the bath and took a stop to have a go at himself with the big mirror on the back of the door. Not as doughy now, he'd lost a stone since Gwen had dragged him into this job -- well, half of one, anyway -- but no more hair than ever, between his eyebrows or anywhere else. *Bloody Torchwood, have me waiting up for Father Christmas next.*

The water felt good, muscles still sore from the endless round of deskbound immobility punctuated by brief moments of running about in terror finally beginning to loosen. Rhys stood under the spray, slowly deciding he was feeling better about it all, yeah. Quite a *bit* better, in fact. Maybe enough to try out the hand, eh? (Hairy palms, hah.) Better than to go bother Gwen at this hour, needed her sleep so long as she was. But when there was no one else to do the job. Come up with something to keep himself occupied all on his own...

And damn it, now he was picturing whatever it might be that Lois and Johnson -- Temperance - might be about with each other (not that he would know, of course, happily married man now, although a bloke couldn't help but come out with a few ideas about it from here and there even if they were probably wildly inaccurate), however two birds might *really* -- But it wasn't on, to think of your friends going at it, no matter how tempting a provocation. Was it? George and Andy might be tucked up in a bed too, he supposed, the one tenderly solicitous of his partner's injuries as they -- well, there Rhys really *didn't* have a frame of reference, unless you counted that night he still pretended he'd been too completely bladdered to remember, and in retrospect he ought to have suspected something was a bit

off about a man who kissed like he hadn't had to think about it. As like they were curled up together like puppies, though, dreaming of better days when no one was bandaged up or under suspicion.

...Not really helping, that image, only make him think of them going at it like wolves. *Which one do you suppose is the, wossname, alpha?* (Why was he thinking about *that* now --) What was that thing that dogs did, where they came stuck together after? Way to catch a werewolf, get him whilst he's wondering if it counts as a cuddle. Gwen would make a beautiful wolf, green eyes and dark silk pelt. They could run together through the hills and teach their cub to feast on mutton. Wolf with a gap between her front teeth. Did wolves have gaps?

Bugger, but his mind was wandering. Bloody Torchwood, leaving a man too tired for *this*. Was a point where you gave it up for a game of soldiers and decided not to waste more water, aye. Rhys stepped out the shower and gave himself a full-body shake. Felt pretty good too, it did. Still on that train of thought, was he? Yeah, might need to bother Gwen after all...

It was another few days and another visit from some increasingly exasperated-seeming coppers before Director Cooper decreed that Torchwood appeared to have sufficient interest in a certain case to go round and pay a social call on *company* time, given that all of their little family's time seemed to be accounted for as company time anymore. When Rhys rang the bell at the number on George's card Andy answered the door, barefoot and in the bleach-spotted trackpants his mate had been wearing at the hospital. (He'd got both arms into the dressing-gown, though he'd not been able to tie it; bloody hell,

but the man had a hairy chest. Skin him for his pelt, you could.)

The house was just another terrace more or less the mirror of what Rhys remembered of Andy's own across the way, one more anonymous two-up-two-down like so many others on this scrottily Victorian edge of Cardiff. The only real evidence to show it was another house at all was that the stairs were on the opposite side and someone who lived here hadn't got rid of their collection of vinyl yet. Rhys craned his head at the line of deteriorating cardboard spines on a shelf in the lounge, making out a few familiar titles like *Revolver*. Right, Mitchell would be the antiquarian. Set up on a nearby table was an ancient gramophone, stonking great horn and all, a wicked needle poised to devour its prey. Andy noticed the direction of his gaze and remarked, "The good player was broken in the move, Mitchell hasn't been able to find anyone to fix it yet."

"Tosh could have," Gwen said absently, the line of regret that appeared between her brows well familiar to Rhys. "They just moved in, then?"

"Mm, seven, eight months, round there?" Andy showed them into the kitchen. (Neater than you'd think in a household of bachelors, even if one of them was -- well, no, that'd be one of those *assumptions* Rhys had been warned of in what had passed for Torchwood's sensitivity training, the bits of it that weren't about not judging a face-sucking alien by its tentacles.) He started banging around with the kettle as he went on: "Came over from Bristol. Think they were looking for a fresh start after George lost his girlfriend."

Girlfriend? ...Ah, yes, sensitivity to modern rubbish like *that* had been in the training as well. (The chapter with the... illustrations. Rhys suspected Captain Harkness had written the whole of the unit on Respecting And Considering Having A Friendly Team-Spirited Go With Alternative And Alien Sexualities.) Maybe that was why Andy didn't think he was gay either? "That close of mates? The one moving here along with the other, I mean?"

Andy shrugged, a bit more motion now to the damaged side before he grimaced. "Know each other's bad habits by now, I reckon. Not many would put up with either of them, anyway."

"You put up with George," Gwen teased. Andy went a bit pink.

"It's a thing."

Out of the corner of his eye Rhys caught a glimpse of a figure in grey watching them from the doorway of the lounge. Dark curls, dusky skin -- He turned his head but there was no one there. Could drugs go on giving you hallucinations after you'd done taking them? When he looked back to the kitchen it was to meet a puzzled look from Andy. "Just them live here then?" Rhys asked, wondering if someone could have gone into the lounge without him seeing.

For an instant Andy looked as if he didn't quite know how to answer that question. "Far as I know, anyway, mean, Mitchell's one for the birds but he's not really got one at the mo. Wasn't anyone over who could give you more of what we were all about that night, if that's what you're meaning by it."

Andy's skill at managing more than the kettle in his present state was somewhat lacking. Gwen stopped him as he tried to fumble open a box

and gently pressed the baby upon him instead, taking up the tea-making operations with her two practised hands. Jenny began to fuss over the swop, but her nominal uncle shortly got her calmed with a few awkward jiggles and his silliest grin, which for Andy was a truly silly grin indeed. "Looks like the arm's healing up some," Gwen remarked as the baby settled her head against his shoulder to no protest of pain.

Andy gave Jenny another gentle rock. "Wasn't that bad a break. Just clean and they set it right together."

Gwen was frowning of a sudden, glancing round the kitchen as if she were just now considering some of the more practical elements of the physical case. "Lucky, that. Nine-millimetre round that close could have shattered it. *Should* have shattered..."

Andy started getting that sarky look of his now, scowling at Gwen as if she was the one here being thick about it. "Wouldn't know about that, not an Authorised Firearms Officer, am I. Or any sort of a doctor. Lucky bloody shot not to have had my arm off, they said." He glanced towards the lounge just as Sadie pricked her ears after a whisper of a sound; in another moment the dog was heaving up from the tiles at Andy's feet to go to investigate, and he watched her trot out, brow furrowing into a deep frown as he turned back to Gwen. "Starting to feel I'm a bloody mental for telling them all how I thought it went and I was *there*."

"We'll all go mental trying to work this out, the police and us both," Gwen said, dragging her teabag round in the mug by the string. "I mean, the best we've got round *our* side of it is that now Johnson thinks you might be a *werewolf*."

Andy looked as if he were caught between the desire to laugh outright in Gwen's face and a sort of creeping horror that she might have gone mad enough to be serious. "What was her *last* case, finding Little Bo Peep?"

"I know, this whole thing is just bloody ridiculous. I mean, *werewolves*, right? Even in Cardiff that's hardly the simplest explanation even if there was such a thing anyway. You know they *must* have just bugged up the ballistics records somehow. "

"Has to be rubbish, you wouldn't have given a werewolf the baby." He dipped his head to nuzzle into Jenny's fine dark wisps. "You'd be a tasty mouthful, eh?" The baby gurgled.

"If you've nothing more you've thought of to add to it then I suppose that's something in itself, isn't it?" Gwen continued, brightly, although Rhys noticed that she *had* given a bit of a look to Andy's one-armed hold on her child. "Don't worry yourself over our part of this, Andy, I can go round tomorrow and have another go with the police to see if we can't sort how they think it could have come from Rhys's gun."

The look Andy gave her was far too venomous for that boyish face, as startling as suddenly being sworn at roundly by Fireman Sam. "What Torchwood *does*, isn't it? Clear it up, make it go away. As if *I've* got the leg to stand on about coverups, anyway," he checked himself with an odd little frown. "Haven't told the superintendent I think I know who murdered the chief constable of Bristol either." Andy looked slightly ill at the thought. "How it starts, the one little thing. Should have handed in my warrant-card then."

"Should have told them where to stick it after the children," Rhys countered. "Dunno why you even went back. They need a man like *you* more than you need them."

"It's not supposed to be *about* me, is it," Andy said gravely. "I can't just say 'oh, it would hurt my friends', or 'oh, he was a tosspot and a corrupt bastard', and decide for myself how things should be. That's what the law is *for*."

"Who *did* murder the chief constable?" Gwen asked after several moments of uncomfortable silence had oozed past. Andy shook his head slightly.

Thump of feet down the stairs then and the blur of one of the housemates-proper ducking into the lounge; "Where's Mitchell gone?" A moment later George came shuffling into the kitchen, attention focused upon a slip of paper. He was also still in his dressing-gown at this hour, this one drab brown plush that had seen some better days than today. "...Oh, no, he's going to come back with a hundredweight of tea-lights and another lutefisk-torturing spoon --" George's eyes went wide as he looked up from the note and realised Andy's guests hadn't cleared off yet. "Oh, erm... you're not finished, ah..."

Rhys caught a glimpse of the oddest look passing across George's face at the sight of little Jenny in his mate's arms (well, arm), the bitter heartache of a man looking through a closed window at a future forever barred to him. Maybe *lost* had meant... oh. "It's all right, we're not discussing anything Official Secrets Act and all," Andy said, sounding as if he might have wished they *were*.

"We should be going, really," Gwen said, pushing back from the table and reaching out

for the baby. Andy rose as well, giving over his awkward hold with his own look of regret. George was still tracking little Jenny as if he'd never seen the like in his life. "Oh, erm, you've not seen... This is our Jenny, Andy must have mentioned her?"

"A bit, yeah." With a look of the utmost gravity George extended a finger and let the baby wrap small fingers round it, shaking her hand gently. "It's very nice to meet you, Iphigenia. Speaking of old-fashioned names," he added with a sly nod to Rhys. "-- Not planning to sacrifice her for a favourable wind, were you?"

"She's named for his great-aunt," Gwen said, looking a bit nonplussed that George had caught the classical reference. But then he was a tutor, Rhys thought, must have an education behind him to get on at that, aye?

George went to check was there any water hot still in the kettle. "I spent an hour on the phone last night trying to tell a DI that I didn't know anything about your 'Torchwood'," he said, clearly mystified that someone would have thought that he did. "I gather the investigation's still not been coming along very well?"

Andy gave Gwen an arch look. "According to *some*, the latest theory is apparently that I'm a werewolf." George took on that same look of politely frozen wariness Andy had done. "Which might be everything you'd *need* to know about bloody Torchwood. Although I'm not sure if this is supposed to be some sort of metaphor for them finding out about *us* maybe?"

George managed a smile that looked a bit forced. "Oh, yes, our, erm, *thing*, yeah, it's as if once a month we get together to bark at the

moon and grow fur. It's great fun until someone tries to kill us for it." He sounded inordinately bitter as he added this last, and Rhys noticed as he shifted that the chain round his neck led to a six-pointed star. Put their feet in more than one issue here, it seemed.

"Might not mind it so much if the fur *stayed*," Andy said playfully, running the good hand through his thinning spot.

"And I suppose I could be your therapy-dog." Again that odd little nuzzle as they leant close. Well, couples got that way, foolish gestures grown into rituals as it went along, until neither of you could remember who'd started saying that old punchline to *every* joke or how you'd come to always break the last biscuit in half to feed it to the other from your palm. (And he'd just thought of these two men as a couple like any other, that was good on him, right?) Looked a bit odd when George was half a head shorter than Andy, well, most everyone was weren't they, but you couldn't really come to a thing like this and have *that* be what you fetched up against, could you. Hardly... fair, or something?

"Right, no werewolves here, moving on," Gwen said, the colour rising in her cheeks as she averted her eyes from the threat of further displays of affection by fussing about for the nappy-bag at her feet. "Give us a ring if you do think of anything more that might help. There has to be a way to get this sorted without anyone, oh, having to turn into a wolf in front of a barrister, yeah?"

Andy and George both gave her wan grins that said the gag was wearing a bit thin by now but for an old mate. Rhys held the front door for his wife and their child and let her go to bagsie

the driver's seat as he went and settled Jenny into the back.

But Gwen didn't move to pull off straightaway even after he'd joined her in the front, but sat with her chin on her folded arms against the steering column, frowning in furious concentration. "Andy is... I don't know, there's something's not *right* about this. If he was shot from the distance inside his kitchen that round *should* have had his arm off. Not just cracked the bone a bit."

"So he *is* a bloody werewolf and he likes to go running about with his mates in the park to wind Torchwood up 'cos we won't hire him. Under a full moon made of cheese, yeah?" Rhys put an arm round his wife's shoulders. "Or have the ballistics boffs switched up a label and he just doesn't want to admit he was arsing about with his mates on Armed Response down station that night? Simplest explanation, love, we're just seen so much of this alien shite we look for spooks round every corner."

Gwen laid her head against him with a rueful sigh. "It's not as if he's *ever* had any sort of a poker face, I don't see that he could even be hiding that he knows who shot him. But there's *something* he's not letting on about. Maybe he's protecting George from something."

"Mitchell looks like the sort might know where to lay his hands on a gun," Rhys said, thinking. "Close enough mates to move house together, maybe he wants George to himself? So he has the go, didn't work, confessed and made it up... Aye, that's worse than that load of wank was in the *Sun* about it, innit. Told you I'd be rubbish at this secret-agent bollocks."

"You do just fine, love." Gwen straightened and went to start the motor. "Has to be a simple

answer to explain all of this, yeah." And here she cocked her head, playfully: "Even if it's they're *all* bloody werewolves."

Rhys reached across to take his wife's hand, morse-code of healing scars all that he could see as her fingers laced into his. "No, love, they're not."

But he couldn't tell that to his nightmares, could he, lost in a moonlit forest watching his packmates butt heads, dark wet noses touching. alpha's long pink tongue comes out to lick his mate's muzzle. he has a mate too, back at the den with the cub, run with them all some night but this is tonight, hunting pack under the moon running for the joy of running, wind in his fur and the distant scent of little-sister standing guard with alpha's other packmate, the one who smells of meat-not-for-eating (not like other-sister who smelt not at all, there only to the eyes). every night is one night to them, every night is tonight. alpha still missing his last mate, smell it on him when he looks at the cub, not a breeding-pair them. lucky to have a proper one him, pack needs its cubs. could go back to the den? scents her, wants her, wants to copulate with his mate --

"Oi, dog breath," Gwen muttered, shoving him away. Rhys blinked, eyes stinging in the gloom of the dawn light filtering in under the blinds. "It isn't morning already, is it? Bloody hell... All right, love?"

Rhys realised he'd been sat there with a blank look, trying to grasp slithering wisps of nightmare as they shredded away. "Weirdest dream, that was. Like I was in a... Ah, 's gone now. Too much telly before bed, aye."

"Curry couldn't have helped you either," she said, wrinkling her nose at him. "Come on, so long as we're both up..."

But bloody work she'd meant, not anything more entertaining than the perpetual piles of paperwork to keep him company of a bright sunny morning. To be fair Gwen was drowning herself in it right alongside him at a nearby desk, an abstracted scowl on her face as she pored over boxes of figures that could as easily have been a normal workplace's payroll spreadsheets as whatever arcane calculation she was actually performing regarding the month's rift activity to date. Made sorting through the remains of the archives for files concerning *artefacts about so big and blue or blueish-green* seem like the easier bit, that did -

In his monitor Rhys caught the reflection of two men standing beside his workstation, watching him. He startled. "Erm, what, that is, can I... help..."

And he broke off, for he recognised them both. One had helped him to save Gwen's life at his wedding. He'd helped the other save the world.

Owen Harper.

Ianto Jones.

Dead men.

Rhys took a deep breath. "Right, bloody Torchwood, funny gas in the ventilation again is it? Must be Thursday then."

Jones still had that jagged scratch on his cheek, well, of course Rhys would picture him like he'd seen him last, aye? Doctor Harper cleared his

throat. "Woo, woo, we come bearing a message from the spirit world, woo --"

Ianto gave his colleague a look of disbelief. "And that would be you *completely* ballsing this up, is it."

Ballsing what up? Owen threw up his hands. "I *said* appearing to him at a porno theatre would have been more traditional, but you didn't like *that* idea either."

"You *still* watch too many bloody films, you do realise that --"

"Right!" Rhys barked, startling both of them into silence. "If this job is going to drive me mental it's bloody well not going to be the two of *you* gets to do it, yeah? *Piss off.*"

A dark head came up from where Gwen had been scribbling something onto a clipboard.



"Rhys? Who's on the comm?"

"Nothing love, just seeing dead people again."

"Is it Thursday already?" Gwen went back to her own paperwork.

Harper managed to tear his eyes away from Gwen, or her cleavage, and returned his attention to Rhys with a world-weary scowl. "Right, anyway, long story short, Williams, you're a werewolf and the fact that you can see us means you're best off topping yourself before next Wednesday, yeah?"

Rhys stared at the apparition. "Gwen always said you had a crap bedside manner." He

squinted over at Ianto's faintly blurry features. "What about you, he's the little devil on my shoulder what's *your* story?"

Ianto squirmed. "As much as it pains me to admit it, Owen may have a case."

Well, *that* just wasn't fair. Or sporting. Or... something. "Oi, don't I get a good cop?"

"I would consider that my professional obligation to be the diplomatic face of Torchwood ended when I died for it," Jones said.

"As if it's *that* fucking easy to get out of here." Harper held up his bandaged left hand.

"You certainly give new meaning to '*L'enfer, c'est les autres*'," Ianto said. Owen folded the wrapped fingers down and gave him the other two in a defiant salute.

As mental breaks went, receiving phantom visitations from a bickering comedy routine seemed particularly Torchwood, somehow. "Right, how do I know that you're even real? Mean, you could, dunno, what's to prove you're not just my own head talking, aye?"

An ugly light sparked in Harper's eyes. "Well, dunno, would your own head know how Gwen *learnt* about my 'bedside manner'?"

"Yes, erm, Owen, recalling the previous remarks on 'ballsing this up' --"

Some premonition of dread prickled at the nape of Rhys's neck. "No, wait, what's he on about? What are you saying, mate?"

One side of that frog mouth turned up into a sneer. "I'm *saying*, mate, that I fucked your wife." A pause to let this sink in, as Rhys felt the icy knives slicing deep through his gut.

"Yeah, reckoned she'd not have told you that bit. Or would she?" Leaning closer now, look of triumph in the dark eyes: "Maybe she did and you just don't *remember* --"

"*Fuck off!*" Rhys took a swing that went through nothing, spinning him round in his chair until he was looking up into Gwen's wide green eyes. Eyes that were clearly wondering what Torchwood policy was now regarding dealing with lunatic spouses -- "Did you sleep with Owen Harper?"

"What?"

"Did you," Rhys stood up and she took a step back, eyes going impossibly wider, "have sex with Owen Harper?"

It was clearly the last thing she'd expected him to ask. But... she had been expecting him to ask. He could see that in the way that she was running through options behind those wide green eyes, searching for the one that might still come up trumps here. "Where in the hell is *this* coming from, Rhys?"

"Jesus christ, you *did*, didn't you. And I have to hear it from his bloody fucking *ghost* 'cos you're thinking you've got away with it all these years --"

Gwen... Gwen was shaking her head. "Rhys... I don't know what you think you've seen, but there's no such thing as ghosts. You're thinking that because... because *I* told you, once. And gave you retcon after, I didn't think you'd want to --"

Rhys felt a growl rising from his throat. He gripped Gwen by the shoulders and backed her up against the wall with a shove that jarred down through his wrists as her back connected

with the breeze-blocks. "You think that makes it any *better* --"

Gwen shoved right back, heaving him away from her. "Don't you even *start* with that, Rhys Williams. Don't you *even* start."

"Going to hit me on the nose with a rolled-up newspaper, then? Or just retcon me again like some stupid... *ape*?"

Jenny had started to wail in fright of the sound of her father's voice raised in anger. Gwen turned away and went to soothe her, fretful jiggles that seemed only to be increasing the baby's distress. "We're at work and on a case, Rhys. We can talk about this when the rest of everything's sorted, yeah?"

Which meant never, 'cos it wasn't as if anything ever got *sorted* round here. Lois and Johnson were staring at the sudden domestic that had boiled up in the midst of an ordinary workday. Rhys sat back down at the workstation, hands shaking in his lap. The ghosts had gone, of course, buggered off somewhere to play Christmas Past to some other stupid cuckolded sod. Of which Harper must have a string, Rhys didn't doubt, his penance in the afterlife to tick them all off in a book? Maybe Jones was his minder. Although, for all the good lanto had done at it just there, maybe Owen was *his* punishment. Hell was, wosname, *other people*, yeah. If Jones had done something wicked enough to deserve that, then where was Rhys's soul bound, after this year with Torchwood?

Bedlam, maybe. Buggering *christ*, he'd just laid hands on Gwen in anger. *It's this job, it gets inside you*. He rubbed at his face, rough edges of healing skin scraping across one cheek. Johnson was still giving him a look. "*What?*"

"All that I am saying is that sudden aggressive tendencies could be a symptom of *many* things that maybe you would do well to look into, yes?"

"I am not turning into a *fucking* werewolf! Still enough retcon left to pack you back to a desk at some listening post in bloody Greenland thinking you're a WAAF in nineteen-forty-three, aye?"

Johnson arched an elegant eyebrow.
"Behavioural changes like this can be caused by... brain tumours, or some sorts of infections -- some sorts of *ordinary* infections," she continued stubbornly as Rhys opened his mouth.

Rhys stood up, wheels of his chair scraping.
"Right, this is bollocks, I'm going home to have a lie-down. Since you seem to think the nutter needs one. Have your girlfriend book me for a bloody CAT-scan if you like, yeah? But make it for the week-end, 'cos I might have to go running about *pissing on trees* for a few nights first." A subdued *blimey* from Lois's station as he snatched up his coat and stalked out.

Stress. Had to be stress. Not had a proper night's rest in more than a year, had he, baby and mental job and mental *wife* to juggle until any man would start thinking a night or two running round the Beacons howling looked like a hol compared to having the police sniffing round after you just for doing your job. *Sorry love, can't go chasing the aliens with you tonight, off with the mates to have a few rounds and take down a sheep or two.*

Speaking of rounds, was a message from Andy on the ansaphone when he got in and sat down on the settee for a listen, Oi, Rhys, we never did get that pint, erm, think they might be

wanting me back on soon, find a minute sometime before Tuesday --? He deleted the rest before it could finish, then dragged the blanket on the back of the settee over himself and went to sleep.

He was still on the settee in the morning, stiff and lonely and irritable about both. Discarded trainers in the doorway told him that Gwen had made it home and chosen to let one sleeping dog lie for just a bit longer. But it wasn't a big enough house to avoid each other forever, not in the mornings, not with the baby, until finally there across a table from her he sat, eating cold cereal and wondering what there was to be done with the strained silence. Not as if they hadn't had their share of troubles, yeah, but it was going to be awkward having to go in and pretend some sort of normality in front of the witnesses to that lapse in standards of professionalism. *But when there was no one else to do the job.*

He muddled through. Maybe it was easier, really, here, at Torchwood, the petty annoyances of the rift not even leaving him time to have that pint with a mate ever, much less remember to dwell upon slights that might have best been left undiscovered altogether (*she'd bloody retconned him*) when it wasn't as if it could happen again (*what had he said to her before he forgot*) and she'd still gone ahead and married him, that was the important bit, that was the thing that he had to keep his eyes on in the end, wasn't it? She'd chosen him.

(And having to look at his little girl in the sick dread of not knowing whether that was Gwen's dimple or Captain Chin-Arse's --)

Right. Let's not even start with that.

Least time had put paid to this werewolf bollocks by now, moon had been full in the sky all last night. He'd sat beside Jenny's cot just looking out the window until it rose past the easy view before he'd curled up on the floor, easiest sleep of the last four weeks stealing over him despite the discomforts. He'd dreamt as well, but this was a better dream, walking free and unafraid on his own two feet through the forest, and at the last the whisper of Jones's voice telling him that he had nothing to fear when he looked into his daughter's grey eyes. (Right, so, that bit might have been more odd than the rest of it, when he woke and gave it a thought, but still it *felt* as if something had been settled, the mind was a funny thing after all?) He'd felt good enough about it come morning to throw together a proper fry-up for two, well, two and a half counting Jenny, and even to manage some cordial conversation over that hastily consumed fry-up with his wife. *Not the end of everything, maybe. Life... goes on, aye.*

His improved mood lasted exactly as long as the drive in to the office, plus the time it took him to get into the building, plus the time for Johnson to recognise that Rhys had entered the building. But not long enough for him to sit down at his own desk. "I've been going over the data regarding one of our outstanding cases and I think I've found something we hadn't been taking into consideration." Johnson tapped at her keyboard and one of the displays lit up with coloured dots. Rhys frowned at it, trying to think where he'd seen that pattern before -- "And this is what happens when you sort the results by locations *and* times," she continued, setting the graph into motion.

Little red dots, stalking across a map. Not a perfect rendition, allowing for the reporting errors, but... Little red dots, following invisible ant-trails that centred, at intervals of four weeks, along an axis between Andy's street and the park. Lois put a hand over her mouth.

Rhys stabbed a shaking finger at the screen. "No, no, no more of this werewolf *shite*, all right? Full moon last night and I'm still here, aye?"

"But the moon looks full for *three* nights," Lois pointed out too pragmatically, poking at her keyboard to add, "Technically it isn't at its most complete stage until... nine twenty-one tonight."

"What?"

And the bloody bell from reception going just then to make them all jump, and Lois to scuttle off playing at receptionist. Lucky her, getting a moment to collect herself. Except that she came back in leading a pair of uniformed officers: "Erm, can we help you?"

Both of the coppers had the same looks of grave but guarded import, as if there was an easy way to accomplish their business here and then there was the plan that they were expecting to have to execute. Rhys stifled a thought about whether the latter involved handcuffs and not in the fun way. "If you could please come with us, Mr Williams."

Rhys looked to his wife and got only a puzzled *play along with it and we'll sort this later* look. "Right, erm, just get my coat, shall I?"

If they only wanted him to assist with an enquiry, he couldn't imagine it would be much worse to be under proper charges for something, read the caution and passed from

hand to official hand within the station to provide sixteen sorts of proof who he was before finally being sat in a room barely large enough to squeeze two chairs facing across a folding table. The DI who'd won, or maybe lost, at the rounds of musical custody glowered back at him across that table, about as welcoming as the detective on that programme where the bloke might have gone back in time. Made you wonder which was worse, 1973 or this mess. If he was lucky maybe he *was* dreaming all of this, lying on a coma ward somewhere with Gwen reading him fairy-stories to keep herself going. *Oh, Husband, what big teeth you have.* Rhys felt his feet tensing, the desire to lope away across a moor like a wild animal going round and round uselessly in his head. He tried to match the DI stare for stare, shamming a confidence he wasn't sure he remembered how to imagine after the last while of gruff voices and ominous papers. "Don't even know why I'm here again, do I? Told you everything I know about it already."

The DI gave him a look as if no one could actually be *that* thick without it being an act. "Why is Andrew Davidson covering for you?"

Of all the possible answers he might have been expecting, he couldn't at first even work out how those words could have fit together in a string. "Sorry?"

"Constable Davidson's accounting of events is somewhat lacking insofar as its correspondence to the available evidence. To wit: no signs of forced entry to any of the access points to the scene, no spent casings *at* the scene, injuries inconsistent with the supposed range of fire, no signs of a struggle and only minor traces of the victim's blood. Which were not found, I might add, anywhere

in the alleged kitchen. Also troubling us is the detail that none of the neighbours were able to recall hearing anything out of the ordinary during the night or early morning of the date in question, which is to say, no gunshots, and *also* no unusual barking that could have been Special Officer Sadie Davidson attempting to summon assistance as she has been trained to do in the event that her partner is being assaulted and or *shot at*." The DI leant closer across the table: "Is there anything you would care to tell us, Mister Williams?"

The bottom had dropped out of his stomach. "I think I might be sick. No, really, miss, I --"

The DI pulled a face, as if she'd seen this ploy a thousand times, but something in his expression must have rung of truth; "I'll bring you some water," she said, and exited the room with a soft word to the officer standing watch outside.

The wave of nausea subsided as he swallowed it back, replaced by cold chills of dread. Rhys rubbed at his fingertips, fancying that they still itched from having the prints taken. Why they couldn't just have asked for the set that Torchwood already had in its files, *my bloody tax that*. The wounds on his right hand still screamed out to the eyes, each individual gash of the alien's -- werewolf's -- *creature's* long teeth stark angry pink against pallid winter skin.

Rhys jumped at an odd little click from somewhere in the ceiling, the sudden absence of a humming undertone that he hadn't really been aware of until it stopped. Bugger, but this place put you on edge even when you really *hadn't* done anything. He found himself hoping that the DI would come back just so that they could have this over with, one way or another,

some sort of resolution where they'd either arrest him for certain or let him go home to his family. Whatever they might decide to arrest him *for*, he couldn't think what way a DI might find to tie him to something he couldn't have done, could he? Wasn't any sort of a criminal mastermind nor a proper copper neither, never mind what he might have been asked to do for his government in the course of his duty with Torchwood. Just an idiot who loved his wife, and look where that love had got him. He looked up as the door opened again. Different coppers again this time, the shorter one's hi-vis didn't seem to fit him properly -- "Oh, 's you then," Rhys said, recognising George as Andy turned into the room to face him. "Didn't know you were both coppers. Arm out of the sling, that's good, aye?"

Andy gave a small snort. "For all the good it's going to do me in about an hour."

"Why? What's then, tea-break? ...Wank-break?"

"Moonrise," George said.

Rhys thought about this, and finally the word presented itself: "Bollocks."

"We have to have you out of here before then or what you've already said to the DI will be the least of our worries," Andy said, wary eye on the door. "You've not been charged with anything yet, have you?" Rhys shook his head, though he wasn't entirely clear on that point himself. "So legally you're free to leave any time, look better getting you out of the building if a copper's showing you out though. Sort the rest of this later, we'll see you're all right for tonight."

Rhys shook his head, but it wouldn't come clear. "All right, sorry, all right to be --"

A solemn blink from George. "All right through the... transformation. Into the wolf."

What was he, on the internet somewhere with a sign *wind him up, he thinks he's been bit?* "Is everybody gone mental about this werewolf rubbish now?"

George gave him a look. "Simplest explanation that fits all of the evidence, isn't it? Occam's razor."

Whoever bloody Occam was and why him shaving entered into it, Rhys was a bit lost. But... if it *was* a wind-up, it was a good one, *they* even looked like they believed it. All of it. "But, but, the statements, you're a *copper* --"

"Statement was a load of tosh, all right? Best-sounding thing we could come up with in the car on the way to hospital." Rhys gaped at Andy. "Wake up in your own back garden and realise you've been *shot* there aren't a lot of stories most people would credit." And here the constable sighed; "We must have run into you whilst we weren't ourselves. Sort of spooky bloody thing some pensioner out walking her dog *would* ring Torchwood on, aye?"

"Oi, now you're just taking the piss. Johnson's put you up to this."

"As if I'd ever bloody well get involved with *her* daft shite again." Had Andy's teeth always looked that... *sharp?* "Could stay here, if you fancy your chances against a station full of coppers. Might take them a while to get Armed Response in after you."

"Doubt it would be long enough to get out, though," George contributed with a look of calculation. "The wolf's not clever, you see, he'd just blunder about through the building."

Reckon he'd hurt a lot of people before he found a doorway to the street. And then... he'd be on the street."

No, no, this was Andy Rhys was looking at, he rings us every twenty minutes about every stupid kid with a toy raygun --

He rings us every twenty minutes about every stupid little thing... and how would we spot the time he hadn't? Not as daft as he looked, or just clever enough to follow through on someone cleverer's plan. A plan to keep some very odd mates safe from a nosy special-ops unit with an interest in the very odd. "We've found a few spots are usually good to run about in for the night," Andy said, that boyish face creased in regret. "Come on. Rhys. This is my career if they find I've been in here talking to you. But the *cnud* looks after its own, yeah?"

Rhys blinked, eyes stinging with something he was horrified to suspect might be the onset of some fit of hysterical weeping. "But I can't just walk *out*, I mean, what's that going to look like? They'll think I *have* done something, find some reason to bloody arrest me *then*. And what would *that* do to my life? Got a family to think of, you know."

George gave him a incredulous look. "*Your* bloody life? I'm impersonating a police officer to assist in a jailbreak, and it isn't even the strangest thing I've done in the last *six months*." He winced, and in the next blink his blue eyes had taken on odd amber glints. "We haven't much time, we *have* to go."

Rhys dug in his heels as Andy took him by the arm. "But what about Gwen? And the baby?"

"I *am* thinking of the baby. You can ring Gwen in the morning, you'll need Torchwood to --" A gruff bark as George opened the door; Sadie

was in on this as well? Echoing through the deserted corridor came the distant sound of a voice carolling *I want to be an Airborne Ranger*. Andy's brow furrowed. "Bloody *hell*. He thinks *that's* a proper diversion?"

"Too many old movies." George's expression had crumpled into something right the other side of disbelief by now. "Oh, Mitchell, stop being a *twat* --"

"Right, 'course you'd have a getaway driver to finish it off. S'pose *he's* a werewolf as well, aye?"

Andy gave Rhys a look as if this were the most mental thing he'd ever heard. "Ah... No."

"Oh. All right, then, that's --"

"He's a vampire. Run --!"