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XXXVI - Resolution "Wulf 1.01"

Kalen felt strange. He had to admit to himself that part of his reason for wanting to go back to school had been that he wanted to go back before everyone forgot about the football game in Ohio, but now that he was there, it was clear that the game was far less important to most of the kids than what he had done on the way home.

In his own mind, there was no comparison. The game had been fun and it was a wonderful win, but it didn't compare to Nadia being safe and sound. However, he hadn't expected the majority of kids at UHS to feel the same way. But clearly they did.

It had been obvious from the moment he'd been dropped off outside the school entrance by Yohni. As he'd picked up his school-bag and turned around, he had noticed that everyone had looked at him in a new way. More than one fur bowed his or her head when he walked past. He wanted to stop and tell them not to. It felt like hero-worship in a way he really wasn't comfortable with. As he walked through the front doors and into the school building itself, this only continued. The normal chatter died down when he walked past some group or other. Everyone looked at him.

For a moment, he considered breaking into a run and hiding in a classroom. But that would be silly too, and besides, he had *wanted* to go back to school. He just hadn't expected this kind of blank reverence. He'd taken a bullet to save a friend's life. What was

so extraordinary about that? Wouldn't anyone have done so, if they could? Hadn't anyone considered that he might have been a split second too late and the bullet could have missed him?

That it could have killed him, just as easily?

He was about to stop and tell someone to stop looking at him like he was the Messiah reborn, when a short, broad-shouldered canid came around the corner, wagging his tail rapidly.

Kalen instantly felt like groaning. He recognized the newcomer. He ran the school radio, and Kalen knew already what this was about.

"Mr. Kalen...Mr. Kalen!!" the boxer called out, waving his arms around as if he needed to catch the equine's attention.

Kalen stopped and chuckled. "I'm right here. But please...drop the Mister, will you? You make me sound like I'm forty years old and wearing a suit."

The boxer looked so excited he was about to pass out. "Please...would you come to the radio booth during lunch break today? I think everyone wants to hear what you have to say. Please?"

Frankly, Kalen felt weirder by the moment. This kind of idolization was highly uncomfortable. Perhaps if he'd been back in school earlier it wouldn't have happened. Or maybe it would have been even worse. At least this wasn't what he had expected. He had expected some pats on the back and some comments along the lines of "hey, great job!" but nothing like this.

"Yeah, sure...on one condition. Stop treating me like I'm some kind of super celebrity..." he said.

The boxer flushed instantly but nodded. "Sorry...sorry, it's just that you won that game fo..."

"No! I didn't," Kalen broke in, immediately. "I did not win that game for the school. The whole team won that game. Dammit...yes, I'll be there at the radio booth during lunch break if for no other reason than to make sure that gets said loud and clear. I don't want the credit for a victory the whole team won. It's rude to my teammates."

Then he continued on. The boxer looked stricken for a brief moment, then it seemed as if Kalen's words sank home and he nodded slowly before heading off in the opposite

direction. A few other kids had overheard the conversation and they too seemed to be snapped out of some kind of rapture.

"Thanks, Kale," a voice said behind him, "It was getting unbearable."

Kalen turned around and saw the backup-quarterback and team place-kicker, Pablo, approach him, books in paw. The equine nodded to his teammate and smiled crookedly.

"Don't mention it. I mean, come on...you actually played my position and got the team some points when I got pummeled. You'd think that guy hadn't actually watched the game to overlook something like that."

Pablo nodded back. "You'd think so, but a few of the other guys on the team told me that even their girlfriends can't stop yacking on about you. It's going to create a really bad atmosphere if it goes on. I can't tell you how glad I am that you're going to tell everyone."

"As if there was ever any doubt!"

"There wasn't. We all know you, Kale. We all heard you in the locker-room and on the field, when you said it was all about the team and not about the individual. You asked if we trusted you. We did, and we still do. But I gotta admit I'm glad you're back in school so you can put a stop to this."

Kalen chuckled and looked around. "You know, I wondered...what would have happened if I'd come back to school immediately, wounded and all. Instead of staying home to heal up."

Pablo shrugged. "I think that's actually part of it. If you'd been there it would never have started. But the fact that you first made that spectacular call to win the game, and then actually saved someone's life by risking your own...c'mon, we're teenagers Kale."

"I see what you mean. Idolization is in the blood."

"Exactly. I shit you not, if you hadn't been back by week's end, they'd have collected earrings and necklaces to make a Golden Kalen to dance around."

Laughing out loud, the equine could just imagine the image. "Oh yeah? I'd have to come down from the mountain with the National Cup and smash the statue, wouldn't I?"

Pablo smirked. "Getting high thoughts about yourself after all, are ya?"

"Nahh...I'm not a Messiah. Just a Moses. Big difference!" Kalen snickered, shaking his head and putting his arms akimbo. "Good God, I didn't think kids at this school would do something like that."

Pablo smiled. "Anyway, I gotta get to class, but I look forward to lunch break already. By the way, you really do need to get a hold of Steve. He's had a Hell of a time since school started again. Most of the kids are still terrified of him," he said and waved as he headed off.

Kalen waved back at him and then looked down himself. He was wearing a plain white T-shirt and a pair of black jeans. He suddenly had an idea and he grinned wickedly, heading off towards the teachers' hallway. He'd find Steve afterwards.

###

Esteban hung up and sat back in his chair. He was at work, but most of today's filming was done by second and third units and would mostly be used in effects shots, so he had time to answer a phonecall. This particular one he had wanted to answer. It had been Fox at the other end of the line, telling him that the law-suit had now been filed. Furthermore, the police was looking into whether similar mistakes had been made by the laboratory in the past.

Most importantly, though, Fox and Miriam had decided not to ask for a multi-million dollar compensation from the laboratory, even though their lawyer had immediately started talking about how this could ensure that they'd be set up for life. Esteban admittedly had asked what the reasoning behind their choice had been, but he liked the answer he'd received.

Fox and Miriam both wanted to make the case public. They were taking it to the press and there was plenty of interest already. Hence, they wanted public support, and saying 'money isn't important, we just want that place closed down to prevent them from harming others in the future' and then asking for a compensation that would cover their legal fees was a good way of ensuring that. When other furs heard of the case, many would automatically say 'they are just doing that for the money' or even question the truth of whether there really was a Rhesus-discrepancy between them, but as soon as money was taken out of the picture, that kind of argument would fall flat on its tail immediately.

That, at least, was what Fox had said they hoped for.

Esteban had warned him that no matter what they did, there would be detractors and those who would look down on them for taking it to court. There always would be, no matter how reasonable and just the case was. There would always be furs who would claim that Fox and Miriam were out to make a fast buck somehow, even if they openly said they didn't want financial compensation.

The maned wolf got up and left his trailer, heading across the lot. It was always a bit weird when filming was going on. Furs in T-shirts and baseball caps were hanging out with other furs in period costumes, while gaffers carried gear past them...

Smiling slightly, Esteban turned to head towards the main set. His first shot was three hours away, but he might as well get started on setting everything up. He had nothing better to do with his time at the moment anyway.

###

Steve caught up with Kalen during the first recess. He'd started explaining how things were going since he returned to school but Kalen had gently responded that he already knew and that he was going to do everything he could to make the truth clear to everyone. The wolf was relieved by that. The situation at home was getting increasingly tense, and he really needed a break.

He had explained that to Kalen as well. The equine had looked thoughtful and asked what he was going to do, and Steve had dutifully explained how he would get a hold of Mr. Leon within the next few days if things didn't start improving at home. Kalen had asked him to give things one week, and Steve had agreed to this.

By now, time was just crawling along. Steve was suffering through a geometry lesson that quite simply did nothing for him. Mathematics had never been his thing, but he had to do well on this class as well as any other he took. Coach Larsen's rule about keeping a B-average all year in all classes meant he really had to pay attention, and he did. It was just boring. He understood the concept of geometry and he was pretty sure he could keep his grade at a B all year. He answered a question and was rewarded with a nod, so apparently he got the Law of Cosines down to pat. Any question answered right was one step closer to his goal, as far as he saw it. He really had to look at it that way to keep his interest from completely failing. At least it'd be time for lunch once this class was over. Today's menu said chicken and rice. Steve's tail started wagging at the mere thought of it and he had to stop himself. It was terribly unwolfish to react like that...but chicken and rice...

Yummm...

His stomach growled loudly at the mere thought. He hadn't eaten any breakfast before leaving home. He couldn't stand the thought of sitting down with his mother for a meal. They always started arguing, and the way he saw it, that wouldn't stop unless she gave him an apology and stopped treating him like a walking rules-violation waiting to happen. The problem, by his reckoning, was that his mother expected him to make an apology to her. He wasn't even sure what for. He had long since apologized for all the trouble he had caused. Both to her and those he had been mean to. What more did she want him to apologize for?

The teacher asked another question and he put up his paw to answer. He might as well, since he knew the answer and it'd make a good impression.

He didn't get to answer before the bell rang. The kids were halfway out the door before the teacher managed to explain what homework they had to do. Steve did hear. He noted it down and got up to leave. He couldn't afford not doing his homework and blaming it on 'not hearing about it'.

"I must say, Mr. Wulf...your new work-ethic suits you," the teacher said.

Steve smiled back and shrugged. "Thank you. I just figured it was just about my last chance to do something with my life other than being a creep," he said, before heading out.

Once in the hallway, his smile immediately vanished as the other kids shrank away from him. It was what happened every time he got close to them.

The in-house radio came on. The excited voice of the lunch-break host started yapping about something. Steve didn't really pay much attention as he hurried towards the lunch hall. Maybe he could find Kalen or the twins there and not feel like such an outcast. Maybe even one of the other football players. Pablo didn't treat him badly either.

"Hey...Big Guy. You look like you're in a hurry!" Charles called out as he approached.

Steve stopped and smiled. "Yeah...I can hear that chicken shouting out to me, saying 'Eat me, Steve!'. How about you?"

"A bird saying 'Eat me'? Jeez, you and my sister are both growing dirty minds after that road trip..." Charles commented, dryly, with a crooked smile.

Steve looked nonplussed for a moment, before mock slapping his friend over the back of the head. "Har har bloody har!" he said, chuckling. "I wasn't the one to point it out. I'm merely talking about lunch."

Charles snickered and shrugged. "Anyway, what's up with the long face?"

"Just the usual. Where's Kalen, d'you know?"

"Yeah, we should be hearing him any moment now."

Steve looked confused again, before Charles pointed to one of the hallway loudspeakers.

Nodding, the wolf understood. Kalen hadn't mentioned it when they'd bumped into one another, but it made sense that he would be asked to come to the radio-booth to give an interview since it was his first day back at school. No doubt, everyone was eagerly awaiting his victory-speech. A smile spread on Steve's face. Kalen would be able to set everyone straight if *anyone* could.

"...the moment you've all been waiting for...the hero of UHS..." the radio-fur said, excitedly.

"Stop that, or I'm walking out of this booth," Kalen's annoyed voice chimed in. "I told you already. I'm no more a hero than everyone else on that team."

There was a brief, embarrassed pause before the interviewer regained his composure and continued. "Well...it's not just about the football match, though. Everyone has been told about the shooting, too...and how y..."

There was a sound of a chair being pushed back. The microphone was muffled and Steve couldn't help smirking as he imagined the scene in the radio-booth. Ten seconds later, the microphone was turned back on and Kalen's voice was heard, loud and clear...

The equine sounded rather annoyed and quite tired.

"Listen, before we continue this interview, there's something I need to tell everyone. I'm not a hero. I took a bullet for a friend, but I was scared to death all along. The real hero is Steve Wulf, who *stopped* the shooter. I didn't. If Steve hadn't charged the jerk with the gun, he'd just have shot everyone else. Steve's the hero...not me. I'd appreciate it if everyone got that fact straight right away. Give him the credit he deserves. He charged a trained, homicidal fur holding a pawgun big enough to scare the living daylights out of any action-movie hero, and he saved not only my life by doing so, but the lives of both his girlfriend...*my* girlfriend...and Charlie and Frankie Lopez. Everyone keeps telling me that I'm a hero for saving a fur's life. What does that make Steve? He saved *five*! And that's not even counting himself."

Steve felt his shoulders sag. It really felt like someone took a massive, overwhelming weight off his back. He had never doubted that Kalen would speak up for him, but no sane fur could look at him as a bully after this. He knew that.

"Erhm...I guess no one thought of it that way..." the interviewer said, rather meekly.

"I know," Kalen replied, somewhat less annoyed now. "And I'm sure Steve would be the first fur to admit that he's given a lot of kids reason to be afraid of him, but he's asking for a second chance. And I'll vouch for him to *anyone*. And if my word isn't enough for someone, please keep in mind that Coach Larsen believes in him too and I don't think there's a single kid at this school who would want to argue the point with her. Steve's my friend...and I'm glad that he is. Please, stop treating him like an outcast, alright?"

"That's...very hard to argue against," the interviewer said, sounding like he was giving this some very serious thought. "But...let's take this from the top. The football game..."

"Alright. Let's start with that then," Kalen answered.

As Steve listened to the rest of the interview, he headed towards the lunch hall. He walked with his back straight and at least some of the other kids looked at him differently. Charles, walking beside him, was grinning widely.

###

It was nearly half past five when the twins made it home. They'd been hanging out with their friends after school, and they didn't have much homework to do before the next day. Nonetheless, they'd called their mother to tell her they wouldn't be home before then, just so she wouldn't get needlessly worried.

When they opened the door, they were instantly greeted by music playing from the living room. Loud music. Frances rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"MOOM, we're HOOOME!" Charles called out,

"Yeah, WOULD YOU MIND TURNING DOWN THE NOISE?" his sister joined in. She did not share her parents' taste in music.

The music was turned down after another ten seconds or so. Then Jean stuck her head out of the living room, perking up her ears at the sight of her children.

"Hey, you're home. Good. Anyway, what have I told you about Rammstein, Frances?" she asked, smiling crookedly.

Frances put her school-bag down and pushed off her shoes with a groan. "That they're the best thing to come out of Europe for fifty years yadda yadda yadda. It's industrialized German noise if you ask me, Mom!"

"Well, I'm *not* asking," Jean chuckled. "Anyway, how was your day?"

Charles put down his bag too. He reached down to undo his shoelaces looking sideways at his sister. "Well, from Frankie's reaction I'd say she's had a really bad day, but mine was great. Kalen finally put a stop to everyone treating Steve like a leper."

Jean nodded, urging Charles to continue as she came fully into the room. Frances quickly headed into the living room turning the music off completely before returning.

Charles shrugged. "Well, he did an interview on the school radio and he pretty much told everyone off for how they'd treated Steve. 'Said that if everyone considered *him* a hero for saving *one* fur, he'd like them all to think about what that made Steve who had saved five."

"And what does that make you two?" Jean asked, raising an eyebrow. "Frances who literally had her paws pressing down on the wound itself for lack of a tourniquet and you who called the hospital while everyone else panicked?"

Frances shook her head. "I really don't want accolades for it, Mom. I just want my friends alive and well. Kalen is just the same. He doesn't want to be treated like some kind of icon. Especially not while Steve gets the Frankenstein's Monster-treatment from everyone at school."

Jean pondered that a moment, then nodded. "Well, you'll always be heroes in my book," she said at last, in a tone of voice that told the twins their mother had *spoken...full stop*. None of them protested either. "Anyway, I take it this means Steve's finally going to be able to go back to a normal life?"

"I wish..." Frances said and sighed sadly, "his mother is still giving him the worst time. He's talking about finding a place of his own...calling Nadia's dad and asking him for help."

Charles shook his head. "He's doing more than talking about it, Frankie. He's decided..."

Jean looked between her children with a thoughtful facial expression. Then she nodded. "And you're both sure it's not him over reacting?" she asked. "He really feels it's necessary to move away from home at the age of sixteen?"

"Mom..."

"Jeez Mom, give him a..."

Jean cut them both off with a paw gesture. "Don't defend him. I'm not attacking him. Just tell me your honest opinion. Is this a matter of a frustrated teenager or does he really need to move?"

Frances sagged a little as she started heading towards the living room. She looked at her mother and twin brother as if waiting for them to follow her. "This isn't a knee-jerk reaction, Mom," she said as they all started moving. "He keeps saying he'd really love to be able to sit down and just have breakfast with his mother, without it ending up with her blaming him for something."

"Yeah. He gave us some examples. He'd try to tell her that he had started reading again...and her reaction had been that if he hadn't turned into such a rotten bully he'd never have stopped in the first place," Charles chimed in. "He is getting pretty desperate about it. He feels she's trying to hold him to being a bully when he could use her support in getting out of it. He needs support to make the B-average all year so he can stay on the team. If he gets kicked off the team, he gets kicked out of school. I swear, Mr. Diazi is just salivating at the prospect of expelling him."

Jean nodded, slowly. "It's very important that he gets that support and that he manages to stay in school, I agree. She just keeps blaming him? I can't say I'm too surprised. The few times I've met her, she seems like the type of fur who constantly tries to run away from any kind of responsibility. Everything is always someone else's fault. I was very much like her once...long ago."

She looked very contemplative and her children didn't know what to say to that, so they just looked at each other and stayed quiet. The frown on Jean's face grew deeper and deeper as she sat down, crossing her knees and chewing on the back of a knuckle.

The situation made a lot more sense to her now. She had hoped Steve's mother would turn out to be supportive of her son once he came home, but she wasn't exactly surprised that the opposite was the case. It was easier to run from any kind of responsibility than admit to it, and it was harder to change ones colors than to maintain the status quo. Yes...she knew precisely what this was all about, and she was sorry on Steve's behalf. Way back, when she and Gabrielle had moved into the apartment in Columbus, she had been much the same. If anything went wrong, it was not her fault. No matter how much it really *was* her fault, she would never admit to it. Gabrielle had, fortunately, understood

that there was no point in arguing the issue, and she usually put problems down to 'misunderstandings' or 'accidents'.

She had been such a mess back then. It was hard to think of those years, nowadays. It was as if she had lived a different fur's life. She could observe what she had done then, almost from the outside, and it was rarely very pleasant. She'd cringe at the memory of things she had done or said, many years before. Things she knew, logically, she could not be held accountable for now. Things she had said or done while under such tremendous emotional strain that she had, probably, been mentally ill. It was something she had come to an understanding of only these last few years.

Her physical condition had often been misunderstood by furs who thought they knew better. They thought her problem was strictly mental, not physical. But the truth was that her birth-defect had caused her so much emotional stress and so many problems socially that she had ended up cracking. The mental problems she had back then were a result of the physical defect...not the cause thereof.

Steve's mother clearly did not have the same problem to contend with, but she still exhibited the same kind of behavior as Jean remembered herself displaying. A complete lack of willingness to accept blame or fault. A tendency to think that the entire world blamed everything on her, rather than an understanding that everyone makes mistakes, and that what defined a fur was not the mistakes he or she made, but how he or she corrected them.

"Mom...?" Frances asked, a little worried. "What's wrong?"

Jean snapped out of her thoughts. She looked at her knuckle and sighed. She'd nearly chewed through the skin.

"Nothing, just a stroll down an unpleasant side street to Memory Lane is all," she said, wearily. "I need to make a phonecall."

She held out her paw to her kids as if expecting one of them to give her their cell-phone. Charles did, and Jean dialed a number, waiting for the connection to take.

"Hi Love..." she said once the line was established, "Yeah, I know you're still at work. Listen...Esteban...you know that workshop you wanted to make in the extra room in the basement? Yeah, the one you've spoken of for five years and never gotten around to making. I'm officially declaring it dead. We need the room for a far more important purpose. Steve Wulf will be moving in with us as soon as that room is ready for him."

Charles and Frances boggled. They stared at their mother as if she'd just told them they had won the lottery. Jean didn't take notice. She was listening to Esteban's response with a deeply serious look on her face.

"It's pretty simple, Love. If he doesn't get away from home, he won't stand a chance of keeping his grade average at B. His mother is giving him such a hard time that he's decided on moving out on his own, with Leo's help. But he's sixteen. He's not ready for it. It'll be months before he's even managed to really find himself after five years of being the Uber-Bully of UHS. He has to have a place where he'll get support and a stable, steady atmosphere. Yes...exactly. Precisely. Good...I'm glad we agree on this then. I'll get the kids working on cleaning out the basement then. They can tell Steve the good news tomorrow at school. Okay, I'll let you get back to work then. See you soon, Love."

She hung up and looked at her children. They were still staring at her, slack jawed.

"What are you two still standing here for?" she asked, good-naturedly. "There's a room in the basement that needs cleaning out!"

###

Leo had promised himself that he would change the pace at the office, and he was sticking to it. The atmosphere was more relaxed and frankly he felt more comfortable going to work than he had for a long time. He hated being the kind of fur who had to check all his employees' every move, and it felt fantastic to delegate some responsibility and then allow the furs in question to get on with their jobs without constantly looking over their shoulders.

He had received some very nervous calls from major shareholders, but he had managed to get them all to relax by explaining to them why he was doing what he was doing. In any case, between him and his mother, the majority of the stocks were in family paws.

The new strategy was already paying dividends anyway. Not only in business terms, but privately as well. Michael Cervus was back to work. His mother...Major Cervus' widow...had called to thank Leo once again for having been present at the funeral and for the speech he had made at the wake. Leo had time to sit there and talk to her for over an hour on the phone, without feeling that he had any kind of pressing meetings he had to go to. He could suddenly *make* the time he needed.

He had started painting again. He was awfully rusty and he needed to pick up his easel a number of times yet, to practice, before he'd be back to his old form. Maybe he'd never be that good again. He didn't know and he didn't care. He painted for his own sake.

Yesterday, he had taken Nadia on a fishing trip.

It was probably the happiest time he could remember experiencing in years, and there were many good and happy moments to compare it to. They hadn't caught much, but Nadia had one upped him by pulling in a trout that at least fed the family that evening. She'd been immensely proud and felt that she had contributed in some way...and Leo understood her well. The food she had brought to the table herself, by her own work, was always better, sweeter and more succulent than anything bought from a shop. There was probably some primal lion instincts in that, somewhere, and even though his daughter was only part lion, she certainly seemed to display that trait across the dinner table.

He had time to spend with Lizzy as well. He'd take her out for a nice dinner one of the next few days, just the two of them. He'd let Nadia invite over some classmates, and they could order pizza from an Italian take-away, and then they could watch movies and chatter away as schoolgirls did until the wee hours of the morning. Everyone would win that way.

It had felt like someone had given him an hourglass, ominously telling him that if he kept up his life as it had been, he'd watch time slip down through it. It'd be rapid and unstoppable and he'd be old and dying before he understood where his life had gone. He'd watch his family from behind the distance of a vast, mahogany desk, growing ever more distant as mountains of paper divided them and him. He'd claim to love them and that everything he did, he did for them, but he would be unable to relate to them and in reality, they would be more of a nuisance than a source of happiness.

Before he knew it, he'd be Scrooge McLeon...

Or he could turn over the hourglass and watch time flow through it at a different pace. One where he had more control. He might even get a few extra years since his blood pressure wouldn't be astronomically high at all times. The mountains of paper and the 'Ocean of the Mahogany Desk' wouldn't be there. Instead there'd be fishing trips and intimate dinners with his wife. There'd be a lot of work, obviously...he wasn't giving himself a life-long vacation after all. But he would have a lot more control over his time. There would still be days where he'd come home very tired and late at night but not as many as there used to be. And he wouldn't have to worry about keeping up with absolutely everything that went on anymore.

Particularly that. How his father had managed to do that was a mystery to Leo.

Maybe he too had felt privately stymied, but never found a way to deal with it? Maybe his life had been exactly the way he wanted it to be.

Maybe.

What mattered to Leo was that he was no longer trying to live his father's life.

He'd have to somehow paint that hourglass-scene once he got his painting skills back to their old standards. An ominous, stormy background and Death holding out the hourglass for him to take. It'd be grizzly, but it was something he finally understood the seriousness of.

He looked up from his thoughts and smiled. Instead of finding himself at the office, working late with loads of decisions still to be made, he was home. In the background, Beethoven's ninth symphony was playing quietly from the stereo. The book he had been reading had fallen to his lap during his long moment of introspection. Lizzy was snoozing gently against him, her head on his shoulder. He put the book aside and slipped an arm around her, kissing her hair.

How he had missed moments like these.

###

"This is a brutal mess, awright..."

The speaker was an almost impossibly tall hound, wearing an orange vest and a hard-hat. Across the road a couple of ambulance-furs were trying to quite literally make heads or tails of a horrible scene of carnage.

"What happened?" a police-fur asked, looking like he was about to throw up from the amount of blood on the road.

"Well mah boys an' Ah were a'workin' o'er there by'em oaks, Officer..." the hound said, pointing towards a clump of trees.

The policefur nodded rapidly, looking like he really wanted this to be over with. "I know. You're not being charged with complicity or anything. Just...did you see anything at all?"

"Yer...we were a'workin' an' then we saw tha' motorcycle...big'un too. Liked the sound o'the engine...pity tha'...pity. Anyway, driver was headin' thataway...an' from the other side came this car with the top down an' a bunch o'drunk kids innit."

"How did you reckon they were drunk?"

"They were tossin' beer cans outta the car!"

The police officer nodded. There was no point in denying it anyway. The whole car stank of beer...and blood. Lots of blood. He shuddered.

"And they collided?"

"S'right. Wasn't tha' biker's fault, neither, Sah. Tried to avoid the crash, real hard. Looked to us o'er here as if them kids inna car *tried* to ram tha' biker. Stupid, drunk shits..."

The officer looked behind him and sighed. None of the kids in the car had worn their safety belts. One had been hurled directly out of the car. It was a convertible and the top had been down. He'd rolled over 30 yards along the road at high speeds. Every bone in his spine and neck had shattered. Dead as a doornail almost immediately. The two kids remaining in the car had taken motorcycle wreckage in the face...

At least he presumed those masses of desiccated, bloody lumps had once been their faces.

The biker was dead from impact as well.

Sighing, he shook his head and looked back to the working fur in front of him.

"Alright...I guess that's all I need then."

The hound nodded and took his hard-hat off, scratching his sparse hair. "Bloody brutal mess, awright," he muttered and picked up his shovel to go back to work.