Aros ac Gobeithio (Wait and Hope)

by celedan

Summary

This is my version of Alexandre Dumas' "The Count of Monte Christo": For fourteen years, Jack had to endure in prison although he was innocent. Now, he finally managed to escape, and with the help of a treasure, he wants to take revenge on his former friends who condemned him to prison. Disguised as the wealthy Count of Monte Christo, he returns to London where he meets all of his enemies again. But also the love of his life, Ianto Jones. Can there be a second chance for the two lovers?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

The sea was wild and stormy, the water icy cold. A man suddenly broke through the surface, desperately gulping in this first, precious breath after being under water for a time, buried under several metres of high waves as if the sea wanted to claim him for herself by pulling him under water over and over. It was like a resurrection, a dead man breaking through the tides of the river Styx into a new life. And for him, it was.

His limbs were stiff from the cold, his lungs burning with the strain, but he stubbornly carried on because the alternative was to drown. So he carried on swimming. He didn’t have a goal for now; he only wanted to leave behind the island looming forbiddingly behind him, and reach the salving shore his burning eyes could make out in the distance. After swimming for a few more minutes, the rocky island becoming smaller and smaller, he slowed down, relaxing slightly when he deemed himself out of immediate danger. The guards wouldn’t look out so far over the sea, they had to make sure that the prisoners stayed in, not the other way round. And he hoped it would still take some time before they noticed his escape. So for now, he took the time to estimate how far he still had to swim, and having been an able sailor in another life, he orientated himself incredibly fast being cast around in the stormy spray.

It was a long way, but he didn't have a choice.

He moved with a certain hurry now for though his limbs were tired, and his lungs were burning as were his eyes, he couldn't risk slowing down. He couldn't risk the cold paralysing him so that he sank to the ground of the sea into his eternal, wet grave after all.

Suddenly, a ship appeared nearby, and a spark of hope revived him, but then he hesitated. What if the ship was on its way to the prison? He would rather let himself sink down into the dark sea than go back there.

But they had already seen him, the ship steered through the stormy waves in his direction since he couldn't hide in the open water.

Within a few minutes, the rather small ship loomed above him. A rope ladder was thrown down to him which he grasped with weak and cold-stiffened fingers. He felt as if he weighed a hundred tons as he heaved himself up.

Hands grabbed for him, and hauled him on deck where he lay coughing up water for a few minutes while the crew of the ship surrounded him curiously. A kind soul put a rough blanket around his shoulders. He cowered on the wet planks, shivering from the cold, and gasping from physical exercise he hadn’t had in years. He hadn't felt the cold for years as well, but now that he was free, it returned to his bones, streaming through his blood like a cruel wake-up call. He felt the probing, curious gazes of the crew on him, and he looked up at them. “What year?” he gasped, and they all looked at each other in surprise. After all, he had stopped counting the days after only a few years of imprisonment.

A skinny, rather small man stepped forward, a permanent, natural sneer on his pale face. “1829,” he answered, crossing his arms before his chest expectantly. “You swallowed way too much water, eh, mate?”

He hadn’t thought it possible, but his body became even colder, dreadful horror seizing his whole being when he heard that fourteen years of his life had been stolen from him. He was glad that he already sat on the deck because his suddenly weak knees surely wouldn't have born his weight at this
moment.

He must have become even paler than he already was because the man who had spoken, obviously the captain of the ship, frowned, and he even recognised something like concern in his forbidding mien. So, he took a deep breath, and tried to compose himself quickly, throwing the man a reassuring smile which seemed to appease the captain again.

“The name’s Owen Harper,” the man stated then when he saw that his guest seemed to feel better. “And I’m captain of this humble ship. Pray tell, what’s your name, Sir?”

He ignored the slightly mocking tone. Instead, he raised himself up to his full height despite sitting down, and proudly answered, “Jack Harkness”, remembering what his name had been all those years ago, before he had simply become prisoner number 34. “At your service, captain Harper.”

Harper nodded. “I have to say I’m curious, Mr. Harkness. Were you shipwrecked? Or were you robbed by pirates who then dropped you into the sea to drown like a rat?”

Jack looked at the man contemplatively, considering if he should tell him the truth or not. After all, being much too trusting had robbed him of his life... So, they either could take him back to Castell o Ywen, or they’d take him in. They were clearly smugglers, but that all the more raised the question if they would show mercy, or if they would let themselves be led by their greed. He built on their own fear of the fate that may await a smuggler if they set foot onto a prison island.

But before Jack could say a word, surprisingly, a woman stepped forward. Her massy, dirty-blond locks whipped in the wind so that she had to brush it behind her ears constantly, and her light eyes scrutinised him with some amusement. He held her piercing gaze bravely.

“He escaped from the island,” she boldly stated without blinking even once.

Harper raised an eyebrow, but took her words for granted. “Interesting,” he murmured, and nodded since this seemed the most logical explanation for the sudden appearance of a painfully thin man with long hair and beard, and only clothed in rags.

Jack felt ice-cold fear wash over him anew at her words, suddenly not sure of anything any more. He suddenly wished he could have escaped their rescue to try his luck at swimming to the shore.

“Please,” he begged. “I'll do anything, but please don't take me back there. I'm an apt sailor; I could work for you!”

Harper didn't bat an eye, simply continued to scrutinise him. “That's why you asked after the year. You really didn't know.”

“Yes,” he admitted because in his situation, Jack had finally come to the conclusion that it would be better to be truthful after all now that his secret had come out.

“How long have you been there?”

“I was sent to prison on February 28th 1815,” he replied readily, his voice sounding far more steady than he felt.

A slight twitch of the muscles in his jaw was the only sign that betrayed how surprised Harper was by this admission. While under his men, compassionate mumbling swelled around them; they probably thanked the Lord that they hadn't been in Jack's stead.

“Ywen is a place reserved for traitors to the crown,” the woman remarked with a curiously raised eyebrow. “What have you done?”
Jack raised his chin highly in defiance. “My only crime was being young and naïve, trusting in those who were envious of me, but in my youth, I wouldn't believe that people I knew and trusted would wish me any harm.”

“That's no reason to send someone to Ywen,” the woman pressed.

“No,” Jack agreed, and looked at Harper again. “But if it's all the same to you, I would like to speak of such matters in private, captain.”

He and Harper stared at each other for long moments, then Harper nodded. “Follow me.”

Two of the men helped him to his feet, and with stumbling, unsteady steps, he followed the captain into his cabin, clutching the blanket tightly around his shoulders. He wasn't really surprised when the woman accompanied them as well as a young black man from the crew.

“Sit down, Mr. Harkness.” Harper indicated an old chair, and Jack gratefully sank into it. Even more grateful, he accepted the cup of hot tea the black man handed him. He didn't know how he had procured such a thing so fast, hadn't expected to find himself on a smugglers ship where they drank tea, but he frankly didn't care. Groaning, he let the rather weak tea slide down his throat, almost scalding him. It was the most heavenly brew he'd ever drunken.

After he'd warmed up a bit, Harper took up their conversation again. “This is my first mate. River Song.” He nodded at the woman. “And Mickey Smith, my helmsman. And now, Mr. Harkness, I believe you owe us a story.”

Sighing, putting his fate once more into the hands of others, Jack began to speak, “I was first mate on a trading ship from Cardiff. When my captain died on our last trip, I only fulfilled the wishes of a dying man.”

“Let me guess,” Smith interjected, “you'd have done better ignoring it.”

Jack pressed his lips together. “Yes,” he finally admitted. “He send me to Caldey Island to accept a letter from general Bertrand.”

Harper snorted, beating Song to her own noise of disbelief. “That was stupid.”

“I know. But I didn't think anything of it. I believed it was the right thing to do because I fulfilled my captain's last wish. The content of the letter wasn't my concern.”

“What happened then?” Smith asked.

“I was supposed to take it to London to a certain man. The next day, I was arrested for being a Bonapartist agent. Someone had sent a letter of denunciation to the prosecutor's office.”

Harper whistled through his teeth. “That's harsh. You know who send the letter?”

Jack looked up right into Harper's eyes, his gaze glittering with cold hatred. “Yes. And I want revenge on those who destroyed my life. And if you pledge yourself to my cause, I will reward you for it.”

Harper snorted, but didn't break eye contact to Jack. “With which money? You said yourself that you were just first mate, and now, you're even less.”

“Let that be my concern,” Jack dismissed Harper's argument. “But are you with me? I could use some good men – and woman,” he amended to Song who returned his gaze amusedly.
“What makes you think we are good people?” Harper raised a challenging eyebrow. “You trusted those other people once as well.”

“I learned my lesson,” Jack gritted out. “But I've become a good judge of character. Had you wanted to hand me over to the authorities, you would have given word to Ywen by now. But you don't dare for fear of ending up there yourself. And had you wanted to get rid of me, you could have already thrown me back into the sea. So, I think you aren't a bad man, captain Harper. But if you don't want to help me, that's fine, I only would ask you to take me to a destination of my choosing then. Until we're there, I can work here on board. I may have been in prison, but I bet seafaring hasn't changed much in the last fourteen years.”

A small, amused smirk played around Harper's lips, and he looked to his companions. “I have to admit, Mr. Harkness, I'm intrigued by you. You show a certain amount of risky behaviour. I don't know if it is bravery or stupidity, driven by your need for revenge that makes you trust us with your story, but I like that in you.” Harper's smirk became quite smug. “And yes, you are right in your assessment. We may be criminals, but we have honour. So, what do you say to coming with us for a while? You can recover, find your way back into the world of the living, and in the meantime, we may get to know each other a little better. Say, in one month's time, we'll meet here again, and you may ask me, and everyone you deem trustworthy and useful for your cause again for our services.” He held his hand out to Jack who, without breaking eye contact to Harper, grasped it, and firmly shook it.

“Deal.”
And so, Jack came to be a sailor once more. At first, his body was uncooperative, even sometimes clumsy, but he regained his strength quickly, and his body remembered all the work that was part of a life on board a ship.

While he worked with Harper's men, he got to know them quite well. He reckoned who may be a suitable ally for his cause, who would be prepared to leave his old life behind, who would be trustworthy, who would be prepared to leave their families – if they had any – for longer periods of time to travel to faraway destinations if need be. Those of the small crew who showed interest in becoming more honourable men in favour of a better payment, he told a little of his story. Only nuggets of information to get them interested, and to keep their interest. And since he was a formidable sailor and a likeable fellow once he turned up his rusty charm again, the men came to love him. In only a few days time, it was as if he had sailed with them for years already.

At the end of the month sailing around with Harper's crew doing quite a bit of smuggling (his old self would have been horrified at the prospect), he'd chosen two men. Additionally to Harper, Song, and Smith if they were willing. So, one evening, they all met in Harper's cabin, and he again asked if they were prepared to join his cause. One of the men declined in the end, but the other, a young lad named Alonso Frame (who reminded him painfully of another dark-haired young man he'd once known), agreed. So did Harper, Song, and Smith (Jack had got the impression that it would only be all three of them or none, and frankly, he was surprised that they really agreed to come with him, and give up their ship).

Nodding grimly, he asked them to take the rest of the crew home first so that it would only be them five (it was the end of a long tour for them anyway, so they were supposed to be on shore leave for a while), then to sail to a certain island at the Welsh coast.

“Monte Christo?!” Mickey exclaimed in disbelief after Jack had revealed their destiny. “There's only rocks. Quite dangerous for a ship actually.”

Jack raised one eyebrow mockingly. “Don't tell me you of all people surrender to some rocky coast?”

Mickey bit his lip. “No. Of course not. But what do you hope to find there?”

Jack sighed, and looked out on to the calm sea. “I'll tell you when I've found it.”

Because, to be truthful, until he hadn't seen the treasure with his own two eyes, he wouldn't fully believe in it's existence. He trusted the Doctor, the man had saved his life and his sanity, but nonetheless, he had been an old man, and quite mad sometimes...

*Jack still stared in disbelief at the old man sitting before him, then to the small hole in the thick stone wall the man had suddenly appeared through just a few minutes ago.*

*The man stuck out his lower lip in a pout like a stroppy child. “I still don't understand how I could have calculated wrong. My calculations were correct, I should have broken through the outer wall.”*
Jack snorted shakily, life slowly returning to his shocked frame. “Obviously not.”

“Seems so,” the old man grumbled. But then, a cheery smile stretched his gaunt features. “Oh well, doesn’t matter, does it. I’ll take the right turn the next time.” And with that, he turned around, preparing to crawl through the small whole again.

“Wait!” Jack cried, and immediately froze, afraid that he had alerted the guards through his cry. He listened carefully for a few seconds, but when nothing happened outside his cell, he relaxed again. Pleadingly, he looked at the old man. “Please, keep me company for a bit. I’m so lonely, and the guard won’t talk to me.”

“Yeah, he’s a grumpy fellow, not one for talk. But all right, lad, I’ll stay for a while.”

Relieved, Jack sank down onto his pallet. The old man sat next to him, and then he frowned when he spotted the bowl of thin soup standing forgotten on the floor. “Won’t you eat that?” he asked curiously.

Jack’s shoulders slumped, and he sighed dejectedly. “I plan to starve myself.”

“Pray God, why?!” the man cried in surprised horror.

Jack looked at him in disbelief. “Because I don't want to live any more. My situation is hopeless, I'll never get out of here.”

“Now, now, my boy.” The old man clumsily patted his arm. “There's always a way out. Look at me.”

“Yeah, you're here,” Jack deadpanned.

“Well, yes. But that's only a little setback.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Oh, I don't know. Maybe ten years.”

Jack's eyes boggled. “That long?! My God. I've only been here four years I believe, and I've decided to give up already. I would never survive for ten years in here.”

“You were surprised what you can survive,” the man said sadly. “But pray tell, what is your name, my boy?”

“I’m...” For a moment, Jack had to search for his name. “I'm Jack Harkness.”

“It's good to meet you, Jack Harkness. I'm the Doctor.” And with a bright smile, the Doctor held out his hand to Jack.

Astonished, Jack shook it. “You’re the Doctor? The nutter I hear the guards talk about sometimes?”

The Doctor glared at him with a raised eyebrow, and Jack gulped sheepishly. “I'm not mad... well, maybe a little.”

“I'm sorry. They all say you are mad.”

“Only because they don't believe in the things I say.”
Jack raised a sceptical eyebrow. “What? That you really have a treasure, and if the administrator lets you go, you share it with him?!”

“Yes, of course.”

The man sounded so sure, but then, of course he would be sure, even if it was only in his imagination.

“But let's not talk about me. What about you? You look like a nice lad, and don't seem to belong here – I don't belong here either, but nobody listens to me, so, well... Why are you here?”

Suddenly, all the horrible circumstances of his life crashed down onto Jack once more. “I don't know,” he sighed.

The Doctor frowned. “You don't know how you came to be here? I can hardly believe that.”

“No, I... I don't know what happened. One day, I was a free man, was supposed to become captain of my ship since my old captain died unexpectedly, and the next day, I get arrested, and because of an anonymous letter, they bring me here. And since that day, I wait. Surely, someone must see that I'm innocent, and release me!” With a desperate groan, Jack buried his face in his hands.

The Doctor patted his arm again. “That sounds like a tricky situation. It's late already, so we don't have enough time until the guards bring our dinner, but tell me about it tomorrow. Maybe together, we can untangle this mess somewhat.”

Hopefully, Jack looked the old man in the eye. “Do you really think that?”

The Doctor shrugged. “We'll try. But for now, goodbye, my young friend, 'til tomorrow.”

The Doctor scrambled up, and swiftly crawled back into the hole in the wall, extremely agile for a man of his age. Jack watched him until he was out of sight, his whole body vibrating with hope and happiness. Then, he snapped out of it, and hastily covered the hole again to hide it from the guard's watchful gaze. Still running on joy and adrenalin, Jack's gaze fell onto his forgotten breakfast. Like a man possessed, he made a dash for the bowl.

Jack went alone onto Monte Christo while his friends patiently waited on board the Torchwood Three. The small island was barren, sharp rocks covering its surface and the area around the island, making it dangerous for a ship to come near. It was exactly like the Doctor had said, and slowly, the last doubts that had remained within Jack started to disappear.

Equipped with some provisions, Jack searched the island for the cave the Doctor had told him about. After searching for a time, all the while exposed to the bitter cold wind, he finally, finally found it. Carefully, Jack climbed swift and sure like a mountain goat down into the partly flooded cave. It was no use trying to light a torch since everything he carried was wet from rain and sea spray. Jack had to make do with the little bit of daylight that fell into the cave, but since his eyes had become used to darkness during the long years of his imprisonment, his eyes were better than most people's in surroundings like that.

Carefully feeling along the sharp-cliffed walls, Jack went deeper and deeper into the dark. Tapping with the handle of his knife against the rocky wall, he worked his way forward slowly.

And there! A hollow sound echoed back at him. The second, hidden cave had to be behind this wall. Feeling carefully along the wall, his fingertips detected indentations, and Jack realised that this was
no rock but carved stone blocks. Breathing faster with excitement, he pushed the tip of his knife into the joints. Scraping back and forth with the knife, Jack managed to loosen the stones, and take them from the wall stone by stone. Eventually, the gap was big enough to slip through.

When Jack came into the second cave, he held his breath in astonishment. Weak, milky light fell through cracks in the ceiling, illuminating the cave. Unlike the other, this one didn't have access to the sea, but nonetheless the sand that covered the rocky ground was wet from the rain dripping from the ceiling.

“In the farthest corner of the cave, the treasure is buried.” The secret letter the Doctor had carried with him all those years was clear on that, so Jack set about to dig with his bare hands in the thick layer of sand.

After only a few minutes, his hands bumped against something hard. Intensifying his efforts, Jack shoved handfuls of sand away, flinging it left and right, until he had uncovered a big, sturdy wooden chest. Shaking with excitement and hope, he fumbled with the lock, picking it effortlessly even if his shaky fingers needed a few tries at first.

When the heavy lid was lifted, Jack held his breath at what he saw. The chest was filled with coins of pure gold, compact blocks of gold, and thousands and thousands of pearls and gemstones. Slumping down before the chest bereft of all the power in his limbs, Jack reached out a trembling hand, and reverently touched the smooth gold shining even in the weak light. Until this moment, to his shame, he'd still doubted the Doctor's words. A last nagging doubt still had sat at the back of his mind telling him his friend had gone mad in his obsession with this supposed treasure. But now, there was no denying any more. And what was even more important, although he'd promised the Doctor to forsake his thirst for revenge, now it blazed up again stronger than ever before. Because now, he was free, and he had the necessary means to destroy those who had destroyed his life.

“Now, tell me your story,” the Doctor asked the next day. Taking a shuddering breath, Jack nodded. And then, he started to talk. He told the Doctor of his captain's last wish, that he, Jack, should sail to Caldey Island, and receive a letter that came from general Bertrand, Napoleon Bonaparte's closest confidant, who, instead of being granted to accompany the exiled emperor to Elba, had been taken to a small island in Wales. This letter was meant for a man in London. Jack had promised to deliver the letter, but he hadn't known its content. And yes, in the aftermath, he realised that he had been foolish, that in his young naivety and eagerness to be an honourable man, he had put himself in great danger. Because even in England, there were small groups who sympathised with Bonaparte, and wished to see him on the throne of France once more. The British government tolerated such tendencies just as little as the French.

He further told the Doctor of the happy reunion with his father after his long journey, and with his lover, only to be arrested on the next day. Believing it surely must be a misunderstanding, Jack had accompanied the police men proudly and of his own free will.

“Oh, you foolish boy!” the Doctor cried, but no scorn lay in his voice, only compassionate affection, so Jack didn't say anything. “It couldn't be a misunderstanding. Surely someone wanted to do you harm out of jealousy. Tell me, who would have a reason to slander you?”

“No one,” Jack assured, genuinely convinced. “I'm much too young to be of any importance. I was only nineteen.”

“Rubbish.” The Doctor made a dismissive hand gesture. “There's always someone who is beaten up by envy over the success of another. Tell me, was there someone on board the Valiant that fits this
“No. The men all loved me. They never would have wished me harm!”

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

“Well...” Jack frowned. “Now that I think about it... there was one man, Harold Saxon. We fought once. He was the Valiant’s paymaster.”

“Had you become captain, would you have let him remain in your service?”

“No. I found evidence that Saxon tampered with the books to his advantage.”

“Aha! There you have it. He wanted you out of the way to get back at you.”

“But...”

“No buts. I’m sure he is your man.” The Doctor nodded very sure before he eyed Jack. “And your lover?”

He frowned when he saw Jack flinch. “Tell me about her. Is there one who would begrudge you her love?”

Jack evaded the Doctor’s gaze, biting his lips in worry.

“Tell me, my boy, what is the matter?”

“The thing is...” Jack sighed, and finally raised his gaze. “My lover wasn’t a woman.”

This seemed to even surprise the Doctor for he blinked at Jack owlishly.

Jack gritted his teeth, and pressed on. “His name is Ianto Jones, the son of a poor fisher from Cardiff. He was fifteen when I saw him last.”

“I understand,” the Doctor murmured, but he didn’t seem as if he now would turn from Jack in disgust.

The younger man breathed out a sigh of relief.

“All right,” he finally said, once more awkwardly patting Jack’s arm. “That doesn’t get us anywhere. Tell me about the contents of the letter.”

So, Jack cited the content of the note word for word. Every inky black letter had burned itself forever before his inner eye.

“Hm,” the Doctor made, tapping his bottom lip. “Clearly, Saxon wrote the letter. The anonymous author names a lot of details about your journey before you came to Caldey Island. That’s something only a person that has been on board the Valiant with you could know. Maybe he overheard your conversation with your captain about the errand.”

“Yes, that may be. The door was open when I sat at my captain’s bedside. But...” Jack frowned. “I know Saxon’s handwriting very well. The one of the letter looked completely foreign to me.”

“Ah!” The Doctor raised a finger to get Jack’s attention. “That’s easy to explain.” And with that, the Doctor pulled forth a self-made quill made from fish bones, as well as a small roll of fabric taken from one of his shirts that he used as paper. He started writing with his left hand, and when Jack
spotted his handwriting, he gasped in shock. “It's exactly the same!”

“Writing with your left hand is a good method to disguise your handwriting,” the Doctor explained.

Jack sagged back against the wall, defeated. “I never thought...” he whispered.

“I'm sorry, my boy. This must be quite the shock. We can postpone this if you want.”

Jack took a moment to gather himself, then he took a deep breath, and shook his head. “I'm fine again. Go on.”

The Doctor looked at him in concern for a moment, then he nodded, and continued. “All right. Who interrogated you? The chief prosecutor personally?”

“No, he was away at that time. A young man, not much older than I was his deputy.”

“Aha! A young, ambitious lad full of ideals.”

“He rather was very kind to me, and wanted to set me free right this minute because he realised my innocence.” Jack frowned as he remembered the situation. “But suddenly, he became pale as a ghost when he read the letter I was supposed to take to London. He demanded, for my own safety, that I must forget the name of the man the letter was intended for, and then, he burned the letter right before my eyes. Nothing should bear any evidence of this whole affair. If somebody learnt about my involvement, it could end badly for me, he told me. I don't know what happened then. Why did he break his word? He wanted to set me free again.”

“Don't you see?” the Doctor asked softly, sadly. “This procurator did not want to protect you but someone who was important to him. And he let you be brought here without a trial because unknowingly, you knew too much. To be more specific, you knew the name of this man. Say, who was the recipient of the letter?”

“A man named Noirtier of Villefort.”

“And what's the prosecutor's name?”

“John Smith.”

“Ha!” the Doctor cried again in triumph, but he didn't feel good about his success. “You have to know, my young friend, I too was susceptible to Bonaparte's ideas, and long years ago, when I were at his court, I indeed knew a Noirtier of Villefort. He was part French, part English heritage, and he had married a woman whose name was Smith. He once told me of his son John who was supposed to become a successful lawyer at the time. Smith must have changed his name to the maiden name of his mother to distance himself from his Bonapartist father which would only have been disastrous for his aspiring career.”

Jack became pale as a corpse. “Oh no,” he breathed. “You really mean they're one and the same?”

“Do you really believe in such a huge coincidence?”

Jack's shoulders sagged in defeat. “No. I don't.”

“He simply wanted to protect his father.”

Jack’s gaze flashed up to the Doctor. “But that doesn't give him the right to destroy another innocent life.”
“It doesn't, no,” the Doctor agreed sadly. “But even honourable people do unimaginable thinks to either protect their family or their reputation.”

Jack balled his hands into fists, a red haze of rage clouding his gaze. “They will pay for their despicable deeds. Both of them.”

He flinched when the Doctor put his hands on Jack’s shaking fists, gently squeezing. Questioningly, he looked up at the old man, trembling with emotion.

“You mustn't do this!” he cautioned. “This path of revenge will lead you directly into Hell.”

“I don't care as long as I take them with me,” Jack spat.

“Please, oh please, stay from these thoughts. That's not the reason I want to give you half of my treasure as soon as we get out of here. I want you to have it so that you can start anew, far away from all who wished you harm.”

Jack shook his head vehemently. “I can't forget what they did. How could I! I'm reminded of it every waking minute.” He gestured around them.

“I know. But trust me. It will only lead to your doom.”

Jack and the Doctor stared at each other for long minutes in a duel of wills. In the end, gnashing his teeth, Jack nodded curtly. “All right,” he pressed out. “I will start a new life if I ever get out of here.”

The Doctor's shoulders sagged in relief, and he smiled at Jack. “Good, good, my boy.”

“Would you, in return, allow me to be your pupil? Teach me everything you know. Let me distract myself from my bleak life.”

The Doctor beamed at him at this idea, and he nodded vigorously. “Yes, of course. I'll teach you ev'rything! Maths, and literature, and physics, chemistry, astrology, history... Oh, there's so much knowledge in my head, we'll be busy for years!”

Jack managed to give the Doctor a real smile for the first time in their conversation, and he felt a small spark of hope. He nodded. “Thank you,” he whispered.

Chapter End Notes

I swapped names with the Welsh island Tusker Rock where Jack finds the treasure, and instead called it Monte Christo because “The Count of Tusker Rock” sounds stupid.
Chapter 3

He took the treasure away from the island, and the first thing he did was order a new, bigger, and better ship. He decided it should be his home for a long while, and when, a few weeks later, it was delivered to him, he called it the Tardis. This had been, as the Doctor had once told him, the fantasy name the small boy the Doctor had once been, full of fantastic stories, had given the village where he'd grown up. Jack at least wanted to honour his friend that way when he didn't honour his promise to forsake his revenge. The Torchwood Three captain Harper gave his old crew so that he knew they were well provided for even without him.

From then on, the four former smugglers followed Jack wherever he went. With his incredible fortune, he could indeed have seen the world, start a new life in never-ending luxury. But Jack couldn't forget. Not those who had done him wrong, but neither those who had meant him well.

And so, one day, he returned to Cardiff. The whole city was excited about the magnificent ship that had cast anchor in Cardiff Bay, and everyone wanted to get a glimpse of the mysterious Scottish lord who owned it. Instead, they only saw the man's crew, and a little while later a hooded cleric that left the ship, and soon disappeared in the crowd.

Jack wandered through the streets of Cardiff in his disguise, soaking it all up. It was exactly as he remembered. The houses, the shops. He even recognised one or two familiar faces. Turning into the street his father's house lay in, he unconsciously walked faster and faster. And finally, he stared up at the three storey building. His heart hammered like mad in his chest, and the only sound Jack heard was the thumping of his blood in his ears. Taking a shaky breath, he went inside and climbed the stairs with weak knees. When he stood before his father's door, Jack took another trembling breath and knocked.

His blood seemed to turn to ice in his veins when a strange woman opened the door. Surprised, she blinked at him. “Can I help you, Father?”

Jack stared at her for a moment, shaken, and only composed himself again with the utmost effort. “Y-yes, yes. I'm looking for a man. I was told he lives here. Franklin Harkness.”

“Oh, he's long gone,” the woman answered with a sigh. “Poor bugger. Must be... fourteen years since he, well...” She hastily made the sign of the cross.

Jack swallowed heavily. His mouth felt bone-dry. “And... do you know what happened?”

“No. I don't live long here yet. The former tenants said something of a tragedy. That he lost his son or something.”

“Thank you,” Jack choked out.

The woman frowned in concern. “Are you all right, Father? Was he a friend of yours?”

Jack nodded. “He was. I never thought I came too late.”

“If you want to know more,” she offered, “downstairs lived a tailor. John Hart was his name I think. He surely knows more. Owns an inn up there in the Brecon Beacons now.”

“Thank you, mistress,” Jack croaked. “May God bless you.”

He didn't know how he managed to descend the steps, but suddenly, he stood outside the house. The
cold air and slight rain were a shock, but they pulled him from his trance-like state.

He started to move, set one foot in front of the other. He'd never have imagined that his father could be... Oh, he had to know what happened fourteen years ago. Right now!

Renting a horse, Jack set out for the Brecon Beacons.

He'd never liked the grassy, secluded hills, and when he'd been here with Ianto one day because they were undisturbed out here, his lover hadn't liked it here either. They were both men of the sea through and through.

The inn John owned was slightly run down, and not even one guest was in sight as he stepped into the deserted taproom. He looked around for a moment, then a noise directed his gaze to the stairs beside the bar.

John Hart stopped dead in his tracks a moment when he spotted the guest, ogling him as if he couldn't quite believe that he actually had a costumer.

“Father!” he cried, coming nearer. “Welcome.”

Jack nodded, and took in the man before him. It was unmistakably John Hart even if he had put on more weight and had fewer hair.

“Please, sit down.” John gestured at a table, and Jack followed suit. “What can I bring you?” John asked, nervously wringing his hands.

“Bring me your best wine. And then sit with me, we have to talk.”

John blanched slightly, but he nodded, and hurried away.

When the two men sat at the table together, a bottle of wine and glasses between them, Jack steepled his fingers, and scrutinised the innkeeper.

“I'm Father Moretti, and I'm here on official business, my son. Did you know a man named Jack Harkness?”

All colour left John's face, but he nodded, swallowing heavily. “Yes,” he croaked.

“Then I regret to inform you that he died a few weeks ago.”

Shaking, John sagged back in his chair, staring into space. “The poor boy,” he breathed. He looked up questioningly at the priest. “He died in prison then?”

“Yes. I was his confessor. Before he died, I promised to fulfil his last wish.”

“What...” John swallowed again heavily, nervous sweat breaking out onto his brow. “What has that got to do with me?”

“You are part of his last will. You see, he came into the possession of a very valuable object, a present from another prisoner who breathed his last breath some time ago. And since it was Harkness' only possession, he wanted his friends to have it.”

And with that, Jack pulled a little box from his pocket, and when he opened it, a magnificent diamond was revealed.

“It is. I had it examined.”

“A-and I...” John couldn't continue the sentence, still staring at the clear stone.

“He considered you a friend, yes. But there were a few others he considered his friends as well as his father. Well, they told me Franklin Harkness died a long time ago. Can you tell me more?”

With difficulty, John tore his gaze from the diamond, his eyes becoming dark and sad. “I can.” He nodded. “After they had taken Jack to Flat Holm, his father waited for him every day and night. He didn't have any influence or money, but Clive Jones, owner of Jones & Son, tried to help him. He left the old man some money so that he would be cared for. But Harkness never touched the money. Every time I visited with him, the red purse still lay where Jones had left it on the mantel of the fireplace.”

“What about Jones?”

“Grief, Father, grief. He only waited and hoped. Everything else had become unimportant to him.”

“Why didn't he take the money?”

“Grief, Father, grief. He only waited and hoped. Everything else had become unimportant to him.”

“A man named Harold Saxon. He was on board the Valiant with Harkness, Jones' ship. Then he mentioned the deputy crown prosecutor, John Smith. He said the man had been kind to him, that it hadn't been his fault Harkness had had to stay on Flat Holm, that he did all he could. And finally, Ianto Jones. You mentioned him already.”

John blinked for a few moments, then he snorted in disgust. “He thought these people were his
friends?! Maybe it's for the best he died without ever knowing the truth.”

“And what is the truth?” Jack asked, outwardly calm, but on the inside, he was vibrating with expectant excitement.

“That there's no justice in this world,” John spat. “I won't say I'm a good man, maybe I should have done more to help, but I never harmed anyone either. And look at Franklin Harkness. Fate punished him although he was the kindest man. And Clive Jones? He is a good man as well, honourable, but his company is headed for ruin. But those…” He pursed his lips angrily. “Those people destroyed the life of another, and they all were rewarded.”


John made a dismissive hand gesture. “Nah, not him. He was a good boy even if his choice in spouses left a lot to be desired.”

“S-spouse?!” Jack whispered shakily.

“Hm? Oh yeah. He married his cousin, Gwenlyn Cooper only a few months after Harkness’ imprisonment. The girl was already pregnant as it turned out.”

Jack's blood ran cold, and for the life of him, over the pounding of his rushing blood in his ears, he wouldn't have been able to hear even one word John may have said further.

Ianto had married Gwen?! But... Gwen had been engaged to Rhys Williams. Gwen and Ianto had been cousins, nothing more. There had never been any hint that they may feel more for each other. After all, Ianto loved J...

A horrible thought suddenly occurred to Jack. A thought that was so terrible that Jack didn't want to believe in it for even one second. What if... what if Saxon hadn't been alone? What if he had written the letter, but another had taken it to the prosecutor?! There hadn't been any reason or hints for the Doctor to suspect another person to be part of the conspiracy. They'd both thought it only to be Saxon. But what if... Gwen! Surely it had been her! But no. She'd always been so sweet and kind. She'd adored Jack. She never would have done a thing to harm him. That left... Ianto... He felt his heart breaking at the horrible suspicion. He'd always thought Ianto loved him. He was sure that Ianto loved him, but on the other hand, Jack had never been the easiest person to be with. In his youth, he had been carefree and boisterous, and it was easy to love him. And it was easy for him to love others. He'd never left out on flirting with a pretty face, be it man or woman, but in his heart, he'd always known that he only loved Ianto from the day they had met. But... had Ianto known that?! Had Jack ever told him? His heart seemed to stop as he realised that he never really told Ianto that he loved him. The poor boy must only have seen him flirting with other's. He must have thought that he was one of many, only a means to warm Jack’s bed. But surely, he must have sensed the truth?! But what if, deep inside, Ianto had been disappointed and dissatisfied? As two men, they could never be together like a married couple could, even if, in his youthful exuberant carelessness, Jack had tried to bring Ianto to do it. Gwen would have been the more sensible choice. A clever, sweet, caring woman that could give Ianto the normal, respectable life Jack couldn't. And Ianto had always been a very pragmatical human being, even at fifteen. With Jack, he would only have had a life where he had to hide, a life in danger even, and despite his strong character, Ianto must have been terribly hurt about all of Jack's flirting. So what if – oh, all those painful, uncertain what ifs! – a good reputation and appearance had been more important to Ianto than Jack? He could understand this, really. It was the most sensible thing to do in times like these. Maybe in a hundred year's time or even more they would have had a future together, but not today. Jack didn't want to believe it, not his sweet Ianto betraying him like that, but it was possible that Ianto had been the one to take Saxon's letter to the prosecutor to do away with Jack so that he could be with Gwen. The seemingly very sudden
wedding testified to Jack's fears. And... God! Gwen had even been pregnant! Somewhere in this world, Ianto had a child...

"Father?"

Jack startled violently when John's hesitant voice ripped him back into reality. He looked at his former friend with wide, haunted eyes.

"Is ev'rything all right?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm fine." Jack nodded shakily, and accepted John's silent offer of pouring him another glass of wine. “Just got lost in some disturbing thoughts for the moment, 's all.”

John didn't seem convinced, but he nodded.

"So," Jack said shakily. “You were saying?"

"Ah, yes. I told you about Ianto Jones. Sweet kid, but as I said, terrible taste in women.”

"Why would you say that?"

John snorted. “Well, considering it was Gwenlyn who betrayed Harkness.”

Once more, Jack’s blood ran cold, but at the same time, a weight lifted from him that, a few seconds ago, he had believed would slowly suffocate him.

“What did you say?!"

“Yeah. The girl is not as sweet as ev'ryone thought. The cunning bitch was in cahoots with Saxon.”

“Saxon too?!” Jack breathed shaken, but at least that was only for show. He'd known about Saxon already after all. But Gwen...

John nodded with a sigh, averting his eyes in shame. “I was there, you know,” he mumbled. “I heard every word of their twisted plans.”

“Tell me,” Jack demanded through clenched teeth.

And John began to tell.

The day Jack had returned to Cardiff with the Valiant from the fateful journey where he had gone ashore on Caldey Island to take that accursed letter with him, Saxon and John had met in a tavern. They were not friends, merely acquaintances, but Saxon had been furious, and had needed someone to vent his anger to. And John, never one to say no to a free glass of wine, had been a willing ear to listen. The reason Saxon had been so mad was that Jack had reported him to Clive Jones right after their return to Cardiff as was his duty as first officer and captain at the time after the surprising death of the old captain during the journey.

“The kid is nineteen years old, and is supposed to become my captain?!” Saxon shouted. “Never!”

While grumbling angrily, an equally as grumpy Gwenlyn had passed the tavern. Normally, it wouldn't have been proper for a lady to join the men in a tavern, but Gwen had always been a sturdy, down-to-Earth girl that didn't care for other people's opinion. And furthermore, she wasn't a respectable lady that could lose her good reputation. She was just a poor fisherman's daughter that
had grown up between all those rough seamen, over the years feeling related to them. So, it wasn't unusual for her to join her friend John and his acquaintance for a glass of wine. Immediately, she had begun to vent her anger as well.

“I thought you were glad Harkness is back,” John remarked, blinking at Gwen questioningly.

“I am,” she seethed. "But he is with my cousin."

It wasn't really a secret that Gwen, despite her engagement to Rhys Williams, fancied Jack since the day they had met. And why not. He was better looking than Rhys, and had a more promising choice of career. He could become someone important one day. But equally as obvious was Jack's liaison with Ianto Jones. The two men thought they were discreet, but they weren't. Not really. Well, John wouldn't tell. He didn't begrudge them their happiness, no matter how unorthodox. And of course, Gwen knew, too, which was the reason for her current jealous outburst.

“He wants to take him away,” she spat, mad jealousy shining in her eyes, and she downed another glass of wine. “As soon as Jack is promoted captain of the Valiant, he wants to make Ianto part of his crew so that they can be together. I heard them talk.”

“Hm,” Saxon made thoughtfully. “Don't tell me, a woman like you will allow that.”

Gwen glared at him. “And what, pray tell, am I supposed to do?!”

“Well.” Saxon shrugged. “You just have to separate them.”

“They're practically joined at the hip,” Gwen snorted.

“There has to be a way. What, hmm, what do you say to... Ah, yes. You could denounced Jones of sodomy. Write an anonymous letter. See, I'll even write it for you.”

Gwen frowned. “But when they send Ianto to prison, they will interrogate him, and then, Jack's in danger as well.”

“Nahh.” Saxon made a dismissive hand gesture. “The boy may be young but not stupid. He is much too infatuated with Harkness, he won't betray him.”

That made Gwen ponder Saxon's idea for a few moments. “Yeah,” she mumbled, a hesitant smile forming on her lips. “I think you're right. Ianto would never do that.”

“See. It would only be Ianto that gets his just punishment for his sins.” As if on cue, Saxon pulled forth paper, quill, and ink. Gwen stared at the items hard. Eventually, she nodded.

“Do it.”

Saxon grinned.

“Wait a minute!” John cried for the first time. “That's cruel! How can you do that to your own cousin, Gwen?!”

She shrugged while she eagerly watched Saxon scribble a few lines with his left hand to disguise his normal writing. “I don't care about him.”

“No.” John put down his glass forcefully, but his movements had already become a bit wobbly thanks to Saxon refilling his glass over and over. “He's just a kid that didn't anybody any harm. That's wrong.” He glared beseechingly at them both. Gwen held his gaze stubbornly, but Saxon
leaned back, and picked up the page with a placating smile.

“Oh, don't worry, John. It was all a joke. Isn't that right, Gwenlyn?” He looked intently at her, so she didn't say anything. In an emphasised gesture, he crumbled the paper, and threw it into a corner. “See,” he smiled jovially at John. “No-one comes to harm. This is just us venting our frustration, but we would never do something so cruel.”

Gwen managed a nod. “Right. We wouldn't.”

“Drink up, my friends, and let's part company for now. My journey has been long, and I am tired.” And with that, Saxon stood up, and threw a few coins onto the table. “Good evening, my friends.”

They both watched him go.

John felt his head getting heavier and his sight blurry. With narrowed eyes and as if in a haze, he watched Gwen get up, and go over to the corner where Saxon had thrown the letter. Thoughtfully, she picked it up, and smoothed the paper between her hands.

“Wha' are y' doing?” John slurred, alarmed.

Startling, so as if she had completely forgotten his presence, Gwen looked up like a deer caught in the hunter's torchlight. After a few seconds, she'd composed herself though, and stood up with a smile. “I only want to get rid of this letter. Imagine someone finds it and takes it to the authorities.”

John nodded in the exaggerated fashion of the drunk. “You're right.”

She threw him a smile once more. “Good night, John. I'm off to Rhys’.”

“Give him my love.”

“Will do, will do.”

Gwen slipped out into the night, leaving John slumped at the tavern's table.

John slumped dejectedly at his own table now as well. “I was such a fool,” he moaned. “When nothing came of it, I was convinced that she had really gotten rid of that accursed letter, but then, the next day, there was a feast for Harkness' birthday. Clive Jones had organised the celebration because he wanted to honour the future captain of his best ship. Suddenly, the guards came into the ballroom, and demanded Jack come with them. We were all shocked, but he assured us that it surely was a misunderstanding. So, he went with them willingly.” John hung his head. “He never came back.”

Jack shuddered for he remembered this night only too clearly of course. He'd gone with them in the good belief that he was innocent, and that he would soon return to the feast.

“Clive Jones immediately went after him, but he returned not long after, reporting an anonymous letter denunciated Jack of being a Bonapartist spy!”

John shook his head in disgust.

“Gwen must have taken the letter to the authorities instead of destroying it. I looked at her, but she only had eyes for Saxon, glaring daggers at him. And then I realised, not only must Gwen have taken the letter, but Saxon must have written something completely different than he wanted to make us believe. I never saw the content of the letter, and Gwen couldn't read yet back then.” John
moaned, and buried his face in his hands. “A Bonapartist spy! Even here this would have been his death sentence.”

Yes, Jack thought. *It would have. But Smith saw my innocence, and hadn't I given him the letter where he read his father's name, he would have let me go...*


“She confronted Saxon. I couldn't hear what they said, but afterwards, she was even more furious. Ianto tried to comfort her, but she struck out at him. Pummelling her fists onto his chest over and over. He probably thought she was only afraid for Jack, but I believe she wanted to take out her rage on Ianto since she couldn't do so with Saxon. It must have torn her apart inwardly to see Ianto free, but Jack imprisoned instead.”

“She could have resolved the whole affair,” Jack seethed.

“And admit that it had been her delivering the letter to deliberately denounce an innocent?” John snorted. “Not likely. She may have fancied Harkness, but the most important person in her life is herself. She'd never have done a thing to endanger herself.”

“I see,” Jack murmured, staring at the still open box with the diamond inside. “And you? You could have stepped forward.”

His sharp gaze focussed on John who flinched under this piercing gaze. “I am a coward, Father, I admit it. And I will burn in Hell forever for not stepping up.”

“So, you do regret it?”

“Yes! Every day!”

That Jack found hard to believe, but he at least believed John that he regretted not helping Jack.

“What happened? To all of them?”

John frowned, thinking hard. “John Smith went to London. He was promoted there because of the whole affair. Today he is chief deputy prosecutor of the crown I believe. As it became apparent that Jack wouldn't return, Gwen and Ianto gave in to their grief one night. I saw them drinking themselves almost to unconsciousness which even impressed me. Then they left together. Some time after, they married, and I later learned that Gwen had borne Ianto twins. A girl and a boy.” John shrugged anew. “Don't know why she married him. Could have still married Rhys and told him they were his children. She despised Ianto.”

“Maybe,” Jack said softly, “she'd rather have a bad reminder of Harkness than none at all. They both must have been very lonely and desperate.”

John snorted. “Maybe. For all I know, she's become an embittered and dissatisfied woman despite all her wealth and power, not to forget her title.”

Jack's eyes grew wide. “Title?!”

“Oh yes. Ianto enlisted in the army. They send him together with his family to Japan for a few years. There, he was part of this whole mess that happened there. Some revolution. I wasn't very interested. Anyway, he came back a hero. The king knighted him, made him Count of Morcerf.”

Jack nodded shakily. Even if he did begrudge Gwen such a life, he was glad that Ianto could live
carefree and well off.

“And Saxon?”

“The bastard became filthy rich in London. Is a baron now, the richest banker in London.”

“I understand,” Jack said slowly, contemplating what he had learned here. “Well,” he finally said, and shoved the diamond over to John. “After everything you have told me, I believe Harkness’ so called friends forfeited their rights to his gift. After all, he wanted to reward them for being good friends. But their despicable deeds preclude them from this gift. On the contrary, they lead a good life full of wealth like you said, including Ianto Jones. And since Franklin Harkness is dead, I believe you are the only one who is entitled to this gift.”

John’s eyes shown with happiness and greed, and he almost didn’t dare touch the diamond. But then, he snatched it up, and held it tightly between his hands. Only with difficulty, he could tear his eyes away from it to look up at the priest. “Thank you, Father. This saves my inn from ruin. How can I repay you for that?!”

Jack waved his hand. “I’m only fulfilling a poor soul's last wish. But if you want to do something for me, do you still have the purse you mentioned? The one Clive Jones left at Harkness?”

John blinked, confused about this strange request. But then, he nodded. “Yes, I still have it. It's yours if you want. That's the least I can do.”

“I'd be very grateful indeed.” Jack nodded.

“Mary!” John shouted, and a few moments later, a blond woman stepped into the room. She must have eavesdropped the whole time in the kitchen. “Get me the red leather purse, will ya.”

Her once pretty, but now weary face distorted to a defiant scowl, but she held her tongue, and disappeared upstairs for a few moments. She returned with the purse in her hands. John grabbed it from her, and eagerly held it out to his guest. “Here, Father.”

“Thank you, my son. And now, I have to be on my way. Goodbye, Mr. Hart. Madam.” Jack nodded at them both, then he left the inn behind.

He was glad when he stepped into the cool air outside. Even if he was still angry about John’s inactions, he clearly saw that the man regretted it when he saw fit to remember Jack sometimes (which couldn’t be all that often, but still), and he honestly wished him well. Maybe through this second chance, his life became a little better. He could draw a line under at least this chapter of his old life.

Furthermore, his meeting with John had proven that his appearance had changed so much over the years in prison that not even people who’d known him very well recognised him.

But even if he could forget John Hart now, the things that had been revealed to him – the ones he already knew about which had now been confirmed to him as well as the new revelations – were a hard blow. So many unanswered questions had been added, but he resolved to get to the bottom of them all.

And the first thing he had to take care of was the disturbing news of Jones & Son being almost bankrupt. As dearly as he wished to immediately go to London to act on his revenge, there were people here who had been good to him and his family. They needed his help. And since it obviously were only monetary worries, it would be easy to help here. Jack had more than enough money. He could even buy Clive Jones a whole fleet of new ships if the situation required it.
Full of new determination, Jack set back for Cardiff to gather more information on Jones & Son.
What he learned was disheartening. Over the years, Jones had experienced a lot of setbacks, his debts grew and grew since a few of his ships had gone missing. And now, even the Valiant, Jones' last ship, was long overdue from a journey that could have saved the shipping company with its cargo. Jack, like everyone else, didn't believe that the Valiant would return, so, he set about concocting a plan to save the business anyway.

To begin with, Jack went to visit the mayor and the former administrator of Flat Holm, now superintendent in Cardiff. Clive Jones both owed them more or less considerable sums. He introduced himself as chief clerk of the banking firm Thomson & French in Rome whom Jones as well owed a huge sum. He informed the two men that his bank had commissioned him to pay off all of Jones' creditors so that Thomson & French alone would hold all of Jones' debentures. The two men were very happy to get their money back which they had written off by now, but when they wanted to pay him his broker's fee for his services, Jack declined. Instead, he wanted information from them, more precisely, he wanted information from the former administrator. He told him that he had been raised by a wise and kind man named the Doctor who had later been brought to Flat Holm. He would like to know what became of the man. All too happily, the superintendent let him browse through the prisoner's files. It would be quite all right, he had said, the files were closed anyway because said prisoners were dead. Instead of looking at the Doctor's file, he browsed the thick book until he had found his own file. Secretively, Jack managed to pilfer the letter of denunciation that way. He too took the petition Clive Jones had submitted on Jack's behalf where a brief note of John Smith said that, since the suspect was a dangerous Bonapartist, there was nothing to be done about his case, he should be kept under constant supervision. Jack's blood boiled when he hastily scanned the note, regretting that he had ever trusted this man. The last document he took was the transcript of his interrogation where, of course, the name of Smith's father was nowhere to be found.

Thus having obtained the first evidence of his innocence, Jack set about buying the rest of Jones' debts so that now, he was the only one who held all of Jones' debts.

One day in late May, a gentleman thus came to Clive Jones, introducing himself as chief clerk of Thomson & French. Jones who, Jack noticed, was still the kind, proud, and honest man Jack had last seen fourteen years ago, cringed when he received Jack in his office, but, true man of honour that he was, he didn't shy away from the dire situation.

“I assume you are here because of the three-hundred thousand I owe Thomson & French at the end of the month.”

Jack nodded. “Yes, I am Lord Carter, and since our firm knows, and values, your extraordinary punctuality, we have bought all of your debts, and now ask you to pay them back to us.”

Jones nodded sternly, slightly relieved that he now could keep face before his associates here in Cardiff; nobody could accuse him of not paying back his debts. He was friends with some of the people he had owed money, and it was always hard to keep up these friendships when debts stood between you. Dealing with such a huge bank as Thomson & French was another matter though, but this was strictly business.

“I will pay, of course, as soon as the Valiant returns to Cardiff,” Jones explained. “If she doesn't, I'm afraid I have to cease my payments.”
“I understand. But is there no one who could help you out?”

“I’m afraid not. Especially not the sum we’re talking about. No, Sir, I’m completely on my own.” Jones sounded dejected, but nonetheless, he held himself proud which made Jack admire the older man even more.

Suddenly, an assistant burst into the room, his face sickly pale. “Sir!” he gasped.

Jones jumped up, a dark sense of foreboding taking a hold of him. “What is it?”

“The Valiant, Sir. It…” The young man averted his gaze for a moment, swallowing painfully. “She sank.”

Not even one muscle in Jones' face twitched, but he became pale as a ghost as well, his knuckles turning white as he curled his hands into fists at his side. “What about the crew?”

“They are well. All of them.”

“Thank God for this small mercy.”

“They’re waiting downstairs, Sir.”

He gave a curd nod. “Please, send them up.”

Uneasily, the assistant left with a nod, throwing a last anxious look at Jack.

Sighing heavily, Jones sank back into his chair as if all life had leaked out of him. He needed a moment to compose himself after the shock.

Jack wanted to express some consolation as much as his role as rich, aloof Scottish lord allowed, but before he could say even one word, the door burst open, and the crew of the Valiant streamed into the room. Jones, filled with new determination, rose and went over to them, completely ignoring his unwanted guest. Silently, Jack observed the proceedings that followed which were only further proof to him what a good man Clive Jones was, and how much he was loved by everyone. The whole crew spurned Jones' promise to pay them their wages as soon as possible, saying they wanted to help the company. They were happy with a small part of the sum, the rest could wait for now. But Jones shook his head sadly, telling them there was no later, that they were free. The good men were shocked, thinking that Jones didn't want them any more.

“It's not that,” he amended. “But I have no ship.”

“Then we will wait until you build a new one!” they said, but Jones shook his head again dejectedly.

“I don't have the money for it. I'm sorry, my friends.”

Equally as dejected, the crew left the room, leaving their employer with his worries and his guest. Jack decided to make himself known again. “Mr. Jones,” he said. “I have to say I am dismayed by this tragedy. And since I am your main creditor now, I will give you a respite of three months.”

Jones perked up at that, tentative hope shining in his eyes. “You would do that? But what will your superiors have to say to that?”

Jack made a dismissive hand gesture. “Let that be my concern. It'll be on my head.” He nodded curtly at Jones. “Since until then we have nothing more to discuss, I will see you in three months, say… on the fifth of September, eleven o’clock sharp. Have a good day, Mr. Jones.”
Jones nodded mutely at him, but Jack had already left the office at a brisk pace. On his way downstairs, he met a beautiful young woman. He recognised her immediately although the last time he had seen her, she had been a little girl of ten years.

Martha greeted him haltingly, knowing very well why he was here. Jack stopped before her, looking her intently in the eye.

“Answer me one question, Miss Jones,” he said, “what are you prepared to do to save your father?”

Martha frowned suspiciously, but she proudly raised her chin, and said without hesitation, “Everything.”

That made Jack smile at her gently, and he nodded. “Very well. Then listen to me. Although it may sound strange, one day, you will receive a letter, signed by 'Captain Jack'. You have to follow the instructions given to you in that letter very closely, do you hear me?”

Pressing her lips together for a moment, Martha eventually nodded. “I promise.”

Jack returned her nod briskly. “Then I bid you goodbye, Miss Jones.”

The crew was still gathered in the courtyard when Jack left the building, holding their small pay inside their hands undecided and sad. Jack stepped up to the first officer. “Sir? Would you come with me? There is something we have to speak about.”

Curious, the first officer followed him.

The benevolent clerk of Thomson & French wasn't seen again in Cardiff, but over the next three months, Jack watched the Jones family closely nonetheless. Happily, Jack watched Martha and her younger sister Letitia, proud of the young women the two girls he had once known had become. He was equally as proud of Martha's younger brother Leonard, a dashing young soldier who returned shortly before the respite ended, called home by his worrying mother to support his father. And he watched Clive Jones struggle to round up the money, making his heart bleed for his old friend. He found out that Jones even asked his former employee Harold Saxon for a loan, but to no avail, Saxon's ungratefulness making Jack furious on his friend's behalf.

So, on the fifth of September, when Jack was supposed to return to Jones & Son, knowing fully well that Jones didn't have the money, he send one of his men to Martha Jones, bearing a letter. Out of the shadows, he watched Martha read the letter of Captain Jack, determination suddenly crossing her beautiful face. He followed her to the listed destination, the house Jack's father had lived in, accompanied by one of her father's most faithful employees and Letitia's fiancée, Thomas Milligan. She went into the house that Jack had bought last month, immediately getting everything set up in his father's old flat for just this moment (the current tenants had been given a better flat downstairs for their troubles), Milligan waiting outside since she was supposed to come alone. After only a few minutes, she emerged again, clasping a red leather purse tightly to her chest. She breezed past Milligan, hurrying back home as fast as she could to show her father all of the cashed debentures stacked inside as well as the two diamonds that, according to Captain Jack's note, were a dowry for Martha and Letitia.

Jack knew that Jones would recognise his own purse, found in the exact same location he had left it behind all those years ago to help an old man, but which conclusions the other man would draw from that wasn't Jack's concern. He liked to believe though that Clive Jones would make the right connections, and realise that his former employee and friend somehow had become his guardian
angel in his darkest hour. It was a nice thought, but he wouldn't reveal himself to the Jones family under any circumstances. He belonged in their past. What counted was the future. And that exact future made a sudden appearance in Cardiff Bay, accompanied by loud cheering and fanfares. The Valiant had returned, manned by her rightful crew, and stocked with the original cargo she was supposed to bring back to Cardiff. Nobody would ever be able to tell that this wasn't the same ship, even if everybody knew it wasn't. Even Jack, after he had seen her launch, almost couldn't have told the difference even though he had known this ship inside out for years, and commissioned her three months ago in a hurry.

An honest smile spread over Jack's features as he watched the Joneses from the shadows, laughing, and crying at the same time as they couldn't turn their gazes from the miracle that was the Valiant. His heart thumped madly in joy, feeling with them. He hadn't thought that he was still able to feel like that. It felt good to help, and after all, it was the original reason the Doctor had left him the treasure. To help people. For that, he had died. To give Jack the chance to get out, and save other lives. A life for a life...

“Please, Doctor, please!” Jack begged, his panic-stricken gaze wandering over the Doctor's trembling form.

The old man smiled. “It's all right, my son,”

“No!”

“It is. We both knew that it was too late for me when I had the last seizure. I wouldn't have been able to swim anywhere.”

Jack swallowed hard, denying it with all his might, but inside, he knew that the Doctor was right. When he had had the first stroke a few months ago, his left arm and leg had been left paralysed. And now... he couldn't move at all any more.

The Doctor's bright gaze looked up at Jack imploringly and full of affection. “But you... you can still get out of here. You are young. And strong. Don't give up.”

Silent tears ran over Jack's cheeks, and he didn't argue with the Doctor. Maybe because he sensed that there was nothing he could do for him. And he had forbidden Jack to call the guards for help.

He waited for hours, waiting for the inevitable. All the while holding the Doctor's hand tight, and they passed their time with little mathematical games that Jack felt were only played for his sake, not the dying man's. But eventually, a shudder ran through the Doctor's weak body, and he gasped, desperately trying to suck air into his lungs. Jack squeezed his hand tighter, trying to reason with him. The rattling, wheezing breathing got worse and worse while all the while, the Doctor held Jack's gaze. And then, it simply stopped.

A soft sob tore itself from Jack's throat as he realised what had happened, and his head sank down on to the Doctor's skinny chest. He crouched like that next to the cot for a long time, watching over the Doctor silently until he heard the guard nearing with their dinner. Only then did he rouse himself from his mourning to slip back through the hole in the wall into his own cell. He listened carefully, and there, he heard the guard's cry for help. Running footsteps of other guards echoed from the stonewalls, and their voices carried over to Jack's cell. He picked up bits and pieces like “wrap him up”, and “til morning”, “too late getting the priest”.

Quivering with sudden excitement, Jack heard them leave, but after a few moments, they returned.
Then, after another few minutes, the guards left again. One of them brought Jack's dinner as if an afterthought, then he, too, was gone. Jack waited a long time, but they didn't come back.

With trembling fingers, he shoved the stone hiding the hole in the wall away, and crawled through to the Doctor's cell. There, on the floor lay a still body wrapped in canvas. He had to swallow heavily, suddenly frightened to disturb his friend's last rest, but then, a voice sounding suspiciously like the Doctor chided him in his head for being so stupid. This was his only chance to ever get out of here alive. And hadn't the Doctor told him, urged him even, to get out of here if he could?

Yes. He was doing the right thing.

Taking one of the Doctor's self-made tools from their hiding place, and putting it beside the body for now, Jack unwrapped his friend's remains, and carefully dragged him into his own cell. He put him onto the bed, and pulled the scratchy blanket up over his ears, hiding the Doctor's white hair.

After he held vigil for a last few moments, Jack crawled back into the tunnel, and sealed it from the inside. Back in the Doctor's cell, Jack wrapped himself in the rough canvas. And then he waited. He almost didn't dare breath, and he held the sharp chisel pressed tightly against his chest.

A night had never seemed so long in his life, not even his first night here, but after what seemed like an eternity, he heard steps outside. The heavy door opened, its hinges creaking and groaning.

"There he is, Father," one of the guards said.

"Can't you unwrap him again for the last rites?"

The priest's voice sounded put out, and a shock of fear run through Jack. He stopped breathing altogether.

"No," a guard said rather impatient. "We just wrapped him up so that the rats wouldn't make a feast out of him over the night. Just speak a prayer for him now, and let's get on with it. There's living people inside here we have to look after, whatever good it may do them."

Steps shuffled nearer, and Jack could hear the priest's irritated grumbling. "Bunch of heathens," he muttered, but came to a standstill beside Jack, and spoke a prayer for his salvation without further complaints.

Jack didn't even dare to breath in relief.

The steps of the priest removed themselves and instead, the guards stepped forward. Jack's breath hitched as they picked him up, and jostled him out of the cell.

"Rather heavy for such a skinny old man," one guard joked breathlessly as they carefully climbed the stairs step for step.

"Spare your breath," the other snapped.

He felt it when they left the fortress. Icy wind, the first he felt in fourteen years, tugged and prodded at his helpless form. It felt good, but at the same time scary.

He heard the crushing of the waves, much louder than from his cell, and his sailor's heart skipped a beat in joy. A heavy weight was suddenly wrapped around his ankles, and he heard the clinking of chains. New trepidation filled him, but he had anticipated this action beforehand already – they couldn't risk for the bodies to float over to the coast.
“All right. On three. One.”

Fear shot through Jack by now. It was one thing to know they threw the dead into the ocean, another to really experience it at this moment.

They reached back, jostling Jack as if in a hammock.

“Two.”

He already felt as if he were falling freely.

“Three.”

And then, he really fell until he crashed into the stormy sea, the icy waves collapsing over him as he sank like a stone. He gripped the chisel tighter.

Jack took in a deep breath when he emerged from this painful memory, the reasonably warm weather suddenly sending shivers down his spine.

He turned away from the harbour.

There was one thing he still had to do before he turned his back on Cardiff, probably forever.

After making sure the Jones family was all right, Jack made his way between all the gawking citizens that were still gathered at the bay to marvel about the return of the Valiant. In the three months Jack had given Jones, he hadn't been idle either, but had made some inquiries. The whereabouts of Rhys Williams among other things.

Nowadays, Rhys lived in a relatively respectable part of Cardiff. He hadn't become rich with his transport company, but it was enough to offer his family a life without material worries.

One of Rhys' adolescent children opened the door for the strange priest, and led him into the parlour. Surprised but friendly, Rhys greeted him and offered a seat.

“What can I do for you, Father?”

“I'm seeking information to fulfil a good man's last wish.”

Surprise was written all over Rhys' face. “And I knew this man?”

“Oh yes. His name was Jack Harkness.”

Rhys' face fell. “Can't say we were friends,” he sniffed rather put-out.

“Oh. But he only spoke well of you.”

Rhys snorted. “Good for him. Then he seems to have died with a clear consciousness, but in reality, he was a skirt chaser. Always flirting with the ladies – and even the men. A great fun it all was for him.”

“You sound bitter about that,” Jack enquired carefully.

“Oh aye. My ex-fiancé was among them woman who fell to his charms.”
“Hm... I can assure you, Mr. Williams, the last years of Harkness' life were everything but 'fun'.”

This mollified Rhys somewhat, and he grimaced. “I didn't like him. Never said he deserved what happened to him though. A sham it was if you ask me. Harkness and a Bonapartist spy! Ridiculous.” Rhys snorted sarcastically, then shrugged. “But nobody could change the authorities' minds. We've never heard of him ever again.”

“They took him to Flat Holm,” Jack explained.

Rhys shuddered, and made the sign of the cross hurriedly. “What a cursed place.”

“Indeed.”

“You have visited him there?”

Jack nodded. “I have.”

“How did he die?”

Jack had to hide his surprise to hear this question and so much sympathy from Rhys Williams of all people.

“A severe cold. Living in a place like that attacks the lungs sooner or later.” Which had indeed happened a few years ago. But with the help of the Doctor, Jack had been able to battle his illness. Since that time, he tired more easily, and his lungs suffered far easier, triggering painful coughing bouts. Another reason to sail for warmer realms as soon as he was done here.

“Hm...” Rhys looked sad, but then his face hardened into a determined frown. “Be that as it may, Father, I'm sorry for what happened to him, but I'd rather forget Harkness and my ex-fiancé with him once and for all.”

Jack threw him an encouraging smile. “You have to let go of these bitter thoughts, my son. They will consume you in the end.”

Rhys evaded his intense gaze, and bit his lip. “I have to admit I still feel betrayed by Gwen. I thought we were happy, but then, after Harkness' imprisonment, she just up and marries her cousin. Even lets herself get knocked up by him.” Rhys sneered in disgust, and shook his head. “Never understood why. He was a sweet kid, but he could offer her even less than I.” Rhys shrugged, self-deprecating. “Turns out I was wrong. He became rich, with a title. They're living in London nowadays. Much too far away from their roots. I bet they've forgotten all about us here in good old Cardiff.”

“You're not considering some kind of revenge, do you, my son?” Jack raised an inquisitive eyebrow, not caring in the slightest that he was quite the hypocrite for warning Rhys of something he himself had made into his life's goal.

Rhys didn't let himself be intimidated by the priest's warning look. He shrugged. “I live my life. I am happy. She lives hers even if she doesn't deserve it. But at least she never got what she really wanted.”

“What was that?” Jack perked up.

“Harkness. She was obsessed with him.”

“What a strange way to console herself to marry a completely different man...” Jack shrugged casually. “But maybe he was good to her in her grief, and that sparked tender feelings.”
“Nah,” Rhys snorted. “She never felt very strongly for her cousin. It was all about Jack. She only
married Ianto because she was pregnant from him – the result of a drunken bout if you ask me.” This
time, Rhys tried to hide his bitterness, but didn't quite manage. “I would have raised the children as
my own if she only would have come back to me... But never mind. I have wonderful children of my
own.” Determined, Rhys stood up. “If that's all, Father, there's work for me to do.”

Jack stood up as well, and bowed slightly in thanks. “You have been very helpful, Mr. Williams.”

When he turned around to go, he caught Rhys' slightly confused expression. He surely must ask
himself what exactly the priest had wanted to know from him, but since this visit had unearthed a lot
of old pain for Rhys, he was simply glad that the priest left again.

Back on the street, Jack slowly returned to the harbour, mulling over what he had learned just now.
He still didn't quite understand why Gwen had decided to marry Ianto instead of Rhys. Surely, she
must have known that Rhys would take her back together with the children. Ianto of course had
married her because it was the honourable thing to do even if it didn't make him happy, but Gwen...

But he feared that this was a secret that would have to wait. There were more pressing secrets to
unearth.

Jack looked back on to Cardiff getting smaller and smaller in the distance. It had once been his home,and, so he had thought, his future. But now, it was neither. He didn't have any feelings left for this
place. Only brief flashes of happiness here and there were anchored to the streets of Cardiff that were
worth to be remembered, but it had been another life. The man who had experienced this happiness
was long gone. For him, it was only a dream now, and he had to make do with what he had now.

“Where to, captain?” Mickey suddenly asked beside him.

Jack took in a deep breath. “Everywhere,” he replied. “Everywhere I can find the pieces to complete
my revenge.”

Because there had to be something. There had to be something that would bring Smith and Saxon
and Gwen their downfall. People like them who were capable of destroying another's life for their
own goals surely had done wrong again.

He would deploy all of his resources, would dig deeper and deeper until he dragged all of their dirty
little secrets to light. And if it took years, so be it. He'd waited fourteen years. He could wait a few
more.

He wouldn't rest sooner.

Chapter End Notes

I know, it's highly improbable that as a black man, Clive Jones would be able to own a
respectable shipping company at those times, or that Leon would become a high-ranking
soldier, but let's simply go along with it. I couldn't leave out the Joneses after all. The
more Jones the merrier ;-)
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Over the course of the next nine years, Jack travelled the whole world, always digging and searching, sending his brilliant and faithful River and Mickey out to do the impossible for him, and over time, he accumulated indeed information upon information that would bring his enemies down. Most of it, he acquired by chance, but that only showed him that betraying him hadn't been the only evil deed this people had done to get what they wanted.

1838, he was in Rome at the time that he, purely by chance, made contact with one that was closely related to one of his targets, and it was the perfect chance to finally weasel his way into London's society and this particular family. Because in Rome, just before the carnival was about to start, he met Rhys, Viscount of Morcerf. Ianto and Gwen's son (what a travesty calling her son Rhys; In loving memory of her ex-fiancé or what? If she bemoaned her forsaken engagement that much, maybe Gwen should have simply married Rhys and be done with it).

It had been such a shock seeing this boy. He had his parents' dark hair, and his mother's dark eyes. But his face... Dear God, he looked so much like Ianto had as a youth that it was frightening. This young man suddenly, right before his eyes, blended with another image held dear in Jack's heart since the day he saw Ianto last. And suddenly, the only thing he saw any more was the boy he had met on a surprisingly sunny day in Cardiff all those years ago. The wisps of memories suddenly flooding his mind were so powerful that Jack's knees almost buckled under their onslaught...

He dashed around the corner, and promptly crashed into someone. At the last second, Jack wrapped his arms tightly around the other person to prevent them from tumbling to the ground. He looked down into a pair of wide, startled blue eyes that belonged to the cutest boy he had ever seen.

“Ev'rything all right?” he asked, breathing heavily, unable to break eye contact with the boy. Who seemed to feel likewise.

“Y-yes,” he stammered.

Jack threw him a bright, charming smile that made the youth's breath hitch. “Good. I'm Jack Harkness by the way.”

“J-jones.” The boy trembled in Jack's arms, but none of the two seemed inclined to let go of each other. “Ianto Jones.”

“Nice to meet you, Jones, Ianto Jones. Say, you haven't seen a grey cat? Myfanwy belongs to a little girl in my house, and she slipped through the door onto the streets.”

“Yes.” Ianto frowned. “Yes, I've seen a small cat. It climbed up a tree just as I passed.”

Jack beamed at him. “Would you show me?”

Ianto bit his lip, then he raised his chin boldly. “I'll help you catch her.”

Jack's smile got even brighter.
Ianto chuckled at Jack's exuberant wriggling. “Haven't you had enough exercise on your ship?!”

“I'm just glad to be here again, 's all.”

“Why? You love the sea,” Ianto laughed. “For me and my family, it's a necessity, but you, you love it.”

Jack rolled his eyes good-naturedly. “Of course I do, silly. But there's one crucial thing missing on the Valiant.”

“Namely?” Ianto raised a questioning eyebrow.

Jack reached up to tap Ianto's nose. “You.”

The youth's eyes widened in surprise. “Me?!”

“I know, we've only known each other for a few weeks, but... I don't know... I feel as if we've known each other for years.”

Ianto's gaze softened. “I feel the same.”

“Really?!” Jack's eyes brightened up, and he grasped Ianto's hands tightly between his.

“Really.”

Impulsively, Jack leaned down to kiss Ianto. The youth sucked in a surprised breath, but then, he tilted his head slightly to give Jack better access. They both weren't surprised that this happened, nor were they afraid of each other's reactions. Deep inside, they had known this would happen. From the moment Jack had fallen from the tree where Myfanwy had hidden, and Ianto had caught him. Their faces had been so close when they'd both tumbled to the dusty ground, and then and there, they'd felt such a strong bond that it seemed like a sign and a blessing from the heavens.

“I've brought you something,” Jack exclaimed proudly, and held up a small satchel like a trophy.

Ianto arched an eyebrow. “You were in Bristol, Jack. 'S not that far away. What do they have there that we don't?”


“Chocolate?!” Ianto's eyes widened as Jack opened the small box. And indeed, inside lay a few pieces of dark chocolate.

“I... I've never eaten chocolate,” Ianto whispered in awe.

“Even better,” Jack smiled, and took a piece of chocolate. “My lucky day that I get to witness you eating your first piece of chocolate. Open up.”

Obediently, Ianto opened his mouth, and accepted the chocolate Jack stuck into his mouth. As the dark confection started to meld on his tongue, the moan that escaped him was almost orgasmic. Jack watched the youth with bated breath, and at hearing this sinful moan, he had to resist adjusting his trousers.
“Good?” he croaked.

Ianto nodded mutely. He stepped forward, and kissed Jack deeply. Now, it was Jack who moaned as the flavour of chocolate and Ianto burst all across his tongue.

They were both panting when they parted from each other, and locked gazes firmly.

“C-chocolate is supposed to be an aphrodisiac, is it not?” Jack rasped.

Ianto nodded.

“And... do you feel anything?”

“I'm afraid I don't know if it's you or the chocolate making me feel like that,” Ianto whispered.

“Then... we probably should find out, don't you think?”

Ianto nodded again eagerly, and began to fumble with Jack's shirt buttons. “Definitely.”

“You want to go to the army?” Jack cried incredulous. “Why? When?”

“I have thought long and hard about it. With my pay as a soldier, I can support my family much better than being a fisher. In the army, I even may have the chance to climb the ranks.”

Jack nestled at his collar, suddenly feeling suffocated by it. “Come with me instead!” he burst out, and Ianto looked up in surprise. “I will become captain of the Valiant now that my old captain is dead. You can become part of my crew, and then we will be together wherever we may be send.”

Ianto sighed and hung his head, suddenly looking much more mature than his fifteen years. “No, Jack.”

“Why not? I don't understand.” A hurt look suddenly flitted over Jack's face. “Don't you want to be with me?”

Ianto sighed again, but now took Jack's hand in his, rubbing his fingers gently between his. “Of course I do. But me being on board the Valiant isn't a solution.”

“I don't see why not,” Jack protested. “If you join the army, they may send you all over the world, and I in turn will be stuck on the Valiant likely in completely different parts of the world. We may never see each other again.”

“But Jack, please try to understand. How could we continue to be together while both being on the same ship?! It's such a small world on there. Sooner or later, somebody will catch us, and then both our lives are forfeit.”

“We will be careful,” Jack assured. “And either way, what could possibly happen when you're with the captain.”

“No! I don't want to argue with you. But it isn't possible. Accept it.”

Jack pressed his lips together tightly, sad and hurt. He took in a shuddering breath. “Why do you have to be so reasonable,” he muttered more to himself.

Ianto stood up. “And why do you have to be so careless,” Ianto replied with a sigh. “Come on. It's
As coincidences went, just at that time, Jack had made the acquaintance of a highly interesting lady. Suzie Costello. She had done the remarkable and become the most infamous bandit in the area of Rome. Her name inspired fear in everyone, even the authorities, but they had never managed to catch her. Some of her gang hadn't always been as lucky, and that's why Jack was busily scheming to safe one of hers. He'd once thought, when he had been young and naïve and full of noble sentiments, that those who broke the law should be punished. By now, his views had changed somewhat. He still believed in punishing those who had done evil. But only because someone was a criminal in the authorities' eyes, were they really guilty? He was the best example that it wasn't so easy. And thus, he rather took matters into his own hands where he saw need for action. And saving Jenny Flint from the gallows was definitely the right thing to do. In return, Jack had ensured Costello's services and loyalty whereas beforehand, he'd only had commercial dealings with her.

So, it was only a coincidence as well of course when a young English Viscount who just wanted to experience Rome's carnival fell into the hands of Miss Costello and her gang only days after Morcerf had made the acquaintance of the wealthy and generous Count of Monte Christo. And of course, being a good friend, Jack immediately sought out Costello to snatch the young man from her clutches. To the amazement of Morcerf and his friends who'd asked the Count for help, he did this without any weapons or bribery, he simply commanded. Afterwards, Costello apologised profoundly to the young nobleman since she hadn't known the Viscount was friends with the Count of Monte Christo.

The young man was eternally grateful, but the Count didn't want to hear about debts. The only thing he asked Rhys as repayment and thanks was, if he should ever come to London in the near future, he bade Rhys to introduce him to the London High Society since he had never been there before. Rhys consented all too happy, and the two men agreed that the Count would come to London at the end of August.

“We even have carnival there,” Rhys laughed. “Last weekend of August. It's only a small, merry affair though, not as grand as this.”

“Nonetheless,” the Count said, “I anticipate the experience.”

And so, they bid their goodbyes for now.

Jack looked after Rhys until he couldn't see the young man any more in the now again darkened streets. The carnival was over, but the time for masks weren't. He just had to switch places.

“Well,” he breathed softly into the cold night air. “London, here I come.”

Chapter End Notes

Fry & Hunt at that time, later J.S. Fry & Sons, were the first British chocolate company who, in 1847, produced wrapped up chocolate bars for consumption as we know them today.
London was in uproar. There was only one topic the upper classes talked about behind hands and fans, and the lower classes read in the papers about: The latest newcomer into their society, the mysterious Count of Monte Christo.

Nobody knew where he came from. Some speculated he was a rich American, some said he had been a keen sailor that had sailed the seven seas fearlessly. Others again believed him to be a Scottish noble man from the wild Highlands, and others again claimed he had lived in a monastery so high up in the Himalayas that few had ever found their way there. The speculations about the Count's origins became more ludicrous and adventurous with every passing day. He himself finally accounted, much to his excited admirers' delight, that he had lived in the orient, and therefore, he begged forgiveness should he not behave according to unfamiliar British customs. They, of course, forgave him every eventual faux pas, and delighted in the Count's many quirks and eccentricities.

In addition to his highly mysterious – and quite romantic, fairytale-like – origins, he had the beauty of a Greek marble statue. He looked like Narcissus himself with impeccable manners and bearing, an amazing knowledge, wit and charm, but also with a certain coldness and aloofness that send blissful shudders down his admirer's backs.

Not to say he was almost indecently rich.

Every self-respecting nobleman or woman who wanted to be en vogue this year would have murdered for the Count to appear at one of their balls and soirées and intimate get togethers. And the Count of Monte Christo did them all the favour to oblige.

One of the first events he went to though was a little get together for tea with only a handful of guests in the house of the Count of Morcerf on invitation of the Viscount of Morcerf. After all, it was him that the Count had saved so heroically in Rome, and as soon as London's upper class learned of this deed, it only added to the Count's allure.

Therefore, he was the immediate star at the Morcerf's, Rhys leading the Count around quite proud to have such a friend.

The first he was introduced to was Rhys' sister.

"My dear Count, may I introduce my sister to you, Miss Rhiannon."

Jack smiled charmingly at the young woman who luckily didn't bear any resemblance to her parents except for her dark hair. She, as smitten with him as everyone who met him had been, giggled at his charming attentions and blushed quite beautifully. But there was also a more earnest expression in her big, dark eyes, and she squeezed both of Jack's hands between hers emphatically. "I am so grateful to you that you saved my brother in Rome."

"Oh my dear, It has been an honour. Let's not talk about it any more. It was nothing."

"Ah ah, I have to disagree," Rhys laughed exuberantly. "It was very impressing how you commanded these bandits. For you see, dear sister, he wasn't even armed when he went into the lion's den to get me out."
Rhiannon gasped. “Impossible! How on Earth did you manage to free my brother?”

Jack smiled mysteriously at her. “It must have been my charm,” he joked and winked at her which prompted another giggle from her.

“That I believe immediately.”

The three spun around, and there stood Gwenlyn, formerly Cooper, now the Countess of Morcerf. While her children greeted her, Jack had time to compose himself again and scrutinise her carefully. She hadn't changed much. Her small body still had all the right curves in all the right places – a trait that her daughter had inherited – and her hair was still as black as ebony. Behind her smile, Jack still recognised the same flicker in her eyes that told of her envious nature that always seemed dissatisfied with the things she had, and instead yearned for what others had. Jack recognised that look, but only now was he able to read it correctly. Twenty years ago, he had been much too trusting in people to assume evil in those who were close to him.

“Mother, may I introduce to you my saviour,” Rhys said, “the Count of Monte Christo.” He turned to Jack. “My friend, my mother, the Countess of Morcerf.”

Jack threw Gwen an equally as charming smile as her daughter, but it was infused with a certain touch of his usual icy politeness.

“Oh, my dear, dear Count,” Gwen cooed as he kissed her hand, and fluttered her eyelashes. “We were dying to finally meet you. Rhys doesn't talk about anything else for months now.”

“I'm glad that I had such an impact on your whole family,” Jack smiled.

“Oh yes, you certainly did. We all feel as if we'd known you for years already. You seem practically family, isn't that right?”

“Yes, mother, it really is,” Rhiannon agreed whole-heartedly.

“You are too kind. And it means all the more to me since I myself haven't any family left.”

“Oh dear, that's sad!” Gwen gasped, and immediately linked her arm through his, pressing against him more tightly than propriety allowed. “Come on, come on. I have the strong urge to introduce you to everyone so that you may have more friends than anybody in this city before the week is over, you good man.”

Jack allowed her to pull him with her, enduring her simpering and her touches while Gwen introduced him to even more people. She was so eager that he feared she would invite people from the streets to introduce him to if she was through with their few guests.

He remembered each face closely since these few guests seemed to be the people who were the closest to the Morcerf's. Maybe, they would be useful to him some time in the future. At least, some of them were quite interesting. Among Rhys' friends, there was a highly fascinating woman that may have been in her thirties. Miss Donna Noble was a journalist who worked for her grandfather's gazette. Many people said behind her back that she only had this occupation because her grandfather wanted to indulge her, but Jack saw that she was more than a spoilt granddaughter who was allowed to write about High Society's gossip and fashion and other topics that held women's interests as all the other female reporters did. She had teeth and claws, this fierce redhead, and wouldn't be satisfied with being treated as a sensitive, decent lady who had no place at the editorial office since it would only offend a woman's sensitive character between all those crude men.

“As if I would care,” she had snorted quite unladylike. Jack had loved her on the spot. He was
convinced that she would prove to be very useful to him.

An ill-veiled impatient tug on his arm took him away from Miss Noble, and a careful glance at Gwen's face told him that she didn't like the attentions he bestowed on the other woman. She didn't seem to like her, period.

To appease her somewhat, he once more turned his complete attention onto her.

“I haven't had the honour yet to meet your husband, my dear. Pray tell, isn't he here today?”

“No, I'm afraid he still had some work to do. Always working, that man, but I can assure you, he is equally as eager to finally meet you and thank you in person,” Gwen chirped, and clearly basked in his attentions.

Jack smiled at her. “I'm sure we will soon have the opportunity, Milady.”

Gwen giggled unbecomingly like a little girl. “But he will be back in one week for the masquerade ball Madame Saxon is busily organising in her house. And I have it on good authority that you are invited as well, isn't that right, my dear Count? Your second day here in London, and already you are invited to one of our seasonal highlights. Your good reputation and news of your deeds run ahead of you.”

Jack raised her hand he still held in the crook of his arm to his mouth to lightly kiss it. “You are very well informed, my dear,” he murmured with a dark, seductive voice. He felt Gwen's hand tremble in his which spread out in her whole body.

She jumped when the sudden exuberant appearance of her son and his friends cruelly imposed on the intimate moment, and she couldn't hide the annoyed scrunching of her nose. Jack smiled inwardly.

“My friend,” Rhys cried, “more people just arrived to whom I could relate your heroic deeds. Let me introduce you Captain Leonard Jones and his sister, Miss Martha Jones. We met only recently through Miss Noble.”

Jack froze for a moment in pleasant surprise, then he let go of Gwen's hand quite abruptly, and greeted the Jones siblings with outright warmth, so as if greeting long lost friends; he grasped Martha's hand, kissing it chivalrously, and afterwards shook her brother's hand warmly.

“It's such a pleasure to meet you,” Jack exclaimed excited. “I have heard only good things about your family.”

The siblings frowned in pleasant surprise.

“Really?” Martha said, blushing with pleasure.

“Oh yes. Your dear father's reputation exceeds him quite far.”

A shadow flitted over Martha and Leonard's faces.

“That's very kind of you to say. Sadly, our father passed away a few years ago.”

Everyone was surprised to see honest distress on the Count's face about the death of a man he obviously had never met.

“I am devastated to hear this. I had no idea.”

“We thank you for your compassion,” Martha said, smiling warmly.
“Maybe you would allow me to meet you again soon so that you can tell me more about your family. This isn’t the suitable environment for a conversation like this.”

“I agree,” captain Jones said. “We would be honoured if you would visit us tomorrow.”

“That would be splendid.”

“Then it is agreed.”

Both Joneses as well as Jack turned to the others again to indicate that their separate conversation was over for now.

“May I enquire where you intend to live, my dear Count?” Martha asked, interested, tactfully changing the depressing topic for good. “Do you already have a house in mind?”

“My God!” Rhys cried, appalled. “You’ve only arrived yesterday! Surely that hasn't given you the time to look for a home yet. But we can't allow you to stay in a hotel until you find a suitable house.”

“My son is right. You are our guest of course,” Gwen agreed eagerly.

Jack chuckled. “That is very kind of you, but I already have a house.”

“Good gracious,” one of Rhys’ friends whistled. “Already?!"

“I send my housemistress ahead a few days ago. She managed to find a suitable home for me in Paternoster Row, and immediately set about furnishing and decorating so that everything was ready when I arrived yesterday.”

Rhys looked impressed about how well organised the Count was.

“You haven’t seen the house before buying it?!” Jones asked, astonished.

“No, I have implicit trust in Madame Vastra. And, as I knew it would, the house is to my liking.”

“Well,” one of Morcerf’s other friends cried, equally as impressed. “Now, the only thing you need is a mistress as is proper for High Society man.”

Jack looked slyly at his spellbound audience, and swapped gazes with Miss Noble who rolled her eyes at the men. “I have no need for a mistress. I have a slave.”

“Oh my. Is she beautiful?”

“Very much so.”

“Where is she from?”

“Japan.”

An impressed whistle escaped the young men.

“Very unusual”, Miss Noble said. “A man like you who lived in the orient for such a long time as you, I would have thought you brought a slave from there.”

“The circumstances I came upon her were unusual as well,” the Count replied mysteriously. “But that is a story for another time. Maybe you will have the chance to meet her when she accompanies me to the opera.”
“You do know, my dear Count, that the crown has aborted slavery, oh... four years ago?” Rhys enquired. “Yes, in ’34 it was.”

Jack looked very surprised. “Oh really. Well, someone will tell her sooner or later, I am sure.”

“Tell me, dear Count,” Gwen once more steered the conversation away from any uncomfortable topics like the dashing Count of Monte Christo having a lover. “How long do you intend to stay in London?”

Jack tilted his head. “I don't know yet. A year or two surely.”

“Oh!” Gwen clapped delighted. “How marvellous. We all will make sure that you have a fantastic time here.”

Once more, Jack inclined his head. “I am sure you will do your best, thank you, Milady.”

Chapter End Notes

I found nothing about female reporters this early, only from the latter half of the 19th century, but I thought Donna would be a good choice, and I didn't want to cut her out either. Anyway, when there were female reporters, they were doomed to write about typical women things like fashion and cooking, and they worked from home, not in the editorial office because it would (according to the men) sully a respectable woman's character since men there behaved very rude and swore all the time, drinking, smoking etc. In my story, Donna of course doesn't care about some stupid misbehaving men, and since it's a High Society journal, maybe the men in the offices there behaved slightly more civilised (I doubt it though).
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was noon the next day when Jack’s carriage held before the small but well kept house of the Jones. The two white horses harnessed to the carriage he had acquired only this morning after he had seen them and been appalled that someone owned finer horses in London than him, causing – as intended – quite the sensation everywhere they appeared all the way from Paternoster Row. Jack was greeted by Martha and Leonard in the lovely courtyard and a few feet away, tending to the rosebushes, Jack spotted the former first mate of the Valiant.

He shook hands with Leonard, and once again kissed Martha’s hand who giggled softly. At Jones’ invitation, Jack followed them inside.

“Please, dear Count,” Martha began after they had been served tea and some sandwiches, “where have you heard about our family that you seem so taken with us?”

“Oh, I hope my interest in you isn't in any way inappropriate?!”

“No, no, I'm just curious,” Martha assured.

“Well, then... I once had dealings in Cardiff. It's been years now. But when I was there, I heard the most wondrous and touching story about your family. I was told that your poor father was on the verge of bankruptcy at that time, all of his ships lost, but nonetheless, the honourable man wouldn't bow before any tragedy, no matter how devastating it may be. And then one day, when everybody said Jones was done for, a miracle happened. One of his lost ships returned, saving the company. I have seen it enter Cardiff Bay with my own two eyes.”

“You were there that day?” Leonard perked up, baffled.

“I was.”

“What a coincidence.”

“It really is. Anyway, I said to myself, you have to make acquaintances to a family like that. There aren’t many people left in this world that are as noble and honourable as you.”

The siblings blushed involuntarily at the, in their eyes, highly overrated praise, but Jack continued unfazed, “Unfortunately, I had to leave immediately. But, here we are now. In only regret never meeting your father.”

“Yes, a pity,” Martha agreed, contemplating him closely.

Jack tried to ignore her scrutinising gaze. She seemed to suspect something, maybe even thought she recognised him as the clerk of Thomson & French, but he doubted it. His disguise, aided by a wig and theatre make-up, had been much too convincing, he was sure of it. “I hope,” he continued diverting her attention to another topic, “that the company is blossoming again?”

“It fares quite well,” Leonard answered. “Our sister Letitia and her husband Thomas Milligan are manning things in Cardiff. I wouldn't have been able to with being a soldier, and Martha...” Leonard threw his sister an inquiring gaze, but Martha shrugged, deciding to confide in their guest.
“I wish to become a doctor,” she stated proudly. “But of course, no University would accept me. So, I have to make do with being a nurse.”

“It really is a crime,” Jack exclaimed in disgust. “I am convinced that you are a very fine nurse, and surely would be a splendid doctor.”

Martha blushed noticeably. “That's very kind of you to say.”

Jack made a dismissive gesture. “It is my deepest belief.” He frowned in contemplation. “If I can help you in any way, please let me know. Actually... Have you considered going to Switzerland? I believe they are more liberal concerning women going to Universities. Some countries in the Orient are susceptible to female doctor's as well. You should talk to my steward, Owen Harper. He once wanted to become a doctor as well. Unfortunate circumstances prevented him from becoming one, though, but he still keeps up meticulously with medical research. I know he would like an apt adversary for discussions, no matter if you are a woman. He appreciates talent, not gender.”

“Sounds like a fascinating opportunity,” Martha nodded happily. “I would like to meet him.”

“I will tell him then.”

A knock suddenly made them all look up, and a moment later, Mickey came in. “Sir, I only wanted to remind you of your appointment today. It's nearly time.”

Jack glanced at his pocket watch and nodded. “You are right. I'll be out in a moment.”

Standing up, Jack turned to his hosts regretfully. “I would have liked to stay longer, but Mr. Smith is right, I have an appointment I can't miss.”

The siblings escorted him outside where Mickey already waited with the carriage.

“You're welcome in our home whenever you want, Sir,” Martha assured, earning herself an honest smile from her guest.

“Please call me Jonathan. And I am honoured to be your guest very soon again. I felt at home here the moment I set foot into your lovely house. But until then, goodbye.”

Shaking Leonard's hand, and kissing Martha's, Jack bid his goodbyes to them. The two Jones siblings looked after their departing guest, astonished but smitten with this strange man.

In the early afternoon, Jack had indeed an appointment with Harold Saxon. He was received very courteously, but nonetheless, Jack recognised the malicious, perfidious streak that always glittered in Saxon's light eyes. The good baron didn't seem to quite believe in the supposed wealth of the mysterious newcomer despite what all the gossip proclaimed.

This became apparent when Jack presented him with three letters of recommendation from Thomson & French in Rome as well as from leading banking houses in Paris and Vienna. As it were, these three houses were the most important partners of the house Saxon.

“Unlimited credit?!?” Saxon cried, incredulous, while scanning the letters again. “What's that supposed to mean?”

“Well, my dear baron, I thought the meaning of the word 'unlimited' was quite clear to you,” Jack smiled mockingly.
Saxon bristled.

Sighing in feigned disappointment, Jack took the letters back from Saxon's unresisting hands. “I was of the impression that, since three grand, respectable houses such as these,” he waved the letters about, “manage to grant me unlimited credit, surely the house Saxon must be able to as well. Obviously, I was wrong. I should go to another bank.”

He made to stand up which snapped Saxon from his stupor. Hastily, he put his hand on Jack's arm to stop him. “Please, my dear Count. Wait just a minute. I'm sure we can come to an agreement.”

Jack nodded, and reclined in his chair again, looking expectantly at his opposite.

“Unlimited is a highly unusual concept, and quite vague as well. Say, how much do you really intend to spend while dwelling in London?”

Jack looked at him, slightly put out. “How should I know,” he exclaimed affronted. “That's why the credit should be unlimited.”

Saxon smiled indulgently. “Well, yes, but I have to work with a number here. I will be generous; how about one million pounds?”

“One million?!” Jack exclaimed in shock.

Saxon smirked slightly, but his face fell again as Jack continued.

“My dear Saxon,” Jack scoffed. “One million is the number of the pocket change I carry around with me.” And with a disdainful, haughty sneer, Jack threw a bundle of banknotes onto Saxon's desk.

The banker's face paled. But the longer he stared at the money lying on the desk, the calmer he became again, and the familiar greedy shine returned to his eyes at the prospect of such a reputable client.

Finally, he tore his gaze from the money to look at Jack. He smiled at him considerably more friendly than before. “How does six millions sound? Say, for one year?”

Jack sighed put upon. “All right. I suppose that is enough for a start.”

Saxon beamed. “We are agreed then. I'll prepare the contract immediately, my dear Count.”

After signing the contract, Saxon asked Jack to stay to meet Saxon's wife and daughter.

“A customer such as you is practically family,” he simpered as he led Jack into the family wing of the house.

“My dear,” he said as he spotted his wife in the parlour. “We have a guest. May I introduce the Count of Monte Christo. Count, my dear wife Lucy.”

Lucy rose and smiled charmingly at Jack. “What a pleasure to finally meet you. All of London only talks about you.”

“Only good things, I hope,” Jack answered with an equally charming smile that made Mrs. Saxon blush.

They offered Jack a chair, and for a few minutes, they chatted amicably when suddenly, a servant
entered and whispered something into Lucy's ear. The young woman reared back in shock.

“What do you mean, my horses are gone?!” She turned wide, accusing eyes onto her husband. “Where are my horses, Harry?! I wanted to loan them to Mrs. Smith for a ride tomorrow, and now I have to learn they have simply disappeared! Robbery, in my own house!”

“My dear,” Saxon smiled consolingly at her. “They haven't disappeared, nor were they stolen. There is nothing odd going on here, I simply sold them this morning.”

“You what?!” Mrs. Saxon's face became red as a tomato. “They were unsaleable!”

Her husband waved his hand dismissively. “Don't be so upset, my dear. I'll buy you a new pair. See, this morning, a man came to me and offered thirty-thousand for them. That's double for what I paid for them. It is not our fault if some poor fool wants to ruin himself only because of two horses.”

“That's all fine and dandy, but now I don't have horses for Mrs. Smith!” Lucy insisted. “Do you know what a fool the Smiths must think me now?!”

Saxon, bored with his wife's screeching, turned to his guest again. “I'm sorry for the scene. It's a pity that you weren't here sooner, my friend. Surely you don't have an equipage befitting your rank yet. I would have made you a good price.”

“Oh, no, no. Just this morning, my intendant presented me with two splendid horses. I don't know where he got them from or what he paid though since it was a surprise gift to me. You can see them from this window there, I believe.”

Interested, Saxon stood up to inspect the Count's horses. He noticeably stiffened when he looked out of the window.

Interested as well, Lucy joined her husband at the window.

“These are my horses!” she screeched, and powerlessly sank down onto the nearest chair, panting heavily.

Since both Saxons didn't pay him attention in that moment, no one saw the slight, satisfied smirk curling the corners of Jack's lips. This marriage presented here before him apparently wasn't as harmonious as they wanted to make him believe. Him breeding discord because of the horses (and of course he had known whose horses they were) definitely wouldn't help.

Jack said his goodbyes very soon, leaving the Saxons to compose themselves in peace.

As soon as he was home, he instructed Mickey to send the horses back to Mrs. Saxon the next day, outfitted with diamond encrusted bridle as an apology as well as a letter where he stated that he wouldn't have been able to bear Lucy's pain if he had kept them.

Being utterly satisfied with the day's achievements so far, Jack decided to take a little break until his own appointed guest would arrive in two hours. He retreated into his bedroom together with Alonso for a very satisfactory afternoon tryst to take his mind off of things for a while.

Two hours later, Mickey announced the estate agent Jack had requested, and he once again wore his mask as the aloof Count of Monte Christo when he met the man in the parlour.

The man brought the necessary papers for the transaction Jack planned, namely, to buy an
abandoned house in Chiswick. The estate agent pleaded with him to look for a more suitable house for a man of his position since the house was in a terrible state, but Jack insisted on this house. Sighing, the estate agent relented, and they signed the sales contract. With a satisfied smile playing around his lips, Jack bid the man goodbye.

“Why did you buy this ramshackle place?” Mickey asked after he had seen the man out.

He winked at Mickey conspiratorially. “Because, my dear Mr. Smith, this house belonged to Peter and Jacqueline Tyler, the parents of John Smith’s late wife Rose. Apparently, they haven’t been there in years because it’s too far away from Cardiff, and since their daughter’s death, they have no interest any more in London’s High Life.” He shrugged. “Maybe it will be of use to me one day. Ah, Owen.”

Questioningly, Owen looked at his master when he entered the room with Jack’s dinner.

“Tomorrow, we will inspect my new purchase in Chiswick. Here is the address.” Jack handed Owen the sales contract.

The younger man put down the dinner tray, and took the sheet of paper. Suddenly, all colour drained from his face, and his hands began to shake.

“Owen?” Concerned, Jack watched his friend become paler and paler so as if he had seen a ghost. “What is it?” He marched up to him, and pushed him into the nearest chair with gentle force. Mickey hurried over to press a glass of brandy into his trembling hand.

For a few moments, Owen stared at the document he still held, then he looked up at Jack, shell-shocked. “I have to tell you something.” His gaze flitted over to Mickey who took the hint and left the two men.

Curious, Jack sat opposite Owen. The other man took a deep draught of brandy, then a deep breath. He started to speak in a solemn voice without looking at Jack. Instead, his gaze was fixed firmly onto the words of the document.

“I have been there before,” he explained, weakly raising the paper.

“When?” Jack frowned.

“Twenty years ago.” He took another swallow. “I didn't know who owned it. Funny coincidence, hm?” He laughed darkly. “I only knew that it was rented to a lady at that time. I only knew her as the baroness. One of the maids, Katie, she... we were... We wanted to get married...”

Surprised, Jack blinked at Owen. He hadn't known that about his friend.

“You know I wanted to become a doctor, but I never told you why I didn't, only that it was because of, well, unfortunate circumstances.”

“Yes,” Jack nodded, recalling that he had used the same words just this noon to tell to Martha Jones.

“Sometimes, I visited with her. Once or twice, I saw her mistress. And her lover. All of the staff knew that she was having an affair of course. Rumour had it she was married and so was he, ’s why they needed a safe place to meet.”

“And they met in this exact house.”

“They did.” Owen suddenly shuddered, and drained his glass, gratefully accepting a refill. “I wanted
to be an honourable man. I really did. But once and again, I liked to gamble. I told me I would stop
when I married Katie, but until then... I had some debts I had trouble to pay, so, when one
evening...”

“What?” Keenly, Jack shuffled forward in his armchair, not letting Owen out of his sight for even
one second. “What happened?”

“I was with Katie, her mistress' lover was there that night as well. 'T was a strange night. Everybody
was on edge somehow, the air was heavy with anticipation, as if a storm was looming. When I asked
Katie, she didn't want to tell me. After a while, I decided to leave again. I went through the garden so
that nobody could see me. And there he was, the lover. Anxious of being caught, I hid behind a bush
to wait for him to go again. But he didn't. He's busily digging a hole underneath one of the trees.
When he deemed it deep enough, he put a heavy looking box inside. Then he sealed the hole again. I
waited a few minutes until I could be sure he was gone, then I unburied the box. I thought he had
hidden a treasure, and I hoped to pay my gambling debts with whatever valuable was hidden in that
box.” A heavy tremble ran through Owen again, and he startled violently when Jack put a
comforting hand on his arm. He gratefully grabbed it, and took a deep breath. “Inside... inside was a
baby.”

This was something even Jack hadn't expected, and he sucked in a sharp breath. “Was it dead?”

“I thought so at first, the boy's face was all blue and he didn't breath. Surely the man must have
thought so as well, why bury it otherwise. But then... I saw a thin string around the baby's neck.
Jack!” Owen turned haunted eyes on to him. “It hadn't been stillborn. They tried to murder it!”

Jack squeezed Owen's arm again, pondering what he had learned. “If they were both indeed married,
an illegitimate child could have ruined their reputation.”

“They didn't need to murder it!” Owen hissed in distress.

Nodding, Jack bade Owen to continue.

“I snapped out of my shock fast, and remembered my training. I tried to reanimate the boy, and
indeed, he was still alive. I took him with me since I didn't know if only the father wanted to get rid
of the child or the mother, too. I couldn't take the risk. My cousin took the boy in and raised him. I
never told Katie though, and a month later, she was dead, killed by a nasty bug that almost didn't
seem from this world in its hideousness. I couldn't safe her despite my almost being a full doctor.
After I had buried her, I left, and never turned back.”

The two men sat together mutely for a long time, the only sound in the otherwise silent room the
-crackling of the fire in the fireplace.

“I'm sorry for your loss,” Jack whispered eventually.

Putting up a brave front, Owen shrugged impassively and sniffed. “Yeah, well. It's been twenty
years.” He turned pleading eyes up to Jack, his impassive facade cracking slightly. “But please, Jack,
please don't force me to go there again. At least not yet. Give me some time.”

Jack nodded. “Of course. Don't worry. You man Paternoster Row while I go there tomorrow, all
right?”

A small, grateful smile played around Owen's thin lips. “Thank you.”
I let Jack tell Martha about going to Switzerland because, indeed, they seemed to be much more liberal there with letting women study medicine than in other countries (I don't know about England, I only found information about female doctors in Germany, and there, they had absolutely no chance in the 19th and a good part of the 20th century against their male counterparts). In 1872, the first female medicine student graduated there, Marie Heim-Vögtlin.
Lucy Saxon got her horses back just in time the next day to indeed loan them to Mrs. Smith for a little ride. As coincidences went, the carriage had to take a detour because of some road works, leading it past the Count's new house in Chiswick instead. A young black man had informed the carriage driver cheerfully, petting one of the horses playfully on the nose as he argued with the man, in the end winning out so that the grumbling man had to take another than the intended way. Soon after, one of the horses started to act strange. It became restless, passing on its nervousness on to the other horse as well. Suddenly, one of them bolted with a shrill whinny, the other following immediately. The carriage driver gave an angry shout while he tried to reign the panicked animals in, the occupants screaming and crying in fear as they clutched to each other. The heavy carriage rumpled across the cobbled street at a disturbing speed, in the tight curves almost being upset more than once.

And suddenly, it was all over.

The carriage came to an abrupt stop, the nervous whinnying of the horses the only sound in the sudden deafening silence.

Shakily, the woman and little boy sitting in the carriage were helped out by the equally shaken driver.

"Dear God! Are you all right?"

The woman looked up, clutching her son to her, and met the eyes of a dashing man worriedly rushing over to her. Her gaze wandered further over a small, stout man holding the reigns of the horses, then to her driver who looked very pale.

She nodded at the man.

"Please, come inside to recuperate from the shock."

Grateful, she followed him inside his house.

Satisfied, Jack passed Strax on his way inside, instructing him to look after the shaken driver, then he led Mrs. Smith and her little son inside. Everything went as planned. The chemical he had given Mickey to apply to the horses had worked perfectly, and his cook, Strax, had acted like ordered as well, waiting causally before the house when suddenly, the carriage had appeared. Strax was good with horses despite his small stature which only helped to show that the Count of Monte Christo not only employed very particular servants but very apt ones as well. Utilizing Strax' skills, he had made him impede the crazed horses, thus saving Mrs. Smith and her son seemingly incidentally.

As she introduced herself after he had led her into the parlour, he had of course known who she was, but now feigned ignorance. He had been told she was a clever and witty woman, but now, even she was much too shaken for interesting conversation, her attention frequently flitting to her son who lay on the settee quite pale and frightened. So, after a little while, he called for his own carriage to take her home again, sending her driver after them with the still jittery horses.
Not two hours later, much to Jack's glee, a guest was announced to him, none other than chief deputy prosecutor John Smith.

The man had the reputation of being unrelenting and strict, his work the most important thing in his life. Amenities like parties or balls, even the opera were not to his liking, even superfluous in his opinion, honourable, hard work being the only thing that was worth striving for. So, to see this rigid man rush inside Jack's parlour, clearly thrown about this afternoon's events though he tried to hide it, filled Jack with a satisfaction he seldomly felt.

He immediately recognised the young, eager prosecutor he had met all those years ago in the seasoned, proud and forbidding man greeting Jack with sincere gratitude for saving his wife and son although it became soon very clear that he hadn't much love lost for the incredibly rich and mysterious newcomer to London's High Society. Jack had known he would get Smith to notice him through his family, therefore concocting the plan he had, not without any risk to Mrs. Smith and the child, he had to admit. But with this man, it was all about protecting his family. If not, they both wouldn't be here now.

“It is quite all right, Mr. Smith,” Jack reassured the man. “It goes without saying that we helped your family. I'm only glad it has been my cook out there on the street at that moment for he is the most apt in dealing with horses.”

“Your cook?” Smith's eyes widened slightly, astonished, and with a hint of irritation.

“Well, yes. I believe he once belonged to a Bedouin tribe from the Negev desert. Their skills with horses are quite astonishing.”

“You employ very interesting people, Count.”

“I only want the best,” Jack replied, aloof.

“Of course. However, please tell me how I can be of service to you. I am sincerely indebted to you.”

“Oh please, dear Mr. Smith, you surely aren't!” Jack assured, though in reality, he had only waited to hear Smith say exactly that.

“I insist. I like my debts to be paid immediately. So, if there is anything I can help you with...”

Jack pretended to think about it for a little while. “Maybe there really is something,” he eventually admitted. He waved his hand dismissively. “It's nothing, really, but recently, a young maid came to me, asking for work. Unfortunately, I don't have any use for her at the moment, but I don't like to abandon people like that.”

Smith started to sneer at that attitude, but Jack continued before the prosecutor could voice his way of looking at this.

“Maybe you would take her on?”

“You are prepared to waste a valuable debt for a girl you don't even know?” A frown marred Smith's angular features, telling Jack how foolish he thought his benevolence.

Bristling inside, Jack only shrugged impassively. “Everything I want, I have, and if not, I can buy it. Why not use connections like this to help others.”

Smith frowned once more, but then he shrugged as well. “Very well. If that is all you ask. I am indeed willing to employ the girl. She shall come to me tomorrow.”
Jack smiled politely. “Thank you. I will send her a message. Her name is Jenny Flint, by the way.”

Smith inclined his head, then stood to depart. “If that is all, I will take my leave.” He bowed formally which Jack returned. “My wife and I would be delighted if you would visit us tomorrow in our home. By then, she will have recovered from her shock sufficiently, and will like to thank you in person again.”

“I would be honoured.”

“Until tomorrow then.”

Smith left the room, being escorted out of the house by one of the servants.

Satisfied that he had Jenny as good as planted inside the Smith household, Jack left the parlour with a noticeable spring in his step. Maybe Alonso would be amenable to spending the eve with him.

“Jack!”

Jack turned to Owen who hurried over to him, looking at him urgently. He was almost as pale as he had been yesterday eve, but now, grim determination additionally shone in his eyes.


Confused, Jack frowned. “I don't understand.”

“The mysterious lover of the baroness.”

Jack's eyes widened in shock. He blinked at Owen for a few moments, then his face took on a determined expression. “Are you absolutely sure?”

“I am.” Owen nodded firmly.

Excitement rushed through him suddenly, making him tremble over his whole body. He grabbed Owen's shoulders, looking him dead in the eye. “Where is the boy? You said your cousin took him in.”

Yesterday, he hadn't cared about the boy's further fate, his only concern had been Owen. But now! Now this boy was more precious to him than anybody could imagine. Finally, he had found something indiscriminating against Smith! The man was slippery as an eel, and seemingly had done no wrongs during his stellar career, no matter how deep Jack dug which was why he wanted to send Jenny into the prosecutor's household, to dig for information if she could. It was incredible and surely a twist of fate that it turned out Jack was friends with the one man who had watched Smith do the unimaginable that would ultimately help Jack bring him down now.

Owen cringed, of course immediately understanding how important the boy was now to Jack. “Johnny ran away a few years ago. Never seen him again. 'M not sorry for that though. The brat was always a nuisance, being on the fiddle from an early age on. My cousin only had trouble with him.”

Jack snorted snidely. “It's the heritage. I believe Smith's little son, Edward, is the same. Although he was paralysed with shock, I clearly recognised the malicious gleam in his eyes.”

“Wonderful character traits Smith has to pass on, charming,” Owen growled.

“Go to River, help her find Johnny as fast as possible.”

Owen nodded, clearly not happy with the order, but obeying nonetheless.
Retaining the victorious grin that wanted to spread over his face just barely, Jack went in search for Alonso. He wanted to celebrate tonight.

True to his word, Jack visited with the Smiths the next day, noting with satisfaction that it was Jenny who opened the door for him, and led him into her new masters' parlour. John Smith was only present for a few minutes before he had to leave for court, but Mrs. Smith was doing well again, and took over tending to their guest whole-heartedly. The boy was up and about again as well, proving to Jack what he had already assumed; that Edward was a spoilt, cruel brat with no empathy for other living beings whatsoever if the dog turning tail when the boy stepped into the room was any indication. Nonetheless, he was the apple of his mother's eye, and she seemingly didn't notice his disturbing nature. As much as she seemed to love her own child, the temperature dropped noticeably though, the smile on Mrs. Smith's face freezing when her lovely stepdaughter Jenny followed her little brother into the room. Jack noticed this with hawk's eyes, memorising every little detail carefully that could help him against Smith.

To his relief, Miss Jenny took the boy away after a little while, leaving him alone with Mrs. Smith. This boy was disturbing somehow, and Jack shuddered to imagine what would become of him one day. Gratefully, he turned his complete attention on Mrs. Smith.

“Pray tell, Mrs. Smith...”

“Please, call me Missy,” she interrupted him with a faux coy smile.


“Isn't it,” Missy grinned.

“Very well. Missy. I couldn't help but notice that you seemed very interested in the elixir I used to revive your unconscious son yesterday.”

Missy's normally strikingly harsh face brightened. “Oh, you really have noticed. Yes. I was much too shaken to say anything, but I was highly curious. Would you tell me about the ingredients of this fantastic brew? You see, I am very interested in the properties of plants. Especially poisonous ones.”

Jack inclined his head. “In that case, I will tell you because it is a brew that has to be handled very carefully. One drop too much, and it could kill instead of revive.”

“Believe me,” Missy smiled, putting her hand trustingly on Jack's arm, “I am very apt in handling such delicate concoctions.”

“I will write the recipe down for you before I leave,” he promised.

“Splendid. Would you like to see my little library? I so seldomly meet someone who has any interest or talent in my passion. You seem like a Godsend.”

“I would love to,” Jack smiled at her, filing the knowledge about her affinity for poisons away equally as careful as the rest. Maybe it would come in handy one day.

Together, they left the parlour, and retreated into Missy's private library where she also had set up a little laboratory. She carefully locked the door as soon as they had come inside, presumably to foremost protect her son from the highly dangerous contents of this room.

They whiled away the afternoon, completely forgetting the time, and, as much as Jack was loathe to
admit, Missy Smith was a very cunning and clever conversation partner. And highly dangerous. He had to be careful around her. If there was one who could really become a danger to his plans, it was this woman.

In the early evening, Jack bid his goodbyes. Leaving the house, he threw Jenny a brisk tight, encouraging smile, not envying her to have to stay in this house.

As if experiencing a déjà vu, a few days later, Owen once more stopped dead in his tracks, and turned wide eyes onto Jack as he was just picking up his master and his exotic companion that turned every head she went from their visit to the opera. “Lucy Saxon,” he whispered, refraining from looking after the Saxons that were just strolling out of the opera house. “It's her. She's the baroness. She's Smith's mysterious lover.”

Marvelling once more at this incredible coincidence, a small, triumphant smile played around Jack's lips. These days, he didn't seem to be able to stop smiling even for a minute. Everything went even better than planned.

Chapter End Notes

I de-fanged Johnny here a little so to say because I still have plans for him, different than from the book (If you think closely about his name, you can guess what I plan for him, and for that, he has to be somewhat decent). In the book, he was not only a brat, but really dangerous, a murderer. He robbed his foster mother blind, beat her, locked her up inside her house, and set fire to it, laughing about it with his friends while she burned inside. A real charming boy, you see, everybody's dream of a son in law.
After his independent visit with the Jones siblings, and meeting the Saxons as well as the Smiths, Morcerf continued his efforts to introduce the Count of Monte Christo into society. Jack visited a lot of people to soirées and for tea time over the course of the next few days. He supposed, none would rest until all of High Society London had made his acquaintance. And if after, his appeal to them would abate, he had cultivated many eccentrics that would be reason enough to talk about, and not to forget his money. He could practically buy everything he wished, and that would surely secure their attention.

But then, the day of Lucy Saxon's grand carnival ball had arrived.

Jack had to admit, he was quite nervous when he awoke that morning. Though he had met all of his enemies and some of his old friends already, none of them recognising him, there was the one person left who could recognise him. Who if not Ianto Jones. Not even Gwen, despite her obsession with Jack Harkness had recognised him. Obviously, not only his outward appearance had changed, but his cold, controlled, aloof demeanour that didn't even disappear completely when he smiled or flirted didn't have much in common any more with the exuberant, carefree, merry behaviour of his youth.

The whole day until evening, he couldn't think about anything else but Ianto (he had thought about him the whole week already, realising with painful amazement that he already resided in the same city as him so many days without even having seen him once). He almost wished Ianto would recognise him. The thought that he would be with him in the same room, talk to him, shake his hand even without being recognised was almost unbearable. He didn't want to be a stranger to Ianto, he wanted to see the light shine up in his eyes when he realised that the man he once loved was alive. But then, what if he wasn't happy to see him? Based on all he had learned over the years, what if Ianto really had changed so much that he had become as despicable in character as his wife? Oh, such torture! And still a few hours until he had certainty. But wouldn't it be even more horrible if he was still the same sweet boy. Though, how could a person retain their innocence after such acts...

The Saxon's house was splendidly lit, and dozens of colourfully costumed guests climbed from their carriages. All of their faces were partly hidden by masks, some plain white or black, others elaborately and colourful like Jack's own. His costume for the eve consisted of that of a marine captain, splendidly clothed in dark blue with shining brass buttons. If this should be Jack's crucible, he wanted to pass it as himself so to speak, wearing an armour that, hadn't he so cruelly ended in prison, would have been his rightful dress garb today. But apart from that, he was glad for the mask as well. He felt less vulnerable with it before Ianto who had always been the only person to see right through him no matter how hard he tried to hide his true feelings.

His hosts greeted him exuberantly, and Lucy Saxon immediately monopolised him to lead him around. Jack spotted Mrs. Smith dressed as Cleopatra accompanied by her stepdaughter who looked bright and fresh and innocent like something from a Jane Austen novel, her blond locks curled lovely around her pretty face. Martha and Leonard Jones were there as well, less because of their high rank in society but more because Leonard was acquainted with Rhys and his friends as well because he was a respectable Captain in his majesty's army. It was always en vogue to be friends with dashing
soldiers. Martha looked beautiful, posing as an exotic Arabic princess while her brother wore the attire of an Indian maharajah.

As soon as Rhiannon in the form of a Celtic goddess spotted Jack, she launched herself at him, and excitedly pulled him over to her family who greeted him equally as happy. Her brother had costumed himself as a Roman soldier while his mother appeared as a lady of the court that would have found herself quite at home at the court of Louis XIV., her ostentatious dress overloaded with frills and gems, her tight bodice pushing up her breasts almost obscenely that she'd always seen as her most valuable assets.

And then he stood before Jack, dressed in a marine captain's uniform as well of all things.

Jack's breath caught, and his whole body started to tingle pleasantly.

“This is my father, dear Count,” Rhiannon introduced, “the Count of Morcerf.”

Ianto stepped forward with a polite but honest smile on his masked face. “My dear Count!” he exclaimed, grasping Jack's slightly trembling hands. “I am so happy to finally meet you. Unfortunately, I haven't had the opportunity yet to thank you in person for saving my son.”

Jack swallowed hard, and had to resist the urge to pull his hands from Ianto's grip, the pleasant warmth he felt through both of their white dress gloves almost too much to bear.

“It was an honour,” Jack replied solemnly, looking Ianto deep in the eyes, searching for a spark of recognition. A noticeable tremble went through Ianto at the intense gaze, but Jack couldn't tell for sure what it may mean.

Ianto seemed lost for words for a moment while they stared at each other and still held each other's hands. A sudden loud laugh from one of the other guests jolted them out of their haze so that they both startled quite violently. Ianto offered him his arm with a momentarily insecure smile. “Walk with me,” he asked, and Jack put his arm into the crook of Ianto's elbow. Slowly, they distanced themselves from nosy ears such as Gwen who threw her husband jealous looks that both men weren't aware of, and strolled around the dance hall.

“An interesting choice of costume, my friend,” Jack observed which made Ianto chuckle. Oh, how Jack had missed this!

“I could compliment you as well on the choice of your costume. Do you know the saying 'Great minds think alike'?”

Jack laughed heartily, suddenly feeling wonderfully liberated.

Ianto looked at him from the side, his eyes sparkling with mirth. “Only the topic of your mask makes me wonder. A peacock, dear Count?”

Jack couldn't stop himself from throwing Ianto his most charming grin, touching the black and gold mask adorned with glittering green and blue gems as well as peacock feathers. “What do you make of it, then?”

“Well, a peacock stands for many things. Vanity for example as well as jealousy, but I neither think you vain nor jealous.”

“Oh, don't get me wrong, I am quite vain,” Jack laughed.

“Hm, no, not like that. Your costume is elegant but simple, not at all like the splendour of my wife.”
With glee, Jack noticed the slight jab at Gwen, therefore, he didn't call Ianto on the not very husbandly comment.

“It...” Ianto continued thoughtfully. “A peacock stands for beauty as well. And love.” Ianto looked intently at Jack, pausing their stroll, their smouldering gazes holding tight to each other. “From what I can gather, the former is quite correct. What about the latter?”

“There is no love in my life any more,” Jack whispered, involuntarily blushing under his mask at Ianto's compliment. “I lost love long ago.”

“I'm sorry to hear that,” Ianto replied softly, sadly. “But if not love...” Ianto looked harder at Jack, trying to read him correctly. “In Christian iconography, the peacock additionally stands for immortality,” he murmured.

Approving, Jack looked directly at Ianto. “Very good, my friend.”

“Please,” Ianto interrupted, “call me Ianto. After all, we are to become friends, are we not?”

Jack swallowed heavily. “Ianto then.” His heart beat like mad as Ianto giggled about Jack's pronunciation of his name. “Then please call me Jonathan.”

“Jonathan,” Ianto mused. “Many of the guests here this eve would give an arm to learn your given name.”

Jack shrugged. “I don't shout it from the rooftops. People have to earn the right to become so familiar with me.”

“Then the honour weighs even more. So, why immortality?”

The bantering note in Jack's voice vanished at once as he answered softly, “It shall remind me that my enemies didn't succeed in vanquishing me. Whatever they tried, I survived, and I shall outlast them in the future as well.”

“Do you have enemies then, Jonathan?” Ianto asked softly.

“Everybody has enemies. It would be foolish to think otherwise.”

“That's a rather hard view on life.”

“It's the truth. You live here, in London, moving over the political stage every day. You know how easy it is to bring another to their downfall. Everybody could be next, you never know.”

Ianto swallowed. “You are right, I'm afraid.”

“Father!”

The two men startled at the nearby giggling cry, and a Celtic goddess suddenly stumbled into her father's arms, quite tipsy already.

Ianto frowned sternly at her. “Rhiannon! Have you drunk the punch?!”

The young woman giggled together with a friend she had in tow. The note of her giggle sounded so much like Ianto's that it was like a painful stab into Jack's heart. “Maybe a little.”

“That's unbecoming of a lady,” Ianto admonished sternly.
“Let her have a little fun,” Jack tried to mediate with a laugh, gently putting his hand on Ianto’s arm.

“Don’t encourage her,” Ianto grumbled, earning himself another giggle from his daughter.

“See, father, even the Count of Monte Christo thinks you should have a little fun. Listen to him, he is very wise.”

“That’s not what he said!” Ianto protested.

“Then I’ll say it now,” Jack snickered. “The tone of our conversation has been rather sombre. We are in dire need of a cheering up. What would you suggest, Miss Rhiannon?”

“A dance!” Both girls cried as one. And before either man could turn to the two young ladies to ask them for a dance, they exclaimed, “Together!”

Both men blushed noticeably under their masks, Jack from unexpected hopeful joy, Ianto from embarrassment.

“That’s not proper, Rhiannon!” Ianto admonished.

“Oh, don’t worry, Sir,” Rhiannon’s friend laughed. “We’re dancing together as well, see.” The two ladies danced in a circle around the men, laughing and giggling like fairies.

“It’s carnival,” Rhiannon agreed. “So, it’s all right during carnival. It’s all about fun, isn’t it.”

“Well,” Jack laughed, then bowed grandly before the girls. “I’m afraid we have nothing to counter your argument with.”

He turned to Ianto who still frowned visibly under his navy blue mask.

“Come on,” Jack coaxed with a grin. “Afterwards, we can always say the ladies forced us.”

Ianto threw pouting glances between the girls and Jack before he sighed heavily.

“All right,” he relented, exasperated. “You lead. I will follow you.”

Jack swallowed around the sudden lump in his throat, but nodded. He stepped up close to the other man, and grasped his hand, his other arm wound around Ianto’s waist.

Under the giggling, cheering, and watchful eyes of the young ladies, the two men moved around the dance hall in circles. Ianto’s stiff, awkward form relaxed somewhat when he saw other men dance with each other as well, laughing and simply being silly. Jack noticed his gaze.

“See,” he murmured, startling Ianto out of his observations so that he focused on his dance partner once more with wide eyes. “There’s nothing to it. It’s only about being merry today.”

Ianto gave a grumbling answer that made Jack laugh.

For a few minutes, they danced without speaking. Jack didn’t know what Ianto felt right now, but he himself felt as if dancing on clouds. He was so happy right at this moment since he held the man he loved in his arms again after all these years, and, he marvelled, it was the first time ever they danced together. And in public as well! What a marvellous concept carnival was.

“I have to apologise,” Ianto said eventually.

Confused, Jack raised an eyebrow. “What for?”
“I'm acting rather silly and quite childish this eve. Normally, I'm not like that, but...” He bit his lip.

“With you, I feel as if we have known each other for ages, so that there is no need to behave right and proper,” Ianto confessed which caused pleasant warmth to flow through Jack's whole body.

“I feel the same,” he smiled gently.

“Do we?” Ianto frowned. “Have we met somewhere?”

Jack’s answering smile was slightly strained as he shook his head. “Maybe in another life, but not in this.”

“Hmm... Strange. I could have sworn...”

“Me too,” Jack smiled wanly at him.

Without even noticing, they had come to a standstill in the middle of the dance hall, all the while looking at each other.

“Maybe we should stop,” Ianto murmured. “I feel quite flushed.”

“We have stopped,” Jack replied softly. “But you are right. It is quite warm in here.”

“Shall we go outside for a moment?”

Jack had to swallow at the slight hopefulness in Ianto's voice, but he declined, shaking his head jerkily. If he now went out into the gardens with Ianto, alone, he wouldn't be held responsible for what he may do. He couldn't stay in Ianto's presence for one moment longer without telling him the truth, so, with the deepest regret so that it almost ripped his heart to pieces, he stepped away from Ianto and bowed formally.

“I'm afraid I have to go,” he said a little stiffly and without explaining himself further. “Good evening, Count.”

Without looking back, he rushed away, leaving Ianto standing in the middle of a crowded dance hall. Despite the heat of the room, a shiver wrecked his whole body, and he was sure he could feel Ianto's hurt and accusing gaze following him.

Chapter End Notes

The carnival I'm talking about here is of course the Notting Hill Carnival. Okay, granted, it exists only since 1966, but the opportunity was too good to let it pass. And it is the perfect occasion for a masquerade ball after all. In the book, there is no such thing, but there is a scene like that in an older Monte Christo film with Jean Marrais. I thought the concept of a masquerade ball quite nice for a reunion.
Jack nodded as his steward had ended his report, leaning back in his armchair to contemplate what he had learned. As he had ordered, Madame Vastra was busily overseeing the redecorations of his newly acquired house so that he could soon give his invitations to his intended guests.

“Thanks, Owen. Very good.”

Owen nodded as well, and leaned back in his own chair, his part taken care of.

Jack looked expectantly at River. “And you, my dear? What have you learned?”

A mischievous gleam brightened River’s eyes that made Jack chuckle. This woman had way too much fun snooping around in other people’s business, but her thorough persistence was what Jack loved about her after all.

“The Saxons and Morcerfs negotiate about a wedding between Rhys and Clara Saxon. After all, they are a good match.”

“Hmm, interesting. Go on.”

“Rhys is rather reluctant, and Miss Saxon doesn't want to marry him at all. The Countess of Morcerf is against this union as well. I think we all know why.”

“Indeed,” Jack chuckled grimly. If there was one person who hated Saxon more than Jack, it was Gwen. A wedding between their children must be like a dagger thrust right into her heart.

River snorted pityingly. “Poor Count of Morcerf seems to be the only one of his family who supports the wedding. But from what I gathered, I think they will abort the negotiations because it will fail due to the other Morcerfs' resistance.”

Put out, Jack pressed his lips together. He didn't know how he thought about this plan. On the one side, he would wish Gwen the humiliation of a liaison with Saxon. But on the other hand, he didn't want to support this wedding because despite his hatred for the parents, he didn't want the children to be unhappy. Until now, his plans had been so easy, he hadn't factored in the children, and that he would come to care for them...

He waved his hand slightly impatiently at his friends who had kept silent while he contemplated this news as well. “Go on. Where's Mickey by the way?”

River and Owen threw each other shrewd gazes.

“He and Miss Martha Jones are currently enjoying tea or coffee or whatever in a small café not far from the Jones household,” Owen reported smugly. “He noticed her already in Cardiff nine years ago, and when he accompanied you to them last week, he was reminded of her merits.”

This news cheered Jack up again, and therefore, he decided to give Mickey some leeway in the near future to pursue Martha. If he himself wasn't destined to be happy, then at least those who were close to him should be if they had the chance. He still had River, Owen, and Alonso who investigated for him, not to forget his faithful Jenny as well as others who he simply paid for the information without
having told them why he needed this information.

That reminded him of...

“River, any news on our elusive Johnny?”

“I may have a promising trace.”

“Very good. Keep me informed.” Jack nodded, pleased. He chanced a look at his pocket watch. He wondered where...

The door burst open, and in rushed Alonso, apologising even before he had stepped fully into the room.

“It's all right,” Jack assured him, indicating for his lover to take a seat.

Owen and River chuckled at him good-naturedly.

“Let me guess,” Owen snorted. “Miss Noble.”

The sweet-tempered Alonso blushed, overwhelmed, and gladly accepted a drink from Owen.

Jack couldn't help himself but admire the young man even if he appeared rushed and quite flustered at the moment (not that the endearing flush on his cheeks didn't make him unbelievably attractive). His lover looked incredibly dashing with his slender body fitted with a fashionably tailored suit. Jack wouldn't be at all surprised if, sooner or later, Alonso attracted someone's eye who could love him the way he deserved. Jack couldn't, and they both knew that...

He was roused from his admiration when the young man in question spoke. “She is quite the handful,” he had to admit.

Jack had to join in his friends' teasing chuckles. Initially, he had sent Alonso, dressed to the nines like the finest dandy, to frequent all the fashionable upper class cafés and salons to gather all kinds of interesting information. After all, nothing was so educational than gossip. As it seemed, he had met Miss Noble there who had taken quite a liking to him, in her exuberant, vigorous fashion almost too much for the kind, reserved boy, but, Jack had to admit, he acquitted himself very well so far. In only a few days, Alonso had brought back a lot of useful information, be it the newest gossip or speculations about stock transactions, the latter having opened a door for Jack to bring Saxon down for sure. Because Alonso had made the acquaintance of a young man who turned out to be Lucy Saxon's lover (a not so well kept secret) who worked for the Minister of the Interior, and frequently seemed to provide his lover with important state secrets she in turn passed on to her husband. These investment information warranted him success in his gambling on the stock exchange because he knew things before others learned of them...

“Well,” he exclaimed, after he had listened to the newest gossip going around, and rose. “I believe it is time I familiarise myself with telegraphy intimately.”

Leaving his slightly confused friends behind, he rushed out.

Taking the elusive and suddenly having turned up again Mickey with him, Jack left for a few days for Bristol for a little shopping. On his way back, he stopped at the last telegraph station before London, and had a little chat with the telegraph master.
At the end of the day, Jack left with his goals accomplished, and the telegraph master was left without a job for forwarding an unauthorised, seemingly harmless little note from Jack but with a pension of a considerable sum.

The next day, Alonso told him that Saxon had, in a kneejerk reaction sold all of his Spanish bonds. When a politically charged message was published in the press about disputes about a turning point in the war about the Spanish succession, everybody who owned Spanish bonds hurriedly copied Saxon's actions, admiring him for his foresight to divest himself of the now worthless bonds. Sure, Saxon lost half a million pounds, but he went to bed completely assured that he had forestalled worse consequences. Jack slept very well that night as well because he, contrary to Saxon, knew which outrageous headlines would grace the newspapers the following morning. Namely that a false telegraph message had caused quite the uproar at the stock market. Immediately, the market rates climbed up again, surpassing even their former worth. Harold Saxon had lost one million pounds like that in only a few hours.

Jack lowered his morning newspaper, enjoying his coffee with a satisfied sigh. Now, he only had to continue in this fashion.

Later in the day, he visited with the Morcerfs. Rhys had invited him, claiming he needed his counsel on something very urgent and pressing.

As a present for his hosts, he bore a small box that he had acquired in Bristol at a certain chocolate manufacturer Ianto would surely remember as well and as fondly as Jack did. At least he hoped he would.

But, much to his disappointment, Ianto wasn't home, so he was received by Gwen instead. Mercifully, Rhiannon accompanied her.

He endured Gwen's simpering with a charming smile while his hostess pulled him along into the parlour, once more, as seemed to become her habit, hanging from his arm pressed intimately close.

“Oh, how sweet of you!” she purred, giggling at her own pun when he presented her with the chocolate as a gift for the whole family.

“What a coincidence,” Rhiannon smiled. “My father loves chocolate, although he indulges only seldomly.”

Jack returned the smile, feigning pleasant surprise. “Then I seem to have had the right intuition to chose this present of all things.” Put out, he had to watch Gwen already nibbling on the chocolate that he had bought foremost for Ianto. “My dear,” he purred, coming up close to her, pressing himself seductively against her back almost indecently close. He brought his lips close to her ear, and felt her shiver delightfully at his closeness. “Chocolate is supposed to be an aphrodisiac, did you know?”

“N-no,” she mumbled, her mouth full of chocolate (Jack hoped she would choke on it). “I didn't know.”

“Yes it is. So, maybe you should enjoy it with your husband together. It is a delightful experience.” He was loathe to even suggest such a thing, the image alone of Gwen's hands all over Ianto making him physically sick, but short of snatching the box from her, it was the only way to suggest she leave some for her husband.
She shuddered anew, but this time, Jack was convinced not out of delight but out of aversion. This marriage, like all the others of his enemies Jack had had the chance to observe closely, wasn't as harmonious as they wanted to make everyone believe. He was convinced that there had never been any intimate contact between Gwen and Ianto ever again since the twins had been conceived. The thought comforted him immensely.

“Yes, yes,” she mumbled, abruptly putting the chocolate box down, sounding a little sick herself all of a sudden. She turned around, and smiled brilliantly at him, trying to hide her uneasiness. He returned the smile with much more success at hiding his discomfort.

Jack had never been so glad to see the Viscount of Morcerf entering the room as he had at that moment since it meant releasing him from the clutches of his mother. Abruptly leaving Gwen standing, Jack went to meet Rhys with a bright, much more sincere smile. He heard Gwen huff softly behind him, put out, spurring him even more to quickly leave the room with her son.

“I am so glad you are here!” Rhys said, heart-felt, and clutched Jack's arm amicably, even a little desperately.

“To your service, my friend. You said the matter you wanted my counsel for was important.”

“It is, it is,” Rhys nodded, absent-minded. “Please, come with me.”

Bowing to the ladies, the two men left the parlour to heed for Rhys' private salon.

“I need your advice concerning my wedding,” Rhys stated promptly barely seconds after they had settled down in plush armchairs, both of them with something to drink in their hands. “You have heard of my family’s attempts to marry me off to Clara Saxon, right?”

Jack nodded. “But I don't understand. This union seems to me very benefiting to all parties.”

Rhys frowned. “I believe... that she doesn't want to marry me either.”

“Well, then, I see no problem. You are both adults. You should tell your families in clear terms that you don't want to marry. Your father surely is the last person to force you to marry someone you
don’t want to marry, right?”

Rhys' face brightened somewhat. “You are right, of course. He loves me too much for that.”

“There you have it. Just talk to him. Everything will be all right, I am sure.”

Eagerly, Rhys nodded.

“But what you have told me just now places me in a dilemma.”

Distressed, Rhys turned wide eyes onto him. “A dilemma?!”

“Yes. This weekend, I plan a little get together in my newly renovated house in Chiswick. Of course, I planned to invite you and your family, but the Saxons as well.” Chagrined, Jack searched Rhys' face closely.

“Oh.” The younger man's face fell. “That's quite the dilemma indeed.”

“You see, I can't simply disinvite one of you, but on the other hand, I don't want to cause your mother unduly distress when she is forced to have to attend an intimate gathering with Saxon.”

“You are very considerate. But I think I have a solution. My father has to go away for a few days anyway, so, I maybe should ask my mother and sister to come with me to Brighton over the weekend before they know anything about your invitation. Then, we can decline your invitation with a clear conscience.”

“That is a splendid idea, dear Viscount,” Jack smiled, proud of the young man's quick thinking which was a trait he had inherited from his father. “That probably would be best for all parties.”

“Very good. I will present my mother with my proposal right this eve. And tomorrow, you can send us your invitation.”

“I will do that.” He put down his glass, and prepared to rise. “Unfortunately, I have to leave now.”

“Yes, yes, a man like you surely has many obligations.”

“Lots,” Jack agreed with a long-suffering sigh.

“Next time, you have to stay for dinner, my friend.” Rhys rose as well to see him out.

“I promise.”

The younger man grabbed his hand tightly in both hands, looking up earnestly at him. “I really have to thank you for your advice in my own dilemma.”

“Oh please! You are my friend. Of course I give you my counsel whenever you need it.”

Rhys smiled warmly at him, looking so much like his father in that moment that Jack hurried his steps to escape the young man's presence.

Rhys saw him to the front door where Jack's carriage already awaited him. He had just climbed inside and settled on the bench when he froze. Jack's heart hammered like mad when he incidentally looked out of the carriage's window back to the Morcerf's home. Because right that moment, another carriage had stopped before the town house. Ianto stepped out, and for the first time in over twenty
years, Jack could look into his lover's face without any debilitating masks. Even if only from afar, Jack could tell how handsome he still was. His dark hair was shot through with a few dark grey strands that had been obscured by the more benevolent candle light at the Saxon ball. But his face was as flawless and beautiful as ever. And, dear God... the short, neatly trimmed beard covering his jaw made him look so incredibly distinguished and imposing. He looked like a real gentleman, wealthy and powerful. It made Jack's heart ache with yearning, and suddenly, he was very glad that he had left before Ianto came home, despite his initial disappointment about Ianto's absence earlier. He didn't know how he would have reacted had he had to face Ianto like this, without both of them wearing their concealing masks like an armour.

Tearing himself away from the enticing sight, Jack reared back from the window so as if the daylight shining inside had burned him. He could only breathe easily again when the carriage set into motion, carrying him away from this house.

At his return though, he didn't find any time to further mope about Ianto. Because inside his parlour, River awaited him with a young man by her side (on whom, especially his agile fingers, she kept a keen eye on).

Jack knew immediately who this young man was even though he didn't look anything like his parents. The cunning, estimating glittering of his eyes was the only sign that linked him to his origins, to his younger half-brother to be more precisely.

He wasn't really in the mood to deal with this now, he rather wanted to call Alonso to him to try to make himself forget all about Ianto, but nonetheless, he threw himself at the looming task with all his might.

Dealing with Johnny was fairly easy as it turned out. The young man was clever, and yes, clearly a criminal, but didn't tend to be malicious like his little brother seemed to be. He was a conman, though quite a likeable conman.

Without telling him why save for the fact that it would make him very rich, Johnny left Jack's house a while later, being now the prince Angelo Colasanto, the prodigal son of a venerable, obscenely rich noble family from Italy that had been kidnapped as a baby. Jack had claimed to act on behalf of Angelo's father, a dear old friend, and he presented the newly appointed prince with all the documents he may need to verify his identity as well as a generous monthly pension.

Come morning, he would give the boy into Madame Vastra's care so that she may whip him into shape to pass for a prince. Furthermore, he had chosen a home of his own for the young man since he didn't want him to live in Paternoster Row, foremost because he wanted to spare Owen the necessity to meet the boy again. To introduce him into society, Jack further considered leaving him in the care of lady Amelia Pond, a celebrated actress whose acquaintance Jack had made in Gore House, one of the most renowned salons at this time in London. This fierce young lady would surely do him the favour to take Angelo under her wing, but at the same time wouldn't stand for any cheek the young man may show. She was like Donna in that aspect. Maybe it was their hair. Jack decided he loved redheads very much.

However, this all had to happen very fast because Jack wanted to invite the prince to his little party in Chiswick the next Saturday.
The Spanish affairs Saxon lost so much money about were the so called first Carlist Wars, 1833-1840, where the late king's brother Don Carlos fought with his niece, Isabella II. over the succession of the throne. Monte Christo's false telegraph note said that Don Carlos advanced on Barcelona with his army, thus bringing the civil war to a turning point. As it turned out, he didn't.

I came to the conclusion that Ianto, to appear more mature being a Count and a politically influential person and almost forty, etc., would need a beard (not a moustache though, they disfigure almost every man – I only say John Watson with a moustache...). It turned out Gareth David-Lloyd looks very dashing with a beard. Therefore, I couldn't resist drawing Ianto with a beard and dressed in 19th century-like garb.
The house was virtually unrecognisable. Within only one week, a run-down, deserted house had been changed into a palace. Madame Vastra's work had been outstanding. The only thing she had been instructed to leave in its original state was the master bedroom since it played a very important role in Jack's plans. The same went for the back parts of the gardens.

His guests, consisting only of the Saxons and the Smiths as well as young prince Angelo Colasanto, started arriving in the late afternoon. They were more or less noticeably impressed with the house (Smith of course didn't let show any emotion on his stoic face). So much so that neither Lucy Saxon nor John Smith seemed to recognize this house at first as the place of their evil deeds.

The mood was easy and amicable since almost all of the guests were friends anyway, and those who were not, namely the mysterious Italian prince that had suddenly appeared in the Londoner High Society only a few days ago, was welcomed very warmly since everybody wanted to get to know him. Harold Saxon seemed especially smitten with the young man. Therefore, the dinner that was held outside since it was a warm eve in early September was a merry affair. The exotic foods that had been dished by the Count of Monte Christo encouraged the light mood because everybody marvelled at this or that exotic dish, and everybody wanted to taste everything.

“I have to say,” Saxon began, starting exactly the conversation Jack had hoped for the whole time, “what you did with this house is remarkable. It was such a blemish to the neighbouring houses. Your parents-in-law probably never thought that they would ever get to sell this monstrosity, eh, Smith?”

Smith startled, and looked up at a smirking Saxon like a rabbit caught in the serpent's spell. “Excuse me?”

Saxon snorted. “The Count of Monte Christo really outdid himself if you don't recognise the property of your own family.”

Smith became noticeably paler which only Jack noticed though. “No, I really haven't.” He looked around feebly. “You are right, it is the same house.”

“Good thing then the Count bought it, and transformed it into this treasure. The neighbours probably will be eternally grateful to you. Only a few weeks ago we passed this house and marvelled about its rundown state, right, my dear?” He turned to his wife who had become pale as well. So much so that everybody noticed at once. “What it is, Lucy? Are you unwell?”

She smiled bravely at her husband. “I believe I only over-indulged myself a bit. Your dishes were just too delicious to resist, dear Count.” She smiled watery at Jack.

He frowned in concern. “That hasn't been my intention, my dear. I can get you something against nausea if you like. It's only a harmless concoction made of various plants. Mrs. Smith will confirm its wholesome quality.”

“Yes,” Missy nodded. “Whatever the Count of Monte Christo intends to give you, you can trust it, dear friend, for he is very apt at handling plants and their different properties, much like myself.”

Lucy gave them all a wan smile once more. “It's all right. I just drink some water and breath the fresh air. I will be fine in a while again.”
“Well, if you insist.” Jack nodded gravely. “But maybe we should really let this formidable dinner come to an end. Maybe you all would like to accompany me for a tour through the house?”

The guests agreed, even Lucy, although reluctantly.

Jack started showing them the ground floor that had been transformed to his rather exotic tastes so that it looked like a palace from The Arabian Nights.

“Marvellous,” Missy sighed, impressed. “Finally, this house is filled with life again. It's always been so horribly empty. If you passed here, you could think it was one of the houses in those ghost stories. It gave me the creeps to be truthful.” She shuddered for effect.

Jack smiled indulgently at her. “I have to agree with you there. I had the same impression when I first came here. Some places gave me a strange feeling of unease, as if a crime had been committed there. Especially one room. I can show you if you like. I left it exactly as I have found it because it didn't seem right to change anything in there.”

The guests agreed once more in morbid fascination while Lucy and Smith became paler and paler by the second.

Upstairs, Jack led them into the master bedroom. It was quite dark in here, stark shadows throwing the room in a sinister atmosphere, and the red damask wallpaper made it look like blood had been painted on the walls. Ignoring Lucy's trembling form who barely dared to step inside the room, Jack launched into his story with grand gestures. He showed them a secret door in the wall, an entry for the servants to the lower parts of the house. “I can literally see it before my eyes,” he said in a low voice, a conspirational gleam in his eyes. “Somebody, maybe a priest, comes up here through this secret entrance, the night is dark and stormy. He is carrying an ill-fated cargo pressed close to his chest so that nobody may see it even if he can't possibly hide his deeds before God's eyes.”

A faint whimper made them all spin around. Lucy was clinging to the wall, on the verge of collapse. Her husband hurried over to support her.

“My dear!” Jack cried, concerned. “Have I really terrified you that much with my story?!”

She waved him away with a weak smile. “No, no. You just have a certain way to tell stories. So vivid.”

“Yes, I have to admit, I have a very vivid imagination, but please, don't worry. It could be as well that this room belonged to a loving mother, the staircase the way the doctor and the wet nurse came up here as she bore her child. Or maybe it was the proud father himself who came to take away his child for a stroll in the garden while he let his wife sleep. A very harmonious picture, don't you think.”

In that moment, Lucy's eyes rolled back in her head, and she slumped in her husband's grip, unconscious.

“Oh dear,” Jack cried, worrying his hands. “Maybe it would be better if we all go into the garden.”

Outside, Lucy came to again, and, as she requested to be left alone for a while, they left her cowering on a bench as Jack led his other guests away a few steps.

“I'm sorry, but I have to tell you, I really believe a crime has been committed here.”

“How do you want to know?” Saxon asked gravely.
“I spoke with someone who saw it happen.”

“Careful, my dear Count,” Missy chuckled darkly. “Be careful what you say. The law is amidst us.”

“Of course!” Jack turned to Smith who looked as if he wanted to be everywhere than here. “What a lucky coincidence. We can begin to investigate here and now.”

All eyes turned expectantly on to Smith. Uncomfortably, the man gave a curd nod.

Briskly nodding himself, Jack led them a few paces into the back part of the gardens. A shovel leaned on a tree, and nearby, a hole had been scooped out.

“When the garden was redecorated, the gardeners found this.” Jack indicated the hole, or rather, the contents, very gravely. “Here, we have proof that a crime has been committed here.”

Missy shuddered delightfully. “Tell us more,” she demanded, a gleeful light shining in her cold eyes. Inclining his head, Jack squatted down to pick up the wooden box that had been hidden in the hole. “They dug up this box. And the contents were... very disturbing.”

He noted that Lucy had joined them on shaky legs, her wide eyes fastened on to the box in Jack's hands, horror written all over her pale face. With a grand flourish, Jack opened the lid of the box, Lucy's outcry getting stuck in her throat. It was a miracle she didn't faint again.

“It's empty!” Missy protested, disappointed.

“Decency forbade to leave the contents in there,” Jack explained gravely. “Because inside was the skeleton of a newborn child.”

Shocked silence descended over the small group, and they all stared into the empty box gloomily.

“Well,” Saxon muttered contemplatively. “Now it really gets serious. This is a grave crime we have at our hands here.”

“Who says anything about a crime?” Smith protested.

Jack cocked an eyebrow. “Oh, you don't consider burying a newborn alive a crime then? What would you call it, master procurator?”

“Who says it was alive when it was buried?” Smith countered, nestling at his cravat that suddenly seemed much too tight around his neck much like an inconspicuous string around the neck of a newborn boy had once been.

“Why should they bury it here in the garden if it was dead?” Saxon replied sharply.

Having kept silent until now, prince Angelo frowned. “What's the punishment for child murder?”

“They get their throats cut, isn't that right?” Saxon looked at Smith for confirmation.

“That's correct,” the lawyer croaked hoarsely.

“I'd say,” Jack quibbed in, “nothing can be done here today any more anyway, wouldn't you agree. Let's all have a cup of tea to calm our nerves. Tomorrow our estimated prosecutor Smith can start with the investigations.”

For the rest of the evening, the mood was glum, but Jack didn't care. He had only wanted to give
Smith and Lucy an impulse to remember and start thinking about it. With satisfaction, one of his servants later told him that she had overheard Smith and Lucy arranging for a meeting tomorrow in Smith's private office at home. Jack immediately send a note to Jenny. If at all possible, she had to eavesdrop into the conversation tomorrow.

Very soon, the Smiths left, Smith claiming to have still work to do. Not long after, the Saxons wanted to take their leave as well, as did Angelo. Saxon offered to take the young man back with him into the city. But before they said goodbye to the Count, Saxon bade him for a private conversation, to Jack's surprise starting to question him about Angelo Colasanto. Ironically, he really seemed to be smitten with his wife's illegitimate child.

“I don't know him that well.” Jack waved his hand dismissively. “But a very good friend of mine, Father Moretti, knows the family rather well.”

“Hm, I understand. Can you say anything about the credibility of their fortunes?”

Jack waved his hand once more. “Oh, all these Italian millionaires are rather modest, but the Colasantos are an incredibly old family with very old money. Have travelled over the whole world. I believe they have millions, and Angelo will have come to London looking for a wife.” Jack chuckled. “The lucky family who gets him as their son-in-law. The dowry will be quite handsome if the father approves. One million for sure.”

A greedy, happy gleam lightened up Saxon's eyes. And there goes his daughter's engagement to Rhys Morcerf, Jack chuckled inwardly, and decided to bait the good banker a little more in a bored, uninterested voice, “These Italian nobles are very practical people. The Colasantos would surely love for their son to marry into a... a banker's family for example. Where Angelo can enter into his father-in-law's business.”

“Very pragmatic,” Saxon croaked. “I like this attitude not to depend only on one's fortune but to work for more.”

“I do as well.” Jack nodded emphatically. “A pity that your daughter is already promised to the Viscount of Morcerf. Miss Jenny and young Angelo surely would have made a beautiful couple.”

Saxon nodded, visibly scheming already. “As if I care about Morcerf,” Saxon snapped dismissively. “But you are in negotiations with the Morcerfs, right?”

“Yes, yes, but young Rhys and the Countess weren't happy about the prospect in the first place. Morcerf was the only one who supported the union.”

“Do you want to say that Rhys of Morcerf isn't a good catch?” Jack looked at Saxon with wide, appalled eyes.

Saxon waved his hand dismissively. “He is, but I would prefer prince Angelo now that I have made his acquaintance.”

Jack frowned. “But surely, the Morcerfs are in no way inferior to the Colasantos, right?”

“The Morcerfs,” Saxon grunted, then a contemplating look crossed his features. “I have to tell you something.” He stepped a little closer to Jack so as if he was afraid somebody might overhear them. Interested, Jack cocked his head.

“Well, I will admit that I have not been born a baron. I worked hard and was rewarded with this title by the late king. I am proud of my achievements, and don't have to hide anything. I carry the name I
have been born with, and it shall be carried on through my daughter and her children.”

“Do you...” Jack frowned, concerned. “This sounds as if the Morcerfs aren't what they seem to be.
Isn't Ianto a born Morcerf?”

Saxon snorted derogatorily. “Surely not. I know him for over twenty years now. I have known him
when I was still a humble employee in Cardiff. He was the son of a poor fisherman. His true name is
Ianto Jones.”

“Do you know for sure?”

Jack looked appalled which Saxon noted with some satisfaction.

“I am. I bought more than one fish from his family over time to be very sure.”

“Then... why would you want to marry off your daughter to his son?”

Saxon shrugged. “We are worthy of each other, both upstarts that came to wealth. With the grave
difference that I was made baron because of my service for the crown. His title was bought with
blood.”

Jack's own blood ran cold although Saxon wasn't telling him anything new. “I don't understand... He
was rewarded for his loyalty as a soldier, wasn't he?”

“Yes, but there are certain things to be said about how the loyalty of Ianto Jones looked like.”

Jack frowned suddenly, contemplating. “I believe I have actually heard the name Ianto Jones when I
was in Japan...”

“Surely in the context of the coup d'état in 1822?” Saxon enquired, politely interested, but in reality,
Jack recognised his burning curiosity if he maybe knew more about the mysterious circumstances of
Ianto's service back then. But he had to disappoint him. Instead, he wanted to appeal some more to
Saxon's vanity and supposedly vast knowledge.

“Yes, I believe that was it. Horrible affair, right. I can't really remember. Do you know what
happened there?”

Saxon preened and straightened up to his full height as he began to speak in a weighty voice, “If I
remember correctly, the Americans forced the opening of Japanese ports to American trade. As far as
I know, the shogun showed considerable weakness as he allowed for this to happen. This caused
uproar throughout the country. Especially court nobility wanted to re-establish the empire and its
traditions. In '22 they overthrew the government, the shogun and his family had to flee Edo. Chaos
ensued, the whole family was killed.”

“Indeed, what a horrible story.”

“Yes, isn't it.” Saxon's eyes gleamed grimly. “And therein lies the mystery.”

“How so?”

“Jones was there. He and his family lived there for a few years already, and he had climbed ranks in
the meantime. It was his duty to protect the shogun. Nobody knew what happened during the
overthrow. They say he stood with the shogun to the last breath, but the shogun died, and Jones
emerged a hero for staying so loyal until the end. I would give a lot to uncover the true
circumstances. They always seemed a little dodgy to me.”
“Hmm,” Jack made. “I imagine it isn't that difficult to get to the bottom of this mystery.”

Saxon's gaze snapped up in astonishment. “What do you mean?”

“Well, you surely have a stringer in Japan.”

“All over the world,” Saxon bragged.

“See. Write him, and ask which role a certain Welshman named Ianto Jones played during the revolution in 1822. Surely he can find out, maybe even find witnesses.”

“You are right!” Saxon cried, excited. “I'll write immediately.”

“Do that,” Jack concurred.

“And if I should uncover some scandalous news, I'll tell you at once.”

“I'd be delighted, my dear Saxon. I'd be really delighted.”

Chapter End Notes

The Japanese revolution I'm talking about here is the so called Meiji Restoration where the reign of the shoguns that lasted for centuries ended, and the emperor was re-installed. This happened in 1867 though, but for my purposes, I preponed this event so that the revolution happened in 1822, and with a little more bloodshed than it did in reality.
After the last guest had left, Jack returned to his house in Paternoster Row, and there, he retreated into his study. With mixed feelings, he reluctantly pulled forth all of the material he had gathered about Ianto in the last decade, then he rang for Owen.

He felt Owen's presence behind him as he entered the study, and he nodded at the papers lying on the desk. "So let the wheels be set into motion," he drawled sardonically, taking a deep breath without turning around to his friend.

"As you wish," Owen answered, and left with the incriminating papers that would be send immediately to Japan so that they could be played into the hands of Saxon's man during his investigations who in turn would forward them to Saxon. Then, Jack only had to convince him to go public with his findings, causing quite the scandal. Maybe Donna Noble would be the most fitting choice for that...

After he was alone again, Jack let himself fall into a stuffed armchair, nursing a much needed Scotch in a sudden maudlin mood. Because he realised perfectly well that in hurting Gwen, he would also have to hurt Ianto and his children. But it couldn't be avoided. Gwen deserved to be punished, even if it was Ianto he had to bring down instead. He loved him still, but he was afraid that he loved a reflection. He loved a fifteen year old boy from Cardiff, not the Count of Morcerf who, just like his wife, in the end had fallen to betrayal. Owen had probably been right years ago, telling him that people changed, especially in times of hardship and danger. He hadn't wanted to believe it, and deep in his heart, a tiny part of him that was still good and pure still didn't, especially not after having met Ianto at the ball where he had seemed to be the same caring, honourable boy from their youth. But the evidence was there, had been safely locked away in his safe for all these years. He'd turned the whole affair upside down, but he hadn't found another explanation than that Ianto was guilty. And in a few days, the whole of London would know what the hero of Edo had done, and thus, plunging his malicious wife into shame.

*When he had first encountered possible evidence against Ianto, Jack hadn't wanted to believe it. And with it, the question if maybe Ianto had been part of the conspiracy against Jack after all came up again. Or at least, if he had been all right with the outcome so that he could have his normal life. The last time they had spoken, they had fought about just this after all...*

"No!" he cried desperately, losing his composure like he hadn't done in a long, long time. "Not Ianto! He wouldn't do that!" To me! he added in his mind. Ianto couldn't betray the sacred memory Jack had of him!

"People change, Jack," Owen implored, for once dropping the title, and instead speaking as a friend. "They change. Greed and ambition change them."

"Not Ianto," he insisted, pressing his lips together stubbornly in denial while he turned from Owen dismissively.

Owen sighed, but continued, now in a much softer voice, "He was fifteen when you saw him last. A child. Times were pretty rough back then."
“Times are always rough,” Jack said through gritted teeth. “Maybe he was forced to do things to survive, but this…” Jack shuddered at the mere thought alone.

“Jack,” Owen said patiently, but not without any compassion. “You maybe have to consider that this is his true nature. Maybe you are right, and people don’t change that rapidly, but then that would mean that, even if he wasn’t part of the conspiracy, that he was glad for the outcome. Didn’t you tell us you guys fought about the difficulty of leading a normal life if you decided to stay together?”

“This would mean he betrayed me in his own way because he never loved me.”

“I’m sure he did. But maybe he came to realise, as he got older, that he didn’t want to be your eromenos any more.”

At that, Jack’s gaze snapped up sharply to glare at the other man, but Owen didn’t let himself be deterred.

“Remember, in Ancient Greece, such a relationship was only accepted until the younger lover became an adult himself. Continuing would have meant losing his honour. Maybe Ianto saw it like that.”

“Why do you know such things anyway?” Jack snapped without expecting an answer. “And no, Ianto clearly didn’t see it like that. I’m sure of it.”

Owen sighed once more, and sadly watched his master delusion himself. With a bow, he let him wallow in his misery and left.

Jack groaned, images of how Ianto had been and of what he had learned fusing together until all he could think about was Ianto betraying him.

His gaze fell onto the documents that Owen had brought him, telling him about how Ianto had fared and about the horrible events that had happened here in Japan. He straightened up, and ruthlessly hardened his heart. He didn’t have time for thoughts like this. Gwen was the one he wanted to bring down, not Ianto. He only had to dig a little deeper, then he surely would come across some misdeed of hers...

Jack had send River and Mickey through all of Japan, gathering information, questioning witnesses. Eventually, the puzzle of what had happened during this revolution became more clear, and even clearer, Ianto’s role in it. It sickened Jack even more. He still hoped to exonerate Ianto by finding the one witness that maybe could shed light into the dark, the daughter of the late Shogun, lady Toshiko. He had come all the way here to Istanbul to find her where she supposedly had been sold as a slave as the last surviving member of her family.

“What have you found her?” Eagerly, Jack looked up as River marched into his study on board the Tardis a few months after they had left Japan.

The blonde woman cocked a mock-affronted eyebrow. “Who do you think I am? An amateur? Of course I found her.”

Jack raised his hands in a placative gesture, laughing at her. “All right, all right. I'm sorry. Of course you have found her. Who if not you, my dear.”

River harrumphed, satisfied. “I bought her from this slaver, and have taken her to your mansion.”
“So, you've found her here in Istanbul?”

“No. India.”

Jack nodded slowly, looking briefly out the window at the skyline of Istanbul where they lay at anchor. “Is she all right?”

River shrugged. “She will be eventually.”

“Good.” Jack stood up. “I want to see her.”

“Wait.” River stepped forward, blocking his way. He quirked an amused eyebrow at her. “She is all right for the moment. I hired an Indian woman, Madame Vastra, to care for her. She is very capable, and, as I checked for myself, a fierce swordswoman.”

Jack chuckled. “Of course she is. But why are you looking at me like that?”

“Sit down,” River ordered. “There's something you should know beforehand.”

Suddenly wary, Jack sat back down. River did as well, and fixed him with her intense stare.

“So?”

“I've brought another one with me,” River explained without preamble.

Jack frowned. “Who?”

“A boy. Eleven years. His name is Daniel.”

“I don’t understand. Who is he?”

“The son of a black slave. Lisa was lady Toshiko's slave and chambermaid before the betrayal in '22.”

“And?” Jack was still confused.

River looked at him closely. “His mother was sold into slavery with her, the boy born in the slaver's house. Then his mother died. He is with the lady ever since, wouldn't be parted from her. A fierce little urchin.” An impressed twitch moved the corners of River’s mouth, and Jack could imagine that in this boy, she already saw her next pupil.

“So, you bought him as well?”

“Yes.”

“Well. That's good. I wouldn't have wished to part them from each other.”

“I hadn't thought as much.” River cocked her head. “But that's not the only reason I bought him.”

“Dear God, River!” Jack moaned. “Would you please tell me what's going on here already!”

“I took him with me because of the resemblance to his father.”

That perked Jack's interest, and he leaned forward expectantly. “His father?”

River nodded. “I'd say, go and see for yourself, but I wanted to forewarn you, it may be quite the shock. But I swear, I'm not seeing things. Owen confirmed the resemblance – who is, by the way,
extremely smitten with the lady Toshiko.” River chuckled.

“River! Stay on topic!” Jack was practically vibrating with excitement.

“Daniel's father is the Count of Morcerf.”

For a few seconds, it was deadly silent inside the cabin. Jack barely dared to breath, his face suddenly ghostly pale.

“How... how do you know?” He balled his shaking hands into fists, and pressed them onto his thighs to try to stop his trembling. “You've never seen Ianto.”

River reverted from snorting in exasperation, the situation was much too emotional for that at the moment. “During my enquiries, I have seen Morcerf a few times. There's no doubt. Despite their different skin colour, Daniel is unmistakably Ianto Jones' son.”

Jack sagged back in his chair, weak with shock.

Ianto had another child.

A child whose mother wasn't Gwen Cooper.

A malicious side inside of him wanted to congratulate Ianto for his sexual prowess.

But another side of him wanted to protect this child, not only because it had led a harsh life as a slave, but foremost because it was the child of Ianto Jones. A little part of him still wanted to protect Ianto and everything that was closely associated with him (well, maybe not his wife, but certainly his children).

The rest of him reeled, not knowing what to think at all.

He turned wide, helpless eyes on to River.

“What shall I do now?”

River shrugged once more. “You could take the boy to his father. Show him he's not an orphan. And who knows, maybe Jones will be happy about an illegitimate son.”

Jack looked at her sharply at that last sarcastic comment.

“I don't even know if he loved this woman. Lisa.”

“Maybe Toshiko remembers. If Lisa was her chambermaid, maybe she saw something even if she was only ten years old at that time.”

“Maybe.”

“But Jack.” River looked intently at him, and leaned forward to put a gentle hand on his arm. “The boy has a right to know. That he has family. And maybe, your Ianto will really be happy that he has another child.”

“He's not my Ianto,” Jack spat. “Not any more. And he doesn't deserve my compassion. Look what he did. Why should I give him a child he doesn't deserve.”

“Don't be stupid, Jack Harkness. You still love that man. And the motives aside, you are prepared to do even more evil than him to get what you want.”
Jack flinched, but he kept his mouth shut because, as always, River was right, and not afraid to speak her mind to him. On occasion, he needed that. Someone who reigned him in.

It wouldn’t be any use to argue with her that he did it out of justice, but Ianto, in all likeliness had done evil because of greed, even if it was completely uncharacteristic for him.

“Take me to them,” he finally decided.

They crossed over to the shore of Istanbul where a carriage brought them to Jack's house. He had it heavily guarded by Arabian fighters that owed him a life debt.

In the innermost recesses of the house, River introduced him to Madame Vastra, a striking, proud woman of Indian heritage. She eyed him speculatively, obviously dutifully thinking about her charge and if he was a threat to the young woman behind the doors at her back. She visibly adjusted the sabre strapped to her side.

Jack had understood her warning, and inclined his head.

Then she stepped out of his way, and let him and River pass.

Stepping into the airy, light-filled rooms, Jack's gaze immediately zoomed in on to the graceful young woman reclining amidst thick, colourful cushions strewn about the floor.

She rose as she spotted him and bowed deeply, the silk of her kimono rustling with every move she made. A little shadow behind her back suddenly stepped forward and glared at Jack bravely, causing the older man's heart to hurt in his chest at the sight. A gentle hand on the boy's shoulder made him retreat again.

“Master,” lady Toshiko addressed Jack, and bowed deeply once more.

“I am not your master, Milady,” Jack objected.

“But you have bought me.”

“I have. But only to set you free.”

Confusion crept onto Toshiko's features, and she averted her eyes uneasily. “I don’t understand. Why would you do such a thing?”

“Because wrong has been done to you. And it may be that the person who did this to you and your family also betrayed me a long time ago.”

Sudden rage flashed in her gentle eyes as well as sadness as she was reminded of her family. “You have saved me. How can I be at your service, Sir?”

“Jack, please.”

She nodded in understanding.

“Help me achieve justice for us both. Then you may go wherever you want. But until it is done, you will not lack for anything. You are my most honoured guest, no matter where our journey may lead us in this world. What do you say? Are we agreed?”

Toshiko didn't have to think about Jack's proposal. “We are.”
“Very well. Then maybe now, you would introduce me to your brave bodyguard?”

Surprised, Toshiko put her hand once more on the boy's shoulder, and gently pushed him forward to answer for himself.

Jack knelt down before him to be at eye level

“'I'm Daniel Pink,' the boy said, his skinny chest stuck out proudly, but he grimaced at the last name. ‘But you may call me Danny, Sir, like my mother did, because you were kind to me, and didn't separate me an' lady Tosh.’”

Jack smiled kindly at him. “Thank you for the honour, Danny. And you're welcome. But tell me, why is your last name 'Pink'?”

Danny grimaced anew. “The slavers gave it to me.” He held up his small hands to Jack, palms outward. “Because my palms and the soles of my feet are so pink while the rest of my body is dark.”

Jack joined in Danny's grimace. “That's horrible. We'll give you another surname. You can take every name you want.”

The boy perked up eagerly. “Really? I get to have a real name like a free boy?!”

Jack's heart constricted; it was the first time in many years that someone had the power to move his stony heart. And it had to be Ianto's son of all people, hadn't it. He swallowed heavily. “You are a free boy, Danny,” he choked out. “You and lady Toshiko are free from now on.”

And in the next second, he had his arms full of a grateful little boy. He felt tears dampen the shoulder of his shirt, and he put his arms around Danny in return, pulling the boy tightly against him...

Jack was jostled out of his memories and glum mood as said boy, now a young, handsome man, marched into his study without a care in the world.

“Father!” Danny greeted. “I'm back.”

Jack chuckled, and looked up at his exuberant son. “I can see that,” he replied drily. “And in such high spirits.”

“Ah, well...” Blushing slightly, Danny sank down into the plush chair opposite Jack's.

“Daniel Harkness!” Jack cried, amazed. “Are you in love?!” He had to admit, he hadn't had spend as much time with Danny lately as he may have wanted since coming to London. And so, he had no idea what his son had been up to on his own in the meantime. Probably studying as he knew him.

Danny shrugged casually, but he didn't deny it. Excited, Jack shuffled to the edge of his armchair, perching there like an eager vulture. The young man peeked at him from under lowered lashes.

“Come on!” Jack urged impatiently. “Tell me.”

“All right.” The corners of Danny's mouth twitched as he saw his father in such an excited, happy mood. “We met in the British Museum. She sat before a Botticelli to draw it. I admired her work, and we got talking.”

A bright grin lit up Jack's face. “Very good. I can see you're happy. What's her name?”
Danny grinned sheepishly. “Oh, you know her actually I believe. Her name is Clara Saxon.”

Jack’s face fell, and although he normally was a person who could hide his true emotions very well, this time, he wasn't fast enough. Danny noticed his shell-shocked expression.

“Father?” Danny asked, anxious.

Taking a deep breath, Jack composed himself quickly. He threw Danny a wan smile. “It's all right.”

“You hate her.”

“No!”

“Then what is the problem?”

He sank back in the armchair again, suddenly feeling incredibly weary. And all of a sudden, he had the urge to stop lying to Danny. “Danny...” he began carefully. “You know a little of my past. You know that I have been in prison although I was innocent.”

Danny nodded. “I know you never told me more because you didn't want to burden me, but I wish you would have confided in me. I'm not a child any more. And to be truthful, I never was allowed to be a child. I, more than most, understand what injustice means.”

Jack scrutinised this young man he had taken in as a son, and he felt awfully proud of the man the little boy had become, and at the same time incredibly ashamed that he had underestimated him so much. “I love you, Danny,” he whispered, moved. “Never doubt that.”

“I know, father.” Danny reached over to lay his hand onto Jack's. “I only want to understand you better. Maybe I can help.”

Slowly, Jack nodded. “As you wish. You know that I want to take revenge on those who betrayed me, leaving me to rot in prison for fourteen years.”

Danny nodded.

“Toshiko is key to one of my enemy’s downfall, you know that as well.”

“Morcerf? She told me he and his family were there when... when it happened...”

“His wife. Though by punishing him, justice will be done to Toshiko’s and your family, and I will get my revenge on her if her husband is dishonoured.”

Danny blinked in surprise, but nodded again in understanding.

“The other two... are prosecutor John Smith and... and Harold Saxon.”

Sudden understanding of the explosive nature of his acquaintance with Clara Saxon made Danny blanch. Taking a shaking breath, he sagged back in his armchair.

Eventually, he chuckled darkly. “What unhappy coincidences. Of all the women I could have met...”

“I'm really sorry, Danny.”

Trying to put on a brave facade, Danny shook his head dismissively. “I should put her out of my head anyway. She told me she is to be married.”
Jack cringed. “To...” He blanched as he realised that she was to marry Danny's brother. “To Rhys of Morcerf. But I know Saxon wants to abandon any negotiations with the Morcerfs.”

Danny perked up again. “He does?”

Damn. Jack had forgotten why. He cringed once more. “He has found a more suitable candidate.” Miss Clara's half-brother. Oh God. He had to hurry up and blow the whole charade quickly. Danny's happiness was more important in this than getting back at Saxon like that. He had enough discriminating information against him. He could forego this path. And it wasn't fair to Clara and Johnny anyway. He had, after all, some scruples left.

He hurried to assure his dejected son, gripping his hand tightly in encouragement. “I have my means. Trust me, I'll talk Saxon out of this engagement.” By bringing him down beforehand, he grimly finished the thought in his head.

“Really? You would do that? Does that mean... I may pursue her? You wouldn't be against me choosing the daughter of your enemy?”

All the children I love are my enemies' children, he thought suddenly, but he just shook his head.

“She is a fine young lady, and I would be honoured if she became a part of our family.”

This raised Danny's spirits again considerably.

Oh, when I can rub that little information into Saxon's face! Jack thought almost gleefully, obviously infected by his son's returned good mood, but he knew better than to let Danny in on his thoughts since he felt bad for thinking like that immediately. Despite this additional, highly unexpected chance to put one over Saxon, he wanted to be happy for Danny. He didn't want his son, or even Clara Saxon any more, to be another pawn in his game for revenge. It wasn't their fault whose children they were.

Chapter End Notes

That was unexpected, I know, but it just happened^.^ I wanted for Ianto to have at least a little love in all this time, even if he lost Lisa again. And through Danny's existence, Jack becomes even more conflicted about Ianto than he already is. Furthermore, if I had Clara in this story, then I couldn't let her go without Danny.
A hooded figure slipped into Paternoster Row the next night. Jenny Flint had come to inform Jack about the conversation between Smith and Lucy Saxon this morning she had indeed managed to overhear. Jack was proud of her, and by Madame Vastra's smug preening, she was even more proud of her lover.

After she had told him all she knew, he let her go with Madame Vastra for a while before she had to return into the Smith household, leaving Jack to think about what he had learned.

With immense satisfaction, Jack realised how terrified Smith was right now. As it turned out, Smith had known, as he had confessed to Lucy this morning, that the box had been empty when he had wanted to check for any traces again he may have left in the soft earth. He had only found the empty box amidst the torn up ground, the child gone. Lucy, according to Jenny, had screeched and sobbed and cursed Smith's name that he had told her all those years ago that the child had been dead. But in reality, he knew for twenty years now that her child was alive. Of course, he hadn't confessed to trying to actually murder the boy, he wasn't that stupid. He assured Lucy instead that he had thought the child to be dead, but had immediately started to investigate. After some promising traces, he had lost the trail of the child, and over the years, had abandoned his search. All the while living with the uncertainty that somewhere someone had watched him bury the child, and could expose him whenever he wanted. Unfortunate for Smith that it had been Owen Harper of all people to catch him at his crime.

"He was more concerned, instead of comforting Mrs. Saxon's hysterics, why you, Sir, would have manipulated the truth," Jenny had said. And indeed. Jack had told them they had found the body. More out of dramatic effect though since until now, he hadn't known that Smith had gone back and discovered the child gone. "He wondered what your motives were, if you knew anything, and he assured Mrs. Saxon that he would make inquiries about you, who you really were."

After that, fed up with his cold-bloodedness, Lucy had stormed out in a rage, being done with Smith forever since she would never forgive him for lying to him about her child for twenty years, regretting ever having started an affair with this cold, calculating man.

Jack for his part now had to make arrangements to appease Smith's investigations about his person. Obviously, it was time to dust off his two alter egos again, Father Moretti and Lord Carter, both intimate acquaintances of the Count of Monte Christo.

Indeed, a few days later, an inspector of the prosecutor's office came to the door of the modest house of Father Moretti in London, wishing to speak to the cleric because his investigations had revealed that the cleric was an old friend of the Count of Monte Christo. He was send away again for the Father wasn't at home, but he surely would be in the evening. This gave Jack time to slip into his role and come over to Father Moretti's house.

In the evening, the inspector – the disguised prosecutor John Smith himself; Jack recognised him immediately though Smith in turn didn't recognise him – returned. Jack, in his disguise as the cleric, swiftly informed Smith about who the Count of Monte Christo was, that he and the Father had grown up together in Scotland, and that Monte Christo – a bought title, of course, initially the son of a wealthy whisky manufacturer – had made a fortune with silver mines in the East.

Why he had bought the house in Chiswick, Smith wanted to know, but Moretti had waved him away
“I believe,” the Father had answered, “that my friend wants to establish a hospice for the mentally ill. A very exemplary endeavour if I may say so.”

Somewhat reassured, Smith had left Father Moretti’s house only to appear at the doorstep of a certain Lord Carter the next day to ask the same questions. Carter, as Smith learned, was an enemy of Monte Christo's all because of a woman whose honour Carter had wanted to defend when they had been to war together in India. “Three times we have duelled already,” the Lord explained to Smith with a sneer, “and three times, he has defeated me.” Growling, he showed Smith a rather nasty, still reddened scar on his neck stemming from a sabre. “I follow him everywhere. When he fails with all his utopian, barmy speculations he endeavours, I want to be there to laugh in his face.”

“And the house?” Smith had asked.

“Oh that,” Carter snorted, his disgusted expression clearly showing what he thought of his enemy's plans. “He believes there to be a healing spring underneath that house. Wants to turn it into a Roman bath house.”

Smith left this house with an equally as satisfied expression as he had Father Moretti’s the day before.

Picking at the false scar at his neck until he had removed it, Jack grimly watched Smith disappear in the evening's darkness from behind the curtains. He hoped that the prosecutor had been reassured now that the Count of Monte Christo definitely didn't want to harm Smith in any way, and that they indeed had never met before. Hopefully, he had him off his back for good now.

He was presented with confirmation as Jenny managed to intercept a letter from Smith to Lucy Saxon (who didn't want to see him in person, therefore, he had to tell her of his findings through a letter). In this letter, Smith reassured Mrs. Saxon that the Count of Monte Christo really had never met them before, bearing no grudge or otherwise, and that it all had been an unfortunate coincidence. Smith assumed that some gossipy servants had told the story of the box who may have heard it from who knew where; only a harmless horror story nobody knew anything concrete about and without any proof that there was even an ounce of truth to it.
Chapter 14

In late September, the Morcerfs gave their yearly autumn ball. Jack couldn't refuse to go, of course, but the prospect of seeing Ianto there was quite hard to stomach. On the one side, he yearned with all he had for this man, but on the other side, he couldn't forget even for one second that he already had set the wheels into motion for Ianto's downfall. It wouldn't be long now. The only consolation was that he wouldn't have to be alone with Ianto at the ball.

But for the time being, he could distract himself with more encouraging news of Saxon's financial failures. This had been going on for weeks now. The good baron was losing more and more money, mostly through Jack's manipulative machinations. And Saxon had come to a point by now that he couldn't joke about his losses any more. At first he had brushed them off, but now, he only tried to hide them. Which he couldn't, of course. All of London knew what he was losing almost on a daily basis. Therefore, it had been the perfect opportunity for Gwen to finally convince her husband to break off negotiations for the engagement. It was only too understandable that a reputable family like the Morcerfs didn't want to risk their son marrying a girl whose father was on the verge of bankruptcy. Instead, Jack had to watch with dismay as Johnny was after Miss Clara more and more. Well, at least there he could try to intervene. He had sworn himself not to punish his enemies' children any more, and furthermore, Miss Clara was the woman his son loved.

So, Jack spend the evening subtly steering Johnny's attentions from Miss Clara. Eventually, he had to make it unmistakably clear that she wasn't for him, especially since her father was running into his ruin, thus appealing to the young man's greedy streak. But even without this last hint, he had understood Jack's warning. After all, the Count of Monte Christo was the one who could blow his cover, no matter if he could denounce the Count's name as well for putting Johnny up to this deceit; Jack was the more powerful of the two, and both knew it. Therefore, he decided to give up his infatuation for Clara Saxon at once.

Cringing, Jack watched, at the end of the evening, Johnny and Rhiannon striking up an animated conversation. Those two seemed to really get along very well, the resolute, more down-to-earth girl was suited much better to the coarse young man than Miss Saxon who was equally as resolute, but was full of higher ideals than Rhiannon. Unlike Danny, Johnny would never be able to hold a candle to her intellect...

Ianto would kill Jack for encouraging this match inadvertently...

Some time that eve, a slight commotion brought excitement into the event – thus sparing Jack the eventual necessity to speak with Ianto – as the Smiths abruptly departed from the ball. Gossip had it that Peter Tyler, Smith's father-in-law, had died unexpectedly on the journey here to London. These were interesting news, but Jack brushed them aside for now. Jenny would keep him informed of everything that went on in the Smith's household.

What his highly competent spy had to report on the goings on at the Smith's had Jack now worried yet still. Because two days after her husband had died, Jacqueline Tyler died as well under mysterious circumstances. Jenny had overheard the family's doctor speak of poison. Smith, horrified at such a possibility taking place in his house, had dismissed the doctor's suspicions promptly. Yes, it could have been an accident, the doctor amended since the medicine Smith's father was administered
was made from exactly the kind of poison that had killed Mrs. Tyler, but frankly, he didn't believe in it.

Initially, the Tylers had come to London for their only granddaughter's upcoming wedding. Jenny Smith was to marry a wealthy young man, a friend of Rhys that Jack had met one or two times, but the young woman didn't want to marry at all. But her grandparents had insisted on the highly beneficial liaison. Since everybody knew of Miss Smith's sentiments, it wasn't far-fetched of the doctor to even suspect Miss Jenny being the one to have poisoned her grandparents to avoid the wedding.

In the doctor's place, Jack would probably have thought the same, but he had another person under suspicion. A person in the Smith household who had a passion and extensive knowledge about the poisonous properties of plants. So far, Jack couldn't think of any motive Missy might have had, but he knew that the cunning, calculating woman definitely had one. Probably, Miss Jenny was in danger as well.

Instructing Jenny to be on her guard, and to be very careful herself, he send her back – not without a disapproving glare from Madame Vastra – to watch over Miss Jenny.

The events of the following days happened in quick succession. First, Miss Jenny's grandfather Noirtier, the initial reason Smith had condemned Jack to a life in prison, set upon helping his beloved granddaughter to call off the undesired marriage by admitting that, during his times as a Bonapartist, he had killed the intended husband's father in a duel. Understandably, the young man broke off the engagement immediately. Smith was furious about his father's actions. Then, Noirtier's trusted servant and tender died of poisoned lemonade that probably had been intended for the paraplegic Noirtier. Nonetheless, the servants left the house in a hurry the moment they learned that now one of their own had become a victim. Jenny was the only one who stayed. She didn't even have to give any justifying reasons; the family was so distraught that they didn't care.

The next night, Miss Jenny started to show the same symptoms that her grandparents did, a very high fever and convulsions, but Jenny managed to save her thanks to an antidote Jack had given her to take back with her as a precaution.

Wanting to help Miss Jenny be free, Jack sneaked into the Smith's house that night, and, with Jenny's help explained all he knew to the young, still rather weak young woman. She was appalled to hear what her stepmother had done, all because – Jack had drawn this conclusion by now – of the huge fortune Jenny would inherit as her grandparents' only descendant as well as Noirtier's sole heir. Young Edward wouldn't inherit as much as his older sister, and obviously, Missy wanted to remedy that by killing Jenny now as well, leaving her little son the sole heir to the Smith's fortune. Determined because she realised it was her one chance to be free of the conventions her family placed on her, she consented to Jack's plan. The only condition she had was that her beloved grandfather had to be informed about the plan as well, and when it was all over, he should come live with her wherever she may go.

The next morning, the cold, lifeless body of Miss Jenny was found in her bed. The priest the heartbroken father called, a Father Moretti, did his utmost to console the family – Smith in his honest despair, Missy wearing her cold mask of indifference behind which she hid her true ugly character, and Noirtier with his stony facade, his face frozen in his paralysis, the only thing alive about him his intelligent eyes who found that of the priest's that he immediately recognised as the man who had come to him last night, explaining his daughter-in-law's hideous action which, quite frankly, he had suspected her of already. The only thing the old man was consumed with was the thought about his
granddaughter who, although she lay still as if suspended in time right before their eyes, would be free, and they would be together for the little time he had left on this Earth.

After the private funeral service, Father Moretti let the body be transferred to the Smith’s family tomb for Miss Jenny’s last resting place where, the next night, the miracle happened and the young woman woke up from her apparent dead like a phoenix from the ashes.

She was awaited by Jack, Jenny and Madame Vastra as well as Strax driving the carriage. She was send out of town to hide in a nunnery for the time being until she could be reunited with her grandfather. The other Jenny went back to Smith because it wasn’t over yet. Missy’s deplorable deeds still had to be uncovered.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I know, it's all a bit rushed in this chapter, but I wasn't in the mood to draw this narrative thread out even more. It's important, yes, but I want to concentrate on the Morcerfs. I hope what happened became clear, though, despite this rather summary-like account.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A few days later, the newspapers were filled with news of Harold Saxon's bankrupt house. Until now, he had managed to more or less keep it a secret – officially at least; gossip was another matter –, but now, it was too late, his situation too severe to hide the dire circumstances of his finances. The whole of London's society knew that baron Saxon was ruined. More and more of his clients withdrew their money from the bank.

Jack was a guest at the Morcerf's, reluctantly, when the news reached them. Watching Gwen carefully, he noticed the gleeful, spiteful light glittering in her eyes as she had it there in black and white that her arch enemy was defeated.

Just watch out, Gwenlyn Cooper, Jack thought, your time will come, too. Faster than you can blink.

His face remained impassive while he watched her, but on the inside, a storm was raging.

All of Harold Saxon's financial problems were soon forgotten though when other volatile news shook the Londoner High Society to their core. Prompted by the incriminating documents that had been played into the hands of Saxon's contact man in Japan, an article had been published stating how, sixteen years ago, a high ranking British officer had betrayed the Japanese Shogun family, leading to their murder. The name of this Judas was Ianto Jones, now known as the Count of Morcerf, a reputable, honourable peer of the House of Lords.

The next day after the article had been published, the Lord High Chancellor had called an extraordinary meeting to undertake investigations about these horrible accusations. Not only was the impeccable reputation of one of their own at stake – although an upstart in British aristocracy, the Count of Morcerf was highly respected by his peers for his exemplary honourable character – but the honour of the House of Lords as a whole.

All eyes that morning were concentrated on the Parliament, awaiting any news with excitement. To keep the investigation as dignified as possible for all parties involved – which, of course was in the best interests of the assembled aristocrats as well –, only a handful of reporters were allowed to partake. Donna Noble was one of them, and upon seeing her, Jack was glad that he had abandoned his initial plan to play the incriminating documents into her hands. He liked her very much, and didn't want to cause her friendship with Rhys irreparable damage. In the end, it didn't matter which newspaper dropped the bombshell after all.

Rhys was there as well, accompanied by his mother who looked very uncomfortable to be here today. Jack, as the only person in this room, perfectly understood why; after all, it was her head that was at stake here as well, not only her husband's. No matter if it was his reputation that would be destroyed today, her good name was sullied as well through this scandal.

The Lord High Chancellor, Baron Cottenham, opened the meeting at ten o'clock sharp, and immediately, the uproar of gossiping and speculating of the spectators and peers fell silent.

“We have assembled here today, gentleman, to concern ourselves with very dire accusations against one of our own,” baron Cottenham began, and launched into a short résumé of the nature of the
accusations.

“Count of Morcerf, do you have any evidence that you can submit here to exonerate yourself?”

Ianto stepped forward, his head held high proudly, and his face a perfect mask of impassiveness, but Jack nonetheless, even up here from the viewer's gallery, could make out how pale Ianto was, and how the strain showed on his face through the little creases around his eyes.

“Honourable Lord High Chancellor, honourable peers. I have to say I am as shocked about these accusations as you are. Therefore, I am not able to present you with many evidence that may proof my innocence precisely because there is nothing I could blame myself for. The only blame that may be put on my person may be the blame I hold against myself ever since the day I wasn't capable to save the Shogun's wife and daughter that had been left in my care during these horrible events that took place in Edo in 1822.”

He said this with so much dignity and open, honest honour that most of those assembled here today immediately believed him.

“But,” Ianto continued, “for the sake of completeness, I brought a stack of letters that proof my loyalty to the Shogun until the end. He even trusted me enough to send me to the Japanese aristocratic opposition as mediator, but the negotiations failed.”

Baron Cottenham nodded gravely, and studied the letters that were presented to him, one of the peers that had been stationed in Japan for a long time, too, sitting next to him to translate the contents. “Tell us about that day, Count.”

Ianto launched into an account of the events in 1822, his voice devoid of any emotion, but everybody who knew him well knew that behind this mask of indifference, his emotions were in turmoil. “As I said, the negotiations failed, the Shogun's abdication was demanded, if need be through violent matters. He refused. But nonetheless, he estimated the direness of the situation correctly, and wanted to know his family safe. He asked me to take them to safety to a secret place outside of Edo only he and I knew about.”

The Lord High Chancellor raised an eyebrow, and nervous murmuring broke out among the spectators. “Go on.”

“My own family was in danger as well,” Ianto explained. “I took them to the English embassy where I deemed them safe. Then, I fled Edo with the Shogun's wife and daughter, accompanied by only a handful of his best warriors.”

“Did you tell anybody about the location you were headed?”

Ianto hesitated. “I told my wife,” he finally admitted. “Not the specific location, but the way we were headed because I wanted to assure here that the route was perfectly safe.”

“Could anybody have overheard your conversation with your wife?”

“No, I am quite sure of it.”

“Could somebody have followed you?”

“I was very careful, but I can't eliminate the possibility.”

“All right.” The Lord High Chancellor frowned as a piece of paper was laid before him. He read it carefully before looking up sharply at Ianto once more. “What happened next?”
Ianto straightened up, steeling himself to talk about what had happened. “For a while, our journey was undisturbed. All of a sudden though, we were ambushed by soldiers that clearly had been send by the opposing aristocrats. They outnumbered us. A lot of my comrades were killed...” Ianto grimaced painfully, not capable of hiding his emotions any longer. “My charges were... abducted. I never saw them again.”

“And you made it out alive?”

“Yes, barely. I wish they had been the lucky ones in my stead.”

“Have you tried to find them?”

“I have. But it was a time of chaos, not much information were to be had, my possibilities were limited, and I had to think about my own family as well.”

Baron Cottenham frowned once more, contemplating what he had heard. “Do you have any witnesses that can confirm your account?”

“No. I don't know what became of the few men that survived,” Ianto admitted.

“Fortunately, here in my hands, I hold the testimony of two of these men. Apparently, they have been traced down by the anonymous source that pressed charges against you through this newspaper article. The men confirm what you have told us here.”

A relieved murmuring went through the crowd, and Ianto's shoulders sagged noticeably in relief.

“But!” The Lord High Chancellor held up his hand. “This doesn't answer the question of who is responsible for having revealed the route the group took that day. My dear peers, you see, I have been given note that unexpectedly, an eyewitness has come here today in person. Is this gathering prepared to hear this witness? Maybe they can shed some light into this grave situation.”

The peers consented, and the Lord High Chancellor gave a sign that the witness should be led inside. All necks craned up in anticipation, every eager eye turned towards the chamber's side doors. A chamberlain came in, and led a young woman into the room, obviously a lady according to her proud bearing and royal appearance. She was of Japanese origin, and a few people gasped softly as they recognised her as the woman who sometimes accompanied the Count of Monte Christo into the opera.

“Milady,” baron Cottenham addressed Toshiko, “you informed me that you can contribute to what happened to the former Japanese Shogun's wife and his daughter. Please, tell us your name.”

“I am Toshiko, legitimate daughter of Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the last Shogun of Japan.”

Shocked murmurs surged over the chamber, becoming so loud that the Lord High Chancellor had to demand silence again.

“Can you proof your identity, Milady?”

“I can.” Toshiko stepped forward proudly, and presented the Lord High Chancellor with some documents. “These are my birth certificate as well as the bill of sale for me and my mother as well as my chambermaid.”

At the mention of Lisa, Ianto stiffened, and his face became even paler than it already was, his eyes not leaving Toshiko out of his sight for even one minute.
“We were sold to an Indian slave trader that lay at anchor in Edo at the time. And here, the bill of sale that states that the Count of Monte Christo bought me from that man a few years back.”

The birth certificate was confirmed as genuine, and since the two bills of sale were written in English, the Lord High Chancellor could scan the contents himself. “It seems, everything is in order.” He bowed his head. “We welcome you, lady Toshiko.”

She nodded her head gracefully.

“Milady, please tell us what happened that day.”

“My father wanted to know my mother and me safe. He instructed one of his most trusted confidants, a soldier named Ianto Jones, to take us to a secret location.”

“Is this man here today?”

“Yes. It is the man over there who today calls himself Count of Morcerf.” Toshiko pointed at Ianto. “I recognise him as if I had seen him last only yesterday.”

“Count of Morcerf, do you recognise in this woman the little girl you once knew as the Shogun’s daughter?”

“I don’t. But I don't doubt that she is the lady Toshiko, and, with all of my heart, I am glad that she is all right.”

Toshiko returned his small smile coldly, and Jack could see that only with all his might, Ianto refrained from asking her what had become of Lisa.

Cottenham nodded. “Noted. Please continue.”

Toshiko turned her gaze away from Ianto, and looked at the Lord High Chancellor once more. “We had left the city behind us when assassins of my father's enemies attacked us. Many brave warriors were killed, and my mother, my chambermaid, and I were abducted by them. They brought us back to Edo, but not before my father's enemies, but to the harbour were a hooded figure sealed a deal with an Indian slave trader. We were taken to India where my mother soon died. I was completely alone.”

“When you were attacked, can you remember Ianto Jones? What did he do?”

“It went all very fast, but he tried to protect us women. Several assassins circled him, and brought him down, standing over him with their katana. I thought his end had come. But then, something peculiar happened which I have never forgotten. Before one of them could deal the final blow, the leader hissed that this man should be spared.” Toshiko's hard eyes turned mercilessly on to Ianto. “Only many years later did I understand the meaning of these words. They could only mean that he and them had some kind of deal. And you will find that the sales contract was signed with 'morwr'. I recognised it as a Welsh word, but only recently have I learned that it means 'sailor' or 'seaman'. He always told me that he stemmed from a fisher's family from Cardiff. For me, there is no doubt, he must be the one who betrayed my family.”

“I haven't!” Ianto exclaimed, looking into the young woman's eyes desperately. “I've sworn to protect your family, Milady.”

Toshiko's expression turned even colder. “That you have, but for the sum my mother and I were sold, even the most honourable man would have become weak.”
“I would have died for you,” Ianto argued. “I could never have...” He stopped, unable to continue.

“Did you know Mr. Jones well, Milady?” the Lord High Chancellor intercepted.

“I did. Initially only a common soldier, he became a trusted companion of my father's after he saved him from an assassination. My and his family became very well acquainted with each other, his children were only a little younger than me so they were sometimes allowed to play with me. I came to trust him, he was always good to me.”

Grave silence had laid over the chamber. Even the most faithful believers of Ianto's innocence seemed to waver in the face of these waterproof evidence.

Jack, although he had known which evidence would be provided but wasn't less shocked, chanced a glance at Ianto's family. Rhys looked shell-shocked and betrayed, ready to demand satisfaction any moment now even if he didn't know whom he should hold responsible. And Gwen... Gwen was ghostly pale. She cowered in her chair beside her son as if she wanted to appear as inconspicuous as possible.

“I ask the Count of Monte Christo,” baron Cottenham broke the shocked silence, and Jack jerked back to attention, “do you want to contribute something to the investigations since obviously you were the one who freed lady Toshiko from the hands of these slave traders.”

Jack stood up, and looked the Lord High Chancellor in the eye, all the while suddenly feeling Gwen's hate-filled gaze upon his person. “Lady Toshiko is a free woman who can speak for herself. She told you what happened in 1822, I wasn't there. I can only confirm that I bought her, and then gave her back her freedom. My motives for my actions are nobody's business.” He sat back down again in a decided fashion which baron Cottenham took as a polite but firm dismissal. He nodded. “Very well. Count of Morcerf, do you have any other evidence that would unmistakably proof that you had nothing to do with the betrayal of the Shogun's family?”

Ianto, still shaken to the core, straightened up proudly. “I don't. I can only once more emphasise that I haven't betrayed lady Toshiko and her mother.” Once more, he said these words with a fervour and passionate conviction that divided the minds. One part of the audience started to believe him again, and even Toshiko, behind her indifferent mask, seemed suddenly unsure for a split second.

For his part, Jack's heart was ripped into thousand little pieces, and he couldn't watch Ianto standing there so bravely. Because once and for all, he believed Ianto. All those years, there had been a nagging doubt of his culpability left, but here and now, Jack believed in his innocence. A heavy weight lifted from his shoulders, but a new one made from guilt bore down on him in its stead. Because he couldn't stop what was happening here any more. Even he, with all his money and power, couldn't proof Ianto's innocence. Nobody in this room could unless the real Judas was found. If he had only thought this through more carefully, if he had only waited. This little part of him that always had hoped that Ianto was innocent had caused him to plead with River to return to Japan, once more turning the whole country upside down for more clues. In favour of his revenge against Gwen and because he believed Toshiko and Lisa and Danny had to be avenged, he had quelled this doubt for all these years, but since he had met Ianto again, since he had realised that he still was the honourable man he had known, this feeling had become stronger, and he had started a last attempt to find proof of Ianto's innocence after all. But River was gone now for weeks, and he hadn't heard anything from her. She probably wouldn't find anything... Oh, what would happen now to Ianto?! Sod Gwen, he had never wanted his lover to suffer prison like he had, or even execution. What had he done?!

A sudden, renewed commotion turned Jack's attention back to the Lord High Chancellor. The baron raised an astonished eyebrow before he turned to the Lords. “My friends, it seems this day continues
to be full of surprises for new evidence seems to have appeared in the last moment.”

“Let’s examine them,” someone cried before the Lord High Chancellor could even propose these actions. Cottenham nodded, and told the chamberlain to bring forth the new evidence.

Jack’s heart stopped for a few seconds as suddenly, River Song stormed into the room in her imposing, graceful manner, marching right up to the Lord High Chancellor. She conversed quietly with him for a few moments, and then handed him a document folder.

As she stepped back, she looked up at Jack, and threw him an encouraging smile. Whatever River had found, it seemed to be in Ianto’s favour. Shakily, he watched Cottenham.

“I have been informed that the letter here in my hand has been found in the possession of the family of a man who admittedly had been one of the assassins that abducted the lady Toshiko and her mother. Apparently, he kept this document all these years as some kind of insurance or some other dubious intentions. Listen all to me.” And the baron read the few short lines that explained where the Shogun family was headed. “It is, as you may have gathered, written in English, not signed, but…” He sighed heavily, and looked straight at Ianto. “It grieves me to tell you this, but I recognise your handwriting, Count of Morcerf.”

Ianto ignored the uproar branding up around him, and shouted, convinced, “I haven't written this letter!”

“Can you proof this?” baron Cottenham asked sadly.

“First, it is in English. Why not in Japanese? Why should the writer betray themselves by using a language that very few people in Japan speak? I, for myself, can speak and write Japanese fluently. Surely, if I had written that letter, I would have written it in Japanese.”

“He is quite correct, Sir,” the peer that sat with Cottenham threw in. “I remember how well Count of Morcerf had mastered the language and even the complicated letters. He has a talent for languages.”

Cottenham nodded. “That is plausible. But what about the fact that I recognise your hand?”

“May I see it?” Ianto asked, and the baron nodded. He held the letter out towards Ianto who strode forward to take it. “If it isn't signed,” he explained while going to take the letter, now full of new hope, “it could have been anyone, forging a hand isn't difficult for a professional.”

“That is correct, and I have to admit it differs slightly from your hand, but it has been over twenty years ago. People's writing changes.”

“That may be right, but surely not that much. Consult a specialist. He shall examine the letter's hand and mine,” Ianto argued distractedly, finally holding the letter in his hands, and scanning the contents. He frowned. “This clearly isn’t my writing although I have to admit it looks very similar to mine. It almost looks like…” One more time this day, Ianto paled, the hand holding the letter started to tremble. His head jerked up, and although Jack was sure it hadn't been his intention, Ianto looked straight up at his wife. Who blanched as well.

As the Lord High Chancellor seemed to be as perceptive as Jack, he had noticed this look, and immediately pounced on Ianto. “Count of Morcerf, would you care to explain the look you just threw your wife?”

Ianto's head snapped around to look at Cottenham with wide, caught eyes. For a moment, his devotion towards his family, deep betrayal as well as his sense for duty and justice warred in his blue eyes before he closed them, a painful shudder running through his frame. “I have, Lord High
Chancellor, recognised my wife's handwriting,” he whispered, but it was so quiet inside the room, everyone had heard his words. And if as one, everyone's eyes turned towards Gwen. She had frozen on the spot, staring accusingly at her husband who had turned his back to her.

“Are you sure?” Cottenham's voice carried through the chamber.

“I am.” Ianto nodded. “Our hands are very similar because when we were young, neither my wife nor I could read or write,” he admitted without shame. “A dear friend of ours first taught me, then I taught my wife. That is the reason our writing seems similar until today.” He stared down at the letter as he continued to speak as if to himself, not wanting or daring to look anybody in the eye, “In addition, the informations are rather vague.” He waved the letter weakly. “If I had written it, I would have disclosed the exact location we were heading to, but only the route we took is described. Exactly the information I gave my wife.” At his last words, he looked up again, and searched Gwen's gaze. The couple seemed frozen in time for a few moments, then Gwen scrambled up, and hastily fled the viewer's gallery, her flight and her silence convicting her.

A few moments later, Ianto's shocked eyes found Jack's, but no emotion could be read on the Count's face. Inside though, his emotions somersaulted; Incredible relief and happiness that Ianto was indeed innocent, glee that Gwen was the real culprit, and eternal gratefulness towards River's persistent nature. When baron Cottenham said, “Count of Morcerf, you are free to go; We will decide at a later time what will happen with your wife”, Jack didn't hear anything any more, his eyes locked on to Ianto, ignoring everything else around him.

Chapter End Notes

Oh please, did you really think I would let Ianto be the culprit here?! ;-)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 16

The door to his study banged open, and Owen's angry words preceded the entrance of Rhys of Morcerf.

Composed, Jack stood from his chair, and approached the furious young man who glared daggers at him. Obviously, Rhys had figured out from whom he had to demand satisfaction.

“Why did you do that?!” Rhys asked, breathing heavily, only barely holding himself in check.

“I had my reasons.”

“After everything my family has been to you!” Rhys spat. “You were our friend, even family. We trusted you.”

Jack nodded slowly. “I know. And for that, I'm sorry. But not for what I did.”

Rhys' nostrils quivered in rage, but otherwise, he stayed frozen on the spot while he still stared at Jack with blazing eyes. “I demand satisfaction for my mother's honour,” he finally said through clenched teeth.

Taking a deep breath, Jack nodded. He'd known that this was a possible outcome after all although he had hoped that it would not. That he should die because of bloody Gwen Cooper of all people, but it wasn't his place to enlighten Rhys about his reasons. “I accept.”

“Tomorrow morning, eight o'clock?”

“Very well.”

Rhys gave a curt nod. “My adjutants will inform yours of an acceptable place.”

And with that, the Viscount of Morcerf stormed from Jack's study.

Not long after, a second Jones came to visit him that day.

Ianto stepped into the room, much more composed and calm than his son although the day's events must have left him worn out.

They stayed frozen in place for a few moments as if in a *tableaux vivant*, each in different corners of the room, staring intently at each other. But suddenly, Jack woke from his trance, and he turned around almost dismissively.

“You've come to ask me for your son's life,” Jack said, outwardly calm, and poured himself and his guest some Scotch.

Since he still had his back turned to Ianto, he could only imagine his nod before his inner eye.

“He just wants to protect his mother's honour,” Ianto said helplessly, ignoring the glass Jack held out to him, still without turning around.

This statement though, made him spin around, the golden liquid sloshing over the rim of the glass still in his hand. He put it down forcefully on the table, and glared at Ianto. “But even he should
realise that she is guilty!"

Ianto flinched under Jack's forceful tone. “I know,” he whispered. “I'm shocked myself now that I know.”

“You shouldn't be surprised though,” Jack spat.

Ianto's eyes blazed suddenly. “Why?! Do you really think I would have married someone who is capable of what she did if I had known beforehand?!! Our marriage was never very harmonic, true, and lately, we've both become more and more unhappy, but I never would have thought...” He cut himself off, pressing his lips tightly together in helpless anger.

“Oh please, Ianto,” Jack snorted in disgust. Ianto's eyes snapped up to him again, a dangerous glint in his eyes which Jack didn't heed though. “How can you be so naïve.” He turned away from Ianto again, not strong enough to bear looking at him at this moment.

But Ianto had other ideas. He stormed over to Jack, and grabbed his shoulder to spin him around forcefully. “Explain yourself, Jack!” he demanded, his wide eyes searching Jack's face for clues as to what he was implying.

It was the first time both of them acknowledged who the Count of Monte Christo really was, and that Ianto knew of it, had known it probably from the start, but since they hadn't been alone again after the carnival ball, there hadn't been a chance to address the matter.

Enraged, Jack grabbed Ianto's wrist that still held his shoulder tightly, and glared at him. “Who do you think sent me to prison, Ianto?!”

Ianto reared back in shock, his wrist still in Jack's iron grip, and he froze, staring at Jack shell-shocked.

“No,” he whispered.

“Yes,” Jack hissed. “Saxon wrote that letter, your wife took it to the authorities. And do you know what; she wanted you to go to prison, not me.”

He felt Ianto start to tremble where he held him tight, but he continued. It was high time that Ianto finally learnt the truth even if he only hurt him more and more with that.

“She wouldn't...”

“You saw what she did in Japan. Do you think only because you are cousins that she gave a damn about you?! Saxon offered to write a letter of denunciation, accusing you of sodomy. She agreed to have you out of my life. But he betrayed her. Since she couldn't read yet, he wrote the letter that condemned me, not you. He didn't care about you at all, only about getting back at me.”

“That explains all,” Ianto mumbled, all strength suddenly leaving his body so that he sagged down onto the chair that fortunately stood behind him.

Becoming worried despite everything, Jack crouched down in front of him, all traces of anger gone in an instant.

Ianto looked up at him with big, distraught, unseeing eyes. “That explains her rage that eve. I thought she was worried about you. But she'd just learned about Saxon's betrayal. Her rage was indeed directed at me...”
“Because you were free, and I was not,” Jack gently finished.

Jack watched his former lover closely for a few moments who simply stared into space, suddenly looking so much older than his thirty-eight years. Suddenly, his gaze snapped up, and wide, haunted eyes sought out Jack's again. “I didn't know, Jack. None of it.”

Jack smiled wistfully at him, and finally released his wrist to reach up to caress Ianto's face. A shudder of long forgotten bliss ran through both of them. “I know,” he whispered.

Ianto closed his eyes to have a moment to compose himself. Then, he took a deep, shuddering breath. “I'll have to tell my children,” he finally said. “When they know what Gwen did to you, Rhys will call off the duel.”

Jack nodded, and laughed humourlessly. “I would miss him of course. I could never hurt a child of yours, but he wouldn't. I'd rather see the next sunset than duel me at all though.”

“You have my word that there will be no duel.”

Ianto nodded as if to himself, then he stood up on shaky legs. “I should go now. The truth has stayed hidden long enough.”

“Ianto...” Jack touched his arm to stop him from leaving the room. Ianto looked questioningly at him, and Jack grimaced slightly. “Better not tell them about... about us. I don't want them to hate their father as well.”

A gentle smile spread over Ianto's face. “They wouldn't. Not because of love since I always taught them that love is humanity's highest asset.”

Jack had to swallow when he heard this. Even though Ianto had been hurt by loving someone, he still believed in it. He fell in love with him all over again right then and there.

“But you are right,” Ianto continued. “It probably would be a bit too much for them on top of it all.”

They looked each other deeply in the eye for a brief moment, then Ianto left.

Suddenly tired, Jack sank into the chair Ianto had occupied only a few moments ago. He sagged back in it, and settled in to wait for Ianto's return although he wasn't even sure if Ianto would return at all. But he had waited over twenty years; he could wait one more night...

He sat there the whole night, unmoving, and neither Owen nor River nor Toshiko or one of the others could rouse him. Only when, in the early morning, the Count of Morcerf with his children were announced, did Jack stir.

He surely must look quite dishevelled if the compassionate gaze Ianto threw him at his entrance was anything to go by. Not that Ianto looked any better. He, too, wore the same clothes he had yesterday, and his handsome face was drawn and tired.

But before he could address Ianto, Rhys rushed forward, and grabbed Jack's hands humbly, but otherwise stood before the older man tall and dignified. He looked pale and equally as tired and dishevelled as Jack and Ianto.

“My friend,” he began. “Jack.” He looked inquiringly at Jack who nodded in permission. “Please forgive me my rash acts. I didn't know of the unforgivable hurt my mother did you, I only learned of
it this night.”

Jack squeezed Rhys' hands back in forgiveness. “You couldn't know. No child should think the worst of their parents.”

Rhys bit his lip. “Nonetheless. I should have known that you are an honourable man, and would never do something to hurt without a good reason, and...” Rhys' gaze flitted over to his sister and his father. “And we've all known of my mother's other indiscretions for a long time now. But that was in the private of our home, and nobody else's business. For someone to expose her in such a way to the public's eye though...”

“Say no more,” Jack assured. “The wish to defend the honour of your mother despite your knowledge of her trespasses says a lot about your noble character. A deed you have inherited from your father.” His eyes met Ianto's who threw him a small, grateful smile.

“Had fate dealt us different hands, we surely would have called you uncle our whole lives, wouldn't we?” Rhiannon spoke for the first time, and her gaze could not hide the affection she held for Jack.

“Yes, of course,” Jack agreed, though inwardly, both he and Ianto knew that, had fate dealt them other hands, Ianto would never have married Gwen, and those two wonderful children wouldn't exist today. This fact was maybe the only good that had come from Ianto and Gwen's union and the betrayal that had led to it.

“We can still be a family.” Ianto stepped forward, and searched the gazes of the three persons he held most dear in this world. They all nodded, their eyes shining with happiness. Most of all, Jack seemed to glow with joy. He'd never have thought that this could be the outcome of all his scheming. Touched to the darkest corner of his shrivelled heart, he swallowed heavily. But there was one thing he still had to do.

“If we shall be a family,” he began gingerly, but with a firm voice, “then it should be complete.”

The Joneses frowned in confusion, but Jack simply bade them to sit down while he went to the door. He knew that River and Owen waited outside without even having called for them. “Please get Danny,” he asked Owen who nodded and left.

“He came back quite late, he didn't witness any of the things happening yesterday,” River assured him which made Jack take a deep relieved breath. She turned away, but Jack's hand on her shoulder made her turn around again. Questioningly, she looked up at him.

“Thank you, River,” Jack whispered, not knowing how he should express his heartfelt gratitude any other way.

But River understood, and smiled gently at him. “It will be okay, Jack. All of it.” And with that, this time she really turned away.

His heart so much lighter all of a sudden, but at the same time full of trepidation, Jack returned into his study where he was tensely awaited by his guests. His family. As composed as he could be, he joined them at the fireplace.

“Ianto...” Good God. How to start... He looked the younger man deeply in the eye, and recognised the worry in their blue depths about what he may reveal. He tried to smile encouragingly at him although he was nervous himself. “When you were in Japan...” He saw Ianto cringe, but he went on undeterred. “I know about Lisa.”

Ianto inhaled sharply, becoming pale as a ghost. “I won't ask how you know that. You've uncovered
everything else as well after all.”

“It was purely by chance,” Jack assured. “Do you know what happened to her?”

Ianto bit his lip, and threw a careful glance at his children, but then, he sighed, and seemed to decide that the time for lies or half-truths was over for good. “I tried to save her when all Hell broke lose, like I wanted to save lady Toshiko and her mother, but I couldn't find her in all the chaos. I never saw her again.” He hung his head in sadness and shame. “I tried to find her afterwards, but lady Toshiko said Lisa was sold into slavery with her, did she not. So...” Ianto turned to his children. “We loved each other,” he confessed. “She was kind and funny and compassionate; everything... your mother was not. And her spirit shone so fiercely despite her being a slave.” Desperate, he shook his head as old, dear, but painful memories resurfaced. “But I only loved her from afar. I thought myself much too decent and honourable as that I could have shamed your mother like that. So, I never acted upon our love.”

“Except the once,” Jack said softly.

Ianto's gaze snapped up in shock, his blue eyes wide and fearful. “How...”

Jack left his chair, and knelt before Ianto, taking his trembling hands tightly in his. “When we located Toshiko, there was someone with her, a little boy who had sworn to protect her since she was the one who had raised him.” By now, Ianto's trembling got worse, and Jack saw that he started to realise where he went with his story. “Apparently, he was the son of lady Toshiko's chambermaid who had died shortly after his birth.” Comfortingly, he squeezed Ianto's hands tighter when the other man let out a painful gasp at the years old news about his former lover's fate. “And when I saw him... Oh, Ianto, it was so obvious that Daniel was yours.”

“H-his name's Daniel?” Ianto croaked, tears running down his cheeks unhindered, and in his pain, his Welsh accent broke through with a vengeance.

Jack nodded.

“My second name is Daniel,” Ianto whispered.

“I didn't know that,” Jack smiled. “But she did?”

Now it was Ianto who nodded, getting more overwhelmed by the second. “Where is he now?!?”

He jumped when an exuberant knock sounded from the door, and he looked in that direction with wide eyes. Jack watched him closely for every reaction as he called, “Enter.”

The door opened, and Danny strode in confidently. He only faltered for a second when he spied his father's guests, obviously recognising them, and maybe wondering about the strange tableau he found them in. But otherwise, his bright, friendly smile never faltered.

But all of that was invisible to Jack because he still looked up at Ianto. He caressed his hands lovingly when the younger man made a choked noise.

“He looks like Lisa,” Ianto whispered.

Hearing this, Danny frowned, his smile freezing in his face, and, puzzled, he stared down onto the man he knew to be the Count of Morcerf, a man whose wife his father had brought down through a scandal only yesterday, and thus avenging Toshiko and Danny himself. “What...”

Deciding to mediate, Jack stood up, and pulled Ianto to his feet as well, keeping a tight hold on him.
lest his knees gave out under him. He reached out to Danny with his other hand who readily took it. He came to a stand still before Jack and Ianto, the three of them forming a tight triangle that was watched by the two other Jones children with bated breath.

“Danny,” Jack addressed his son. “You know who your mother was. But you never learned your father's identity.” Jack looked at Ianto, then back to Danny. “Finally, the time has come. I want to introduce you to your father. Ianto Jones. Ianto, this is your son, Daniel Harkness.”

Another choked noise passed Ianto's lips as he heard Danny's surname, but other than that, he didn't react, never taking his eyes from his son.

Danny blinked, equal parts astonished, overwhelmed, and unsure. His gaze flitted from Jack to Ianto, then to the siblings blinking equally as shocked. Finally, it came to rest on Ianto.

“You... you are...” He stopped again, his voice sounding hoarse with emotion. He still didn't seem to know what he should make of this revelation, unsure how Jack stood to the Count of Morcerf. The last he had heard was that he had been involved in the events that had led to Toshiko and himself losing everything.

Ianto gently smiled at him, trying to reassure him.

“Dad?” Danny asked, searching Jack's gaze now with wide eyes.

“It's all right,” Jack smiled, refraining from the urge to reach for Ianto's hand to squeeze it to show Danny that there was no reason to have any qualms against Ianto.

“You knew?” Danny asked, but, much to Jack's relief, he didn't sound angry or condemning.

Jack nodded. “I never told you, Danny, because I was selfish. You are one of the few good things I had in my life, and I didn't want to lose you to your real father whom I suspected all these years to have betrayed the woman you've sworn to protect as well as your own mother.”

Again, Danny threw slightly nervous gazes between Ianto and Jack, but Ianto only smiled encouragingly at him when he guessed Danny's train of thought. Then, Danny looked Jack firmly in the eye. “You are my real father, Jack. Never doubt that.”

On the spur of a moment, Danny stepped forward, and wrapped Jack in a tight embrace. The older man sagged into his son's arms in relief, embracing him in return.
They sat together for a long time, Ianto carefully dividing his attention between his older children, watching their reactions closely, and his youngest son, incapable of letting him out of his sight for too long. And then there was Jack. He paid him the least attention, but nonetheless, he felt his comforting presence every minute at his back.

The clock had long chimed midnight. Rhiannon practically fell asleep in her chair, and her brother, though he tried to hide it, didn't fare any better.

“Maybe it would be better to take you home,” Jack said softly, looking at the twins.

“I'll do it,” Danny offered readily, peeking shyly at his siblings.

They smiled at him, tired but cordial. Rhys rose, and pulled his sister up as well. “Father, are you ready?” He turned inquiring eyes on his father.

Ianto didn’t hesitate with his answer, “I will stay.”

The siblings blinked at him, a knowing expression flitting through Rhiannon’s tired eyes, obviously much more perceptive than her brother, but eventually, they accepted their father’s wish. They left with Danny, leaving Ianto and Jack alone.

“I hope I don’t presume too much,” Ianto whispered, insecure.

“No,” Jack shot back, smiling shyly. “I wouldn’t have dared ask.”

Ianto nodded and rose, holding out his hand to Jack. “Then let us retire.”

Eagerly, but still of a peculiar shyness, Jack jumped up to take Ianto’s hand, marvelling at the naturalness with which the other man simply picked up their intimate relationship again. But to be honest, it felt natural to Jack as well, like cogwheels slotting together in place to set into motion a long disabled device again.

He led the younger man out of the room and up the stairs into his bedroom in unspoken agreement. As soon as the door closed behind them, the two men were over each other, tearing at their clothes, uncaring about the garments, and all the while locked into passionate, desperate kisses. As Jack pressed close to Ianto, a hard object poked his chest, at first dismissing it as Ianto’s pocketwatch, but when he felt two lumps, he drew back. There was Ianto’s shiny pocketwatch, stashed into the outside pocket of his waistcoat as was proper. But what... Curiously, he reached down, sliding his hands to the inside of Ianto’s open waistcoat. From a hidden inside pocket, he pulled another pocketwatch, old but lovingly cared for. His eyes widened as he recognised the item.

“You...” His wide eyes searched Ianto’s. “You still have it,” he breathed in astonishment.

Once, Ianto had told Jack that he always wanted a pocketwatch. Since he was little, he had held a special fascination with watches, but his family called him crazy for it. Pocketwatches were for the rich, as their status symbol, not for poor fishermen. Sometimes, he had thought himself silly, and eventually, he simply hadn’t talked about his wish any more. He hadn’t known why he had told Jack in the first place. But Jack hadn’t thought him silly. He hadn’t laughed at Ianto. Instead, one day, he returned from a journey to Venice with a little present in his pockets.
They had passionately celebrated their reunion, hiding away in a remote barn on a warm summer's night. After they had made love, they lay in the sweet smelling hay, their naked bodies entwined with each other. And suddenly, Jack remembered his gift.

“I have something for you!” He sat up excitedly, and started rummaging in his discarded clothes.

Ianto sat up as well, an amazed expression on his face. “For me?”

“Of course for you, silly,” Jack laughed good-naturedly, and pulled something from his pocket. He held it out to Ianto.

Curious, the youth took the item from Jack's outstretched hand. And froze. There in his hand lay a pocketwatch. A real one that was working perfectly, the soft ticking a soothing noise in Ianto's ears. He had never held one in all his life, only seen them in the shop windows or with the more wealthy people. Moved, he looked up at Jack.

The other man blushed visibly, and shyly averted his eyes. “Ehm, we ll... I was in Venice, and I saw it at a market, and I bargained and bargained until I could afford it...” He shrugged. “I thought you would like it.”

Suddenly, he had his arms full of joyous youth.

“Thank you!” Ianto whispered over and over.

“I wear it every day,” Ianto confessed in a thick voice, bringing Jack back in the here and now. “I never go anywhere without it.”

“Does that mean...” Jack didn't dare hope.

“Of course it does, silly.” Ianto smiled at him gently. “I could never forget you.”

It wasn't quite what Jack had wanted to hear, but he was happy nonetheless. Maybe, what he had wanted to hear was implied in Ianto's words as well. Carefully, he put the pocketwatch on the night stand, and shoved Ianto's waistcoat and shirt from his shoulders so that they pooled in a careless heap around his feet. Not breaking eye contact for even one second, he drew Ianto down onto the bed with him, pulling the other man's body on to his own. He drew him into another deep kiss.

“Please, make me yours,” Jack pleaded when they broke the kiss eventually. “I want the circle to come to a close.”

Ianto smiled gently at him, caressing Jack's face. “It's never been about that back then. You don't have to do this only because in the past, it has been I who gave myself to you.”

Nodding in understanding and relief, Jack explained, “I want us to be equals.”

“We are. Always were.”

“Then, please...”

Ianto smiled at him in consent. And he bend down to take Jack's lips in a deep kiss, and his lover's yearning body into his arms.
“How did you know?” Jack asked into the comfortable silence, entwined in his lover's arms. “I'm not the man I once was.”

“No, you're not,” Ianto agreed with a sigh. “And I don't delude myself that under all this coldness and vengeful thinking, the man I love is still alive, but nonetheless, I would always recognise you. Your carefree spirit and your bright smile may be lost, but your eyes, though hard and cold now, are the same. I suspected for a while now, but didn't dare to hope.”

Jack swallowed hard, a lump closing up his throat. “You... you said 'love', present tense.”

Ianto firmly looked him in the eye. “Yes, Jack. I never stopped loving you. I thought the pocketwatch was proof enough.”

A relief so strong that it made him light-headed took possession of Jack, and he had to flop back down onto the mattress, his muscles suddenly too weak to hold him propped up on his elbow. Tears gathered in his eyes that he didn't even try to hide. He buried in Ianto's arms as they came around him soothingly, and he breathed in deeply, taking in his lover's scent.

“And the chocolate.”

“What?” Confused, Jack blinked up at Ianto, the last traces of happy tears still lingering in his eyes.

“The chocolate gave you away.”

Jack chuckled darkly, finally understanding what Ianto meant. “Part of me had hoped that it would.”

“I assumed from the first moment we met, but when Rhian presented me with the box, and I read the label...”

“I couldn't resist,” Jack admitted. “I think I needed you to know on some level. The thought of you talking to me, being in the same room with me, and not knowing who I really am... it tore me up inside.”

“And yet... you were prepared to hand me over to the hangman to get back at Gwen.”

Jack cringed, and he didn't want to ruin their comfortable mood, but he knew that they had to talk eventually about what had happened.

“Yes,” he answered carefully, and when Ianto didn't pull away from him in disgust, he continued to explain himself, “Despite my thirst for revenge, I wanted the culprit punished for what they did to Toshiko and Danny. At first, I only sought for ways to destroy Gwen, but when I met those two, I came to love them, and I wanted to do them justice. And for a long time, I was prepared to accept the possibility that it had been you.”

“I understand how it looked like,” Ianto replied thoughtfully. “If not for your friend River procuring the letter, I surely would have been found guilty. I would have found myself guilty as well faced with all this evidence.”

“I'm sorry, Ianto,” Jack hastily cut in. “I regret not having thought this through more carefully beforehand. Because when I watched you, and when I heard your heart-felt, honest words as you stated your innocence, I believed you. And I regretted having set this course of action into motion in the first place. If not for River...”

“I have to be honest, I am not really happy about what you did, Jack,” Ianto said. “It hurts that you would think me capable of something like this, but I was only a boy when you saw me last, and
people change. I understand why you did it, and I would have wanted to punish those who had hurt Toshiko and Danny as well. Mind, that's the only reason I forgive you.”

Jack buried himself in Ianto’s arms, wrapping himself around the other man. “Thank you,” he breathed, not daring to further challenge his luck.

“What happened to you really changed me,” Ianto suddenly mused, pressing a soft kiss on to the top of Jack's head. “I was devastated. And then, Gwen and I... I am not proud of what we did, but I can’t regret it either because I wouldn't have my children today otherwise. Even... even Danny.”

“If not for your marriage to Gwen, you could have been happy with Lisa,” Jack argued. “She must have been a remarkable woman.”

“Yeah, maybe we could have been happy,” Ianto admitted. “Who can tell in the aftermath. And yes, she was. When you were gone, I was so hurt I promised myself I would never let myself love again so fiercely, but when I met her...” Ianto took in a deep, shuddering breath full of emotion. “She made me feel so alive again...”

“I understand,” Jack murmured. “I'm deeply sorry for what happened to her.”

“I should have tried harder,” Ianto admitted as a response. “Maybe I could have...”

“No, Ianto.” Jack propped himself up on one elbow again. “You did all you could. And as you told your peers, you had your family's safety to consider.”

Shakily, Ianto nodded. “I just hope... she didn't have to suffer.”

“I am sure Toshiko would be willing to talk about her if you ask her.”

“I would like that. No matter how hard it would be to hear how she... Maybe then, I can finally let her rest. But now, I have to concentrate on the future. I never even considered that I had another child. I have to be there for them now. And you...” With suddenly moist eyes, Ianto looked at Jack. “To get you back now as well, alive and whole... It's more than I ever dared to hope or deserve.”

“I'm far from whole, Ianto. I'm broken.”

“And you think your loss hasn't left me broken as well?!”

“Not like me. You don't know how it was.”

“No, I don’t. And I don't want to know, but at the same time, I dearly wished that it had been me in your stead. I would have done everything to spare you a life in Hell.”

“Don't say that! You know nothing of the life I had to endure, so don't say now that you wished to have swapped places with me.”

“What? Do you want to tell me I would have been less prepared for being thrown into prison than you? Did you ever, for one second anticipate such a fate? My childhood was much harsher than yours, and you were much too young for a life in prison as well. You may have sailed the world, knew much more than me, but you were still a child, too. Nobody is prepared for that.”

“I'm sorry. I didn't want to question your integrity. But what I wanted to say... I just wanted to warn you of the man I am now. He is not a nice man, and capable of many despicable deeds...”

“The fact alone that you worry about my reaction to the man you have become shows me that the
Jack Harkness I knew maybe is still in there somewhere. It may need time, but I'm sure that... that we can save each other eventually.”

“You... you are willing to... be with me again?” Jack asked carefully, hopefully. “Only because you still love me doesn't mean you want to be with me. Like you said, you have to consider your children.”

Ianto considered this only for a split-second. He just searched for words to express himself, his decision on the other hand had been made already. “I would be a fool to throw away this second chance, Jack,” he carefully explained. “My children, all of them, will want for nothing nonetheless, I will make sure of it.”

“If you let me, I would want to provide for them as well,” Jack added eagerly.

“For their sake, I am not too proud to reject your generous offer.”

“This includes yourself as well, you know. I have all this money. Until now, I have only used it to punish my enemies and reward old friends. What use is it otherwise if I can't share it with someone.”

“I don't need that money,” Ianto argued. “I never have.”

“Neither do I. But it is mine. And maybe soon, I can use it for what the Doctor really intended it to be for; starting a new life.”

“The Doctor?”

“Oh Ianto, there is so much to tell you.”

“We have the rest of our lives, do we not?”

Jack beamed at him, taking Ianto's breath away like every single time Jack smiled at him like that.

“Yes. Yes, we have.”

“Tell me,” Ianto pleaded, and Jack readily launched into his life's story.

It had been a long night. When Jack had finally finished with his narrative, Ianto, too, had told him how he had fared in life. Eventually though, the two men had fallen asleep, completely exhausted but at peace for the first time in over twenty years.

However, it was before sunrise that they awoke again. Maybe their subconscious yearning for each other made their bodies forsake sleep in favour of spending their waking time together. Adding to that, they both were habitually early risers.

Both were disorientated for a moment when they woke. The prospect of a warm body pressed against their own such a foreign concept that they needed a few seconds to recall where they were and what had happened.

Jack smiled when he remembered who was in his arms. It felt so good. Not even Alonso spend the night with him since they had both agreed on a casual fling only, no emotional strings attached. But to wake up in Ianto's arms now, to wake up in the arms of the only person he had ever truly loved and who rightfully belonged in Jack's arms, it was more joy than Jack could comprehend at the moment. Utterly happy, he pressed a kiss onto Ianto's shoulder.
At the soft touch, the younger man stirred, and turned around in Jack's arms. They smiled at each other.

“Good morning,” Ianto murmured contentedly.

“Good morning to you too,” Jack replied, still smiling, and he reached out to caress Ianto's cheek. He still couldn't believe that he had been reunited with Ianto.

“Your hands are cold,” Ianto mumbled softly, his voice slurred with remaining sleep, but nonetheless, he rubbed Jack's fingers between his hands sluggishly.

“I don't feel the cold any more,” Jack whispered, but allowed Ianto to warm his hands, enjoying every chance he got to touch the other man.

“What time is it?” Ianto mumbled, bringing Jack's hands to his lips to kiss them.

“Isn't that your usual area of expertise?” Jack chuckled, snuggling closer to the other man under the bedding. “You always could tell how late it was, even without a clock.”

“Can't think any more,” was the mumbled reply. “Not after last night.”

Jack tried to hide a snicker, but only earned himself a playful slap onto his fingers.

“Oww,” he whined theatrically, wanting to wriggle out of Ianto's grasp to no avail. “You're supposed to be good to me, not mistreat me!”

Ianto snorted impassively. “I am supposed to lie here, as your guest, and wait for you to bring me breakfast.”

Jack grumbled in mock-affront, reluctantly un-plastering himself from Ianto's warm body to leave the bed. “Slave driver,” he muttered, and met Ianto's glittering, amused gaze peeking out from under the heavy duvet with one of his own. “And it's not even dawn,” he grumbled as he slipped into a luxurious morning robe.

Grinning, Ianto buried deeper into the warmth to wait for Jack to return with breakfast.

The heavenly smell of coffee roused him again a while later, tempting him from under the duvet.

“Jack!” he exclaimed. “That smells divine!”

Grinning, Jack put down the tray he carried carefully over Ianto's lap, then he climbed back into the bed again.

The ecstatic moan that escaped Ianto when he sipped from his cup of coffee was perfectly obscene, making Jack's whole body tingle all over pleasantly.

“Oh my God! Where did you acquire this coffee?!”

Jack's grin became even broader. “In the orient, I learned how to brew coffee correctly there. And since Rhiannon once let slip that you are a coffee addict, I thought I could ensnare you with my skills.”

Ianto's eyes widened. “You made this?”
Jack nodded.

“All right, you have ensnared me. I’m never leaving again.”

They both laughed at Ianto’s eager voice, but both were all too aware of what Ianto had said. And they both knew that he was completely serious.

To defuse the heavily emotional implication, Jack laughed, and exhaled in mock-relief. “Puh, lucky me. Then I don’t need to deploy my other talents to satisfy you.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Ianto chuckled drily. “I’m not that easily satisfied.”

“Didn’t look to me like it last night,” Jack grinned devilishly, making Ianto blush promptly.

“Anyway,” Ianto hastily changed the topic, “thank you for this divine coffee. And Rhiannon is right, it is my guilty pleasure. Together with chocolate.”

“What a coincidence that I also brought some chocolate with me as well,” Jack smiled innocently, and procured a small bowl filled with pieces of dark chocolate. Ianto’s eyes lit up.

Picking up a piece, Jack held it out to Ianto. “Open up,” he instructed, and waited for Ianto to open his mouth so that he could pop the chocolate inside.

Ianto moaned once more indecently, and Jack couldn’t resist to pull him into a deep kiss. As the flavour of the chocolate combined with Ianto burst over his tongue, he was reminded of a day many, many years ago.

Ianto as well, it seemed, because when they broke the kiss, he whispered against Jack’s lips, “Chocolate is supposed to be an aphrodisiac, is it not?”

Jack grinned. “It is,” he replied before pecking Ianto quickly on the lips. “Do you feel anything?”

“I do,” Ianto confirmed, and pulled Jack back into the kiss.
Chapter 18

When the clock chimed eight, the lovers' intimate time together came to an abrupt end: The Countess of Morcerf was announced.

Sighing, Jack kissed Ianto, and promised to deal quickly with the whole affair. He hastily threw on a few clothes, and left Ianto behind.

Gwen awaited him in his study.

Furious, she marched up to him when Jack entered, all of her good manners forgotten. “Explain yourself!” she screeched. “First, both of my children as well as my husband are gone for the whole day, and when they returned late in the night – minus my husband –, they had me informed that the duel between my son and your person yesterday morning has been cancelled! Why?! Maybe you can give me a credible explanation for why my own son didn't want to avenge his mother's honour.”

Jack’s impassive face was contorted in a sudden sneer. “Because there is no honour in you that could be avenged.”

Gwen gave an indignant, choked off noise, for a moment rearing back as if she had been slapped before she glared daggers at Jack. “Why do you do this to me?!” she asked when she recovered eventually.

“For the simple reason that it is my right, Gwen Cooper,” Jack replied coldly.

Gwen reared back in shock again, staring at him with wide eyes. “What did you call me?! How did you come to this knowledge?!”

“Because the last time we spoke in another life, it was the name that I knew you under.”

“W-w... we met before?” Blinking, Gwen frowned, trying to recall a meeting with the dashing Count of Monte Christo.

“Indeed. You were my guest then. A birthday feast Clive Jones gave in my honours.”

For a moment, Gwen stood frozen before him, then, her eyes widened again, and she became pale as a ghost. With a squeak of shock, she stumbled back, only the mantle stopping her hasty retreat. “No!” she whimpered. “It can't be. I'm seeing things.”

“You are not, I assure you.” Jack followed her menacingly, and only stopped closely before her, pressing her against the marble of the mantle by his sheer presence without even touching her.

“I...” She swallowed heavily, her chest heaving with mounting panic. “I never wanted for you to...”

“Oh yes,” Jack sneered. “I know that not I was your target but Ianto.”

“Saxon betrayed me!” she tried to defend herself.

“He did. As he did me. And for that, he has already suffered by my hand, but you, Gwen Cooper, took the letter to the authorities. You wanted to denounce your own cousin!”

“I don't care about him or what would have happened to him,” she shouted, her heavy breathing the only sound for a few seconds in the otherwise silent room. “I only ever wanted you!”
Contempt distorted Jack's handsome face, and he almost had to turn away from her because in his
disgust, he couldn't look at her any more. “You knew that he and I were together. Couldn't you just
have accepted it? You already had a good man who loved you very much.”

Gwen snorted in disgust. “Yeah, you and my cousin. Sooner or later you would have parted ways
anyway. As if a... liaison like yours could have lasted.”

“It would have,” Jack stated, completely convinced. “If not for you, Saxon, and Smith.”

“I would have been a good wife to you,” she insisted with a sneer, completely disregarding Jack's
words.

“You always wanted more than you had,” Jack sighed. “Rhys wasn't enough for you, the life you
led wasn't. Even when Ianto became more and more successful, you had to go and betray a family
that had trusted you. I would like to know why?”

“I would like to know as well.”

Ianto's voice caused Gwen to spin around in shock. Her nostrils flared in rage as she took in her
husband's slightly dishevelled state, the same Jack was in, and that he was wearing clothes that
clearly weren't his. “You were here,” she whispered, shocked. “The whole time, you were here...”

“I was,” Ianto confirmed impassively. “Now kindly answer the question.”

“Why I told those stupid heathens were to find Tokugawa's family?” Gwen snorted unladylike, and
threw Ianto a disgusted look. “You, with your sense of honour and loyalty. You wouldn't realise that
Tokugawa was done for. You said it yourself, you would have died for them. And for what?! The
fight was a lost cause anyway. The Shogun's supporters only would have fallen with him. But I!”
She puffed up her chest. “I had enough foresight to realise this. I did my utmost to control what
would happen by keeping you out of it mostly, but let you be a part of it only enough to emerge as
the loyal war hero.”

“And not to forget the money you got for selling the women into slavery,” Jack spat, disgusted.

“That as well.” She looked at Ianto. “Remember when I told you I had speculated at the suggestion
of Lucy Saxon shortly after our return? You were angry that I gambled like that at the stock market.
But you were appeased since I came out of it with a huge amount of money, and I only had to
promise you not to do it again. Well, I didn't. But I had to give an explanation where the money
came from, didn't I. You see.” She spread out her arms. “We came back to London rich and with a
title, and my husband a war hero. All of your success you had because of me.”

“I never wanted this success!” Ianto shouted, appalled. “Not if it was bought with blood.”

“What should we care about these people,” Gwen sniffed dismissively.

“They were our friends!”

“Oh yes, I have seen that,” she spat. “You were especially enamoured with their property. I saw how
you looked at this black slave girl.”

Ianto flinched back as if Gwen had slapped him. An impassive mask suddenly settled over his face,
only his eyes were blazing with dark fire. “Don't talk about her,” he pressed through gritted teeth.

She snorted derisively. “So noble. You make me sick.”
Pressing his lips together as he tried to reign in his emotions, Ianto otherwise stared at her without any emotions on his face, but Jack could see how hard it was on him not to react to his wife's malicious words. “You have hurt me enough, Gwen,” he said slowly, completely in control again. “You can't hurt me any more because for once in my life, you have lost, and I have won. You have lost everything, but I, finally, have gained back what I lost, Gwen.”

Her nostrils quivered as she stared at him, trying to comprehend what he meant. When she realised as well that his words were true, that she had, indeed, lost, her whole body started shaking with rage. “You will go down with me,” she spat. “My good name ruined will tarnish yours as well.”

Ianto shook his head at her obtuseness, and he stepped back from her, right into Jack's arms whose strong chest at his back gave him security. “We were married all these years, Gwen, but obviously, you never knew me. If you had, you would know that I never cared about... about all of this.” He waved his arm, indicating the wealth surrounding him, his good name in a society that was insincere and shallow behind all its glamour.

Incomprehensibly, Gwen stared at the two men whose love proved stronger than all her machinations.

“You can't hurt us any more,” Jack repeated Ianto's words calmly.

“I can,” she spat defensively. “What I did once, I can do again.”

Ianto stiffened in Jack's arms, but Jack still stayed calm, giving her a haughty stare. “Nice try, Gwen. But, let's be honest, who would believe you after everything that happened?” He leaned forward over Ianto's shoulder, giving her a confidential smile. “And after all, you trying to denounce someone to be a sodomite worked so well the last time, didn't it.”

Gwen flinched back as if Jack had slapped her, but then she froze, her back ramrod straight. She soundly grated her teeth, glaring at them both.

For a few long moments, they stared at each other in a silent duel of wills before, eventually, Gwen spun around, and stormed from the room. They both were convinced that they had seen the last of her once and for all.

Only a short while later, Ianto's children returned to Jack's house. Taking one look at their distraught faces, Ianto knew what had happened. He pulled Rhiannon into his arms, the young woman readily seeking comfort in her father's embrace.

“When the carriage came home,” she mumbled, shaken, but no tear escaped her eyes.

“She was found inside,” Rhys took over, trying to look composed although he, too, was very pale. “Shot herself. The small, hidden gun she'd carried probably had been intended for you.” He looked at Jack firmly who returned the young man's gaze with as much compassion as he could muster up.

“I'm sorry for your loss. Really.”

“Don't be.” Rhys shook his head stubbornly. “The shame she brought upon her family...” He aborted his words, too shaken up by Gwen's betrayal than her actual death. Being as honourable a person as his father, Jack could only imagine how hard the blow was that Rhys had been dealt through his mother's actions.

Jack met Ianto's eyes over Rhiannon's head, reading only indifference about Gwen's fate in them.
They nodded at each other.

“They understand if, under these circumstances, you don’t want to return home,” Jack spoke up kindly. “You are welcome here for as long as you want.”

Rhys bowed before him formally, incapable to show any emotions at the moment. “Thank you. We appreciate your kind offer.”

“I will send someone for your possessions.”

Nodding, Rhys looked at his sister and father. “If you would excuse me... I would like to be alone for a while.”

“Of course. A servant will show you to a room.”

Bowing once more, Rhys turned and left.

“Do you want to be alone for a while as well or do you want to stay here?” Ianto softly inquired, gently pushing his daughter away to look her in the eye.

Bravely, she raised her head. “I would like to stay with you for a while.”

“Of course,” Ianto smiled at her, and drew her over to a chaise lounge. “We can sit right here for as long as you want.”

Rhiannon nodded, and snuggled up to her father, not saying anything from then on for a long while.

Ianto searched Jack’s gaze once more, silently asking him to stay.

Understanding Ianto’s request, Jack sat down in a plush chair, lending silent support to his lover and his daughter.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Not long after though, Jack needed to think about his undertaking again. Excusing himself, he left Ianto with Rhiannon. He felt sorry for the family, of course, but Gwen had managed to estrange them from her all on her own so that their grief was kept within bounds, and they wouldn't need Jack's continued comfort. They were strong, and he knew they would pull through. But for Jack, it was time to leave Gwen behind.

Meeting with River in another, smaller study of the house, he went over his next plans with her, Owen joining them a short while later.

“Any news on Saxon?” he asked them, and River nodded promptly.

“I just got word about it,” she reported. “Looks like Lucy Saxon left her husband, taking with her a considerable part of his remaining fortune.”


River shrugged. “She is as good as penniless now. Not long, and her father will have to sell their property.”

Tapping his chin thoughtfully, Jack stared ahead of himself for a moment.

“Does Danny know yet?”

“No, I just learned about it myself.”

“All right. I'll tell him he may bring her here, offering her shelter.”

Owen snorted. “Your house's becoming a sanctuary.”

Sighing, Jack evaded Owen's amused gaze. “Yeah,” he admitted. “It's the least I can do; trying to salvage what I may in the aftermath of all the mess I've caused. Neither Jenny nor Rhys, Rhiannon or Clara are at fault for their parents' wrong doings, and although I have only been the one to uncover their vile deeds, it is because of me that their lives turned upside down.”

He looked up when River put a hand on his arm and squeezed encouragingly. “That may be, but you did good as well. Mrs. Smith would have started killing off her family with or without you. On the contrary, if not for you, Jenny Smith would be dead by now.”

Jack gave her a small, grateful smile. “Thanks. I appreciate your kind words.”

River raised a dry eyebrow at him. “Jack. We've known each other for ages now. Have you ever experienced kindness from me if it wasn't justified? I've always been honest with you.”

This time, the smile Jack threw her became brighter, more cheerful as he realised that she spoke the truth. “I love you, River Song,” he declared heart-felt, grasping her hand still lying on his arm and squeezing it tightly. “Without you, I would have been lost.”

The pointed clearing of a throat made them look over to Owen.
“And you, of course!” Jack laughed, and impulsively pulled Owen over into a hug. “Thank you,” he whispered into the smaller man's hair. “For everything.”

Since his face was hidden in Jack's neck, Owen allowed for his grumpy mask to slip to make way for a real smile. “You're welcome,” he grumbled.

Still needing to take care of a few things, Jack retreated into his study that by now had been vacated by Ianto and Rhiannon.

When he emerged for dinner, he was delighted to see Clara Saxon already being a guest at his table together with an infatuated Danny, Ianto, and the twins. Warmth infused his heart; his unexpectedly acquired family was growing more and more, slowly making him complete again. Maybe there was forgiveness for him after all in form of these wonderful people.

Nonetheless, dinner was a strange mixture of gloomy and amicable. The twins had decided to be able to better deal with their mother's death within the innermost family circle, and Danny did his utmost to console his siblings although in reality, he wasn't really sad about the Countess' demise. Additionally, he had only eyes for Clara who did her best to give comfort where she could as well after Danny had confided in her about everything that had happened, and how he was involved in the things Gwen had done. He loved her even more when she had declared that she didn't care about his ancestry. The only thing she cared about was the affectionate environment he had been adopted into, having turned him into the man she loved.

Ianto was in a similar predicament; he wanted to console his children – for he himself had hardened his heart about his wife's death –, but at the same time, he wanted to leave the dinner table to spend the rest of the evening and the night in Jack's arms since his spirits brightened more and more since it seemed as if their happy end was finally within their reach.

Jack for his part felt sorry for Rhiannon and Rhys, but since they were in good hands with their brother and father, he could concentrate solely on the man sitting beside him. His dinner still stood before him, barely touched, because drinking up the sight of Ianto was enough to sustain him for a while. As for all the grief he had caused this family, he hadn't dared to hope that they would still want to be with him. But they were. They were here, they were his family now. And, if Fortuna was merciful on him, Ianto would remain his for as long as he lived. They had shared their bodies again, yes, but Jack still feared it may be caused by all the emotional upheaval Ianto had to go through at the moment. Despite Ianto's declaration of love and his wish to remain with Jack, maybe, if a few weeks passed, he would realise that he felt fondly for Jack, but that a physical relationship between them wasn't possible after all. He feared Owen had been right when he had told him, all those years ago, that Ianto wasn't a boy any more who needed his erastes...

Toshiko, clever, empathic woman that she was, had decided to dine in her own rooms because she didn't want to cause the Jones children unduly grief with her presence. Owen kept her company of course. At least, Jack knew them to be secure under this roof if not present at his table. The same went for River, Madame Vastra and Jenny. But Mickey as well as Alonso were absent, Mickey no doubt busily courting Martha Jones. Jack wished them all the happiness in the world. And for Alonso... well, maybe at the moment it was for the better that his occasional lover and the love of his life weren't in the same house too often. Alonso was much too busy leading the life of High Society's darling dandy anyway, a role which he, despite his normally shy demeanour – not that different from Ianto, really –, embraced whole-heartedly and with gusto even after his investigations for Jack had been over. He still talked about Miss Noble whenever he could, and sooner or later Jack imagined hearing wedding bells ring. After all, Donna Noble was a woman who knew exactly what she
wanted. And at the moment it seemed as if she wanted Alonso Frame. The thought of these two so different characters coming together made Jack chuckle, but if they were happy, he would do his utmost to support this union.

Apropos weddings...

After dinner, Jack bade Danny into his study, carefully broaching the subject of getting engaged. Danny blushed fiercely, but part of him flushing to the roots of his hair was of utter happiness. Since that seemed settled, Jack called for Clara.

The outcome when he confronted her was the same so that he now had two blushing young people sitting in his study. Hiding a big grin, he nodded decidedly.

“Then that's settled; tomorrow, I will announce your engagement in The Times.”

“And want to take advantage of the engagement to further your revenge against Saxon!” Ianto exclaimed, glaring fiercely at Jack as he realised which hidden agenda his lover intended with this move.

Jack grimaced, and evaded Ianto's glare. Instead, he tried to hide in the short-lived safety of pulling his shirt over his head.

“What?!” he bristled defensively. “They are happy together.”

“Yes, but what would Danny think if he knew you use his happiness to further your revenge?”

“He doesn't need to know,” Jack snapped. “And regardless, it won't hurt either him or Clara.”

“That doesn't make it acceptable. You have to understand that I only want to protect him. He is my son, Jack!”

“He's my son, too!” the older man shouted, approaching Ianto in a rage, and only stopping shortly before him. The two men glared at each other in a silent duel of wills.

“He was my son long before he was yours; who do you think protected him all his life!” was on the tip of Jack's tongue, but he stopped himself just in time. He didn't want to hurt Ianto by furthering his guilt for not being there for either Lisa or Danny.

Although Jack hadn't said the words himself, Ianto nonetheless thought them as well. He lowered his gaze, and pressed his lips together in remorse. “I'm sorry,” he mumbled. “I forgot...” He raised his head, and looked at Jack. “If not for you, I would never have met him, and he probably would have died in India.”

His gaze softening, Jack gently cupped Ianto's cheek. “Stop feeling guilty. You didn't know. And if you had, you would have done everything in your power to get them back, Lisa as well as Toshiko.” He leaned forwards, and softly kissed Ianto's lips before drawing back and finishing undressing. “I know that sometimes, my revenge seems the most important thing to me,” he explained while climbing into bed. Ianto, still undecided, stood next to it, lost for a moment, but then he started taking off his clothes as well, folding them neatly and putting them on to a chair. “And that sometimes, I've done horrible things to get my revenge, all the time trying to convince myself that the end justified the means, but Ianto, please, believe me when I tell you that it's not true. Not any more.” Jack reached out, and Ianto grasped his hand, letting himself be pulled down into the bed. The two men embraced tightly, Ianto putting his head on Jack's shoulder. “In fact, it was Danny who forced me to
sort my priorities. He showed me love again. Although he was horribly scarred by what he had to endure as well, his capacity to love was strong enough to even warm my icy heart again. I owe him a lot of my happiness, Ianto, and I would never do something to endanger his in turn.”

Ianto was silent after having heard Jack's heart-felt words, thinking about them for a while while absent-mindedly caressing Jack's chest. Eventually, he nodded. “I shouldn't have doubted you. I'm sorry. It's just... my children...”

“I know.” Jack leaned down, and pressed a kiss to Ianto's temple. “Although he isn't my blood, I know exactly how you feel.”

Once more, Ianto nodded, pressing closer to Jack. “Go to Saxon. Tear him apart, no matter how. For both of us.”

“I will.” Jack pressed another kiss to Ianto's temple, then shuffled down to reach Ianto's lips.

Jack decided to pay Saxon a visit the next afternoon.

The luxuriously furnished house already seemed a little bit more empty, a lot of the expensive furniture sold to pay Saxon's mounting debts. The number of servants were decimated drastically as well as far as Jack could see. He imagined the bank didn't fare much different, a lot of Saxon's employees already without a profession. The final straw for the bank had been Jack's recent letter that he intended to withdraw the considerable rest of the granted six million pound credit which of course, the bank didn't have.

“I have been told my daughter has found refuge in your home,” Saxon snapped by way of greeting when Jack entered his study. “Why? What business is she of yours!”

Calmly, Jack approached, and laid a newspaper before Saxon who was slumped in his chair before his desk in defeat. “Because she soon will belong to my family.”

Saxon blinked, and then bend down to study the article that had been marked on the newspaper page. “The engagement is announced between...” His eyes widened, and his face became ghostly pale. He looked up at Jack. “Daniel Harkness, son of Jonathan, Count of Monte Christo...”

Saxon's eyes widened even more, suddenly staring at Jack in utter terror. Frantically, he scrambled from his chair, and backed away from the apparition in front of him. “You!” Saxon cried, pointing a trembling finger at Jack. “No, it can't be. You're dead!”

Jack threw him a sickly sweet smile. “Not dead, apparently.”

“Why...”

“Please don't insult both of our intelligence by asking me that question,” Jack interrupted Saxon with a sneer.

Saxon pressed his lips together, not really knowing how he should justify himself since he knew only too well that he was guilty of what he had done to Jack, no matter how he looked at it.

“I won't ask if you are sorry,” Jack continued, unfazed. “I don't think you are, but frankly, it doesn't matter. I just wanted to let you know who is responsible for your downfall.”

A sneer formed on Saxon's face. “A life for a life?” he mocked bitterly.
“Indeed. I like to think of my actions as God's justice.”

“Well, then, congratulations, Count. You have outdone yourself. And now? What happens now?”

“That's beyond my power now. My work is done, the stage now belongs to the next generation.”

“Yes,” Saxon agreed through gritted teeth, his numb fingers twitching as if he wanted to reach up and place them around Jack's neck to strangle him. “That may be for the best.”

“Despite the fact that it's my family she will marry into, maybe it is a consolation to you that your daughter will want for nothing. My son loves her very much, and she is a very clever, intriguing young lady. I am convinced they will be very happy together.”

Saxon nodded mutely, not wanting to admit if the thought consoled him or not. Probably not since the most important thing for him at the moment was his lost fortune.

“Goodbye then, Saxon.”

Turning on the spot, Jack exited Saxon's study, never to look back again.

Although he felt satisfaction about this additional victory, the only thing Jack could think about was returning to Ianto as soon as possible. The younger man awaited him in his home in Paternoster Row – hiding from the gossip of London and his social obligations – enquiring what had happened at Saxon's. He was still slightly miffed despite his words last night, but was appeased somewhat when he learned that Jack hadn't really gloated about the engagement, and thus utilising their son – and he already came to think of Danny as their son – for his revenge, not matter how justified it was. That it had naturally been a shock for Saxon was another matter, one which Ianto didn't really care about.

All that was left to be worried about was pushed back for a while, though, when they retired for the night, the younger man leading Jack into Jack's bedroom without a word where the two lovers lost themselves in each other once more.

“Jack?”

“Hm?” Jack made questioningly, but never stopped caressing Ianto's naked chest idly.

“What happens when you have quenched your thirst for revenge? What's left for you then?”

Jack's gaze focussed onto Ianto, panic shining in his eyes. “You have changed your mind?” He couldn't hide the hopelessness and despair marring his face. He had known it! The horrible moment was there sooner than he had thought, though.

Ardently, Ianto tightened his hold around Jack. “Of course not! Jack Harkness, I love you, and I won't ever leave you until the day I die.”

Shivering in relief at the heart-felt declaration, Jack slowly started to believe Ianto. He probably would never rest completely, a last nagging doubt would remain in him for the rest of his life because he simply didn't deserve this divine creature that had gifted him with his love.

“I don't deserve you!” Jack blurted out, not able to stop himself. “In my need for revenge, I have become as despicable as them. That certainly doesn't give me the right to demand any happiness
from you..."

“Shh, shh,” Ianto soothed him, caressing his hair and kissing his face. “Calm yourself. All is well.” He tried to catch Jack's gaze. “I promised you I would stay. Why do you doubt me?”

“I don't know,” Jack whimpered. “Good things don't happen to me. As soon as I think I have them, they are taken away from me.”

“Nobody will be taken away from you,” Ianto assured firmly. “You have wonderful, loyal friends, a beautiful lady who adores you like a daughter her father, a son who loves you fiercely, and now, you have won two more children who love you. And you have me.”

Tears sprang to Jack's eyes suddenly, and he buried himself deeper in Ianto's arms, weeping with joy and relief. He slowly started to heal again.

“Twenty-five years ago, I spurned your offer of a future together only because I was a coward,” Ianto continued to explain. “I won't make that mistake again.”

“No, no,” Jack objected, still highly emotional, “it was the reasonable thing to do. You were always so reasonable and proper. I admire that.”

“No matter, I refuse to be reasonable any more. Or proper. Being reasonable and proper brought me too much heartache. For once in my life, I want to do the right thing; what my heart tells me, not my sense of propriety.”

Jack braced himself up on his elbow, searching Ianto's eyes. “Then, go away with me,” he pleaded. “You wanted to know what's left for me after all of this is over? Here, nothing. I am sick of this High Society life already. But for the rest of my life, I hope that... that *us* is what's left.”

“Yes,” Ianto agreed readily. “I want to start anew with you.”

A beaming smile brightened Jack's face, taking Ianto's breath away. “Let's go somewhere warm then. Will be better for my lungs. I get awfully short of breath in cold climate.”

“I didn't notice anything about a bad condition last night,” Ianto teased him. “On the contrary.”

Jack winked at him. “Well, that may be because I pulled myself together. After all, I was highly motivated.”

Ianto laughed, free of any worries for the first time in a long time. “Cheeky.”

“Always.” Grinning, Jack leaned down to kiss Ianto once more.

When they parted, Ianto became serious again, all traces of banter vanished.

“What about Smith?” he enquired. “You said he is still left. But you already took his daughter from him.”

Jack’s smile froze, and he pressed his lips together uneasily. “There is still an ace I have up my sleeve against him,” Jack explained evasively.

“Let me help, yes?” Ianto pleaded. “After all, he destroyed my life as well. I'm too late to help you with Saxon, but here, I want to help, share your burden. I'm through with being a wimp.”

“You are not a wimp,” Jack protested automatically.
“I am. Always doing what is proper, taking the coward's way out.”

“That's not cowardice but an admirable sense of honour.”

Ianto grunted self-deprecatingly, recalling his own daughter's words when she had learned of her mother's actions only a few days ago. In her despair because she had seen how much he suffered, she had accused him of not being a real man, letting his wife trample over him, letting her manipulate him, and at the same time putting up with her affairs. Ianto knew, even though Rhian's words had hurt, that she was right. Gwen hadn't loved him, never had, and she hadn't cared for him. Sometimes he hadn't even been sure if she loved her children at all. And he himself, out of integrity, had remained unhappy, had never sought love in the arms of another, and the one time he did, he had denied himself this love, losing her forever.

Jack’s gentle hand caressing his cheek brought him out of his musings, and he looked at the man he loved. He stuck out his chin determinedly. “No matter what we call it. No more of it. I always accepted my fate, endured your disappearance, tolerated Gwen's affairs, and forsook a future with Lisa because of propriety. I can't continue like that, Jack. I want a fresh start.”

“I agree with you on this. And we will have a fresh start... after. But let me do this alone. Isn't it enough that I am corroded with the thought for revenge? It's like an ulcer that eats through you, slowly consuming you alive. Don't taint yourself with this.” Once more, he tenderly stroked Ianto's cheek with his thumb. “Please, listen to me.”

Helpless, Ianto frowned, wanting to object, but eventually, he nodded. “Maybe you are right. I have to think of the children,” he repeated his earlier words. “They need me.”

“Yes, they do,” Jack agreed readily. “And besides...” Here it comes, he thought with a grimace. “You won't endorse what I have planned to destroy Smith's reputation anyway.”

Ianto narrowed his eyes. “Jaaack?!” he moaned in exasperation, glaring at his lover. “What are you on about.”

Jack cringed. “Let's talk about this tomorrow, yeah?”

But Ianto wanted none of it. Resolutely, he wrestled the other man onto his back, and straddled him, pinning him into the mattress with his weight on top of him as well as his glare. “Spill,” he said calmly, but Jack knew this deceptive calmness. It never boded well for him in the past.

He swallowed heavily. “All right. But promise me you won't be mad at me.”

“I'll decide afterwards,” Ianto deadpanned.

“Fine, fine,” Jack whined, wanting to throw his hands into the air in exasperation, but Ianto had them pinned to the bed. “That young man Rhiannon is so infatuated with...”

“Prince Angelo Colasanto?” Ianto frowned.

Jack grimaced. “He... is not a prince.”

“Not a prince,” Ianto repeated impassively.

“No... and his name is not Angelo Colasanto.”

Ianto's eyes narrowed once again. “But?”
“His real name is Johnny Davies, and he is the illegitimate son of John Smith and Lucy Saxon.”

You could have heard a pin being dropped in the room while Ianto blinked at Jack, trying to comprehend what he had just learned.

“Excuse me?!” he exclaimed eventually, releasing Jack's wrists, and struggling up into a slumped position on top of Jack. Eventually though, he pulled himself together, and started to realise what Jack's words meant. “And you know this why?”

Jack evaded Ianto's piercing gaze innocently. “Maybe because I happen to be the one who tracked him down after I learned what happened in the house in Chiswick that I have bought?”

“And, pray tell, Mr. Harkness, what happened there?”

Oh oh, they were at the Mr.-Harkness stage. Never a good sign.

Taking a deep breath, he stared into Ianto’s eyes seriously. “Smith tried to strangle the newborn and buried him alive. An illegitimate child from an affair with a high ranking lady would have destroyed his career.”

Ianto's eyes widened, this time in shock. “How could he...” he breathed, not wanting to believe what he had learned about a man he had considered an acquaintance (until he had learned that he was responsible for his lover's incarceration, of course).

“Owen saved the boy by chance, and brought him into a good home, but...” Jack shrugged apologetically. “Johnny bunked one day, they never saw him again until I had him traced down.”

“He bunked,” Ianto clarified, once more completely impassive. “To do what?”

A grimace stole itself on Jack's features again, “Ehm, possibly to do a little bit of conning.”

“My daughter is being courted by a conman!?”

“A charming and quite harmless conman, I have to add,” Jack tried to appease Ianto.

For a few long moments, the two men stared at each other in a duel of wills. Eventually, Ianto pouted, narrowing his eyes. “I don't know if I'm more furious about the boy's origins, his choice of career, or about your deception.”

“I know what I would prefer,” Jack mumbled, but a glare from the younger man shut him up.

But suddenly, all ire went out of Ianto, and he sighed heavily. “If you swear on all that is holy to you that, despite being a conman, the boy is harmless, then I am willing to let the matter rest. Rhiannon really got it bad for him. And I have to admit, they seem to fit quite well together.”

Jack nodded solemnly. “I swear on your life that he is a decent guy despite being a small-time criminal.”

Ianto blinked, surprised at Jack's oath, but nodded slowly.

“And in my defence, I hadn't planned for Rhiannon to fall for him when I set him up to impersonate a prince. I only encouraged his interest in Clara...”

“Don't make it worse again, Jack,” Ianto warned, and Jack shut up, realising that admitting to wanting to set up the half-siblings instead, one of them now engaged to their son, he only dug himself deeper again.
“Shutting up, you are right,” he admitted, throwing Ianto a disarming smile that, despite himself, made the younger man chuckle.

Huffing in exasperation, Ianto finally released Jack, and let himself fall to the side, coming to lie next to Jack again. Wistfully, he stared up at the ceiling, massaging his forehead. “It's strange, isn't it.”

“What is?” Glad to be finally out of harm's way, Jack propped himself up on one elbow to watch Ianto.

“That two of my three children marry into the respective families that hurt us so much.”

“Our fates seem to be tied to each other even in the next generation, yes.”

Ianto shook his head. “It doesn't matter though. As long as they are happy. It's not their fault after all, and it shouldn't concern them which family they marry into as long as they are loved and cared for.”

“I promise they are. I couldn't live with myself if I would cause them any more harm.”

Ianto turned his head to look at Jack, reaching up to caress his cheek. “You are a good man, Jack Harkness. Never doubt that.”

Chapter End Notes

And that’s it for Saxon. In the book, he flees with his money to Rome, and there Monte Christo orders him to be captured by “Suzie's” gang where they take all the money away from him again. In the end, Monte Christo shows mercy, and lets him go with a small pension. But I dislike Saxon too much as that I would want him to be shown mercy. Although in his later life, he didn't commit any further crimes like Smith or Gwen did, he started the whole conspiracy after all. So, no. No mercy for Saxon in my story.
Smith was the last one still standing, but Jack was already busily planning his downfall. Additionally, he needed to bring Missy to justice. Her husband needed to know that his beloved wife was responsible for his daughter's death, that of her grandparents and almost that of Smith's father. The blow to the man whose reputation and justice meant all to him would be spectacular. As soon as he knew, Jack was sure that Smith's infamous mercilessness against all things criminal would turn with a vengeance against his wife. Though probably not publicly. Smith would find a way to punish Missy, but at the same time keep this scandal out of the press.

Therefore, although Smith was devastated about his daughter's death and thus maybe punished enough already, Jack wanted the public to know what a person the mighty prosecutor really was. Namely a man who would murder his own newborn son to protect his reputation.

A short, anonymous letter was played into the hands of the court that unmasked prince Angelo Colasanto as a fraud, that the young man was nothing more than a poor conman. Johnny was arrested only one hour after the letter had been delivered.

In the pretence of making sure Johnny was okay so that Rhiannon would stop worrying, Jack send Owen to visit Mr. Davies in prison. There, his friend had order to finally tell the young man who his real parents were so that he could reveal this information at his trial in a few days. Jack was firmly convinced that, as soon as Smith's crime had been revealed, Johnny would be set free because of mitigating circumstances. A prosecutor who had tried to murder his infant son was so much more interesting after all than a small-time criminal who had tried to impersonate someone he wasn't. He hadn't harmed anyone after all.

At least Jack hoped that this would happen. Otherwise, he would have to answer to Ianto and, God forbid, Rhiannon. If everything else failed, he could still get the boy free through not quite legal means... which would mean a life on the run for Rhiannon. Oh joy. Ianto would be thrilled even more about that.

But with all of Jack's plans concerning his revenge, this one as well went as predicted.

Halfway through, the trial had to be aborted because of the uproar the revelation of Smith as the defendant's father caused. Johnny was set free immediately (River was already waiting for the boy outside of court so that he wouldn't simply disappear on his future wife), and Smith fled home.

Jack followed him there to confront him once and for all.

But when he arrived at the Smith's household, a serious looking Jenny opened the door for him, and a dark sense of foreboding gripped Jack.

“Mr. Noirtier told his son that it was Mrs. Smith who poisoned the Taylor's and Miss Jenny,” she informed him in a low voice while she led him through the tomb-like, utterly silent house. “I heard him confront her this morning before he went to court, giving her the choice to either be brought to trial for her crimes or to take matters in her own hands.”

They both looked at each other grimly as Jack understood what this had to mean.
“He came back from court in a rush a short while ago, completely troubled. Whatever happened at court, it must have made him change his mind. He ran through the house, calling for his wife, begging her to not do it. He went into her private salon. I heard an anguished cry, but since then, I haven’t heard from him. I didn't dare go in there.”

Jack nodded distractedly, putting his hand on Jenny's shoulder. “I'll find my way from here, Jenny. Pack your things and go home. Your work here is done.” Impulsively, he leaned over, and kissed Jenny on the forehead, giving her a wan, reassuring smile.

Her lips pressed together grimly, she nodded, and hurried away.

His feet heavy as lead, Jack reluctantly made his way to Missy's salon. His hand shaking, he pushed down the handle, and softly stepped into the room. The first thing he saw was John Smith, cowering in a pitiful heap on the floor next to his wife's lifeless form.

What made Jack's blood run cold though was the small body lying next to the dead woman. She hadn't...

Panic gripped him, and he rushed over, falling to his knees beside the little boy. Ignoring Smith's surprised hitch of breath as he spotted his unexpected visitor, Jack pulled forth a little vial that he always carried with him since having met Missy, and took the still child in his arms. He pried open the stiff jaw, and drizzled a little bit of the concoction into Edward's mouth, trying to revive him. He hadn't wanted for this to happen, and he felt horrible that he hadn't stopped Missy sooner, but then, Jack shook this guilt from him. Like River had said, it hadn't been his fault, Missy would have started killing anyway. He wasn't responsible for the actions of this woman...

The two men waited with bated breaths for a few agonisingly long moments, but nothing happened; Edward was dead.

Dejectedly, Jack laid the child on to the floor again. He didn't want to meet Smith's anguished eyes, but he at least owed the man that much. He met wide, broken, red-rimmed brown eyes that stared hopelessly at him.

“I'm truly sorry,” Jack whispered.

Shakily, Smith nodded at him. “Thank you for trying to save my son though. I... I never thought she...”

“Me neither,” Jack pressed forth. “I never intended for this to happen.”

A spark of life returned briefly to Smith as disbelieving rage flickered in his eyes for a moment. “What do you mean? It wasn't you that poisoned my family but... my own wife.”

“But I knew about her despicable plans all along,” Jack admitted.

“What?!” Smith flared up, his sorrow-laden body jerking weakly so as if he wanted to hurl himself at Jack. “And you did nothing?! My daughter could still be alive if you had spoken up!”

“As could my father had you spoken up twenty-five years ago,” Jack replied coldly, once more hardening his heart in the face of Smith's pain.

The other man froze, staring wide-eyed at Jack. “I... I don't understand...”

“I think you do. If you think back on an eve in late February in Cardiff. You celebrated your engagement, I my birthday.”
Smith frowned for a second. But suddenly, his already pale face lost all colour. He couldn't move, simply stare at the ghost before his eyes.

“No,” he whispered so softly that even Jack could hardly understand him in the otherwise quiet room. “Jack Harkness.”

Jack sneered coldly at him. “That I understand. But you wanted to protect your reputation and your position as well, over and over, not just in my case. You even were prepared to murder your newborn child for it. And that's something I can't forgive.”

He rose and turned his back on the desperate man who sat slumped next to his wife and son's bodies, not waiting to watch as Smith realised that what had happened this morning at court had been Jack's doing as well.

“Goodbye, John Smith,” Jack said over his shoulder. “Now we definitely won't see each other ever again.”

“What am I supposed to do now?!” Smith cried after him.

Jack stopped, but didn't turn around again. “What I had to do for fourteen years. Wait and hope.”

This time, he didn't stop, and Smith didn't call him back again. Jack left Smith's eerily silent house, the feeling of his final victory tinged with lingering regret about the boy's death, but he brutally squashed any guilt he felt once and for all. As soon as he stepped over the threshold of Smith's house into the cool London air, Jack knew that it was over. From now on, his past lay behind him. What counted now was only the future far away from here.

Briskly, he pulled his coat tighter around him, and hurried to his waiting carriage that would take him home to Ianto.
Okay, the argumentation why Jack manages to get Johnny free maybe is a little thin, but I didn't want to follow the events of the book where “Johnny” murders “John Hart”, and is charged for it. For one, I didn't want to bring John Hart into it again, and second, I didn't want him to die. And under no circumstances could Johnny become a murderer! Ianto would have my head for setting his daughter up with a murderer!
A sleek, proud ship slowly brought more and more distance to Cardiff, its white sails gleaming in the weak sun, and the name of the ship – *Tardis* – shining in bold blue letters on her hull. Two men stood on deck and watched the city of their childhood get smaller and smaller, leaving their old lives behind for good now, leaving all the pain behind, leaving the Count of Monte Christo behind together with all the bitterness and thirst for revenge, but also leaving behind their friends and families.

Although he knew that it would be a long, long time before he would see some of his friends again, maybe even years, Jack sailed away in the knowledge that they all were happy now, and had the chance to lead the life they all deserved. They needed to go their own ways at last, but at least he could make sure that they would never lack for anything in their lives again, having invested in stately pensions for all of them years ago already at Thomson & French. Finally, he could honour the Doctor by using his treasure for the purpose it had originally been intended; starting over. His fortune was so vast that, no matter what he did, he would never manage to spend it all. Though both he and Ianto didn't need all this money, having always managed to get by with little, Jack wanted that Ianto was well provided for as well. Before leaving London, Ianto had renounced his title since he was socially ruined anyway, as well as his wealth, leaving all his fortune to Rhiannon and Rhys. He himself didn't need it any more, he had never needed it, and although he normally was a proud man, he had agreed to live off Jack's fortune. As long as his children were provided for, and he could finally be with Jack, he didn't care about the rest.

Ianto reached for Jack's hand, not hidden between the folds of their cloaks, but openly since they were surrounded by trusted servants and friends. Behind them, they heard River's shouts as she instructed the crew. They both heard the glee in her voice at the chance to order about so many people.

No matter what Jack had offered her, River Song had refused to leave Jack. All of his other friends were starting a new life since they all had found people with whom they wanted to share it, but River had devoted herself to Jack from the first day, and she wouldn't stop now, no matter where his journey may lead him and Ianto.

In the distance, Jack could make out the sails of another proud ship. The *Valiant* was preparing for a long journey herself, Martha and Mickey Smith on board since it was the fastest way for them to get to the continent where their journey would lead them to Switzerland. Martha had taken Jack's advice to heart, and decided to become a doctor there, her new husband accompanying and supporting her before he would eventually return to Cardiff to become captain of the *Valiant*. At the wedding only a few days ago here in Cardiff, being Mickey's best man, Jack had revealed himself to the Jones siblings. Not only that he was the mysterious benefactor that had saved the house Jones all those years ago but that he was Jack Harkness as well. Martha, clever woman that she was, had had her suspicions already at least about the identity of their benefactor, but vividly remembering the man she had known as a child as well.

Owen and lady Toshiko would go with them for a short part of the journey, the pair headed for Paris to start a new life there.

And... and Danny was on board the *Valiant* as well. After the ship left the continent, it would head for India where Clara wanted to become a teacher. Danny whole-heartedly approved of his fiancée’s
plans, even intending to help her in her endeavour. Jack knew they both would be wonderful teachers, and one day would become caring parents. Letting Danny go was the hardest part for Jack, but he knew he would see him again soon. After all, there was a wedding to attend to in the near future.

Before they had left London, they had been guests to another wedding where Donna Noble had finally become Mrs. Frame. Initially, Jack had wanted to offer Alonso to manage his new trading ships sailing under the flag of Jones & Son, but obviously, he had been bested by Miss Noble who had made up her mind which man she wanted as a husband. Jack had been powerless in the face of her determination, not to mention Alonso (who seemed to enjoy his wife's strong hand though).

Jack had also left behind Madame Vastra, Jenny, and Strax in London, transferring his house in Paternoster Row into the curious trio's tenure. He had the feeling that London's women had a new protector. Since Madame Vastra couldn't watch over Toshiko any more, the fierce fighter had vowed to protect all she could from injustice and violence. No doubt Jenny and even the peculiar Strax would help her in her endeavour, giving all their lives a purpose.

Rhys had left them while they all were still residing in London. He had decided to join the army to get the chance to make reparations for what his mother had done all those years ago, dedicating himself to help and protect people where he could. Rhiannon on the other hand had left with the newly released Johnny. The two wanted to start a new life together elsewhere as well even if Ianto still thought him a rascal. At least he really loved Rhian, and since his daughter wasn't a woman who let herself be cowed, no matter by whom, Ianto was sure they would lead a good life under the fierce, pragmatically thinking young woman's guidance. And it wasn't as if Johnny hadn't had a long chat with Jack, Ianto, Rhys and River separately about how he was supposed to treat his future wife, and that he could be sure that he was being watched wherever they went. Solely for their protection, of course.

The two men were startled out of their musings as suddenly captain Song appeared in their line of sight. “Where to, gentlemen?” She cocked an inquiring eyebrow.

Jack looked at Ianto, then back towards River. “How about where the wind takes us?”

River's eyes glinted mischievously. “You wanted to go somewhere warm, so maybe I should take control instead of the winds, hm? Nobody wants to end up in Greenland.”

Jack snorted in amusement, and mock-bowed to her. “Once again, I bow to your infinite wisdom.”

River winked at him. “You better, sweetie.”

Laughing, she took off, leaving the two men alone once more.

Snickering as well, Ianto pressed closer to Jack, and slipped his hand through the crook of Jack's arm.

“Are you afraid?” Jack whispered over the wind.

“No,” was Ianto's prompt answer. “Even if we don't know where we may end up, we are together, are we not. No fear could be stronger than this joy.”

Jack couldn't hold back the delighted smile tugging at his lips.

“Once, you promised to show me the world. Show me, Jack.”

Nodding, Jack pressed a kiss against Ianto’s temple. “I will,” he promised. “For as long as you like.”
Chapter End Notes

Wow, the story is really finished. At first, it was only a vague concept with a few ideas, but then I decided to really pull this through. The end is a bit more hopeful than the original. I wanted - of course - Jack and Ianto to have a happy end. In the book, the Count doesn't get together with his ex-fiancé, but he goes away with the princess (Toshiko's character) as his new love. I found that way too depressing. I hope you liked what I made of this classic piece of literature. (And I know, the story is very, very complex without me changing things. To get the grasp of it, read a thorough summary of the book to get rid of the things that maybe didn't become clear)

End Notes

The Welsh title (hopefully correct) is taken from the motto of the coat of arms of the Count of Monte Christo: in the original French it means “wait and hope”. You can find a picture of how it may look like in the Wikipedia article of the Count of Monte Christo. It looks really cool. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Count_of_Monte_Cristo

Chateau d'If, the fortress where the Count is held prisoner in the book, means Castle of the yew tree, so I simply translated it into Welsh, Castell o Ywen (At least I hope it's translated correctly), and put it onto Flat Holm. General Bertrand is kept prisoner on the Welsh Caldey Island, right before the coast near Penally. In reality, he was on Elba with Napoleon.

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