M155 5M17H

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1109.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	Femslash (F/F), Hetero (F/M), General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	Doctor Who - All Media Types
Relationship:	Kate Lethbridge-Stewart/Christofer Ibrahim
Characters:	Kate Lethbridge-Stewart, Christofer Ibrahim, Petronella Osgood, Shirley Ann Bingham, Melanie Bush, Gordon "Gordy" Lethbridge-Stewart, Kate Lethbridge-Stewart's Daughter, Original Female Character(s)
Additional Tags:	Hacking, Podcast, Journalism, Investigation, Aliens, Manipulation, Healing From Trauma
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-11-03 Updated: 2026-11-04 Words: 13,230 Chapters: 6/?

M155 5M17H

by wilczyca

Summary

The children of Kate Lethbridge-Stewart meet up for another anniversary of her death as they attempt to get through their day to day lives. Still dealing with their grief years later, what happens when they discover that their mother is actually alive?

Notes



A special thank you to **bookqueen101** for their amazing beta reading. I was so unsure about this story and if it weren't for you, I probably wouldn't have had the courage to write it, much less post it. Thank you!

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Kate watches the Blue Box Files podcast and recognizes a problem.

Frances asks her brother to keep a tradition.

Kate Lethbridge-Stewart leans back at her office desk chair, soft, classical music playing. Needing to calm down after another stressful day of meetings with government officials who refuse to take her and her warnings seriously. *Why even invite me?* Pointless. Absolutely pointless and frustrating. Hearing the chirp of her mobile phone, the sound she has set for her most trusted inner circle, Kate reaches into her blazer pocket, hanging from the back of her seat. Seeing a text from Osgood.

'You need to listen to the most recent episode of the podcast.'

Kate knows exactly what podcast Osgood is referring to.

Several years ago, U.N.I.T came into direct contact with the hosts of the Blue Box Files podcast. Since then, both Kate and Osgood have found the podcast and the discussion held within to be, usually, refreshing. However, recently, there has been more discussion about U.N.I.T and their movements appearing within the *Files.*

'If you don't want to listen to the whole thing, FF to 16:24.'

Kate hears the second vibration, looking at the message, which only causes her to furrow her brow. She opens the application on her mobile, going to the podcast in question, the video version, letting it play naturally, but allowing her ears to perk up when she hears the name of someone who has been of interest to herself and U.N.I.T and realizing that it's at the minute marker as indicated by Osgood.

"Now, time for the surprise we promised at the start of our show." Cleo begins, a broad smile is filling her face, "our guest, to those who frequent our servers, will require no introduction."

"You flatter me far too much."

"And they've decided to take on the voice of our very own, and recently departed, Queen Elizabeth." Abby continues with a soft laugh in her voice, "and you all can't see this, but they're using a cartoon avatar in the video conference that they've created themselves of-"

"They created the entire program, hosted it, created the user interface, and-" Shawna shakes her head, "I'm absolutely amazed. I want this in my day to day life."

”Just a bit of programming. Nothing terribly difficult. I’ll make you one that works best for you. Just tell me what you want.”

”Will you be my new best friend?” Shawna continues softly, earning a laugh from her cohosts.

”Listeners, I haven’t been excited about a guest like this in a while. You know them, you love them, you favor every single one of their posts and put them at the top of the server every single time. According to Shawna, her new best friend, Miss Smith!” Cleo continues, finally introducing their guest as the three hosts give claps and cheers, causing the guest to laugh. They begin to calm, allowing Cleo to continue, “thank you so much for agreeing to come on the show today.”

Kate sits a bit straighter, instantly recognizing the name. A problem that U.N.I.T has been encountering over the past six months or so.

”And, just to quell any questions that we know will come across for you, may we ask you some general questions?” Abby watches the computer screen, “and, of course, you answer them how you see fit or not at all.”

”Of course,” M155 5M17H smiles, the cartoon avatar copying each of their host's movements within the video conference application. The avatar appears as an office worker with skin made of an ever moving galaxy, the gender is nondescript.

Folding her arms over her chest, Kate leans back in her office chair. She isn't surprised that M155 5M17H wouldn't show their true face or reveal any aspects of their true identity.

”First of all, is Miss Smith your actual name?” Abby asks first, “and, if not, where did the name come from?

”I won’t say if it is or isn’t.” M155 5M17H responds simply, giving a nod to indicate that is their full answer.

”You seem like you believe in the...complete opposite of the Think_Tank doctrine.” Shawna offers, “we had a few members of their organization on the show a year or so ago and it was as if...they got very popular and then all of a sudden, vanished or close to it. Now, I'm a skeptic, though I don't agree with the actions that they took. However, many skeptics did agree with Think_Tank and their actions. Why do you think such a...violent organization such as that became so powerful, so quickly?”

”Fear. It’s all fear. That’s all it’s ever been.” M155 5M17H shakes their head a little, “not that they’d ever admit that. However, seeing a Zygon unmasked for the first time, the glimmer of a Dalek eye stalk, or giant rats in London, whatever it might be, it’s easier to convince oneself that it didn’t happen or that it wasn’t real than it is to try to make heads or tales of what you’ve seen. Skeptic doesn’t mean stupid. It means that you’re open to the idea. Think_Tank didn’t do that. I don’t consider them skeptics. They didn’t want to be open even when it literally stared them in the face, I don’t know if anyone caught that video that was streamed by them when they held the people of U.N.I.T tower at gunpoint...as if that was a good idea.”

”So you think all skeptics are just afraid?” Shawna tilts her head to the side, interested in the discussion.

M155 5M17H shakes their head negatively, “not all of them, but certainly Think_Tank. Do you remember the video where they drew a major U.N.I.T presence to Colson? The one where they dressed as offworld beings? Not once did their people question where the idea for the beings’ appearance and behavior came from...which was U.N.I.T’s own files. They copied proof from U.N.I.T’s own files, that one of their inside people stole while working as an employee of U.N.I.T, while they were creating something they pretended didn’t exist.”

Kate finds herself exhaling a soft laugh, listening to the words, laughing at the disbelief painting the faces of the hosts.

”Which, no matter how you spin it, Shawna, it’s mad. Would you agree with that?” M155 5M17H offers a slight smile, knowing the answer, but wanting the group skeptic to agree.

”Even for a skeptic, I think I would.” Shawna nods, grinning at the idea.

”I’ve been trying to do that for years.” Abby replies in exasperation and a soft laugh.

”You always seem to be...on the cutting edge of the type of breaking news that our group is interested in. How do you manage?” Cleo asks finally, “How do you find your sources?”

There’s a long pause before M155 5M17H begins speaking again, ”the only thing I’ll say is this, you follow the helpers. U.N.I.T knows what they’re doing. They may have some tactics that might be considered questionable, or even shady at times, but their priority is the protection and safety of the human race. Not necessarily among ourselves, but among other races from other planets and even from this planet.” They pause briefly before repeating their words, “you follow the helpers.”

Kate reaches forward, stopping the episode on her mobile once the portion with the one they’ve come to refer to as Miss Smith finishes, muttering to herself, “follow the helpers.” She considers the comment, standing from her office chair and pulling on her blazer, catching a quick glimpse of Christofer Ibrahim opening her office door. She walks closer to him, muttering, “Follow the helpers.”

Raising an eyebrow, Christofer offers her a kind half-smile, “follow the helpers?”

“Conference room two. You grab Shirley and Mel. I’ll reach out to Osgood. No one else for the time being. Keep it off absolutely any coms.” Kate keeps her voice very low, only slightly above a whisper, meant only to her Military lead turned partner. “Give them twenty at the absolute most. I just need to grab a few things and I’ll meet you there.”

Christofer gives a single understanding nod, “yes, ma’am.” He keeps an eye on her for just a moment longer as she returns to her desk before he turns away, walking towards the hanger bay office space.

“Follow the helpers,” a young man removes his earbuds and carefully places them back into their charging case. He tilts his head to the side, his finger gliding over the trackpad of his laptop, going to the Blue Box Files dedicated message boards, peering at the uploads of the user known as M155 5M17H. Everyone has their guesses, but a part of him believes it may be a frustrated employee. However, he wonders how they’d be so-

Buzz

The young man jumps slightly at the sound of his mobile vibrating on the wooden desktop, the image of his sister flipping the bird as her caller identification. “If it isn’t my favorite little delinquent,” he begins to smile to himself.

“Hey,” her voice is rough, always was, as if she smoked a cigarette a day since birth. “What are you up to?”

“Just listened to my Blue Box Files and now I’m...reading articles, I suppose.” He licks his lips, “how was school today?”

“Couldn’t really concentrate much,” the young woman explains, lifting a hand to her scalp, running her fingers through her hair, smoothing it back. “It’s...it’s almost Mum’s anniversary and uh...it’s always difficult, you know?” She bites the skin of her lower lip, leaning back against the back of the sofa in her living room. “We’re still having dinner that day, right?”

It isn’t that he didn’t know it was coming up, but he chose to push it to the back of his mind. To allow himself to forget as much as possible, not wanting, or needing to dwell, “Frankie-”

“It’s tradition, Gordy. It’s been our tradition for years now.” The young woman sits up in her seat, Frances Lethbridge-Stewart inhales slowly, her chest tight as she reaches for her inhaler. She closes her eyes, “I’m sorry. I’m...I’m being childish. If you have plans, that’s fine. We can have dinner another day. It really doesn’t bother me. I have plenty to do anyway, it’s-”

“Can you calm down for two seconds?” Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart asks gently. He has been more of a father-figure for his sister than their own father, who abandoned their mother once after he was born and then again when their mother discovered she was pregnant with Frances. The siblings also had quite an age difference between them, but it truly never bothered Gordon. He’d protect his sister with his life if it came down to it. “I was going to ask if you wanted to come here or if you’d prefer I came there?”

A small half-smile forms in the corner of Frankie’s mouth as she squeezes her usual dosage of her inhaler into her mouth, doing her best to inhale the contents. “I’ve decorated a little. We can get a takeaway and watch telly.” If there was one thing Frances was good at, it was the friendly manipulation of her brother’s heartstrings, “something old, maybe? You know how Mum liked those old black and white films on rainy days...when she was home.”

“It would be fitting.” Gordon nods a little, licking his lips.

“I wish there were more rainy days.” Frances’ eyes glisten with un-shed tears that she keeps from her voice. She swallows, the space between them going quiet for a moment, “I’m sorry, I’m getting all...” Frankie trails a little, “you alright?"

“The um...the podcast that I listen to, they said something today that just...I don’t know.” Gordon shrugs to himself, exhaling slowly, “they said they follow the helpers to know more information and...maybe that’s what i need to do with this whole...job thing, you know?”

Frankie begins to slowly shake her head, “If you’re going to tell me about how much you want to work at U.N.I.T again, I’m-”

“It would be a great opportunity and I wouldn’t even be doing anything dangerous. I’ll see if they have anything available like...paper pushing or in admin.” Gordon shakes his head a little, “I wouldn’t even use my actual name if I could help it. I wouldn’t want any special treatment or anything anyway. Less of a target on my back.”

“Literally anywhere else. I’ll see if there’s anything at the University.” Frances shakes her head, “please.”

Gordon inhales slowly, “It’s just a place, just a building. Why can’t you-”

“I’m not having this conversation with you right now. You’re far too intelligent not to understand my point of view.” Frances replies quietly, knowing it would get to her brother. “Look, I need to go. I’ll message you-”

“When you get out of class. Mum wouldn’t want you to skip.” Gordon continues.

Francis begins to smile to herself, “good thing she happens to be dead then, she’ll never know when I’m off my arse for most of the day.”

Gordon hears as his sister disconnects her end of the line, lowering his mobile from his ear. He lifts his head, glancing over to the photograph on his mantle of himself, his mother, and his sister. Possibly the last one he has before his mother died. He swallows, “I’ll keep taking care of her, Mum, and I’ll make you proud. Don’t worry.”

He knows his sister would probably give him a hard time about speaking to a photograph as if the ghost of their mother, Kate Lethbridge-Stewart, could hear them or would even care. To Gordy, it was a comfort. A promise to himself that, maybe, somewhere, she wasn’t truly dead.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Kate speaks with her newly compiled team.

Gordon meets with his sister so they can spend time together for their mother's anniversary.

Chapter Notes

AN: First part happens the same day as last chapter, but the second part is a few days later.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Christofer leans over to Kate's ear once she enters the conference room, "Room is clean." He knows she would understand his indication that he checked the room for any recording devices. The pair of them were able to work together on a different wavelength. She was the right hand to his left, his other half, through and through. They just...*understood* one another.

"Thank you, Colonel." Kate replies with a quick nod, glancing around the room at the table of familiar, trusted individuals.

"I had a feeling I know what this is about, so I took the liberty of playing the questionable portion of the podcast for Mel and Shirley." Osgood offers her mentor turned dear friend a soft smile, hoping she did the right thing.

"Perfect, saves us time." Kate nods, turning her head to look at Christofer, "you can listen to it later. It isn't terribly long." She returns to look around the room, "I've also brought my laptop for everyone to view the visual evidence. I'd like your impressions and what you believe is happening here." Kate always appreciates the input from her team, wanting to know if this was just her imagination running wild or something she should earnestly be concerned about. Well, *of course* she should be concerned, she knew that much, but it was more about where that concern should be directed. "Osgood, if you would, please."

"Of course." Osgood types a few things on the laptop before plugging it into the projector cord for the room, easier and safer than streaming, putting the screen on the wall. She navigates to the various social networks for the Blue Box Files podcast, including their message boards. "I think this may be the easiest place to see it first."

“That’s the...the health assessment on the Skarasen in Scotland.” Shirley furrows her brow, “we took great lengths to ensure there were no witnesses.”

“That’s the thing about Miss Smith. She just...manages.” Osgood shakes her head a little, moving to another post. "Here's another where we were checking in with a Zygon family who were having issues with their neighbors. The husband, as you can see here, is unwrapping his arm to show us a wound, which was keeping him from masking that part of his body. Now, Miss Smith did blur the individual’s face, which is a small saving grace, but they were still able to obtain this information.”

Melanie folds her arms, leaning back in her chair a little, “Miss Smith...in um...what’s it called...”

“Leetspeak.” Kate, Osgood, and Shirley respond in unison without hesitation.

“Leetspeak,” Mel nods slowly, agreeing with them, “do we think it’s a reference to the Doctor referring to himself as John Smith as we know he likes to do, is it possibly a reference to Sarah Jane Smith, a reference to their actual name, or...no connection to any of those options and just a name they’re using.”

"Why do you think Sarah Jane Smith would be a consideration?" Kate places her hands on her hips, still standing next to the table, watching her small team.

"This is, essentially, investigative journalism, which was her profession after traveling with the Doctor." Mel explains, "she was a good friend."

Kate offers a tight, closed-mouth smile with a subtle nod, "never thought of it that way though. Good point."

"Rani Chandra, who worked closely with Sarah Jane Smith while she resided on Bannerman Road, wouldn't take her name for anything. I also don't believe she would post anything in Leetspeek. She doesn't seem the type." Shirley thinks aloud, "this is a more…guerilla-like approach. Staying to the shadows. A part of me wonders if it might be a network or a team of people."

"Well, if it is, they aren't saying so." Kate shakes her head a little, looking up at the projected screen.

"What about a drone?" Christofer asks, standing in front of the door, not willing to allow entry to anyone that wasn't cleared by his Commander. He points at the screen when another picture comes up, "that one is my team and I-"

"I recognize the short sleeves." Kate interrupts playfully, smiling to herself, amused when she hears him huff a soft laugh.

"I can say, my team completely canvased the premises. This was the suspected Cerberus activity surveying Zygon-owned businesses and homes." Christofer explains, when the others seem slightly confused, "humans who continually attempt to provoke non-human species to

attack so that they can retaliate and it appear justified, though most don't even care about that part. They hate anyone that isn't human and, many will attack on sight."

"A drone is a good suggestion, actually." Shirley nods slowly, "I'm unsure, however, if there are any that are without or with very limited sound. Usually they have, at least, a soft buzzing of a motor."

"If it was small enough, however, it may have that same buzz, but it would be less noticeable and easier to hide." Osgood offers, "I know of our tech, but I don't know if they're available to the public though."

"Wait," Kate turns her head quickly, looking at Osgood as she accesses her memories. "I seem to remember a report regarding the repair of some of the Ravens that were a tad worse for wear and reporting that two of them had gone missing and were offline." She points at the screen, "scroll up again." She takes a step closer when Osgood follows instructions. "That one is taken from a height, telephone pole height."

"Could they easily be altered?" Shirley thinks aloud, "if they were to come back online, is there a way we could find them?"

"Only if their locator chips are still intact and weren't removed." Osgood explains softly.

"They could be…altered though. Reprogrammed." Melanie explains, leaning forward. Her arms are folded atop the conference table as she continues, "obviously, I can't say for certain. Robotics and animatronics aren't my fields, but at its root, it's all code. I can do code."

Kate nods absently, turning around and taking a few steps over to an empty seat at the head of the conference room table. *An unspoken rule that no one would sit there except for the Commander.* She pulls it back from the table and sits gingerly, "Colonel Ibrahim, did you notice-"

"I was not looking for birds, ma'am." Christofer mutters, shaking his head with an amused glimmer in his eye.

"Probably for the best." Kate nods, leaning back in the chair. "Okay, we don't know for a fact that one of our birds was used by Miss Smith to gather information. That is a suggestion that requires some investigation, however. What other options do we have?"

"Accessing CCTV cameras." Shirley offers, "to piggy-back off of Mel's idea, I'm sure it wouldn't be terribly difficult for a master coder."

"For some of them. There are a few locations here that wouldn't have any state-issued cameras around." Osgood points out, "I think the Colonel is on the right path though with the drone idea though. At least that's one method of observation, CCTV is another."

"More importantly, and above all of these ideas, I believe this indicates that we may have another leak." Kate sighs softly, "Shirley, I need you to compile a list of those that you believe may have the ability to do any of this. Melanie, see if we're able to track IP addresses or whatever else may be able to lead us to someone or any details or hints to identity.

Osgood, keep a close eye on any updates from Miss Smith. Colonel," Kate glances up at the man, still standing over at the entry door, hands folded *at ease* in front of his waist. "well, I'm not entirely-"

"I'll just look for birds," Christofer offers, an amused half-smile in the corner of his mouth.

Frankie takes a sip of her drink, one of her mother's favorites, an Amaretto Sour without the egg. *Never needs the egg,* she remembers her mother muttering after a long night in the lab, standing in their kitchen, compiling the drink as if making one of her scientific potions to test. *Expertly.*

Gordon lets himself into her flat. He always had a key *just in case.*, especially since she was living alone in a flat at University. "Went to the chippy, just like you texted me about earlier," he calls out. "Grabbed a few things, including fish and chicken strips. We can have variety."

"Variety," Frankie exhales a breathy laugh to herself, "as long as you got the good chips with that chip seasoning on them from that place by your house, I'll be thankful."

"Well, you're in luck, you spoiled brat." Gordon places the bag onto her small dining room table. "How was school today?" When his sister doesn't answer right away, he lifts his gaze from unpacking the bag of food, looking over at his sister, "Frankie."

Shrugging a single shoulder, Frankie brings the drink to her lips, taking a long sip. "One day is not going to ruin anything and I'm at the top of my class, it doesn't matter." Frankie exhales softly, "can I make you something to drink?" She absently motions to the kitchen with a tilt of her head, "I got stuff for Mum's favorites. So your options are Amaretto Sour, Grasshoppers, Traditional Gimlet, and a bottle of Viognier."

Gordon raises an eyebrow, "and how many have you had already?"

"Oh my days, what is your problem?" Frankie furrows her brow, "I'm not some…underage teenager looking to-"

"You aren't far from it." Gordon shakes his head with a soft, exhaspirated sigh, returning his gaze to the food in front of him. Once he's finished unpacking the bag, he begins to take his jacket off, hanging it on the back of the chair. "I mean, technically, you've only just started on the stuff. *Technically,* you are a teenager looking to-"

"If you're going to be a miserable bellend, why even come over?" Frankie lifts a hand, moving a few whisps of hair at her temples that had fallen from her messy bun, behind her ear. "For fucks sake, it's one day, Gordy. One day so that I can…so that I can breathe and remember Mum in a way that works best for me."

"Getting shit-faced works best for you?" Gordon continues, "the hangover alone would-"

"Do you want a fucking drink or not?" Frankie interrupts him, raising her voice ever so slightly. Not shouting, just injecting a bit of bass.

Gordon wasn't expecting his sister to sound like *her.* Especially with how rough her voice often is. It causes him to pause, his train of thought to abandon him. Gordy swallows, "I'll have whatever you're having."

Frankie gives a quick nod, clearing her throat as she slinks toward the kitchen, "I have three films set up. Whether we watch them actively or they play in the background is up to you. *Jeannie, The Captive Heart,* and *The Sea Shall Not Have Them.* All of them close to ninety minutes a pop." She makes the Amaretto Sour like her own, carrying it to the living room area, offering it to her brother.

"Can you at least also have some water while you have that? It will ease the blow of the hangover…I promise." Gordy takes the drink from his sister, swirling it absently in the glass before taking a sip, "what is this?"

"Amaretto Sour." Frankie mutters softly, stepping to the kitchen table silently and taking a seat.

Gordon watches, sitting on the sofa arm, watching his sister, "you know, I don't mean to-"

"I was having a good day at school and…and then I was called down to the headmistress' office…and there were U.N.I.T officials standing there, ordered to take me in. Some…some U.N.I.T protocol, I'm sure. You were already there." Frankie opens the wrapped food, "and I knew…before they even said anything, I could see it on your face." She takes a bite of a single chip, not wanting to look at her brother, keenly aware that he's watching her. "That's the part I remember most about that day, by the way. It was your face."

Tilting his head to the side, Gordy thinks for a moment, "I don't remember that day."

Frankie expected that answer, it was a long time until she started to remember as well. She exhales a soft single huff of rueful amusement, her voice remaining quiet, "well, lucky you." After a moment, her brother takes a seat at the chair opposite her, "do you ever wonder if U.N.I.T…made you forget?"

Gordon sighs, doing everything in his power not to roll his eyes, "why must you go to the worst possible outcome?"

"Because that's what U.N.I.T does. They make people forget what is inconvient to *them* for someone to remember." Frankie answers quietly, "I know it's…our legacy or whatever, but that doesn't mean they aren't questionable or without faults." She licks her lips, taking a moment before speaking again, "if you plan to work there, just…be careful, please. For me."

"Well, I'm glad you're bringing this up because I actually got a job with them." Gordon raises an eyebrow as his gaze lifts to look at his sister's eyes, "data entry and document procurement. Whatever that means, but it's a foot in the door."

"Well, hopefully, that foot doesn't get blown off." Frankie offers her brother a cheeky grin, only causing him to laugh to himself.

Chapter End Notes

If you notice the Easter Egg I threw in here, let me know.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Gordy starts his first day of work.

Frankie gets a little too close to the family business.

Kate continues to delegate.

Chapter Notes

Few days to a week from last chapter.

"Gordon James, with me." Burgundy Maxwell calls out, Supervisor of the Data Entry and Procurement department, looking at her newest employee. She sighs a little when he follows closely as she walks towards the room of cubicles. "I just want to show you to your desk. It isn't much, but you're welcome to decorate it as you please as long as your decorations are work appropriate and you keep it tidy otherwise. The Commander is big on personalization."

"Okay," Gordon nods, having provided his biological father's surname as his own to mask his identity. "Am I allowed to listen to music?" He pauses, "with like…earbuds."

"That shouldn't be an issue, the only thing I suggest is open-back buds and play your music quietly, still. That way you can hear when we're calling you, and only do it if you're focusing on data entry. Obviously don't if there's…much going on." Burgundy nods, "you'll get the vibes."

Gordon nods again, "will I be reporting directly to you?"

"I am your lord and master while you're here. At least for now." Burgundy offers a smile to her newest employee, finally stopping at one of the cubicles. "I'll be training you, but today is all about ensuring your security clearances are in place and all your log-ins are working and you're able to set passwords. Also, I'd like you to actually go to the coffee area during your breaks and lunch so that you can meet your coworkers and introduce yourself." She explains, "it's important that you become aware of who you work with. Security is a top priority here. It's essential for us to keep track of these things."

"Understood." Gordon nods.

"You're a man of few words. I like that, James." Burgundy gives a quick nod, "in the meantime, go ahead and take your jacket off. Get comfortable. I'll have the Tech crew bring up your computer and get it set up to your specifications. There's a few lessons in our learning area and agreements you have to make before I help you with the log-in stuff. Tech will help you get there and they'll let me know when they finish up." When her new employee gives another nod, Burgundy continues, "and Gordon, relax. I'm not throwing you to the wolves. It's one thing at a time and we'll get there before you know it."

"I appreciate that, ma'am. Thank you." Gordon sets his bag down, slowly removing his jacket.

"Of course," Burgundy turns to move away, pauses and returns to the cubicle, poking her head around the side, "Oh, and James?" When the employee turns to look at her, "welcome to U.N.I.T."

"I fixed the formatting of the next edition," Frances explains to the head editor of the university newsletter, "and I've fixed the digital edition as well." She pulls it up when the editor of the newsletter steps behind her, leaning over her shoulder to peer at the laptop screen. Her eyes absently shift to the neck of the young woman perched next to her.

"That looks so much better." Violet Ripley mutters sweetly, her Dublin accent sounding like birdsong to Frankie's ears. "I knew I could count on you." She gives Frankie's shoulder a gentle squeeze before stepping away, "oh, and your interview with that lecturer that was scheduled for LGBT Literature, that turned out amazing. How did you manage? He has a reputation of slithering out of interviews with women."

"Told him my name was Frank when making the appointment, as I normally do." The corner of Frankie's mouth turns up, "and I may have…blackmailed him a little."

Violet laughs softly to herself, "blackmail?"

"I told him that I was recording our interview, which wasn't a lie, and that if he tried to leave our interview after agreeing to it when he believed I was a male interviewer, knowing now that I was a female, it would only strengthen the belief of his misogyny." Frankie explains, "but that's all nothing compared to your investigation into the misappropriation of funds in the arts department."

"It was all done out of frustration." Violet explains, "I was tired of not having a professor, I was tired of not actually learning anything." She places a hand on her hip, "our professor, and I use that term loosely, showed on the first day, introduced himself, introduced his TA, and then let them lead the class. It's been them teaching, and again I use that term loosely, the course since the first day while he gets paid for it. I don't understand how that could possibly be allowed." Violet continues, folding her arms over her chest. *She's on a roll now.* "We have no easels, no new supplies, no models. Nothing. I had to suggest at least still life or something."

"Men," Frankie leans back in her chair, folding her arms behind her head, "can't live with them…and that's it. Can't live with them." The comment causes Violet to giggle sweetly,

which only just causes Frankie to smile warmly.

Screams. Scared screams. Running sounds of students down the hall. Objects being broken, destroyed. Glass shattered.

Frankie quickly stands from her seat, running to the door and closing it, turning off the room's overhead light. She does it without a single thought, without a sense of curiosity. Only exuding a sense of preservation.

"What's going on?" Violet asks nervously, her brow pinching with concern.

Holding a finger to her own lips, signaling for the other woman to be quiet, Frankie whispers, "don't know yet." She obtains one of the chairs, barricading it against the door. Proud of that, Frankie quickly moves to the windows, only to see some significant destruction of the small campus. "Though something tells me it isn't anything good."

She notices a purple colored substance on one of the statues on the campus, then another. Not a lot, but enough that it catches her eye. Frankie knows what this means. "Listen, Vi. There are some people that are about to show up at any minute." Frankie turns to look at her friend, "people that will take care of the situation, but may unintentionally injure others in the process."

"What are you even talking about?" Violet shakes her head, confused, "we need to get out of here."

"If they see you running away, you'll be captured and they'll make you *forget*." Frankie swallows, anxiously licking her lips to rid them of their dryness.

"You-you sound mad." Violet furrows her brow, "we need to get out of here."

Maybe it's for the best. Frankie motions to the windows, "I'm sure I can get the window open enough that you'll be able to get through…and get to safety." She notices the black sports utility vehicles of U.N.I.T starting to show up not terribly far away from their room. "You see that? Just get over to them and they'll help."

"Is that the military?" Violet asks quietly, "what is happening that the military is here?"

"Now isn't the time to ask questions. You can ask questions later." Frankie swallows, looking back

at her friend and offering a quick half-smile. "Everything will be okay."

Violet shakes her head a little, reaching out to touch Frankie's bicep, "Why are you so calm about all this?"

"Long story." Frankie replies softly, looking over Violet's face almost absently, "it's a um… it's a family thing."

"The Colonel and Osgood have reached Wychwood University, ma'am." Shirley sits in front of her desk, typing away. The movements and body cameras of those on the grounds broadcasting to the large screen above the desks.

Kate swallows, hands at her sides as her index finger anxiously rubs over her thumbnail. "How are the-"

Shirley knows she's going to ask about her children, in particular her daughter, who attends Wychwood University. "She's fine. Tracker says she's at home. The other one, on the other hand, something is blocking the signal. Offline, but…not necessarily in a bad way."

"What do you mean offline?" Kate furrows her brow, moving closer to Shirley's desk.

"His last known location is just outside this building. If he entered, we have signal jammers." Shirley explains, "our mobile phones are all registered, so they're allowed, but anything else is jammed for security purposes, until they're logged into our systems. For instance, a guest or a tour's mobiles would be blocked until they logged into the guest Wifi."

"But it's one of our devices, surely that would override that rule." Kate sighs softly, "or one would imagine it would already be covered or…able to bypass."

"The locator chips only project a signal. Not the other way around. We just read it." Shirley explains simply, "but, as previously stated, I think that's only because he's in this building."

"Why would he be here?" Kate furrows her brow with concern. Whether that's concern that he's discovered her secret or concern that he may be about to, she doesn't know. *What if someone notices a resemblance?* Not nearly as much as her daughter, but it's still there.

"I don't know." Shirley shakes her head, "nothing that either of us have been alerted to. Maybe he's simply on a tour."

Hopefully, he's simply on a tour of their relatively new, tall skyscraper painting the London sky.

Kate gives a quick nod, "and you're sure she's at home?"

"That's where her locator says she is." Shirley watches as her boss slowly returns to the front of the room to her own desk.

Swirling her chair around, Kate watches the screens of the pandemonium happening on the campus. Osgood actively narrates her actions.

"We believe the Vellatrax to be injured as we can see what we believe is their blood on various art pieces, large sculptures that adorn the University campus grounds. It's as if the Vellatrax was leaned against them while attempting to run or walk by, though we can't determine their speed at the moment. It's purple in color, but seemingly the same viscosity as human blood. Possibly low on oxygen, but we can't say for certain yet." Osgood, wearing a small camera on her glasses, steps closer, "My team has taken samples for further study from each location."

Osgood turns, hearing someone running in her direction. The person is obviously scared, but she can't quite make out where this young woman may have come.

"Help, please help. I was inside and…and we heard screams and things being broken. I don't know what's happening." The young woman shakes her head, "My…my friend is still inside, but she barricaded the door and…and I think she's okay for the moment…if she isn't found."

"What's your name?" Osgood asks carefully, "are you injured?"

"I'm fine. Just shaken." The young woman shakes her head, glancing around the campus at people running and everyone simply terrified, "what's going on?"

"What's your name?" Osgood asks again.

It takes the young woman a moment to realize the question she's being asked, "Violet…Violet Ripley."

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Christofer calls Kate's bluff.

Gordon tells his sister about his first day of work.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Christofer enters the small room with the 2-way window, carrying a travel mug of coffee with a lid. "Osgood is still on scene at the University with the cleanup crew. Area was closed off. Retcon deployed after witness interviews." He explains, "a few of my people stayed back as security and crowd control." Christofer offers the mug to her, "you've been on the go since early this morning."

"And probably a few hours more tonight." Kate takes the coffee mug from him, glad it's him and no one else. She gives an absent nod toward the window, motioning to the Vellatrax in the hospital bed, "I've come to the conclusion that they were probably a part of that ship crash this morning." Kate brings the mug to her lips, taking a slow sip. "I think something as simple as a rogue lightning bolt. There were…electric burns on the ship hull." She pauses, slowly exhaling, "they must have been terrified."

"Seemed that way." Christofer nods absently, "we remained calm as we approached. There was significant - what we believe - is blood loss. I told my guys to lower weapons and the uh…the Vellatrax understood that we weren't going to hurt them." He explains quietly, "but this isn't about them right now, Kate. They're safe and secure." Christofer turns his head to look at her profile, "this is about you. You've been…distracted most of the day. Shirley told me about your two."

Kate didn't think he would notice. It's why she sent his team as support for Osgood's scientists. Whatever kept him out of the building.

"Your daughter was reported to be at home. So…at least there's that." Christofer turns his head forward again, absently looking at the Vellatrax in the hospital bed. "I looked into your son's whereabouts. His feed cut as he entered the building. At that time, four people entered the building within the same six seconds. One woman, three men. One of those men was recently hired in Document Procurement, or something. Paper pusher."

This catches her attention. Kate turns her head to look at him, "Gordy."

"I think so. He's using a false name though and it would probably be in your best interest not to draw attention that he's of relation to you. I don't know if he'd like that." Christofer explains, "though, really, it's your call."

"They think I'm dead, Chris." Kate explains quietly, "I went to…to great lengths for them to forget me. Retcon, memory re-training, essence of the Silence for whenever my photograph-"

"Silence essence?" Christofer furrows his brow in slight confusion, "what's that one?"

"The kids remember me when they're looking at a photograph of me, but forget my appearance when they look away." Kate explains quietly, "their sensors were coated in it. It was…experimental tech at the time. If they forgot me forever, that was the risk…and it'd be fine."

"How-how are you okay with that?" Christofer asks softly, "don't you miss them?"

"More than anything," Kate's voice is only slightly above a whisper, "but I also love them more than life itself and…I know how dangerous this job is. Especially my job. I know how easily they can be used to get to me. So…if they don't know me or…or think I'm gone, they won't look for me." She explains, "they won't get close. They won't be watched-"

"Gordon is already in the building. He's getting close without knowing." Christofer shakes his head a little, "I know you say you've done all of that to protect them and…that's commendable, but is it *really* protecting them or is it protecting you?"

"Protecting me from what?" Kate shakes her head absently, not quite understanding the question or the thought process.

"From needing to explain yourself each time you see them. From keeping them from being interested in this place…in you…and your life. Maybe even in me." Christofer draws his lower lip into his mouth, moistening it gently. "You worry about needing to decide between the human race and the lives of your children…because you don't think you'd be able to choose the human race over your children." He continues, "and if they think you're already dead, it stops them from trying to see you again. It stops that impossible choice from becoming concrete."

He was right. He knows her too well. Kate looks away from him again, biding herself some time by bringing her mug to her lips, taking a slow sip. "It's been years."

"Years that you've watched them from afar. Years that you've had *us* protect them." Christofer slowly nods, "I know."

"I don't think they'd forgive me anyway." Kate swallows, an absent, nervous tremble in her hands, only slight, "and it would be selfish of me to put them at that risk just to…"

"Just to tell them that you love them?" Christofer exhales slowly, "just to embrace them again?" When she doesn't answer, he continues after a few moments, "I don't think it's selfish. I think it's human." Christofer looks in her direction again, "and I think you should consider your decision in making them believe that you're gone already…because there's no telling

how long we have on this Earth." Another pause, "we do what we do to protect the human race, sure, but…we really do it for the people we love." Christofer's eyes drift to her lips, then back up to her eye. "Would you agree?"

Kate gives a slight nod, reaching a hand out to place on his muscular forearm. She doesn't need to vocalize her agreement with him, simply just moving ever so slightly closer to him, her shoulder brushing against his bicep. *It's enough for them right now.*

Gordy scrolls through the photographs of the crashed spacecraft, tilting his head to the side as he raises his mug of tea to his lips, taking a slow sip. His mobile begins to vibrate, showing the telltale identification picture of his sister, flipping him the bird. Gordy quickly answers, glad that it's a video call. "Are you okay? I'm looking at these pictures from Miss Smith on the BBF servers. Why didn't you call me?" His brow is furrowed.

"Because I'm fine." Frankie shakes her head, "if I did call you, what would you do?" She raises an eyebrow, as if testing him, "besides, you were having your first day. That's way more important than my thing."

"In no way is it more important than your thing," Gordy sighs softly, "did you really come face-to-face with an off-worlder?"

"What?" Frankie furrows her brow, "a what?"

"You know…someone who isn't from this planet?" Gordy raises his brow with excited optimism.

"Gordy, I have no idea what you're talking about. I left just before lunch because I had a migraine." Frankie sighs, "did something happen?"

There's something in her voice that causes his brow to furrow, "Are you okay?" Gordy can't quite pinpoint it. He starts to look over her face, "do you need anything? I can run it over."

"No, no. It's fine. I ordered a takeaway and some paracetamol." Frankie lifts a hand to stroke through her long, straight light-brunette hair.

"Probably looking at a computer screen a bit too much." Gordy offers, "did you miss any classes?"

"No, but I don't really care if I did, to be completely honest with you." Frankie yawns, "I was up late last night studying so I knew I was going to be struggling a little this morning. I just didn't expect a bloody migraine…and you're telling me I missed ET visiting campus?"

"A non-human, yes." Gordon corrects quietly, "looks like they were bleeding and injured. Possibly part of a crashed ship that was found. You should see the photographs that were uploaded by-"

"Gordy," Frankie stops him from his rambling about his hobby. About the alien sightings or whatever is going on with the websites he frequents or podcasts he listens to, she's heard so

much about it already. "You didn't tell me about your first day. Is the place as ugly inside as it is outside? I don't remember." Frankie pauses, "though, I think it was brand new when we went, so they've probably changed it a bit since then."

"No idea, but it's fine. It's just an office space like any other." Gordon shrugs, "my supervisor is pretty nice, but I'm still in the swing of training and, lucky for me, they're taking their time with it. Understandably, I reckon. One wouldn't want to mix anything up with that. Like mixing documents from the 1980s in with the files from the 70s, imagine the nightmare that would cause."

"I'm sure it would certainly be a pain." Frankie lays back on her sofa, "but otherwise U.N.I.T was okay?"

"A perfectly normal office. I'm even allowed to decorate my cubicle." Gordy nods, "though it's too bad I can't take any in of Mum and Grandad yet. I just don't want the special treatment."

Frankie had a feeling he would provide them with fake information, "Did the fake name thing work?"

"Like a dream. They didn't question too much, actually. I guess my good looks and charm prevailed." Gordon explains, nodding a little, "I do need to invest in some open earbuds, whatever they are."

"I have a few pairs that I use for school. I'll send you some links. I prefer to know what's going on around me instead of any sort of noise canceling." Frankie explains, "and they do exactly what you want them to do."

"I'd appreciate that, tech-o." Gordon smiles a little to himself, looking at his sister's face through the video link on the mobile. His voice drops, softening, "you know, when I saw everything that Miss Smith was posting to the server of your Uni…all I wanted to do was race there…make sure you were okay. I'm glad you were at home, though. I'm glad you were safe."

"And what would you have done?" An amused half-smile forms in the corner of Frankie's mouth.

"Whatever I could." Gordy knows she's right, knows that rash decisions would lead to injury.

Frankie nods slowly, "I appreciate the sentiment." She licks her lips, "but contrary to popular belief, I'm made of sterner stuff than you give me credit for and I wouldn't be the first Lethbridge-Stewart to sort out a few non-human foes." There's a slight chortle in Frankie's words, "and, who knows, they may fancy me so much that they ask me to be their new leader."

"I have no doubt that you could pull it off." Gordon nods slowly, doing his best not to let on how anxious the whole ordeal made him and how worried he was for her. "Did you hear the ship crash? It looks like it wasn't terribly far from your flat."

"No, there was a storm last night. Bad thunder and lightning. So, if there was anything, I was either studying while wearing earbuds or sound asleep." Frankie shakes her head absently, getting up from the sofa and walking through her flat, moving towards the kitchen.

Gordon watches the scenery behind his sister as she moves around, furrowing his brow when he spots something odd, "hold on, what was that?"

"What was *what*?" Frankie runs her hand through her hair again, sighing a little.

"Was that a skeleton?" Gordy furrows his brow with confusion, "in a maid's fancy dress?"

Frankie pauses in her movements, a slight half-smile forming in the corner of her mouth, "Oh!" She turns around, going to another area and turning on the rear-facing camera, letting him see the full object. "That's Bonehilda."

"Bonehilda?" Gordon starts to laugh quietly to himself, "where on Earth did you get something like that?"

"I'm not telling you where I acquire my wares, Gordon." Frankie replies in jest, "but wait, there's more. I've programmed her to a…smart home system. So she can control my lights, stereo, the blinds in the windows. She can take phone calls and messages…oh, and she can also vacuum, as she's connected to my robot vacuum." She turns the camera to face herself again, "she can tilt her head while speaking, but I didn't want to do it with her arms and legs because it would have freaked me out."

"I was unaware that you were into robotics." Gordy finds this entire thing amusing.

"I dabble." Frankie responds with a shake of her head, "I just wanted to see if I could do it. Built my own intelligence system and gave her a personality. She can carry a conversation if you want her to." She gives a shrug of insignificance. "I'll introduce you when you're over next."

"I'll let you know when I'm able. I haven't been given my regular schedule yet." Gordy explains, then exhales, "I'm really glad you're okay, Frank."

"Likewise. Never would have thought I'd be happy about a headache." Frankie bids her brother farewell, turning around and tossing her mobile onto the sofa. "I'm just glad he didn't see you." She turns to look at the smaller robotic animal on her small kitchen table, "at least not yet."

The animal twitches, tilting its head to the side as if understanding her fully.

Chapter End Notes

So that whole thing about this being exclusive elsewhere...that didn't last very long. :-D

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Frankie chats with a friend.

Osgood reveals something that she knows was meant to be hidden.

Chapter Notes

AN: The day after last chapter.

"I tried to ask around for more information on the campus closure, but no one seems to know anything or…is willing to talk about it. That's mad, right?" Violet leans back against the sofa cushion in Frankie's flat, pulling her feet up under herself. "And I've even attempted asking the University Board of Directors, the maintenance staff…whoever I could get ahold of, and I've been met with bloody crickets."

"Well, what about yourself?" Frankie, cross-legged with her laptop on top of her lap, sits at the other end of the sofa, knowing exactly why no one remembers anything. *Of course it's mad.* "What do you remember?"

Violet adjusts her position, sitting sideways to face her friend, giving her a moment to think. Her legs curl under herself, finding the space comfortable. Violet's negative head shake is subtle as she absently looks at her friend. "Well, that's…that's terrifying."

Frankie nods slowly, fully remembering everything that occurred, but knowing she can't let onto that secret. "So, you need to…decide whether you wish to investigate that or…if there are questions that you don't want the answers to."

It's the way her friend says the words that catches Violet's interest, "because you think the truth is worse than not knowing at all."

"I didn't say that," Frankie answers quietly, typing something on her laptop. *Code.* "I uh…I managed to infiltrate the network that maintains the security cameras around campus. You can see what what they're doing." She pauses, reaching over to the television remote and turning the device on before streaming her laptop window, allowing them both to see everything more clearly.

Violet turns her attention towards the television, her face softening with wonder, "how did you manage this?"

"They have poor security measures," Frankie answers quietly, "nothing terribly impressive."

"Well, I'm impressed." Violet answers with certainty, a half-smile starting to appear at the corner of her mouth. "I could never do anything like this."

Frankie blushes, but does her best not to draw attention to it. "It looks like most of the damage was on the center grounds." She switches between camera feeds, furrowing her brow as she focuses on her own laptop screen, knowing that Violet is watching the television, "hazmat suits…" Frankie uses the camera to zoom-in on one of the workers.

"Meaning, in some way, there were hazardous materials involved." Violet draws her own conclusion, "from where though?"

"Maybe not necessarily hazardous, but they aren't sure if it's hazardous. So it's probably unknown." Frankie answers quietly, moving the camera to another worker, "they're collecting samples."

"Samples," Violet folds her arms over her chest, getting up from her seat and walking closer to the television, as if it would make the view clearer, "samples of what, though." It isn't a question, more like something she's attempting to reason with herself. Violet turns, looking at Frankie again, "I don't…*what* happened yesterday?" She takes another moment, "and why do I get the feeling that you know the answer to that?"

Frankie begins to shake her slow, dismissive head, "Vi, I don't-"

"You do. I can see it in your eyes." Violet lowers her hands to her sides, "what happened to us?"

"I really don't know," Frankie doubles down, "I just think it must have been something that the government is going to great lengths to cover up." She motions to the television with an absent wave of her hand, "look at the logo on that yellow kit. Are you able to make it out?"

Turning to look at the television again, Violet tilts her head to the side, trying to focus on the black blur, "a bird of some sort?" She pauses, "I see wings."

Frankie begins to nod slowly, "Right. Have you ever heard of an organization called U.N.I.T?"

"What updates do we have?" Kate glances around the conference table at the individuals she's elected to assist her in this conquest in finding the one known as *M155 5M17H*. She gives a quick glance over at Christofer, who seems to be peering at her with adoration, something he does without even realizing it these days. Kate does her best not to pay him much mind, "has anything regarding the Vellatrax appeared on the Blue Box Files servers?"

"It certainly has." Osgood nods, pulling the website up on the laptop in front of her as it streams onto the wall in front of them, capturing the attention of the others in the room. "We'll start with the ship crash."

Kate is slightly taken back by both the angle and the clarity of the photographs, "this is as if we were being followed by a film crew." Her voice is slightly breathy, surprised, "how is this possible?"

Osgood inhales, "I tried to track the properties of the photos, which includes the type of camera that was used as well as the time that the photo was taken and-"

"We were on-scene at that time." Kate shakes her head, then looks at the others around the table before focusing on Osgood once more, "were you able to discern any other details from the pictures?" She lets out a sigh when the other woman shakes her head negatively. "Figures."

"The information was then passed over to me. I started following the websites and the uploads by the user known as Miss Smith." Melanie explains, "each time anything is uploaded to the internet, whether it be a comment or a photo, usually an IP address is left like a footprint. IP address stands for Internet Protocol, which is a set of rules governing the format of data sent over the internet or local network. There are ones for a local network like in your home between printers and laptops, smart home devices, and there are ones for the larger internet as a whole. They tell you where someone is located, essentially, and what computer something may originate."

"Okay," Kate nods slowly, glad to have context for the information she's about to be told.

"So, when I track the IP addresses of all the images uploaded from the crash site and the photos of Wychwood University, they are all from different places in the world, but same camera. One registers from Lisbon, Greenland, Australia, New York, et cetera." Mel explains, "which then tells me that Miss Smith has something called a rotating VPN, or Virtual Private Network."

"I remember hearing the term in the press," Kate comfortably folds her arms over her chest as she sits back in the seat, "it allows you to appear as if you're elsewhere, correct?"

"Exactly." Mel nods again, "now, a rotating VPN is one that constantly cycles place to place. Making the user even more difficult to track." She pauses, glancing up at the screen, "it normally isn't impossible though. Usually someone will slip up at some point. Forget to turn it on, things of that nature, but that doesn't happen here…ever."

"Miss Smith is a professional then." Shirley offers, "they're simply careful."

"I think it's more than that, because when I do use our systems and technologies to track it, and they're often able to bypass VPN systems, there is…*nothing*. It's completely blank. They're using multiple VPN servers, but then altering their own IP…effectively blank."

"Meaning they're untraceable." Shirley mutters, an impressed half-smile forming in the corner of her mouth, "completely untraceable."

"And we have no other identifying qualities about them. No contacts, no…nothing." Kate shakes her head a little, "because they masked their voice and appearance when they were on Blue Box Files."

"Yes, but they made a program for the hosts to use in order to communicate." Osgood mentions, remembering the podcast episode, "what if there is some sort of programming fragments that were left behind after the connection?"

Mel notices Kate lean forward in interest from the corner of her eye, "I actually reached out to them already."

"And?" Kate raises a hopeful brow.

"One of the members was reached out to with a long line of code to input. There was nothing that Miss Smith touched." Mel shakes her head, "I've already spoken to each of them."

Kate sighs, leaning back again, "okay, what else do we have?"

"There was something else from the photographs that were uploaded and I'm hoping you'll catch on to why it's troublesome." Shirley offers, giving a nod to Osgood to scroll down on the webpage. There are photographs of the grounds of Wychwood University with the spots of violet blood on the statue decor scattered around the campus grounds.

Swallowing, Kate looks at the photos. It takes her only a brief moment before she speaks, "we aren't there." There's a beat as she turns her attention to Shirley, "*Follow the helpers,* but Miss Smith was there before we were."

"My thoughts exactly." Shirley's eyes dance with mild excitement, returning her attention to the photographs that Osgood is streaming.

"Okay, that's…that makes things interesting." Kate exhales, drawing her lower lip into her mouth and biting the skin absently.

"I can request a list of students that were reported to have attended their morning classes." Christofer offers, "and we'll go from there." He continues to stand by the single door leading out to the hallway, "I'll also request campus security cameras though I believe we acquired all that we needed."

Kate glances over at him, "All rooms or just the rooms that the Vellatrax were in?"

Christofer points at her, symbolizing that she's making a good point. "I'll look over all of it again." He pauses to add emphasis, "personally."

An affectionate half smile fills the corner of Kate's mouth, "Thank you, Colonel."

Shirley discretely exhales a soft laugh to herself, leaning back in her chair, "what would you like the rest of us to do, Kate?"

"Oh, uh," Kate turns her attention back to the rest of the table, "maintain attempts to track and locate Miss Smith, as well as any updates to the Blu Box Files websites." She gives a nod,

moving to get up herself.

"Ma'am, could I have a brief word?" Osgood interrupts her mentor's movements.

Kate gives Christofer a nod, dismissing him with Mel and Shirley. She watches a moment as the other three leave the room, turning her attention back to Osgood, "everything okay?"

"I actually…had a bit of a search regarding a young woman that came up to me not long after we first got there." Osgood explains, "Violet Ripley, you probably saw her in the feed from-"

"Yes, I remember." Kate nods, interrupting her friend. "What about her?"

"She's a close friend of your daughter." Osgood explains, "who she mentioned, in passing, was also in the building that day. She said they were working together on the Uni newsletter." She notices Kate's face soften, "however, when the building was searched, your daughter was nowhere to be found and she was not part of the Retcon deployment efforts."

Kate furrows her brow, "I don't understand."

"I don't either." She admits quietly, swallowing. "The Colonel knows, but didn't speak about it to his team that were searching the tapes." Osgood hesitates briefly, "It might be something to bring up with him later when it's just the two of you." She notices the slight alarm in Kate's eyes, "you're my closest friend and he makes you happy. Your reasons for keeping the relationship secret is yours alone, but there's no need to hide it from me."

Swallowing, Kate relaxes and nods with slight embarrassment, "thank you."

Osgood removes the cord from the side of the laptop before closing it. She exhales slowly, "it feels like we're closer to finding this out than we've ever been. We'll get it figured out."

Kate watches as the younger woman leaves the room from the corner from her eye, taking a moment to breathe. She inhales and exhales deeply, slowly before standing, making her way back to her own secluded office. *Has she been too obvious? Who else might know about her and Christofer? How long will it be before she's called into HR or receives a summons from Geneva?*

Lowering herself into her office chair, Kate opens the lid of her own laptop, starting to type when a terminal prompt opens suddenly, then a simple text document. She tries to close them both when they open again.

I am not your enemy.

Kate furrows her brow, not quite understanding what is happening. She types on the next line, *'Who is this?'*

M155 5M17H.

Her eyes widening with slight alarm, Kate moves her hands back to the keyboard, ready to type again when-

I think we should talk.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Christofer tends to his partner.

Frankie opens up to a friend about her mother.

Gordon makes a discovery.

Chapter Notes

AN: Few days after last chapter.

"You seem rattled." Christofer pokes his fork into the zucchini on his plate, "what's wrong?"

"I'd like to be able to do my work first before eating," Kate mutters, frustrated with her partner for insisting that she eat with him. He wasn't a child. He was able to do things without her. Though, truly, she isn't so sure she'd want him to. Not many things at least. Maybe the occasional thing or two.

"When that happens, you forget about eating and I end up needing to carry you to bed." Chris explains, "and I'd rather not see you get a light head over something so silly." His tone is gentle, knowing she would argue with him. *She always does.*

"Why didn't you tell me you were aware that my daughter was present at the University that day?" Kate asks quietly, "her location sensor was registering at home and…that turns this into a major security flaw."

"For you." Christofer continues, "if you want them to forget you, shouldn't that then mean that you forget them?" He offers, "not monitor them, not have security detail assigned, just let them live their lives without remembering you." Christofer shakes his head almost absently, "that's what you want, isn't it?"

Kate swallows, looking across the table at him after a moment, at a true loss of what to say.

Chris can tell that he hurt her feelings, exhaling softly, "I uh…Gordon, your son, I managed to snag a copy of his security file for you." His voice is quiet, gentle, "along with the videos from Wychwood University from that day. I thought you might like to go over some of them together." Christofer lifts his gaze, looking at Kate again, "she's just as beautiful as you are."

Face softening, Kate bites her lip, giving herself a moment, "after the house…after my old home was blown to smithereens, it was just…it was a wake-up call. I immediately started thinking of hypotheticals. *What if it was the holidays and one of them were home? What if they were there to surprise me when I arrived home after a long day?*" She swallows, "just being near me meant that their lives were in danger."

Beginning to place the pieces together, Christofer begins to nod slowly, "so if they weren't near you and knew that they couldn't be, it would no longer be a possibility." Noticing the meek nod from his partner, he slowly reaches across the table, gently taking her hand, stroking her knuckles with his thumb, "why didn't you say that before?"

"It's difficult for others to understand." Kate's voice is only slightly above a whisper.

Waiting a moment before replying, Christofer clears his throat, "you know that things are different now though, right?" When he catches her gaze again, he offers a gentle half-smile, "you've got me." Christofer notices her blush as she turns her head away from him, amused, "and I'm not about to let anything happen to you and, by proxy, to them." He pauses again, "that still doesn't change my opinion that you owe it to yourself and your children to let them know that you're okay."

Kate licks her lips, giving herself a moment to formulate her thoughts. "Why would they even wish to speak with me?" She gives a noncommittal shrug, "I've lied to them, broken their trust, and gone radio silent with them for years now." Kate finds his eyes again, "that makes me a terrible person…and an even worse mother."

"No, it doesn't." Christofer shakes his head a little, "it makes you selfless. You put their safety and security ahead of your own wishes."

"I miss them more than-" Kate stops talking suddenly, shaking her head a little, not wanting to be too emotional about this. She knows that if she starts, she won't stop the flow easily. She swallows, her eyes glassy, "keeping track of them is the only thing that makes all of this remotely bearable."

Chris gives a single nod, stabbing a slice of squash and offering it to her on the end of his fork. "Eat so that we can look over the things I smuggled from our place of work and brought home with me."

Kate offers him a genuine smile, leaning forward and taking the bite of the food being offered to her off of his fork with her teeth.

"It's a type of drone somewhat." Frankie smiles to herself, "I've applied a sort of…artificial intelligence to mimic that of a real, biological raven. They can talk like a raven, fly like a raven, follow commands." *Photograph.* No, that's not important to mention now. "The issue is, though, that they're starting to…look a bit worse for wear."

"Certainly is," Violet smiles softly to herself, huffing a soft laugh when the raven looks at her. "Hello, you."

"Hello, Violet." The Raven croaks.

"It," Violet lifts her gaze, looking at Frankie, "it said my name."

"It has the ability to learn. That's what artificial intelligence is about sometimes. Not always nefarious purposes." Frankie assures, reaching a hand over to stroke the robot's head, grinning when the bird acts excited, as if drawing pleasure from being touched. The action causes Violet to giggle softly, *sounding like music to Frankie's ears.* "Isn't that right, Terry?" She continues to absently stroke along the bird's back as he nods.

Violet furrows her brow, "Terry?"

"Bonehilda named him." Frankie explains, "Terrance Raven, private investigator." Another laugh from her friend causes Frankie to grin broadly, "mostly based on his inquisitive nature."

"A nature that you provided to him?" Violet connects, shaking her head absently, still providing the raven with affection, "I didn't know you were into all this."

"Just a hobby." Frankie shakes her head, "I wanted to learn coding. So I learned coding, a few different types. I wanted to see what I could do with that coding, so I did. I hacked a home control device to not only control my home, but do so without being connected to servers for corrupt companies or harm the environment by being processed through a large data center that uses hundreds of thousands of gallons of water a minute just to cool their CPUs." She moves away from the table, over to a little box and a laptop, "so I made my own server…with my own storage and my own…everything."

"Why?" Violet watches her friend with wonder, obviously impressed.

"To see if I could." Frankie shrugs, falling quiet for a moment. "My Mum was a scientist. She was always quite…encouraging of exploration. *But do it safely,* she'd always say." She smiles to herself, nodding a little as her eyes grow glassy. Frankie clears her throat, pushing her emotions down. "So this all makes me feel a bit closer to her in a way."

Violet's face softens slightly, seeing Frankie's tough exterior crack, "was she also interested in robotics?"

"She was interested in everything. She loved learning." Frankie falls quiet briefly, inhaling deeply, "you'd have liked her. Easily one of the most fascinating women in the world." She smiles to herself, "you'd have loved to have interviewed her at least."

"You didn't tell me your Mum died." Violet moves closer to the other woman, reaching a hand out and gently placing it on Frankie's elbow. "How long ago?"

"Nearly five years, give or take." Frankie nods a little, not quite looking at her friend just yet. "It was just her anniversary, well…the anniversary of when U.N.I.T told us she died."

"So *that's* why you know so much about them." Violet begins to nod slowly, piecing together the clues, "was she important there?"

"She was important everywhere." Frankie replies automatically, sighing after, "sorry, um… yeah, she was important at U.N.I.T. It's a family thing. My grandfather created it. Sir Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart." She licks her lips in thought, allowing herself a moment, "my brother works there now. He's been trying to do so since he found out about it all."

"And you?" Violet takes another, smaller step closer. "What do you want to do?"

Finally lifting her gaze, meeting Violet's eyes, "I um…I wanted to ask you if you'd help me mend the bird." Voice quivering ever so slightly, Frankie swallows, "I've seen the things you can do with your hands." A blush forms across her cheeks, "I-I didn't mean it-" Her words are stopped by Violets lips meeting her own.

Something she certainly wasn't expecting.

Gordy furrows his brow as he sits at his desk within his cubicle. *A little late night work never hurt anyone.* He scrolls through another file as he clarifies it for further categorization.

Gordon places the large earphones over his head, ready to transcribe the audio file.

"-received her call late at night. It was just the Colonel and I left in the office as I wanted to tie up a few loose ends. He doesn't leave until I do, not that I haven't tried to make him, of course, but…there aren't many people that can get the Colonel to change his mind, myself included." There's a soft pause in the recording but the recording doesn't actually stop, "though I do like to try.

Furrowing his brow, Gordon pauses the recording to finish his typing. He smiles to himself, recognizing the voice. It sounds an awful lot like-

Gordon swallows, pressing play on the recording, moving to the next recording.

"I feel sorry for whoever they have assigned to transcribing these things. Geneva requests for me to record each day, said the date will mark itself automatically. Keeps me from having to look at a calendar. I normally don't know time, much less day it is anyway." A soft sigh is heard, "we've made contact with a Silurian female by the name of Va'stra. Though her species is well known to us, her subspecies is still currently unknown. She appears more human than other Silurian that I've encountered. However, I do not wish to scare her away. We've provided her with a biological dampener and perception filter to make things easier for her and she visits to tell us stories of her deceased wife and her time with the Doctor. Win-win." Another pause, "She's centuries old. As old as this planet. We'll take whatever stories she's willing to tell us." Another pause, "I should offer her a job."

It takes Gordy a moment to realize that he hasn't notated anything down for that one. He stops the recording again. Taking a breath, listening to the date at the beginning of the next recording.

Only a month ago.

His back straightens, rewinding and replaying the audio again. And again. *And again.*

"How is this possible?" Gordon asks himself, rewinding the audio again.

"This is the small activities room, and here's the Employee area, and here's the Newsletter and print office." Christofer flips through the different feeds, pausing on the last feed as he glances over at his partner, "this one would probably be of interest to you." They lie next to one another in bed, completely comfortable and relaxed. At this point, this was something just to earn him back some appreciation points. Chris lets the video play, looking at his lover's face.

Kate leans against his side in order to see the screen of the laptop a bit better, smiling to herself, "that's my Frances." She pauses, nodding a little as she points to one of the young women in the video. "The one at the computer." The camera feed is clearer than Kate anticipated.

Christofer starts to grin, as his attention returns to the monitor, "she has your eyes." He hears the young woman speaking to the other in the video, "and your voice, and your-"

"Watch it." Kate mutters, playfully teasing him.

"Keep watching," Christofer feels as Kate takes hold of his hand while leaning into him, her head against his bare shoulder and upper bicep. Another moment passes as the two young women look at the door, leading towards the hall. "Watch how quickly her instincts kick in."

Kate can't help except smile proudly as her daughter quickly barricades the door. All of the actions from that day play through. *Frankie scanning the courtyard through the window. Frankie warning the other young woman about people coming to help. Frankie helping her friend escape through the window, telling her…something.*

"Sorry, can you play that back?" Kate asks quietly, "just before Frances helps the other woman through the window."

"Follow the helpers."

Kate's back straightens ever so slightly, lifting her head off of Christofer's shoulder as she thinks about it for a moment. Glad when Christofer pauses the video.Finally, she mumbles softly to herself, her voice nearly at a whispers, "follow the helpers."

Chris glances over at her, "everything alright?"

Nodding slowly, Kate gives him a quick half-smile, returning her head to its previous position against his shoulder and upper bicep, "everything's perfect."

The video shows as Frankie removes her mobile from her pocket, touching the screen briefly before bringing it up to her ear, muttering quietly, but just loud enough to be picked up by the cameras, "Bonehilda, building four."

"And that's when all the cameras in the building turn to static." Christofer explains, "for roughly six to seven minutes." He fast-forwards through the video until the feed returns, "and

then it comes back up as if nothing happened at all, and as you can see-"

"Frances is gone," Kate finishes for him, impressed. "Osgood said she wasn't found on campus or as part of the Retcon distribution."

Christofer nods, "correct." He pauses, "so that then begs the question, how did she get away unnoticed?"

Kate continues to watch the video, glad when he instinctively rewinds it back, letting it play though, "maybe she didn't. Maybe she hid instead." She offers, smiling to herself before exhaling a soft huff of amusement, "if she escaped, you would have seen her, but you didn't, and I doubt the soldiers checked anything that wasn't immediately apparent."

Beginning to shake his head negatively, Christofer speaks again, "we checked rooms, closets, stairwells…

"What about the ceiling?" Kate asks after a moment, "this Uni has drop ceilings. She could have climbed into the ceiling…and waited until everyone vacated the building."

"Roughly six hours?" Chris furrows his brow, "maybe more?"

Kate shrugs the opposite shoulder than is leaning against him, "the Lethbridge-Stewarts can be patient when we need to be."

Christofer slowly turns his head to look down at her, leaning against his arm. He feels a playful nudge from her.

"One word out of you and you're sleeping on the sofa." Kate warns with a cheeky half-smile in the corner of her mouth.

"You love me too much to make good on that promise." Christofer beams, hearing another laugh leave her lips before leaning his face down to capture her in a tender kiss.

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