On Happiness

by engagemythrusters

Summary

Ianto Jones used to be such a happy child. He wasn't any more, not after the way the world had treated him. All Rhiannon wanted was for her brother to find that happiness again.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Warning: because it was only vaguely implied, I didn't put any abuse tags; however, I just wanted to forewarn everyone that Ianto's family is a bit shit. I apologise in advance if this is bothersome.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

On the days Rhiannon would bother to remember far back enough, she would remember that her brother used to be a happy child. Bright, gummy smiles as a tiny infant when Mum helped Rhiannon hold him. Wide, toothy grins while he laughed at Rhiannon making faces into his pram. Cherub cheeks with dimples as Rhiannon sneaked him another biscuit without Mum's permission. Explosive giggles as Rhiannon chased him around the house. She could remember the way she taught Ianto to sign "more" with his chubby baby hands, so Mum could shovel extra pea mash into his greedy little mouth. She could also remember how Mum spent hours pouring over books, trying so hard to teach herself (and her daughter) to communicate with her deaf son, while Dad ignored the three of them in favour of his work.

Of course, life could never stay golden and sunny for very long, not in that family and not with that life. Rhiannon did not recall exactly when the world got so cruel, but it had to be around the time Ianto started school. Children could be such fickle creatures, especially to someone was so different from them. Rhiannon didn't personally witness any of the bullying, but from what she gathered, the kids mocked Ianto for his signing. Home was far worse than at school. Dad was, by far, the worst bully of them all, and not even when he was just drunk off his arse. Dad made sure Ianto was miserable constantly, with his drive to keep assimilating Ianto to a hearing world. He enforced attendance at public school (letting Ianto continue to get bullied), he refused to learn to sign (so Ianto had learned to lip read rather rapidly, too, just to avoid... mishaps), and he even scrounged up money they didn't have to send Ianto to speech therapy (something that sucked the happiness out of Ianto faster than pulling a plug from a drain).

Rhiannon had tried so hard to keep him the little happy child after that, but it was so difficult. Dad lost his job soon after, and drank himself silly all the time. He got into fights with Mum all of the time, and Rhiannon couldn't keep Ianto distracted anymore, because he was learning why they were yelling, as well as what happened after a particularly bad screaming match. There was nothing Rhiannon could do to stop the other kid's torments at school, and less about her father's refusal to learn BSL and his drunken rampages, but she and Mum could keep signing happy things to him and hope for the best.

When Ianto had gotten a little older, he stopped trying to be happy altogether. At twelve, Ianto had no mates and was completely alone, as far as Rhiannon could tell. She tried to fill the void, but there was only so much a sister could do in replacement of a friend. Also, saving the last biscuit, making
goofy faces, and spouting happy nonsense really only worked for small children, not soon-to-be teenagers. Rhiannon just did what she could and hoped for the best.

"Want to go see a movie?" She had once asked one particularly rough Saturday. "I found a theatre."

Ianto had frowned. "They never use subtitles."

"This one is silent."

The way Ianto had looked at her made her heart feel light for at least a month afterwards.

That was how Ianto had developed an affinity for silent films and cartoons, and the Electro had become their refuge for a while. All good things had to come to an end, though, and eventually, even that couldn't stop him from being unhappy.

Ultimately, Rhiannon had to move out. She was an adult, and Dad didn't think it was important to keep her around anymore. Rhiannon wanted to disagree, because who else would mitigate between him and Mum? Certainly not Ianto, who narrowly avoided disaster every time he spoke with Dad. But it was time. She had a boyfriend, and a baby on the way, and though she desperately wanted to be there for her brother, those two had to come first.

"Please stay," Ianto had signed, his face crestfallen and distraught.

She had taken him in her arms, mindful of her pregnant midriff, and prayed to god that Mum would be enough to keep her baby brother, if not happy, alright. Then she had let go and taken her last suitcase to pack in the vehicle, leaving behind a very despondent Ianto.

After David was born, Ianto took every opportunity to visit. Rhiannon took that to mean that Mum was failing, probably by no fault of her own. She watched him rock her son and deliberated whether or not Johnny would be alright with letting Ianto move in with them. She decided against it when she realized she couldn't support a baby and Ianto, not to mention that Ianto wasn't even done with school yet. So, she let him stay over as much as possible, and tried to lift his spirits whenever she could.

The year she married Johnny was the year that Ianto finished school. David was two, and Rhiannon was pretty sure she was pregnant again, though it was too soon to tell anyone. Rhiannon was ashamed to admit she spent most of her wedding watching Ianto, sandwiched between their parents, looking utterly miserable. It broke her heart, right on the day it was supposed to feel the fullest. All she wanted was to see her happy baby brother again.

She had gone over to him in the middle of the reception, as he watched her son. He was always good with David. Johnny, not so much; Johnny kept forgetting all the sign language he knew, and it created more than a slight barrier between the two men. Sitting down next to Ianto, she took her son and placed on her lap, well aware that that her white wedding dress was going to get very dirty with him there. David was a menace, and a filthy one at that. He was not as happy as Ianto had been, but happy enough, she figured.

"University." She left it open, neither question nor statement, letting Ianto decide what to make of it.

"I'm moving to London," he signed.

She stared at him for a whole minute before regaining her composure. "Why?"

"I hate it here."
His eyes flickered to Dad, so fast she barely saw it.

"What will you study?" she asked.

She was not at all surprised when his answer was information science. Ianto had always had a way of labeling the world around him, putting boxes around the things that didn't make sense and hoping they would stay there, tucked away, where they couldn't touch them. It was probably a coping mechanism, if she thought about it hard enough. While that had made her slightly sad, she was happy that he was going to do something he loved and she hoped for all of the world that it could finally make him happy.

The day he left, Rhiannon had come home to help him pack. It was an odd moment of joy, with Ianto throwing socks at her while she talked about smuggling away in his suitcase, or perpetually visiting him. Mum watched from the corner of the room, happy in her own silent way, and Dad was unsurprisingly absent, which did not bother Ianto one bit. Rhiannon helped pack his suitcases away in her car and drove him to London. She and Mum held a quiet conversation to themselves up front, while Ianto sat in the back, watching the country pass by outside the window. Mum told her about the things she missed: the shoplifting, the isolation, the poor grades.

They left him on the stairs of his dingy flat, a determined look on his face. They signed their final "I love you's" and walked out into London, feeling somewhat worse about the world. Rhiannon took one last glance back at her brother and hoped with all hope that this would be what made him happy again.

For the next few years, Rhiannon somewhat lost touch with Ianto. He started out emailing at least once a week, if not more, and then it dwindled down to once a month. It was less than shocking if Ianto didn't contact her for a few months at a time. Mum fretted about that, but Rhiannon figured it was bound to happen. She just hoped the reason he stopped contacting was because life was going well, not poorly. Besides, Rhiannon had two kids and lived in Newport, and couldn't spend all the time worrying about Ianto, who was an adult and could take care of himself.

When Dad died, Ianto came back for a while. He did not look one bit sad, and that terrified Rhiannon. Just how bad must her father have been to elicit that reaction? Mum cried, but Rhiannon suspected it was more for the would-have-been's. Rhiannon herself didn't feel anything. Maybe just a tiny bit melancholy, but that was all. Johnny tried to be sympathetic in his own way, but it really wasn't necessary.

Ianto would come around to her house every now and then. They would talk a bit about that museum he had worked in, or his time at university, and then he would head home to help Mum. Rhiannon felt a bit sad, because her house wasn't as vital to him as it used to be, but she was glad he didn't need a sanctuary from home anymore. But it did make her feel horrible that David had gotten worse at signing, and Mica barely could. In all fairness, Mica was two, but Rhiannon was falling off the wagon when it came to teaching her children. She had a job, and David wouldn't sit still to learn, and Mica was a terrible toddler, and Johnny wasn't helping, and Ianto was rarely over. She just wanted her children to all of the sudden know the language, like it felt she had, but it was hard when it wasn't utilized constantly around the house.

One day, roughly a month after Dad had passed, Ianto came around to say he was heading back to London.

"I have a new job," he signed.

She wondered how he found a London job while in Cardiff, but she was proud of him. "What job?"
Ianto suddenly looked very, very awkward. "Government work. It's a secret."

She felt her eyes widen. He wasn't a spy, was he? She knew he liked James Bond and that sort of thing, but he wouldn't become one, right?

"Nothing important," he signed quickly, as if understanding her concerns.

That didn't make her feel any better, but she bit her lip and nodded. He seemed excited about this job, in a quiet, reserved way. She didn't want to ruin that with her worries and doubts. But she wished him luck and sent him on his way with some homemade biscuits and a message of love for Mum.

As she watched him step into his car, she felt her heart flutter with simultaneous hope and fear. The world could do so much for this twenty-one-year-old boy: good, bad, and a hell of a lot worse.

Lisa immediately noticed when the coffee started tasting different. Better, of course, but different. She had gotten used to Luke's shitty half-watery coffee by then, so the sudden change was jarring. She had a caffeine high for most of the day, that stuff had been so pure.

She mentioned this to Jenny, while they poured themselves mugs of the stuff in the break room the next morning.

"I was feeling jittery all day," Jenny agreed. "I ended up spilling that alien slime I was telling you about all over my lab table. It was a nightmare."

Lisa finished filling her mug and looked down at it. Did she really want to explain to the rest of the Acquisitions department why she was bouncing off the walls? Jenny glanced down at her own mug.

"It was good, though," she said, as if to justify it to herself.

Lisa smiled. "Oh, yeah."

They both took their first sip and grinned wickedly at each other as though that single act was one of sin and impurity. Silly, really, when it was only drinking coffee.

"Testing the new brew?" Matthew from Research asked as he joined them.

"It's divine," Jenny said, curling her fingers tighter around her mug.

"The new junior researcher makes it," Matthew said. Lisa frowned. " Didn't know we were taking on new junior researchers."

"Yvonne herself hired him," Matthew said with a shrug. "Must've been something special."

"He clearly is, with this coffee," Jenny sighed. Lisa suspected Jenny was half in love with the man already.

That Wednesday, she came into work earlier than usual. She had woken up before her alarm and found herself unable to fall back asleep, so she had started her morning early with those extra twenty minutes. As a creature of habit, she immediately went in search of coffee. Luke wasn't here yet, but there was every chance that the new junior researcher had made a pot already.

There was a man standing at the pot. For a moment, she thought he was Gareth, but he clearly wasn't, because Gareth didn't make coffee, and this man was obviously the new coffee god. Lisa

"Excuse me," she said.

The man didn't acknowledge her. She said it again, louder, but he still didn't turn, or even say "hold on a second." She stood there for a few moments, thinking to herself that maybe he was just very focused, and hoping that he wasn't just outright rude. Then again, Yvonne didn't really take interest in rude people. She generally went after the sweet ones and then turned them into her little lackeys.

She was about to reach out and tap his shoulder when he turned.

"Oh, god," she said, completely on accident.

This guy was cute. Handsome blue eyes and a cute button nose and... wow.

The man stared at her as she stared at him. He looked slightly wary, while she merely stood there, gobsmacked and slightly turned on. No way was Jenny getting this one. Lisa wanted him to herself.

"Sorry," he said after a beat.

"I... no, you're fine," she said. "Definitely... fine."

They kept their staring, the man still worried and Lisa still surveying, until another man walked into the room. Lisa's eye was instantly drawn to the other man, too, because damn, he was hot. Chiseled jaw and everything. Suddenly, Lisa was the interior of a sandwich of attractive men. An equally hot interior. In her mind, she was already formulating a way to get them both into bed with her to try out hot-men-plus-Lisa sandwich.

The second man ignored her and made this gesture with his hands at the first man, and for a split second, Lisa was confused. When the second man, still looking apprehensive, made some gestures back, she got it. She mentally kicked herself, then took a deep breath and hid the shame away to dwell on later (probably at one in the morning). She watched them sign at each other, slowly starting to back away. The first man saw her, and they both froze awkwardly, returning to their original staring. This time, the man broke out of it first, signing something quickly to the other man. They both turned back to her.

"Hi!" the second man declared, voice warm and colourful in a way Lisa would fully appreciate later. "I'm Mark. I sign for Ianto, here."

"Hi," she said slowly. "I think I... sorry."

"No, no," Mark said, holding his hands up in a placating manner. "Everything's fine. Did you want the coffee?"

"Yeah."

The first man, Ianto, stepped out of the way of the coffee machine, and Lisa moved forward to pour some into her mug. It was a very uncomfortable few seconds as she did so, because she could feel the eyes of the two men on her back, and not in the fun I-wanna-shag-you kind of way, but in the who-the-hell-is-this? kind of way.

"I'm Lisa, by the way," she said as she turned back around. "Lisa Hallett. And I really like the coffee."

Mark signed her words to Ianto, who gave her a small, tight smile and signed something to her that
The three of them returned to an awkward silence again, and Lisa took another glance at the two handsome men before booking it out of there. She could feel their eyes trailing behind her, but this time, it was definitely the I-wanna-shag-you gaze.

Not that any of them would know it at the time, that was the start of their strange little dance around each other. Their odd little love triangle that was not unlike those that Lisa read in those trashy romance novels she pretended she didn't like. Their... thing.

Over the course of the next week, Lisa learned a little about the duo from Matthew and a few other people from down in Research. Ianto was the deaf Welshman that Yvonne took a liking to, and Mark was the translator that Yvonne had hired for her new plaything. Ianto made coffee and Mark drank tea. Ianto was witty and Mark was funny. Ianto was serious and Mark was bubbly.

She didn't have an actual interaction with the two of them until a week later, when Jenny was trying (and failing) to flirt with Ianto. Lisa walked in between the three to nab another cup of that irresistible coffee, and both their gazes immediately went to her. Ianto's was deep and considerate, and Mark's was warm and beguiling. Lisa took a sip of her coffee and raised an eyebrow. She half expected Ianto to blush and Mark to politely grin, but Ianto merely arched his own eyebrow in return and Mark bit his lip in a leer.

That was probably why Lisa slept with Ianto first. She liked the calm, collectedness demeanor that floated about Ianto. It was so damned enticing, and Lisa couldn't help but fall into him. But she made sure to keep herself from falling for him, because that would be a mistake.

"This is just sex," she told him before they even took their first layer of clothing off.

"Okay," he said in that soft voice of his.

They never said much to each other. They were never sure of the boundaries between what to say and what not to say, so they never talked. And Lisa kept trying to find time to learn BSL, but she never found it. She promised she would, but she never did. She partly felt bad about that, but she knew this wouldn't last.

Ianto was like ice, and she wanted fire. Mark, with his golden eyes and temperate smiles, was certainly fierier than Ianto's cool blue eyes and short smirks. Ianto would say her name in a chilling tone that sent shivers down her spine, but Mark would make her name sound so wonderfully sultry and it warmed her to the core.

They had agreed to an open relationship, as it was only sex, but Ianto stopped sleeping with her the moment she first shagged Mark. She never noticed any friction between the two because of it (she suspected that they refused to talk about it to a point where it was just unhealthy), but there was definitely a different air around them when all three of them were together.

Mark talked with her. He told her everything, and she did the same with him. He told her about why he became an interpreter (his father was deaf), and she told him how she came to work for Torchwood (she had friends who had friends in higher places). He told her about his fears (spiders) and she told him hers (rats and skeletons).

But even when she was with Mark, she found she couldn't leave Ianto well enough alone. So, while she was messing around in Mark's bed and Mark's heart, she tried to play her hand in Ianto's love-life.
She first set him up with Jenny, who had never worn passed that initial crush, but that was a complete disaster. Jenny's life was already taking a turn downhill, and she had upended a bottle of Retcon while her thing with Ianto was still starting. Lisa never learned what really happened to Jenny after, but she had heard that Jenny became a chemist for some big company of sorts. After that, Lisa set Ianto up with Carlie Roberts, but that was also a mistake. Carlie was never one for one-night stands, and the affair ended in lots of tears on her part. Ianto then slept with half of the women in the Acquisitions department following that, and Lisa hasn't ruled out the possibility that this was just to spite her.

Sometimes she thought, if she had just learned to really communicate with Ianto, things might've been different. She might have broken through the icy exterior to find something equally fiery inside. But she didn't have the time to break down someone's walls, and Mark was already tearing his down for her.

She thought of this especially the day that Torchwood fell, when Ianto found her lying there, burning away in her new, metal case. She screamed for help, for him to please, please help her, but he only shook his head in terror and sorrow.

"Please," she begged. "Please! There has to be something you can do!"

That was, of course, wrong. There wasn't anything to be done, and she could feel it. She could sense the cybernetic hive-mind gnawing away at her consciousness, the silvery casing growing around her body, the metal joints replacing her own.

"Lisa," he said mournfully. For a second, she let herself imagine him saying it the same way he said it in her bed, between sloppy kisses and gasps for air.

Perhaps, she thought, if only she had held on to that ice of his, maybe it would have been enough to stop the burning all around her.

Maybe it would have kept her from slipping under as the Cybermen screamed at her, pulling her away inside her own head towards the nothingness of nonexistence.

When she heard about the tragedy of Canary Wharf in London, Rhiannon only had a vague thought about whether Ianto would have seen it or not. Imagine her horror when Ianto came home soon after, claiming that was his workplace.

Mum had phoned her and told her all about it, or at least all about what Ianto would say, which was apparently not very much. Rhiannon wanted to rush over to Cardiff right away, but she had work, and David needed to go to football practice, and Johnny was out trying to find another job again. She told Mum to keep her updated. Footie or no, if Ianto needed immediate help, she would be there.

On Saturday, she drove to Cardiff with Mica and David (because Johnny was out... somewhere). The second Ianto opened the door, she could see how bad it was. His eyes looked empty and hollow, his face held no emotion, and he seemed so very, very tired. It was all Rhiannon could do to keep from sweeping him into her arms, holding on tightly and never letting go. He blinked at her for a moment, then down at the kids, and then moved away from the door to let them in.

"Kids, say hi to your Uncle Ianto," Rhiannon urged them as they stepped inside.

David gave a jerky nod in Ianto's general direction and Mica asked: "Where's Nan?"

Rhiannon silently cursed them both. David was getting to the age where he liked nobody and Mica was four, the age where grandparents were the fun people who give out extra biscuits and
uncles were boring.

"Where's Mum?" she asked Ianto.

Ianto shrugged. "Shopping."

"Nan's shopping," she told the Mica, shooing her and David toward the sitting room. "Go play."

She turned around to apologize to Ianto about their rude behaviour, but Ianto had already left for the kitchen. She followed him there, watching sadly as he leaned over the kitchen bar and placed his head in his hands. He scrubbed at his face for a moment, then lifted his face and looked up at her with his empty, hollow, emotionless, tired eyes. This was a twenty-three-year-old boy, she realized with a jolt. This man was barely an adult, and somehow, he knew enough horror, enough tragedy, to make him look like that. It broke her heart in ways she didn't know her heart could break.

"What happened?" she asked, aghast.

Ianto stared at her for a moment, nothing changing in his face, and yet, everything changing. Slowly, he shook his head.

"Explosion," he signed. "I know Mum already told you."

"Are you okay? Were you hurt?"

"Bruises and burns."

She knew he purposefully avoided the first question. "Did anyone else make it out okay?"

Ianto looked away. "26 others."

"Mark?"

Rhiannon had met Mark only the once, on a trip to London to visit Ianto during lunch for his birthday. Mark had been kind and generous and easy to talk to, and Rhiannon enjoyed his company, but she never fully trusted him. Ianto seemed to be friendly enough with him, but she could see something deep and uninviting harboured in her brother's eyes when they talked. But just because she didn't pin her faith on the man, that didn’t mean she didn’t hope he was still alive.

The way Ianto glanced down at the floor was telling, and Rhiannon hoped to god Ianto wasn't there when whatever happened to him occurred. If he was, she never wanted to know; that was something, for the sake of her soul, she could live without knowing about.

She pulled him into a hug, something she was sure he'd hate but secretly, even secret to himself, needed. He hung there limply in her embrace, and Rhiannon was suddenly worried, because when had he become this skinny? She brushed that aside. Surely Mum would get him to a normal size again. Right now, all she need focus on was making sure he was safe and sound.

Eventually, he pulled from her grasp. She wanted to say something, anything, but the moment she raised her hands, he signed a vehement "I'm fine" and turned away. Before she could do anything else, Mum returned from her shopping, and Rhiannon spent the afternoon trying not to let her children eat Mum alive, and Ianto went off to god knows where.

Ianto spent a week living with Mum before he moved out to his own flat. Rhiannon made sure Mum kept an eye on him for that week, and the two of them promised not to leave Ianto alone for more than two days at a time. They didn't think he would do... anything, but it was always good to be safe
side. Plus, Ianto could probably use the company.

A full month went by, and nothing happened. Ianto couldn't find a job, and Rhiannon worried that it was discrimination, but by the way Mum seemed to talk about it, it was mainly because Ianto wasn't trying that hard. Rhiannon tried to stop by his place as much as often, but it was hard to find the time. When she did, she noticed he was getting increasingly gaunter and his eyes got more haggard. She asked him once if he was getting enough sleep, and he replied with an enigmatic "I can taste the ashes" before shaking himself and quickly changing topics. They never spoke of it again. Rhiannon made sure to bring food that didn't taste bland each time she came after. She didn't know if that would help whatever it was that was bothering him, but he always stuck it in his fridge and said he would eat it later. She wasn't sure if he ever did.

One night, Mum called Rhiannon in a frantic hysteria. For a heart stopping second, when Rhiannon couldn't understand Mum's jumbled, half-formed sentences, she thought... well, it didn't really matter what she thought, because she was wrong. Mum was just in a frenzy because Ianto wanted to go back to work for that same office he used to. Rhiannon didn't understand, because it burned down, didn't it? Then Mum said there was a Cardiff branch, and Rhiannon told her to stop worrying. Ianto would be fine. There wouldn't be two explosions, now, would there? But Mum made her promise to talk him out of it, so two mornings later, she headed out to his flat.

When asked about the job, Ianto stared out his window for a while before answering.

"He said no."

She didn't know who "he" was, but the look on Ianto's face said, no, she did not want to ask. Rhiannon instead asked why, and he merely shrugged.

"Is it discrimination?" Rhiannon asked, because she had to be sure. If it was... well. Whoever "he" was would have hell to pay.

"No."

Ianto wouldn't elaborate beyond that. He did, however, mention that he would be trying again in twenty minutes, so he was heading out. She wondered why he was dressed like that to go to an interview, but she made no comment.

"Why do you want this job?" she asked. "Why the government?"

Rhiannon needed to know. For Mum's sake, or his own, he could have any other job in the world. Why was this one so vital?

He didn't even pause to consider it. "I feel important."

She could live with that.

Ianto came back from his interview later with a demeanor that clearly stated that he should not be asked about how it went. Rhiannon said nothing, and they had tea together. She was slightly surprised he didn't suggest coffee instead. That boy was addicted to caffeine.

As she left, she made Ianto promise to tell her if he ever got the job, because Ianto was trying again that night. Ianto was nothing if not persistent.

She was not contacted for a month. A whole month. Neither was Mum. They were constantly sick with worry. (Or just plain sick, in Mum's case, which worried Rhiannon for the obvious reason, but also because Ianto didn't know.)
Rhiannon was at Mum's for tea after a brunch with Tina on Rhiannon's part and a doctor's appointment on Mum's, chatting idly about Mica's choice of dress that morning and David's poor attitude towards school, when a knock on the door came. Mum stood up to get it, thinking it was her neighbor Tiffany, three hours early for their daily gossip. Rhiannon sipped her tea, nearly spilling it all over herself when Mum practically screamed her name. She rushed to the door, wondering what in god's name was going on, and stopped dead when she saw Ianto standing there in a very nice suit. He gave them a sheepish half-smile.

There were three things that Mum had a fit over. The first being, of course, the fact that he literally had no contact with either of them for a whole month. Mum used phrases like "we thought you died!" which was not at all helpful or true, but Rhiannon could understand the sentiment. She had spent many hours awake at night fretting. The second issue was less founded than the first. The suit instantly caused problems with Mum, because suits were bad news to their family. Rhiannon was glad that Mum had finally gotten the picture of what a monster Dad had been, but it was only a suit. Ianto had worn them at his past job, too, though maybe Mum had never seen that. But Mum was having none of it, even though Ianto said he liked wearing the suit. The last thing Mum didn't understand was why the London branch could provide an interpreter, and not the Cardiff one. Ianto, very uncomfortably, told her budgeting was different, that it wasn't even required for him to have one, and that it was fine, that he was okay with lipreading. Rhiannon doubted that very much, and Mum was silently continued to worry.

Mum eventually stopped berating him and smothering him for Rhiannon to finally take a good look at him. He looked... not quite better, but at least healthier. He didn't look like he hadn't eaten in days. When Mum went to the kitchen for biscuits (to continue fattening him up), Rhiannon got the chance to ask a few of her own questions.

"How are you?" she asked.

He fidgeted slightly. "I'm fine."

That was a complete lie, but less of a lie than it had previously been.

"Mum isn't fine."

Ianto's eyes went wide in horror, and Rhiannon quickly related the new information Mum's appointment brought forth.

After what ended as a normal tea, Mum sent both Rhiannon and Ianto on their separate ways, telling them to keep in touch; she wanted to hear from them both again, and soon. Especially Ianto.

Ianto did not keep in touch.

Rhiannon was starting to get used to that.

Late one night, very late one night, someone tried pounding down the door of the Davies's residence. Well, not pounding, but it was certainly loud and certainly startling. Rhiannon, having heard enough murder stories and watched enough crime shows, decided she wasn't the best person to answer it, and tried to get Johnny to go down to send whoever it was away. Johnny, being himself, did not move an inch, and so Rhiannon cautiously went to answer it.

Of course, it was Ianto. Wide-eyed, anxious Ianto.

She ushered him in with a fond chiding, because what the hell was he doing here, at midnight, in Newport? He had no answers for her, but accepted the glass of water she handed him. She waited
for him to say something, anything really, and she spent nearly twenty minutes doing so.

"He's learning," he signed eventually. He seemed stunned.

"Who?" she asked, confused. "What?"

He shook his head. "They're all learning sign language."

She could hardly believe that. It didn't feel... real. More like some sort of wishful fantasy, where everyone finally started accepting her brother for who he was. But, though it could have been the trick of the dim kitchen light, Rhiannon could have sworn those were tears brimming his eyes, and she felt her own begin to fill as well. Whoever "he" was, Rhiannon now wanted to thank him.

Rhys loved Gwen. He loved her with all his heart. Gwen would say his "big heart" or his "soft heart" or something like that. She always joked that he was the kind of man who looked like he could punch a polar bear in the face, but in actuality was a kitten-loving sap. Rhys once asked why he couldn't be both, and Gwen laughed that lovely laugh of hers.

"Never change, Rhys Williams," she had said, all adoration and no sarcasm.

Anyway, he loved her. He really, really did. But he did not love that new job of hers at all. She got home at odd hours, she never had time for anything, she was constantly preoccupied, and she seemed to be only happy when talking about work. Which she didn't do much of, because she wasn't allowed to. Special ops, she said. But she somehow managed to talk about work without actually talking about work, and sometimes, just sometimes, that was quite annoying.

Oh, and her boss. He was a right bastard, Rhys thought, because Gwen was obviously infatuated with him. She has never mentioned his name, never pointed him out in a crowd, never done anything other than say "my boss" in that tone. The tone that said, "he and I aren't fucking, but if he suggested it, we might be." Rhys hated that tone.

Honestly, Rhys just had to sit and put up with it. At times, it was easy. Just shut up and listen to Gwen pointedly not talking about work. Let her zone out a few times while he talked about his. It was nothing big, really, and it kept them happy, not to mention better off than if he just fought it constantly. Other times, though, it was hard, and Rhys had a very, very hard time keeping his cool. He usually managed. Usually. Sometimes it slipped through the cracks.

One night, when Gwen was distracted over her spag bol and wine, Rhys had just about had it. A snide comment on his part turned into a shouting match about work versus home life, and it did not turn out well at all. He slept on the couch. His neck twinged the whole week after. She looked sorry the next morning, and, needless to say, he certainly felt sorry.

They talked about it the next night. She admitted that she was being a tad selfish, and he conceded that he was being a bit over dramatic (though he certainly didn't feel that way; he did have every right to get mad, he thought). They resolved to be more open and communicative in their relationship. A joke, if there ever was one.

So, Gwen continued "talking" about work, which really meant skirting around everything and really just making idle chat about literally nothing, and Rhys made sure she listened when he talked about his work. She didn't. He came to the conclusion that their argument was pointless, and that they would have plenty more of them along the way. It certainly was not a prospect he was looking forward to, but he could enjoy the peace while it lasted.

There were things he learned about her work from her talking-about-but-not-taking-about-work. He
started making a mental list.

Point the first: she was definitely into her boss, who might be American and somehow from the 1940's. That was something he learned before she even got the job, when she had frantically told him about her car chase and subsequent promotion. Rhys didn't understand how any of that worked. Also, one time, their flat got trashed, with leaves and rubbish literally everywhere, and Gwen thought it had something to do with her job, so her boss came over to help clean while Rhys was out. So, at least Rhys knows the man cares what happens to Gwen, even if it is a little (a lot) misguided.

Second, she felt everyone was smarter than her. She would complain how (redacted name) learned sign language faster than she did, and (redacted name) had already learned it before Gwen had even joined. In only two weeks, she would always point out, bitterness hanging in her tone. Rhys came to the conclusion that Gwen found the first person to be a prat and the second to be a goody-two-shoes. He just found it a bit weird that she had only three coworkers. He told her out loud that she could do it, that she was the smartest person he knew, not because she had brains galore, but because she was fucking determined, and quietly, to himself, he wondered how five people could make a special ops team, even if they were brilliant.

The third point went hand in hand with the second. The coworker she talked least about (because, apparently, the man was exceedingly shy), was deaf. Rhys once asked how a deaf guy could do special ops stuff, and Gwen went off at him for being an insensitive prick. That was fair; he deserved that. But he never did get an answer. In a later conversation, Gwen let slip that the man was only general support, or some sort of thing like that.

Point three point five was that the team, or whatever Gwen liked to call her group of coworkers, all learned sign language for the man who Rhys now pictured as the reserved, deaf butler. It was mighty generous of them, he thought. Gwen called him insensitive again at that comment, and he didn't even know why. Rhys did really think highly of it, though. Sometimes he'd sit and watch her read books and practice signs, and he'd wonder to himself if he should learn it, too. It would be fun to talk shit about Beth and Mark right under their noses at another one of their stupid "dinner parties." That could be done with any language, he figured. Maybe he should learn Welsh or something. French, maybe. Or Italian, because he did love a good pasta. Ha. He had a pleasant time imagining himself cussing out Mark's linguine in Italian.

Penultimately, point four was the name of a coworker.

It had been early in the morning, the day before that team "camping trip." (If Rhys didn't know any better, he would think she finally got around to fucking her boss. But he did know better.) She was supposed to be waking up early, but they'd had a... long night, so Gwen slept right through the alarm. Rhys was pretty sure she smashed the alarm clock when she hit snooze the third time. But she wasn't allowed to smash her mobile, so she had to pick that up when it screamed at them.

"God, Owen, what?" she demanded.

Owen. Rhys filed that away for a future evaluation.

"Get the fuck out here," a gruff, annoyed voice crackled through the mobile.

"Piss off," Gwen snapped. Rhys knew better than anyone what a nightmare that woman could be in the early morning.

She hung up right as the man was about to say something again, rolling out of bed without another word.
Rhys did not see her again until late that next night. When he did, he tried not to scream at the nameless boss and nameless company that let this shit happen to her. A fucking gunshot wound? Really? What the hell were they doing? The man who had driven her home that morning, quite possibly that Owen fellow, had muttered something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like "cannibals," but there was no way that was correct. There were no bloody cannibals in Wales, right? Besides, all Rhys could think about is how awful Gwen looked, and how enraged he was at whoever had done this to his girlfriend.

He tried asking her about it all, but she was apparently way too far gone in shock.

"I think," she said slowly, her eyes staring vacantly at the wall, "my boss is shagging the secretary."

Point five, he thought to himself. And then...

He frowned. "Hang on, isn't the secretary--"

He promptly shut up at the look on her face, though he was pleased at least that Gwen's boss wasn't fucking her. Then he started worrying about the fact that she got shot, and the only thing she could worry about was office affairs.

God, sometimes Rhys really hated Gwen's job.

At precisely two thirty-three in the morning, Rhiannon received a text. The jarring sound of her mobile woke her, but she ignored it and fell back asleep as soon as possible. Whatever it was, it could wait until morning.

She was woken again at six thirty sharp to the shrill tone of her mobile going off. She fumbled around for it, and accidentally knocked it off the nightstand. Johnny made a grumbling sound from beside her, rolling over and almost pinning her to the bed. She shoved him over, but by the time she reached the mobile, the call had finished ringing. In its stead, a text was blinking up at her.

Sitting up, she flipped the phone open and read the text, along with the one from earlier that morning. The first said “Come over” and the second said “Please.” They were both from her brother.

There were a few things that worried her instantly. First, Ianto never texted. At least, not to her. Second, he never texted like that. No urgency was ever employed by Ianto Jones, the master of making light of terrible situations. He never asked for help, and he never asked for her to come over. And still. He never texted.

She decided then and there that this was texted by another one of Ianto’s floozies (Ianto could never get himself a girlfriend, but a one-night stand was apparently his thing). Rhiannon didn’t know why some random chick was texting her number, but she thought it was better to assume that this was a girl and not Ianto in the middle of a real crisis. If she actually let herself think it was a crisis… No. It was certainly a girl.

“Who was it?” Johnny asked muzzily as she started getting dressed.

“Ianto.”

“Your brother?”

“How many others do we know?” she snapped.

Johnny didn’t even bother to respond. He stuffed his head back in his pillow and instantly resumed
his snoring. Rhiannon left him that way. There was still a little time before he had to wake the kids up for school, anyway.

It was not a crisis, Rhiannon reminded herself while she rushed out the door. No need to speed, she thought, as she continued to speed into Cardiff. Just a stupid girl, she told her brain as she hurried into Ianto’s apartment building.

She pressed the doorbell and waited. Then she pressed the doorbell four more times, because Ianto had a habit of ignoring the flashing lights. Or people in general. Which dispelled some of the worry, because if he’d really texted her, he’d have been waiting for her, and probably not ignoring the lights.

Eventually, the door opened. It was barely a crack, and through it, Rhiannon could only see a sliver of Ianto’s face. His eyes went wide, the door snapped back shut, and any remaining doubts and fears of Rhiannon’s flew out the window. She knew that face and that door slam from the few times she’d visited him at uni. He definitely had a girl over, then. Though that still didn’t explain why the woman felt the need to text him. She supposed she’d just have to wait and see.

That waiting part took a little while. She estimated somewhere between five and ten minutes before the door creaked open again. It only swung out a short way, and she shook her head as she finished opening it. Sometimes she wished her brother could make a tiny bit more effort on his part…

Oh.

Oh, god.

She believed she might’ve said that out loud as she slapped a hand over her mouth.

Ianto, her sweet baby brother, was covered head to toe in sickening, mottled bruises. His face was purple and red, and he looked like he was wincing with every breath he took. There was a small plaster taped to his neck.

For a moment, she stood there, not knowing what to think. Abuse? It was likely. But from the girl? Not quite as likely, if she’d sent those texts. And Rhiannon had seen bruises before, from scraped knees to shiners caused by drunken fists, and these ones looked very new. A day old, at most. So, probably not from the girl.

Taking a very deep breath, she decided that jumping to conclusions was not her best option. Very calmly (or as calmly as she could fake) she raised her hands and asked: “What happened?”

He stared at her for a moment, as if he wasn’t sure what to say. He made to sign a few different things, but seemed to think the better of it, and shook his head each time and returned to contemplating.

“Nothing,” he settled on, which was a complete and utter lie, but a complete and utter Ianto thing to say.

She paused for a moment, eyeing him carefully.

“Abuse?” Even if she’d ruled it out, she still had to ask.

He blinked, looking horrified, and shook his head. She let out a small sigh of relief. In that moment, she didn’t care that he was never going to give her a true explanation, just as long as there was no other repeat of their childhood.
“Does it hurt?” she asked.

Ianto scoffed and rolled his eyes. That was uncalled for; it was a valid question. She supposed it was a tad bit self-explanatory, but still.

They stood there for a moment, not knowing what to do with themselves. Ianto fidgeted slightly, looking awkward, which seemed to be his natural state nowadays. Rhiannon adjusted her purse and kept observing him for any other red flags.

She nearly jumped when the toaster in his kitchen popped. She peered over her shoulder at the pieces of toast, and then back at Ianto. Did he stick them in there when he made her wait outside? He shot her a quizzical glance.

“Toast,” she signed, and he nodded, brushing past her to the kitchen.

She suddenly realized, in her haste to get here, she forgot to eat breakfast, and trailed after him. Maybe she could sneak some toast from his plate.

He was buttering the toast when she walked in. Too much butter, she noticed. Some things never changed, then. He saw her watching him and rolled his eyes again.

“It’s healthy,” he signed, knife still dripping butter in his hand.

She tried not to laugh and shook her head fondly as he found some jam and started slathering that on the toast as well. When he was finished, he handed a piece over to her, and she felt a sudden surge of nostalgia. They used to eat toast together like this when Mum was out (Mum would yell at them for using both butter and jam when she was home).

They ate their toast in silence, Ianto silent because he never talked to anyone, ever, and Rhiannon because, between the purpling bruises and the pained movements and expression, she didn’t know what to say to make anything better. Was there anything to make it better? She doubted it. He looked a mess, and not just physically. Well beyond her repair, in any case, though that hurt her to realize.

Her eyes darted about the flat. This was her first visit, and she hadn’t really gotten a look at it yet. She’d been too focused on bruises and cuts to notice, say, the lump of men’s clothes that lay on the settee. It seemed disproportionately large. Too small for laundry but too big for a one-day pile. Maybe there were women’s clothes under there, she mused. After all, she hadn’t seen a woman duck past her whilst Ianto was cleaning. Was the girl still here?

“Is there a woman here?” she asked.

Ianto abruptly pulled the toast from his face. He set it down on the plate and stared at her for a second.

“No.”

Now, Rhiannon was well-versed in Ianto and his misdirection. She regarded him carefully for a second. He was wearing a face that stated that, while he was technically not lying, he wasn’t telling the truth, either.

She continued studying him for a moment.

“Was she nice?” she asked.

“There was no woman,” he signed, somewhat forcibly.
Well, that time he looked like he was telling the truth. But why was he being so dodgy about it? He threw her a glance that said to let sleeping dogs lie, and she held up her hands in a capitulating manner and stopped asking questions.

They finished their toast and Ianto promptly, albeit kindly, ushered her out of his flat. She took one last look at him, bringing a hand up to his red-and-purple marbled cheek. He flinched from it, either from pain or from insecurity, and she lowered the hand again.

With a sinking feeling, she realized she was becoming less and less attached to her brother’s life. Less important to him, even. That terrified her, because he was her brother. She didn’t want to lose him. Especially not if this… these bruises and cuts and all were what happened when she wasn’t there.

“Don’t be afraid to talk to me,” she signed. “I’m always here if you need me.”

He looked to the side and shrugged. “I know.”

The door quietly closed on her face, and she wanted to cry. She took a moment to compose herself, then turned away from the door and left, trying not to let herself feel like she was walking away from more than just a flat.

When she started her car, she started to wonder two things. Why were there two pairs of men’s underwear in that clothes pile? And who, if not a girl, sent those texts?

Of course, those were completely forgotten when Johnny called her halfway back to Newport. Mica forgot her lunch again. Rhiannon tried not to wish for a better father for her children. Johnny did his best, she reminded herself. And then continued to remind herself when he called again, telling her that he was going out drinking with his mates. At eight in the bloody morning.

"Men," she sighed.

A few weeks later, Rhiannon received another text from Ianto. This time, it was actually from Ianto. She could tell, because it was borderline concerning in a very different way.

"How do people think thoughts?" it read.

She stared at that for a nearly ten minutes, trying to work out what to say to that. What did that even mean, anyway? Thankfully, another text rolled in before she could even begin to decide how to respond.

"Nvm, im v drunk."

She rolled her eyes and put the mobile down, deciding that she should just ignore Ianto's texts in the first place.

Her head ached. That was only to be expected, though, when a bullet was reversing itself from being shot into one’s brain. At least it meant it was working. Soon, Suzie would be alive, and Gwen would be dead in her stead.

She couldn't raise her head, or move much at all yet, so she couldn't check to see what damage the knife had done to her chest. Hopefully, any wounds inflicted upon her even after death would be handed over to Gwen as well. If not, bloody Jack Harkness would have hell to pay for sticking her lovely chest with her knife. God, why was Jack still here? How was he still here? She punched a hole through his skull, even before she did hers. He should have been bolted in the morgue next to
her.

All the complexities of life and death were torn from her mind as she felt her body being shifted. She
flicked her attention down to her feet where a... oh, god, is he only removing Owen's body tag now?
He couldn't have done that before? Suzie scoffed to herself.

"Bloody useless," she muttered.

Hands began to undress her. That in itself was humiliating enough for her to scrounge up energy she
didn't have to raise her head to glower up at him.

"Hey!"

He didn't hear her. Of course he didn't. Actually, it looked like he was pointedly ignoring even
looking at her.

"Idiot," she said, letting her head fall back onto the metal slab. That hurt. She didn't dignify anyone
listening in by grunting from the tremendous pain she was feeling.

When the bland white garment was being pulled over her head, she managed to catch his eye. She
sent him a steely glare that should have sent him shivering. He parried it with a blank look of his
own.

"I see you're still alive," she said.

"Yes," Ianto said simply.

There was an implied "unlike you" in his tone, and Suzie could only feel a little humiliated by it.
After all, she was coming back to life, wasn't she?

"Do me a favour," she said. "Look down and tell me if my chest has a hole in it."

"Your chest has no hole," Ianto replied, without looking.

Definitely gay, then, Suzie decided. She'd have won that bet. Speaking of which, where was Owen?

"Where is everyone?"

There was no response. She sighed. This is why she didn't want him around. Liability.

A blue garment slid over her head. She felt his fingers accidentally slip into the gaping cavity in her
skull, and she grimaced. Not the most pleasant feeling. He didn't even have the nerve to seem
disgusted by it. He just kept pulling the garment over her prone body, heedless of the blood on his
fingers.

The good news was, if there was blood, her body was beginning to heal. She wondered if Gwen
was beginning to feel the faintest prick of a headache just now. If not, then soon she would be.

She let out a quiet cry as he heaved her body off the autopsy table into his arms. How the hell was he
that strong? Last she checked, he was scrawny and underfed. There was no way he could lift her that
easily. Unless that boy had a sudden change in dietary plans, this should be a lot harder for him.
Either that, or he'd been getting more exercise.

"They aren't letting you out into the field, are they?" she asked when he began positioning her in the
wheelchair.
He blinked. "No."

Then where was he exercising?

"Have you finally shagged Jack?"

There was a momentary pause. "No."

"Liar." She'd have won that bet, too.

But surely even a good fuck or two (because god knows Jack wouldn't have anyone more than twice) wouldn't get someone that strong. Had he always been like that, then? No. Not Ianto.

"Hang on a second," Suzie said. "How are you going to get this wheelchair up all these-- walking away from me. Wonderful. God, you're bloody rubbish."

She shrieked as the chair suddenly tipped back and crashed up the first stair from the autopsy bay.

Things just got worse from there. She could feel her brain repairing itself, and it was utterly agonizing. She felt like screaming the entire time. The wheelchair was uncomfortable, too. And the interrogation room was less fun when she was the one being kept in there.

Oh, and the team. Everyone's lives were going so well, weren't they?

Jack's was still going, for one thing. That would forever haunt her and piss her off. Did he use the glove? If he did, how did he figure out how to get it to truly work? It had taken her months to make it out herself. He had three, she supposed, but she didn't think Jack was even good enough with technology for him to understand it. Why else did he have Toshiko?

Toshiko herself... coward. She couldn't even face Suzie. Couldn't face much else, really. Poor little baby Toshiko, forever afraid to be locked in a cell again. Pathetic. She probably still had that ridiculous crush on Owen still.

And Owen. Oh, Suzie half wished it was him on the other end of the glove, and not Gwen. That fucking traitor. They used to be together on everything. Even together together, at one point. They were the true core of the team. They used to persuade Jack into letting them fuck off for the rest of the night, halfway through a shift. They'd goad Toshiko into doing their paperwork for them. They'd bet on how long Ianto would last, after Jack had his shag. They laughed at idiotic PC Cooper, wandering around the Quay in the dead of night because she heard a name and followed a car. Not to mention all that fucking and fighting and drinking and just having a good time. It was glorious. Now, though? Now, he was agreeing with Jack, sitting with Toshiko, learning sign language for Ianto, and shagging Gwen. That fucking bastard of a man.

But what poured the most salt on her wounds was Ianto and Gwen. They weren't supposed to be here. Gwen wasn't supposed to replace her. She was supposed to be the one her bullet ate. Not Jack. Certainly not Suzie. Gwen. Ianto just wasn't supposed to still be around. Neither Suzie nor Owen had bet he'd stay this long. What was it, seven months? Eight? More? He was supposed to be dead already. Not Suzie.

Suzie wanted the lot of them gone.

Good thing she had a trick up her sleeve.

"How's Max settling in?" she asked Ianto as he set the tea down in front of her.
Ianto frowned at her.

"I said," she sighed. "How's--"

"I know what you said."

"You don't like me," she remarked after a stretch of silence.

"I believe the feeling is mutual," he said coolly.

"Hm." She eyed him for a second. "I bet you were pleased to see me go."

"No."

She shook her head and rolled her eyes. He was never very good at conversation.

He set another cup of tea down.

"Who's that for?"

"Gwen."

Suzie could barely keep the flash of contempt from her face. She took a breath in to control herself.

"Really, how is Max getting along?" she asked.

"I think you already know."

He leaned down to her level and looked at her, eyes full of untapped hostility, and she involuntarily shuddered. He signed something at her, something she never bothered to learn. It didn't seem friendly in the least. Then he stood back up, tucked his tea tray under his arm, and silently left the interrogation room.

She watched him go, suddenly quite worried. Did he suspect something? He was a witty one, that Ianto. Always watching. What had he seen, from those shadows he dwelt in?

When his footsteps stopped echoing through her skull, she shook herself. Whatever he thought he knew, it didn't matter. She had a plan.

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Emma Cowell didn't know much about the world. That much was clearly evident. It was hard to know things about life fifty-some years out of time. Then again, Emma hadn't known much about her own time, so how could she be expected to understand this one?

That was why she considered it a huge blessing that she had a wonderful, kind team to help her, not to mention two other people who were going through the same thing she was. Misery loves company, she supposed. She hadn't really grasped that concept until now. She hadn't really been miserable until now. And now that she was, she was so very grateful that she didn't have to figure it all out on her own.

Diane was, perhaps, her new favourite person. She was cool, collected, and elegant in a manner Emma had never seen before. She'd say she was slightly starstruck by Diane, if she had to admit it. Diane knew things about their old time, and Emma learned one or two things about piloting and women's rights and such during a brief conversation. Not that she'd listened very much; she was too busy staring at that lipstick. It was a lovely colour, and Diane wore it well.
She did not like Mr. Ellis. He was cranky, much like her Uncle Joseph, and she didn't much like her Uncle Joseph.

Jade and Alesha, though not part of the three travellers or the kind people helping them, were also very generous. They didn't understand exactly why Emma was so sad, but they understood she was sad, and they tried to cheer her up. They were good people, Emma decided, and she'd love to become their friend. Their twenty-first century attitudes weren't quite what Emma was used to in a group of friends, but she'd have to assimilate to it eventually, and what better way to do so than with these two? They were caring, and that was all that mattered to Emma. And they were nothing like Mr. Ellis, which was an added bonus.

Of the strange team, Emma liked Gwen and Ianto the best. She hadn't spoken to Tosh much, and Owen not at all, though they seemed fine enough. But she liked how thoughtful Gwen was, and how she tried to look after Emma. Gwen was a people-person, and neither Owen nor Tosh appeared to be that. Emma like people-persons. She was one herself.

Ianto was nice. He was bit... new, because Emma had never really met a deaf person before (there was her mother's American cousin Andre, but he just lost a bit of his hearing after that explosion in the war). Diane warned her and Mr. Ellis both not to ask rude and unnecessary questions, because that would be, well, rude. Emma listened, and kept her burning questions to herself, but Mr. Ellis, being the awful man that he was, couldn't leave Ianto well enough alone. She had never wanted to stomp on anyone's toes more than she did then, though Ianto kept a calm face and answered the queries almost too politely.

Ianto was also cute as a button, much like her friend Kate's Peter back at home. And he was incredibly funny.

When she had grabbed snacks off the wall at the supermarket, he had chided her. "Twelve pounds ten. You'll ruin your teeth."

She had wondered how he could do the maths that fast, though she supposed he was just smart. Then she realized he sounded like exactly like her mother, and she turned to tell him as much. He rolled his eyes at her, but when she turned back to continue shopping, she could've sworn she had seen a ghost of a smile playing on his lips.

That and the conversation she had with Gwen last night was what kept playing through her head as Mr. Ellis turned his nasty attitude on her. She kept wondering which of the two she should get a hold of, because Diane was gone, and Alesha and Jade couldn't stand up to Mr. Ellis themselves. She thought it through quietly, eventually settling on Gwen; she could use a shoulder to cry on right about now. And she was grateful that this was her call when she finally ended up screaming at Mr. Ellis.

Emma pressed the heels of her hands into her eyes, trying to push the tears back into her eyes. A small cough came from the doorway of her room, and she turned to see Gwen standing there. She hadn't noticed that the other woman had followed her.

"Come on," Gwen said gently, making a beckoning motion.

"What?" Emma sniffed.

"I'm taking you home."

For a moment, Emma's heart soared, and then plummeted when she realized Gwen had meant her home, not Emma's back in 1953. Emma berated herself as she followed Gwen to her car.
She couldn't ever go home, never. She stared out the car window into the blackness of the night and sadly mulled that over in her head the whole ride.

"You don't... live here, do you?" Emma asked skeptically as Gwen lead her back to that underground base.

Gwen laughed. "No, no. I'm just going to tell Jack what's happened, so that no one wonders where you've gone."

"Oh."

Emma followed her down into the depths of the Hub, and was yet again reminded how gloomy that place felt. It sort of fit her mood at the moment. Gwen called out for Jack a few times, each with no answer, and she began searching the main floor. She peeked in his office, down that weird little round, white room, and in the kitchen.

"Okay," Gwen said as she returned to Emma. "Jack's not up here. I'm going to check the lower levels, alright? You just wait up here."

Then she dashed off to some place Emma would never see, leaving Emma alone to stand by Tosh's computer things that she did not understand.

When Gwen had not returned after a while, Emma had an idea. She'd just pop into Jack's office and write him a note. No need for fuss, she mused as she opened the door. She stepped into the dark room and fumbled around for the light switch. She couldn't find one, and settled for fumbling around the desk for a piece of paper and pen. She had just found a blank page when she noticed an odd noise coming from somewhere in the room. She set the page down and listened for a moment, baffled, before searching the room for where the noise was emanating from.

She came across a hole in the floor, which was completely bizarre. It had a ladder coming out of it. Was Jack down there? She peered over the edge, and was rewarded with what was probably the strangest sight she had ever seen.

For a moment, all she could do was stare. She had never seen a naked man before, much less two of them, so it intrigued her for the briefest of times. And then she realized that these men were naked, and staring at them was highly improper. Her hand flew to her mouth with an undignified smack. One head shot up in shock, and Emma found herself staring into the eyes of an amusedly bemused Captain Jack Harkness. She blinked down in horror, unable to remove herself from the spot, as Jack tapped the shoulder of his partner, and none other than Ianto Jones himself looked up. He at least had the decency to blanch.

"Hello, Emma," Jack said while Ianto ducked out of sight.

Emma finally uprooted herself from her spot as she got a better view of Jack's... um... In any case, she moved away from the hole in the floor, standing back and ogling at the dark wall of Jack's office, trying to comprehend, or not comprehend, what she had just seen.

The passage of time escaped her, but eventually, the two men, both thankfully mostly clothed, climbed back up into the office. She gazed at them both with wide eyes. Jack seemed to have no shame whatsoever, with his brash smile and laid-back attitude still written on his face. Ianto, on the other hand, was definitely blushing when Jack turned on the desk light (which she belatedly registered with a jolt of embarrassment).

"Might I ask what you're doing here, Emma?" Jack asked. He didn't sound accusatory, she noticed.
Mainly interested, if anything. Perhaps a touch concerned.

"I... um..."

"Oh, there you are!" Gwen's voice abruptly exclaimed

Emma turned to watch her barge into the room, pausing instantly to take in the scene. A blush, one rather similar to Ianto's, and possibly Emma's, formed on her face.

"Right," she said slowly. "Emma, why don't you step outside for a moment?"

Emma had never been so grateful to flee a room in her life. She glanced around the dark, gloomy base for a moment, trying to compose herself, only to whirl back around when the door snapped shut behind her. Ianto smiled awkwardly at her, and she relaxed a little.

They talked outside the office as Jack and Gwen talked inside, and Emma found herself nearly crying again as she recounted the ordeal with Mr. Ellis. Ianto patted her on the back uncomfortably, and she was suddenly very glad she picked Gwen to stay with. Ianto, though a sweetheart, was not a good shoulder to cry on.

Gwen came out of the office at some point and dragged Emma home with her, though Emma was so tired and worn out at that point that she didn't remember most of it.

And then she woke up to another naked man.

Emma tried to forget all the naked affairs. She was successful with her endeavors, because it was easy to forget something like that when there are still so many other mind-boggling things out there for her to discover. For instance: computers. She liked them far better than typewriters. They were so much more fun.

Then, that night, Gwen had to explain the sexual awareness of the twenty-first century. Emma really wasn't too thrilled that everyone wanted to throw themselves at each other like that; she much preferred to wait for the right person. She ended the conversation after that, because there was only so much of that talk she could take.

She was halfway to the bathroom to brush her teeth when she remembered something. Gwen was still sitting at the table when she returned.

"Can..." She stopped, trying to find the right way to put it. "Can men... and men... have sex?"

Gwen frowned at her, and Emma felt like she said the wrong thing, until Gwen's expression softened into an understanding one.

"Jack and Ianto," Gwen said.

Emma nodded.

"Yes. There are lots of same-sex couples nowadays. I'm sure that wasn't really... a thing... back in your time, but it's more widely accepted now." She paused. "Well, by most people. Anyways, point is... well, my point is, it's nothing to be afraid of. Or worried about. Or anything. It's just sex, that's all."

That night, Emma found herself thinking of Susanne down on the corner. Susanne, with her "friend" Rosie. Had they been together? Did they have sex? Did they love each other? If they did, did they stay together?
The prospect of a new job popped into view, and Emma could not have been more excited. London was calling her, and she finally had the chance to go! She pushed through all of Gwen's opposition and got herself a bus ride to London. She had a slightly teary farewell with Gwen at the bus stop. She didn't even get to say goodbye to Alesha and Jade, Diane, or Ianto, but Gwen promised she'd tell them all for her.

Maybe it was just the twenty-first century rubbing off on her, but thoughts of sex seemed to follow her everywhere. Well, not everywhere. She wasn't just thinking about sex all of the time, but it seemed that she couldn't escape a single day without an allusion to nudity or the mention of sex. But, for the first time, she started to wonder if she really minded. She didn't enjoy having a man's... thing in her face, but when Anna the cashier started talking dirty, she really did not mind. Not one bit.

Human minds were not difficult to manipulate. Despite their incessant claims that they were higher beings, that they had higher consciousness, they were so easy to misdirect and misinform. Bilis Manger had to only plant the smallest of ideas into their minds, and suddenly, the entirety of their reality could be altered. Foolish beings.

The only difficulty Bilis could find in manipulation was how to manipulate. The rest was easy, because the humans would convince themselves, but finding exactly what made them tick, what best to change their world view, that was the tricky part.

Sometimes, it came with great ease. Those in pain were the easiest. Find the source of their pain, and instantly that person was dealt with. Doctor Owen Harper, for example. It wasn't hard to dig for his pain, not when Diane Holmes was sitting right on the surface.

Bilis rewound time and viewed the two of them. He watched Diane leave Owen on the tarmac. He witnessed Owen going home and crying. He spectated as Owen let himself get beat up by a being of low-level sentience just because he couldn't get over her. He observed as Owen distanced himself from his team, his friends.

Then Bilis sat at a bar and let his manipulation do its work.


Bilis raised an eyebrow as Owen's hand went to the air in front of him.

"I can touch you. I don't understand," Owen said to the nothingness. "Where did you end up?"

Bilis caught the bartender out of the corner of his eye and pointed him in Owen's direction. The bartender held up a finger, and Bilis nodded, turning back to watch Owen shake his head at whatever his illusion was saying.

"I don't know. Everything's out of sync."

Diane must have said something sad, because then Owen let out a huff of air, and tears pooled in his eyes. Bilis smiled as the bartender popped his head in front Owen, distracting him to reality. Though he never bought a drink, Bilis left a tip for the bartender, and then rejoined the time stream.

Other times, everything left to manipulate in a person was old. Loves already forgotten, suffering long since passed, agony now compartmentalized. When things were not as fresh, it tended to take multiple rewinds for everything to make sense to Bilis. Toshiko Sato understood everything that had come her way, and didn't dwell on it as much anymore, but Bilis was notorious for bringing up
Bilis rewound time and surveyed Toshiko stealing the sonic plans. He noted Tosh building the device. He observed her saving her mother, foolish and brave. He saw her rot away in a UNIT cell as she lost her will to live.

Then he walked into a hospital ward and let his manipulation fly.

Toshiko stared down the corridor.

"Mother," she said disbelievingly.

Bilis thought the Japanese was a nice touch. He'd have to brush up on the language himself. It had been a while since he'd visited Japan.

"What is coming?" Toshiko asked.

A man carrying a clipboard walked by, and Bilis stepped out of his way.

"Do what?" Toshiko cried. "Mother!"

Bilis visited some patients before he left the hospital. If things went according to plan, none of them would be alive for much longer.

There were people who had so little tragedy in their lives that there was nothing to manipulate them with. Bilis almost felt sorry for those people, and himself, because he'd have to conjure something up, instead of stealing from the past. Gwen Cooper had no real trauma to speak of, but she did love that boyfriend of hers very much.

Bilis rewound time and watched Gwen meet Rhys Williams. He followed them through their relationship. He saw every argument. He listened to every nightmare. He waited as they finally admitted love. He witnessed Gwen slowly detaching herself from him.

Then he waited patiently at his shop and started making up a future.

"Do you really want to know?" he asked Gwen.

She blinked at him. "Know what?"

"Hold my hands. I'll show you." He offered them to her.

"Okay."

He pulled they away as she reached for them.

"Only if you're sure," he said.

Her gaze stared him down as she said: "I'm sure."

Then they held hands, and Gwen's eyes blew wide. She stared and stared, until they were ripping their hands apart.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"What did you just show me?"
"The future."

She ran out of his shop. He took great care in flipping the sign to "Closed" before stepping out himself and getting on his way.

Then there were those people who had so much tragedy in their lives that it was impossible to pick just one. They had become so dulled to everything that no one single thing stood out as the most painful, or the most persuading. Everything blurred together. Captain Jack Harkness lived a long life of sorrow, and not even one single illusion could influence him, not even a particular Doctor.

Bilis rewound time and ignored Jack Harkness throughout the last two centuries. He searched for places Jack had not been. He scanned for new tragedies yet to be bestowed. He viewed for deaths and births and loves.

Then he called an anonymous tip about to complain about music from an anachronistic dance hall.

"Is Toshiko your woman?" the real Jack Harkness asked.

"No," the fake Jack Harkness said. "There's no one."

Bilis rolled his eyes, because there wasn't "no one," not for Captain Jack Harkness. There was always someone. Right now, that certain someone was causing Bilis havoc back in the normal time stream, so Bilis could not stay to watch the Harknesses fall.

In fact, that certain someone was causing Bilis havoc in lots of ways. One, he was convincing Owen and Gwen to pull Jack back from 1941 prematurely, so Bilis had to delay that at all costs. Two, he was proving to be rather difficult to persuade.

Ianto Jones, like Jack, had faced too much tragedy. But the problem was, he had never been close enough with anyone or anything. Bilis had dealt with only a few people like that. People who were so detached and lonely that nothing could coerce them, because nothing had gotten close enough to be important. Bilis would feel sorry for the poor boy, if he weren't already trying to be his undoing.

Bilis rewound time and sat through the entirety of Ianto Jones's life. He saw a kind mother, a devoted sister, an abusive father. He found no friends to honestly consider. He spied no true loves or losses. He did witness, however, an almost. A lost potential. He could work with that.

Then he settled in to a dark, dank hall in the Torchwood Hub and let his manipulation loose.

The creature in the cell made a noise, and Ianto stared wildly at a cement pillar and took a step back. He kept staring at the pillar, but his eyes were refocusing, as if the image was coming closer.

"What do you want?" Ianto said eventually. "Why are you here? This isn't happening."

Bilis sighed loudly as Ianto continued his staring. Then Ianto closed his eyes, then snapped them back open, and the vision dispelled. Ianto glanced around everywhere, then placed his hands on his hips and let out a few sobs, stepping away from the caged beast. Bilis rolled his eyes at the drama of it all, then recalled himself back to the time stream, where he could finally complete his plan.

What he did not count on was the team reuniting itself, but it was of little consequence of him. His plan was already in motion by the time they'd hobbled up onto the street. Tosh and Owen stopped and stared at him, and Gwen left Jack to cling to Ianto as she stepped forth. Foolish humans. They thought they were so clever, so important.

Not for long.
"From out of the darkness, He is Come!"

"What is he talking about?" Gwen called, but she was addressing him.

"Son of the Great Beast," he informed her. "Cast out before time, chained in rock and imprisoned beneath the great Rift."

"What is he saying?" Ianto asked from in the back.

Gwen ignored him, still gazing confusedly at Bilis. "What?"

Stupid creature. Did she really not know his Lord? No matter. The ground was trembling. He is Come.

"All Hail Abaddon, the Great Devourer, come to feast on life!"

The team turn their heads from him, and Bilis watches with them as his Lord emerges.

"The whole world shall die beneath his shadow."

And He went, out into the world, to begin his new and eternal feasting. The screams of humanity are a blessing to hear, resounding from the buildings and echoing in the streets. Bilis would never know peace like he did in that instant.

"I look upon you, my God, and know my work is done."

Then he disappears into the time streams, and waited for salvation.

It never came. Salvation died with his Lord, his God, and it was agony. It felt like a thousand suns burned into his soul, and he could only curse Jack Harkness as he writhed in pain. He screamed vengeance upon the man and everything he was, until the pain stopped, and his Lord was gone.

His only consolation, in the end, was that Captain Jack Harkness was gone as well. Now they all would grieve with him. He watched from tucked away in the time stream as Ianto Jones cried into a greatcoat.

Unfortunately, he also stayed long enough to watch Ianto Jones kiss a very alive Jack Harkness as well.

His rage echoed through the time stream, up into the Vortex, and somewhere, somewhen, a little blue police box heard his cry and realized it needed to take a stop.

Johnny, in an unexpected act of fatherhood, had taken the kids to a park. Rhiannon hadn't known what to say when he approached her with the idea. She almost laughed at him, until she came to the conclusion that he was actually being serious. Wonderstruck, she gave him her blessing and sent them on their way. Both kids were already whining by the time they reached the car, and she remained astounded when they weren't back in five minutes, the three of them grousing their arses off.

A half hour later, she was still surprised they hadn't returned yet, and began wondering if this was really happening. She brewed herself some tea and stopped waiting for them to return. Odds were, Johnny already lost one of them by now and was chasing them down, so she didn't expect them to be back for a while.

She was browsing through her CDs, resigned to have a quiet, relaxed evening in, when a knock
came at the door. She set her tea mug down, swearing as it splattered over the counter. She looked about frantically for something to mop it up with as the knock came again. Panicking, she threw a hand towel over it, then groaned. Bugger, that was her nice one, and now it was going to stain.

"I'm coming!" she called to the door as another knock sounded.

She mopped the tea up and tossed the towel over her shoulder to the sink, carefully setting the mug down again. No spills this time, thank god. As the knock came for a fourth time, she wanted to scream. This relaxed evening was turning less and less relaxing by the second. She marched over to the door in a huff, prepared to give whoever it was a stern talking-to about proper door etiquette, and wrenched it open.

"Bloody hell," she said.

Ianto frowned at her.

It hadn't even occurred to her that it could be him knocking. She hadn't seen him in three months, and he hadn't been over for about half a year. She gawked at him for a moment, giving him a once over. What was it this time? She mentally scolded herself for assuming her brother was only over because he wanted something. Though that did seem to be the only reason he contacted her anymore.

He lifted a bag up, holding it out to her.

"What's this?" she asked before taking it.

"Alcohol," he signed as she peered into the bag.

A bottle of Scotch twinkled up at her in the evening light. It was either a gift, or they were drinking it. If it was a gift, Ianto needed something. If they were drinking it, then Ianto still needed something. She stifled a sigh and ushered him in.

The Scotch was for drinking. Her tea went down the drain and she got out fresh mugs. She wasn't going to bother using proper glasses on this cheap bottle and her brother; neither really deserved the fanfare.

She took a sip of her drink and studied Ianto carefully. He was staring down at his own mug, looking nearly disconsolate. She wondered, yet again, what it was this time that did that. She sighed again and put the mug down in front of her. He glanced up at her.

"Have you talked to Mum recently?"

He shook his head.

"You should," she signed solemnly.

"I thought she was doing better."

Rhiannon pursed her lips, and his face grew even darker. Though she felt like she was only piling onto his troubles, it was important that he knew. Mum was getting worse and worse as of late. It wasn't as if it could be any day now, but it was rapidly getting closer to that point. And, even if she weren't sick, Mum would still probably like to hear from her son every now and then. Still, Rhiannon felt bad for making him look the way he did now.

"Are you going to tell me what's wrong?" she asked finally.
He scowled.

"Course you won't tell me," she muttered to herself as she lifted her drink to her lips again.

Ianto must have seen that, because his scowl deepened into a glare. His mug snapped down to the counter with a crack, and Rhiannon had to stop herself from checking to see if either counter or mug was harmed. Instead, she met his angry gaze with a challenging one of her own, and held it until he broke. His elbows plonked onto the counter and his head went in his hands, and she sat back in surprise. What was going on?

After some time, Ianto lifted his head and sat up straight. He eyed her for a few moments, then exhaled deeply.

"I work for a powerful and dangerous company based in Cardiff that defends people against aliens and prepares us for the future."

Rhiannon laughed. She laughed because that was complete bullshit, she laughed because she thought he was having her on, and she laughed because he looked deadly serious and she was actually beginning to consider what he was saying.

She closed her mouth and stared at him. His face was empty of all emotion, a grave mask that betrayed little of what lie beyond. That frightened her.

"You're joking."

Ianto shook his head, slow and somber.

Maybe she mistook him. Maybe she misread a sign.

"Aliens?"

Ianto nodded.

"No," she said out loud. "No way."

Frowning at her, he reached into his suit pocket and pulled something out. She craned her neck over to see him hold out his mobile. He placed it on the table and then slid it over to her, letting it spin right into her fingers.

"Watch it."

She stared down at it, half expecting it to come to life and whisper to her the secrets of the universe.

Ianto rolled his eyes. "The video, not the mobile."

That made more sense, and she turned it on. A video was waiting for her on the screen. With an approving nod from Ianto, she pressed play and watched. Then she screamed and shunted the mobile away from her. He caught it before it flew off the table, sending her a disapproving glance, though she was far too freaked out to notice it.

"What was that?"

He spelled something out for her.

"W-E-E-V-I-L," she repeated, still thoroughly horrified.
Ianto nodded and she shook her head.

"This isn't funny," she told him.

"It's not a joke. This is real."

Rhiannon didn't want to believe him. She wanted to believe that the video was special effects, or that CGI crap. But the look on her brother's face and the fact that this came from a camera phone is enough to give her pause.

She bit her lip anxiously. "You work with those?"

"Yes."

"That has to be dangerous!"

He didn't respond, and something came to her mind.

"London."

Instantly, he looked away from her, but not before she saw that flash in his eyes. She clasped a hand over her mouth and stifled a sob.

The two of them sat there, each in their own respective horror and misery, until Rhiannon began to steadily collect herself and Ianto seemingly pushed his trauma down deeper.

She brought his attention back to her.

"Why are you telling me this?" she asked.

Inexplicably, Ianto snorted a laugh. A rather sad one, and it paired terribly with the angry, frustrated look on his face.

"Because-" he used a name sign that she didn't know "--has left us and everything is a mess and I don't know what to do. I don't have anyone to talk to and it's hard when nobody understands. I'm alone. He left me."

That was a lot to process for her.

"Who?" was all she could think to ask. "What?"

Ianto told her very little other than "Jack Harkness" and "Torchwood," neither of which she understood, and then he checked his watch.

"I'm also telling you this because you have only a minute until the Retcon kicks in." At her confused expression, he continued. "R-E-T-C-O-N. Memory loss pills. It takes a while to work, with our genes. I'm able to break its effects, but I don't think you can." "Ianto!" she cried, socked and revolted.

He gave her a sad smile. "Don't worry. It will just look like you forgot everything because of the alcohol. Nasty hangover, but you'll live."

She wanted to say something to him, to scold him, or ask what the hell he was thinking, but she suddenly began to feel really, really tired.
"I'm sorry," he signed, and Rhiannon could see through her drooping eyelids that he meant it. "But I had to say something. I just didn't have anyone to talk to. I'm lonely."

He looked away. "It's been one week. I miss him. I miss him and I want him back and the only person I could tell was you. But you can't know this."

She managed to pull her arms in front of her before her head fell to the counter. The world was going dark around her, but she felt a hand on her head, gently and awkwardly patting her to sleep.

"I'm so sorry," Ianto said in her ear, and she wanted to cry, but all she could do was slip away.

Rhiannon woke with a jolt. Her head hurt. No, no. Her head was in absolute agony.

"Here you go," Johnny said somewhere to her right, his voice too loud and too bright.

She opened her eyes, just a smidgen, to see a tablet and a glass of water being handed to her. She sat up with a groan and downed both, then shoved the empty glass back into Johnny's hand.

"What happened?" she asked when she found her mouth.

"You drank too much," Johnny said, chuckling away like the prat he was. "I mean, normally that's me, but it was you."

"I don't remember that." She frowned. "Don't think I remember anything from last night."

She did wish he'd wipe that stupid, shit-eating grin off his face. "Not surprising. You downed quite a lot of Scotch between the two of you."

"Who?"

"Ianto. You know," he continued when she gaped at him. "Your brother."

"What?" She'd like to think she'd remember having her brother over for drinks.

"You could ask him if you'd like," Johnny said. "He slept on the sofa."

He made an "oof" noise when she pushed him aside, rushing down to their small sitting room. She stopped abruptly and stared.

There Ianto sat, waiting patiently as Mica babbled on about some thing or another. He didn't look like he had a clue as to what she was saying. Part of that was because Mica was Mica and also not even five years old, but Rhiannon still felt like shit for failing her brother and children by still not having taught Mica and David enough British Sign Language.

"Mica, why don't you go eat breakfast?" Rhiannon called.

Mica turned to her, and Ianto's eyes followed her gaze up to Rhiannon.

"I already did," Mica said defiantly. "I'm talking to Uncle Ianto."

"Did Uncle Ianto get breakfast?"

Mica shrugged, and Rhiannon shooed her away. Finally turning to Ianto, she surveyed him. He looked... tired.

"Are you hungry?"
"I ate. David made me eggs."

She groaned, because David cooking meant a mess she’d spend forever cleaning. Who let him make eggs? Ianto grinned, as if sensing her inner turmoil, and she wanted to slap him. Cheeky bastard. She shook her head and sighed.

"Coffee?" She had some around, just in case he ever showed his face.

"No," he signed, "I have to go to work."

That mysterious government job of his that kept him so far away from her. She didn't want him to leave just yet; she wanted to talk to him. She never got the chance to anymore, and, as far as she knew, they probably hadn't talked at all last night, either.

She managed to fit in a small chat with him before he left. Not much, mainly just an apology for forgetting last night, which he accepted with a tight-lipped smile.

"Have you spoken with Mum lately?" she asked.

His smile became tighter and sadder, and she wondered if they talked about that last night.

"I'll talk to her later."

"Soon."

"Soon," he agreed.

Before he left, he gave her a peck on the cheek, and she wondered just what the hell they had talked about last night.

Chapter End Notes

This is sort of based on that one tumblr post I saw once and then never again, and therefore have no link to. But it was about a Found Family and Ianto, two of my favourite topics, so I had to write about it.

British Sign Language and Japanese are not like English. BSL structure is more time-topic-comment and Japanese is more subject-object-verb, whereas English is subject-verb-object. Because it would be confusing for most people (including myself), I left translations in English syntax.

I really tried to edit this one. Really. It didn't work. Sorry!

Anyways, I've said enough. I want to thank you all for reading, and I want you each to have a lovely, wonderful, beautiful day!
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Belated Disclaimer: I am not d/Deaf or hard of hearing. I have done my best to write this, but there is every chance I have made mistakes, and I apologise for that sincerely.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The United States of America had not been one of the places Martha Jones had expected to find people she knew. Well, people who knew someone she knew, but still. America. A whole ocean away from home. And they knew Jack, for Christ's sake. Seriously, what are the odds of that?

The first time Martha met them, they were sitting together in the far corner of a housing facility in Utah's only labour camp. They were eating their nightly meal, sitting so close that their shoulders were pressed together, keeping themselves to themselves. Martha thought they were the most intriguing people in the entire camp because they weren't from the camp. Martha had been there a week to nurse her sprained ankle, and by then she'd met most of the people who lived there, but she had never once seen the two of them before. She had approached them, prepared to give them an abridged version of what she called "The Doctor Story," but as soon as she got close, the woman looked up from her food, nudged Ianto, and they both simultaneously rolled their eyes.

Martha had been insulted until the woman had said: "We're not interested in hearing about your Doctor."

"What?" Martha was thrown off by the non-American accent. What were (other) British people doing in America?

"We know who you are," the woman said. "Martha Jones, champion of the Doctor. We're not interested."

She and her partner returned to their meals, and Martha began to worry, because if these people didn't like the Doctor, that meant...

"Oh, don't worry," the woman said, not looking up from her... beans? They looked like beans. Sort of. "We're not the Master's spies. But we're also not the Doctor's biggest fans."

"What's wrong with the Doctor?" Martha asked, confused.

The woman shrugged, digging around some of the more questionable beans. "He stole a friend of ours. We don't take kindly to people who let our friends become prisoners of the Master."

Martha watched her shovel some a bite into her mouth, wondering who the hell the Doctor stole from them. The Doctor didn't steal people, and he certainly didn't let them... Oh. Martha blinked down at the two as understanding dawned.

"You know Jack?"

The woman's head snapped up. "What did you say?"

"Jack Harkness. Do you know him?"
"Oh my god," she breathed.

She urgently elbowed her friend in the ribs, who had been ignoring them in favour of his own food. He glared at her, though it was without menace.

Martha's eyebrows raised as the two of them began conversing in sign language. Martha didn't know any sign language, so there was no way for her to follow along, but it seemed they were both astonished, excited, and a bit worried. It ended with the tiniest of arguments and the woman sighing and turning back to Martha.

"How do you know Jack?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Martha scoffed.

The woman ignored her. "Was he with you when the Doctor took him?"

"Hold on, now," she said, starting to get a little offended on the Doctor's behalf. "The Doctor didn't take anyone. Jack came to us."

The woman's face went from eager to stony in a second, and Martha found herself backtracking.

"Look, he just wanted to ask some questions. I don't think he meant to run away with us. It was an accident."

Tension drained from the woman's face instantly, and she closed her eyes and exhaled deeply. The man pulled her attention back to him, and Martha watched the woman express Martha's words to him, and his face grew more... boyish, Martha would say. Livelier. The man clasped the woman's hand, and they shared relieved grins.

"Thank you," the woman said to Martha as the man smiled kindly at her.

If Martha had to guess, Jack's apparent disappearance was a burden that had gone long unsolved.

Something else occurred to Martha in that instant.

"Are you Torchwood?" Martha asked curiously.

The man's fork clattered to the ground, and it was suddenly his turn to elbow his companion excitedly in the ribs. The woman batted his arm away, staring up at Martha.

"You shouldn't know that word," the woman advised.

"I thought you were in the Himalayas!"

Both of their faces darkened.

"Sorry," Martha said, though she had no idea what she was apologizing for.

"It's alright," the woman said. She took a breath in, evidently composing herself, then held out a hand for Martha to shake. "Toshiko Sato. This is Ianto Jones."

Ianto Jones signed something, a playfully glint twinkling in his eye.

"What did he say?" Martha asked Toshiko.

Toshiko threw Ianto a look that seemed to ask "really?" and Ianto shrugged, still grinning
wickedly. Toshiko gave a long-suffering sigh, but Martha could see the smile behind it.

"He said: 'No relation,'" Toshiko translated.

It took a second for Martha to understand that he meant between Martha and himself, not Toshiko. Jones and Jones.

"Sit with us," Toshiko said to Martha. "I think we have a lot to talk about."

She sat down on the floor in front of them as Ianto bent over to retrieve his fallen fork. He inspected it, and sighed heavily at all of the dirt from the floor caked on the prongs. He set it beside him, then turned his gaze over to Toshiko's fork. Toshiko caught his coveting stare, rolled her eyes, and placed it on his plate. The two of them shared the singular fork for the rest of the meal, passing it to each other between bites.

That act itself was what made Martha want to join them. She'd been so lonely, travelling by herself, and all she wanted was to have a few people to share this life with. And the two of them, Toshiko Sato and Ianto Jones (no relation), with their close bond and their shared forks and their playful banter, they were absolutely perfect.

Tosh gave a very long-winded explanation for what they were doing. Essentially, it paired down to: they once found a flaw in the Archangel Network (one unrelated to the flaw the Doctor found in the Archangel Network), and now they were gathering data across the globe from each individual satellite, so that they could take it down. Tosh used to have computers that could do it in a second, she said, but they were blown to bits, and now she was stuck scrounging around on inadequate equipment that hardly worked. She was quite bitter about it.

They were both very on board with the idea of Martha tagging along with them. They had yet to visit Central and South America, like Martha, and agreed it was probably for the best if they stuck together. The action plan became to loop down through the western coast and back up on the east, where they would end New York, the only place that still sent ships overseas to the other side of the world. Tosh and Ianto had no objection to returning to Europe; they had already finished their data collection (save for the Americas), while Martha still had Europe to persuade.

The next morning, they rolled out. In an SUV, of all things.

"How do you escape detection in that?" Martha asked, agog.

Tosh's eyes lit up.

"Well," she said, and Martha could hear the excitement bubbling up to the surface. "Basically, what I did was--"

Those were the last words Martha understood. Much like the night before, Tosh kept her illustration none too short and none too comprehensible. Martha tried to follow along, but it made her head spin. She sent a confused glance to Ianto, and he heaved a resigned sigh, and gave her a get-used-to-it grimace.

"--and that's it, really," Tosh finished eventually.

"Oh, that's great," Martha said when she realized Tosh had stopped talking.

"You didn't understand a single word I said," Tosh sighed.

"No," Martha admitted. "Sorry."
"It's fine," Tosh said. "I'm used to it. Nobody understands. Well, Ianto does, but..."

She threw Ianto a dirty glance. Ianto shrugged and looked like he just couldn't be arsed to care, though Martha saw that glimmer in his eyes.

"Actually, I was sort of wondering how you got around undetected. I kind of gathered you wouldn't be travelling around with... Well." Tosh smiled kindly.

"Well," Martha said, a part of her childishy excited to show off her Very Cool Toy. "I could just show you instead."

She pulled out her TARDIS key, dangling it slightly for the drama of it all, and then looped it over her neck. She waited a moment, watching for the confused stares slightly to either side of her, but they never came.

"Sorry, what was supposed to happen?" Tosh asked after a long silence.

"Perception filter," Ianto said after an even longer pause.

Martha stared at him. She had so many questions, like: how the hell did he see through the key's filter? How did he know what it was? And also, how did he--

"Oh, yeah." Tosh reached out and plucked the key from Martha's chest, studying it closely. "Like the invisible lift."

"The what?" Martha asked.

It seemed Jack had already beat her to the punch years ago. She suspected that might be the case with lots of alien bits and bobs, and probably most of her stories, too. Bit of a letdown, really. She'd wanted to impress them with something.

When the clambered into the SUV, Ianto took the driver's side and Tosh slid into the passenger's seat, already fiddling with her technology. Martha crammed herself into the back with the bulky equipment, beeping monitors, and twisting wires. They started driving slowly, though Martha didn't know why, when there were no other cars on the roads ahead. She sat back as much as she could without bumping into something important and puzzled it over for a while.

A few miles into their journey, Ianto's hand reached out to the stereo, and Tosh looked up from her whatever-it-was, alarmed, and slapped the hand away. Ianto signed something indignantly at her.

Martha frowned. "What's going on?"

"It's his turn to pick the music."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Well, I just wasn't sure if you wanted to listen to heavy metal."

Martha looked at Ianto. He grinned at her and she blinked. He didn't seem the type that listened to heavy metal.

"It's the bass and the drums," Tosh explained with a sigh.

Ianto made a drumming motion with his hands.

"Is that the sign for 'drums'?" Martha asked
Ianto flicked his thumbs up, beaming at her. Then he turned back to Tosh and started signing something rapidly. Martha had the feeling she was referred to multiple times. Tosh grumbled slightly to herself as she twisted in her seat to look at Martha.

"Look, do you think you could tolerate heavy metal, or are you a normal person?" Tosh asked.

Martha could see the plea written on her face and the imploring one on Ianto’s. She couldn't believe she had to play favourites already. Still, Ianto's puppy-face was more effective than Tosh's.

"What music do you listen to?" Martha asked Tosh, to be fair.

"Classical."

Ianto laughed and Tosh glared at him. Shaking his head, he turned to Martha and signed something.

"He thinks it's stupid," Tosh said, still glaring. "But it's honestly better than metal."

Tosh relinquished her control over the stereo in the end, and Ianto gleefully began to select his music as she handed back a pair of headphones. Martha was going to ask what they were for, but without being prompted, Tosh told her it was going to get quite loud in the vehicle as she slipped her own pair on. Martha quickly understood when the booming started. She clutched her headphones to her head, feeling her body tremble with every earth-shaking beat, and wished that she had picked Tosh's music instead. She glanced over to Ianto and, nope, even with his contented look, couldn't fathom him as a metal fan.

"God," Martha said when they stepped out of the SUV to rest.

"Told you," Tosh said.

"How do the Toclafane not hear that?"

"Well, the thing that makes us... undetectable is sort of relative." Tosh was visibly struggling to simplify things. "If they're in range to hear that, then our sensors fry their circuits and they can't find us, anyway. That's also why we have to drive slow. Satellites can pick up our movement, and we're too far away to scramble them."

"Oh."

"Yeah," Tosh said. "It's going to be a slow trip."

Martha looked between Ianto and Tosh.

"You know what?" Martha smiled. "I think I'm okay with that."

Travelling with those two was everything Martha could have wanted. Tosh and Ianto were some of the most... interesting people she had ever met. Their wacky camaraderie was only the surface. They were each... very interesting.

Tosh was absolutely bonkers, when she got down to it. Off the rails. Mad scientist level. Like the Doctor, only more petite and less alien. She would spout technological nonsense that neither Ianto nor Martha understood, and she wouldn't stop until someone diverted her. She was wicked with her technology, and could absolutely kick anyone's arse in all things computer. She had an amount of intelligence that was probably unparalleled by anyone Martha knew, excluding the Doctor. Maybe not even then.
Ianto was, pardon Martha's language, a snarky, sarcastic little shit. He knew what he was doing, he knew what everyone else was doing, and he knew that he was doing it right and they were doing it wrong. He had the professionalism of a butler thrown in with the sass of a toddler, and it was possibly the best combination Martha had ever seen. Nothing was funnier than witnessing Ianto go off the rails. Martha could watch all day when he told Tosh off for forgetting to clean her computer screens and still be entertained by the time he reached the state of the keyboards.

"We weren't always like this," Tosh said one night.

It was cold that night, and they were watching Ianto build a fire. More like Ianto was playing around with the fire, really, because it was already blazing merrily away.

"I was a pushover," Tosh continued. "I wouldn't speak up for myself. I don't think it ever even occurred to me that I could."

A loud hiss emitted from Ianto's direction, and Martha and Tosh watched as he yanked his hand from the fire, shaking it profusely and glaring at the flames. Martha would have to check his hand out later.

"He always hid," Tosh said quietly as her eyes dropped from Ianto to the dirt under her boots. "Always in the shadows. He never bothered to let anyone see passed that superficial persona he had. I don't think even... no. He didn't let anyone in."

Ianto, as he was rubbing at his hand, caught Martha's stare just then.

"What?"

"I saw that," she signed, grinning. "Stupid."

He threw her a rude gesture.

Martha's grin faded slowly as he turned away and she was left with the hard reality of her conversation with Tosh.

"I used to just go through the motions," Martha confessed. "All I ever did was work to become a doctor. There was nothing else in my life besides that."

"And now, you search for a bigger, brighter future," Tosh said gently. "That's not so bad."

Martha learned other things on the trip. One: Some British Sign Language. She was rubbish at it, but she kept trying and trying. She wasn't going to be fluent any time soon, but it helped that she was using it constantly, even though she made Ianto repeat things over and over again at an agonizingly slow pace. Two: Tosh and Ianto were not a couple. Martha had assumed as much, but she still had to ask. Actually, according to Tosh, Ianto was Jack's... something. Ianto, when prompted, refused to elaborate. Tosh was single. Three: Martha could make a mean meal out of almost nothing. She was always on nightly cooking duty, except for those few nights where she couldn't bring herself to do it, or when Ianto was in too much of an I-have-to-keep-myself-busy-or-I'll-burst mood. Four: Do not touch anything Ianto had just organized. Ever. Five: Tosh and Ianto were not only quirky, but also the most durable people this side of the apocalypse.

Sometimes, Martha wondered how those two could be so happy in a world so dark, especially when they'd both lost so much. Sure, so had everyone else, but both of their tragedies started long before this hell began. Maybe that was why. They had already learned to deal with a fucked-up world, and could soldier on better than everyone else with their newfound and rather raw agony.
Not that it was always smiles and happiness on the trip. There were days where nobody said a word to each other, when they were so tired and worn out that a fight could break out at any second. There were days when they just couldn't pretend that they were fine, when they just nodded to each other and silently dealt with it themselves. There were days when they were so utterly broken they couldn't breathe, when nobody could talk about the Doctor or Torchwood.

There were days when they didn't dare mention the name "Owen" (or the Himalayas in general) to Tosh, or else she would start silently crying and not be able to stop.

"Hey," Martha said, sliding into the girl's tent beside her.

Tosh did not roll away from the opposite wall, or say anything, but the soft snuffle was enough for Martha to judge her mood. She slid into her own sleeping bag and shuffled her body closer to Tosh. Tosh flipped over, so that she was facing Martha, and Martha enveloped her in a hug.

"He said he was sorry, by the way," Martha whispered.

"I know," Tosh sniffed.

"I don't think he meant to make you upset."

Tosh buried her face into Martha's shoulder. "I know."

"Also, he said my soup tasted bad tonight, so I'm mad at him, too."

That elicited a watery chuckle from Tosh.

There were days when Ianto would take long walks by himself, or days when he would shut down if anyone spoke of what might be occurring on the Valiant.

When she finally found him, he was staring off into the sunset.

"You'll damage your eyes," she said.

He quirked an eyebrow.

"Fine, fine, hang on."

She managed to sign "eyes" and "you" and "hurt" then gave up and peeked at Ianto for the correct translation, but he wasn't looking at her anymore. She didn't bother chastising him again. There was no point. It wouldn't take that sad look off his face. She wrapped her arms around him, letting him enclose his own arms around her and rest his chin on her hair. They stood like that for an hour before she took his hand and slowly lead him back to camp.

And there were days when Martha just couldn't look at the fire, because all she could see was Japan burning.

She heard the car door open. She didn't bother to look behind her; she knew it was Ianto, bringing her a hot plate of mashed potatoes and corn. A hand went to her back, gently rubbing small, soothing circles, and she tried not to sob. She did jolt slightly as the other door popped open, and Toshiko slid onto the seat next to her. Suddenly, Martha was being comforted by two sets of hands, one pair of small ones holding Martha's hands, one larger pair now tenderly massaging at her shoulders.

"Sorry I couldn't make food tonight," Martha mumbled eventually.

"Oh, no," Tosh said. "No. You don't apologise for this. We understand."
God, Martha loved those two.

But, even with the hard and bad times, there was always some fun to be had. Like in churches, for example.

They always stopped in churches, whenever they could. Martha wasn't sure why, really, when none of them were at all religious in any way, shape, or form. But they slept in pews and used old hymn pages for firestarters (Martha always felt bad about that). And they always had a blast if there was a pipe organ. Ianto liked the organs; he said they had the best vibrations.

Martha leaned over the keyboard.

"Do you know how to play this?" Martha asked.

"No. Though I did play piano when I was younger."

"Oh, me too!" Martha ran a finger over some keys. "Maybe it's a bit like that."

"Maybe," Tosh said.

"Hey!" Ianto called from somewhere on the main floor.

Martha peeped over the balcony.

"Hurry up!" he signed.

Martha rolled her eyes and stepped back.

"Tell him impatience gets him nowhere," Martha said to Tosh as she sat down at the organ's bench.

She managed to pump out Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, which was the only thing she could remember from her piano lessons from when she was six years old.

"How was that?" she asked.

"It was... nice."

"Liar."

She hopped up from the bench and ran back to the balcony. Ianto was standing with his hands pressed on a pew, taking in the last of the reverberations. He looked up and smiled that goddamned cheesy smile of his.

"Your turn," Martha told Tosh, and she went down the stairs to appreciate the vibrations with Ianto.

Anyways, that was them. Martha, Tosh, Ianto. Hopeful, clever, witty. It was like the wildest uni road trip with best mates (who also happened to be complete nutjobs) on steroids. Martha loved every second of those precious three months spent on the road.

But, like all things, it had to end.

They were in Virginia, and they'd split up. Martha to the single labour camp there, Tosh and Ianto to chase a signal Tosh had found a week ago. The plan was to meet back up in a church not too far from the camp.

Tosh and Ianto weren't there when she returned. They weren't there two hours later, when she
walked back to the camp to check for them there. They weren't there the following morning. They weren't there three days later.

By the fourth day, Martha couldn't wait any longer for them. She'd known since the moment she'd walked into the church to find them missing that she wasn't going to find them again, and there was no use in delaying the final leg of her trip just because she was sad. She didn't have time to be sad, not when she had a world to save.

So, she packed up all her emotions and sailed to Italy. She spent the last month of that horrible year in Europe before returning to Britain on the last day.

It was easy to fall for Tom Milligan. So, so easy, when her heart was missing such a large part that she was so desperate to fill with anything else. It was why she wanted to find him when the world restored itself.

But before she could find him, there was another man she wanted to see.

"I met some friends of yours," she said to him. "They were--"

"Don't," Jack interrupted. "They're alive again. Don't think about it."

She knew they'd died. That was the only possible explanation. But what did Jack know about it?

Unless...

"What happened?" she asked, feeling her world sliding from under her feet again.

"It didn't happen," Jack said.

But it did. It happened to her, even if it didn't to the rest of the world.

She asked Tish about it after.

Tish told her that the signal Tosh had found was a ruse from the Master, to lure them in and catch them. He'd gotten bored up in the Valiant and wanted some new entertainment, and the last remnants of Torchwood were just what he fancied.

"Jack didn't talk for two days after Toshiko... died," Tish whispered to Martha as they curled around each other on Tish's bed. "God. I thought that was bad, but..." She took a shuddering breath in. "Jack went... blank after... after Ianto. Weeks before he snapped out of it, and I only think that happened cause we were gonna fix the world."

"But what happened?" Martha asked. She was desperate to know, even if it killed her inside.

Tish shook her head fervently.

"Tish!"

"Does it matter? We fixed the world. They're alive. Jack's happy again."

"This isn't about Jack!"

"Just move on," Tish urged. "It really doesn't matter."

It mattered to Martha, because she lost her two best friends, and saving the world didn't change that. She often wondered if it was really Jack the Master had been punishing.
Music scenes inspired by the fact that I literally cannot fathom Ianto liking any particular type of music. Like, thinking of Ianto liking metal is just super hilarious to me. Also, I friggen love organs. There’s a little bit of projection going on.
Part of me is like: this is not realistic! Make it realistic! And the other is like: boy, am I sure glad fiction exists! So if this all sounds wildly outrageous... I understand.
Have a great day, and thanks for reading!
At nearly midnight, Mum was admitted to the hospital. Rhiannon got the call and was out the door by a quarter after.

She thanked God, or whoever was out there in the great, wide universe, for Mum's neighbor, Marion, who had heard the crash. Why was Mum rearranging her cupboards that late anyway? She supposed Mum had always been one of those stress-cleaners. Rhiannon hadn't inherited that trait, but she was fairly certain Ianto had.

Though maybe it would have been nice to have something to reduce her anxiety as she sat there, in the hospital, at one in the morning.

She hadn't gotten a hold of Ianto. She wasn't sure how to, really, because Ianto had gotten even more distant than usual in the past three months. She hadn't heard a word from him. It was like last year all over again, only, far more concerning. Because Mum was in the hospital.

Rhiannon accidentally fell asleep in one of those uncomfortable hospital waiting room chairs. One moment, it was two thirty and she was wondering if her brother's caffeine addiction would help at the moment, and the next, it was five fifteen and her neck hurt something awful. Thank god she hadn't dribbled or anything, though by the way the man across from her was looking at her, she may have snored a bit.

Around six was when she finally got to visit Mum. Mum was asleep. It was pointless. Rhiannon drove home at six thirty, then collapsed in bed and knew no more for eight hours straight.

She returned to the hospital that afternoon. Mum was awake, chatty, and overall far too chipper for someone in a hospital bed after collapsing the previous night. Then again, that was Mum, always pretending to be fine, even when she clearly wasn't. No wonder Rhiannon and Ianto were so repressed; they'd learned from the best.

Mum asked if Rhiannon had seen or heard from Ianto recently, and was slightly dismayed when Rhiannon admitted Ianto had yet to report back.

The doctors said she would be fine to leave, but they wanted to run some tests, so Mum agreed to stay another night so they could do whatever it is they wanted to do. Stick her with needles, run her over with radioactive scanners, shove her under machines. Mum told Rhiannon she was being over dramatic when she voiced that out loud. Then she herself went on to worry about those same things.

"How's your Mum?" Johnny asked when she came home.

"She's batty," Rhiannon said, "but otherwise alright."

"Good." He pecked her on the side of the face.

Sometimes, just sometimes, Johnny was the most perfect man in the whole wide world.

Unlike her brother, who still hadn't contacted her.

She picked Mum up from the hospital the next day, drove her home, and had tea (which she made,
because Mum was supposed to be resting, even though she was most certainly going to go do some gardening once Rhiannon left). Rhiannon promised to call before she left, because at least one of Mum's children should take care of her.

Rhiannon was very shocked to come home to find Ianto sitting at her table. David was talking to him in his shabby sign language. Ianto looked like he was trying not to laugh at his nephew. She stopped just to his left, folding her arms disapprovingly. He peered up at her, glee souring into worry.

"Is Mum okay?"

She shot him a dirty look.

"Where have you been?" she asked him.

"Work."

Of course, it was his bloody work. That boy was a workaholic. Whatever emotions he couldn't deal with were thrown into his labour, instead of processing them like a normal person. Mum's repression, at its finest, come back to bite her in the arse. Or maybe it was Dad's absent behavior, come back to haunt everyone. Rhiannon shuddered to think about that.

"I've been busy," Ianto signed, looking desperate to clear himself of blame. "Someone is gone. I have to do more work now."

To Rhiannon, that sounded like a weakly pathetic excuse. Someone was gone? Couldn't they have found someone else to cover for them? She rolled her eyes, then stopped David's hand, which was attempting, rather poorly, to pinch Ianto's wallet. David didn't even bother looking ashamed of himself when she shooed him away from the table. She got Ianto to stand up, too, and all but shoved his coat into his arms.

"Go see your Mum," she signed to him.

And then she frogmarched him out of the door and snapped it shut behind him.

She stood there on the other side of the door for a few moments before wrenching it back open. Ianto was still planted where she left him, blinking owlishly at her. She gave a laugh and stepped back out to hug him.

"I love you," she signed. "Now go visit Mum."

He kissed her cheek (and thus upgrading himself to a perfect man) and turned to leave obediently, and she leaned against the door frame and watched him go with a sinking feeling in her chest. Somehow, she felt like things were only getting worse.

Gwen had become more distant than ever. Rhys didn't know what it was that made her rush away constantly. She said it was her boss, that he'd up and scarpered, but Rhys didn't believe that. What kind of special ops team just lets someone disappear? And who thought it was a good idea to make Gwen their appointed leader? She was the newest, for god's sake! She had a life! Couldn't they just find some pencil-pushing arse to take over? Gwen said it didn't work like that, but Rhys couldn't see why not.

Oh, it wasn't all her fault. She did try. She tried very hard, and Rhys could tell how unenthusiastic she was to get called away in the middle of some good lasagne, or how she hated when she had to leave for work early in the morning. So, he knew he wasn't just being thrown aside, tossed away for
a job. He knew she wanted to be with him. It was a matter of could versus couldn't, not would versus wouldn't. That gave him some comfort, at least.

She promised it would die down eventually. She said the reason things were so hectic at the moment was not just because her boss skedaddled, but because there had been an upsurge in "dangerous crimes" ever since a "specific indecent" over three months ago. It was predicted to go down, she said, just... in another month or so. Rhys didn't want to wait a month. He missed Gwen. He missed waking every morning to find her snoring in bed beside him, he missed having uninterrupted sex, he missed eating a whole meal without any work getting involved. He wanted his old life back, the one that only had to share Gwen with a normal job working normal hours with normal people.

He didn't know what possessed him to propose. He loved Gwen, for sure, and he definitely did want to marry her, but this was not the time to be proposing. Not when everything was under constant pressure and when they couldn't find the time for each other. Maybe he just thought, deep down, that if he could tie Gwen to himself, then she'd suddenly be able to break free of all other commitment and go back to the way things were. Stupid, really, but he could hardly blame himself.

He tried to get down on one knee. Really. He did. But as soon as he got close to the ground, that pain in his back (the one he'd told Dav about earlier that week, and Dav said would go away in a night, the prick) twinged rather awfully. Gwen helped him to the couch and lovingly patted his head, looking thoroughly amused.

"Maybe you should get that checked out," she said. Rhys could hear the laugh in there.

"It's not funny," he grumbled. "I was gonna propose."

Her hand stopped working its way through his hair, and she stared at him like a deer in headlights.

"What?" she asked.

"Oh, bloody hell," he said. "It wasn't supposed to come out like that, I swear."

"No, no," she said, her eyes still wide and a hint of a smile creeping up on her lips. "Go on."

"Really? Now?"

"Rhys Williams," she said lowly. "If you don't finish that proposal, I will run off with Banana Boat."

"Better save you from yourself, then," Rhys chuckled.

With an awful lot of awkward maneuvering (the ring got stuck in his pocket), he finally popped the question. Even though she knew what was coming, she still squealed like a little girl, shoving the ring onto her finger. She held her hand up and started admiring the ring in the light, then held it to her face and made a suggestive leer. Rhys never loved her more than he did in that moment.

Things could only go downhill from there.

For the next week or so, things were perfect. Life was great. And then, one Wednesday, Gwen came home rather tetchy. She was so worn out and run dry, and Rhys just thought something bad happened at work. He said nothing, hoping it was a one-off.

Gwen didn't even come home the next night.

The night after that, the horrible mood was still present. They didn't say a single word to each other.
That Saturday, Rhys tried broaching the subject without actually... broaching the subject.

"Didn't come home last night," he said, loading chicken parmesan onto her plate. "Or the night before. Busy at work?"

She didn't even bother answering, merely staring wearily at something in the distance.

"I've, uh..." He cleared his throat. "I've been noticing you haven't practiced your sign language in a bit."

What he had subtly been hinting at was: "is your coworker still alive?" (because he wondered if she was just grieving, or something). He did not expect her to start laughing humourlessly, looking like a fucking zombie, with her dead eyes and false smile.

"Are you alright?" he asked, more than a fair bit alarmed.

She gave another wooden laugh. "Am I alright?"

God, the man really was dead, then, wasn't he?

"Gwen, I'm so sorry--"

"He's not dead," she spat. "Nobody's dead."

Rhys blinked. "Oh."

She eyed him for a minute, then sighed. "Why do I bother?"

Well, he certainly hadn't been expecting that. "I beg your pardon?"

"Why do I bother?" she repeated. "Four months. I've gone through four months of the same questions. Over and over. You think Ianto's dead. You have since the second month."

"Second month of what?" he asked, flabbergasted.

"You ask that, too." She sighed again, longer and harder. "I could tell you. You'll just forget it. You always do, when it resets. Or I could just wait another night and begin this again, without explaining a single thing, because it won't matter. We'll just have this same conversation again, and again, and again."

He couldn't think of a single word to say to that.

"I'm in a time loop, Rhys," she snapped.

To his sheer astonishment, she started asking all of Rhys's questions for him.

"What time loop?" The one Ianto fucking set off. 'Who's Ianto?' You meet him every third loop or so. You think I'm having an affair with him. I'm not. He's just the only one stuck in the bloody loop with me. 'Is he the deaf one?' Yeah, Rhys, get a clue. 'There's no such thing as time loops!' Get over yourself. 'There are more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio.' Yes, that was Shakespeare. I've had a lot of time on my hands."

She let out a huff and sat back.

"Any questions that you haven't already tried?" she asked tiredly.
He stared at her.
"What the fuck?"

"No, you've asked that one already."

"This isn't a game, Gwen!" he shouted. "What the hell is going on?"

She rolled her eyes. "We just went over this. Time loop. Me and Ianto. Next question."

"What--"

"Exactly do I think I'm playing at?" Gwen finished, and Rhys started to wonder if maybe, just maybe, she was telling the truth. "Nothing. Look, there's three hours before the reset. You can either get very angry and rant a bunch, or believe me and skip to the part where we have make-up sex."

Rhys felt his mouth open and close a few times.

Three hours later, on the couch, Gwen abruptly sat straight up.

"Oh my god," she hissed. "It's three past ten. It worked."

She crawled over him as he let out a tired groan, and dashed to the kitchen. He listened to her tinkering around for a second, and then suddenly, a glass was being pressed into his hands.

"Drink up."

He didn't even question why he was drinking this water. He just did it.

Suddenly, it was noon on Sunday, and Rhys had no idea how that happened. Two seconds ago, it had been the midday on Saturday. He shuffled out of the bedroom, very confused, to find Gwen sitting on the couch. With another man. And he had his arm around her shoulder, and she was cuddled up to his side.

"Rhys!" Gwen said brightly, shoving the man away from her.

At the very least, he was pleased that the pissy mood she had was gone. Whatever was that, anyway? He resigned to ask her about it later. At the moment, he was more concerned about the man Gwen was now hurriedly ushering out of the door.

"Who was that?" Rhys demanded.

"Coworker," Gwen said, in an offhand manner that he did not want to let slide.

"What was he--"

He was cut off by her lips ramming into his.

"I'm sorry," Gwen breathed when she drew back, "that I've been so grumpy lately. Something came up at work, but it's fine now. Everything's fine."

Then she kissed him again, and all thoughts of other men and cranky attitudes were thrown out the window.

Life started to even out after that. Gwen still came home at irregular hours and left in the middle of important events, but at least she wasn't upset. He did get the chance to ask her about it, days later,
but Gwen brushed it aside. She was going through a rough patch with one of her friends, she said. But she made it sound more less like they were fighting, and more like they'd been sharing a problem. Rhys could never figure out why.

Once or twice, he caught a glimpse of Gwen hanging around with that other man. It always from the corner of his eye, and he never saw them for more than a split second. He'd turn around for a better look, and they'd be gone. It didn't help theiggling feeling he had that Gwen was having an affair. He always chastised himself. Was he so insecure that he thought Gwen was sleeping with everyone from her work? At least her boss was gone, so no worrying about him.

Unfortunately, that did not last. The very night Rhys learned he had gotten the managing job he'd applied for, Gwen came rushing home. He thought it was to celebrate his promotion, but no. Gwen's bastard of a boss just happened to show up. Why was it that Rhys was always playing second fiddle to that man?

"He does know you're engaged, right?" he asked, cutting over her ramblings.

She paused. "What?"

"Your boss."

"What do you mean?" she said.

He knew her nervous smile when he saw it.

"Only, you'll be busy. With wedding planning," he said, watching her uneasy grin relax into a real smile. "He can't expect so much of you now."

"Oh," she breezed, "I'm sure he knows that. No need to worry."

"Right," he said.

They smiled at each other for a minute, each surely hiding their own true thoughts.

"I don't suppose you want to invite him to the wedding," he said.

"No, I don't think my boss needs to come," she said, too quickly.

He waited another moment before asking: "Any of your other coworkers you want to invite?"

She gave a shrug. "Not... particularly. Now, about that promotion!"

He sighed quietly to himself. Why couldn't things go back to normal?

Mum's death was unexpected, and Ianto arrived exactly twelve and a half minutes too late.

It was like Rhiannon couldn't breathe, like the air was being sucked from her lungs. Then Ianto burst through the doors, and she had to force herself to draw that air back into her chest, because now it was her baby brother who couldn't breathe. She had to be strong for him. God knows she couldn't do it for herself.

She immediately pulled Ianto to her, gathering him close as he began to sob. She could only contain her own tears for so long before she broke down as well.

Time blurred after that. One moment, she was holding Ianto and weeping, the next, she was sitting
on a bench in the hall. Ianto was sitting next to her, cradling a cup of coffee in one hand. He sniffled slightly and stared at the tiled floor. Where did he get that coffee from, anyway? Did coffee just follow him around? Rhiannon chuckled mirthlessly at that thought. She was grateful Ianto couldn't hear that, because then she'd have to explain that everything was wrong and nothing made sense and she couldn't get a hold of herself.

Instead, she caught his attention and asked: "Where did you get that?"

Ianto blinked down at his coffee, as if just noticing it for himself. He looked between the cup and Rhiannon, back and forth, back and forth. She was sure he was going to start crying again, so she scooted closer to him and rested her head on his shoulder.

She took Ianto home with her that night. He didn't say a single word on the drive to Newport, staring out the window at the sky the entire ride. The first time he said anything was when they were entering the (shockingly) quiet house, and his mobile vibrated. He fished it out of his pocket, stared at it, and then quickly stowed it away again.

At her questioning look, he signed: "Nothing important."

She was fairly certain he was lying.

Johnny and the kids appeared then, and she was oh-so grateful that, for once in all of their lives, they weren't being obnoxious little arseholes. Probably not the kindest thing to say about her husband and children, but...

Johnny pulled her into a hug and she lost it again. She allowed herself a short, good cry before prying herself away from him and turning to the kids.

"Is Nan dead?" Mica asked, with frightened eyes and a sad face.

"Yeah, sweetheart," Rhiannon barely choked out. God, what else could she say?

She embraced her daughter, holding on tight as little hands clutched at her arms. She pressed a kiss into Mica's hair, and out of the corner of her eye, saw David lurking just to the left. Wrenching an arm free and holding it out, she let David shuffle into her hold, tears falling freely down his cheeks. She continued to hug them, to hold them tight, as Johnny awkwardly reached out and patted Ianto on the shoulder. Ianto gave him a smile that was more of a grimace, and Rhiannon had to burrow her face into her children as the crying restarted.

Ianto spent the night on her couch. He protested at first, but he was already here and she was not driving him back to Cardiff, not tonight. Though she soon learned why he was so insistent on leaving.

Near midnight, she was woken by a loud shout. More of a scream, really, and Rhiannon dashed out of her room to see which of her kids it was. Upon seeing both of their confused and slightly terrified faces, she sent them to bed, and sought out Ianto in the sitting room.

He was sitting on the couch, head in his hands. She stood off to the side for a bit, unsure if she should say something to him or not. She was just about to leave when he noticed her. He immediately sat up straight, looking cautious.

"Sorry."

"Are you alright?" she asked.
He nodded, and she suspected he was lying again.

"Bad dream," he signed.

She could only wonder what sort of life he lived to have nightmares like that.

He left quickly the next morning, before anyone could bring the subject up.

Ianto was back and forth between Cardiff and Newport for the next few days as they arranged the funeral. Rhiannon did most of the work, because she knew more about funeral arranging after helping Mum plan Dad's. Ianto helped with things, like copying out addresses in his neat print and picking out flowers that Mum would've liked, but Rhiannon did all the reserving and calling and planning.

Two days before the funeral, when Rhiannon was over at his flat to go over the shared budgeting, they got into a fight.

Ianto set down the spreadsheet he had printed and looked over at her. She frowned questioningly.

"I don't want to go to the funeral," he signed.

For a moment, she couldn't comprehend that at all. What the fuck did he mean, he didn't want to go to the funeral?

"What?" she asked.

Ianto began to sign it again, but she stopped him with a furious shake of her head.

"You did not just say that," she signed, her rage bleeding through. "Mum dies and you can't go to her funeral? That is so wrong and cruel. What did Mum do to earn that? What kind of son are you?"

She jumped as his hand slammed down on the counter.

"Rhiannon," he snapped angrily, and she recoiled.

In this family, Ianto's voice was a weapon. The mark of a vile tyrant and his unlawful rule, come around to make them remember that this? This is what happened when they failed Ianto. This is what happened, and it was their fault. Mum and Rhiannon never stopped Dad from his constant torment of assimilate, assimilate, assimilate, and their guilt was the consequence. Ianto rarely ever used this weapon, but it was quite effective. He could hold it over their heads for all eternity, and there was nothing Rhiannon or Mum (when she was alive) could have done about it, because that was what they deserved.

"I'm sorry," Rhiannon signed, and, like always, she didn't know if she was apologizing for then or for now.

She let the rest of her seething rage seep away as she concluded that there was probably a reason he didn't want to attend the funeral.

"Why don't you want to go?" she asked, attempting to keep it light.

He hesitated slightly. "Too many people. I want to mourn her on my own."

She stared at him. While she knew for a fact that his excuse was nowhere near what he really felt, she still couldn't believe he had chosen such a pathetic one to relate to her.
"Please come," she signed, choosing slight manipulation rather than brute force. "I can't do this alone."

Ianto glowered at her and did not look convinced. She kept trying to persuade him the rest of the visit, but by the time she left, she wasn't sure where he stood. She didn't know how she was going to convince him before the funeral.

She was deeply lost in thoughts on how to cajole him that she almost ran into someone while leaving the building. He was extremely handsome, and he beamed down at her as he apologised. She watched him continue into the block of flats, pondering his anachronistic coat and American accent.

The day of the funeral came, and Rhiannon hadn't been sure Ianto was going to show up until he did.

Most of the other guests had already shown up when Ianto walked in. As he began to survey the room, Rhiannon surveyed him. She would say he was dressed nice if she didn't already know that suits were his normal attire. And he looked more forlorn than in grief. She gave him a smile (or as much of one as she could muster) when his gaze stopped on her. He brushed passed everyone as he crossed the room to her.

"It's good that you came," she told him.

He scowled lightly, but ultimately did not respond.

She went a whole five seconds without saying anything.

"See? It isn't bad." She knew she was goading him on a little.

"They don't care about Mum," he signed.

She blinked. "Why do you think that?"

"Look at them," he signed.

At first, she didn't understand what he meant. Everyone appeared to be mournful. Some were at Mum's casket, paying final respects. Others were telling anecdotes about her. It didn't seem to her like they didn't care about Mum. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Then she started catching the glances. They were dressed as pitying expressions for the two now-orphaned children, but Rhiannon had seen too many of those looks in her life to be fooled. Pity was hardly a good disguise for pity.

"They look at me and they don't see Ianto Jones, or Mum's son." The bite to his signing matched the bitterness written on his face. "In their mind, I'm the deaf kid Mum was stuck with. I'm the person who changed Mum."

"That's not true," she protested, but she believed that just as much as he did.

"I know there was more in her life than just me, but I was still a part of it. If they don't care about me, they don't care about Mum." He shook his head. "I want to remember Mum for who she really was. These people don't."

She eyed him sadly. He was right. In the end, it had always just been Rhiannon, Mum, and Ianto against the world. No one had really been very good at accepting them. No one had really tried. How many of these people were actively involved in Mum's life when they were kids? God, she
remembered so many of her cousin's birthday parties where the three of them had sat in the corner by themselves. And in the moment, those same relatives who had ignored them were here, acting as if they were someone so very special to Mum.

Now that he pointed it out, it was so damn tiring.

"Also," Ianto signed, then paused.

He took a glance around the room, evidently searching for the right words.

"I'm proud to be deaf, and I'm proud to be Mum's son," he signed at last. "It's hard to be with people who think I shouldn't. I know that's selfish, when it's Mum's funeral."

She reached out and placed a hand on his arm. He looked down at it briefly, then away, and she rubbed his arm gently. She wasn't so sure he was being selfish. It was hard to grieve for someone when everyone else was grieving for an entirely different (and completely imaginary) person.

Ianto really ruined Mum's funeral for Rhiannon. Now she was stuck dealing with Aunt Rhonwen and her teenage son, also named Ianto, and trying not to think how hurt that had made Mum when the kid was born. Sure, his name was technically "Ifan," but when everyone called him "Ianto," it made certain other people feel very insignificant. Rhiannon wanted to kick the both of them out of the chapel when they came to pay their "respects."

The service itself was... alright. She supposed she only got what she paid for. Anyways, that wasn't even the real part of the funeral, not for her. It was always about the burial.

Rhiannon, because she couldn't trust herself to delve too deeply within her thoughts, searched the faces of her loved ones as they lowered Mum into the dirt. Johnny kept stealing glances out of the corner of his eye to Rhiannon, concern wrought on the lines of his face, bless his heart. She slid closer to his side and took his hand, and turned her gaze to Mica. Little Mica, with her lost eyes and trembling lip. As she threw her flower into the grave, she peered over the side of the hole to watch it drift down, and she jerked back quickly when it landed. Rhiannon put a hand on her shoulder when she returned. David was standing off to the side by himself, his tears betraying the perfect soldier he was pretending to be. Ianto, on the other hand, had more experience with acting emotionless, and was pulling it off far better than his nephew. While Rhiannon was sure the stoicism was deceiving everyone else, she could still see that little toddler who needed his Mum because he couldn't understand why scraped knees hurt so badly.

It took Johnny's hand moving to wrap around her shoulders for her to realize that she was starting to cry. Christ, she missed Mum.

There was a gathering after the burial. When everyone left the cemetery for it, Ianto stayed behind. Rhiannon couldn't blame him. She assumed this was his chosen time to truly mourn, and moved on with her family. She'd see him later, anyway.

The odd thing was, she saw that same handsome, grey-coated American from earlier that week walking into the cemetery as she walked out.

She wasn't sure what to make of that.

Back when Gwen had been promoted or whatever, Andy Davidson hadn't known a thing about it. Not that she was leaving him, not what her job was, not when he'd ever see her again. The only thing he had known was that she was gone, and he was without a partner or a friend.
In her stead, he'd been paired with Mark. Bloody Mark. Fat lot of good Mark was. Mark didn't know heads from tails, and was a shitty copper. Couldn't do his job to save his life.

Needless to say, Andy's life had gone down the drain significantly. He was lonely, he was behind payments on his flat, he had no... girlfriend... and he had the worst partner on the force.

And then, oh, and then. He started observing Gwen popping up at crime scenes with her gang, looking all prim and proper, acting like she was the queen of the goddamn world. Suddenly, not only was his life shitty, so was all his nice and rosy-coloured memories of the woman. That kind friend she had always been to him? Seemed it went running off on that high horse of hers.

So, there Andy was, decidedly not having the time of his life, when he began to notice things about that new little gang of Gwen's. Like, they always showed up when weird shit had gone down. And, they always talked in hushed voices and told the police officers on the scene a pack of lies every single time. Or that they drove in a fucking SUV with "Torchwood" emblazoned upon the side.

Cardiff knew about Torchwood. Well, not really. Nobody really knew what Torchwood was, or what they did. But people had speculations. Government spies. Wales's own Area 51. Secret police. The rumours were endless. Andy chose not to believe just one, but stole bits and pieces from each theory, forming one of his own. One that made more sense than "the people who record all of our private activities and sell it to aliens." Seriously. That had actually been on someone's blog. Idiot.

What Andy has accepted to put his faith in is that this Torchwood is like a silent Sherlock Holmes gang. They take the odd cases, and the police let them. Then they solve it with their massive intellect and even larger egos, and never speak of it again.

He once made the mistake of telling that to Mark. Mark laughed at him and told him that was stupid. What did Mark know, anyway? Nothing. Mark knew nothing.

Bloody Mark.

Andy began to quickly take note of everything Torchwood did. Which wasn't much that he could see. Everything important must be done behind closed doors, because, from what he could tell, all they ever did at a crime scene was boss people around and stand around in brooding poses.

There were four people on the team. Two women and two men. There was Gwen, obviously. She was the newest, and, rather shockingly, the only native team member. Kind of weird to have an organization based in Cardiff with next to no Welsh people. The other woman was an attractive Asian woman, who Andy suspected was the smartest, because she seemed to be the only one that did any work. There was a grumpy Londoner, and he did the least obvious work. Most of the time, he stood around back, making nasty comments and swearing a lot. The final member was the American with the body and face of a god. Captain Jack Harkness. He was the king of the brooding squad, both because of his superior brooding skills and because he was literally their leader.

Out of curiosity alone, Andy once asked around the force to see if anyone knew anything more about them. Nobody did. The only offered information was that Captain Harkness would often flirt with a lot of people. A few of the girls mentioned that, much to their chagrin, he hadn't been doing that as of late. Other than that, nobody knew anything. Although, there was a betting pool as to who was the worst person on the team. It was a toss-up between the Londoner and the American on who was rudest, but Gwen was thrown in the mix solely because everyone felt a bit snubbed that she moved up in life, while they were still stuck in squad cars, breaking up bar fights and writing tickets. Everyone generally ignored the other lady, because she generally ignored them. In a nice way. She simply left them alone to do her own thing, whereas the rest of the team were quite snobbish in the way they disregarded the police.
There was a period of time, roughly about four months, when Captain Harkness disappeared. Nobody had a clue where he went. Everyone else was just getting pissed because apparently Gwen had taken over for him, and now they really felt spurned.

When the newest member was spotted, it caused almost instant commotion. He didn't hear anything about it online, because the bloggers and the conspiracy theorists didn't actually pay close enough attention to see what was really going on, not when they could stick to pulling bullshit theories out of their arses. Instead, he learned from all of the people still invested in the stupid betting pool (that somehow hadn't petered out of existence when the Captain left).

"I think it's rather foolish of you to be investing so much time in people who are just doing their jobs," Mark said, upon being asked his opinions.

"Uuugh," Andy said, letting his head fall back, slamming it repeatedly into their car's headrest.

"But--"

Andy snapped his head back up straight, ogling at Mark.

"--from what Anna tells me," Mark continued, "he's even more mysterious than the others. Doesn't say a word. Keeps himself to himself. Barely even shows up, maybe only to do a little bit of cleanup. And he wears a suit, for some reason."

"Huh," was all Andy could say, partly because Mark wasn't being a right prat and partly he didn't know what to do with Mark's information.

The betting pool suddenly roared back to life. Nobody knew what to make of this new character, but they were going to find out, no matter what.

"I'm going to figure out what this guy's deal is," Andy promised Anna.

"There's fifty quid on whoever gets there first," she said.

"Keep your money," he scoffed (though he'd later regret that). "I just want to know, you know?"

She rolled her eyes. "Whatever."

That had been about halfway through Captain Harkness's disappearance. For the next two-ish months, Andy worked hard to get his arse assigned to all the weird cases. What did it get him? Three glimpses of the man. That was all. All the other team members were in the way, or they were already clearing up, or something. He tried following their stupid SUV once, just to see if he could spot the man again. It did not end well.

"You're obsessed," Anna said, eyeing his drenched hair.

"Thanks for that," he griped, swiping a sleeve at the water droplets threatening to fall from the tip of his nose.

The Captain did return, eventually. In fact, the night he did, Andy got the closest to the team's newest member that he'd ever been. It was actually by accident. Everyone thought it was just a normal murder. If people normally got shoved off rooves, that was. Andy got to watch the whole team, plus new guy and, shockingly, Captain Harkness, ducked under the tape, and then back out. Andy stopped Gwen when she thanked him, hoping the rest of the team would, too, but no such luck. Everyone kept on walking as Gwen lied him about later informing him if it was a true spooky-do.
Andy slammed the car door shut and pointedly ignored Mark when he turned to face Andy.

"Well?" Mark asked, tone just shy of smug.

"Well' what?" Andy snapped crossly.

"Did you get your big breakthrough? Find any dirt on the new kid?"

"Oh, shut up."

**Bloody Mark.**

Three or so weeks after that was when Andy finally had his chance.

Something that Gwen called a "crab" (Andy knew what crabs were; that was *not* a crab) was being bodily shoved into the back of that ridiculous SUV of theirs by the cranky Londoner and Captain Harkness, while the Asian lady clutching the weirdest device Andy had ever seen and giving instructions to the two of them. Gwen was off chatting with Mark, undoubtedly spinning him the same web of lies that she gave Andy. And the new guy? He was tapping something onto a PDA, glancing occasionally down at the spot the "crab" used to be.

Andy saw his chance and he took it.

"Hey," he called.

The man did not look up.

"Excuse me," Andy said.

The man didn't move.

"Sir!" Andy tried again, starting to get fed up.

The man still didn't acknowledge him, so Andy closed the gap between the him and the suited man. Andy was four steps away from him when he finally looked up. He instantly scowled at Andy, and Andy bristled. The *nerve.*

"Hey!" Andy said shortly. "Where do you Torchwood people get off, with your high and mighty attitudes? I've just about had enough of--"

"Andy, Andy, Andy!"

He frowned, peering over his shoulder at Gwen, who was hurrying over.

"Andy," she repeated reached him. She put a hand on his arm and gestured to the suited man. "Before you do anything stupid, this is Ianto Jones. Andy, Ianto is deaf."

"What?" Andy asked.

He swivelled his head to gape at this Ianto Jones guy. Ianto Jones was still scowling down at him, but this time with a rather annoyed look on his face. Andy turned his attention back to Gwen.

"You're not serious."

"Andy," Gwen warned.
Consider Andy amazed when Ianto Jones started moving his hands and Gwen not only understood, but returned with her own gestures. Since when did Gwen know sign language? The shock diminished quickly when Andy grasped that they were probably talking about him, judging by the irritated expression on Ianto Jones's face and the apologetic one on Gwen's.

"Hey," Andy said defensively, not liking whatever it was they were saying about him.

Gwen paused to glower at him, and Ianto Jones took the opportunity to roll his eyes with great exaggeration and make one last motion: a quick double rap of his fist to the right of his forehead. Then he turned on his heel and ditched Gwen and Andy for the rest of his team, who were staring at Andy with varying expressions of disapproval. Captain Harkness's was by far the worst.

"So, Captain Hotshot goes on holiday and you hire a deaf guy," Andy remarked to Gwen when the team had returned their focus to whatever they were doing. "How does that work ou-- Ow!"

He rubbed profusely at his arm, where she had just punched him. Hard.

"That hurt," he whined.

"You are such an arse, Andy Davidson," she spat.

"Oh, I'm the arse?" Andy asked, dropping his hand from his arm. "You swan off and gang up with that lot, not a word to me, and I'm the arse?"

"When you say stupid things like that, yes!"

"It was a real question!"

"It was crass and rude!"

They glared at each other for a minute before he relented.

"Fine," he said. "I just want to know why you'd choose him to replace your Captain Universe, and not me."

"Ianto was already on the team before I joined," Gwen said. "There were no replacements."

"Right."

Months worth of searching high and low for clues, and all for him to learn that he wouldn't have been offered the job, anyways.

"Wait," Andy said. "Then why have I never seen him?"

"He prefers admin duties."

"No wonder," he scoffed.

"Andy!"

"Sorry, sorry!"

She glared at him some more.

"You really wanted a job?" she asked skeptically.
"Well, look, it's not every day that I get to do exciting things like you lot, now, is it?" He shrugged. "Besides. It's been a while since we've talked. Look at you! Engaged and all. And now you know sign language, too! I've been missing lots of your life."

Gwen's head tilted to the side and she smiled kindly. "Oh, Andy, that's sweet of you. But you don't have to give up your job just because you miss me."

Andy blinked and opened his mouth to tell her that wasn't his point, not really, but she patted his arm and stepped back.

"Look, I've got to go. I promise, we'll catch up later, alright?"

"Alright," he sighed, and she beamed.

"Great!"

She had taken all of five steps toward her team before turning back to him.

"Oh, and you're invited to the wedding!"

He watched with a sigh as she finished catching up to her new friends. She hooked her arm through Ianto Jones's and proceeded to relate something to the Captain. Andy shook his head to himself and started walking away.

Bloody Gwen and her bloody wedding. Bloody Ianto Jones.

Bloody Torchwood.

Feeding off of memories was... tricky, to say the least. Memories were slippery. Breakable. One false move and poof, everything was disorganized, chaotic, and just plain wrong.

That was why Adam had to be careful. Why he had to be exact and delicate on what he laced in and what he moved around. Otherwise, he'd end up with something like this.

Gwen was remembering wrong. She couldn't remember Rhys, because Rhys was something Adam had moved ever so slightly too far to the left of where he was supposed to be, just so that Adam could burrow himself into her mind. It was an amateur mistake, and he couldn't believe he made it, but there they were. At least he was working on fixing it.

Rhys was having a worse time than others Adam had accidentally written out. Gwen had a gun and knew how to use it. Most of his victims didn't have that. Also, most of his victims tried to listen to reason when it was presented to them. Gwen was more stubborn than most, it would seem. She didn't even want to believe Rhys was her soon-to-be husband. If Adam didn't already know the spot Rhys used to occupy in her mind, he'd say she didn't even want him that much. But Gwen was used to showing everyone and everything just how much she did want Rhys, so this was a bit harder to deal with than usual.

He went back in her mind and tried to slot Rhys back into place. It was like trying to wedge a door shut when a bit of carpet or something got rammed in the way. Adam's small sliver in Gwen's mind was taking up barely fractions of too much room, and so Rhys couldn't be aligned back properly. Adam did his best with what he had. Hopefully, things would slowly come back to Gwen. Not perfectly, of course; they'd be slightly skewed, but at least they'd be there, which was certainly better than the alternative.
But that wasn't the end of his problems.

Jack's memory failure was not Adam's fault, actually. It was just that Jack's memories were so convoluted, so unkempt and messy, that even the faintest whisper of Adam's workings would have sent it spinning out of control. So, it certainly was no fault of Adam when repressed memories unfurled right in front of Jack's eyes after Adam choked himself in there.

The good news was, the problem Jack had was not as condemning as Gwen's. Adam wouldn't be found out because of some unearthed past. That could be blamed on anything: stress, the right trigger, even time itself. Gwen, on the other hand, was told by Owen that her memory loss might be from sex. Sex. So, harder to trace Jack's issues back to Adam.

But that was if it was only Jack alone. Both Gwen and Jack having memory troubles? Not good. At all. Things could be noticed, and Adam could be discovered. That was why Adam had to go trudging through a fucking sewer to find Jack. Adam had to rectify Jack's problem before he told someone and raised suspicion.

Thank god it was raining. Cleared the sewer stench out of his nose as he followed Jack. Though he was much less thankful for Jack's petulant, broody attitude. Things would go a lot faster if Jack would just cooperate for two seconds.

"It was meant to be buried!" Jack was saying. Denial seemed to be a good friend of Jack's. "I buried the memory over a hundred and fifty years ago! Why now?"

If Adam could just zap it right, like he did with Gwen, he would, all so he could save himself the trouble of dealing with this. Unfortunately, it would likely damage Jack's mind further, and Adam wouldn't have anything to slowly feed off of, then.

"Well, maybe it's time," Adam said. "Maybe, up until now, your subconscious was protecting you. But you can't block out the past forever."

A weak attempt, but it was the best he could do with manual convincing.

He got Jack to work through the memory with him, and, for a moment, things were looking brighter for Adam. But then Jack got so damn emotional, like Jack always seemed to be, and it got in the way of Adam's fixing.

"Balls," Adam muttered to himself in the tennis court as the rain poured down.

Then he flickered.

Just barely. Hardly noticeable to the naked eye, but it was there. He could feel it. Someone was starting to remember, and not Adam's way of remembering, no. This was true memory, shining through.

At first, he panicked. Gwen? Or Jack? Not Jack. Jack would've turned back already and probably beaten the shit out of Adam. So, Gwen. He mentally reached out to her, to his place in her lovely little brain. She was crying, and he knew it, but it wasn't her. It was someone else.

Frantically, he searched his links to the others. It wasn't his beautiful Toshiko. It wasn't that snotty Owen.

Ianto.

Damnit.
Adam raced to the Hub, running over possibilities in his head. How would he fix this?

He took immense pleasure in making Ianto jump.

"What's wrong?" Adam asked, still playing the "concerned colleague" card until he knew more.

Ianto leapt from the sofa and stared wildly at Adam.

"My diary," he said. "You're not in it. Everyone else is."

He walked backwards as Adam walked forwards, but they both stopped short when Ianto started signing a few gestures, a testing look in his eye as he watched Adam's response.

"What?" Adam asked after a pause.

"You don't know how to sign," Ianto said. "How come you don't, when you've been here so long?"

The truth was, Adam could place himself in memories, and he could feed off their essence, but he was completely unable take them. Adam couldn't learn how to sign lickety-split like that. But the other truth was that he also didn't care.

His hand winked in and out of existence. He had to think of something, and fast.

"Oh, Ianto," he laughed. "Don't you think you're overstating your importance, just a little? You expect everyone to bend to your will?"

There was only a split second where the hurt revealed itself on Ianto's face, and then it was gone, replaced by a dark and interrogative look. Adam had to hand it to the man, he was very good at pushing aside emotion for professionalism.

"What are you?" Ianto asked.

Adam lunged forward, grasping Ianto by the lapels and heaving him up against the water tower.

"Cross me and I will fill you full of fake memories until your head is on fire, because that's how I exist," he hissed.

"Gwen? What did you do to her?"

Adam had to give it to the man, he did know how to sleuth things out.

"Memory is a very delicate thing." He didn't know why he was explaining. Maybe it was because he was tired already. Maybe because Ianto wouldn't remember it, anyway. "Feeding myself in wiped other memories out. It's a side effect of what I have to do in order to survive."

"Jack has to know," Ianto said, ever the man of blind faith.

Adam reached out again, slamming Ianto back once more, this time bringing a hand to his forehead.

"Remember this," Adam said.

It was only an instant for Ianto, not even a second in his time. It was lifetimes, to Adam.

He saw every crevice, every nook and cranny of Ianto's mind. It held so much, and much to Adam's immense pleasure, it was mainly pain.
That was how Adam worked. He started with the gut emotions, the strong, deep, primal feelings, and worked his way into those memories. It was why Gwen couldn't remember the man she loved and why Jack's most painful memory was returned to him. Adam chose the most important things and went from there. And Ianto was filled with many, many painful things.

Oh, how Adam could play around in that mind. A crooked father, a horrid childhood, a rubbish life. So little love. So little of much else other than pain, really. The only lights in that glorious darkness were barely stopgaps to what lay beyond. While they were currently bright, shining points, Adam could dim them again. A loving mother and sister? Two additional sister figures? Whatever Jack was? Easy.

Let Ianto become a killer of women. Let him give in to those dark urges his father should have bestowed upon him. Let him trust Adam more than Jack with this newfound secret.

It felt so good, to plant those memories. Ianto gave him one hell of a fight, but it was worth every second of it.

"We know the rot in your heart," Adam said. "You crave flesh."

"No," Ianto pleaded, oh-so softly, oh-so painfully. "Please."

Adam delved deeper that time, sticking those memories in firmer than he had with Gwen or Jack. Ianto kept crying out, but there was not a soul about to hear him scream. Save for Adam, of course, who was enjoying it all with great delight.

In a surge of sheer bliss, he grabbed Ianto's face with a hand and yanked him in for a kiss, sucking in that aftertaste of those memories.

"You know," he said, tucking Ianto's cold, clammy head under his chin and twisting at Ianto's hair, "I forgot what a rush it is, feeding in the bad stuff."

He patted Ianto's forehead and released him, letting Ianto gasp and pant and sob all on his own. Adam had better things to do than listen to the man go insane. He really didn't want to give Ianto a second thought, really.

What did he care if Ianto lost himself in the throes of this newly-formed madness? Who was Ianto to him? The man who lurked in the shadows? He was nothing. Nobody.

However, Adam severely miscalculated what role Ianto played to Jack, or anyone else, and that, in the end, was his downfall.

On August nineteenth, Rhiannon dragged her children and husband away from the telly, shoved them in the car, and drove them to Cardiff. All three of them whined the entire car ride and did not stop until they had parked near the block of flats. She hauled her children out of the car and booted her husband out of the passenger seat, and then marched them all towards Ianto's flat.

Of course, they might not have known it was Ianto's flat. She'd never taken them to his flat before, as evident by Mica's constant string of questions.

For example: when Rhiannon pressed the doorbell, Mica tugged on her trousers.

"Why are you ringing the doorbell?" she asked.

"So that Uncle Ianto knows we're here."
"But Mum," Mica said. "Uncle Ianto can't hear it."

"No, but he has some very special lights set up, so that he can see when someone rings the doorbell."

If he ever bothered to pay attention to the doorbell, that was. She fully expected to be waiting a good ten minutes before he realized they were there.

"But Mum--"

"Mica," Rhiannon sighed.

She nearly jumped out of her skin when the door swung open, revealing Ianto holding two mugs of steaming coffees in one hand.

Ianto ogled at them. He slowly looked down to the coffees, then up at them. Then down at the coffees again. Then back up. Rhiannon took it that they were not at all who he was expecting. She gave him a smile, half apologetic, half totally not. He blinked once before stepping out of the way of the door, allowing Mica and David to plow their way through. Johnny followed closely behind, and he gave Ianto a resounding thump on the back as he passed. Ianto winced slightly.

"Happy birthday," Rhiannon signed as she stepped over the threshold.

His response was a long sigh as he handed her one of the coffees. It was black. He definitely hadn't been expecting her, then.

She took a sip and tried not to grimace (really, coffee was only good with milk), and he took an alarmingly long draught from his mug. It reminded her of Ainsley "Don't Talk to Me Until I've Had My Coffee" Hughes from her last job. Or maybe it was the other way around. Either way, she half expected Ianto's eye to twitch until he'd had his third mug.

"You're addicted," she told him.

He took another drink and she rolled her eyes.

"Idiot." She shook her head and turned to David. "Where are the presents?"

"Well..."

"Did you leave it in the car?"

"Weeeell..."

"Really? You had one job." She sighed. "Go with Dad and get them, please."

Johnny complained, but after a meaningful glare from Rhiannon, took David to retrieve the gifts from the car. Ianto asked Rhiannon what was going on, but she told him to wait and see. Ianto then rolled his eyes and polished off the rest of his coffee in one go. She gave a disapproving tut and he raised an eyebrow and went to get more coffee.

When he returned, Mica stepped in front of him, eyes big, wide, and full of inquiries.

"Where are the lights?" she asked him, and Rhiannon tried, and failed, not to be disappointed by the lack of signing.

Ianto stared down at her, and then up at Rhiannon.
"Doorbell," Rhiannon explained.

That only caused Ianto to frown confusedly, and by the time he raised his hands to say something, David and Johnny were returning with the two gifts. Ianto drowned himself in his coffee upon seeing this. Rhiannon was beginning to suspect that he was not only addicted to coffee, but treating it as a substitute for alcohol. Watching him drink that coffee was a lot like watching someone do a shot. At least his addiction wouldn't lead to what Dad's did.

"Happy Birthday," she repeated as she handed him the larger box.

Ianto took it with a slightly pained look in his eye. She knew he didn't like being fussed over. Too bad. He could deal with one day of being appreciated. God knows he needed it, by the looks of it.

He carefully unwrapped the crinkled paper (Rhiannon glowered at David; she'd watched him pick at it half of the car ride), drawing it out longer than was really necessary. Mum all over again. She tried to make everyone reuse wrapping paper. Ianto, thankfully, set it aside for the bin. She almost sighed when he pulled out a pocket knife to cut open the tape on the box. Why did he have a pocket knife on him, anyway?

The look on his face when he pulled out the two coffee mugs was priceless. A small corner of his lip curled up, and then twitched as he tried to reign it back in.

"I thought you hated my coffee habits."


He lifted them up to the light and studied them closer, then weighed them in his hand.

"Thank you," he signed when he put them down

"Please never use them."

He rolled his eyes. She half expected him to dump his coffee from his other mug into the new one just to spite her.

David shoved the second gift over to him. To Rhiannon's dismay, the paper was even more crumpled than the last gift. Last thing Mum would ever wrap, and David had wrinkled the pristine folds.

"It's from Mum. She bought it a while ago."

Ianto looked at her, inscrutable and stony, before giving a brusque nod.

If he had been careful when unwrapping Rhiannon's gift, then he was absolutely fastidious and assiduous now, going to painstaking lengths to preserve the already torn paper. He held onto it for the briefest of moments before setting it with the other paper. He lifted the lid of the box and peered down.

Rhiannon watched as his face contorted for less than a second, then smoothed out into the blankest expression she had ever seen on him.

"She knew red was your colour, too."

He nodded and slipped the silk tie through his fingers. His face crumpled a second time as it hit the
sunlight, making the red shine even richer. He took a shuddering breath and started to slide his blue tie off, replacing it with the new one. The red clashed with the cobalt of his shirt, but he didn’t seem to mind one bit.

“She didn’t hate the suits altogether,” Rhiannon signed. “She thought they looked handsome on you.”

He lost it then. She moved around the counter to him and wrapped him in her arms. He buried his face in her shoulder and sobbed. She held him tightly as he cried, thinking of all the things that were probably running through his mind. Like how he never got to see Mum before she died. How he wouldn’t ever see her again. How it was her that was supposed to be here, not Rhiannon, like she had been every year on his birthday, without fail. How he missed her so much.

When he regained control of himself (or, more likely, was able to replace the impassive façade he always had), he drew back from her and exhaled deeply. Rhiannon rubbed her own tears away from her face and gave him a weak smile.

“She knew you loved her,” she signed. ""And she loved you. Even when you made mistakes. Or when you forgot about us, or when you were gone for Christmas. She still loved you."

He didn't look like he was going to cry again, but it was a near thing. "I miss her."

"I miss her too."

They said nothing else for a while, each remembering Mum in their own way.

"Thank you," he signed eventually.

He then signed it again to Johnny and the kids, who were standing in the corner of the kitchen. Johnny was looking bored and the kids were fighting quietly over something David had in his hands. Rhiannon gaped at them. She had forgotten about them entirely.

"David!" she said belatedly.

"What?"

"Leave your sister alone! Give her back whatever you stole!"

"I haven't got anything!" he protested, and Mica harrumphed.

"David," she warned.

"Fine."

She shook her head as David passed back a balled-up sheet of paper that she recognized as the one Mica had coloured that morning. David began to pout slightly, while Mica looked far too overjoyed for receiving back a simple leaf of paper.

Ianto caught her eye, a grin slowly spreading on his face.

"Remember when that was us?"

Rhiannon scoffed. "We weren't like that."

He gave her a pointed look. "You told me that butterflies made lots of noise."
"I forgot about that."

She bit her lip, trying not to laugh. He had been young and gullible, and she had been rather annoyed with him. Needless to say, it had not turned out well for either of them.

"Mum got really mad at me for that."

"I know," he signed. "You couldn't visit Anna Yates after that."

"I remember Anna Yates," she signed with a sudden jolt of nostalgia.

Anna Yates had been her friend for a short while. She couldn't remember why they'd it had been so brief, but it had been fun.

His smile warped into something far less pleasant. "You were so awful to me when she was around."

She grimaced as she began to recall the full story. Butterflies hadn't been the only source of entertainment.

"I'm sorry."

Ianto gave a half-shrug, and she observed with a glum acquiescence as the smile faded from his face and the merriment of the past few minutes fled. He stopped being her awkward, fun, happy brother again and resumed his usual awkward, reserved, distant brother.

Any conversation following that couldn't bring back the amiable air of before, so Rhiannon gradually stopped trying. She gave Ianto a kiss on the cheek, wished him a final "Happy Birthday," and ushered her family out of the door.

If she saw a grey-coated man passing by them in the door to the lobby, she didn't give it any thought. She was dealing with two bored children, a grumpy husband, and a potentially long car ride, and couldn't give the occurrence the time of day.

Martha tried to ignore the two of them.

She didn't want to. She wanted to rush up to them and hold onto them tightly, tell them how much she missed them. Tell them everything. About Tom, about UNIT, about how her family was doing.

But she couldn't.

They didn't know her. She didn't know them, either, really. Not anymore. These Toshiko Sato and Ianto Jones weren't her Toshiko Sato and Ianto Jones. These were Jack's.

For a day in advance, she had to keep reminding herself of that. It broke her heart, but not as much as it did when Ianto looked up at her, told her sorry, they were closing, and then stared in horror as he recognized her. Well, not her. He was recognizing Adeola's ghost in her face. Her Ianto had told her about that, back in what then used to be Mexico City.

"I like your tie," she lied in the lift, to break the tension just a little.

While it was a nice tie, and while it did look good on him, she wasn't used to him in suits. She missed his ratty tactical gear that he had stolen. She missed his clunky boots and his stupid jumpers.

At first, she found it odd that he frowned almost suspiciously at her. Then she looked down at her hands and thought, oh. Right.
They had never met, in Ianto's mind, so it might have been a bit of a shock to see her signing at him. She hadn't thought about that. She'd been so used to working on her signing with him that she forgot she couldn't, not with this Ianto.

"Jack told me," she signed quickly. She prayed that would be enough of an explanation.

Ianto's eyebrows raised, and she saw the tiniest bit of a blush form on his cheeks. That was new to her. Her Ianto hadn't blushed. He was awkward, sure, and he had side-stepped a lot of conversations about Jack, but he never blushed.

"My friend taught me to sign," she added when the blush had faded and he was still eyeing her warily.

"Good friend," he remarked.

She nodded amicably, but on the inside, she was screaming for him to remember, please remember, that it was him who taught her. She had taken a class or two on her own after she lost him, just to hold onto something good from her time during that year, but it all came down to him and Toshiko and a lot of patience and practice.

Martha didn't try talking to him after that. It was just too painful. He was nothing like the man she knew, and she hated being reminded of that every two seconds. This Ianto and his ties and his minute blushes (and his surprising lack of laughing) wounded her to the core.

Toshiko... well, she didn't even try talking to Tosh. She might accidentally reach out mid-conversation and grab her hand, or do something she used to do with her Tosh, but would be quite embarrassing attempted with this Tosh. At least this one dressed like hers. It was a bit fancier, with impractical heels and a blouse, but at least it was still dark clothes. Martha couldn't decide if that was better, because it was something familiar, or worse, because it led to the illusion that this Tosh could be her Tosh.

It was so damn hard, all the time.

She almost cried with relief when she had to go undercover. No ghosts of Ianto and Tosh hanging about in the Pharm.

Ianto had to brief her before she went, though.

"Don't take unnecessary risks," he told her.

They weren't signing. Martha had warned him that she was (still) rubbish at it. Best not to use it at the moment, they had both decided. It would have been bad for her to misunderstand something and then get herself in trouble because of it.

"Understood," she said.

"Cool."

She almost laughed and she almost cried, because that was a little bit of her Ianto, shining through. It killed her.

He tried to walk away, but she caught his attention again.

Her Ianto had always said he'd try to make things more between himself and Jack, should they ever find each other again. Then again, her Ianto had the closure of learning the truth about Jack's
disappearance. This Ianto didn't (it made her want to tell him herself, but she didn't, as a big favour to Jack), so she wanted to know if they'd made it further. The blush had given her a clue, but still, she felt some confirmation was in order before she got her hopes up.

"Jack asked me for a red UNIT cap for you to wear," she signed.

He didn't blush this time, but he made an awkward smile that didn't suit him. Not her him.

She more or less asked him if they were together, and Ianto gave an offhand answer. But it was clearly a yes. She was just happy that he looked pleased (really pleased) with whatever it was the two of them shared.

And then she left him well alone.

The one thing she did do was watch Toshiko and Ianto from the background.

Tosh was criminally underrated. No one looked at her with reverence, no one worshiped the ground beneath her feet. Ianto and Martha used to all the time. So, it was a bit frustrating when she was seen as simply a computer geek, and not the wizard tech god that Martha knew. She wanted to smack everyone upside the head and yell at them for what they were missing out on. Especially Owen. Or Jack. Or Gwen. Ianto was alright; he seemed like he already knew Tosh was brilliant beyond belief. But everyone else drove Martha mad. She just wanted them to understand who Tosh really was.

Ianto did live in the shadows, like Tosh had said. He existed in the periphery, in the corner of the mind that was only activated when brought to attention. Not Martha's mind. She thought about him all the time. Thankfully, everyone seemed to be well aware of Ianto's deafness. The one thing she found interesting was that meetings were done in Signed Supported English, but individual conversations with Ianto were done in BSL. She understood the logistics behind it; it was easier to speak in English with SSE than it was in BSL. She thought it was neat, tailoring needs based on the group and the individuals alike. It was also nice that Tosh had developed a speech-to-text for him for comm use. All of it meant Ianto wasn't too lost in his world of shadows.

Owen, after he was dead and gone and then revitalized again, noticed her lurking.

"You know that's really creepy," he said. "And that's coming from a dead man."

Martha said nothing, feeling silence was far less incriminating.

"So, what is it?" he asked. "Why those two? What makes Tosh and Ianto far more interesting than the rest of us?"

"What doesn't?" she scoffed, unable to help herself. "The both of them are absolutely brilliant. They're geniuses, just like the rest of you. And you just... ignore them. You let them get away with hiding themselves from the world. Not me. I won't forget them."

Owen eyed her.

"That still doesn't explain why," he said, though with none of the acerbity from before.

"They're important, that's all," she said.

"Martha..."

She let the matter sit for a moment, hoping he'd move on to more of an Owen-centered topic, but it would seem that he had gained a bit of patience along with his newfound not-life.
"They were my friends," she said when he had waited long enough for her to crack. "They were my friends, but now they can't remember. And it's killing me. No offense."

"What, just because I'm dead?" he joked. The grin slid into a sadder expression. "I don't think I get the monopoly on dead jokes. No, I think I have to share those with Jack."

She snorted.

"They can't remember," he parroted. "Does this have to do with Jack's disappearance? You don't have to tell me what that was," he added when she frowned at him. "God knows Jack would probably kill us both. And I don't think I'd come back a second time."

"They knew," she said quietly. "They knew what happened to Jack, back then. It was so freeing for them. And now they don't have that, and there's this... tension. It's so very slight, and only visible if you knew them before, but it's there."

"Did it really make that much of a difference?"

She gave a wry smile. "Back when there was an end to the world in sight, yeah. Little things like that mattered. All you had was those you trusted. It meant so much to them to know they could still trust Jack."

"That's the second time one of you has mentioned the end of the world," he commented. "Not asking for details, but was it really?"

She thought for a second back to the missile silos and the countdown, to the pain and hunger and loss, to the Master and the Doctor and the Valiant.

"Oh, yeah," she said. She sighed. "But it's over now."

"You don't... miss it, do you?"

She didn't know how to respond.

That was the problem, wasn't it? She missed Tosh and Ianto so much that she'd give anything to see them again. Maybe even the world. Is that how villains were born? No. Villains were like the Master, who definitely shouldn't have power. So, maybe she didn't miss it.

"I don't know," she admitted finally.

Owen patted her gently on the shoulder.

"Tosh is brilliant, by the way," she said when she had collected herself.

"Yeah, I know. We all know."

"No, you don't. And it's such a crime. Let her in a bit, why don't you? She might surprise you."

"You going to lecture me about Ianto next?"

"I think I'll save that one for Jack," she said.

He blinked at her, but she walked away before he could ask what she meant.

Goodbyes had to be said eventually. Owen thanked her, kissed her cheek and gave her a hug. Gwen hugged her. Tosh was not there. Yet again, Martha couldn't tell if that was better or worse than her
being there. Ianto, oh, Ianto, with his beautiful red tie, kissed her cheek. It wasn't like he used to kiss her cheek, with adoration and fondness; it was more... goodbye-ish. Made everything feel more final, in a way.

She gave Jack a (relatively chaste) kiss on the lips, because, well, why not? Ianto didn't seem to mind.

"You can so come back anytime," Jack told her.

"Well, maybe I will," she said. "One day."

One day, when it didn't hurt so much.

She refused to look back when she carried her suitcases away.

He had married her. Finally.

Even though she had a watermelon stuck in her belly.

Alright, it wasn't a watermelon. It was actually weirder. It was a fucking egg of an alien parasite baby that Gwen caught from a bite on her fucking arm.

Oh, and Gwen called up her deaf friend, the one she was possibly in love with, to DJ the reception.

Jesus Christ.

Sometimes he just wanted to... run away. Get away. (Okay, so the deaf guy wasn't a bad DJ, but it was a bit weird to play Tainted Love at the reception. Had he ever listened to the bloody song? Well, obviously not, but he must've known that it wasn't wedding appropriate--)


"I haven't said anything!"

"No, but I can hear you thinking!"

Rhys sighed. It was going to be a long flight to Paris.

But since it was a long flight, he did have time to do his thinking. Quietly. So that it wouldn't wake his new snoring bride.

The deaf guy, Ianto whoever, he wasn't the only one Rhys had been afraid of. Her boss Jack the American had been more than a bit concerning. Especially today, when he stopped the wedding, when he made a few passes at Gwen and constantly gave her goo-goo eyes, and when he danced with her like a gigantic prick. Oh, and also when he insulted Rhys's mother. The entire day, Rhys wanted to punch him more than just the once. Fucking bastard. Rhys hated his hero complex, Rhys hated his stupid coat, Rhys hated his braces-and-belt combination, and Rhys hated his team.

Alright, in all fairness, Rhys couldn't hate the team, not completely. They did just stave everyone's lives, including Gwen's. And they saved Rhys, that last time.

Rhys couldn't really remember the time he helped them take down that meat cartel thing. He had flashes of it, glimpses of what he did and who he met, but not enough to form a picture of it on his own. Gwen helped fill in the gaps, but it wasn't much use. He didn't know the team other than their names, and he didn't recall the whale other than that first impression of its torment. Gwen said he
couldn't remember because of the stress, and later pain, because she hadn't used those amnesia pills on him. Retcon, or whatever.

They had given those pills to the wedding party, spiked in the champagne (which he'd really wanted to drink). Rhys had questioned it quietly to himself at first. Was Jack really interested in making sure no one remembered the bloody Nostrovite thing, or was it because he wanted no witnesses to remember the wedding itself? No one to prove Gwen belonged to Rhys, just Jack and his minions. He even tried to Retcon Gwen and Rhys, for Christ's sake!

But, if he thought about it hard enough, Rhys supposed it was for the best. His mum would've been in a right state for months if she knew what Gwen did for a living. God, she'd be on another Anti-Gwen campaign for a whole year. And as for aliens, well. They'd do his mum's head in! Then there was the baby... the baby that miraculously showed and miraculously vanished. Mum would've been so upset to forever know she'd lost a potential grandchild (even if it hadn't actually been a potential grandchild).

No, that wouldn't have done. Retcon was the only option.

Rhys let out a long sigh and let Gwen snuggle closer on his shoulder. What he wouldn't have done for a perfect wedding...

At least there was a wedding, in the end. They'd been spattered with black blood and had lost a lot of dignity in the eyes of their families, but it still happened. And now Gwen was Mrs. Williams (though he suspected she'd like to stay Cooper, because it was Gwen, after all), Rhys didn't have to worry about Jack or Ianto or any other male who would want to swan off with her.

Not that Jack or Ianto would be swanning off with anyone but themselves, apparently.

Gwen could've just told him that they were together. Would've saved him a lot of stress and self-doubt. Would've saved him a lot of time that he spent plotting their demises, too. Not that he would have actually killed them, but thinking about it had channelled out a lot of rage that would have otherwise pent up inside him and festered.

But she hadn't told him, and Rhys had to learn for himself.

It was after Rhys had surrendered Gwen over to Jack for a dance. Only as a "thank you" for saving her life, of course. He'd observed them, sulking from the sidelines, as they gazed dreamily at each other, dancing slowly. They laughed a few times, sounds that struck deep into Rhys's chest with angry pangs.

Then Ianto had swooped in not very gracefully, and broken the two of them up. Rhys sighed as he prepared for Gwen to start turning her romantic ogling to him, but to both Rhys and Gwen's surprise, he took hold of Jack and started dancing.

"What the fuck," Rhys muttered to himself.

He didn't mind that two blokes were dancing together. It was just... startling, because he'd thought they were both after Gwen.

"You didn't tell me they were together," he said to Gwen when she came to stand by him.

"Sure I did," she said, breathless and grinning. "After my camping trip, remember? I told you they were shagging."

He frowned. She had, hadn't she?
Then again, she'd never said a thing about intimacy. Because, really, those two were clearly quite intimate.

Ianto came back to steal Gwen for the next song, and Rhys had watched them go without actually watching them.

On the plane, Rhys jolted with a realization. Gwen snuffled beside him, and he stared down at her with a newfound appreciation.

The way she'd looked at them... it wasn't romantic love. It wasn't even lust.

Though they may have stared at he like they would offer her the world, and she back at them like she would give them the same, it wasn't anything like the way Gwen looked at Rhys and Rhys at her. It was more like... well, if Rhys had to compare it to anything, it was like all those celebrities Gwen swore she would leave Rhys for, should they come knocking on her door. Only, with those two, it was with a lot more intensity and a lot more fondness.

Gwen loved them, that was clear, but it was the love one carries for their heroes and the quixotic dreams of a best friend. A kind of love Gwen thrived on, but not the kind of love she had for Rhys.

Rhys looked at his newlywed wife and gently stroked her bangs from her face.

"Oh, Gwen," he whispered. "You are too good for this world."

Then he pulled her close and held her tight.

Maybe Jack the bastard boss and Ianto the deaf secretary weren't so bad after all.

...nah, Rhys still didn't like them. That came with hating her job.

"Mum," Mica said.

Rhiannon groaned inwardly. She was far too busy cleaning the entire kitchen and its contents to listen to another of David and Mica's petty squabbles.

"Not now," she said, elbow deep in a pot that hadn't been touched since the dawn of time itself.

Behind her, Mica let out an exaggerated sigh and slunk away with heavy footsteps. Rhiannon shook her head. Kids.

It wasn't long before those same footsteps were coming back.

"Mum."

"Mica, what did I tell you?"

Why did they always have to argue at the most inconvenient of times?

"But Mum!"

"Just go somewhere David isn't, and he'll leave you alone! Now go!"

Mica emitted another sigh with the force of a bloody T-Rex, and then stomped out of the kitchen.

The third time she walked back in, Rhiannon wanted to scream.
"Mum!"

She threw the rag into the dishwater and whirled around to face her daughter. "What?"

Mica blinked up at her. "Uncle Ianto's here."

"For the love of..." She held back a few choice expletives. "You couldn't think to tell me?"

"I tried!"

Rhiannon pushed passed an offended Mica and went to the door. Ianto was indeed standing outside, as awkward as usual, examining the door frame as if it held some sort of interest to him. He glanced over at her when she folded her arms and glared at him.

"What?" he asked indignantly.

"You don't have to stand outside and wait," she signed. "You're welcome in."

She reached out, grabbed his arm, and dragged him through the door, muttering "daft sod" to herself.

Upon entry, Ianto took one look at the kitchen and grinned.

"You're cleaning," he signed.

"Don't start lecturing me."

"I wasn't!"

But that shit-eating grin did not leave his face, though. She glared at him until a movement in the corner of her eye caught her attention.

"Mica!" she snapped. "Next time your uncle shows up, let him in!"

"Fine!"

She then turned to shift some pots and pans around to make it less of a visible distraction to both her and Ianto, but not before she saw Ianto palm Mica a ten-pound note.

"You have to stop that," she told him when he followed her into the kitchen.

"What?"

His feigned innocence was never very good, not with her.

"Idiot."

He pouted slightly and she smiled. There. That was better.

"How are you?" she asked.

The offhand shrug he gave made her heart soar. If he had told her "I'm fine," that would have meant he was lying and he was, in actuality, decidedly less than fine. Her brother was a backwards man. But it still thrilled her that he was, however reservedly, excited for something.

She regarded him curiously. "Why are you so enthusiastic?"
That was the wrong question to ask, because he instantly put forth a defensive front and clammed up. Rhiannon sighed. If he made her do any more mental gymnastics, she'd qualify for the Olympics.

"It's okay to be happy," she signed. "The world won't end."

He rolled his eyes, but the pleasant mood was restored.

"The Electro is opening again," he signed, the barest hints of a smile dawning on his face.

"Oh my god," she declared.

That couldn't be. It closed for good! Health hazards, or something.

"Really?" she asked.

He nodded and she leaned back against the counter, losing herself to nostalgia.

She missed the Electro. Being essentially dragged inside by an eager Ianto, treating themselves to popcorn and sneaking in candies, laughing at the stupid movies. Acting like a bunch of idiots, because, for once in their lives, they could afford to do so.

"Opening night is next week," he signed. "Want to go?"

Her heart plummeted. She didn't have time next week. She had footie practice and birthday parties and school and work and so, so many things that she and her family needed to do.

"I can't," she signed.

It killed her to watch as all traces of excitement washed off his face, leaving him a blank mask of... well, she didn't quite know what emotion that was, but it was certainly dismaying to see on his face.

"Next week is too busy," she continued. "We could go a different time."

He shrugged. This shrug was less nice. This was a shrug of forced indifference, when in reality, he was disappointed, and not a shrug of forced indifference to hide his excitement. Rhiannon wished she could take it all back and tell him that, yes, she did have time, and if she didn't, she'd make time, but it was already too late. She made her bed, and now she had to lie in it.

"You could bring a mate," she signed, then mentally kicked herself. Ianto didn't have any friends. "Or a colleague."

Ianto didn't respond, and she followed his gaze to his shoes. They both stared down at the shoes for a while. She idly noticed the quality and polish on the shoes. Were they new? How on earth did he have enough money for those? Then she remembered those bruises from a year ago, and all the bumps and scrapes she'd seen since then, and determined that any pay he was receiving was not nearly enough. What did he do, anyway?

"Maybe," he signed, so long after the conversation she had nearly forgotten what they were talking about.


"Good," she signed, even though she was somewhat perplexed.

Did he like his colleagues? She'd never heard anything about them. By the look on his face, she wasn't going to now, either.
He didn't stay long after that. He never did. He always said his piece then left, giving Rhiannon no chance to talk to her brother. It was tiresome, sometimes. And really sad.

The next time she heard from him was a week later.

Ianto hadn't taken her advice by coming straight in, but Mica had listened and let him in anyway. Rhiannon was pleased to see him, but it was rather late at night, and the kids were going to bed soon, so what was he doing here? She was going to ask, but before she could even bring up her hands to sign anything, the vacant desolation mounted on his face stopped her.

He held up something, and it took Rhiannon a second to piece together what it was. An old film. VHS, even. She thought it was odd that he was here with a film, but if he wanted to watch it with her, then so be it.

They did not say anything to each other the entire night. She didn't want to ask the wrong question and he didn't want to tell the wrong thing, simple as that. They sat through the movie in silence, eating popcorn and old candy of David's, watching Buster Keaton act like a fool. It was the best of her childhood, wrapped in a blanket of sadness that she just couldn't understand. She'd get it if he was melancholy from the nostalgia of it all, but sad? It just didn't make any sense to her.

He hugged her before he left. That was new. Ianto was one for kissing cheeks with the air of a gentleman, but not hugs. Never hugs. Hugs connoted feelings, and Ianto didn't do feelings.

She watched through the window as he drove away under the bright autumn moon. Odd, that it wasn't raining. They'd called for rain on the forecasts.

It wasn't until the next afternoon that she learned about the mysterious deaths related to the Electro.

"Oh my god," she said, clasping a hand to her mouth. "Oh my god."

"What is it?" Johnny asked as he peered over her shoulder at the newspaper.

"I knew it was too good to be true," she said.

He snatched the papers from her slack grip and read the headline. "'Cinema owners found dead after grand reopening.'"

"It had closed for health reasons," she whispered. "It should've stayed closed..."

"Christ, and they weren't even the only ones!" He kept scanning the papers. "Says there was more deaths like theirs, all in the vicinity of Hope Street in Cardiff! Hang on, wasn't your brother there?"

She buried her face in her hands.

"He'll be fine," Johnny said. He was never one for consolation. "Saw him last night, didn't you? He looked alright."

She sniffled a little and nodded. "Yeah. It's just..."

There were so many things that "it was just." A tragedy being the main one, but... She was torn between knowing that he was okay and worrying that he wasn't, that he'd been infected somehow. She didn't want her baby brother to slip into a coma and die. She couldn't lose him!

"Christ," she muttered, swiping a hand at her eyes.
Andy Davidson went looking for Torchwood. As in the place, not the people.

It wasn't because of the betting pool, because he'd grown weary of that when winning what felt like a stupid consolation prize after he learned that he would have never gotten a job with Torchwood in the first place. No, his fascination (not obsession, Anna, fascination) went beyond any other cop's, and he didn't need a betting pool to spur on his desire. This was a more personal mission, because Andy had a few choice words for a certain Gwen Cooper.

It was surprisingly easy to find them. Just ask literally anyone on Mermaid Quay about Torchwood and they point to the water. That in itself wasn't exactly the most helpful, because what did that mean? They lived in the water? Or on a boat? Anyway, it wasn't useful until Andy got down to the water's edge, then looked right, and saw a door at the end of the walkway. A door that led to a tourist centre. Interesting, because it was nowhere near any of the tourists; it was below them. Great place to hide a secret base, though.

He was thoroughly disappointed when it wasn't a secret base. It actually appeared to be a real tourist shack. He let out a sigh. Oh, well. Maybe whoever worked here could give him some real directions.

... or maybe they did actually live on the water. Not on a boat, because then Gwen wouldn't have needed to nick a boat ride off him. But maybe they worked underwater. Maybe, they had a secret base at the bottom of the bay, with a secret entrance somewhere along the end of the Quay.

Or maybe they did have a base in the tourist centre, because none other than Gwen's new best mate (no, Andy did not have a grudge) had just stepped out from behind that bead curtain.

"Hello," Ianto Jones said.

"Is this Torchwood, then?" Andy asked, peering around the place. "Thought you'd be... bigger. More... tech-y."

"Is there something you want, PC Davidson?"

"Yeah, is Gwen around?"

Ianto flicked an eyebrow up.

"What, you're the admin, aren't you? Shouldn't you know these things?"

Ianto Jones took in a very deep breath, closed his eyes, and exhaled the breath, long and slow. When he opened his eyes again, he stared at Andy with such a dead, vacant stare that it was almost more jarring than if he had simply punched Andy in the face.

"Yes. I know everything. Unlike you," Ianto Jones said. His tone was low, and just the tiniest bit of irritation bled through. Hell, he might still punch Andy in the face.

"Wait, hey!" Andy cried, belatedly noting the insult.

Ianto Jones did not bother responding. He had already turned to his computer and was typing away.

"Does this mean you're not going to find Gwen?" Andy asked after a while.

When no response came, Andy sighed.

"Okay, I get it, you can't hear me. Bloody-- Gwen!"
"What are you doing here, Andy?" she asked tiredly.

First, he couldn't respond, because he didn't understand how she got here. She hadn't been in here a second ago. He tried to puzzle that out. Did she teleport? Was there a false wall? Was she already there before, only invisible?

Then he couldn't respond because Ianto Jones was already talking to her. Andy sighed again and leaned on the front desk, watching them. He couldn't see Ianto Jones's face, because his back was turned to Andy, but there was a clear view of Gwen's face, and it was forming a very unpleasant glower. A glower that was directed at Andy.

Andy did catch Ianto Jones making that same knocking sign to his forehead, the one he'd seen last time he'd met Ianto Jones.

"Are you insulting me?"

"Andy, shut up," Gwen said, and Ianto Jones glanced over his shoulder at Andy.

He closed his mouth and sat back on the desk.

Ianto Jones eventually finished his conversation with Gwen and disappeared behind the bead curtain. He didn't spare Andy another look, which was somehow worse than him glaring daggers at Andy.

"Do you have to be such a prat?" Gwen asked, drawing Andy's attention back to her.

"How am I always the prat?" he asked. "I got you a boat-- you're welcome, by the way-- and you swan off without me, leaving me without a few quid I'd have very much liked to keep!"

"At least I have common courtesy! Do you have to insult Ianto every time you see him?"

"Insult him? He insulted me! I saw what you were saying! I mean, I understood none of it, but the message was clear enough!"

"Andy," she breathed out angrily.

She then took a moment to herself, and Andy braced himself for whatever came next.

"He wouldn't have insulted you," she said, "if you had not insulted him. Can you get that through your thick skull?"

"All I said was that he was admin! You said that too!"

"I said he prefers admin!"

"What's the bloody difference?" Andy cried. "It means the same thing!"

"Ianto is much more than admin. Degrading him to--"

"There was no degrading! Why are you all so uptight about this!"

"We're not!" she burst out. "We're all just so pissed at you because you bollocked everything up!"

Andy was stunned into silence momentarily.

"What?" he asked.
"You messed it up when you brought me into this. Nikki Bevan..."

She let out a long sigh.

"You can't blame this on me!"

"No. But that doesn't mean we all don't think you're a bloody idiot. Just..." She shook her head and pointed to the door. "Get out."

Absolutely flabbergasted, Andy could only comply, feeling very aggrieved and just a touch humiliated. Who did Gwen think she was, blaming this on him? And why was Ianto Jones so upset about Andy helping Gwen with the Bevan case? He didn't do anything. Did he?

He was so lost in thought that he nearly walked straight into the figure of Captain Jack Harkness.

"Christ!" he said, jumping back.

Captain Harkness was standing in one of his usual brooding positions, arms clasped behind his back, feet shoulder width apart, coat gently billowing in a non-existent wind (seriously, how was his coat always moving?). He was facing the water, and Andy thought he was lucky that the sun wasn't out today, or he'd be getting an eyeful of sunshine. Of course, knowing Captain Harkness, the squinting would probably just make him look handsomer.

"Andy Davidson," Captain Harkness said, still gazing outward at the water.

"Yeah?"

"Stay away from Torchwood."

"Pardon?"

"Stay away from Torchwood," Captain Harkness repeated. "You keep sticking your nose where it doesn't belong, and it's costing us a lot. And it does you no favours, either."

He finally turned to Andy.

"If I see you near Gwen, or Ianto--"

"What does he have to do with this?" Andy interrupted.

"Or Ianto," Captain Harkness bit out, "and if you're causing trouble, I will hunt you down to the ends of the earth. Got that?"

All Andy could do was nod and watch, horrified, as Captain Harkness strode passed him and into the tourist centre. He flinched as the door slammed and blinked as the "Open" sign on the front flipped to "Closed."

"I didn't even do anything to Ianto," Andy muttered to himself. "And Gwen talked to me! See if I ever do something for you lot again."

But, deep down, he knew he would. He'd do anything to get into Torchwood.

He walked back to his car carefully, eyeing everyone who walked by him. With his luck, the cranky Londoner and the quiet Asian girl were going to jump out and beat him to a pulp. Why was everyone so uptight about this? What happened to Jonah Bevan? Why was Ianto involved?
Andy had no idea.
"Bloody Torchwood," he said.

Rhys sat on the steps of the police headquarters and sighed. What a weird day it'd been. First, he was digging up people from a bombed abandoned warehouse, then he was saving the police from Weevils, and now he was dealing with Andy bloody Davidson.

"You can let them go," Rhys repeated for the fourth time in the past five minutes.

"No, we can't," Andy insisted. "What if they start rampaging again?"

"They won't. Didn't you see the others? They all went home."

"Yeah," Andy said, "and the ones we have are clawing through the doors to get at us."

"Or they're clawing through the doors to get out and go home."

Andy murmured something murderously under his breath.

A ringing emitted from Rhys's pocket, and he pulled out his mobile.

"I see you've fixed everything, then," he said cheerily. "No more Weevil troubles. Think we can let the ones at the station go?"

Gwen didn't reply, but there was a lot of ragged, heavy breathing coming from the other end of the line.

"Hello? Love?" he asked.

"Is that Gwen?" Andy asked brightly. "Can you ask her if I'm officially off Torchwood's shit-list yet? Because--"


A muffled sob answered him.

"Gwen?" he asked again, starting to panic. "Gwen, can you hear me? Are you--"

"I'm fine," she whispered.

He took a sharp breath in as she paused.

"No, I'm not," she said. "He killed..."

Then she broke off into a full out cry, and he exhaled deeply. Oh, dear.

"It's okay, it's okay," he soothed. "Look, I'm coming by to pick you up, and--"

"No, no," she said, cutting through her sobs. "Go home. I'll... I'll meet you there. There's some things... some things I've got to do first."

She hung up on him before he could say anything else.

"Right," he said. He looked up at Andy. "Think you lot can handle yourselves now?"
"We could handle it before!" Andy protested. "We didn't need you."

"Oh, I'm sure. That's why you didn't call Gwen in a panic, is that right?"

Andy glared at him as he straightened his jacket, got up, and left.

His drive home was a bloody nightmare. Cardiff was lying in ruins, and it made traffic worse than usual. An hour to get home? From the station? There were so many detours and roadblocks and obstacles. Traffic aside, the streets just looked... bad. Downed buildings and injured people and crying children. It was like a scene from an apocalyptic film.

He made tea while he waited at home. Tea was always helpful. Especially when someone had died. Or at least, he thought so. None of his coworkers have died. Nor any of his mates.

Who had been killed? Not Jack, because Gwen wouldn't be that sad about it. Sure, she was an empathetic woman, but it wouldn't make her call him sobbing if it were Jack. He hoped it wasn't Ianto. Or that Toshiko or Owen. But then that left no one... good god. He was terrified to know the answer.

When Gwen came home, she wasn't alone. She had Jack and Ianto (oh, good) in tow, all looking varying degrees of dead on the inside, with Jack looking like a zombie in more ways than one, Gwen still letting tears trickle down her face, and Ianto riding somewhere in between the two.

"Ianto's flat has been evacuated," Gwen said in a flat voice. "So I told him he could stay here for now."

That didn't explain why Jack was there, but Rhys didn't bother asking about it. The man looked like he could barely stand on his own, much less do anything else. Perhaps it was best that he was with other people.

"Jack?" Gwen said gently, turning to Jack.

Jack made no motion that he heard her.

"Jack?" she tried again.

This time, he blinked. Then blinked again and looked around him, as if he suddenly just realized where he was.

"It's alright," she said. "You're okay."

Jack just stared at her.

"You need to take a shower," she told him. "Do you think you can do that?"

Rhys thought it was pointless of her to try asking him, because he highly doubted Jack could even comprehend her question, much less answer her. But, lo and behold, Jack gave a nearly imperceptible nod.

"Okay. Do you know where the bathroom is?"

Another small nod.

"Good. I'm going to go get you some of Rhys's clothes, alright?"

Normally, Rhys would've protested the involuntary donation of his clothes to the likes of Captain
Jack Harkness, but in this moment, Rhys couldn't be arsed to care. Jack looked as though he was functioning on barely one brain cell alone, and also like he was buried alive, plus someone on his team had just died. Rhys wasn't a complete bastard; he could show some compassion towards his fellow man now and again.

Gwen and Jack slowly shambled off in the direction of the bathroom and bedroom, Jack shed his coat and deposited it into Ianto's arms. Ianto frowned uncertainly after them as they left, holding the coat awkwardly in his outstretched hands. Ianto turned to face Rhys, confusion still plastered on his face.

"Oh, uh," Rhys said, before slowly fingerspelling "J-A-C-K." Then he had to pause and think about it a bit before remembering and signing "shower."

Ianto nodded slowly, but he still kept frowning at Rhys.

"How did you know that?"

"Gwen," Rhys said, shrugging. "Used to help her practice. Forgotten most of it. It's been a while since she's needed help."

"Right."

"Right," Rhys repeated. "Would you, uh... would you like some tea?"

Ianto's face went as blank as Jack's had been.

Gwen came back into the room then and immediately went to Ianto. She began signing to him as he stared absentely at her. Eventually she gently reached out and led him to the couch, having him sit down with Jack's battered coat resting on his lap. She sat down next to him and softly stroked her fingers over his cheek as tears began to drip down his cheeks.

Rhys wanted to tell her off for focusing so much of her attention on the others, because he could see the tears she was holding back herself. But he knew that this was Gwen's coping mechanism, to take care of others before herself. It was something she refused to admit to; she always said that Ianto was the one who did that, not her. Rhys didn't know Ianto much other than what Gwen now willingly parted to him, so it might be true that he was always acting as the help, but he did know Gwen, and denial or not, she was a carer, and she would never not be.

Jack eventually (meaning, after an hour) came back out, face clean as a whistle and wearing Rhys's favourite track bottoms and a t-shirt from Rhys's band in uni (they'd been called Imperial Road, and they had sucked). He took one short glance about the room and then promptly went to sit on the other side of Ianto. Ianto had long since composed himself and was back to gazing blankly at the floor while Gwen had tucked herself underneath his arm, also staring at the floor. Jack leaned ever so slightly onto Ianto.

The three of them jumped when Ianto let out a shout of pain.

Gwen and Jack were immediately on him, checking him over. Ianto blinked rapidly in shock as they did thorough once-overs of him. Rhys supposed he'd be equally as confused if people began fussing over him like that. They were acting like poor Ianto was dying...

Oh. That made more sense. Gwen and Jack wouldn't want to lose another person.

The pair of them eventually backed off as Jack began questioning Ianto. Rhys caught "shoulder" in there once or twice, and it made sense. When Rhys had first seen him in the warehouse, he had been
holding himself a little off-kilter.

Ianto had to sign what Rhys took to mean "I am fine" quite a few times before either Gwen or Jack backed off. Both only did so begrudgingly.

It was well beyond midnight when Rhys could pull Gwen away from the men long enough to let them get to bed. Rhys didn't know how the two of them would fit on the couch when Rhys and Gwen barely could, but Gwen said they'd slept on smaller things. That sent images through his head that he very much did not want up there. He doubted she was making an innuendo, but it still sounded... odd.

Jack instantly dove beneath the blankets and pillows they had thrown onto the couch, but Ianto took a bit of convincing from Gwen to get him under there, too. Once she'd successfully ushered him into Jack's awaiting arms, Rhys took her by the shoulders and led her to their own bed.

Gwen cried long and hard the entire night. Rhys was willing to bet that Ianto was the only one able to sleep through that. That is, if Ianto could get to sleep in the first place.

No one bothered to tell Rhys what had happened or who had died, Rhys was able to piece together one or two things.

It was both Owen and Toshiko. Torchwood had lost forty percent of its structure, and Gwen had lost two of her closest friends.

Despite initial thoughts, it was not (entirely) the fault of this John Hart character. He, in an odd turn of events, actually helped Torchwood out, in the end. Rhys wasn't sure of what to make of that.

Rhys wanted to protest when the three remaining members of Torchwood decided to report back to work after watching the morning's news. Jack had told him off before he could even open his mouth.

"We have things to do," Jack said as he slid his disgusting coat on. "A city to help rebuild. Cardiff needs us."

Gwen said nothing, but gave Rhys a peck on the cheek on the way out the door.

Ianto dawdled behind slightly. He and Rhys stared at each other.

"Thank you," he said after the awkward pause.

And then he turned to leave.

Rhys wasn't sure if he could hate Gwen's job or coworkers anymore.

With a sweep of his hands off the door, Jack stood and turned to him.

"Need help with those Rift predictions?"

His tone was biting and hard. John Hart held back a retort and chose something less damaging to say.

"A lot of this planet I haven't seen. You like it so much, I thought I might take a look." He gave Jack a wry smile. "Maybe see you around."

Jack tried to brush passed, but John stopped him with a hand to his chest. John bent closer and pecked a kiss to his cheek.
"I'm sorry," John said, and finding himself meaning it, "for your losses."

Then he turned away from Jack and walked up those stairs, trying not to feel like this was a final goodbye. It wasn't supposed to be, but knowing Jack... knowing himself... it very well could be. And he didn't want to look back if it was. It just might kill him.

Onward, he decided, ever onward.

He let out a sigh when he reached the upper level. A whole world, and he had nothing to do on it. Sex? Sex. But where? He knew fuck all about twenty-first century Earth. He knew about the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, but beyond that, this planet meant nothing to him. He was born in a time where "humans" and "Earth" weren't exactly mentioned in the same sentence. Hell, not even the same paragraph or chapter. Book, maybe, but other than that... Earth was no more than an ancestral breeding ground, and John didn't much like animals.

Gwen and Ianto were staring at him when he walked by the workstations. Gwen's eyes immediately fluttered away when he caught them, and she hid behind a curtain of dark hair as she quickly walked away. Ianto held his gaze with an empty intensity that would've sent shivers down John's spine if he hadn't already had it replaced after that little incident on Altair V.

"Oh, Eye Candy," John said.

How he admired that feisty young man. He had ever since he put the barrel of his gun to the boy's head and saw him bare his teeth as he snarled a "Why are you doing this?" Absolutely sweet, Ianto Jones was. Definitely eye candy. John certainly wanted a taste of that. Alas, it seemed John's tastes were of far more mature men. Men who had, say, a few thousand years under their belt. Belt and braces. Christ, Jack had such a bad sense of fashion. John wondered if that would ever change. He highly doubted it.

"It's been fun," he added. "Let me know if you want the fun times to continue."

"I think I'll pass," Ianto deadpanned.


Ianto eyed him for a moment, then looked down at the ground. John could practically feel him thinking under that fluff of gorgeously soft, brown hair. Like, really, a Grendan chicken could nest in that stuff, it was so downy.

When Ianto looked up again, he regarded John very carefully.

"How do you take away his pain?" he asked in that ever-so-quiet and ever-so-gentle voice of his. (Again, Grendan chickens would simply adore that.)

John took a metaphorical, physical, emotional, and mental step backward.

"That is a loaded question," John said, hearing the shock in his own voice. "Do you even know what you're asking?"

"Yes."

John let out a whistle. He vaguely wondered if Jack was listening in. Probably not. While Jack had always been one for a good snoop, he was far too deep within his own grief and thoughts to do any of that now.
"You really want to know?" John asked.

"Yes," Ianto said again.

"Alright."

He moved in closer to Ianto, making Ianto fidget slightly. He towered over John in size, but the force John had in his stride made Ianto tense stare down at him in a mixture of defiance and caution. John had to fight to keep the grin off his face. Ianto was so fun to tease.

But right now, they had a serious topic on hand, and a topic that John knew plenty about.

"Keep him moving," John said. "Don't let him drown in himself. Force him to swim. Make him remember why he's swimming. That's the only way you keep him afloat. Got that?"

Ianto shook his head.

"I missed some of it," he said.


Ianto frowned, and John let himself mentally trace those elegant lines on Ianto's face.

"And," he added, "above all..."

He reached up and brushed his fingers against the soft skin of Ianto's cheek, then moved back.

"Always love him," John said.

Then he started walking away before Ianto could register that, before Ianto could question him, before Ianto could understand.

He pressed his new vortex manipulator and the cog wheel door rolled open, and he stepped through it and let it close behind him without a single backward glance.

Onward, ever onward.

He decided to go to Paris.

&Rhiannon!

"What?" Rhiannon snapped.

Couldn't she have five minutes of peace? She just wanted to finish this phone call to her boss without being interrupted for every minor issue her husband and children managed to find with the world.

"Your brother's here!"

The phone slipped from her grasp. She swore quietly and retrieved it from underneath the bed.

"Sorry, Eloise, something's just come up," she said. "I'll call you later."

She hung up without bothering to listen to any of Eloise's protests, and flung the phone onto the bed. Taking the stairs down by twos, she saw Johnny standing at the door. Just standing there. Not inviting her brother in, or anything polite. She sighed and pushed him aside.
Ianto's eyes followed Johnny as he went, impassive as ever. Well, except for the slightly arched eyebrow. Rhiannon shot him a glare.

"What?" he asked defensively.

"I thought I told you that you didn't have to knock," she signed.

She shook her head and let him in the house. Trailing behind him, she nearly ran into him when he stopped dead in the area between the kitchen and the sitting room. She was about to ask him what he was playing at when he raised an arm and started coughing into it. God, it sounded horrible. It terrified Mica, who had been colouring at the table.

"Christ," Rhiannon said as Ianto took some wheezing breaths in.

In the past few days, she had heard a lot of coughing. Everyone in this house had coughed for at least a day; Mica for two, with her tiny lungs. But she hadn't heard anyone cough like that. He sounded like he was about to hack up his entire chest: lungs, heart, and everything else in there.

"Are you okay?" she asked, though he rather obviously wasn't.

"I'm fine."

"You don't sound fine," she told him.

He shrugged awkwardly, then leaned forward to peer about the house.

"Were you safe from the fumes?" he asked.

Rhiannon nodded. "We stayed inside the house. Everyone had slight coughs, but we are okay now."

Ianto looked relieved.

"What about you?" What had he been doing that day, to warrant such a cough?

"I'm fine. Nothing to worry about."

Rhiannon wanted to scream. Of course, he was deflecting. When would Ianto ever give her a straight answer?

She offered him tea. She hoped the steam or something would clear his chest; it had seemed to work for Mica. Apparently, it was one-time miracle, because as soon as Ianto took his first sip, he began coughing and coughing, so hard and so much that she wondered if she should call the hospital.

"Nothing to worry about?" she repeated when he had finished.

"I'm fine."

She wondered how many times he would say that today.

"You should see a doctor, because you're clearly not fine."

He didn't see her whole sentence. As soon as she signed "doctor," his eyes closed tightly shut. If Rhiannon didn't know any better... well. When he opened his eyes again, there was a great deal of pain hidden behind them.

"Thank you for the tea," he signed.
Then he got up and walked out of the house without another word, leaving Rhiannon to puzzle over what she did wrong.

Rhiannon hadn't been expecting to hear from him again so soon. Not that it had been him she had been hearing from.

No, it was a hospital, inquiring if this was Rhiannon Davies, emergency contact to Ianto Jones.

The ride to Cardiff was terrifying. A million scenarios had run through her mind: he was gravely ill, he was dying, he was already dead. God, it scared the shit out of her. She couldn't lose him, not so soon after Mum. No. She just couldn't lose him at all. He was her baby brother, for Christ's sake!

She immediately calmed down upon learning that Ianto was not, in fact, dying, or anywhere near death's doorstep.

"Yeah, we've been getting a few people like that," the receptionist said.

"What do you mean?" Rhiannon asked her.

"Just, a few people have collapsed like that. All the people who went running around in the smoke."

Running around? What was Ianto doing, running around in the smoke?

"Crazy, that stuff," the receptionist continued. "I mean, we all thought ATMOS was safe, right? It was supposed to be a good thing. I guess everything good is secretly bad these days."

"Right," Rhiannon said, not really listening.

She was brought to a waiting room, filled with less-than comfortable chairs, small end tables, and crap magazines. She took the chair closest to the hall and picked up one of the magazines, barely skimming it as she took in the area around her.

Nurses and doctors were walking back and forth in the hall, some deep in conversations, others reviewing information on clipboards. Sometimes, someone would walk by, rolling some big, fancy medical equipment along with them. Rhiannon got sick of watching them after not too long. It just made her nervous. How many of them were discussing her brother? How much of that equipment did Ianto need?

She turned her eyes to the waiting area. There were five people in there with her. A father and young daughter sat behind her. She didn't look around to view them, because, well, that would be rather rude. Especially because they were completely silent. A child that young being that quiet could only mean something dreadful was happening, the likes of which that child had never seen before in her life. So, Rhiannon respected their privacy, pretending to turn the page as she focused her attention on the man sitting a few chairs to her right. He smelled like cigarette smoke and liquor, even from that far away. She shouldn't judge, but she was less inclined to like alcoholics and smokers after Dad, so she didn't think much about this man.

The people sitting opposite to her and just to the right were by far the most interesting. Mainly because she could see them the best without looking like she was prying. They were a man and woman, both of which looked very exhausted. She couldn't blame them; it was quite late. The woman was sleeping with her head on the man's shoulder, a blue-grey coat bunched up beneath her head as a pillow. She was snoring slightly, and her hair was gradually creeping its way into her mouth. The man had his face in a hand, blocking Rhiannon's view of it, but...

It didn't make sense, but Rhiannon could have sworn she'd seen that man before. She couldn't place
it or him, but something niggled in the back of her mind. Maybe if he moved his hand, so she could get a better look at him, she'd be able to remember.

"Mrs. Davies?" a woman called from the hall.

Rhiannon nearly jumped. She took a deep breath to still her racing heart and looked up at the nurse with a clipboard.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Jones is awake now, if you'd like to see him."

"Oh. Thank you."

Getting up to follow the nurse, she shouldered her bag and flopped the shit magazine back on top of the rest. She caught another glance of the man before she went.

She might have imagined it, but she thought she saw the man's eyes track her as she left.

The first thing Ianto did upon seeing her was slowly shrink into his bed. Rhiannon would have laughed if she wasn't suddenly pissed. Instead, she folded her arms and took him in.

He looked paler than usual under the hospital lights. The white blankets and robe washed him out, or maybe that was just how he looked after losing consciousness like that. He was hooked up to an IV and some oxygen, making him, the entire six feet of him, appear tiny and feeble. He looked like shit, really.

"I told you to see a doctor," she signed angrily.

"What are you doing here?"

She scowled at him. "What do you think?"

Ianto blinked. "I forgot to cancel you as my emergency contact."

She felt her eyes go wide. "What?"

What on god's green earth did that mean?

"I'm your sister!" she exclaimed. "Why would you make somebody else your emergency contact?"

Ianto's gaze flickered to the door and then back, as if it were a trick question.

"Oh my god," she said aloud. "Are you seeing someone?"

"No."

She narrowed her eyes. Even if he looked convincing, she didn't believe him. Why else would he want to change his emergency contact? Still, she let the matter slide. She had bigger fish to fry.

"Why were you outside with the smoke?"

He blanched.

"I couldn't find somewhere to hide."

That was a lie, and they both knew it.
"They said you collapsed."

"I'm fine."

"You said that last time, and you weren't."

He stared at her, something deep lurking in his gaze. To say it broke her heart was an understatement.

"You're never going to believe me," he signed.

"How can I?" she asked. "You always lie."

She had to glance away then. The waterworks were threatening to burst through, and she had to calm herself. Rubbing her fingers over her eyes, she took a deep breath in and out a few times and tried to think of something positive.

"Who found you? I want to thank them," she signed. when she had composed herself.

There was a significant pause before he signed: "I don't know."

She shook her head and sighed.

"Why can't you just tell me the truth?"

He didn't respond.

"I love you," she told him, "but sometimes you make it so hard."

"I know."

She leant down and kissed his forehead.

"Don't forget to visit."

"I won't," he signed, even though he would. He always did.

Rhiannon left the room without a single backwards glance. It would have been a lot harder to leave him if she had.

She went by the waiting room on her way out. That she did glance at, just to see if she could recognize the man now. She couldn't. His face was turned as he gently shook the sleeping woman awake.

With a sigh, she resigned herself to letting it go. Though she did give a last fleeting thought to who they could be visiting as she walked to her car.

Martha's vision of the Daleks was horrifying, of course, but not as horrifying as others.

"Jack is bloody terrified of them," Tish had told her a while back. "He had all these nightmares. Sometimes, he'd tell me about them. Something to do with roses and stuff. I dunno. He was always vague."

That part about roses had made Martha feel a little sour, but also worried. Anything that could make Jack frightened was... bad. Really bad.
She knew the Doctor loathed them. Hated them and pitied them and wanted to destroy them. It was complicated, she gathered. But the point was, the Doctor and the Daleks do not go well together.

Tom didn't know a single thing about Daleks. Neither did Mum, Dad, or Leo. Tish only knew that they looked like metal salt shakers with whisks and toilet plungers stuck to them (Jack was never very good at fluent descriptions).

Tosh hadn't had any experience with them, really. She knew they existed, but not much else. Ianto, on the other hand, had his own share of horrors when it came to the Daleks. He'd even introduced her to another one of the Doctor's enemies: the Cybermen. It was horrifying, to listen to Ianto's story of the Battle of Canary Wharf. Especially since Adeola was part of it.

Anyway, the point was, anyone who knew the Daleks was afraid of them.

Which meant that, after tonight, everyone in the entire world was going to fear them.

Martha herself was going to develop a healthy fear of teleportation.

"Don't use Project Indigo," Jack ordered. "It's not safe!"

Martha wanted to remind him that he wasn't the boss of her, but Sanchez was already telling her the same thing.

Then the Osterhagen key was being shoved into her possession, and the Daleks were coming, and the General was going to go off to die.

"Bye, Jack," she said, hoping to god this wasn't the end.

"Martha, don't do it!" Jack yelled.

Too late, she was already pulling the cords.

And arriving... at Mums?

"Mum?" she asked, bewildered.

This isn't where she was supposed to be. This is where she wanted to be, yes, but nowhere near where she was supposed to land.

Mum came rushing down the stairs and over to her, pulling her into a tight hug.

"Thank god you're safe!" she said. "I was so worried! Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," Martha assured her.

"It's a nightmare out there," she said, "and I--"

She cut off with a strange face as a bizarre noise came from another room.

"Mum, what was that?" Martha asked.

"I haven't the faintest idea," Mum admitted.

She began to follow the noise, but Martha grabbed her arm.

"You don't know if it's dangerous!"
"So only you get to be a hero?" Mum asked, prying her arm away from Martha's grasp.

"Mum, that's not--"

"Oh, it's the computer!"

"Mum!"

Martha dashed after her to find her seating herself at the table with her laptop in front of her. Its screen was filled with static, and the strange noise kept going. It sounded... weeeooo-y.

"Mum, get out of the way. It could be the Daleks!" When Mum didn't move, she added: "Or my job!"

Mum grumbled a little, but moved out of the way. Martha took her spot just as the static cleared.

"Hello?" she asked.

"Haha! Martha Jones!" Jack said.

She wanted to give him a vindicated "I told you so," but it was slightly hindered by the fact that she never actually did tell him so. She thought she was going to die, too.

In any case, she wouldn't have had time to tell him as much, because things became instantly rather important, and it was crucial to listen to Harriet Jones. Really. Harriet Jones was talking to them. Unbelievable.

And then Ianto Jones showed his lovely face and it suddenly became a Jones party.

Mum looked at Martha as Martha began grinning like an idiot. She down frowned at Martha, and reality hit. Right. Different Ianto. But it was good to see his face again, even if he wasn't her Ianto. And then she was reminded of Tosh, and then everything just... hurt.

It became less of a Jones party when Harriet sacrificed herself to the Daleks.

So much death.

The Doctor answered his phone too little too late for Harriet, but in just enough time for Martha to send Jack his teleport base code and then get on her own way. She told Mum she loved her, then jumped to Geneva.

The first thing she heard when she reappeared was the Daleks. Speaking German. She didn't know they could do that. It also pissed her off, just a little, because their German was better than hers. Why couldn't they have sent her to Station Three?

Things were a whirlwind from there. First, she was helping destroy the Earth. Next, she wasn't, because the Doctor didn't condone it, and also because she'd been transported to the Dalek Crucible. Then she was destroying the Daleks. She somehow ended on the TARDIS. (Later on, she would only have a few distinct memories of tonight, and they pretty much followed that story. Her memory only picked up when the Doctor started yelling everyone's names as they fled for their lives into the TARDIS.)

"And off we go!" the Doctor said as the Crucible exploded behind them.

"But what about the Earth?" Sarah Jane Smith asked (Martha liked her; she was nice). "It's stuck in the wrong place!"
Martha watched as Jack's head shot up when the Doctor called out for the Torchwood Hub. He pushed out of the circle of people clinging to the console for dear life and stopped behind the Doctor.

"Is Jack there?" Martha heard Gwen ask.

"Can't get rid of him," the Doctor said.

Jack frowned down at him briefly before signing the Doctor's words at the monitor. Martha smiled. She'd seen Gwen translating in the corner of the screen before, back on Mum's laptop. She supposed Gwen wouldn't have time to translate if she was doing... whatever it was the Doctor was going to ask her to do, after he'd geeked out with Rose about genetics, or whatever. Even Jack looked lost on that part.

The Doctor said a lot of words that made very little sense to Martha and then called the Smith household, and honestly, Martha was just riding in the background along with the new people, Mickey Smith and Rose's mum. It was kind of boring and she felt a little underappreciated. One look at Mickey and Jackie told her they felt the same.

Okay, but it was rather thrilling to help fly the TARDIS, she had to admit.

In the end, though, she was much happier to be holding Jack's hand and walking away from it all. She loved the Doctor, and she always would, but... her home was with Mum and Dad and Tish, and now Tom. She liked it that way. And she liked her job, even with Jack's recruitment pitch.

"You know, I'm not sure about UNIT these days," he said. "Maybe there's something else you could be doing."

"Jack, you know that's not going to work," she said.

"But don't you miss us?" Jack asked.

"Yeah. But... it's... it's different now."

Jack squeezed her hand. "Thanks for coming to their funerals."

Martha didn't think they could technically call Owen's a funeral, not when there were only four people in attendance and no body to bury. And it was so very, very hard to keep herself together through Tosh's.

"I miss them," Martha said.

For once, she meant more than just her Tosh, too.

"Hey, you two!"

They turned to see Mickey Smith running towards them. Jack let out a groan and dropped Martha's hand. Mickey took his place, throwing an arm over both of their shoulders. Rather forward of him, seeing as he'd never met Martha before, but... at the same time, she didn't think she minded.

Best not tell Tom that.

"Give Ianto and Gwen my love," Martha told Jack as they stood in front of the door to Mum's place.

"I will."
Jack kissed her cheek, smiled, and turned away, coat flowing behind him as he went.

She sighed to herself and opened the door. Sometimes, when she looked at Jack, she could almost feel the ghosts of her Ianto or her Tosh.

"Martha!"

"Mum," she said, putting the ghosts aside.

But only for the moment.

Chapter End Notes

Someday, I'll come back and edit this. Today is not that day.
Thank you for reading this regardless! Have a good day!
He took the name Doctor John Smith. It suited him. He looked like a John Smith. Rose was just glad he kept “Doctor.” It would be a shame for him to disregard everything he was, and it would only make her very aware that he was not truly the actual Doctor.

Of course, he really was the actual Doctor, just a bit different. Not different enough for her to care, though. She loved him instantly, like she always had and always would. When she kissed him, her world was alight, and everything felt completely and totally right. It was like a little slice of heaven, there on Bad Wolf Bay.

The first date they had together, the first official date, she was nearly a nervous wreck. What on earth was she supposed to do on a date with the Doctor, of all people? Five minutes in, and she realized this? This was nothing. It was just like any other interaction they’ve ever had: full of joy, ridiculous stories, and love. That was all that mattered, in the end, and the date went fine.

Life went onwards. Both new and different alike, but always onwards. She loved it. How could she not? She had her mum, dad, little brother, and now her Doctor. She lived in a big house and wanted for nothing, she had a great job, and she had a real life. It was almost blissful.

Almost.

Because there were nights, long, horrid nights, where she would lie awake and think about all that was missing in her life. This wasn’t her world, these weren’t her people. There were great big gaps in her, empty spaces where people should be. People like Mickey, her neighbors, her old school mates… they weren’t with her here. She missed them like crazy.

The Doctor had remedied his own empty spaces. Within the first month of being in this universe, he had already spotted out his old companions, and worked his way into becoming their friends.

Sarah Jane Smith was a reporter. A good one. But she was single, childless, and utterly lonely. So, it was no wonder that she latched onto the Doctor at first sight. Rose wanted to believe it was some holdover from the other universe; a tiny spark of I-know-you-from-somewhere, hidden deep within Sarah Jane. Even if that wasn’t the case, she did love to watch the two of them bond over crazy, outlandish stories they had.

Martha Jones was still a doctor. A brilliant doctor, working on a cure for dementia. She didn’t have any long-term relationships, and Rose was a bit peeved when Martha immediately grew fond of the Doctor. But the Doctor pulled someone out of seemingly nowhere for her, a pediatrician called Thomas Milligan. The four of them occasionally went on double-dates, and Rose thought the world of the pair of them. They were perhaps their closest friends.

Donna Noble was the last person for the Doctor to seek out. Rose gathered it was the guilt. She herself already knew Donna; she’d done a bit of… spying on her, back when she was teleporting in and out between the two realities. She had only wanted to know if the two of them were anything alike, and, by Jove, they were. Donna made Rose laugh in ways she didn’t know she could.

She was a temp, often between jobs. (Rose was beginning to find it amusing that everyone had similar occupations as their counterparts, because it was like they were just meant to be what they
were. Rose did enjoy a bit of fate.) When the Doctor finally did go to meet her, it was to offer her a job as his personal assistant. Personal assistant for what, no one would ever know. But, all of the sudden, Donna worked for the Doctor… somehow.

Watching the Doctor and Donna talk was like watching clockwork. They fit together in ways incomprehensible but to those who knew how it worked in the first place. Rose knew it was because this Doctor was a bit of Donna herself, but she liked to think that it was like long-lost siblings.

That was how the Doctor found his family again, how his empty spaces filled. Rose sometimes privately envied the Doctor for his lack of holes. Though she loved her new friends dearly, they weren’t enough to replace the ones she lost.

So, she went off to find her own friends herself.

Mickey was gone. She knew that. There was no one here to remind herself of him, because Ricky was dead and so was his Gran. That would be a hole she could never fill, and sometimes it made her hate herself for not treating him better. She hoped he was happy and loved, back in their real universe. It was all she could do to keep from despairing.

Her old mates and neighbors weren’t her mates and neighbors here. They didn’t care about anyone with the last name Tyler, because they were all a bit too jaded about that rich man who let the world fall to Cybermen, even if he was trying to remedy his mistakes. Rose could try and try again to prove she was just like them, that she’d grown up on Powell Estate and lived a life like theirs, but they could never see past her invented heritage. She tried to prove it constantly, before and after the jump to and from her old universe, but now, it was starting to make her feel even more lonely. Eventually, after a good cry in the Doctor’s arms, she gave up on them all together. There was no point in bending over backwards for people who would never change.

There was only one person left for her. Her beloved Captain Jack was somewhere out there, and that always made her smile.

Before, she hadn’t gone out to look for him. She was still too lost in guilt: guilt for letting him die on Satellite Five, guilt for ignoring his sacrifice afterwards, guilt for not being a good friend. But now that she knew he wasn’t dead, that he was, in fact, very alive, she could go out and search to all her heart’s content. She still felt guilty for apparently condemning him to eternal life, but that wouldn’t have happened to this Jack, now, would it?

But that was the problem. There was no other Doctor or Rose here to make him immortal. There was no one here to tie him down to this century. So, it was practically impossible to find him. Rose suspected the Doctor already knew this, and that was why he never went looking for their captain. She almost gave up on looking after a few unsuccessful weeks.

In a spark of ingenious inspiration one day, she and Donna went searching through old government documents and what felt like the entirety of the internet for any mention of a Captain Jack Harkness in 1941. They found one result. A casualty report for a Captain Jack Harkness of the RAF. An American volunteer. Rose’s heart sang in pure joy for a solid second before noticing that the attached photo was not of her Jack at all. She denied it at first. This must’ve been one of Jack’s cons. Nobody bought his Chula ambulance, so he faked his death, sent in a random man’s photo, and went home. Then she remembered that the only reason the ambulance went to the 40’s in the first place was because he was luring the Doctor down there. No Doctor, no luring, no 1941.

“Why are we searching for him, anyway?” Donna asked.

Rose shook her head and tried to keep the tears at bay. “Just an old family friend, that’s all.”
“Well… he’s not coming for tea any time soon,” Donna said.

“Right,” she murmured.

That night, she cried and cried, until her eyes couldn’t make any more tears and her hiccups took over her sobs. The Doctor held her close, whispering kind, gentle things into her ear. At one point, she looked up at him, and the look on his face said that he already knew. There would be no new Captain Jack Harkness for either of them to fix a large and rather important space.

A month later, it began to occur to her that there was one way to keep him close. Jack had friends back there. A team of some kind. Gwen Cooper, who looked like Gwyneth, and Ianto Jones, who looked fleetingly familiar somehow, and was obviously in a relationship of some kind with Jack. (Rose wasn’t sure if there were others on the team, but those were the two on screen of the TARDIS.) Neither of them here would have known Jack, of course, but it would give her some peace of mind to know that they were both happy and healthy. That they weren’t also filled with a gaping hole.

Gwen was easy to find. One search of the internet brought up Detective Inspector Gwen Cooper-Williams, newly promoted. Further research showed she had a seemingly loving husband, Rhys Williams, and two children, Mairwen and Evan Williams, five and two respectively.

There was nothing to be found on Ianto Jones. At least, not the one she saw on the TARDIS. That scared her witless for a while. What happened to him? Was he never born here? Was he dead?

A deeper search, one that was undoubtedly illegal and aided by her father, found something that could be promising. Rose printed off the address to a small flat in Cardiff and told Dad to keep quiet about it. Then she took a little trip.

She told the Doctor that it was just to see if she could find some old mates. It wasn’t completely a lie. Substitute “mate” with “the mates of a mate,” and it would be a hundred percent accurate. She didn’t know why she felt the need to keep this a secret. Maybe it was because she needed this for herself. It was her one favour to her Jack. The one small thing she could make right in repayment for her one big wrong.

Once in Cardiff, she took a brief stop to snoop in on Gwen. She was rewarded with a small snippet of conversation between Gwen and some redhaired officer outside the police station. Something about Mairwen being sick. That was unfortunate for poor little Mairwen, but the general tone of the conversation led Rose to believe Gwen was perfectly content with the life she lived. She left with a newfound skip in her step.

The sight of Ianto Jones’s ratty, worn down, horror-esque flat building took that lighthearted air from her immediately. The Powell Estate wasn’t perfect itself, but it certainly wasn’t anything like this. It looked like it was perpetually in the middle of a disastrous renovation, abandoned and forgotten. She didn’t want to think about the life Ianto had.

After twenty minutes of staring, agog and horrified, someone came walking up the pavement to the flat. She sunk down into the seat of her car, barely peeking out the window, and watched Ianto Jones enter the building. He was too far away to tell if he looked happy or not, but she was under no illusion that he was happy. Not in this place.

She remembered who he was then, as she watched the door close behind him. She had seen him, ever so briefly, in London, during the fall of Canary Wharf. They never talked, never even acknowledged each other, but she had definitely seen him. That whole event was far less unpleasant to think about, now that she had her Doctor back, but it still felt so raw and horrible.
There was no Canary Wharf here, only the Cyberman uprising. She wondered if he faced the same atrocities here as he did there.

She fell asleep with the screams of the damned, the Daleks racing and Cybermen stomping, round and round her head in an endless nightmare. She woke up with a shout, and was momentarily concerned, because there was a lack of a warm, comforting body beside her. She shifted in her seat and wished she had rented a hotel room, instead of foolishly deciding to stakeout in her car.

At six fifteen in the morning, Ianto Jones left his flat. Rose waited for him to turn the corner before starting her car and tailing him. He walked for a short while, then grabbed a cab. Rose, who was not well-versed in spying, neither the ethics nor the practice, wondered if she should really be doing this. After a short bout of deliberation, she decided her curiosity outweighed her respect of privacy at the moment.

Ianto Jones worked at an art gallery. She popped in to see him, but he was nowhere to be seen. He worked as an archivist in for the gallery, an assistant at the front desk told her. Hidden away. She said she could get someone to grab him, but Rose declined.

With gentle prodding from Rose, the assistant proceeded to gossip about Ianto Jones. At length. The girl was clearly bored with her job and had absolutely no sense of privacy.

According to the girl, Ianto Jones was a “sad man who had no friends and only liked his job.” Actually, she wasn’t sure if he liked his job, but that was all he did, ever. No hobbies that she knew of. Not that she knew much about him, anyway; he talked to no one and no one talked to him, save for the few times they had to speak about work.

“Rather cute, though,” she said, leaning forward on her elbows. “Very… sexy. In a quiet sort of way.”

“Really?” Rose asked in a falsely intrigued voice.

“Yeah. I mean, it’s a pity the guy doesn’t have a girlfriend, but…” She gave an offhand shrug. “I’d shag him up against a wall if he asked.”

Rose blinked, and then promptly ended the conversation then and there.

“Oh, don’t forget to grab a pamphlet on your way out!” the assistant called as she turned and left, as if she hadn’t been proposing to fuck Rose’s best friend’s alternate universe boyfriend not two seconds before.

Rose did not grab a pamphlet.

She spent more agonizing time in her car, left alone with her thoughts and her feelings. It felt so lonely and blue, for reasons unknown to her. She called the Doctor once, simply to hear another voice besides the nagging one in her head. He asked how meeting her alternate friends was going, and she truthfully told him she hadn’t spoken with them yet. She laughed when she heard Donna make snarky comments to the Doctor in the background. It certainly lifted her spirits to hear them banter away.

“I’ll come home soon,” she promised him before she hung up.

When Ianto Jones left work at five sharp, Rose resumed her spying. She followed his cab to a supermarket. She watched him enter the store, then waited a good few minutes before entering herself.
Those few minutes had caused her to lose him amongst the many aisles, but she wasn’t concerned. Worst case scenario, he left before she did, which wasn’t too worrying, because she knew where he lived. She suddenly felt like a stalker. She continued her spying despite that.

She found him in the alcoholic drinks section, staring at the cheap and crappy choices in front of him with a slightly forlorn expression. Oh, god, he wasn’t an alcoholic, was he? She was thoroughly relieved when he sighed deeply, turned away from the drinks, and continued onward to the frozen section.

“Ianto Jones?” she called, trailing behind him.

If she had any remaining questions as to whether or not this universe was similar enough to the other for this Ianto to be deaf, they were quashed. Well, either that, or he was just plain ignoring her. That seemed rude, though, and the other Ianto hadn’t acted rudely.

She caught up to him as he began to inspect some frozen peas. Reaching a hand out, she was going to tap his shoulder, but he was already whirling around, startled by the sudden motion.

“Oh,” she said stupidly. “Um. Are you Ianto Jones?”

His eyes scanned her warily. “Yes. You’re the girl from the gallery.”

It wasn’t a question, but it wasn’t an accusation, either.

“I-I’m sorry,” she stammered. “I just…”

“What do you want from me?” He sounded tired.

She blinked. If this was how he dealt with being… not stalked, well, she didn’t want to know how he’d deal with it if he really was. She supposed that his ability to be unshaken was probably what made him suitable for Torchwood in the other life. Still, it was unnerving how collected he was.

“What do you want?” he reiterated.

She opened her mouth, but the words didn’t come out. What did she want, anyway? All she wanted was to see that he was okay, but now that she knew he wasn’t… what was she doing? What could she do?

“I want to offer you a job.”

Her words astonished her as much as him. They stared at each other for quite some time, both shocked and confused.

“Sorry, I think I missed that,” he said eventually. “I thought you said--”

“I want to offer you a job,” she found herself repeating.

Saying it once had shocked her, but now it was just worrying. It was as if her mouth had a mind of its own. It was like being possessed by Cassandra all over again, except with the terrifying reality that she wasn’t being possessed at all. This was from her own volition. Her mouth’s volition.

There was another long pause.

“In London,” she said.

His face instantly went dark.
“It’d pay well,” she added.

“So you’re doing this?” he asked. “Surely you have something better to be doing.”

“This isn’t a joke!” She huffed in exasperation. This was getting out of hand, but it seemed she was doomed to keep offering. “I’m serious!”

“Why?”

Simple question, not a simple answer. Why? She didn’t know why. All she had wanted was Jack back, and now she was here, offering Ianto Jones a non-existent job.

“Because you’re good,” she said. “Because we need people like you.”

He didn’t look like he believed her, but she was uncertain if it was because she wasn’t selling it right, or if he merely had that much self-doubt.

“Look,” she said as her hand rooted through her bag for a card (because she had a card now, working for Dad). “I’ll give you my card, and if you want, you can… y’know. Call me.”

He glanced down at the proffered card, his eyebrows gradually raising on his face.

“You do realize,” he said, right as Rose began to understand her mistake, “that I’m--”

“Yeah,” she said.

She chewed at her lip and looked down at her shoes, unable to meet his eyes.

When she plucked up the courage to look up again, he was staring down at her. Amusement gleamed in his eyes, and he looked like he was going to start laughing.

“Generally, when you stalk people, you don’t forget one of their biggest factors,” he said.

“I wasn’t stalking you,” she muttered.

“Sorry?”

“Not stalking,” she said. “Just sort of… following you around.”

“That’s stalking.”

“Okay, well…”

He rolled his eyes, a smile beginning to split his lips.

“Give me the card,” he said.

It took her a second to process that.

“Really?”

“Is there an address?” he asked, definitely smiling now.

“Oh, uh…” She checked the card. She didn’t know why she checked; she already knew there was one on it. Nerves finally catching up to her, probably. “Yeah.”

He held out his hand, and she stared at it a moment before realizing that he wanted the card. She
shoved it at him, smacking his hand out of the way on accident. Honestly, it couldn’t get any more mortifying than that. His eyebrows raised again as he took the card from her grasp. It was nice to see that he was still entertained, even at her expense.

“I hope you enjoyed stalking me, Miss…”

“Rose Tyler,” she said, starting to blush. “And I didn’t stalk you.”

Brows still arched in amusement, he stuffed the card in his pocket and turned back to his frozen peas. She took that as a sign to leave.

Rose had not expected him to beat her to London. She had a head start and everything! What, was he some sort of maniac behind the wheel? Maybe she should have stalked him.

He had just beaten her to entering the lobby at Dad’s work. She dashed in the doors behind him, prepared to do… well, something. The Doctor got there first, taking one look at Ianto Jones, face grim and posture tight. She prepared to flee from the building.

“Rose!”

She shrunk in on herself a little as she turned back around to face him. He was marching up to her, a less-than-impressed scowl stamped on his face. Ianto stood in the distance, frowning at them.

“What are you playing at?” the Doctor asked lowly.

This was his Dangerous Voice, his I’m-Talking-to-Fools Voice. She hated that voice, and she hated that he was using it on her.

“Well, Dad was always saying he wanted someone to file those records—”

“Rose.”

“Look, I couldn’t help it, okay?” She took a deep breath. “He was just… so unhappy, Doctor, and I couldn’t leave him like that, could I? Anyway, you hired Donna, why couldn’t I hire him? It’s my chance to make things right for Jack!”

“Jack’s not here,” the Doctor hissed. “And this isn’t that Ianto Jones.”

“I don’t care! I could help him!”

The Doctor glared at her for a moment longer before his face softened.

“Oh, Rose,” he said, soft and gentle.

He put a hand to her cheek briefly, stroked it once with his thumb, and then yanked it away. His tender expression turned into a no-nonsense one.

“Right, I suppose we’d better interview our newest hire.”

She ogled at him.

“You mean… you’re going to let him stay?”

“Well, that’s up to your dad and Mr. Jones, but he’s already here, so why not?”

She followed the Doctor to an empty room with that same feeling that had kept her following him
throughout time and space. She barely even remembered to motion for Ianto to come along with.

They sat down at a table, with the Doctor and Rose on one side. To Rose’s immediate surprise, the Doctor began to sign something rapidly to Ianto. Ianto, just as stunned as Rose, gaped at him momentarily before slowly bringing his hands up to sign something in return.

“I didn’t know you knew sign language,” she muttered to the Doctor.

“Five billion languages,” he reminded her.

“Right.”

She watched the Doctor and Ianto talk, eyes darting back and forth to track a conversation she couldn’t follow. There was a moment when things went dark, when the Doctor’s face got gloomy and Ianto looked so sad that it hurt Rose, even though she hadn’t a clue what was being said. Then it passed, and the interview ended quickly after that. Ianto left the room, with a small, passing smile to Rose as he left.

She turned to the Doctor.

“You gave him the job, didn’t you?”

“How do you know that?”

“Because I know you,” she said. “And I know that look you get when you’ve decided to help someone. It was all over your face, just there.”

He smiled at her and made the whole world just a little bit brighter.

“So, what was it, then?” she asked. “What did he say that changed your mind?”

It was alarming how quickly his smile turned to a frown. He looked down at the table and kept his thoughts to himself before looking back up at her with those eyes that screamed “I am nine hundred years old and have felt every bit of it.”

“In the first wave of Cyberman…” He shook his head. “He said his family wasn’t rich. Had no money, and they still decided to sink it into the earpieces. His mum, his sister and her kids… all gone. Taken by the Cybermen from right in front of him.”

“They didn’t take him?”

The Doctor shook his head. “No need for earpieces when you can’t hear.”

“So, he’s just…”

“All alone. Yeah.” He put a hand to her cheek again. “You were right to bring him here. I think he was drowning, and you just threw him a rope.”

Of course, ropes didn’t fix everything, not by a long shot.

After a month of working for Dad, Ianto still seemed very lonely and very sad. He’d throw smiles her way every time he saw her, but as far as she knew, he had made no other friends and locked himself away in the records room whenever he was at work.

“I don’t know what to do,” she said. “I mean, I try to be his friend, but other than that…”
“You can’t mend everything, Rose,” the Doctor advised. “Maybe he’s just shy.”

“No, it’s more than that, I’m sure of it.”

She took a moment to run it down in her mind. What were things that made people want to seclude themselves from others?

“Could it be… well…”

“No, go on,” the Doctor urged.

“Well, I was thinking… communication barrier?” She shrugged. “It’s just that, back on the TARDIS, Jack was signing for him and stuff… and now, you’re the only one here who signs with him, and you don’t even talk to him that much…”

“That could be it,” the Doctor said.

Rose nodded. “Teach me sign language.”

“What?”

“Teach me sign language!”

“That’s not going to make—”

“I know that! But can’t I just try to make things easier for him?”

The Doctor studied her for a moment, then reached a hand back to ruffle his hair.

“Well,” he said, “the first thing you should know is that there isn’t a single sign language. Ianto uses British Sign Language. Actually, in the universe, there is a count of exactly—”

Rose grinned to herself and mentally began taking notes.

Ianto stared at her the first time she signed “good morning” to him. He stared and stared, and she was afraid she might have had something on her face. Then a slow smile dawned on his face.

“Good morning,” he signed back. “How are you?”

“I’m fine, thank you.”

She wanted to sign something more, but the Doctor hadn’t taken her off greetings and simple phrases.

“You’re doing great,” Ianto told her.

She beamed.

It was fun, learning from two fronts. She had both the Doctor and Ianto helping her out, and that was brilliant. Sometimes, the Doctor would teach her something that Ianto would tell her that that was wrong, and then she would go back to the Doctor and tell him that. Then the two of them would get in a long, often heated, argument (in both English and BSL) about grammar and syntax and all that language stuff.

Although sometimes it was hard. Rose had never ever been good at school. She barely hit mediocre. Normally, that didn’t matter, because she had other strong points, but when it came to learning
languages… She might as well have been taking advanced calculus. She just didn’t get it sometimes. The Doctor and Ianto would help (occasionally leading to more hilarious fights), but she was just so slow and so bad.

Then Donna started joining Rose’s little BSL sessions, and they both sucked together, so it wasn’t so bad in the end.

But the thing was, that didn’t fix things. It just meant Ianto went from having a few sort-of friends to three close friends. Having three friends does not a healthy, balanced person make. Ianto was still just seemingly coasting along, making the bare minimum of life.

It was heartbreaking, and now more than ever, as she got to know him better. He was… wonderful. If she hadn’t had the Doctor…

One day, as he was explaining to her the complexities of time-travel in “this day and age,” it hit her.

“Doctor,” she said. “Would it be possible to send a signal to the future?”

She loved watching him think things through. It generally provided her a good show of his facial expressions alone, and today’s bunch was pretty fantastic.

“Well,” he said, “I suppose it’s possible. As long as you have the right equipment—which we could make—and if you have the knowledge how to do so—which I do—then yes, you could. Why are you asking?”

“I want to send a signal.”

“I gathered. But why… no. Rose, no.”

“I want to find him,” she said stubbornly.

“He’s not the same.”

“Neither is Donna. Or Martha or Sarah Jane.”

“This is different,” the Doctor insisted.

“I miss him!”

“As do I,” he said. “That doesn’t mean we should bring him here.”

“But what if…”

She let her voice trail off. If he was already skeptical, it wasn’t going to change because of her stupid idea.

“What if what?” asked the Doctor.

“What if he can help Ianto?”

Rose mentally counted the seconds it took before the Doctor stopped staring at her like that. She reached fifty-seven before he spoke.

“He can’t.”

“You can’t know that! He still could!”
“And how do you figure that?”

“Because they were happy!”

“That doesn’t mean they’ll be happy here,” he said. “Different universe, different Ianto, different Jack.”

“Didn’t stop you from setting up Martha and Tom,” she countered.

“Because they’re nearly identical to their counterparts! This Jack hasn’t met me! You remember what Jack was like before us!”

“Well, we can change him again!”

“We don’t know that for sure,” he said. “And even if we could, what makes you so sure they’d even fall for each other?”

She shrugged. “Mum and Dad…Martha and Tom…”

“Could be anomalies,” he finished.

“Or they might not be! Maybe everyone always ends up with who they’re supposed to be with! I’d fall in love with any version of you; any version of me would, too!”

She blushed and pulled at her shirtsleeve.

“That’s why there’s not another me in this universe,” she muttered. “Cause there’s not a you for me here. And I’m nothing without you.”

She looked up when his hand gently took hers, tugging it away from her sleeve. His eyes were soft and kind and held the entire world in them.

“Rose,” he said gently, “you are everything. With me or not.”

Then he kissed her, so tenderly that it was like her first kiss all over again, only like those movie first-kisses, because those are always wonderful and fantastic, and her first kiss was crap.

And that was how she manipulated the Doctor to sending a signal to nearly four thousand years into the future.

The day they sent it, months after Rose had suggested it, Rose, Mum, and the Doctor were the only ones allowed in the room to greet him. All the people that missed him. Rose snuck Ianto into the room, though, as official recorder (something they didn’t really need, but she’d be damned if Ianto wasn’t there to meet Jack).

“You might want someone who can actually hear the conversation,” Ianto protested as she dragged him to the top floor.

“No, I want you. I don’t care if you record it or not.”

“You really shouldn’t—”

“Ianto,” she said. “Shut up and come with me, or I’ll demote you.”

He rolled his eyes but obeyed.
From the instant Jack stepped foot in their time, Ianto and Jack did not get along.

It was like watching magnets repel, even though it didn’t make sense, because they were polar opposites. Jack was clearly like his alternative version’s old brash self, and Ianto could be very uptight when the occasion arose (which it did). Like tramp meets secretary, Mum would later say.

“Okay, who sent the transmission?” Jack demanded. “If you’re looking for your ship back, I don’t have it. Who’s to say I ever did?”

Beside Rose, Ianto scoffed and performed yet another of his patented eyerolls.

“Something I said?” Jack asked.

Ianto ignored him. Or possibly didn’t see him speak.

“You sent a signal for a thief?” he asked Rose.

“Well…”

“Hey!” Jack blurted. “I’m not a thief. At least, not that you can prove.”

“Conman, then.”

Jack cocked an eyebrow. “Possibly. You still can’t verify that. Though there are other things you could… verify.”

His come-ons were even worse than the other Jack’s, Rose decided.

“I don’t think I want anything to do with the likes of you, thanks.”

Jack’s leer turned into a glare.

“Listen,” he said. “I don’t know who you are, or why you sent for me, but once I find out, you’re going to regret it.”

Things rapidly went downhill from there.

Jack hated everyone. Sort of. He vacillated between wanting to take everyone to bed and wanting to shoot them all. He was allowed to do neither of those things and he had been immediately deprived of his gun and his vortex manipulator thing, which angered him immensely and made him refuse to cooperate with them. Rose did feel a bit awful. No, more than a bit. It was like trapping him here.

Officially, Jack was here to serve as tactical defense against Cyberman weapons. Jack knew all about weapons and engineering, and they did desperately need his help. The Doctor could only do so much on his own.

Unofficially, he was partly failing at his job. He had warmed up to Rose and the Doctor, constantly gazing at them both with that starry-eyed wonder that his other self had. He offered to take them to bed the most out of everyone (and never separately, Rose noted).

But he was still having a rough time with Ianto. Rose just couldn’t understand it. They’d been so happy, even from the distance Rose had seen them from. Or, if not happy, then in love. So why weren’t they falling all over each other here?

It took nearly a month for Rose to realize the issue.
Even though he now had the Doctor and Rose, Jack hadn’t had around a hundred and fifty years to learn about this era’s Earth. He had no tragedy for reference. He had no idea how Ianto burned inside.

“Just casually mention siblings when both are around,” the Doctor said one night.

“Why’s that?” she asked curiously.

And then the Doctor explained Jack’s brother Gray, his disappearance, and his disastrous reappearance at Torchwood Three.

“He might never find this Gray,” the Doctor said, “so maybe…”

“They could relate?”

“Something like that.”

Rose considered it.

“I don’t want to talk to him,” Ianto signed when Rose suggested it to him.

“We need you two to cooperate,” she replied. (She had looked up cooperate in preparation for this. She knew he was going to be stubborn.)

“Why?” he asked. “We don’t work together.”

“Because you’re our friends.”

“Why are you his friend?”

She shot him a look and didn’t answer that.

Ianto must have taken her advice, though, because there was a significant change in the way they acted around each other. It was slight and gradual, with changes so small in the long run that Rose only noticed it when Jack came up to her one day and asked her to teach him to sign.

“Jack, I can’t,” she said.

“Why not?”

“Because I’m still learning myself!”

“Can the Doctor teach me?”

“Why don’t you just ask Ianto?”

Jack opened and closed his mouth like a fish.

“I want it to be a surprise,” he eventually settled on.

Oh.

Jack made Donna and Rose feel really bad about their signing skills. The Doctor said she shouldn’t, because Jack was supposed to be that smart; only very smart people could be Time Agents.

“And,” he said, “British Sign Language is very similar to Standard Sign Language from his time. It’s possible he already knows that. He’s quite adept with languages.”
“You can’t be serious.”

“No, he really is! You should ask him how to ask for eggs in Melusian, he’s really quite—”


“Oh. Yeah.” He shrugged. “It’s like a mix of American, Chinese, and British Sign Languages.”

“All those aliens,” she said, “and they stick with human languages?”

“Well… I could get into the specifics of colonization in space and its effects on the population of the universe as a whole…”

“Okay, I get it. Humans bad.”

“Humans aren’t bad. You’re just…”

He didn’t say what they were “just.”

“Anyway,” he continued, “isn’t this a good thing? Faster to communication?”

“I suppose,” she said.

It still didn’t make her feel any better about her signing.

Rose also began to notice how close they were getting when the two of them shifted their focus.

There used to be a sort of hierarchy of friendship with those two.

For Ianto, it started with Rose, because they were slowly becoming each other’s best friends. Then it was Donna, who he could snark the day away with. Then the Doctor, who was the best at understanding him. Mum and Dad fit somewhere equally on the list, and he was polite enough with Martha and Sarah Jane when they stopped by. Then that was it.

For Jack, it began with Rose and the Doctor, because there was probably no universe where it didn’t. Then there was Martha (to the Doctor’s great pride), and then Donna. Then Mum. Not Dad. He did like little Tony, though. And that was all.

But now? Now, Ianto and Jack were slowly moving to the top of each other’s lists. They loved their other friends still, but there were definite moments when they were clearly only ever thinking of each other.

She was pleased at first, but then dismayed. She’d become so close to Ianto, and even though he wasn’t pulling away, necessarily, she missed his need for her.

“I know it’s selfish,” she told Donna. “But I miss him.”

“Didn’t you only ever begin this mess because you missed someone else?” Donna asked. “And now you miss him?”

“Bit stupid, I know.”


But it was stupid, because now she had a Jack, but she felt just as lonesome as before.
Especially when they went and buggered off to the fifty-first century.

It was nearly a year after Rose had first noticed the change in the two of them. The Doctor had granted Jack his vortex manipulator back (something she was later going to have strong words with him about) Ianto had quietly come and told her the news, and she sat there for a long while, not able to comprehend any of it.

“It’s just like living in his flat with him,” Ianto explained. “Only that it’s to his time, not his flat.”

“Why can’t you live with him here?”

“There’s no family for me here,” he signed. “Jack has family, back there.”

That hurt. That hurt a lot.

“No family? What about me?”

“I didn’t mean that,” he signed. “You know that.”

“Don’t leave me,” she pleaded. “Stay!”

“I’ll come back. It’s not forever.”

He kissed her cheek and hugged her tight, and then left to say his goodbyes to Donna.

She still didn’t understand. The other Jack and Ianto hadn’t seemed that domestic, not even in her five minutes of seeing them interact through a screen. Hell, Jack had never seemed domestic in either universe. So why now?

“I don’t know,” Jack said upon her asking. “It’s just…”

He sighed and gazed off at some distant object.

“It’s different,” he said after some time. “I think he would say the same thing. Neither of us know what it is but… I don’t know. I want to show him my world. I want him in my world. And this is my chance.”

“You don’t have to go for that to happen!”

“We’ll be back,” he promised, echoing Ianto’s words. “I’m a time traveller.”

“But I’ll miss you.”

He kissed the top of her head twice before he went to say goodbye to Martha.

That night, on the top floor, on the very same spot that Jack had appeared to them, they vanished together.

Rose had never felt so alone in her life.

Chapter End Notes

Literally all of my writing is based on characters suggesting batshit things and the others
just... going along with it. I know that's not how it works in real life. Too bad. This is fiction, babey!
Have a beautiful, joyous day! Thank you for reading!
I realized a little too late that Rhiannon might not actually live in Newport. Not sure where I got that idea from, anyway. But I've already worked it in to this fic, so there's no way I'm going back to fix that. Far too much work. Just take it with grain of salt, and everything will be alright.

Susan Pitts from on the corner was around for tea. Rhiannon didn't know why. She just sort of... popped in. Without permission. Or without someone asking her to stay. But there was no moving her, not now. Rhiannon just had to deal with it.

Now, Susan Pitts was known around the estate for her excessive gossip. Since all Rhiannon had heard so far was blather about football and the weather and restaurants. By the looks of it, though, whatever she wanted to say or know was coming up on the horizon, and quickly. Rhiannon wished she would just cut to the chase already, so that Rhiannon could get her out of the house. She liked a good gossip as much as anyone, but good god, not with Susan Pitts. Nobody liked gossip with Susan Pitts.

"--and they just don't make that meringue like they used to," Susan was saying when Rhiannon tuned back in again.

"Definitely," Rhiannon said listlessly.

Were they still talking about that Italian place? No matter, she was zoning out again. She caught words here and there like "risotto" and some fancy wines, and eventually "baguette."

"Your brother," Susan remarked casually, and Rhiannon practically jolted upright. "Ianto, is it? He's deaf, right?"

Instantaneously, Rhiannon was on guard, red klaxons sounding in her skull. It was like school all over again. Rhiannon sized Susan up cautiously, waiting for the trap to spring. Susan simply took a sip of tea and waited patiently for Rhiannon's response.

"Yeah," Rhiannon said coldly. "What about it?"

"Oh, nothing!" Susan said, blinking in an offended manner that was clearly false. "You misunderstand me; I'm just curious."

Rhiannon wanted to punch her in her smug face. Twisting her words was one thing, but twisting her words when it came to defending her brother? One step too far. Anything more and Rhiannon would have Johnny throw her out of the house.

"It's just that we might have seen him in that French place. You know, the one in Cardiff?"

She knew Rhiannon wouldn't know.

"By the memorial?"
"Alright," Rhiannon said, just to get things moving along.

"And I mean, I thought I'd recognized him. I've seen him around here once or twice before, you know," she said, and Rhiannon took that to mean she had been spying on them, "and I think I vaguely recall you mentioning to me that he was deaf."

Rhiannon hadn't mentioned it at all. She flicked an eyebrow up.

"Or perhaps it was Johnny," Susan added hurriedly. Smart of her. Johnny had the memory of a goldfish; he wouldn't be able to prove he hadn't told her. "Anyway, he was signing with the other person, so I assumed, you know. He could be your brother."

Did people really think every deaf person was her brother?

"And you two do look a lot alike," Susan backtracked again. "That eyebrow raise, it's so much like his."

Now she was starting to sound like she knew Ianto, and that was beginning to piss Rhiannon off.

"Anyway," Susan continued, "I only mention it because of the person he was with."

Rhiannon refused to acknowledge the skip in her heartbeat. She was not going to lower herself to Susan's level.

Fortunately, Susan was perfectly content to stay on Susan's level, and Rhiannon didn't even have to ask.

"He was with a man," Susan said.

Whatever reaction Susan was expecting, she wasn't going to get it. Rhiannon knew better than to let her emotions through. Once Susan Pitts knew she had someone, she dug her pink-manicured talons in and didn't let go. Rhiannon wasn't about to be milked for gossip, and she wouldn't milk Susan fucking Pitts for it, either. Getting information from Susan Pitts was like asking the fireman to predict the weather. It was opinionated, misleading, and generally nowhere near the truth.

That being said, Rhiannon kept her whirling thoughts to herself.

She knew what that sounded like. Fancy restaurant, Ianto, and a man? That could be... well. It could be that, or it could be something else entirely. Susan said he was signing with the other person, right? Well, he could have been out with a deaf friend, or something.

Rhiannon really hoped it was just a deaf friend. Not because she was worried about it being... the other thing, but because, honestly? Ianto could use a friend. Especially a deaf friend.

She didn't completely understand the difference between deaf and Deaf, or how Ianto viewed himself in that sense. She knew it had something to do with how someone fit within the community, like the Deaf were raised in it and the deaf weren't, or something similar. She assumed that Ianto would consider himself deaf, then, and not Deaf, because he'd had very little to do with the Deaf community. It wasn't for a lack of trying. Ianto had tried, but where he failed make friends due to communication barriers with the hearing world, he just couldn't make friends with anyone who understood him because he was, well, awkward. And shy. And all those "undesirable" traits that would make a six-year old wind up with no friends. Then there was Dad, who just made it impossible for Ianto to connect with who he was or anyone who was like him. Of course, Ianto had broken free a bit during uni, and she was sure he'd made some Deaf friends there, but she didn't think that had lasted. It never did, with Ianto.
So, she prayed to God or anyone else out there that this dinner was just that; connecting with the Deaf community. Finding a place for himself. She wanted that for him so badly that it ached in her heart.

"I'm sure there's a perfectly good reason for it," Rhiannon said.

"I'm sure there is," Susan said.

Her complacent tone dashed any hopes and dreams Rhiannon had just found.

It also effectively caught Rhiannon in her trap, because now Rhiannon desired to know exactly what Susan thought she saw.

Damnit.

"Why?" Rhiannon asked with a slight sigh. "What did it look like?"

"Well," Susan started.

Rhiannon sat back and cursed the world that this was coming from Susan Pitts, and not a reliable source like Tina.

"The man was beautiful," Susan said. "Bloody gorgeous! Impeccable jawline and perfect teeth and amazing hair. Like someone from the films, or a model." She took a sip from her mug. "Or an escort."

That didn't prove anything, Rhiannon told herself.

Susan must've seen that on her face, because Susan set her mug down and smiled sweetly.

"And it was so... intimate," she said.

"Intimate how?" Rhiannon asked, because there was no point in pretending she didn't care now.

"Has Ianto ever had a girlfriend?"

Rhiannon blinked. And blinked again.

"No," Rhiannon said, and Susan looked triumphant. "But he's had girl... lovers."

Susan didn't seem convinced.

"I suppose it wouldn't have even mattered if he had," she said. "No girl was getting her feet around that table, no sir. That man had only eyes for your Ianto. Gorgeous blue eyes, too. Your brother really knows how to pick 'em."

There was a question that Rhiannon had, but she didn't want to ask. If she asked, Susan would pick up on it take it as confirmation that her story is indeed a fact, and not an uncertain tale.

But now that she was thinking about it, Rhiannon needed to know.

"This man," Rhiannon said slowly, and Susan perked up. Oh, she was already regretting this. "Was he American?"

The cogs visibly turned in Susan's mind as she worked out how to weave it into her story.
"Oh, I have no idea," Susan said, though her eyes were gleaming, the bloody witch. "Didn't speak a word the entire night."

"Did he have a grey coat?"

Susan blinked in surprise, then grinned wider than the Cheshire cat. "Why, he did! It was this great big military thing. Old fashioned. Kind of like the man himself."

Rhiannon didn't care anymore that Susan would spread this around like wildfire.

Jesus Christ.

Jesus bloody Christ.

_Fuck._

She vaguely heard herself asking: "Did they seem happy?"

That was all that mattered, wasn't it? That Ianto was happy?

Susan shrugged. "How should I know?"

Rhiannon gaped at her. Trust Susan Pitts to notice how _intimate_ they were, but not be able to notice whether or not they were _happy_. God knows, she probably let her husband give her a good fuck that night, all while thinking about Ianto and his...

Christ, did he really have a _boyfriend_?

"Oh, is that the time?" Susan asked.

Of course, she was leaving now. Of course.

Rhiannon couldn't even bring herself to be bothered by it. She stared at the table as Susan Pitts swaggered off, probably next door, to spout to Mr. and Mrs. Warner all about her gay, deaf brother.

She was still sitting at the table when Johnny came home twenty minutes later.

"Do you think Ianto's gay?" she asked without thinking.

Johnny scoffed. "Your brother? Obviously. Hasn't ever had a girlfriend, has he?"

"But he's had... women."

"So?" Johnny shrugged. "Maybe he's gone bender. Bets are he has. Last time he showed up, he was wearing a bloody pink shirt. And pink on his tie."

Rhiannon didn't think that mattered, did it?

"And besides," Johnny said. "He's always been such a mummy's boy--"

There were times in Rhiannon's life where she was concerned she would turn out like her father. But every time, every single bloody time, she was able to hold back and calm herself. There didn't need to be another Mum, Rhiannon, and Ianto in life. Not one created by Rhiannon herself.

So, she was very, very careful to make sure her hand slammed on the table, and not anywhere near any living creature.
"Don't you dare, Jonathan Davies," Rhiannon spat. "Don't you fucking dare!"

Johnny could only stare at her.

"Never say another thing like that again," she seethed, "or you'll find yourself living on the streets, do you hear me?"

Johnny nodded, and Rhiannon let out a deep breath. She turned around and clasped a hand to her mouth and took a long, long time to herself.

She wasn't like Dad. She wasn't going to be like Dad.

A hand touched her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, alright?" Johnny whispered. "I didn't mean it like that."

"I know."

"I liked your Mum," Johnny said. "And... well, the jury's still out on Ianto--"

Rhiannon breathed a laugh.

"But I didn't mean to insult him or your Mum. Okay?"

She nodded.

"And you're not your dad."

"Thank you," she murmured. She really needed that.

"And look," Johnny said, resuming his prior cheeky attitude, "if your brother's gay, he's gay! Just look at Mica's friend's Mums! They're doing alright, aren't they?"

Sian's mums were doing pretty well for themselves...

"Don't tease him about it!" she called as he began to walk away.

"Wouldn't dream of it!"

Liar.

She took another deep inhale and sat back down.

Ianto was going to have a chat with her next time he came 'round, whether he liked it or not.

Of course, there was no telling when that would be. Not with Ianto bloody Jones.

Rupesh Patanjali thought his job was simple. Play the stupid idiot, catch the attention of "Captain" Jack Harkness, and call Johnson when it was all over.

He did not expect to be dealing with a dying old man whilst watching Captain Harkness and his associate, Ianto Jones, pretend to be a married couple from next door. It was a bit pathetic. They could hardly pull it off. Both of them being happily married? And to each other? The odds of either of those things felt very, very low.

"I'm sorry," he told them, feigning feigned sorrow. God, there was an extra layer to things when he
was a spy and a doctor. "We did everything we could, but he didn't make it."

"Oh, that's a shame," Captain Harkness said.

"Very sad."

Wait, hang on, hadn't the intelligence report said Ianto Jones was deaf? Rupesh was instantly suspicious. Ironic, that. A suspicious spy.

"Poor old Mr. Williams," Harkness said.

"It's very sad indeed," Jones agreed.

Okay, okay, it could not be any clearer that the two of them were faking it. Rupesh didn't even have to be a trained spy to know that. Were he just a normal doctor or nurse, like Sally Whatsherface, he'd still be able to tell that they had no idea who Mr. Williams was prior to the last, oh, hour or so. Give or take five minutes.

"There'll have to be an autopsy," Rupesh said, because he, unlike them, could lead a convincing role. "But I'd say his heart gave out."

"Brave old heart," Jones said.

Rupesh tried not to laugh at that ridiculous attempt. Harkness was bad, but Jones was worse. So much worse. Couldn't the captain have taken the other one with him instead? That Gwen Cooper girl, the ex-copper? Surely, she'd be better at this than Jones. Good lord was Jones bad. Even Harkness was looking at him oddly.

"You were his neighbors, is that right?" Rupesh asked. On the records, it said nephews, but he was sure they'd forgotten that by now.

"We live next door," Harkness said, confirming Rupesh's suspicion.

The shoulder rub he gave Jones was awkward, at best. But, for all Jones's own awkwardness, he didn't seem to react much to the touch.

Alright, maybe they could play a convincing couple. It was just that literally nothing else was convincing.

"He's got no family to speak of," Jones said. "All on his own."

Incredibly stupid thing to say, when they'd declared Harkness the sole living inheritor.

"We just," Jones continued, "keep an eye on him, you know."

"Well, I'm sure he appreciated it. If only there were more like you two in the world."

Rupesh did not miss the strange glint in Jones's eyes.

"I know it's an imposition--"

Any sentence starting like that was certainly a cause of interest.

"--but with us being such good neighbours... Can we see the body?"

Rupesh kept his smile to himself as he led them to the body of "poor old Mr. Williams."
"Bless him," Harkness said.

"God rest his soul."

Did... did they rehearse these lines?

"Say," Harkness said, and Rupesh prepared to be told to leave the area.

Rupesh watched the two of them through the small space between the curtain and the wall. They made signing gestures back and forth as Jones handed over tools. So, Jones was deaf, then. Was he lipreading, then? Interesting. Exploitable.

When he felt like it was an appropriate time, he opened the curtain on them, and pretended to be shocked and horrified to find Mr. Williams spliced open, with Harkness yanking out some sort of... odd organ. Alright, that did actually shock and horrify Rupesh, but not enough to break through his acting performance as... shocked and horrified. God, so many levels to this job.

And then Harkness and Ianto tried to leave, and Rupesh had to think of something. Fast.

"There are bodies going missing!"

Shit. That had not been what he was planning to say. He was going to say something about the kids talking weirdly...

Too late now. They were interested.

"What bodies?" Harkness asked. "Where?"

Frantic, and probably showing it (though that actually might help his character, so he didn't much care) Rupesh rambled on about bodies and mortuaries and missing records. He threw in a little bit about ethnicity. That should grab attention, right?

He swore quietly to himself as he watched their SUV drive away.

Then he got in his own car and followed them.

At their base, or somewhere near it, at least, he met Gwen Cooper. He also had the fortune of being on hand when the children did that strange talking-together thing again. Honestly, he should have mentioned that in the first place, instead of that "missing bodies" shit. It got Harkness to come around to fetch a kid from him (which was slightly sick).

He prided himself on his good work and reported it to Agent Johnson.

Rupesh could honestly say, he had not expected to be shot down by her later.

What a shitty boss she was.

It had been a bit of a scare, seeing the kids talk like that.

Rhiannon decided to keep them home, just to be safe. She didn't want to hear some story about them falling into mass hysteria or something equally as bonkers, no thanks.

She was folding up her flyers in the kitchen, keeping an eye on Mica, when the door opened and in walked her brother.
Nice to see he'd finally stopped waiting outside the door like some jilted lover boy.

"We must be in trouble," she signed. "Or is it Christmas?"

"How are they?" Ianto asked.

She assumed he meant the kids. If there was another "they," she didn't know about it. She started telling him about her fears and her decision to keep them home, but he wandered off as she was mid-sentence to go pass of a five-pound note to Mica. Honestly, he was going to spoil the kids rotten.

"Did you say thanks to your uncle?" Rhiannon asked, because there was no point in telling Ianto off for it again.

"I did!" Mica said.

Well, if she had, Rhiannon hadn't seen it. Those grubby little fingers never left that game controller. Rhiannon was going to have to give her a talk about lying, one of these days.

"David, your Uncle Ianto's here!" Rhiannon called.

She had to keep from rolling her eyes as Ianto pulled out another note.

He put the note on the table for David to snatch up as he signed: "I thought I missed Mica's birthday. I thought I could take her to McDonald's, or something."

Hardly seemed like much, when he'd just passed out fifteen quid. She told him as much, and he amended his offer to take her to the cinema, instead. She smiled. Cinemas. She hoped that could become a thing in her family. Ianto and the kids, off to the cinema. Just like when she'd take him. She didn't realize until after Mica agreed that she'd like that, too, that the last time Ianto had suggested the cinema, people had died there.

"I thought maybe this afternoon," Ianto signed, but Rhiannon was already shaking her head.

There was no way she'd let the kids out of her sight, not even with Ianto. No deaths, no mass hysteria. Some other day when the chances of either of those things occurring were less high would be better.

"I'm busy Saturday," he signed upon her suggestion of the date.

She didn't believe that bullshit.

"You're a civil servant. They don't work weekends. They invented weekends."

That is, if he actually was a civil servant, anyway.

The conversation stopped when she insisted Mica wouldn't be going anywhere. As in, the dead stop it usually came to when Ianto decided it was time to leave.

Not a chance.

Not this time.

"Sit down," she told him. "I have some spinach dip. And we've got things to talk about."

He immediately looked apprehensive. "What things?"
“You've been seen.”

That certainly got his attention. He slowly sank down into a chair as she poured him a mug of tea, frowning to himself. Oh, she did enjoy making him worry, just a little. What are big sisters for?

She sat down with her own mug, fiddling with it slightly before setting it down on the table.

"Susan from on the corner was in town and it was her anniversary," she began, and she watched him try to figure out where this was going. "They went to that posh French restaurant in town by the memorial, and there you were."

"So?"

"There you were, having dinner with man."

She could practically see his anxiety levels jump up to eleven.

"So?"

"Having dinner with a man in a restaurant."

"So?" The instant defensiveness was interesting, to say the least. "You have dinner with Tina!"

"Not in town," she signed. She fiddled with her mug slightly before continuing. "Susan said he was gorgeous. Like an actor. Or an escort."

"He's my boss," Ianto signed.

Boss? Really? That's the best he could come up with? Boss? Some boss that was.

"She said it was intimate," she told him. "She said no girl was getting near that table. No chance."

Then she asked him if he'd gone bender and gauged his response.

First, he looked back at Mica, then back at her, then down to the table.

"Go on," she signed when he looked up again.

When he didn't proceed, she sighed.

"You never tell me anything now." She looked down at her mug. "Like I did something wrong. I didn't."

He waited for a moment to say anything, a very tense moment on both their parts.

"It's not that," he signed. "It's my job. It's difficult."

She resigned herself for that to be it again.

Sometimes, she wished she could take herself back to the moment it went wrong between them. But then she realized she didn't know when that was. When she moved away? When she got married? When he left for uni? When he went back to London? She couldn't tell. It didn't matter, anyway, did it? It was too late.

Just when she prepared to get up to take his mug and put it in the sink, he started signing.

"He is very handsome."
She felt a smile grow on her face. "No."

"Stop it."

"You're kidding me! Really?"

He looked off to the side, then back, his expression tense.

"Christ Almighty," she said to herself.

"He's nice, isn't he?" she asked him. "Is he?"

Ianto didn't respond.

"Since when?" she asked.

He continued his silence at first.

"It's weird," he signed after a pause. "It's just different. It's not men, it's just him. It's only him."

She wanted to say something, to ask him more about it, but he didn't give her the chance.

"And I don't know what it is, exactly, so I'm not mentioning it to anyone."

Her promises to keep it silent and to herself were dulled when Johnny came and instantly began teasing him.

"Thanks," Ianto signed sarcastically.

All of the sudden, Rhiannon felt like Susan Pitts.

She watched Johnny give Ianto a gigantic hug when she noted a high-pitched whirring. Shit, were those boys stealing another car?

"Whose car is that outside? Is that you?" Johnny asked Ianto. "Black thing?"

"That's the company car," Ianto said.

Rhiannon pursed her lips and stared down at the table. Damnit, Johnny.

"You want to watch it on this estate, boy."

"No, it's fine. Top of the range. It's got a triple deadlock."

"Oh, aye," Johnny said mockingly. "Sounds like it."

"What?"

Rhiannon glared at her husband. "Johnny, just tell him--"

Johnny shoved Ianto towards the door as tyres screeched outside, and Rhiannon rushed out fast enough behind them to see the Granger boys and Michael Lloyd drive by in an SUV.

Rhiannon let out a long sigh. This wasn't how today was supposed to go.

The entirety of Roald Dahl Plass was in ruins. Fires were still burning in the rubble and the smoke
was thick enough to darken the entire Quay. Chunks of concrete were turned up and over, bars bending and twisting over the remains of the pavement. It was a chaotic mess.

Andy surveyed it. Nobody had said anything about any bodies, so that was hopeful. He doubted Gwen would've been caught in this. She was too clever. Probably got away. She had to have gotten away; he wasn't even going to entertain the possibility that she hadn't.

There was tape already outlining the perimeter of the explosion when he arrived, and he'd assumed it had been Torchwood's own doing, but now the other officers were grumbling something about an anti-terrorism department. Andy couldn't make heads nor tales of that. Anti-terrorism? Did they think a terrorist blew up the Plass? Not likely. Andy suspected aliens himself. Mark had called him an idiot, but then again, what did bloody Mark know?

Now, Andy was standing with Miles (as good a bloke as any) and watching this lady cross in front of the mangled heap of debris. She was yelling something about keeping the police back. Why was it, every time Andy showed up to an investigation, they were blocked off by Torchwood or "anti-terrorism" or the likes of them? Couldn't the police just do their job? He supposed this was Cardiff, in all its spooky glory, so perhaps not.

"If she's anti-terrorist, I would not mind being Uncle Terrorist," Andy remarked to Miles.

He was certain the joke went right over Miles's head, but that was alright. Andy knew it was funny.

"Two escaped suspects," the lady was saying. "Ianto Jones, Gwen Cooper, armed and dangerous."

Now, Andy didn't give a damn about bloody Ianto Jones, but as for Gwen... well... come on. Did they really think she would have blown up the Plass? Her own workplace? He highly doubted it.

"I know Gwen Cooper," Andy called to the lady. "She's an ex-police officer; she's not a terrorist."

The lady observed him with an unamused glance.

"Haven't you got tape to tie?"

Oh, ha ha bloody ha.

Seriously, is that all that people thought of the police around here? Idiots that stand around doing nothing while the big kids muck about? Christ.

"Fine, I'm just saying. You're barking up the wrong tree, that's all."

She started walking away with the two armed men. "I want their homes raided."

What the fuck?

"Gwen Cooper is not a terrorist!" he insisted.

The woman slowly revolved on the spot. He suddenly felt very small as her gaze landed on him, eyes glinting with something dark.

"You must know where she lives," she mused.

He realized his mistake far too late.

Oh, shit.
"Come on," the woman said, beckoning him forward.

"I don't think--"

"I'm sure you don't," she said.

Andy was about to say something, anything, to that rather rude statement, but the two men she was with stepped beside him. It was rather threatening, and he felt his feet carrying him forward before he even recognized what he was doing.

He followed the scary trio to a vehicle. A man was already in the car at the wheel, and Andy was forced to pile in between the two brutes as the lady herself claimed shotgun.

"Directions," she snapped.

"You could be a little nicer," Andy said, but it was all bluster. He was, quite frankly, terrified out of his wits, and they could definitely get any information out of him if they tried.

"Please," she added, but somehow, it didn't at all make it feel like any less of an order.

They were all dead silent in the car. No one said a word, save for Andy, who was still giving directions. Sometimes, he threw in suggestions or tips. Told them to leave Gwen well enough alone, because she hadn't done anything. Nobody acknowledged him, so he took that as a sign nobody would shoot him in the face if he kept going.

"I mean, shouldn't there be some sort of briefing first?" Andy asked. "Like a risk assessment?"

There was no answer. He wasn't even sure they were listening.

"Not that Gwen's a risk," he added, just in case they were.

He sat back and glanced between the two men beside him.

"So, what's your names?"

They didn't even look at him. He decided to personally call the left one Joy and the other on the right Happy, just to amuse himself.

"So, er, you lot are some sort of specialists from London. Am I right?" he asked.

Not a word was said in reply.

"I mean I totally respect that," he told Happy. "Really, I do. But sometimes, there's no substitute for a little bit of local knowledge, and let me tell you, Gwen'll be absolutely no bother."

Well, at least, he hoped she wouldn't be.

"I mean, we're not going in there all guns blazing, are we?"

"How far is it?" the lady in front asked.

He glanced briefly out the windscreen.

"Two minutes."

He felt his eyes go wide as guns were loaded to his left, right, and front.
"Oh, shit."

He didn't look anywhere but out the windscreen for the rest of the ride.

When Gwen stepped into the middle of the road, he was fairly certain the driver was going to run her over. Then she raised her gun and he spared himself another "oh, shit" moment as she shot at the vehicle. Everyone ducked, but the anticipated bullets never came bursting through the glass. Actually, they heard the screech of burning rubber before they sat up.

"Now do you believe she's a terrorist?" the lady asked as they started to drive after the speeding car. They didn't get very far.

"She shot the wheels," Andy scoffed. "What kind of terrorist shoots your wheels?"

The lady's head dropped back into her seat.

"A clever one," she said.

Andy rolled his eyes.

"You really don't know Gwen Cooper at all," he said.

Bloody "anti-terrorists."

Sometimes, Rhiannon was very grateful for a man like Johnny. It was so good of him to keep the people across the street (the ones in the car, listening in) occupied with his ranting and raving.

She inspected the card carefully before opening it. David said it was probably from Ianto, and he was right. But she wasn't sure she wanted to open it. Not after last night.

God, what had Ianto done?

"Innocent kids, fast asleep at home, and a gang of uniformed thugs break in and point guns at their head?" Johnny was yelling. "It's no wonder they're traumatised. It's no wonder our poor David pissed the bed!"

"I didn't!" David denied.

"Ha, you big baby!" Mica said from beside Rhiannon.

Rhiannon opened the card.

Oh. God.

"It's the police state to blame," Johnny went on, and suddenly it was too much for her to bear. "and I'm going to rinse the bastards for every--"

"Oh, shut up, Johnny!"

She went up the stairs to the bedroom and sat down on the bed. She couldn't take her eyes away from the contents of the greeting card. That was Ianto's print, alright. She gnawed at her thumbnail as she read it over and over and over again.

"Where dad broke my leg,
at noon.

Bring laptop.

I.”

Rhiannon kept running her fingers over her lips. She couldn’t understand it. She didn’t know what to think of any of this. What did this have to do with the men last night? What did he need her laptop for?

Why bring Dad into this?

Johnny came into the room and sat down on the bed beside her.

"What's he done?" she asked him.

Johnny said nothing.

"Why's he bringing this to our door?" she asked.

She didn't mean it, and she knew it the second the words left her lips, but she was afraid. For herself, for her kids, for Ianto.

"Hey, hey," Johnny said, pulling her to him. "We're the only family he's got."

She stared at the words on the card and tried very hard to keep herself together.

"So how are we going to do this?" Johnny asked after some time.

"I don't know," Rhiannon admitted. "Can't go anywhere, what with them watching us and all."

"We just have to get them to stop watching us."

She rolled her eyes. "Oh, really? I'd never have thought."

He ignored that. "I can get some of the boys out. Beat 'em up, or something."

"You'll get killed, doing that."

"Alright. I could... make a scene."

"It'd have to be one hell of a scene," she said doubtfully.

"Call 'em perverts. Get everyone else's attention."

The strange thing was, it actually worked. Bless him. Though pushing the car like that might get him into a bit of trouble... She couldn't think about that. She had to go, and fast, if she didn't want to be seen.

She hadn't been to that park in years. Not since that day, really. She absolutely refused to bring David and Mica to it. Too many bad memories. Cardiff as a whole was like that. It's why she stayed the hell away when she could. Not Ianto, though. Ianto liked to live in the centre of it all. Right in the very heart of his pain.

Speaking of Ianto...

"Oh my god," she said.
Not again. Not fucking again.

"What happened to you?" she asked

"I'm not sure yet."

He looked around, probably spying for any... spies.

"I wasn't followed," she signed when he looked back at her. "Sit down."

She wanted to ask him a lot of things. Why here? What happened? Who did this? Why? What the hell is his job? She asked the last four of those, and got the vaguest answers she could possibly receive. That was Ianto, through and through.

"Are the people you work with okay?"

"I don't know. I think G-W-E-N is alive. Not sure about J-A-C-K."

"Is he your boss?" she asked. "The one Susan saw you with?"

Jack. A nice, American name. Suited the man.

"He will be okay," Ianto signed, seemingly to himself. "They won't get rid of him that easy. I just need to find him."

It went oddly quiet around them. Made everything feel... funny. Off. Like someone took away something important. Rhiannon started looking about to see what was missing.

The kids were standing still. Her heart clenched. Oh, no. Not again. Mica and David...

Ianto stood up from beside her.

The children at the park began chanting again, over and over and over.

"What are they saying?" Ianto asked.

"We are coming tomorrow," she told him.

Then she got a call from the school. Mica and David, saying the same thing: "We are coming tomorrow." But what did it mean?

"What is it?" she demanded of Ianto. "What is it?"

"I don't know," he signed. "But this is my job. We deal with things like this."

"So deal with it," she signed. "Stop it!"

"I need to find--" He signed something that must've meant his Jack. "Give me that."

She handed over the laptop, and then her keys when he insisted upon taking those, too.

As she watched him go, she felt something wrong in her chest. Something very, very wrong. It felt like the end of something big. Something important.

It terrified the shit out of her.
Rhys loved Lois Habiba. She bought him steak and chips! And she passed him the ketchup and sugar. She was bloody brilliant, and she was welcome at theirs for tea any time.

Of course, that would have to wait until after they'd rescued Jack from... Ashton Down, was it? The military compound or whatever. And then until they'd fixed whatever mess Torchwood had managed to get themselves into and after they'd saved the children from this mass hypnosis thing they were under. And after they'd told the government off, good and proper.

And after Gwen finished tying up this undertaker.

*Then* they could have tea.

"Why are we doing this, anyway?" Rhys asked.

"Because--"

"No," he said, sensing her I-am-about-to-rant-at-you tone. "I meant tying him up. I know why we're doing the rest of it."

"Well, we don't want him to get away, now, do we?"

"I suppose not."

"Help me lift the coffin."

"Okay, but why the coff--"

"Because I said so!"

"Alright, alright!"

They heaved the coffin up and as the undertaker thrashed about inside, trying to free himself. Rhys still felt bad for leaving him bound and gagged in a coffin in the middle of the woods. Especially since they also had stolen the poor man's clothes.

"Okay, now, don't panic," Gwen said as they pulled up to Ashton Down.

He braced himself as Gwen rolled down her window and an armed guard came down to them.

"Hi," Rhys said. He was sweating like a beast under the undertaker's stolen clothes. "We're here to pick up a body. Five thirty appointment to Corporal Camara?"

"Kodak's dead?" the guard asked disbelievingly. "When did that happen?"

"No," Gwen said, looking him as if he was stupid. Rhys himself was wondering the same thing. "He's the contact. The name of the deceased is Patanjali. Rupesh Patanjali."

Inexplicably, the guard laughed.

"Jesus," he said. "Shit meself then. He owes me money."

"I'm sorry," Rhys said.

"I'll have to look in the back," the guard said.

Rhys had a déjà vu feeling. From what little he remembered of his time helping Torchwood with the
space whale, he knew he'd once driven a lorry to the warehouse with people hidden inside it. He could vaguely recall that the feeling he had then was the same as the feeling he had now.

"Kodak?" the guard radioed in when he was pleased with what he saw. "Got a couple of body-snatchers down at the gate for you, over."

Rhys got back in the vehicle, and Gwen gave him a minute smile as they drove off. Or maybe it wasn't a smile. He couldn't tell. God, was he sweating.

"We're not going to get away with this," he said as he pulled to a stop.

"You really shouldn't be here, Rhys," she muttered.

"I shouldn't?" he asked incredulously. "Hello? If Jack needs carrying, you're going to need me here."

Okay, that time she did give him a smile.

He couldn't believe when Corporal Camara started hitting on her. With her right there! If Rhys had blown their cover for telling him off, he wouldn't have been too sorry. Gwen didn't seem too happy about that, though. Rhys was just happy Camara apologised. And that Gwen smacked him upside the head with her gun. Rhys really loved that woman.

Finding Jack proved to be a bit of a challenge.

Finding Ianto? Less so.

Not that anyone knew what the fuck he was doing, save for Ianto himself. Rhys had no clue what he planned to do with a concrete cell to get Jack out. If they had to chisel him out with jackhammers or something, Rhys was going to be bloody pissed.

"Where the hell is he taking us?" Rhys asked Gwen.

"Do I look like I know?" Gwen called back.

His question was (somewhat) answered when Ianto pulled into a quarry. Rhys gawked at him as he drove right up to the edge of a small cliff. He was going to drop his boss, and lover, off a fucking cliff, the madman!

Ianto turned to Gwen and signed something rapidly, too fast for Rhys to pick up on any of the limited words he knew. Gwen must've understood, though, because she dashed off towards the silver car. Rhys, for a lack of anything smarter to do, ran after her. He watched from the car as Ianto extended the concrete cell over the edge of the cliff and then let it drop.

Jack came out of the rubble completely starkers. Rhys didn't know what he'd expected, exactly, but it hadn't been that. He offered Gwen his coat to give to Jack as she explained the recent updates on the kids. Jack made no attempt to cover up... himself. He merely slung the coat over his shoulder and went and got in the car. Rhys was getting tired of lending his clothes to that man.

And he was getting really tired of Jack in general. Come on, why couldn't he be more like Ianto? Shouldn't a bit of Ianto have rubbed off on Jack by now, after how long they'd been together?

That didn't come out right.

What Rhys meant was, Ianto was a decent bloke, and Jack was still a bastard.

Ianto asked *politely* if Rhys could make a phone call for him. Jack would've just demanded it.
Though Rhys wasn't exactly sure why he was making the call for Ianto, and not either of Ianto's friends.

"Are you sure you don't want to ask Gwen?" Rhys asked. "Or Jack?"

Ianto's eyes slid over to Jack as he walked across the warehouse in the distance, then back to Rhys. Rhys could see the apprehension in there.

"Alright," Rhys said, shrugging. "What do you want me to say?"

"Tell him to give her the thumbs up. She'll know what it means."

Rhys, on the other hand, had no idea what that meant, but called anyway.

"You calling for Ianto Jones?" was what the man's voice asked immediately upon picking up.

"Yeah. He says you can give her the thumbs up now. Whatever that means."

"Right."

"Th--" Rhys pulled the mobile back and frowned at it. "Thanks. Christ, you think he'd have a bit more courtesy than that. He hung up on me!"

Ianto just blinked.

"What was that for, anyway?" Rhys asked curiously.

Ianto blinked again.

"Letting people know I'm alive," he said.

Then he turned away, leaving Rhys alone with the mobile.

Gwen, in either a stroke of genius or insanity, made them go out and act like the criminals that everyone thought they were. Rhys claimed some of the credit for that; it was his idea she'd bounced it off of. He was also just a bit excited because he got to stage a fight. He'd always wanted to do that. Never had the chance until now.

"You punch me first," he told Ianto.

"Sorry?"

"You hit me first," Rhys repeated. He mimed punching himself.

Ianto raised an eyebrow.

"Maybe I should just push you."

"No, it's gotta look real."

Ianto pushed him anyway. Ah, well. Better than doing it with Jack. Jack, upon being prompted, most likely would've actually punched Rhys in the face.

"Look," Ianto said, when Gwen had snatched the laptop and they'd managed to get away from the growing crowd. "I've got to do something. I'll be back."

"What? Where are you--"
Rhys sighed as Ianto turned and dashed away to nab a cab.

"Going," he finished uselessly.

Upon his return to the makeshift Hub (not a catchy name; it needed a catchy name), Gwen and Jack immediately hounded him for losing Ianto.

"He's not lost!" Rhys exclaimed for the third time. "He said he needed to do something, then he'd gone off!"

"Yes, but where?" Gwen asked.

"I don't know, now, do I? I'm not his minder!"

Jack glared at Rhys with the might of a thousand suns. Rhys wanted to tell him to stick it.

Ianto came back, eventually, like Rhys had told them he would. And he came bearing gifts!

Rhys, dressed in his fresh clothes, decided that he did hate Jack again, because Jack was a bastard, but he was quite fond of Ianto. If Gwen wasn't careful, he'd steal the other man for his own best mate. Gwen can have Dav and Banana Boat for all he cared.

Gwen was nice, Clem decided. And kind and lovely. And *nice*.

She saved him from jail. That was awfully nice of her. Nobody had saved him from jail before. He'd never been to jail before, he supposed. But he'd also never had anyone who would have wanted to save him from jail, either. So, she was nice.

She also called him Clem. Not Timothy. That was very nice.

Nice Gwen was just nice.

What wasn't nice was... *them*.

Clem was pointing, and he knew why.

They were here. And they were going to get him.

"It's them," he told Nice Gwen. "They're back."

"Come on," she said, taking him gently to a car. "You're connected to them. We need to find out how."

He didn't want to know why they were connected. All he wanted was to hide from them. They couldn't get him if he hid. But he had to hide really, really well, or else they'd be able to find him.

"You need to hide me," he said.

Nice Gwen smiled at him through the mirror of the car.

"Don't worry," she said. "We're going to a place no one can find you."

That was good. "No one" included them. He could be safe, then.

But it didn't feel safe now. They were still stuck in a line of cars, and *they were here*. That wasn't safe! Cars weren't safe!
"Bloody London!" Nice Gwen was shouting into her mobile.

His head hurt.

He was remembering things.

He smelled him.

There was a hand on his shoulder. Nice Gwen.

"Hey," she said gently. "It's alright, Clem."

He could still see it.

"You're safe."

Safe.

"You're with me," Nice Gwen was saying. "You're safe. You're alright; you're safe."

"I keep remembering more," he said. "It's not just them up there. It's the man! He's come back, after all these years!"

He sniffed.

The scent was in the air, drifting.

"I can smell him."

"What man?" she asked. "Who is he?"

"It's the same man," he told her. "He's come back for me."

Clem always knew he would.

This wasn't safe.

"Alright," she said. "Time I got you a nice cup of tea. And a hot dog. Do you like hot dogs? I bloody love them."

He wasn't sure how he felt about hot dogs. He supposed they were okay. He'd eat one, if he was given one.

He also wasn't sure how he felt about Nice Gwen's driving. It didn't stay in a line, like it was supposed to. Her driving went all over. Including on the pavement.

It was dark when they got to the safe place. He didn't like the dark. The dark was when they came. But Nice Gwen said it was safe here, and she'd given him those hot dogs, so maybe he would be alright.

Nice Gwen had kissed the man who told Clem to save some hot dogs for the rest.

"He's your husband?" Clem asked, pointing to the man.

"Yes, yes," Nice Gwen said cheerily. "My beloved."

"Nice house, isn't it?"
It wasn't, but Nice Gwen was nice to him, so he could be nice back.

"We do our best," she said.

"It's got shower facilities," Nice Gwen's Husband said. "Just stand under the skylight."

Clem smiled. Nice Gwen's Husband wasn't that funny, but he was nice, too.

"I've stayed in worse," he said.

He started to get a new smell.

"And who's the queer?" he asked, gesturing to the man by the computers.

Nobody answered him for a while

"Um," Nice Gwen said.

"He is queer," he said, trying to explain it to her. "I can smell it."

"Clem," she said, "we don't use that word anymore."

Nice Gwen and her Husband looked very uncomfortable. Clem took a drink of his tea, and Nice Gwen stood up and walked away.

"That's Ianto," her Husband said when she had gone.

"The queer?"

"Yeah, stop saying that, mate."

Clem shrugged and turned to watch as Queer Ianto and Nice Gwen gathered around a computer. Nice Gwen's Husband stood up to join them, and Clem decided to observe from afar.

Well, he tried, but it wasn't long until Nice Gwen called him over.

"Come and see this!"

He didn't want to see it. No, he did not.

"Oh, don't be scared. It's miles away. What do you think?"

He took a good smell of the air.

"Anything you've seen before?"

He took another smell. No, still couldn't get it.

"Can't smell it from here." He bent closer to the computer. "Is that what tried to take me?"

"Yeah, I think so."

He watched curiously as the people on the screen moved. One man stepped forward. Nice Gwen, her Husband, and Queer Ianto started talking about something, but Clem was only interested in the man in front of the glass box. What was going on?

It surprised him when the picture started moving to the side.
"You've got eyes in the room!" he said.

"The software's not so good in profile," said Queer Ianto.

But the computer was still speaking anyway. Clem wondered how.

"That's not so bad," Nice Gwen told Queer Ianto.

She grinned up at Queer Ianto before putting another smile on the computer.

"You hate smileys," her Husband protested.

"Shut up."

Another problem with the speaking computers came up after that.

"Did it speak?" Nice Gwen's Husband asked.

"It hasn't got a mouth," she said. "It's got bloody speakers."

That was funny. No mouth? Ha.

"That's bloody shorthand!" her Husband said when the computer showed some scribbles being made on a notepad.

"No, I can read it," Queer Ianto said.

Boy, was he a jack of all trades. Clem wished he could read that.

"It says 'yes.'"

"This is a nightmare," Nice Gwen said.

No. That wasn't the nightmare.

The nightmare was when the man showed up.

This place was supposed to be safe!

But he'd said it was safe, too.

Liars.

All of them.

"You," Clem said, "are in every nightmare I've ever had."

"I'm sorry," the Bad Man said. "I'm really sorry."

He took a step forward, and Clem grabbed Nice Gwen's gun.

He wasn't going to send Clem away again.

Clem shot him.

Queer Ianto went running and picked him up. Nice Gwen tried to take Clem's gun. Her Husband called Clem dangerous.
And the Bad Man woke up.
This place wasn't safe.
Nothing was safe.

Rhiannon had a lot on her hands, with this many kids, and she had a lot on her mind, with those numbers. Three, two, five, zero, zero, zero? What in god’s name did that mean?

She was bloody terrified and strung out. She needed a break. Only, that wasn't going to happen, was it, with nearly twenty kids in the house and no one to watch them but her and Johnny. Well. Just her, really, because Johnny wasn't doing shit. Would that man ever pull his weight?

But the phone was ringing, and she had to answer it.
"Pipe down, you lot!" she yelled at the prattling rabble.

She picked the landline off the receiver.
"Hello?"
"Is this Rhiannon Davies?"

Time seemed to freeze.
"Are you Jack?" she asked when she could breathe again.
"Yes," the American voice said.

Oh god. Oh god, oh god, oh god.

His boss was calling. That only meant one thing, right?
"What's happened to Ianto?" she asked.
"What? No, no, nothing’s happened to Ianto."

She let out a shaky breath.
"I thought you lot couldn't call here," she said. "Is it all over?"

"No, it's far from it."

Johnny came up to her, frowning.
"It's that boss of Ianto's," she told him.
"The gay one?"

She shot him a glare.
"Look, just tell Ianto I want my car back in one piece."

"Listen," that Jack said on the other side of the line. "Ianto has something he wants me to tell you, alright?"
Her heart started thudding funny in her chest.

"And what's that, then?"

"Don't let anyone take Mica and David from you, no matter what reason."

There was a short pause.

"And for the people listening in, the same goes for you," Jack said. "Keep your kids close."

Then he resumed his translating.

"He says he loves you, and the kids. He's only warming on Johnny."

"We love him too," she said, heart beating all wrong and tears starting to form in her eyes. "but why are you telling me this?"

"Look, I've got to go."

"No, wait!" she cried.

There was another pause on the other end, and she was so sure she'd been hung up on. Then came a "what?" and a little bit of hope crept in.

"I don't know what it is you're doing," she said quickly, before he did hang up on her. "But you keep him safe, you hear me? Don't let anything happen to him."

The third pause was even more worrying, but he still came back.

"I've got to go."

"Please!" she shouted into the phone, but there was a click, and she had finally been hung up on.

She set the phone back on the receiver with something that felt a lot like dread settling into her stomach.

"What is it?" Johnny asked. "What did he say?"

Rhiannon simply went to go sit down next to Mica. She pulled her daughter close, kissing her forehead and stroking her hair.

If she hadn't already been certain that the park was the last place she was ever going to see her brother, she was now.

This really felt like an end.

"Andy, bring your car. We're coming back to Wales."

It was an enigmatic call, and he hadn't even the chance to say "hello" or "goodbye." Not even a "where am I supposed to bring my car to?" He'd said nothing in those brief four seconds.

Fortunately, he received a text from an unknown number that told him where he was indeed supposed to bring his car. Well, not his car. He was still on duty. It'd have to be the cop car. Not that Gwen would mind that. Used to be her sitting in that car with him.

Andy watched as the helicopter touched down. Gwen was sure flying back in style, wasn't she?
Interesting, when she hadn't solved the bloody problem yet and was still technically labelled a terrorist.

Gwen jumped down, Rhys on her heels, and she dashed to Andy.

"Welcome to Wales," he said, a little proud of his Welsh.

He'd worked hard on that. Spent an hour of his waiting trying to figure out what he'd say to her.

She hugged him, but it was really more of an awkward pat on the back. No love for her old friend, then. When Ianto Jones himself leapt out of the helicopter and joined them, Andy knew why.

Ianto bloody Jones, the man who had everything Andy wanted. Mostly everything, anyway. Andy liked hearing things.

"Right," Andy said, good mood gone, "get in the car."

He let Gwen into the front while the men had to pile into the cramped back.

"No big entrance from your Captain Harkness?" Andy asked as he got inside himself.

"Just drive," Gwen said.

"Boy, we're bossy today."

"Drive!"

"Alright!" Andy shook his head and turned on the car. "You haven't even told me where we're going."

"I'll tell you the directions."

Andy was suddenly reminded of two days ago. Only this time, he was the opposite side of things. He was the one driving blind now. It was silent except for when Gwen told him where to turn. Andy again felt it was his responsibility to make that silence go away.

"Everyone's on standby," he said. "It's red alert. Riot gear and everything. All ready to mobilise, except no one's saying why. What's going on?"

"I can't tell you."

Denial was a step up from silence. Not a big step, but it made things less uncomfortable.

"I am the police!"

"Right now, Andy, I need you to drive this car," she said. "And if I told you--"

"What?" he asked when she never completed her sentence. "Well, come on, then. What?"

Gwen refused to finish what she was saying. Andy sighed to himself. Bloody women.

"Don't you bloody hate people who don't finish their sentences?" Andy muttered.

"Hey," Rhys said in the back. "She's pregnant!"

Oh, wow. Andy took a few moments to process that. Pregnant?
Pregnant meant maternity leave. Maternity leave meant three people became two. Three people becoming two meant Torchwood needed to hire someone new.

Andy suddenly had a very good chance, if he played his cards right. Just had to get off Captain bloody Harkness's shit-list, and then...

He tuned in briefly to hear Rhys and Gwen arguing away about children and living in worlds like this.

"Gwen?" Ianto asked, cutting through the fight. "Why are we headed to the Cromwell Estate?"

She did a full body turn in her seat. Dangerous, that. If Andy took a stop too hard...

When she turned back around, it was to say: "Take the next left."

She didn't explain to Andy why they were headed to the Cromwell Estate. Bloody Ianto Jones, stealing his best mate.

They pulled up in front of a house. Gwen still hadn't explained what they were doing. Did the alien that was mind-controlling the kids live here? If it did, Andy wanted to help them catch it. That would be a spectacular way to redeem himself in the eyes of Torchwood, wouldn't it?

"Just keep an eye out, yeah?" Gwen told Rhys. Thankfully, she didn't tell Andy to stay with the car, too.

Ianto pushed passed Gwen and Andy to the front with a hurried pace. Andy thought that was rather unsafe. What if the alien got him? Then again, he still wasn't feeling the benevolent mood for the likes of Ianto Jones, so he didn't say anything.

"You know Ianto?" Andy asked Gwen.

She hummed in response, looking forward at the aforementioned man with a strange look.

"Is he gay?"

"Shut up," Gwen said, not looking away from Ianto.

Andy opened his mouth to say more, but Gwen stopped him.

"Look, listen," she said. "There's a lot more going on. You've just got to trust me. Okay?"

Ianto was already pressing the doorbell when Andy and Gwen caught up to him. Andy stood a little back, just in case the alien had claws or something.

It wasn't an alien that answered the door, but a woman. She did launch herself at Ianto, though, so the threat level still remained.

"Oh my god," the woman sobbed, holding tight onto Ianto.

"Andy," Gwen said, "we have to get her kids out of here, alright? Wait in the car. We'll be back."

Andy didn't have time to protest, because Gwen was already walking into the house after Ianto and the woman. Andy sighed and trudged his way back to the car, where Rhys was already standing.

"That's his sister, mate," Rhys explained when Andy asked what the hell was going on.
Didn't really explain much, but Andy shrugged it off. Somehow, this was important to Torchwood, so he just had to play along.

Playing along very suddenly meant shedding his uniform to go beat up some fellow cops.

Bloody Torchwood.

"Oh my god."

She held tight onto him, vaguely aware of the woman and the other man. She was just so happy to see him again. She thought...

Well, it didn't matter now. He was here, and everything was going to be okay. She hoped so, at least.

She drew back and glared at him.

"I told you to stop knocking!"

His eyes went wide in indignance, but he didn't have the chance to say anything before she was dragging him inside the house.

"Oh, so he's not dead, then," Johnny said, barely glancing up from his video game. "Ask him where my bloody car is. Who's she?"

Rhiannon looked back. That woman had followed them in. Sort of rude, coming in without permission. The man hadn't followed them in. Come to think of it, wasn't he dressed like a copper?

"Why are you with the police?" she asked Ianto frantically. "Who is she?"

"No time," Ianto signed. "You need to leave."

"What?"

"You and the children need to leave," he repeated. "Go somewhere safe."

"This is safe!"

He shook his head.

"You need to run," the woman signed.

Rhiannon took a second to stare at her. What the bloody fuck? Who was this woman? Wait a moment. Ianto had mentioned someone he worked with two days ago. Was this her?

"Are you Gwen?" Rhiannon asked her.

"We have to go," Ianto signed before the woman (probably Gwen) could respond. "Now."

"Wait! What's happening?"

"No time!" Ianto signed again.

"Could someone please tell me what's going on?" Johnny asked.
Rhiannon hadn't even realized he'd moved to stand behind her. She frowned at him for a moment.

"You have to get your kids and go," the woman (Rhiannon was certain this was Gwen) said. "I don't know which ones are yours. I don't care. Take all of them, and get the hell out of here."

"What?" Johnny asked. "Why?"

"It doesn't matter," Ianto said. Rhiannon bit her lip.

"The hell it doesn't!"

"Look." Really, this had to be Gwen. "We have to go now, if you don't want--"

Some man broke into the house just then.

"Gwen," the man said. "They're here."

There were military trucks outside, filled with men with guns and those big shield things. There was a sinister feeling in the air, and Rhiannon could tell that no good would come from any of this. This was bad.

Ianto got in front of her.

"I don't have time to explain," he told her, "but they are coming to take the kids. You have to run."

"What?" Johnny asked behind her.

"Shut up," she told him.

"They're going to come into your house and they're going to take your kids," probably-Gwen said to him. "I'm sorry, but you have to believe us. They're going to come and they're going to take your kids. You'll never see them again. Never."

Rhiannon looked between her and Ianto. They both had a deadly serious look on their faces.

She nodded, and then Ianto was all but shoving her back into the house. Once inside, he made a beeline to the kid's coats, Gwen right on his tail. They took an armful of coats each, with her staring strangely at him the entire time.

"Alright kids!" Rhiannon said.

When no one listened, Johnny whistled. Bless him.

"We have to go now," Rhiannon told the suddenly attentive children. "We have to go, and we have to be very quiet."

"Why?" Lactose-intolerant-Eliza asked.

"Because some bad men will take you if you don't."

Johnny's serious tone had every child's eyes going wide in fear and horror.

"And also, we're playing spies," Gwen added, with a glare at him. "The quietest one wins."

Ewan, Bronwyn from down the street's son, darted forward to snatch his coat from Ianto's hands. He was always one for competition. Drove David insane. But he got all of the kids rushing after him,
each trying to get to their coats as fast as possible. Rhiannon and Gwen helped the youngest with their coats.

"Hush now, darling," Gwen told little Anna. "Nice and quiet. Don't make a sound, just like the game, yeah?"

Rhiannon caught her eyes flicking up to Ianto and back, but Rhiannon didn't have time to dwell on it.

"Now, you don't make a noise until we get there, okay?" she told Timothy. "You stay nice and quiet, and I'll get you some sweets, yeah?"

"Where is this place?" that other man asked.

"It's down by the field. It's all boarded up."

"Right, look," Gwen said. "We've got to go right now."

"Okay Come on, everyone," Rhiannon said. "David and Mica. Like we're spies. We're playing spies. Now, come on. That's it. No one makes a sound."

That man that Ianto and Gwen had brought picked up little Anna as soon as they were outside. He quietly ordered the kids along.

"Rhi," called Johnny from behind her.

She turned as kids funnelled passed, frowning up at the oddly determined look on his face.

"You take them. I'm going out the front. Somebody's got to stop them."

Oh, no. No, no, no.

"No, Johnny," she said. "Don't be stupid."

"It's not just us, you daft sod."

She never loved him more than she did in that instant. She kissed him and promised him silently that if he didn't make it back... if he didn't come back to her, she would dig him up from his bloody grave and murder him herself.

A hand pushed at her as she watched Johnny run away. She blinked up at a stony-faced Ianto, who kept shoving her onward.

Rhiannon's heart never beat so fast in her life. Not only was it screaming at her to stop sprinting like that, it was urging her to keep running, faster, faster, faster! She'd never been afraid like this before. Never. She didn't think she ever would be again, partly because she was so damn certain they'd be found and...

Never mind it all. They'd reached the sheds, and the kids were filing in.

"Oh, it's stinking," David groaned.

"Keep your voice down," she told him.

They had the kids sit down and pretend to be quiet mice. They all must've been terrified out of their wits, because never before had that tactic ever worked, to Rhiannon's knowledge. She thought it was
a bit odd when Gwen and that man, her husband Rhys, started filming something, despite the need to be silent, but she kept that to herself. She just held Mica close on her lap and Ianto close in her hand.

It was David who spotted the men first, and Rhys who got them running again.

But it wasn't enough.

Mica was ripped from her arms as she screamed. David was already taken. Ianto and Rhys were being beaten to the ground. Gwen was getting away with little Anna.

Then an ugly noise came from the kid's mouths. A high-pitched sound that hurt Rhiannon's ears as she struggled against her captor. The noise went on and on, until it stopped, and the sky cleared.

Rhiannon was abruptly being let go by the men who held her. She glanced back at him.

"What was that?" she asked him.

He frowned. "I... dunno."

But he'd let her go. Did that mean...

"Is it over?"

After a moment's pause to consider it, he shrugged at her. Good.

She bent down and held out her arms, and Mica ran into them. She held her daughter close. It had to be over. If it wasn't over... well, she wasn't ever letting Mica or David out of her sight again.

When she stood up again, Mica up in her arms, David ran to her and hugged her midriff, and she placed a hand on his head. She looked over to Rhys, who was rounding up a few girls and telling them how brave they'd been. Ianto was standing off to the side, bent over to re-zip Timothy's coat. He straightened when saw her, giving her that half-smile she was so familiar with. She felt a wave of relief wash over her. He was safe, the kids were safe. It was going to be okay.

Gwen came rushing over to him and threw herself at him, wrapping her arms around him like an octopus and burying her face in his chest. He awkwardly patted her back at first, then sighed and returned her hug. Rhiannon gawped at them. Gwen caught her staring, and she pulled away with her lips pressed together slightly sheepishly.

That copper was in their house when they returned, applying ice to a split lip. He smiled at Gwen when she walked in, but frowned at Ianto when he came in after her. Rhiannon wanted to split the other side of his lip, too. He was lucky she had more important things to do at the moment.

"Johnny?" Rhiannon called, peering into the kitchen.

"I got a fucking black eye," he said behind her.

She jumped.

"Christ, don't do th--" Her eyes nearly popped out of her head. "Christ!"

"Told you," he said. "Black eye."

It wasn't just the eye that was bruised. He looked a mess.

"Got the kids to safety, then?"
"Yeah," she said. "And all thanks to you."

"Oh, don't get all sappy on me," he whined. Then he grinned and winked. "Save it for later."

"I don't know why I bother with you," she said, rolling her eyes.

She gave him a kiss regardless. A kiss that was interrupted by the phone ringing.

"Don't answer it," Johnny advised. "What if it's someone from the government."

She rolled her eyes again and leaned across to grab the phone.

"Hello?"

"Tell them to wait for me."

Then the line went dead.

"That's the second time he's hung up on me," she said, frowning as she placed the phone back.

"Who?"

"Ianto's... Jack, or whoever."

"What did he want?"

"He said to tell them to wait for him," she said.

When she told Ianto as much, his eyes slid over to Gwen, and they shared a look that Rhiannon couldn't even begin to understand. Then Ianto shrugged and turned to help Mica pull her coat off. Gwen frowned after him, though a smile was slowly starting to replace it.

"You keep looking at him like that," Rhiannon said.

Gwen's attention rapidly snapped over to her.

"What do you mean?"

"Ever since you came here, you've been looking at him funny," she said. "Before, it was like you were afraid he was going to disappear. Now, it's just like you can't believe he's not going to."

There was a short pause, during which Gwen eyed her warily.

"Look," she said, "I know he's your brother... but... he's my best mate. And, back in London, I thought... Well, I thought I lost him. And that was so scary. I half expect for myself to wake up, and this all be a dream. That he's really gone."

"What happened to him?" she asked, her heart thudding all wrong. "I got a call from your boss then, too. It made it sound like... did he really almost..."

Gwen's lips disappeared into a thin line. Then she sighed.

"They're not going to ever release this," she said. "They never would. They're going to lock it up and keep it under wraps until the end of time itself."

"What? Who? What are you talking about?"
She shook her head.

"The Thames House," she said. "Everyone in the Thames House in London was killed. Every last person. They said it was a virus. It's never going to hit the news. You're never going to hear about it, not ever. But so many people are dead."

"And Ianto?"

"Was almost one of them," Gwen confirmed.

Rhiannon clamped a hand to her mouth.

"But it's okay," Gwen said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "He's still here. Still with us, yeah?"

Rhiannon watched him take off the coat from Timothy's shoulders and set it in his tiny outstretched hands.

"Yeah," she said.

Most of the time waiting for his Jack to show his face was spent getting the kids home. There were calls Rhiannon had to make (sixteen of them, in fact) and coats she had to sort and injuries she had to tend. The odd scraped knee and bruised elbow wouldn't go amiss with their parents. And she had to worry about Johnny's swelling face and that copper's bloody lip (though she still felt like injuring him more). Plus, Ianto's cheek had split open again. That one was a bit beyond her care. It might scar.

"Does it hurt?" she asked when she put the medical tape in the first aid kit.

He shrugged and poked at the gauze.

"Don't touch it!" she scolded.

He rolled his eyes.

A loud thud that sounded a lot like the door being slammed open came from behind her, and she jumped. Ianto gave her an odd look, frowning slightly at her, but then his eyes wandered just to the left of her and they went wide. He sat very, very still for a moment before pushing away from the table and passed her. She turned in her chair and took in the sight.

Jack the American, Ianto's boss and boyfriend, stood there, peering into her house. He caught glimpse of Gwen and nodded at her and her husband, and then his gaze sought out Ianto. Upon finding him in front of him, he reached out and pulled him into a hug. Ianto barely had time to react to it before he let go of Ianto and put his hands to Ianto's face, bringing it close to him so that their foreheads could touch. He closed his eyes and relaxed into it, but Ianto looked nowhere near relaxed. His eyes were still the size of saucer plates, and they met Rhiannon's in what seemed like...

Oh, Ianto.

She took a deep breath and nodded slightly. His mouth twitched into an almost-smile, and his eyes went back to Jack before they closed, too, and he let himself go. She exhaled her breath and wondered to herself what she'd done to make him feel the need to ask for permission to love his bloody boyfriend.

The two of them remained like that until Eliza's dad came to pick her up. Which was quite some time, actually. Made it feel borderline... weird, by the time the knock on the door broke Jack away from Ianto.
"Hello," he said sincerely to Rhiannon afterward, sticking out his hand. "Captain Jack Harkness."

"Oh," Rhiannon said. "Captain?"

He raised an eyebrow. Did he get that from Ianto, or did they both just do that? She let her mind briefly wander to a scene where they both just raised their eyebrows at each other until kingdom come.

"Where's my car?" Johnny asked from the sofa.

Jack did not acknowledge that. Smart of him.

Ianto appeared back beside him, with his coat on. Gwen and Rhys came over, too, both wearing coats and jackets of their own.

"You're leaving?" Rhiannon asked Ianto.

He gave her a tight smile in response.

She didn't want him to go. She wanted him to stay a little while longer, at least long enough for her to understand that this wasn't a dream, like Gwen had said. But he kissed her cheek and was gone, leaving her with her worries and four extra kids for her to deal with.

At the very least, it did warm her heart when she saw Jack take Ianto's hand when she spied on them through the window.

Maybe, just maybe, things were looking up for her brother.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, just take everything with a grain of salt, actually.
Thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy your day!
Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Martha had a "honeymoon."

Not that she'd gotten married. They had called that off nearly four months ago. No, it was just that she couldn't get a refund for her trip to the Maldives, and she wasn't going to waste the money she'd spent on it.

So, she was on what was supposed to be the best trip of her life, having no fun at all and trying not to think about home. Or work. Or Tom.

There were lots of reasons why Tom and Martha hadn't worked out. Their conflicting jobs (he was always in Africa; she was often travelling), conflicting goals (he wanted kids right away; she didn't know if she was ready now, if ever, to be a mother), and conflicting... everything. They fought way too much for anything to truly work out. For every five minutes of good times with him, there were twenty minutes of arguing and fighting. It was like Mum and Dad all over again. The only difference was that Tom and Martha hadn't even gotten married before it fell to pieces. Mum and Dad had at least made it a few years before the shine wore off.

Those weren't the only issues, of course. There were more. Most of those were tiny problems in the grand scheme of things, but they were still there. There was only one big problem that had hung between the pair of them.

That year. The year.

So many of their problems stemmed from that year. The little things piled on to the bigger things, which piled on to all of the problems in general, and it was all just a complete mess.

But the funny thing was, it had all come crashing down because of one single argument.

And it had all started with churches.

Martha refused to step foot inside a church. There was no way anyone could make her. Not by pleading, not by threatening, not by dragging her in there, kicking and screaming. It was so damned harrowing to be even near a church. Martha had gone to a friend's wedding a few months ago, heard that organ play, and spent the next two weeks having nightmares upon nightmares, each time waking disoriented and terrified, yelling for Toshiko and Ianto to run.

This was a problem for Tom, who was an avid church-goer. He didn't necessarily care that she wasn't one herself, or that she didn't believe in God or wasn't religious. But he did expect to have his wedding in a church, something Martha could not handle. So, when Martha told him that... well, things went downhill from there.

"What do you mean, we can't do it in a church?" Tom asked. He was smiling, like he hadn't quite registered it yet, or like he was hiding the anger he really had. "We've already got the church for the day of the wedding."

"I know, but--"

"No, no," he said. Alright, so it was the anger, then. "You had all this time to tell me, and you want
to say it *now*? Two months before the wedding? Where was this back before we made arrangements? Before we decided on a church? Before we put it on the invitations?"

"I didn't realize it would be such a big issue until recently!" she exclaimed. She took a deep breath. "Look. There's some space outside. We can just... ask the p--"

"We're not getting married outside," he scoffed.

Martha frowned. She'd always wanted to get married outside. A big garden wedding, with flowers and butterflies and bumblebees. Sort of not her personality, but she'd been little when she decided upon that, and she had never grown out of wanting it.

"We're getting married in a church," he said. "Inside it."

"And I'm telling you I can't do that!"

"Why?" he asked. "Because two people who don't even exist went into a church with you a few times? Come on, Martha! Be reasonable about this; just move on!"

She stared at him.

And stared at him.

And stared at him.

And Martha stared at him until he folded his arms angrily at her and until her eyes watered horribly. But she didn't look away.

"It's more than that," she said. "They're more than that."

"Martha!" he cried. "They literally never existed!"

"They did to me!"

"And they're gone! You need to move on!"

"I can't!"

"And why not?" he asked. "You only knew them for three months! That's barely enough time to get to know someone, much less form this... insane attachment! That's what this is, Martha: insane!"

She clenched her fists. Had he not been listening to her stories? Had he ever listened to anything she'd said about Tosh or Ianto, or about that year? She was starting to feel like he never had. If he had, he would understand that it was hell on Earth for an entire year. He'd understand that it was quite often unite or die. And he'd understand that, in those situations, people bond like crazy. With that level of intense emotion, and that level of trust, it was hard not to. That's what Martha had done; she'd latched on to the two people who could ensure her chances of survival more than anyone else and made them her family. Made them her everything, because, at the time, that's what they had been. She'd fallen for them in ways she couldn't understand. She was sure, had there not even been an apocalyptic world surrounding them, if she'd found that Ianto and that Tosh in real life, she'd still have clung to them like her life depended on it.

And even if he hadn't been listening, he surely should have picked up how quickly Martha fell for people. If Martha found someone she liked, she'd instantly fall for them. She'd done that with the Doctor in a single day, then let it grow into love. She'd done that with Jack in two days, then let it
become one of her most important friendships. Falling for people easily was one of Martha's most fundamental traits.

"I only knew you for a day," she said slowly.

"Oh, no," Tom said. "Don't drag this into it."

"How can I not?" she demanded. "You're the one making it about us!"

"I'm not! I want to get married in a church! How is that making that stupid year about us!"

"Because I met you there!" she yelled. "If you can't honour what I feel for Tosh and Ianto, how the hell can you honour us?"

"It's different!"

"And how come?"

He floundered about for a reply, his mouth opening and closing like a feeding goldfish.

"I don't know," he said quietly after some time.

"Me neither," she admitted.

"Then what do we do?" he asked.

"I think..."

But she didn't have to say it. It had been coming for some time, and they both already knew what had to happen.

"But I still love you," Tom pleaded.

"And I love you!" She felt tears pricking the corners of her eyes. "But I think... I know that's not enough anymore."

He bit his lip, but gradually began nodding.

"Yeah," he said.

It had all ended with phone calls and emails and visits to all their friends and relatives and to get refunds for everything. The only things that couldn't be refunded were the down payment for the church, ironically, and the honeymoon.

So, that was why Martha was here, in the Maldives, wasting her own time and making herself miserable.

Honestly, she was quite relived to be going home the next day. She was certain that nobody else ever thought that whilst in the Maldives. It made her feel a tad bit guilty. It made her feel guiltier when she was excited to come home to something catastrophic. Aliens? Kids? London? Sounded interesting.

She instantly lost that excitement when she heard the missed calls on her home telephone. Jack's frantic voice, begging her to please demand something from UNIT, for the love of god! His sixth and final call had been cut terrifyingly short buy something unknown to her.

The first call she'd made was to UNIT, asking for answers. The second call was to Jack, to make
sure everyone was still alive.

It had been a close thing for all of them.

"I'm sorry I never got your calls," she whispered after Jack had relayed the last part of the story.

"No, no," Jack said. "You were gone. I should've remembered."

Martha shook her head sadly to herself and let Jack pass the conversation over to Gwen. At least Gwen bore good news: she was pregnant! Brilliant. Martha knew she'd be a good mum. She told Gwen as much before she was passed back to Jack, and she could practically hear Gwen beaming through the mobile.

Jack offered to help her talk to Ianto, if she wanted.

Martha's heart thudded in her chest.

"I'd love to," she said, "but... you used up all of my time. I have some reports I need to finish."

"Right," Jack said, though it sounded like he'd spotted her lie.

"Give him my love, yeah?"

"Of course."

Martha quickly hung up after that.

It wasn't that she didn't want to talk to him. Well, it was, but there was a better reason than not wanting to. In truth, it was because it hurt, and not just because she missed the other Ianto. Now, it was just because not only were her Tosh and Ianto gone, but the other Tosh was gone, too. There was a gaping hole in her chest for two Toshiko Satos, and this time, there was no replacement for either of them. Martha wouldn't ever see her again, and Ianto only reminded Martha of what she'd lost.

It was fucked up, at best. At worst...

That night, Martha did the one thing she swore she'd never do again. She got pissed.

She woke the next morning with no memory beyond her second shot of vodka and with the taste of something rotten in her mouth. Most likely puke. It made her want to puke again, and she dashed to the bathroom as soon as she could see through her throbbing headache.

She'd written in lipstick (Tom's favourite shade) on the bathroom mirror.

"Get thf u

ckin ta p

es ."

Needless to say, there was a reason she did not get drunk very often. Even she couldn't understand her inebriated ramblings. What did that even mean, anyway? Soapy towel in hand, she stared at it for a while before smearing the lipstick around and washing it off.

The epiphany came when she made herself some bland toast.
Back when the Master had control of the Valiant, he also had control over the video surveillance. Most of it was used for just that: keeping workers in line, making sure Jack didn't escape, the works. But he'd also used it for his own morbid pleasure. Recording Jack's torture sessions, mainly. Sometimes videoing his own reactions when he blew things up on Earth, and then laughing delightedly with his recorded self later. Because all of these recordings were on the Valiant, they had survived the transition back into the non-paradoxical reality. Every last file had been compiled, saved, and stored deep within UNIT's Black Archive, deemed as "dangerous to human knowledge." Ianto would have been appalled by that description, and would have promptly refiled it properly, but that was neither here nor there.

The point was, everything that had happened up there was documented. Including, perhaps, the deaths of one Toshiko Sato and one Ianto Jones.

Martha dropped her toast on the floor.

This was something she had wanted for a while now, after Tish and Mum and Dad and Jack had failed to tell her. She hadn't wanted to ask the Doctor. She didn't know why. Maybe it was because she might've blamed it on him. So, when she'd run out of people to ask, she had decided to go another route.

Access to and viewing of the tapes was denied and illegal to literally everyone in the world, save for seven people: the Doctor, Jack Harkness, any current head of UNIT, two undisclosed and high-ranking UNIT officials, and Martha herself. But, even for those seven, there was a catch. In order to gain access to and view the tapes, it must be signed off on by the other six members.

The Doctor had signed off on the paper for literally everyone the moment he received the document. Martha didn't ask him why, even though she didn't understand. While Martha may mock the description, it was dangerous to human knowledge, and the Doctor had never been one to place the lives of humanity in danger on purpose. She had once guessed that maybe it was because the Doctor hadn't wanted to be bothered by signing it later, or because he felt that all knowledge should be free and available, no matter how damning it was. But, if she was honest, she thought it was mostly because the Doctor wanted to be a contrary son-of-a-bitch.

Martha strode into work that morning, pulled out a very small manila folder, and filled out a form. She slipped it into the inbox of the director and went on with her day.

By the end of the evening, she had two signatures (one redacted from her view). One was still deliberating whether or not they should sign off on it, and Jack hadn't answered anyone's calls, so there was no way to tell if he'd even received his own document.

On the second day, she had all three UNIT signatures and was waiting solely for Jack.

She was still waiting for it by the end of the week.

Then, early Saturday morning, so early that it was still dark, she received a call.

"Nightingale!"

"Emphasis on night," she mumbled blearily. "What do you want?"

"Oh, a great deal of things. Mainly, I just want to know why I'm holding UNIT's classified form G112."
She shot up, staring at the dark walls of her bedroom.

"Fill it," she said.

"No."

"Jack, please," she said. "Fill it."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I know what you're looking for. It won't help you."

"I need to know."

"No," Jack said, "no, you don't."

"Why does everyone keep telling me that?" she snapped. "I think I can make these decisions for myself!"

"You don't want to know what happened to them," he said. "You just don't."

"Yes, I do! A whole fucking year has gone by, and I know nothing! I'd rather it killed me to know the truth, than for it to kill me because I don't know!"

"Martha, I'm serious, you don't--"

"Stop saying that!" she yelled. "You can't decide this for me! You have no idea what this is like!"

"I do," he said solemnly. "I lost them, too!"

"No, you didn't!" she spat. "You had no idea what they were like, Jack Harkness! How many times did you ask Tosh how she knew what she knew? Were you aware that she adored India's architecture? Did you ever ask her to play the piano for you? Did you know that Ianto despises canned chicken noodle soup? Have you taken him stargazing? Or to a metal concert?"

Somewhere in there, she had started crying. The tears were tracking slowly down her face, her voice husky and raw.

"Did you know," she asked thickly, "how much they loved church organs?"

She set her mobile on her bed-clothes, put her face in her hands, and sobbed.

It felt like a very long time before she could control herself. When she did, she contemplated not picking the mobile back up. It was likely Jack wasn't even still there anymore.

No. Knowing Jack, he probably sat through all of it, absorbing her hurt as his own. That man had a devastating attraction to pain.

"Shit," she whispered, sniffing a little.

She replaced the mobile by her ear and rubbed the last of her tears out of her left eye.

"I need closure," she said, before she could even determine if Jack was there anymore.

For the longest time, she thought he'd hung up on her. She didn't hear a dial tone, though, so she held
on to the phone and prayed he hadn't hung up.  
"Okay," he said, and she breathed out in relief before it hit her.  
"Wait," she said. "Okay?"

"Okay."

She clamped a hand to her mouth and held back a fresh wave of sobs.  
"Thank you," she said when she could speak again.  
"You won't thank me later," he said grimly, but she didn't care.

It sounded as though he were about to hang up, so she quickly added something more.  

There was only silence before the line dropped, but she knew he'd heard her.  

That evening, when she left work, she was holding a thick case of video files.  

Technically, there was a time limit for how long one could hold and review the tapes; however, the time limit itself was... pointless. A whole year. A year to review a year's worth of torture, destruction, and other vile, wicked acts. Nobody was going to hold onto the tapes for that long. They'd view them and simply get them out of their hands. So, Martha had all of the time she could ever wish to do what she wanted.  

In fact, the time limit was the only rule she wasn't about to break.  
"I need your help," Martha said.  
"Yeah, I kinda figured," Mickey said, eyeing the case of tapes. "But what with?"

"I need you to watch them."

He gaped at her as a waitress put their orders of coffees in front of them.  
"You just said that was illegal," he said when the waitress had left.  
"I know, I know, but..." Martha bit her lip. "Look, do you trust me?"

"Not really," he scoffed. "I mean, no offense, but we barely know each other."

"Fair enough," she said. "Do you think you could learn to trust me?"

He was silent for a moment.  
"No one has ever asked me that before," he said. "I suppose I could, yeah."

"Quickly?"

"That's pushing it a little."

"Mickey, please."

He sighed. "Fine. Only 'cause you're a friend of Rose's friends."
"I only trust you because you're a friend of my friends, so, I guess that makes us even."

He grinned. "I guess it does. What am I looking for?"

The grin slowly faded from his face as she told him everything she could spare without bursting into tears. About The Year, about the Doctor and the Master, about travelling the world, and, most importantly, about Tosh and Ianto.

"That's... gruesome," he said when she had finished. "God, I can't even imagine that. And I watched myself die in another universe."

Martha blinked in surprise. That was something she hadn't experienced with the Doctor.

"Alright, I get what you're looking for, but why am I doing this?" he asked. "Don't you want to see them for yourself?"

"I do!" she said. "But... I need you to copy them."

He couched on his coffee.

"What?" he rasped.

"I need you to copy them," she repeated. "Please."

"Martha," he said. "Do you know how hard that's gonna be? I know UNIT. I know how they make their files. This isn't only uncopiable, this is... they'll kill me if they figure out I'm doing this!"

"I know you can do it!" she urged. "You're great with computers! You bragged about it when we first met, with Jack, remember?"

"Yeah, I may have been overstating that a bit."

"No, you weren't," she said. "Anyone who knows the Doctor is a bit brilliant in one way or another. You can do this!"

That seemed to bolster him a little.

"Fine," he said. "Fine. But on one condition."

"Name it."

"You're here, with me, the entire time I do this," he said. "You don't have to watch, or help, or nothing, 'cause you'll just get in the way--"

She tried not to feel offended.

"--but," he continued. "If UNIT comes crashing through my doors, I want proof that this wasn't my idea, and that I didn't steal these from you. If I go down, you're coming with me."

She studied him momentarily. Was the gain worth the risk?

As if that were a real question.

"Deal," she said.

"Great."
He stuck out his hand, and they shook on it.

Working with Mickey was interesting, to say the least. Every day, right after Martha got done with her work for the evening, she would meet him in the same café for coffee, talk, and tape-related work. Within the first two days, he found the specific time frames she was looking for without even watching any of the tapes, and by the fourth, he'd produced the correct means of copying them without alerting UNIT. Tosh would've completed it in two days, tops, but she wasn't here, and that was the point. Mickey was good enough in his own rights, anyway. He was smart, Martha would give him that.

Martha was also starting to learn she liked hanging out with Mickey. Along with his hidden intelligence, he was funny and kind of charming. He was certainly brave, despite what he or others may say about him. She'd seen him fight the Daleks, and from what she heard about fighting Cybermen in that alternate universe, he was quite courageous, even if it was subtle at times.

And, most of all, he understood. She told him more about her Tosh and Ianto versus Jack's Tosh and Ianto, and he understood. Martha had never had that before; everyone who'd withstood The Year's reversal had nobody to leave behind. Mum, Dad, Tish, the Doctor and Jack had all had each other and only each other, but Mickey? He was the first person who understood what it was like to have everyone change, and to miss people who didn't exist anymore. He told her about looking for his friends here over there, and his friends from there over here, and just being miserable all around when they weren't the same.

"It's like, my mate Jake?" he said as he typed away on his laptop. "He's not here. Not my Jake. This one's got a girlfriend and a kid. Isn't interested in anything but them. I get it. It's nice to have a family. But I miss the things we used to do together. This one only wants to show me pictures of his little girl, not go out and blow up robots with me."

"I get it," she said glumly.

"And he just... he doesn't have the same personality," Mickey continued. "He's a great guy, yeah, but he's not... hard. Tough, I guess. I miss the person who was just as angry as I was."

"Tosh wasn't as sure of herself when everything switched back," she said. "Ianto, too. They weren't as funny, or happy. It made me so... sad."

"Yeah. Sad's a good word for it."

Martha hummed in response, studying him closely over the rim of her coffee mug.

He was sort of handsome, too, now that she was thinking about it.

One week from the night Martha first approached him, Mickey finished his work on the tapes.

He sat back in his chair and blew out a sigh.

"I did it," he said, as if he couldn't quite believe it. "I actually did it!"

"See?" Martha said, grinning. "Didn't I tell you?"

"Yeah, well, don't get your hopes up," he said. "There's still every chance UNIT's gonna come breaking down that door and haul us both away."

"Good thing we know a few people who can spring us out of jail."

She smiled slightly. "I'd do it."

He blinked at her. Then laughed.

"The Doctor snatches you from a cell, only for you to land up in one again as you try to free me."

"A right pair we'd make," she mused, her smile growing.

" Yeah..."

He took a drink, but she swore she saw her smile mirrored on his face.

The next day, she turned in to UNIT the case of video files, along with a letter of resignation. She felt all the lighter for having done so, with the entire weight of The Year finally starting to fall from her shoulders and the freeing idea that she no longer worked with people who couldn't (and possibly wouldn't) have stopped aliens from taking the world's children.

She accepted the copied tapes from Mickey while they were on their first official date.

She never watched them.

Chapter End Notes

Oh wow, this is novel length. Well, at least this story proves I can do that, if nothing else.

Right! Thanks for reading! Have a lovely rest of your day/night!
Rhiannon was listing the costs and benefits of buying another pair of trainers for David, versus taping the older pair, when a knock came on the front door.

With a sigh, she set the damaged shoes on the table next to the tape, and went to answer the door. If it was Anna asking for Mica to come play again... Rhiannon understood their new friendship, she really did, but even still, was it really that necessary for them to spend all of their time together? They were barely in school; they weren't old enough for them to be connected at the hip, not yet! Rhiannon waited until she was ten to find her best mate Tina. If Rhiannon had to spend her entire life dealing with Anna and Mica like this, she might explode.

It was decidedly not little Anna on the other side of the door.

Captain Jack Harkness, or however he was called, took up the entire frame of the door. His shoulders spanned the entire width, his feet the same length apart. His head was held high, chin forward and tight, eyes imperceptible and old. His hands were clasped behind his back. So, even if it weren't for his coat, his posture screamed "militaristic" and "intimidating."

"Hello," he said.

Rhiannon had the vague impression that his "hellos" generally came with more warmth, but there seemed to be an edge around him when it came to her. She could honestly say she felt the same way about him.

"Two months," she said. "It's taken you two months to come introduce yourself to me."

He raised his eyebrows. "I believe--"

"Yeah, yeah, that didn't count," she cut in. "You gave me your name and then swanned off with my brother. That's not an introduction, that's theft. Where is Ianto, anyway? I haven't seen him since."

"Ianto isn't coming today," Jack said.

"Why? What've you done with him?"

Jack looked affronted. "I haven't done anything to him. He's busy."

"Like I haven't heard that one before," she said.

"It's the truth."

"Doesn't give him an excuse to ignore me. Or you, for that matter."

She stepped aside, gesturing for him to come in. He glanced around the house as she shut the door behind him.

"Nice place," he said.

She rolled her eyes.
"You don't seem to like me very much," he remarked.

"Well, perhaps if you'd stopped by earlier..."

"Like I said. We've been busy."

Instead of gracing that comment with a reply, she asked: "Would you like some tea?"

"Yes, thank you."

Well. At least he had some manners.

She motioned him to the table as she began to prepare the kettle. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched him peer at the shoes. His face went from curious to blank in a blink of an eye. Rhiannon wondered what that was about, because it wasn't quite the judgmental outcome she'd expected.

They didn't say a word to each other until Rhiannon had set the mugs down on the table in front of them. She sat down and took a sip from hers, eyeing him as he did the same.

"So," she said. "Are you going to tell me why you're here?"

Jack slowly set his mug down.

"You met Gwen," he said. "Or, at least, you sort of did."

"And you think that makes me want to meet you?"

He gave a wry chuckle. "I know you do. Ianto told me you were asking."

She refused to let herself blush.

"I didn't turn him gay," Jack said.

"I didn't say you did," she said, even though, looking at Jack now, she could understand it if he had. "All I know is that he said it was you. Only you."

He looked down into his mug.

"I don't think it was," he said, mostly to the mug. "I think he's just realising it now, because he's finally allowed himself to. It's like that with a lot of things, with him."

Why was he telling her this? What, did he think she hadn't noticed that?

"Look," he said, glancing back up at her. "I can't presume to know anything about you, or him, or the way things used to be--"

She bristled. Whatever was coming next, she did not like.

"--but I know he misses it, in part," he finished, and she was so surprised she forgot to relax. "Not... all the bad stuff. He misses you, even if he doesn't say anything about it."

She said nothing, because she had no idea what to say to that.

"That's why I came," he went on. "I've been trying so hard to keep him close to what he misses, to not let things drift."

He frowned. "I've had to do that a lot, actually. Your brother is surprisingly stubborn."
That last bit wasn't anything new to her, but something else was slowly dawning on her.

"There was no girl," she said slowly.

He seemed to slightly choke on his drink of tea, though his hands were steady as he lowered the mug back down.

"Excuse me?" he asked.

"That night, with the bruises and the texts," she said, more to herself than him. "That was you, wasn't it?"

He studied her momentarily before nodding.

"Yeah," he said.

"And you were always there when I came 'round to his place," she said. "And you were at the funeral, and the hospital..."

"You know, you're as smart as your brother." He contemplated that. "Maybe even smarter."

She wasn't about to be manipulated by compliments, even if they would later make her blush a little.

"Like I said," he continued, "I wanted him not to lose you. I can't fix him. You can't either, but... you've been doing it longer than I have. And you saved his life, you know."

She frowned. She was hardly certain that asking him about abuse was saving his life. Unless... No. This man, Captain Jack Harkness, while odd in his own right, was nothing like Dad.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Your phone call," he said.

As if that explained anything.

"I was prepared to just let him walk into the Thames House," he said, starting to talk down to his mug again. "I mean, can you imagine that? The thing had no mouth; how was Ianto going to..."

He broke off, shaking his head and letting out a huff of mirthless, broken laughter.

"What you said on the phone saved his life," he restated. "And I'm also here to thank you for that. I can't imagine.... I can't imagine going on without him."

"Do you love him?" she found herself asking.

He didn't respond for quite some time, still studying his mug.

"Yes," he said, after what felt like ages.

"Have you told him that?" she asked.

His fingers began fiddling with the handle of his mug while he stayed silent. A no, if she ever saw one.

"He deserves better than that."

His head whipped back up to her, somehow looking ancient and young at the same time.
"I know," he said, sounding a thousand years older. "I know he does. I try to tell him that, but he doesn't seem--"

"No," she cut in harshly. "No, you don't get to do that bullshit. I don't give a bloody fuck about your insecurities. He doesn't deserve those, either. Get over yourself, and treat him right."

They stared at each other. Rhiannon refused to let her gaze drop even for an instant, even though, by Jack's staring, he was very good at maintaining uncomfortable eye contact for long periods of time. God, what kind of job did they have?

Eventually, he just grinned. Sort of madly, as if he were truly broken behind it, and hiding it poorly. Ianto looked like that sometimes, but he made his smiles softer, less jarring. Not so many flashy, blindingly white teeth.

"Sometimes, I wish I had a sister like you," he remarked.

She blinked.

"But mostly, I'm just glad Ianto has you," he said.

"So you've said."

"I'll keep saying it," he said, leaning forward on his chair. "He needs you, Rhiannon. I want you to know that. Both of you."

"You haven't been helping as much as you think you have," she said, slightly colder than she'd meant.

Jack didn't let that faze him.

"I know he's distant," he said. "There's... a lot out there he won't say. Some of it he can't. Others... he just doesn't know how to reconnect."

She eyed him, trying to decipher who exactly this man was, behind the pomp and circumstance and the bluster. Hopefully, he was someone who, at the very least, made Ianto happy.

"Is he happy?" she asked.

Jack's jaw shifted. She didn't know what to make of that.

"I hope so," he said.

Rhiannon hid her sigh behind a sip of tea.

"Do me a favour," she said as she set her mug down. "Make him happy, before you get him killed."

He paled.

"I know what you do is dangerous," she said. "I don't know what it is, exactly. But I've had two months to think about those few days. I don't know why he sticks with it, whatever it is you do, but..." She shrugged. "Don't let my brother die."

"I won't," he promised solemnly. Then he grinned again, this time more sincere than the last. "I think we've come to an agreement now. We both care about Ianto. Anything else we've missed?"

She let out a short laugh.
"I suppose we have been a bit..."

She struggled to find the right word, but he was already nodding.

"I think we should try this again. Start out on the right foot." He stuck out his hand to her. "Captain Jack Harkness."

"Rhiannon Davies," she said, reaching out to take his hand. "You like my brother."

He grinned harder. "I do."

"Good," she said. "He could do with... a boyfriend."

Jack made a face that suggested 'boyfriend' wasn't quite the word he would have chosen. But he recovered quickly.

"I hope I meet your standards."

"You learned sign language for him," she said "That's more than anyone's ever done for him."

He laughed, though she wasn't sure why.

"No, actually," he said. "I learned it for a boyfriend who had no mouth."

That was the second time he'd mentioned people not having mouths. Where was he finding these no-mouthed people?

"But I relearned it for him, yes," he finished. "And I did make it a... workplace regulation, of sorts, for everyone else to learn it. Didn't need to enforce it, really. Everyone loved Ianto."

"That's..."


"...good."

He nodded. "Yeah."

"He's got friends, then."

Jack's jaw did that clenching-thing again, and Rhiannon still wondered what for.

"Yeah," he said again after a beat.

Then he took one last gulp of tea, smiled, and set the mug down decisively.

"I have to get going now," he said. "Work to be done."

He stood up and thanked her for the tea, but she stopped him before he could leave.

"I meant what I said before," she said. "I don't know what kind of James Bond shit he's gotten himself into--"

He laughed at that.

"--but I do know it's dangerous. So, please, take care of him."
"Don't worry," he said, his smile gentle and genuine.

She watched as his coat swished behind him as he let himself out, and realised that, oddly, she wasn't worrying. Well, she was, but it was a different worry than it was before she met Jack. This type of worrying was far less concerning.

She jumped slightly as the door crashed back open and Jack poked his head around the corner.

"There's a girl named Anna here," he said, voice barely containing his laughter, "and she is adamant she sees Mica now."

Rhiannon let out a sigh, but her smile betrayed her.

"Oh, let her in," she said.

Little Anna burst through as Jack's laughter broke, and Rhiannon shook her head to herself, grinning madly.

Yes, things were definitely looking up.

The small slip of ripped paper suggested for her to go to the newly-rebuilt tourist centre. Lois wasn't too sure about that. What did a tourist centre have to do with Torchwood? Was Gwen meeting her there to show her around Cardiff? It would make sense; Lois knew very little about the city. Or perhaps Gwen was going to point Torchwood's real base out on a map. Or this could be a test.

Lois took a deep breath, told herself to stop over-analyzing, and continued walking down Mermaid Quay. She'd have to look up why it was called "Mermaid Quay" later, assuming there was a real reason. Lois liked knowing things. It was usually her job to know things. Hopefully, it would be her job to know how to deal with alien things soon. Alright, how to deal with people dealing with alien things, really, but same difference.

She stopped outside the tourist centre for a moment. New or not, it still looked... dingy. She mentally shrugged, assuming all tourist centres most likely looked like that anyway, then pushed through the front door with the "Now Open for Business" sign and into the building.

It somehow looked worse on the inside. If it was old enough to have dust, she would probably be looking at a thick coat of it everywhere. However, since it was still new, there was no dust, but there were an alarming number of old pamphlets and brochures, and the computer on the desk looked ancient. The lamp was... ungodly. And there was a bead curtain. Yes, an actual bead curtain.

"Do you like it?"

Lois took a gasping inhale and clutched her chest as she turned to face Gwen Cooper.

"Jesus," she breathed.

Gwen beamed.

"Sorry," she said, not sounding particularly sorry. "Didn't mean to scare you. Well, I did, but not that much."

"I... you... Where did you come from?" Lois asked. "Is this Torchwood?"

"All in good time," Gwen said, still grinning like a madwoman. "But do you like it? Ianto took great care in making it look like the old one. Said it gave it more character."
Lois would like to meet this "Ianto" and tell him a thing or two about character.

"You'll be spending a bit of time up here," Gwen said, patting the desk appreciatively.

Lois gaped at her.

"Okay, I take it you don't like it," Gwen said, starting to frown.

"No, no," Lois said quickly. "It's just... a little bit to get used to, that's all."

She startled again as one of the walls quite literally opened in front of her. A man in a suit walked through, studying a thin stack of papers. He set them down on the desk and looked up, instantly frowning between the two of them.

"You started without me," he said.

Lois blinked as she watched Gwen make the sign for "sorry" to him, followed by a few more signs she couldn't quite catch. She didn't know much of British Sign Language, only just the basic "please/thank you" and "okay" and a few other signs. A couple fingerspelled letters, too, but mostly the vowels, because those were easy.

Through her musings, she suddenly became very aware that the man was glaring at her. She opened her mouth to defend herself from... well, whatever it was that he was angry about, but then she caught the mischievous twinkle in his eye.

"Gwen says you don't like my decorations," he said.

"No... they're... they're okay," she said. "They're fine."

"Liar," he said. But then he grinned. "Ianto Jones."

"Lois Habiba," she said, shaking his proffered hand. "And it's really not too bad, honestly."

"It's okay," he told her. "You don't have to like it. It's just so that people don't think too hard."

Lois disagreed, because this was all making her think way too hard.

"He thinks that people will forget the explosion happened if everything is the same," Gwen explained, rolling her eyes.

"Does that usually work?" Lois asked.

"Yes," Ianto said as Gwen said: "No."

The two of them glared at each other.

"I've faked enough reports to know that people generally accept the easier truth," Ianto said.

"People are smarter than you give them credit," Gwen countered.

"What?"

Gwen made more signs, including a squiggly one in the air that Lois thought was kind of interesting.

"Are you deaf?" Lois asked when Ianto had returned his attention back to her.

She instantly blushed, because that might've been too forward. Oh, Christ, she hoped it wasn't too
forward, she wasn't even hired yet, god, they couldn't fire her without hiring her, right? Oh, god...

Ianto gave her a light smile. "Yes."

"Oh," she said. She wasn't sure what else to say.

"I can lipread," he added.

"Like the contact lenses," she said, intrigued.

"Those were based off him, actually," Gwen said. "T-- an old colleague of ours worked with him to make the lipreading software."

"It's better at it than I am."

"Oh, don't be dramatic," Gwen said.

"It is!" Ianto said. "I can't read lips from the side."

Lois took note of that for future reference as the two of them started arguing in sign language.

"Excuse me," she said when she felt the argument had gone on long enough.

Gwen, then Ianto, looked over at her.

"Sorry, but is there going to be an interview portion of this interview?" she asked.

They stared at her for just long enough for her to feel uncomfortable. Then they both burst out laughing.

"Yes, sorry," Gwen said when she got a hold of herself again. "Sorry, sorry."

The interview turned into a true interview, but the level of focus shifted only minutely. Ianto and Gwen were still prone to break into signed arguments halfway through a discussion point, though Lois was beginning to enjoy it. She didn't understand any of it, but she loved the way the two acted together. Like family. She briefly considered if she'd ever get to be that close with them.

"So, anyway," Gwen said at one point, "what that means is, you'll be taking over some of Ianto's duties. Taking care of the tourist centre, general housekeeping, phone calls--"

"Actually, I've never taken phone calls," Ianto said.

Gwen rolled her eyes. "Point is, you're--"

"Admin," he finished.

She sighed, long and hard.

"I was going to say PA supreme," she told Lois. "Like your old job, only with more aliens and glory."

"And more liability to end up in a jail cell," Ianto deadpanned.

She put her face in her hands and groaned loudly. Ianto raised his eyebrows, then gave Lois a quick wink.

"She's pregnant," he said to Lois, as if that explained any of it.
"Oh."

"The point is," Gwen repeated as she lifted her face again. "You're taking on everything Ianto is leaving behind."

"What's he going to do?" Lois asked.


"What about tea?"

"Nobody drinks tea," Ianto said.

"Oh, I drink--"

"Nobody drinks tea after they've had Ianto's coffee," Gwen amended.

"I can't have coffee," Lois said. "It gives me migraines."

Ianto threw her a dirty look. It wasn't filled with animosity, but she took it to mean that coffee-hating was frowned upon here.

"So, I don't need to file anything here?" she asked, trying to move away from coffee.

"No," Gwen said. "Though I expect you'll be doing a lot of paperwork. Both your own and Jack's."

"Jack should be doing Jack's paperwork," Ianto said.

"And we both know you do it, anyway," Gwen said.

Ianto raised his eyebrows again, setting jaw awkwardly and flipping through a brochure. Gwen shook her head fondly.

"Um," Lois said. "Am I going to meet Jack soon? I mean, it's just that, technically, he is my employer and all..."

Gwen nudged Ianto and signed something to him. He shook his head at the end of it.

"Lois," he said to her, "because we like you, you are not going to meet Jack today."

"Alright," she said, though that completely baffled her.

"Jack is out of town," Gwen told her in exasperation. "He's not that bad."

"Am I supposed to call him Captain Harkness?" she asked. "Or just Captain? Or sir?"

Gwen coughed as Ianto grinned.

"Just... call him Jack," Gwen advised her. "God knows his ego doesn't need any boosting."

"Oh."

"We should take her down," Ianto said.

"Are you ready?" Gwen asked.

"I suppose," she said, even though she was uncertain of what she was supposed to be ready for.
"Right."

Ianto made a grand thing of pushing a hidden button under the desk, and the opening wall she saw earlier revealed itself again. Lois watched it go in curiosity, but Gwen put a hand behind her back and gave her a little push forward.

"First time I went through this door," Gwen said, "I was carrying pizza that nobody ordered. Ianto was standing at the desk, probably trying not to laugh at me. At least he succeeded in keeping it in. As soon as I got down to the Hub, everyone else laughed at me."

The only thing Lois got from that was...

"The... Hub?"

"Yeah," Gwen said. "Right, in you get."

Gwen ushered Lois forward again, and she stepped into a small lift at the end of the corridor. Ianto and Gwen filed in after her, and then Ianto pushed a button and they began their descent. It was a very nice lift, she had to admit. Then again, it was very new. All shiny and flashy, unlike both the exterior and interior of the ugly little tourist centre.

There was a door that rolled away as soon as they walked off the lift. The whirring alarm and lights that went with the door were a little... ostentatious, but Lois wasn't really paying attention to it. She was mainly staring open-mouthed at the vast room around her, trying to take everything in at once.

"Nice, isn't it?" Gwen asked.

"Yeah," Lois choked out. "Nice."

"Ianto and Jack took a lot of effort to make sure everything was rebuilt exactly the same," Gwen said. "Well, mostly the same. Myfanwy's nest is a little bigger."

"Who is Myfanwy?"

"Our resident pterodactyl," Gwen said proudly. "Or pteranodon. I don't know the difference, but Ianto does."

"You have a pteranodon?"

"We," she said. "You're one of us, too, now. And... I'm not really sure, to be honest. We didn't see her in the rubble when we cleared it up, so she might've not been in the explosion, but..."

"I see," Lois said faintly.

"You've seen an alien before," Gwen said, "and you're freaking out about pteranodons?"

"Pteranodons are aliens?"

"No, they're dinosaurs!"

"Then... why do you have a pteranodon?"

"Oh. Right," Gwen said. "The Cardiff Rift runs through time and space, sorry."

"So, what you mean is, we deal with dinosaurs and aliens? Regularly?"
"Not regularly for dinosaurs, fortunately. But things do often fall through time and land here."

"Okay."

"You're taking this surprisingly well," Gwen said.

"Um," was all Lois could say.

"Don't worry," Gwen said with a smile. "It gets easier with time."

"So," Ianto said, stepping in front of them. "What do you think?"

Lois took another look around the place. The expensive computers blinked at her as she blinked at them. The shiny pillar base of the now-refurbished water tower sprayed water merrily as she caught her warped reflection. She could hear the coffee burbling happily away in its maker somewhere to her right. The lights were somehow too bright and too dim to be lighting up the concrete and chrome around her, and the whole room just screamed damp, dark, and secretive.

Honestly, this place was mad. Absolutely bonkers, off-the-walls, out-there, batshit insane.

"I think," she said, taking another sweep intake of the room before looking back at Gwen and Ianto, "this is nuts."

"But?" Ianto asked wisely.

"I love it," she admitted.

"Don't we all," Gwen said, beaming and extending a hand.

Lois shook the hand, and Ianto's, when it was offered.

"Welcome aboard," Ianto said.

Lois grinned.

She gnawed at a thumbnail as she stood at the window, watching him play outside. Even nearly four months wasn't enough to quell the fear that someone was going to snatch him away from her. Especially on a day like today. That man was a danger to the both of them, both he himself and all that baggage he brought along with him. God, she hated him. She hated that man so much that it was close to love, and she loved him so much that it was close to hate.

The door slammed, and she roused from her thoughts.

"Mum?"

She turned to face him, then sighed.

"You've got dirt all over your face," she said. "Didn't I tell you to keep yourself clean?"

"But Mum!"

"No buts," she said. "Go to the bathroom and wash off your face."

She watched him go, taking in the state of the back of his outfit.

"And change your socks, too!" she called after him.
She received a loud, dramatic, groaning sigh, and she smiled to herself. Ten-year-olds. Old enough to get exasperated by their mums, but young enough to still love them, too. Perfect age, really.

The doorbell sang a note. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath before she did anything else. Mental preparation was necessary for today. She opened her eyes and threw one last glance out to the garden, wishing for easier times. Then she moved away and to the door, where the doorbell was chiming again. She rolled her eyes at the persistence and wrenched the door open.

"Dad."

"Alice," he said, his tone equally stony.

"Is Uncle Jack here now?" Steven yelled from the bathroom.

She eyed her father again. His face bore no indication of his feelings, just a slate of neutrality. She internally sighed, then opened the door wider and let him step in.

"Is he?" Steven called again, the pitch of his voice raising at the end. Just old enough for that, too.

"Where are you, soldier?" Dad asked.

There was a pounding of rushing feet as Steven zoomed down the staircase.

"Here I am!" he cried as he practically launched himself into Dad's awaiting arms.

She curled her hands into fists as Dad and Steven clutched onto each other tightly. Ever since she had watched Dad take down the 456, or whatever they were called, she'd been very wary about bringing Steven near him. It was why she waited four months. She didn't care how many times he assured her he never, ever would have used Steven. She didn't care that the poor boy he used instead wouldn't lasted the week anyway, or that it was to save the lives of billions globally. She still had to watch her father kill a child, and it made her nervous to have Steven in the same city as him, much less let them hug each other.

"It's been ages!" Steven said as Dad set him down.

"And you've grown a whole foot since I've seen you!"

"No, I haven't," Steven laughed. "But Mum thinks I grew some more last week!"

Dad looked over at her.

"Really?" he asked.

She pursed her lips. "Barely."

"That's not what you said last week," Steven reminded her, and Dad's face went blank momentarily as he looked at her. "Want to see the new fort I built outside?"

"Another fort?" Dad asked, grinning down at Steven again.

"Mum made me wash the dirt off my face, but I think that's rubbish, 'cause I knew we were just going to go outside again," Steven told him.

"Don't talk about your mother that way," Dad warned Steven. "There's a reason she's keeping you clean, kiddo."
"Yes," Alice said. "And where is he, anyway? Your... reason."

"He'll be coming up shortly," Dad said. He ignored Steven, who was trying to pull him outside.

"The two of you couldn't share the car?"

Now that was a good sign. It would be like Mum all over again, if they could barely tolerate each other long enough for a trip to London.

"He was busy."

"Right." She knew what "busy" meant.

"Really," Dad insisted.

"Uncle Jack," Steven whined. "Let's go."

"Steven," she said, "I think we're going to stay inside, sweetheart."

"But I want to show Uncle Jack the fort I built!"

"You can show him later," she said. "After our guest has left."

"You already said he isn't here yet," Steven complained. "So why do I have to wait?"

"Because you've already gotten dirty once, and I'm not washing another pair of socks."

Steven threw her a pout. Still young enough for that, too.

"Go finish washing your face," she instructed. "You still have a smudge by your nose."

Dad licked a thumb and bent down to wipe it off. Steven scrunched his face up.

"Stooop!" he squealed.

"Gotta get all the dirt off," Dad said, enjoying every moment of Steven's mock torment.

"Muuum!"

"Alright, alright," she said, shooing Dad off of Steven. "Do you know when he'll be here?"

"Soon," was all Dad would say.

"Who is coming over?" Steven asked curiously. "Mum said he was your friend."

"He's not... my friend," Dad said, a little awkwardly.

Steven's eyes went wide. "He's your enemy?"

"No, no," Alice sighed. "He's your uncle's boyfriend."

"You have a boyfriend?" Steven asked Dad.

Dad made a slight noise that was a clear objection to the term "boyfriend." Not surprising. Dad had commitment issues, which was why this fling wouldn't last, and therefore why it was pointless for Alice and Steven to meet him. Alice sighed yet again to herself. Sometimes, she didn't know why Dad even bothered with anything more than a one-night stand.
"What's he like?" Steven asked.

"Young," she muttered to herself. Dad must have heard that, because he frowned at her.

"You'll find out soon enough," Dad said, turning back to Steven. "But there's something you need to
know, alright?"

Steven cocked his head to the side. "What's that?"

"Ianto is deaf."

"Deaf... like Granddad Joe?" Steven asked as Alice felt her eyes go wide. "That's what Mum says
about him, anyway."

"No," Dad said, smiling a little. "Your Granddad Joe is hard of hearing. Ianto is completely deaf. He
can't hear anything."

"At all?"

"At all," Dad confirmed. "So, when you talk to him, you have to look at him and make sure he's
looking at you, so that he can read your lips. Okay?"

Steven nodded. "Okay."

"Steven," Alice said slowly. "Could you go see if the kettle has been washed? I think I'll make some
tea."

"Mum, you washed it yester--"

"Could you just go check, please?"

Steven sighed, but turned away and stomped off to the kitchen.

"What?" Dad asked Alice's glare.

"He's deaf?" she demanded. "You're taking advantage of a deaf guy? What on earth were you
thinking, Dad?"

Dad's posture straightened, his eyes blazing underneath his incensed glower.

"I'm not taking advantage of anyone," he said, tone low and dangerous.

She scoffed. "Then why else would you--"

"Do you really think so little of me?" he asked. "You think I have no other intentions than to take
advantage of him?"

Now it was her turn to become enraged.

"What, so all of the sudden you're the family man now, is that it?" she asked. "Find a nice man from
work and settle down, love him for all of his faults and flaws until the day he dies?"

"Is that so hard to believe?"

"Really?" she spat. "You're asking me that? You couldn't give that to Mum, why should I believe
you could give it to this..."
She threw her hands up in the air, at loss for what she truly wanted to call the man.

"Don't you dare discount him for your mother's failings," he warned.

"Mum's failings?"

"I keep telling you, I would've been there if it weren't for her."

"Are you talking about Nana?"

Alice and Dad both looked down to see Steven staring up at them, holding the sparkling clean teakettle.

"Yes," she said.

"I don't remember Nana," Steven said, thrusting the kettle up at her. "What was she like?"

"Nice," she said.

"Angry," Dad said.

She glared at him.

"Your mum is a lot like her," Dad told Steven. "In more ways than one."

"Mmm," Alice said. "And your uncle is a lot like your absent Granddad. Arrogant, conceited, and egocentric."

Dad passed her another one of his imperceptible looks as Steven blinked up at her.

"What does arrogant mean?" he asked. "And conceited and eco--"

"Nothing, sweetheart," she sighed.

The doorbell thankfully rang then, cutting off any more talk about the tricky subjects of Mum, Dad, and Mum and Dad.

"That's him," Steven said, then sprinted off to the door.

"Wait up, soldier," Dad chuckled as he started to follow him.

Alice rubbed a hand to her forehead, took a deep breath, then walked down the hall to the door, right on Dad's heels. When they reached it, Steven had already opened it, and was gawking up at a tall, dark haired man, who was smiling awkwardly back down at him. God, Alice hoped he had a baby face and wasn't just that young.

"Hello," Steven said breathlessly.

"Hello," Ianto replied.

Steven grinned like a maniac, and much to her chagrin, Alice realised her son was already starstruck. Ten was that age, too. Everyone was his hero, even people he'd just met.

Ianto's eyes wandered up, and his expression shifted minutely as he looked between the faces. Apprehension for Alice, relief for Dad.

"Hello," he repeated to Alice.
"Hi," she said. "Come on in."

Steven stumbled back a few steps, still staring open-mouthed at him as Ianto entered and shut the door behind him. Ianto grinned even more awkwardly and handed him one of the two things in his hands. Alice couldn't see what he passed Steven, but the other item seemed to be a wine bottle. And one of her favourites, too, damn him for making it harder for her to rightfully hate him. But she could hate him for spoiling her child. Steven's eyes had gone wide as he stared at whatever it was in his hands.

"Thank you!" he said as he looked back up at Ianto.

"You're welcome," Ianto said.

He then turned to Alice and offered her the wine, which she tucked under her arm alongside the teakettle.

"Would you like some tea?" she offered.

"Tea would be nice, thanks," he said.

She did not miss the encouraging wink Dad sent him as she turned to go to the kitchen to prepare the tea.

She stood by herself in the kitchen the entire time it took for the water to come to a boil, seething in her resentment of her father and his new plaything. Maybe it just pissed her off that Dad might actually want to stay with this Ianto, and he hadn't with Mum. Or maybe she was pissed because Dad was intruding on her life with another one of his flings that will depart just as quickly as they came. She couldn't make up her mind if she despised Ianto or pitied him. It was quite likely both, if she thought about it.

Steven marched into the kitchen at one point, proudly carrying his box of... god, were those candies?

"What are those?" she asked him.

He showed her the box. "Ianto gave them to me!"

Great. She really could hate Ianto for spoiling her child. And possibly blame him when Steven got his first cavity.

She sighed. "Put them on the counter."

He stood on his tiptoes to shove the sweets all the way back against the wall.

"Uncle Jack wants to know when you're going to come back," he said.

"When the tea's done." She leaned against the counter. "So?"

"So?" Steven parroted confusedly.

"How is Ianto?"

Steven's face split with a wide beam.

"He's great," he proclaimed. "He knows everything! Literally everything!"

Alice doubted that very much.
"I'm glad you like him," she said, even though she wasn't. "Go on back out there."

He zoomed off without needing to be prompted twice. She heard the moment he reentered whatever room Dad and Ianto had settled in, because suddenly there was a loud conversation starting. Steven had no volume control when he was excited.

She sighed as the water came to a boil. Everything and everyone were eventually doomed to fall victim to her father. She must have been the only person who never would.

There was no point in ringing the doorbell. She knew he was home and that he had no one over, and she fully intended to give him a proper display of what she wanted him to do when he came over to visit her.

Rhiannon opened the door, walked in the flat, and found Ianto drinking coffee. How predictable.

He started when he saw her, and nearly spilt his coffee on himself. Glaring at her, he carefully set his mug down, and she felt a little sorry. But only just a little.

"Good morning," she signed.

He glared harder and raised the cups to his lips again. It was nice to know he wasn't a morning person. It meant there was at least one thing her brother could not do perfectly. She'd have to keep that in mind for the future. Not to humiliate him, no, but to... humble him a little.

After he had downed an absurd amount of coffee, he returned his attention to her.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"Jack told me you didn't work today, and I wanted to come celebrate your promotion with you," she told him.

She amused herself watching him process that information. First, he looked at the table for some time. Then up at her. Then he blinked a few times. Then he frowned.

"You talk to Jack?" he asked.

"Every Saturday morning."

His eyes grew to the size of that toad David found in the Pritchard's garden the other day (no, Rhiannon had not let him keep it; she didn't want salmonella, no thank you). She grinned to herself as Ianto blinked owlishly a few more times.

"What do you talk about?"

She assumed he meant to present this as calmly as possible, but really, it felt like the beginning of a frantic interrogation.

"Everything," she signed with a shrug.

The eyebrow raise he gave prompted more, but she waited a moment before continuing.


The fact that he was still thrown off by that made her laugh. Honestly, it was probably a little rude to toy with his emotions like that, but it was so rare she had the upper hand in these sorts of things.
Besides, this was harmless fun. Sisterly love. It was like teasing him about a crush! She never got to do that when they were younger.

"You idiot," she told his scandalized look. "We care about you. We love you. We just want to make sure you're alright."

He did not look convinced.

"Although he really doesn't know how to play football," she signed, frowning slightly.

"I know," Ianto agreed. "I've told him a hundred times already."

"He seems convinced that it won't stay long," she signed. "I don't know why. It's very popular. I don't think people will stop playing it."

Ianto gave a thoughtful scowl, but she knew he was hiding something behind it. Though what he could be hiding about football or Jack's opinion on it, she had no idea.

"How are Mica and David?" he asked.

"They're fine. They still think you're a spy. Mica wants to be a spy, too."

"She's five."

"She doesn't care. She wants to be a spy like her Uncle Ianto."

He frowned. "I'm not a spy."

"Then what are you?"

He didn't say anything for a minute, and Rhiannon was prepared for him to blow it off yet again. She didn't mind anymore. As long as she knew he was safe and Jack had his back, she could live with it, whatever it was.

Then he signed: "I work with aliens."

She stared at him for a moment, then burst out laughing. He didn't laugh along with her, but he grinned.

"That's a bad lie, even for you," she told him.

He shrugged.

"Do you want coffee?" he asked.

"No."

He shrugged again and left her to pour himself some more.

"That coffee is going to kill you," she told him when he came back.

Meeting her eye, he took a very long drink, and she could see his smile around the rim of his mug.

"Idiot."

They actually had a chat that morning. A real, proper chat. One where he talked about absolutely nothing and she told him lots of gossip, and nothing sad was ever mentioned. She almost had
forgotten what that was like. Well... forgetting that would imply the two of them had done it before. They hadn't, really. But it was nice, this.

She left that afternoon with a fair amount of hope.

"Is everything just one of your spooky-dos these days?" Andy sighed.

He reached out a hand to help Gwen stand up.

"Not everything," she said, huffing a little. "That murder two weeks ago wasn't ours."

"No, but you had to check to make sure first," he scoffed.

"Oh, hush," she said. "Help me over to the car. My feet hurt."

Bloody Torchwood. Six months pregnant, and Gwen was still on her feet, working her arse off. Okay, six months wasn't that far along, but it was getting up there.

"Shouldn't they be finding you a replacement?" Andy asked as she planted herself on the boot of the Torchwood SUV.

She glowered at him. "I'm pregnant, not retiring."

"Still," he said. "You'd think they'd stop making you run around all day, chasing aliens and shit. You can't be doing that for much longer. And you're going to need someone to take your spot."

"And why is that?"

"Because you've only got three people."

"No! We have four!"

"Besides you."

"Oh."

"And between you three," he said, "you have your Captain Universe who can't stop brooding for the life of him, you have Ianto, who is deaf--"

"Andy," Gwen warned.

"And you've got Lois."

"What's wrong with Lois?"

"Nothing. That's why I didn't keep going."

She let out a sigh.

"Really," he said. "They can't keep working you like this."

"Jack's been less broody lately," she said defensively. "And Ianto--"

"Is deaf."

"Andy, if you continue to use that as an insult, I will throw you in to one of our Weevils."
"You have more than one now?" he asked curiously.

Her glare reversed to a grin. "Yeah! We gave Barbara a friend."

"What'd you call it?"

"Susan."

"Not as catchy as Barbara."

"Take that up with Ianto," she said. "He named her."

"Oh, no wonder," Andy mumbled.

"Andy!"

"Look, I just don't want you giving birth in the middle of an invasion, alright?"

"You honestly think we don't have something in place for this?" Gwen asked, gesturing to her extended belly.

"Alright, what is it, then?"

She fell silent.

"See?"

"Shut up."

"Just think about what I said," he told her, then darted away from the SUV as Captain Harkness appeared in the distance.

If someone had asked Andy then what he expected to come from that, he probably would have said nothing. Bloody Torchwood hated him, so why should he expect anything? Which, of course, is why it came as such a shock to him when Captain Harkness began talking to him at a crime scene.

It was the first Torchwood crime scene Andy had been to that week, and Captain Harkness was standing in the rain, crouched over a body.

"Where's the team?" Andy asked, feigning indifference.

"Not needed," Captain Harkness grunted.

"Right. Okay."

He shoved his hands in his pockets and studied the captain as the captain studied the body.

"So, what are you thinking, then?" Andy asked. "Weevils... other aliens..."

"Here's a tip, Davidson," Captain Harkness said.

"What's that, then?"

"Don't start a list if you only have one point." He heaved a gusty breath and stood, evening his gaze with Andy's. "That's your first lesson as a Torchwood employee."

Andy made a garbled noise in the back of his throat as he tried to process that.
"As... as a what?" he asked when he was able to make his mouth form coherent words.

"You heard me," Captain Harkness said.

"Yeah, but I think you're going to have to repeat it, anyway."

He did not repeat it. Instead, he made one of his classic brooding positions (feet shoulder width apart, arms folded, chin jutting forward in a hostile act of dominance) and looked Andy directly in the eye.

"You were right," he said. "Gwen won't be able to work soon. She'll become a liability to us, and we'll become a danger to her. We need a replacement."

"But I thought you hated me!" Andy protested.

"You're not giving yourself a convincing argument."

Andy didn't know what to say to that, really.

"But we need someone who has contact with the police," Captain Harkness went on. "You're our best option, since you already are aware a number of things I'd rather most people did not know."

"So, what you're saying is..."

"You're our only option," he sighed. Andy was expecting "best option," but no. No, "only" would make more sense. Still, it meant he could do whatever the fuck he wanted and not get fired, if they needed him so badly.

"When do I start?" Andy asked, not bothering to mask his excitement.

"Make no mistake, this is temporary," Captain Harkness said, ignoring his question. "The moment Gwen gets back, I Retcon your ass into oblivion, you got that?"

"What's Retcon?"

Captain Harkness made a noise of disapproval. "I thought you cops were supposed to be smart."

Andy couldn't think of a decent retort before the captain started walking away.

"Report first thing tomorrow morning. Don't bother talking to Swanson. I've already done that."

Then, with an over-the-top swish of his coat, he disappeared into the rain.

"Bloody fuck," Andy said to himself.

The only place Andy could think to go that next morning was that shitty tourist shop, so at eight sharp, he walked inside and waited for someone to show up.

It took them twenty minutes, the bastards.

"Sorry," Lois said, hustling in with papers spilling from her arms. "Sorry, sorry."

"That's alright," Andy said, all anger fading at the sight of her.

"You're... Andy, right?" she asked as she set the papers down on the ugly desk with a thunk.

He frowned at her, but she didn't seem to notice; she was far too concentrated on sorting her stack of
"We've met," he reminded her.

"Have we?" she asked, finally looking up at him.

"Yes! On crime scenes?" He sighed at her unconvincing look. "Remember the purple and blue things you said was an octopus, but had way too many tentacles to be an octopus?"

"Not particularly, no," she said. "Look, I just need you to sign off on some papers, and then we can both get on our way."

Grumpy mood restored, he signed everything she shoved under his nose. She asked him to follow him down to the base, but then immediately disappeared when he walked out of the rolling door. Not that he missed her, anyway, what with all the staring he was doing at this Hub of theirs.

"No time to daydream," Captain Harkness's voice snapped somewhere to his left.

Andy turned to him, but he was already walking away. Did people just do that to Andy now? Was that going to become Andy's life, here at Torchwood? To be left behind?

"Come on!"

He jumped and filed in after Captain Harkness. He wasn't sure where he was being led, or what they were doing, but he wasn't really prepared to get on the captain's bad side at the moment. Not when the man was all stompy boots and swishy coat and also had a gun close to his hand. Last night, he'd been so sure that he would be able to get away with anything, but now, in this place? No, he was not prepared to get shot in the face.

At least, not by Captain Harkness.

Captain Harkness led him to a door, opened the door, shoved him through it, and slammed the door ominously behind him.

"Christ," Andy muttered. "You'd think I was a crim-- Gwen!"

"Hello, Andy," she said, smiling.

"Can you believe it?" he asked. "I'm here, in Torchwood!"

"Yes, I can," she said. "I'm the one who convinced them we needed you. Otherwise..."

She shrugged.

"Oh, thanks for that."

"Don't be such a spoilsport," Gwen said. "Lighten up. It's your first day! Hopefully yours goes better than mine."

"What happened on--"

"Oh, I released an alien gas which held an alien consciousness and it transferred itself into a girl named Carys and then she started having sex with people until they died because that's what the alien wanted."

"Right," Andy said slowly. "Okay. Well, then, I'll keep away from any alien gases. But... what are
we doing in here?"

Gwen looked about her, as if she'd forgotten where they were, then blinked and turned back to him. Andy held back a very long, frustrated sigh as Ianto slid out of the shadows beside her, holding two pairs of earmuffs and three pairs of safety glasses.

"Gun range," she said. "We're going to teach you how to shoot a gun."

"I already know how to shoot a gun," Andy told her.

"You do?" she asked, incredulous.

"Yes."

"Then we're going to teach you how to shoot a gun the correct way," Ianto said, tossing a pair of earmuffs to him. "Because you probably suck."

Gwen snorted a small laugh, but when Andy glared at her, she held up her hands in an innocent, placating gesture, then grabbed the other pair of earmuffs and some safety glasses. Ianto slid a pair on his own face, then threw the last one at Andy, who barely caught it with his free hand.

He held up his glasses and earmuffs. "What's with these?"

"We practice safe shooting in Torchwood," Ianto said.

"Really? I'd just assumed you fired at anything that moved, heedless of the well-being of yourself and others."

"Andy," Gwen sighed.

He walked further into the room, now seeing that it was indeed a gun range. He found a table full of handguns. One of them looked like an old revolver, similar to but not exactly like the captain's gun. Andy picked up the one he was most familiar with, stepped into what he knew to be the right position, and shot a few rounds into the Weevil-shaped targets. He missed a few, but one of his bullets pierced the shoulder of the target, which pleased him immensely.

So, it was sort of infuriating to hear a quiet scoff behind him. He whirled around, prepared to give Ianto a telling-off, but the man was already stepping in place beside him, picking up a gun of his own, and shooting it into the Weevil targets. None of his bullets missed; they all landed dead centre of the Weevil's head. He smirked slightly, which made Andy hate him even more.

"Gwen?" came crackling over some hidden intercom.

"Shit," Gwen muttered.

She jogged as fast as her expecting body would allow her to the source of Captain Harkness's voice. Andy and Ianto watched her go curiously, both still holding their respective guns.

"What is it?" Gwen asked Captain Harkness.

There was a very pregnant pause before his response.

"Do you remember finding the bomb?"

Her face went dark. "Not funny, Jack."
"Do you remember finding the bomb?" he repeated forcefully.

Gwen frowned for a moment, and Andy did the same, hoping to god there was no bomb in the Hub, because he absolutely did not want to die on his first day at Torchwood. Then a very different look dawned on Gwen's face, leading Andy to conclude there was, thankfully, not a bomb.

"Oh, no," she whispered disbelievingly.

"Oh, yes," Jack's voice said.

"Oh, Christ."

She put a hand to her mouth, her eyes wide in shock. No, not shock. Okay, yes shock, but something else, too. Something more excited than shock. Amazement, perhaps. Andy threw a quizzical look at Ianto, but Ianto ignored him, still gazing intently at Gwen, who was staring back at him.

"You told the wrong person," she said to Jack quietly.

"Tell Rhys it's payback. Can you bring him up here?"

Gwen was already waddling back to Andy and Ianto with a speed that Andy didn't think was entirely possible. Andy wanted to ask what the hell was going on, but she was grabbing the gun from Ianto's hand, slamming it on the table, and dragging him out of the shooting range.

Andy sighed as the door thudded closed, leaving him alone in the room. He had the very distinct feeling that this was going to be his entire life with Torchwood. Abandoned and forgotten, and overall hated.

_Bloody Torchwood._

"You sure about this?" Mickey asked. "I mean, we were never really best mates and all."

"I'm sure. You've got Martha. I trust Martha."

He scoffed. "Yeah, whatever. Look, I'll see what I can do, alright? But I can't promise nothing."

"Just do your best."

"When have you ever known me to do any less?"

A laugh came from the other end of the line, one that Mickey probably deserved.

"Thank you."

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever," Mickey said.

Then he hung up and stared at the mobile in his hand. He took a deep breath, in and out, shoving the mobile in his pocket and adjusting the paper bag in his other arm. He fished out his keys with his free hand and turned around to the front door.

"This is not going to go over well," he said to himself.

With another sigh, he rammed the keys into the lock and opened the door. He readjusted the bag in his hands to put the keys back and to push through the door, listening for any signs of life in the house. He heard a rustling of papers from somewhere in the kitchen.
"Only me!" he called, and the rustling settled.

He set the bag on the ground, hung up his coat, took off his shoes, then picked the bag back up and hauled it and himself to the kitchen.

"Got more juice," he said.

"Perfect, thanks," Martha said wearily. She shuffled through a few papers in front of her. "I heard you talking outside. Was Mrs. Marsden bothering you again? You just have to tell her to leave off."

"No, no," he said, unpacking the bag's contents on the counter. "Just a phone call, that's all."

She perked up. "A job?"

"No. Well... yes."

"What?"

"It's a bit complicated."

"Mickey..."

"Hang on, it's not illegal, or nothing. It's just... really, it's complicated."

She set aside the papers for a moment and gave him her full attention as he finished sticking the juice in the refrigerator and sat down on the table across from her.

Mickey honestly could say, he never thought he'd end up dating Martha Jones. First of all, she was way out of his league. Big time. She was a classy, intelligent doctor, and he... well, he grew up on the Powell Estate, and that should be obvious enough. But socioeconomic divide (or whatever Martha liked to denounce) aside, there was also the fact that they had a sort of history. Mickey hadn't been all too keen in playing second fiddle to the Doctor again, and when he first met Martha, it had been clear she had a thing for him. And Martha herself hadn't been very interested in being a replacement for Rose again, either. Maybe that was why they worked so well together, though. They both decided not to let anyone or anything old or new stand in the way of what they had together.

Dating Martha was great, though. He didn't think ever in his life he'd meet someone as brilliant as her. She made him laugh, she once made him cry (damn story about saving the world... *fuck*), and she always saw the best in him. And she understood him, which was absolutely mad and absolutely fantastic. When he talked about missing Jake or Jackie, she *got* it. Things still did get a bit awkward if either of them mentioned missing Rose or the Doctor, but they were working on it, and they still understood it. Really, they both actively worked on this. It was probably the healthiest relationship Mickey had ever had in his life.

It had moved sort of fast, because Mickey had moved in with her after four months, but that was alright. That was how things worked with Martha. She loved fast and easily, and Mickey adored that about her. It made her unique, and it made him love her, too. Plus, there was the fact that Mickey was having a tough time keeping a job or a flat. Not too many people take kindly to a very large gap in his life; nobody could understand where he'd gone for those years he was... away. Lies like "I was taking care of my gran" didn't cover the fact that his existence took a literal jump and no official (or unofficial) records could place him. But Martha, with her understanding and her quick love, let him move in, and that was great.

The only problem, both in his life or in their relationship, is that neither of them had a job. Mickey was still finding it hard to keep a steady job, and he was constantly getting hired and fired. Martha,
on the other hand, had been seemingly blacklisted by UNIT, because she was having a tough time finding a job, too. And it didn't help that she was so picky about what she wanted. Every hospital was too far away, or didn't need exactly what she could offer, or some other excuse. Mickey was starting to get the impression she missed what she did at UNIT too much to find a job in the real world.

But that was okay now, and he told her as much.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You don't have to look for a job."

"Of course, I do! We money can't last on this money forever!"

"That's not what I meant," he said quickly. "What I meant is... I've got us a job."

"Us? As in, both of us?"

"Yeah."

She sat back in her chair, eyebrows raised. "This better not be a daycare, or something."

"What? Why the hell would you... look, never mind. It's not a daycare."

She relaxed. "Good."

"You really think I'd suggest starting a daycare?" he asked sceptically.

"No, but it wouldn't the first time someone suggested it to me today."

"Really?"

"Tish thinks I'm desperate," she sighed. "And she's starting to get baby fever. I think she's just ready to be an aunt. Again."

"Huh," was all he could think to say.

"What's this job, then?" she asked, leaning forward on the table.

"Don't freak out," he said.

"Why would I freak out?"

"We'd have to move to Cardiff."

Mickey noticed the instant that registered in Martha's brain. Her face settled into a blank mask, her body stiffened, and she sat up straight in her chair.

"No," she said.

"You haven't even heard--"

"No," she repeated.

"Martha, just--"

"No!"
"It's a favour from Jack, okay?" he managed to yell before she shot him down a fourth time.

"I don't care," she said. "I'm not going over there. I've moved on."

Mickey sighed. This could go one of two ways.

"Look," he said. "I get it. You're done with that year and everything that has to do with it. But getting closure and moving on does not mean you can ignore Ianto."

She opened her mouth to say something, but he cut her off.

"Hear me out," he said. "Those last few times you've seen him, or talked to him, you avoided him, because you were so broken up about your Ianto. And I get that. Really. I do. But avoiding him means you don't get the chance to grow close to this Ianto, too. It means you're missing out on a lot of new chances with him. I don't think your Ianto would want you to write him off, just because he isn't the exact same. Am I right?"

It was some time before she slowly began to nod.

"You missed your chance with Tosh," he said. "Don't miss out on Ianto, too. Okay?"

"Okay," she whispered.

He got up from his chair and bent over her, planting a kiss in her hair. Thank god for small mercies, right?

When he stood back up, the tears that had been shining in her eyes had long since fallen and dried, and she had recomposed herself.

"So, what is this favour, anyway?" she asked. "It's not because of Gwen, is it?"

"Why would it be for Gwen? It's only been five months since she learned about her baby."

She grumbled something under her breath about not being an expert on prenatal care. He considered it wise that he did not point out that she was a bloody doctor.

"You want to know what it is?"

"Obviously," she said.

When he told her, it took her a short while to process the information. She stared at him first, incredulous, and then frowned as she tried to understand the workings of it all. Her face finally settled on a wide grin.

"Oh my god, really?" she asked.

"Yeah," he said.

"Shit!"

She jumped up onto her feet and clasped both her hands to her mouth.

"No!" she yelled excitedly. "No way! You're having me on!"

"I'm really not," he informed her. He frowned. "I mean, it sounds like a great bloody joke, but I'm really not."
"How is that even possible?"

"Do you think I know?" He, yet again, wisely did not remind her that she was the resident doctor.

"Shit!" she repeated.

"I think you're way more excited about this than anyone else," he told her.

Her hands flew to her head. "Oh my god! I have to tell Mum! And Tish!"

"I think you should wait until--"

Martha was already dashing away for her mobile.

"Should I call Jack back and tell him we'll take the jobs?" Mickey called after her.

An excited noise answered him, and he took it as a yes. Actually, his brain thought something along the lines of "affirmative," and suddenly he was thinking about K-9. God, he hadn't thought about that tin dog in a while. Or its owner. He should call Sarah Jane Smith sometime.

"Do you think Sarah Jane knows Jack?" he asked Martha when she returned.

"How should I know?" she asked, mobile already to her ear.

Then she stuck her finger in her other ear and started walking away as she began to talk.

"Mum! Hi! I've got some good news! It's not my news, but... No, I haven't got a job. I told you, it's not my news. Mum, it's about Jack!"

He grinned to himself as Martha walked out of earshot and pulled out his own mobile.

"Hey. It's me."

"Well, that was fast," Jack remarked.

"Yeah. She made up her mind right away, once she heard it."

"And?"

"Did you honestly think that after that, she'd say no?"

"No. Chicks love me."

"And blokes, too, evidently," Mickey said.

"Sorry, Mickey, you've missed your chance."

"That wasn't a--" Mickey started to yell, but there was a laugh on the other end of the line. "There's a reason your nickname's Cheesecake, you know."

"It's Beefcake."

"Yeah, like that's any better. When do you want us over?"

"Well..." Jack sighed. "Any chance you're willing to move as soon as you can?"

"Not like we've got anything better here," Mickey said, taking a glance around the worn kitchen.
"I just want you here before Gwen leaves," Jack said. "Smooth things out for when she gets back and... well."

"Right."

"Need any help moving?"

"Are you offering to help?"

"Nope. I can send over Andy."

"Who's Andy?"

"Someone we don't like."

Mickey scowled. "Why'd you hire him?"

"He's police."

"You hired a cop?"

"Gwen's ex-police. It's easier to cooperate with them that way."

"You put on a lot of shit about being outside the government for someone who hires and works with the cops."

"I'm sending you Andy. Good luck!"

Then the line went dead.

"Prat," Mickey muttered, then stowed the mobile back in his pocket.

"I know!" Martha was practically squealing from another room.

Mickey threw another glance around the kitchen.

"Time to move on," he said to himself.

Rhiannon gaped at him.

"A baby."

He nodded slowly, his eyes wide and staring.

"A baby," she repeated, just to make sure she'd seen that right.

"A baby," he affirmed.

She sat back and tried to wrap that around in her mind. She tried and tried again to make sense of it, to understand it, but she was coming up with blanks.

"How?" she asked, stunned.

"It was an accident," he told her.
"You're both men!" she reminded him. "It can't be an accident!"

He shook his head, apparently at a loss for words and still processing it all himself.

"Surrogate," he signed after what felt like ages.

That was one hell of a surrogate, if she could get pregnant by accident.

Hang on...

"Did he cheat?" she asked.

His eyes went wide again, and he shook his head even more fervently.

"Did you cheat?"

Now he glared at her.

"I had to ask," she signed defensively.

"Nobody cheated," he told her, still glaring.

"Then how is it an accident?"

She watched him take an extensive inhale through his nose and close his eyes. He put his hands to his face and rubbed it, then let them fall as he exhaled and opened his eyes again.

"I don't know," he signed. "It isn't."

It was obvious he was lying again, or withholding the truth. She had come to learn those were two very different things. She resigned to ask Jack about it when he called on Saturday. Jack wouldn't say much more, but at least he'd have a better explanation for it all. Surrogate... what kind of surrogate accidentally gets pregnant with the child of two men?

Jesus Christ Almighty.

"A baby," she stated yet again, because it needed to be said.

"A baby."

She put her hands on her head, then her cheeks, then her mouth, her smile starting to crack through. Her baby brother was having a baby!

"Your baby!" she exclaimed.

He nodded again, returning to his wide-eyed stare. God, he was processing this worse than she was.

"You're a dad!"

He held up his hands to sign something, but instead blew out another breath and brushed them through his hair, then placed them on his hips. She waited for a moment, letting him come to terms with it in front of her. Sometimes it took a bit. It didn't hit her that she was pregnant with David until... well, until she told Ianto.

"I don't want to become Dad," he told her.

At first, she mistook him, and thought he meant he didn't want to be a dad, and her heart broke for a
millisecond before she understood. Then her heart broke for an entirely different reason.

"You won't become Dad," she told him. "You are nothing like him."

He didn't seem convinced.

"You're like Mum," she told him. "You love everyone so much. You want to help them and protect them. You are not like Dad. Never."

When he still looked unsure, she sighed.

"You have many people to help you," she told him. "You won't be alone. You have Jack. You have me and Johnny. You have that woman."

"Gwen."

"You have Gwen." She frowned, remembering something Jack told her a few weeks ago. "Isn't Gwen pregnant, too?"

"Yes."

"How will that work?" she asked. "There are only three of you!"

He shook his head. "There are more now. Jack called some friends."

Rhiannon looked forward to hearing about this from Jack on Saturday. Some friend he was, asking them to come work his dangerous job so he could go off and raise a family.

"That's not what's going to happen," Jack told her.

He had actually come around for tea. Ianto had, too, but according to Jack, he was out in the car, freaking out a bit.

("He'll be fine," Jack had said. "He's been doing this a lot lately."

This had not eased her worries one bit.)

"They're trained in this stuff," Jack told her. "Well, as trained as you can get, anyway. Trained in the line of fire, I suppose."

"But what about this Gwen?" she asked. "If all three of you are out, what will happen?"

"She plans to be back by the time..." Jack blinked. "By the time our kid... Wow. That's..."

He tapped a finger to his lips distractedly, then shook himself and sat up straighter in his chair.

"Anyway," he said brightly, grinning as though the last minute never happened, "we'll form a sort of co-leadership when we're both back. Easier for everyone that way. And we might employ more people. Who knows?"

"Fancy letting me in?"

He laughed. "I'm fairly certain you wouldn't like this job."

"Fine," she sighed.

Ianto came in the house just then, sat down beside Jack, grabbed Jack's tea and drank from it. He
grimaced and slid it back to Jack, who grabbed it back and took his own drink from it with a small grin.

"Congratulations!" she told them. "You're dads!"

Her brother shook his head, and Jack tilted his head at him slightly, still smiling that soft smile.

"He'll get used to it," Jack told her when they left shortly after.

She barely saw Ianto after that, and she could hardly get Jack on the phone long enough for a real conversation. It wasn't their fault, they told her. Life had just gotten very busy as they prepared to be parents and dealt with new people at... wherever it was they worked. Rhiannon didn't blame them, really, but it was just that she missed them. She had gotten used to her brother coming around more often to see her and Jack calling her on Saturdays to chat about the man they both loved.

Eight months was a long time, though. A third of a whole year, and she saw Ianto only three times and heard from Jack five times. It began to worry her, even though they'd seemingly called and visited just often enough that she didn't start thinking one of them died. Ianto still seemed frazzled every time she saw him, though Jack seemed fine, if not a little nervous.

Then, one day, out of the blue, she was finishing the wash late at night, when a knock came on the door. She didn't make it two steps before the door opened and in walked Ianto, Jack, and a large black object in Jack's hands that Rhiannon's brain refused to acknowledge as an infant's car seat until it was being shoved in her hands.

"Oh my god," she managed to choke out.

Jack grunted in response and made a beeline for the sofa in the sitting room, where he collapsed on the sofa next to Mica, letting his head fall onto the back and throwing an arm over his eyes. Rhiannon recognized that. However, the snoozing Jack was slightly charming, and wasn't as concerning as her brother, who looked like he would collapse if he blinked for a fraction of a second too long. But the state of the two men couldn't capture her attention for very long, not when she held the car seat of a baby, Ianto's baby, in her grasp.

With an excitement she hadn't felt in a long time, she gently carried the seat over to the table and set it down. There was a blanket that covered the seat, most likely to keep the winter chill off the baby, and Rhiannon lifted it to see the child.

"Oh my god," she breathed out again.

A little face, pink and round, peeped out from under a smaller blanket. Rhiannon removed that one, too, to see the little green one-piece pyjamas covering the little body. Her heart melted instantly.

"Baby!" Mica exclaimed as she climbed up onto a chair.

Her pigtails swung in the way as she stuck her face into the car seat, and Rhiannon moved her back. The baby, asleep or not, did not need to be crowded like that.

"Is it a girl or a boy?" Mica asked.

Rhiannon translated that for Ianto, and she grinned when he told her: "Girl."

"It's a baby girl," she told Mica.
"But it's wearing green!"

"What's wrong with that?" Rhiannon asked, sticking a finger in the car seat to gently stroke the baby's soft cheek. "You like wearing green."

"Yeah, but she's a baby!"

"Mica," she sighed. "It's late. Go and get ready for bed."

"But I wanna play with the baby!"

"The baby's asleep," Rhiannon told her, "and you should be too."

Mica glared at her and then stomped loudly up the stairs. Jack jolted awake on the sofa for a split second, then sank back and resumed his quiet snoring. Fortunately, the baby didn't wake up. She did do one of those tiny little stretches, one of the ones that made her face grimace sweetly as she raised her arms above her heads and tensed, before relaxing into what looked like the most uncomfortable yet adorable position. Rhiannon stuck her hand in again to touch the tiny little nose and stroke the chubby little clenched fingers.

Ianto sank into a chair then and rubbed at his eyes.

"How old is she?" Rhiannon asked.

"Ten days."

She wanted to scold him for waiting ten whole days before bringing her new niece to her, but she refrained, mostly because she was finally grasping that she was an aunt now.

"Aunt Rhiannon," she mused to herself, as if she hadn't tried the title out many times in the past eight months.

"What's her name?" she asked Ianto.

"N-E-L-L-E."

Nelle.

Well. It was certainly cute, and looking at the child, seemed to fit her, but Rhiannon didn't have a clue how to pronounce that. She glanced quizzically at Ianto. He shrugged.

"A common name in Jack's family," he told her.

"It's nice," she signed, because it was, but she was really going to have to ask Jack about it later.

There was one other thing Rhiannon had wondered these many months. More important than the date of birth or the sex or the given name. Those things would have been made clear in time. She supposed this one could be, too, but it would never be a definite answer. Not unless she directly asked Ianto or Jack "who is the biological father?" She didn't think that was appropriate, for some reason, but she did have another, sneaky way of asking.

"H-A-R-K-N-E-S-S?"

Ianto shook his head. "J-O-N-E-S."

Well, that was that settled. Not that it was certain that, just because his was her surname, he was
definitely the father, but it meant Rhiannon didn't have to wonder about it for the rest of time. Besides, she'd like to think that Ianto had the same nose when he was a baby.

Oh, god. Her baby brother had a baby now. This was going to keep hitting her in waves, wasn't it?

Which reminded her about Ianto's earlier concerns.

"Are you alright now?" she asked.

He frowned up at her. "What?"

"Are you okay being a father?"

For the longest time, he didn't answer her. She eventually gave up waiting for him to answer, gathering that he probably still had not accepted it yet, and had unbuckled and picked little Nelle up. Oh, it had been a long time since she'd held a baby like that. Rhiannon cuddled her close and watched her every move, from the one time she yawned with her little pink lips and little pink gums, to the two other times she squirmed and stretched.

By the time she looked down at Ianto and saw him nodding solemnly up at her, she'd nearly forgotten what she asked. When it hit her, she smiled softly down at him, carefully leaned over, and planted a kiss in his hair. He gaped confusedly at her when she drew back, and she shrugged. She was allowed to be affectionate now and again, wasn't she? He'd just have to deal with it.

It was quite late by the time Jack had woken up. Rhiannon had refused to relinquish her hold on baby Nelle the entire time, and was sad to part with her when Ianto took her and put her back in the car seat. At least Nelle was still asleep. No doubt Jack and Ianto would have a very fussy baby to deal with later on, but for now, she was a good little girl for her aunt, and that made Rhiannon happy.

Jack seemed like he was about to fall back asleep any moment as he stumbled out the door into the pitch-black night, and Rhiannon prayed, for everyone's safety, that Ianto would be the one driving home. He still looked worse off than Jack, but at least he was truly awake.

Before Ianto left with baby Nelle, Rhiannon reached out and stopped him.

"You'll be a great dad," she told him.

He must have been tired out of his wits, to give her a smile like the one he did, the daft sod.

She watched from the doorway as Ianto and the baby car seat disappeared into the night, smiling to herself and wishing the best for her brother and his new family.

Chapter End Notes

How did they get a baby, you ask? Alien intervention. That's all the more I'll say. Everything else... well... we only know as much as Rhiannon knows.

Thank you for reading! Have a wonderful day!
They named him David Christopher Matthew Smith.

Actually, the Doctor had named him David Christopher Matthew Smith, because Rose had still been drugged and not entirely coherent when he made it official. Rose later went on to complain that this was a boring name, and the Doctor had gotten offended, because in his opinion, that was what made them the most interesting names of all. She gave up arguing when they agreed to call him just David (and only refer to him by his full title when he got himself into trouble), but she still secretly wished they could have given him a Gallifreyan name. Something to teach him of a forgotten and lost home in the stars, to teach him his place in this big universe of theirs. She silently decided that, whatever the Doctor's true name was, that would be her son's name, too. The Doctor Junior, in a way; like father, like son.

David was a lovely boy, and clearly his father's son. He was brilliant from the instant he opened his eyes, but that could have been Rose's rather biased opinion as his mother. Oh, but he had a mop of dark hair and beautiful brown eyes and the sweetest smile, and Rose absolutely adored him. She loved him with every fibre of her being.

It wasn't just Rose who adored him. Mum was so excited to play Gran, even though she herself had a relatively young son. Dad was also excited, and sometimes it became quite difficult to take David back from him, simply because he refused to let go. Donna, now dubbed Aunt Donna, spoiled him rotten. Rose had to tell her multiple times that she was not allowed to fund David's entire wardrobe. Donna pretended to resent her for this. Martha would sometimes stop by with Tom and their little Anna (and everyone would pretend not to notice the strain between the couple). Sarah Jane came to see little David once. Rose tried not to remember how happy she had been to have her own son, because then Rose would feel sad and probably try to go finding Luke in this universe, which the Doctor had forbidden her to do. Everyone pointedly ignored the invisible spaces of the two other people who should be here.

And the Doctor? He was over the moon (with a Jadoon platoon, he liked to say). He was so thrilled to be a father that it always filled Rose with such joy. He looked so happy all the time now, and she and David were responsible for it! She knew he used to have kids, a family on Gallifrey, but he never said anything about them, and for those nine months she'd had David inside her, she'd worried that he'd think of David as an unsatisfactory replacement. So, it meant so very much to her that her son made the Doctor so happy.

Honestly, David became Rose's whole life after that. The Doctor, too, because like she had said, her life was because of his. But David gave her life a different meaning, and she loved what it became. She never thought she'd be a Mum (or Mummy, Christ... it took a while for her desensitize the word enough to let him call her that), but now that she was one, it made everything so much more fun. He was so bright and inquisitive, and she knew he was a star amongst stars. Fantastically brilliant, as his father said.

The first few years of Rose's new life seemed to go by too quickly. It was like, one moment, David was a babe in her arms, and the next, he was talking to her about the heliocentric orbit of the solar system. For the first week after David's fourth birthday, Rose was in a deep panic. She felt like life was moving on too quickly, like her baby was slipping away from her grasp too fast. Donna teased her for having a premature mid-life crisis, but the Doctor understood. He told her he felt that way the
first time he was a parent, too. Then he reminded her that she was being a bit ridiculous, because David was still very little, and he would never stop being her son. She did have to agree, in the end. She just sort of missed holding a baby, really. Not that she wanted another; she was perfectly happy with just the one.

"Mummy," David began to ask her one night. "Can I have a sister?"

Rose stared down at him. "Why do you want a sister?"

"Cause I like Anna, and I want a friend like her."

Martha had started bringing Anna over more often for Rose to babysit, due to the ongoing divorce and her large workload. Rose sympathized immensely, and was silently thankful, because Anna was really David's only friend.

"David, sweetheart, Anna is your friend."

"But she's not my sister," he reminded her. "I want a friend like a sister."

"No, she's not," Rose agreed. "Not in the way everyone thinks of brothers and sisters."

"What do you mean?" David asked, tilting his head a little too far to the right, letting it rest practically on his shoulder. Cute.

"Well..." she said. "Sometimes, when someone is so close to you, you think of them like your brother, even though they aren't."

"Or sister?"

She nodded "Or sister."

Then she kissed his head and tucked him into bed, trying very hard not to think about two people she missed so very much.

The day after David turned four and a half was the start of a different chapter of Rose's life. She was sitting in the hospital, holding Mum's hand, and crying like a lunatic, complete with snot and big, fat tears, and a fair amount of sobbing.

"It's alright," Mum said. "They're gonna be alright."

Rose just pressed her wrist to her nose and cried harder.

The police told her it was a drunken idiot who had ploughed into them. The driver was dead on impact, but thankfully neither David nor the Doctor were critically harmed. That was all she was told at that point, until she managed to snag doctor, some angry bloke called Dr. Harper who yelled at her for bothering him. She stood her ground and demanded to be told if her husband and son were okay, and he suddenly calmed down, smiled gently at her, and told her they were going to be fine. For some reason, maybe because he was a doctor, or maybe for some other reason entirely, she trusted him and finally started to relax.

David was fine. The other car hadn't crashed into his side of their car, and he'd just been jostled about a bit. A concussion and some nasty bruises, that was all. He was asleep when she came in to see him, and she brushed some of his normally sticky-uppy hair out of his face and kissed him. He looked so perfect, sleeping like that. Like a little cherub.
The Doctor was also fine, just relatively... less fine. He'd managed to avoid most of the damage from the other car somehow. Rose would have to ask him about it later, but she knew already that that was just how the Doctor was, always safe from the worst danger. But, even with his amazing evasion skills, he still hadn't gotten himself completely safe. His leg had gotten pinched, and that wasn't fine at all.

David recovered quickly. The Doctor? Not so much. He limped heavily for the first few months, and it only evened to a less heavy limp. Martha told Rose that it probably wouldn't go away. Rose didn't mind, but, then again, it wasn't for her to mind, anyway. She enjoyed rubbing balm on the worst spots in the mornings and evenings, because it gave them some time alone where they could just be vulnerable and kind to each other. However, the Doctor was constantly irate and cranky, because his leg was in pain and slowing him down. She felt for his pain, though, and tried to be as understanding of his needs as possible, even to the point where she had to listen to him ranting at least three times a day.

It took about half a year for them to settle into the new life. A life where the Doctor was forced to take it easy, a life where David wasn't allowed to hide behind his dad's legs when he didn't want to talk to strangers, and a life where Rose was just trying to help everyone as much as possible without drawing too much attention to herself.

Sometimes, people would point out to Rose that her child was different that everyone else's. Rose didn't find that strange, because she knew David was different. He had the Doctor for a father and had a mind far more advanced than any other kid his age. But sometimes, people would point out things she hadn't noticed before. Things that did seem quite different, when looking on the outside in. She'd missed them, somehow, in her understanding that he was already a child unlike the rest.

It wasn't as if the differences were bad. Just... well, just different. Of course, the other parents didn't think so, because in their limited human minds, differences equated bad. That's what the Doctor said, anyway.

"What's so different about him, anyway?" Rose asked curiously as they watched David swing with Anna at David's favourite playground. They'd stopped on their walk to the museum, because the Doctor's leg was acting up. "I mean, I know what, but..."

The Doctor shrugged. "He's normal enough, on Gallifrey."

All discussion was cut off in that moment, because David came over, Anna in tow, and asked if they could go get ice cream. Since it was hot, and because David, Anna, and the Doctor all had that puppy-dog look on their faces, Rose sighed and acquiesced.

As she watched Anna and David scarf down their ice creams, she began to truly consider just how many Gallifreyan traits had stayed with this part-human Doctor. How many of the things that made him a Time Lord had stayed? How many had been passed on to her son? What was it that made a Gallifreyan, Gallifreyan? Was it the brains? The way they acted? The genetics? The proximity to and the understanding of the Time Vortex?

She questioned it all so much that she worked her brain up into a fit, and could only sort it out when she realized that it wasn't about Gallifreyans, necessarily. This was about the Doctor and David. How much of David was the Doctor? And then it was less confusing to her, because sometimes she would look at things David did, and then things that the Doctor did, and go "yeah, that makes sense." Like his intelligence, obviously, but then there was the way he moved around, the way he interacted with others, the way he loved all things great and small, and the way he understood and enjoyed the world around him. David was just a little Doctor.
"Ah!" the Doctor cried out, startling her from her thoughts. He pressed a hand to his forehead. "Brain freeze."

Rose failed at hiding her laugh, and he grinned at her and made her laugh even harder, until she was practically crying into their shared banana shake.

And that's when she decided she didn't care if David was different from the other kids. If he was like the Doctor, in any way at all, did she really care? And even if he wasn't, he was still her son, and she would love him until the end of time itself.

"Come on, you lot," she said, wiping a vanilla mustache off David's face. "We've got a museum to see."

Anna accidentally dropped her spoon on the ground in her excitement, and David's eyes nearly bulged out of his head.

"Dinosaurs," he breathed.

Rose kissed his tiny forehead on her way down to pick up Anna's fallen spoon.

No, she didn't care one bit.

That was the day she started thinking about what the Doctor was capable of, and how much she could prepare David for the world ahead of him. He was a child of Gallifrey, and she was determined he saw the stars. She didn't want to push him, exactly, because she from what she knew of the few kids from the Powell Estate who were good at something, their parents pushed them too hard into it and then they quit for good. But she did want to urge him to see a brighter future for himself.

Later that week, she went to the library and took home a few books. She left them on the bedside table in David's room, where he always left his books that he read before bed. Barely five years old, and already reading to himself. No wonder the other parents felt threatened.

"Mummy?" she heard the next day.

"Yeah?"

"What's... British Sign Language?"

Of all the books, between the space book and the dinosaur book and the geology book and the music book, he'd picked that one to ask her about? Granted, he'd probably read the others last night, but still. She wasn't expecting this conversation... yet.

"Well, it's a language," she told him, kneeling in front of him. He liked it when people didn't talk down to him, physically or otherwise. "Sometimes, when people can't hear, they use their hands to talk."

"Oh," he intoned thoughtfully. He looked down at the book in his hand. "Why'd you put it on my table?"

"Because I know you like learning things, and I wanted to show you a few things I know you'd like."

"Dinosaurs and rocks?"
She nodded. "Dinosaurs and rocks. But I also put a few new things in there, so you could see if you like more things."

"Like talking with my hands?"

Smiling privately to herself, she nodded again. "Yeah. And music. I know you like that, too."

He considered it briefly. "I want to play cello."

"Are... you sure?" she asked. This was the first she was hearing of it.

"Yes. And also the drums. But mostly? The cello."

"Why the cello?"

He shrugged. "Cause it looks cool."

"I'll... talk to Dad about it, okay?"

They both knew he'd be over the moon with a Jadoon platoon (which had now become a family saying) that David wanted to play any instrument, really.

"And what about sign language?" she asked. "Do you want to learn that, too? I could help."

He gaped up at her. "You know it?"

She laughed sadly. "Yes. Your mum does know something, at least."

"Dad says you're very smart," he told her sincerely. "And that you're not supposed to say you aren't smart."

"Really?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "And I'm supposed to tell you that you're a great mummy."

Then he hugged her very tightly for a brief second, then let go to awkwardly kiss her forehead. Rose kept her smile to herself as he scampered off, looking down at the BSL book in his hands.

And that was how David became the "cello-playing, hand-talking, go-to kid for diplodocus facts and mineral samples" when he started school. The Doctor laughed a little too hard when David very solemnly told them this after his first day. Rose just told him she was proud of him and held in her giggles until it was just her and the Doctor standing in the kitchen, watching him carry off his tiny backpack that was so crammed with books that he was leaning backwards. Honestly, they were a little surprised to later find out from his teacher that he actually was widely known for those things.

Oh, she loved David with all her heart.

The day of his sixth birthday was... interesting. Interesting, meaning Rose nearly cried four times for three separate reasons.

First of all, David looked adorable, and he was getting older, and she still had those moments where she felt he was getting too old too fast. She woke him up with a hug and a kiss and fed him crepes with strawberries, then went off to the bathroom to sob for twenty minutes. Then Mum found her in there, dragged her out, and made her look presentable again.

Second, she got so frustrated with the way her cake turned out that she went back into the bathroom,
not an hour later, and glared at her reflection as angry tears raged down her cheeks. She managed to clean herself up at that time, and went back out to restart the frosting quickly before the guests arrived.

Third, while the guests included the normal list of Mum, Dad and Tony, Martha and Anna, Donna, and three or four of David's classmates, it also included four uninvited guests.

"Isn't everyone here?" Rose asked Donna as they ate the (thankfully) decent cake.

"Maybe David invited another kid?" Donna suggested.

Rose passed Martha a napkin for Anna's face and considered that. It was highly unlikely. David still had a hard time making friends, and the only ones that he ever bothered to talk to were all here.

"I'd better go see who it is," she told Donna.

She hurried to the door a little, partly out of curiosity and partly because she didn't want to miss a single second of David's happy day. She tucked some flyaway hair behind her ear as she opened the door, because if it was one of David's sort-of friends, she didn't want to look like a complete fool in front of their parents (her impostor syndrome still needed some working on).

Her hand got tangled in her hair when it flew to her face, making her sob into a knotted mass of hair.

"Hey," Jack said, grinning.

She sobbed harder, shook her head, and closed the door on them.

"Hey!" she heard Jack repeat through the wood as she slid down it to the floor.

Continuing to heave dry sobs, she somehow managed to get her hand even more snarled into her hair as she put her face in her hands and her elbows on her knees and just... sat there, making herself look the mess she felt like on the inside.

"Rose?" Donna called, and Rose heard her footsteps coming closer. "Rose? Who was... god, Rose, are you alright?"

Donna's legs stood in front of her, and her shadow descended down on Rose as she crouched down beside her.

"What's the matter?" Donna asked.

Rose just shook her head again, sobbing harder. Real tears were coming out now, and she hated herself for being like this. For being so damn emotional.

"She's just sad," Jack yelled through the door.

"Oh, nooooo," Donna said as Rose sniffed in a gross amount of snot.

Donna reached out and helped Rose to her feet (and helped her detangle her hands from her hair). Rose managed to wipe some of the tears from her face before Donna swung the door open again.

"You utter bastards," Donna told Jack and Ianto. "You two are such-- oh, shit, there's kids. I mean... oh, shoot."

"It's fine," Jack said cheerfully. "They can't hear you anyway. Hello, Rose. Looking good."

"Shut up," Rose mumbled.
Then she launched herself at both Jack and Ianto, holding them both as close as she possibly could. Jack's arms returned the hug immediately, but as it always was with Ianto, he was startled by the embrace before he settled into it.

When she stepped back, she took a moment to take them in. Jack looked... the same, really. Handsome as ever, with that cheeky grin of his. Ianto looked even more sophisticated than usual, sporting a neatly-trimmed beard that had just the faintest flecks of silver in it. And Donna had been right, there were indeed children. Two of them: a boy and a girl, roughly the same age, standing behind Jack and Ianto and looking around them like they hadn't quite seen something like this house before. They might not have, depending on what Jack's Boeshane looked like.

"You look handsome," she told them Jack and Ianto.

"Thank you," Ianto signed.

Then she punched them both on the arm. Hard.

"Ow," Jack said, while Ianto looked insulted.

"Seven years!"

"Sorry," Ianto apologised. "We needed to wait until they were old enough to travel."


"They're cute," she told them, nodding to the children.

She smiled at the kids, crouching down by habit, and waved at them.

"What are your names?" she asked them.

The kids looked between each other (oh, adorable twins) and then back to Rose.

"R-I-A-N-N-O," the girl signed. She looked the sterner, more serious part of the two.

The boy was a little more reserved. "G-R-A-Y."

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Six."

She smiled. Perfect.

"Do you want some cake?"

Rhiannon shrugged, like it didn't matter either way, but Gray's eyes widened, and he nodded fervently.

"What happened to you?" the Doctor asked when she rejoined the group.

She smoothed a hand against her snarled hair self-consciously.

"And who are they?" he asked, nodding to Rhiannon and Gray.

Then he stood up quickly. Too quickly, and it looked like it hurt, but the Doctor didn't seem to register it as he made his way over to Jack and Ianto.
"Oh my god," Rose heard Martha whisper.

"Hi, Martha!" Jack said. "Jackie! How are you? Oh. Pete."

Then he let out a loud "oof" as Tony rammed into his stomach.

"Oh, you've grown," Jack groaned.

Rose felt a tug on her trousers, and she looked down to see David peering up at her. She crouched again.

"What, sweetheart?"

"Who are these people?" he whispered to her.

"These are your parent's friends. Jack and Ianto," she told him. "Me and Dad... we love them very much, and they went away for a while."

"And now they're back?"

A smile grew on her face. "Apparently so."

David tilted onto his left foot to peek over her shoulder.

"Who are the kids?"

"Those are their kids. They're called Rhiannon and Gray."

"Like the colour."

"Yeah."

And a brother that must never have been found. Jack and Ianto really had bonded over lost siblings, then.

Then David gasped and stared at her.

"Mummy!" he exclaimed quietly. "They're using sign language!"

"Mhm. That's because Ianto is deaf." She thought back to Jack's comment. "And so are they."

David's eyes went alight. He always looked that way, when he got to use something he knew. She loved the way he enjoyed his knowledge. Maybe this time, he could use it to make a friend.

"Go talk to them," she said, giving him a gentle shove in their direction.

She stood as the momentum from her push made him take a few stumbling steps forward, unsure of himself. Then he seemingly gathered his confidence and marched straight up to Gray, who was hiding himself behind Ianto. She caught Ianto's eye and grinned.

Rose was sad to hear about Jack's mum, but she was surprised and excited when they said they planned to stay here, on Earth, in this century. Jack claimed it was because he had nothing left back home but a sandy planet and a terrifying ex. Ianto said it was because Jack was lonely without his mum, verging on depression, and it was far better for them both to be with people they knew and loved.
"We knew about David and Anna," he signed. "So we came back when they were the same age as Rhiannon and Gray."

She had to ask him to sign that again twice over. She hadn't practiced nearly enough over the past seven years to maintain fluency. David was better off than she was at that point. Then again, that was generally a given.

Within a week, Jack and Ianto had found a decent place to live. Ianto got himself rehired by Dad, who missed his filing skills dearly. Jack wasn't needed to take down rogue factions of Cybermen anymore, so he went out job hunting the one day and came back as a bartender, and nobody knew how. For Rhiannon and Gray, they chose a school for the Deaf, because Ianto wanted them to have a better experience than he had. He said they could choose something different when they got older, if that was what they wanted, but for now, he wanted them to meet other people like them. When asked about it all, Jack said: "I don't know, I'm just their dad" and then grinned like an idiot.

The second time David, Anna, Rhiannon, and Gray all met was a slight... well... disaster. Rhiannon and David, with their dominating personalities, butted heads constantly, and David kept trying to befriend Gray, who was absolutely terrified of him. Poor Anna, who was further behind in her studies of BSL (she only learned them from David when he bothered teaching it to her), didn't really interact with anyone, standing off to the side and throwing in gracelessly signed words when she got the chance. Rose felt bad for her and sympathised with her, because she understood what it felt like.

Actually, at one point, Anna had come up to Rose and said: "We are the worst signers"

Then she dashed off after David again. Rose didn't know whether to laugh or be offended, so she stood there in stunned silence as Jack did the laughing for her.

"She's right, though," Rose said glumly.

"Oh, don't feel too bad," Jack said. "Languages are hard. You're trying. That's all that matters. We love you anyway."

"You know," she said, "if you ever leave me again, I will build myself my own Vortex Manipulator and I will chase you to the end of the universe."

Jack laughed again, hugged her close, and kissed her on top of the head.

"On behalf of both Ianto and myself," he whispered into her hair, "I promise never to leave you behind. Not you, not the Doctor, and not your little boy."

"Good."

They got together every Sunday after that and had a sort of potluck. Jack and Ianto brought the main course, while the Doctor made the appetizers, and Mum and Dad bought dessert. Martha would always bring wine, while Donna would bring more wine. The kids would run around like maniacs for half the night, and then pass out in little piles on the sofa near the end.

Rose was glad to see that Gray eventually warmed up to David (and was warming even further... she'd have to keep an eye on those two in the future), while David and Rhiannon had settled on becoming reluctant friends who sometimes had heated arguments. Anna progressed in her signing as she got older, and when she was ten, decided that that was what she wanted to do with her life. Literally nobody could sway her. Nobody wanted to try, anyway. Tony, being older and "cooler," didn't really hang around the younger kids much, but sometimes Rose caught him looking longingly at the rest of them. Then the moment would pass and he'd sit beside Jack and pretend to be more
mature than he was.

Ianto and Jack didn't leave again, like Jack had promised. It was going to be the Doctor and Rose and Jack forever, now completed with Ianto and Martha and Donna. Plus kids! There was nothing that made Rose happier than knowing that.

And finally, surrounded by her big family, Rose felt whole.

Chapter End Notes

I got a little carried away with this one. Can you tell? Honestly, I loved writing these Rose chapters so much that I might end up taking it all, rewriting a few parts, and publishing it as its own Ten/Rose fic (with a side note of Janto). Also, yes. I love kids. Everyone gets a kid. Yay! Thank you all so much for reading, and have a nice day!
It was not a surprise that Rhiannon was absolutely pissed when it came in the post.

"You could have called," she told him over the phone. "You could have visited. You could have even texted, for all I care!"

"Um--"

"But I get an invitation in the post, like I'm some long-lost cousin?" she demanded.

"I'm sorry," Jack said. "I just forgot, okay?"

"You forgot?" she yelled. "You bloody forgot?"

"It's been a busy week!"

"Oh, yeah, we all know. Weevils this, Weevils that. You and your bloody Weevils."

"They're really bad this year!" Jack protested. "Look, that's not even why."

"Really? What's your big excuse this time?"

"It's because your brother here," Jack said, and she could imagine him throwing a glare at Ianto on the other side, "wants to invite absolutely no one. I told him that's not the point of a wedding--"

She sighed to herself as a long pause came as Jack and Ianto undoubtedly began arguing. Was she like that with Johnny? It was so long ago that she couldn't remember. God, she'd been, what, twenty-three? David had been two, so... yeah, twenty-three. Ianto was now thirty-three, going to be thirty-four. Christ, she felt old.

"Okay," Jack's voice said as it returned to the line. "Ianto does want to invite people, he just wants it to be small. I still think we should invite more than ten people."

"Ten?"

"You, Johnny, David, Mica, Gwen, Rhys, Anwen, Evan, Alice, and Steven."

"Is he just sticking with 'family'?"

"Yes," Jack said sourly.

"So those are the only people who received invitations?"

"No."

"Good," she said. "I like that Lois girl. She should come. Though I suppose she didn't have to wait until she received an invitation?"

There was a pause.

"No."
"I'm going to bloody kill you, Jack Harkness."

"Look, the only reason I didn't tell you was because I'd forgotten to call before the invite got posted, okay? Easy mistake."

"Your wedding is going to be your funeral."

Jack burst out laughing, for some reason.

"Would you believe me if I told you that's happened before?" he asked.

She frowned. "Is this another one of your Torchwood things?"

"No. Well. Sort of."

She rolled her eyes. Sometimes, she regretted asking too many questions about what Jack and Ianto did for work.

"Tell Ianto that he has friends, and they deserve to be at his wedding," she instructed Jack.

"Believe me, I have. He's just stubb--"

There was a jostling on other end of the line.

"Hi, Aunt Rhi!" came from a mouth that was far too close to the receiver.

She winced. "Hi, Nelle."

"Dads are getting married!"

"I know. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I dunno. Gotta go, love you, bye!"

There was another rustling at the phone was passed back to Jack.

"He's stubborn," Jack finished. "Thankfully, I didn't listen to him anyway, but now we're going to get in another fight about it in... oh, about five minutes, I'd say, when he gets a text from Lois about it. I sent one to the tourist office."

"For what purpose?" she asked. "Never mind. What colour should I wear?"

Jack laughed with an intensity that was not called for.

"You still have yet to argue about that," she inferred.

"You bet," Jack said tensely. "Oh, sh--okay, so it was a little less than five minutes. Gotta go! Wish me luck! Bye!"

Rhiannon marvelled at the similarities of father and daughter as she set her mobile down.

Red. She should wear red. Ianto loved red.

She grinned to herself as she imagined Ianto in a red tie, walking down an aisle (assuming they walked down an aisle; for all she knew they were having the wedding on one of Jack's favourite rooves)."
"Mica!" she yelled.

"What?"

"Your uncle's getting married!"

"Took him long enough!"

"Text your brother!"

"Why don't you?"

She sighed and retrieved her mobile again. Perhaps she should call him. Did kids like getting calls? Mica hated it when Rhiannon called her.

"Where's your dad?" she called back to Mica.

"No fucking clue!"

"Watch your language!"

She barely heard the disgusted sigh that emanated down the stairs from Mica's room. Thirteen and already a brat. Christ.

Setting the invite on the table, she smiled at it one last time. Oh, exciting days were still ahead.

"Do I have to wear these clothes?" Evan sighed.

"Yes," Rhys and Gwen said.

Evan groaned a dramatic groan and melted in his car seat.

"Stop slouching," Anwen told him. Then she gasped. "Mam! He stuck his tongue out at me!"

"Evan, don't antagonize your sister," Gwen said, not even gracing either of them with a look. "Anwen, stop bossing."

Anwen hmphed and Evan groaned again.

"Boy, we're chipper today, aren't we?" Rhys remarked cheerfully.

"Oh, they'll lighten up once we get there," Gwen said. "When they both have other people to pick on."

Right on cue, Anwen asked: "Do I have to talk to--"

"Yes," Gwen cut in before she could get any further.

"But--"

"You are going to be civil today," Gwen said.

"I am civil!"

Gwen made a disbelieving noise.
"I don't even know what that means," Evan said. Rhys could only imagine him doing that little, confused shrug of his.

"It means you're not going to act like a hooligan at Uncle Jack and Uncle Ianto's wedding," Gwen said. "Is that clear?"

There was a long pause from the back seat of the car.

"Is Uncle Jack going to change his name?" Anwen asked.

"Why would you assume Uncle Jack would change his name?" Gwen asked. "Maybe Uncle Ianto wants to change his."

"Ianto Harkness sounds silly," Anwen said.

"So does Jack Jones," Gwen pointed out.

"It sounds like a pirate!" Evan cried. "Arrrrg!"

"You are not a pirate," Anwen told her brother.

"Anwen, be nice."

"He isn't!"

"I think they're both keeping their names," Rhys said, just to keep the peace. "Like your mam and me."

"That's stupid."

"Evan!"

"Okay, everyone!" Rhys said. "We are going to be nice to each other the whole rest of the way."

It was dead silent in the car for the rest of the ride. Well, dead silent except for Gwen sighing longingly for days gone by, when Ianto and Jack first got together, when she accidentally walked in on them (Rhys had to shut her up before she got to the adult parts), when they had their first date and Gwen had semi-stalked them to make sure they were okay and also to save their arses from having to end the date prematurely for a Weevil hunt (Rhys again cut her off so she didn't end up revealing certain truths to the kids)... and the stories just got weirder from there.

"And were here!" Rhys nearly shouted over one particular story about a Hoix and a double-date. "Look at that! And we didn't say anything rude to one another."

"That's 'cause Mam didn't shut up."

"Evan!"

"I'm just happy your uncles are getting married," Gwen said defensively, unbuckling herself. "They're my best friends. I'm glad they're finally having their special day."

"Why'd they wait so long?" Anwen asked. "You got married before you had me."

"Some people just like to wait, that's all," Rhys said.

He opened his door and stepped outside. Oh, that felt nice. He needed to stretch his legs. It was a
long time since he used to sit down in a lorry for two hours straight. He opened the Anwen's car
door.

"They got married when they felt like it," he continued. "I'm honestly just surprised they're getting
married at all."

"Rhys," Gwen scolded as she opened up Evan's door.

"What? I'm serious. Never thought Ianto would be ready for it. Or Jack."

"Well, it was bound to happen, sooner or later," she said. "I'm just glad it happened in my li--"

"Anyway," he said quickly. "Out we get."

"You, mister," Gwen said to Evan as she lifted him out of the car, "can get two whole slices of cake
at the party afterwards--"

Evan cheered.

"If!" she declared, and Evan groaned. "If you can keep all of your clothes on your person and keep
them all clean."

Evan considered the deal, then nodded severely. "Okay."

"And you," Rhys told Anwen as she hopped out by herself, "can get two whole slices of cake if you
promise to leave Nelle well enough alone."

Anwen heaved the most theatrical of sighs, rolled her eyes, and started stomping off after Gwen and
Evan.

It was funny. The four of them, Gwen and Rhys, Jack and Ianto, had thought that Anwen and Nelle
would become the best of friends, considering how close they were in age and how frequently they
would end up seeing each other.

Not so much.

No, the two of them despised one another with a burning passion, the likes of which Rhys had only
ever seen on bloody American reality TV. Honestly, it was that awful. The two girls just had two
very, very different personalities.

If someone took all of Rhys's occasional stubbornness and added it to Gwen's occasional stuck-up
attitude, and then multiplied that by, say, a million, they'd wind up with Anwen. Seriously. That girl
was prissier than the most spoiled of princesses. Rhys said that out of love, though. He really did.
(He also prayed every minute of every day that she would grow out of it, but that wasn't the point.)

Now, Nelle, on the other hand, was clearly the daughter of Jack and Ianto. All of Jack's brashness
and all of Ianto's witiness had been funnelled into her, making her the scrappiest little girl Rhys had
ever seen. She was a little fiend and a hellion. At least she was nice about it, though. She'd beat a kid
in a fight, sure, but she was always polite and happy. Rhys was quite honestly terrified of the kid.

Anyway, combine those two opposing attitudes, and it was already a recipe for disaster. But then add
in the fact that they constantly fought over Ianto and... oh, boy. See, Anwen had, from the instant
she'd popped out of Gwen's womb, declared Ianto her uncle. Gwen joked that it was because they
were both the poshest people that the two of them knew, and that the posh people had to stick
together. Be that the truth or not, no one was coming near Ianto when Anwen was around. She made
allowances for Jack and Gwen, but that was about it. This made it outrageously difficult when Nelle wanted her rightfully deserved attention from her father. So, the two of them would fight (with words, thankfully; Rhys lived in fear that, one day, Anwen would goad Nelle on so far as to get a smack-down from the other girl) about who got the coveted attention from their beloved Ianto. Rhys felt bad for the poor sod, having to deal with this shit constantly.

So, it was for the best that Anwen would leave Nelly alone on the day of Jack and Ianto's wedding. Ianto didn't deserve the extra headache today.

Evan was relatively easy in comparison to his sister. If he kept his clothes on him and in order, everything else would fall into line. Which was hard, sometimes, especially when Jack started preaching to him the positive effects of nudity. At least the only uncle the little tyke was obsessed with was...

"Mickeeeey!

"No running in the car park!" Gwen shouted, but it was no use. Evan was already long gone.

Rhys just counted his blessings that Mickey and Martha's Rodger liked Evan well enough to share both of his parents.

"Hey, squirt!" Mickey said as he bent down and gathered Evan in his arms. "How are you?"

"I'm getting two slices of cake!"

"If he keeps clean," Gwen added as the rest of them caught up.

"You're gonna have to work hard for that one," Mickey said to Evan.

Evan shrugged.

"Oh, other people," Martha sighed when she joined them. She set a bag down on the pavement and readjusted her son in her arms. "We've made it here without a fuss, let's just see if we can get through the ceremony, hmm?"

Rodger just buried his face in his mum's neck. He was a bit shy, that one.

Gwen and Martha both exhaled deeply in unison, both sharing the same smiles on their faces.

"Can you believe it?" Gwen asked.

"No," Martha laughed. "God, I really can't."

"I love your dress," Gwen told Martha.

Martha looked down at her flowing red dress. "Thank you! It has pockets, thank god."

Gwen made a noise of jealousy.

"My dress has pockets, too!" Anwen said, ramming her hands down the pockets of her floral gown.

"I see that," Martha said. "It's very lovely."

"Thank you!" Anwen sang.

"Shall we get going?" Gwen asked in a forced calm that Rhys knew meant she was buzzing with
excitement behind the façade.

Rhys took Martha's bag from the pavement and carried it for her, waving off her thanks. Mickey carried Evan and Martha carried Rodger, and Anwen and Gwen walked hand in hand, Anwen's white dress with green and red and blue flowers clashed slightly with Gwen's lavender dress. They did look lovely, the pair of them, just not together.

Nearer to the church (and Rhys still didn't know why it was at a church, when neither of them were religious), the group ran into Steven and Alice. Rhys watched as Gwen's face grew bitter. Gwen disliked Alice for a large number of reasons.

"--don't understand why he's marrying that man," Alice was saying.

Gwen's jaw tightened, and Rhys put a steadying hand to her back.

"Mum, you've really got to stop with that stuff," Steven sighed.

Alice harrumphed, and Rhys moved his hand from Gwen's back to her shoulder. Best not let anyone fight today.

"Really, I don't understand what you've got against Uncle Ianto," Steven said.

Rhys understood perfectly fine what Alice had against Ianto. Gwen would rant about Alice and her horrid behaviour to her father any time the subject came up: Alice couldn't handle being older than her father's soon-to-be husband. There was probably a fair bit of prejudice in there, as well. Gwen hated Alice.

"Hi, Steven," Anwen called.

Steven pulled his attention from his mother to the group, and his face split into a grin as he hugged Gwen. Alice's expression soured, but she trailed after her son closer to the group. She and Gwen began a glare-off, whilst Steven hugged Martha, Anwen, and Evan.

"You look beautiful," he told Anwen.

"Thanks," Anwen said in a tone that really meant "I know!" That girl had the worst crush on Steven.

"And so do you," Martha said. "Handsome, anyway. How's school?"

Steven shrugged. "Ready to be done."

"I can understand that," Martha said. "Know what you want to do?"

"Not yet. Maths, maybe?"

"Doctor," Alice grunted.

Steven did not look convinced. Rhys began noticing that Gwen was beginning to snarl slightly below her breath.

"We should head in," he suggested.

He promptly began steering Gwen towards the church again. Once she stopped facing Alice, she relaxed and acted like a normal person. He rolled his eyes, waiting for everyone to file ahead of him so he could bring up the rear.
In front of the church doors, Martha stopped dead still for a moment, looking upwards at the church. Rodger made a small whining noise, tugging at her to keep moving.

"You alright?" Rhys asked behind her.

"Yeah..." she replied after a moment. "Yeah. I'm fine."

She smiled back at him before turning around, taking a deep breath, and stepping over the threshold into the church. Rhys followed after her, a little confused, though it was soon forgotten as he got a look around the place.

He hadn't been to church since he was a boy, when his Mam would drag him by the ear, spouting off about he needed Jesus. He probably did, back then. He was a right devil child. But that had been nearly thirty years ago. Bloody fuck. Was he really that old now?

"Lois!" Martha called joyfully, disturbing Rhys from the beginnings of a mid-life crisis.

Lois shuffled over to Martha and Rhys, palms to her temples. Poor woman. Jack and Ianto had roped her into coordinating half of the wedding, and she looked frazzled. Nice, with that burgundy dress of hers, but definitely frazzled. She looked like she could use a strong cup of her own chamomile tea. Or a strong cup of something else entirely.

"They're not arguing, are they?" Rhys asked.

"Oh, no," Lois said frantically. "I wish they were."

"Why?" Martha asked. "What's happened?"

"Nothing!" Lois cried. "Abso-bloody-lutely nothing!"

Martha and Rhys shared a look, which ended with them both shrugging, clueless. That woman thrived on chaos. She was not happy unless there was disorder she could tame. She was a great PA.

"Okay, Lois," Martha said. "Why don't you go over the catering for later. I'm sure there's something that still needs working on."

Lois frowned for a moment, probably going through lists of all the things that could potentially go wrong, then nodded and walked off, mobile leaping from her hand to her ear.

"Well, that's that settled," Rhys said.

Martha reached out for her bag and Rhys unshouldered it and passed it to her. Then, with an awkward and excited smile each, they took off in their separate ways. Rhys's family was already up at the front of the church, sitting in a pew with the Davies. Rhys slid in beside Gwen, between her and Rhiannon. Those two had less intense, more polite version of the Anwen-Nelle situation, and it could sometimes lead to a fair amount of tension, which nobody wanted today.

"Where were you?" Gwen muttered to him.

"Lois."

"Ah," she said. "Are Jack and Ianto behaving themselves?"

"Yep."

"Aw. Poor Lois."
Rhys turned to Rhiannon and smiled at her.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello."

She must have been quite eager for the ceremony to start, because she didn't keep talking like she normally would, instead checking the time every few seconds, then glancing back over her shoulder down the aisle. After a few minutes, Gwen started doing the same thing. It was like standing between hens, with all the fretting and the constantly moving heads.

Then an organ started playing, one of those big pipe ones that vibrated the entire church.

"Jesus," Rhys said, startled.

Everyone rose and turned to the back to watch Jack and Ianto walk hand up the aisle together. Gwen stood on her toes, trying to see over the tall people behind them. Rhys chuckled slightly as she lowered back onto her feet when the couple reached the front. When the organs stopped playing as Jack and Ianto threw each other nervous grins, he heard a small sniff beside him.

"Are you crying?" Rhys asked her. "Already?"

"Shut up," she whispered.

Gwen proceeded to cry for the entire ceremony. Rhys thought that was a bit much, and he would forever refuse to admit to any tears in his eyes when the officiant's translator pronounced them husband and husband.

"Oh, I hate those bastards," Rhys muttered to himself.

Gwen nodded and sobbed even harder.

Martha groaned and kicked her heels off, switching them for a pair of flats. No sense trying to hobble around the grass with sinking heels, especially when she'd most likely be carrying an almost three-year-old around, too.

"Why did they choose something so far away from the church?" Mickey grumbled. "I mean, it's nice and all that, but it's so far away."

"I think they met here," she said, looking out the window at the park. "They caught a You-Know-What together, or something."

"Huh. Not surprised that's how they met."

"Mickey."

"What? They are both freakishly obsessed with their jobs."

She shook her head and sighed, then popped open the car door and stepped out. A warm summer breeze wafted by and she smile. Perfect day for a wedding. She walked around to Rodger's side of the car and opened the door, sticking her head in.

"Ready?" she asked.

"Wanna go home," Rodger pouted.
"I already told you," she said, gathering his shoes from the floor. "Uncle Jack and Uncle Ianto want us to be here. We have to give them their present, remember?"

He perked up at that. So did she, really. They had paired with Lois to get the newlyweds each a new coat. Jack's greatcoat, though only worn for eight years, was already falling apart at the seams, with holes and acid marks and scorches, and all sorts of irreparable damage. Ianto's coat, which generally stayed with him down in the Archives these days, didn't have as many issues, but was still getting a bit worn with age. So, the Smith-Joneses and Lois had pitched together and found good coats for the both of them.

Rodger had gone with Lois to pick the coats up. Lois had bundled him up in Jack's coat for fun (Martha had seen the very adorable pictures), and ever since then, Rodger had become obsessed with it. For the past week, he had been quite excited at the prospect of seeing it outside of the wrapping paper again.

Martha finished stuffing his feet in his shoes, unbuckled him, then shooed him out of the car.

"Stay with Daddy," she told him. "I'm going to grab the box."

"Wanna help."

"This is Ianto's box." And she really didn't want him dropping it.

Rodger sighed heavily and slumped his way over to Mickey, who took his tiny hand and started walking into Bute Park. Martha followed behind them, balancing the gift carefully in her arms. She sped up a little when she saw the menagerie of blankets strewn across the grass and the familiar heads of people she loved. Honestly, she didn't know why Jack and Ianto had settled on a garden-partyesque reception, but it was a lovely idea, especially for a day like today, with the shining sun and the beautiful green trees.

"Mickey!" she heard Nelle yell. "Aunt Martha!"

"How come you get to be 'Aunt,' but I'm just 'Mickey?'" Mickey groused.

"It's because you are, as they say, cool," Martha told him.

He seemed a little less peeved about that as they went up to meet Nelle.

"Oh, yours looks like Aunt Lois's!" Nelle gasped, standing on tiptoes to see it.

"We coordinated," Martha told her, bending down to plant a kiss on her head.

"It's a coa--"

Mickey quickly clamped a hand over Rodger's mouth. Rodger pouted again, and Mickey swung him up into his arms.

"It's a secret," he told Rodger. "Remember?"

Rodger continued his pouting.

"Where do we put this?" Martha asked Nelle.

Nelle pointed to a small purple blanket near a food-bearing fold-up table. Martha noted a gift that looked very similar to hers: Lois's gift to Jack. Martha would have to set hers by that one.
"Thank you," Martha said. "Where are your dads?"

"Dad wanted coffee, so they went home so Dad could make him some."

Martha sighed. She wasn't sure if "coffee" meant coffee, or something else entirely, but regardless, it was very on-brand of Jack and Ianto.

"I got to ride with Aunt Lois!" Nelle said.

"Bless your Aunt Lois." Lois had done way too much for those two. "Do you know when your dads will be back?"

"Soon," Nelle promised. Then she peered at the gift again. "Aunt Lois said hers was for Dad. Is this one for Dad?"

Martha nodded.

Instead of calling one "Dad" and the other "Tad" or "Daddy" or something, Nelle would sign the BSL term for "Dad" whenever she was talking about Ianto and the American Sign Language term for "Dad" whenever she meant Jack (her "American" dad). It was ingenious idea, because it incorporated both of the languages Nelle grew up with. Apparently, it had been Jack's idea. Martha applauded him for exploiting the whole American Jack sham to for his benefit. For the same reason Mickey and Martha didn't talk about aliens at home, Jack and Ianto couldn't either, especially not when it came to the whole "immortal" and "time-traveller" issues. It was for the best, really.

Nelle and the Smith-Joneses parted ways, with Martha dragging her husband and son off to deposit the gift and Nelle dancing around on her toes as she waited for other guests (and her parents) to arrive.

Mickey spread out their own small blanket on a stretch of grass near the Cooper-Williamses.

"Do you think they'll hyphenate, too?" Martha asked. "There seems to be a Torchwood trend."

"Jones-Harkness?" Gwen tried. "Harkness-Jones?"

"We can't have two that end in Jones," Rhys said.

"Oh, but it's so very Welsh!"

"I'm not Welsh," Martha pointed out.

"And Wales mourns that," Rhys said solemnly, winking at her.

"Oi!" Mickey said. "That's my wife!"

Anwen shrieked and jumped up at that point. Martha thought it was a bug that had bothered her, but no, it was just Jack and Ianto, returning from "coffee." She turned to watch Nelle sprint towards her parents, while Anwen made a loud huffing noise.

"They're her dads, love," Rhys said, while Gwen just buried her face in her hands.

Anwen began tapping her foot impatiently while Nelle clung to Jack in the distance, signing with Ianto.

Martha looked to her own kid. Rodger remained unbothered by it all, sitting with Evan and playing with one of Evan's trucks. He wasn't the sort to give a damn about his uncles or aunts; they were just
older people who sort of terrified him. The devotion that Nelle showed Lois and that Anwen showed Ianto was absent in him. It relieved her slight, but also worried her.

It wasn't that the Smith-Joneses weren't close to any of the others, it was just that they worked freelance now. They didn't see the fellow Torchwood parents or their kids as often anymore, only when big events came up, or in crises that Torchwood needed their help on. So, there were no favourite aunts or uncles for Rodger. But that also meant he was growing up on the outskirts of the so-called "Torchwood Family."

"But," Anwen whined after a moment, "I haven't talked to Uncle Ianto all day, and--"

"Nelle probably hasn't either," Rhys told her. "He's been very busy."

Anwen muttered something like "stupid weddings" under her breath.

The food was mediocre at best, and even Jack and Ianto would later admit that, but nobody dared mention it to Lois. She would have either bitten their heads off (possibly literally) or combusted into eleven story flames. At least the champagne was good. Martha drank far too much of it as a result, but at least it made up for the uninspired food. Unfortunately, Lois couldn't be credited for the champagne, as it was actually Jack's doing, so in the long run... poor Lois.

She finally got to speak to Jack and Ianto after three hours of trying. By then, she was tipsy, hot, and tired.

"Take him," she said exhaustedly, passing Rodger over to a bewildered Ianto.

Rodger instantly reached out for Martha as soon as he was dumped in Ianto's arms, but Martha was too busy stretching her back. It hurt more than it should to do that. Too many Hoix-wrangling episodes at night for her own good, that was her problem.

She was reaching over to touch her toes quickly when she heard a noise.

"Oh, you're joking," she said, whipping back up straight. (Ouch.)

Ianto threw her a quizzical look, and she shook her head.

Damn him. Damn him and his stupid box and his stupid need to show up just too late. Oh, she was going to kill him! She was going to kill him so many times that he would stay dead! For good!

Jack came up behind Ianto and stared at Martha.

"No," he said disbelievingly.

"Yes," Martha said.

Ianto looked between them, then at Rodger, who was peering around for the source of the groaning whir. An understanding look flashed across Ianto's face as a deep blue police box appeared in the field in the distance.

"Fuck," she heard Mickey say somewhere nearby.

Her first thought was "oh, he's never had an elderly person with him before" and then it was "oh, he's never been an elderly person before." She stole a peek at Jack, who was looking like he was struggling. She also caught Ianto glancing back at Jack, too, and saw his tiny, amused smile. Idiots. She loved them both.
The Doctor's new hair was... interesting, and his clothes were... interesting, and he was overall just... interesting.

"Oh, you're new," the Doctor said as he walked passed Evan and Anwen. He pointed down at Gwen. "Not as new. Do I know you?"

"Yes," Gwen said, both looking and sounding confused.

"Doctor," his companion hissed. Oh, Martha liked her.

"Right. Right. The newlyweds."

He clasped his hands and sort of hop-skipped around blankets and people to get to the small crowd of Jack, Ianto, Rodger, and Martha. Still sprightly, for an old guy, then. Martha was slightly impressed.

"Doctor," Jack said, his voice just a tiny bit off. "You're looking--"

"Old, yes, yes. I know." He gestured to his face. "It's the lines."

"Sort of familiar," Jack finished. "Have I seen you before?"

"No. I haven't come to see you in over a thousand years. Been busy. That happens. Sorry about that."

"Oh, you do apologies now?" the woman asked him

Jack yet again visibly tried to control himself (and Ianto did too, but his smile was breaking through).

"Hi. Captain Jack Harkness," Jack said, in what was clearly meant to be a serious.

"Hi," the woman said. "I'm Bill. Nice picnic."

Then she stuck her hands in her pockets and glanced around the people on the picnic blankets, who had returned to their own conversations.

Jack looked gutted. Ianto started laughing so hard that he nearly dropped Rodger. Martha reached out and took her son from his arms, then set him down and sent him towards his father as Ianto recomposed himself.

"She doesn't care," Ianto signed to Jack, grinning. "Maybe you should try again."

Jack managed to scrounge up a glare for his new husband.

"Hello, Doctor," Martha said, before Jack and Ianto could start a domestic.

The Doctor's caterpillar eyebrows rose high on his head. "Martha Jones!"

"Smith-Jones," she said.

"You married Sarah Jane?" the Doctor asked, frowning.

"No! Mickey!"

Bill shook her head apologetically at Martha.

"Why are you here, Doctor?" Jack asked.

"What? Can't I come celebrate my friends? Eat a bit of cake?"

"You don't usually," Jack said.

"Well, you don't usually get married, do you?"

"Not the point," Bill mumbled to him.

"You didn't come to my wedding," Martha said.

Bill looked up at the Doctor. "Really?"

"I was... busy. It happens."

Bill and Martha shared an unconvinced look.

"Why are you really here?" Jack asked.

The Doctor grimaced slightly and turned to Bill, who sighed.

"Languages," she said.

"Right!" He spun back to Jack. "Languages! I've forgotten semaphore!"

Jack blinked. "Con...gratulations?"

"What?" Ianto asked Martha.

She shrugged. she had no idea what was going on.

"I've replaced it again," the Doctor continued, unaware. "Which is unfortunate, if someone needs to speak to me using semaphore, because I won’t be able to respond, and that might turn out badly for everyone involved, but the good news is, I've replaced it with sign language!"

"He's been meaning to for a while," Bill added.

Ianto was still looking to Martha for help.

"He's an idiot," Martha told Ianto. "But he remembers sign language."

Ianto rolled his eyes.

"I saw that," the Doctor said. "And I understood it, too."

"Why are you here?" Ianto asked him. "You can't take Jack."

"I don't want Jack," the Doctor signed.

Alright, so he did know sign language. Had he before? He mentioned replacing it... Whatever. Martha was still confused.

"I came to apologise," the Doctor said. "I do those now. I can't remember why."
"Why are you apologising?" Jack asked.

The Doctor took a moment to himself before replying.

"I forgot sign language, and I forgot you all," he told them. "I made another person immortal. The Master is a woman now."

"Excuse me?" Martha demanded aloud.

The Doctor barely glanced at her.

"I owe you," he told them.

Then he leaned close to Jack and whispered something in his ear. Jack tensed, and the Doctor pulled back and strode quickly away. Bill, looking just about as confused as Martha felt, followed him back to the TARDIS before it whirred away. Martha's attention was drawn back to Jack as he snapped out of his reverie, grabbed Ianto and kissed him hard. A cheer started, though it sounded like nobody had any clue why they were cheering.

Martha never heard what the Doctor told Jack, but she had her suspicions.

She took a glance back to the spot where the TARDIS used to be, losing herself to a wave of nostalgia. Then she pulled herself together, kissed Jack and Ianto on the cheek, and went about the rest of her day celebrating and having fun. This wasn't about her, or the Master, or the Doctor. This wasn't about her Tosh or her Ianto. Today was about Jack and Ianto, and she'd be damned if she didn't enjoy that while she could.

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"It's not that hard, Mum," Mica said. "It's just Skype."

"Yes, but I don't know how to do that," Rhiannon said.

Mica threw back her head and sighed. "Just look it up!"

"Your brother used to help me," Rhiannon reminded her.

"Then call him and ask for help!"

She could call him. But she didn't know if kids liked being called while they were at uni. She didn't know the etiquette. She had never called Ianto, because Ianto couldn't call. Not back then, anyway. Now they have things like Skype and that stuff.

"No, I need your help now," she said. "Your uncle is expecting my call in two minutes!"

"And you're just now learning to use it?" Mica asked. "It's not like this is new! It's been around for a while."

"Don't get smart with me. Just help me with this."

Mica shook her head and shoved Rhiannon away from the computer, bending down to tap things into the keyboard. Rhiannon watched and tried to follow along, but she got lost almost instantly, between Mica's flying fingers and confusing directions.

"There," Mica said. "Just press that button and call."

"And that will connect me?"
"Yes," Mica sighed.

"You should do something with computers," Rhiannon suggested.

"That's David's thing."

"You could, too."

"No."

Rhiannon eyed Mica. She was sixteen, and she refused to even bother considering what she wanted to do with her life. Rhiannon was adamant she went and got an education, because Rhiannon had worked her arse off for the past twenty years for her kids to get to uni.

"You used to want to be a spy."

"I'm not gonna be a spy, Mum."

"Why not? You thought your uncle was so cool."

"Uncle Ianto's not a spy," she said, bending her head over to type something into her mobile. "And he was certainly never 'cool.'"

Rhiannon scowled at the back of her retreating daughter. Try as she might, Rhiannon could never get her kids to connect with their uncle. They never even tried learning sign language, which made her so frustrated with them. Steven, Jack's nephew, could stumble his way through a bit of SSE, if he really tried. Gwen's kids had learned it as one of their first languages. Even that Martha had started teaching her kid some BSL when he turned four (apparently, the optimal age to learn a second language). But Ianto's own true niece and nephew? Couldn't be arsed. She had finally accepted that this wasn't her fault, that they just refused to be taught, but it still made her feel bad, because she was his actual sister, not some wannabe, and she had failed him.

She sighed and pressed the little button as Mica had instructed. Then she waited, a bit impatiently, to see if it had worked.

"Oh!" she exclaimed as Ianto's face popped up on her screen.

"Can you see me?" he asked.

She allowed herself a small moment of joy before responding: "Yes! I can see your kitchen!"

He glanced behind him, as if he was just remembering where he was, then turned back and nodded.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"It's nice," she told him. "I like that house."

He shrugged indifferently. From what she had gathered, it was Jack who had decided they needed to move; Ianto had seemed perfectly happy to stay at their old house. Rhiannon personally thought this new one was better. More space for Nelle to run around. Nicer walls, better lighting, good cupboards and closets and wardrobes, and it had a decent marbled bar island. Ianto must have been sitting at that right now, because she could see the sink just to his left. Oh, this Skype was nice. Slightly grainy, and it lagged just a bit, but it was nice.

"Are you completely settled?" she asked.
"No," he signed. "All of my suits are in a box."

"Did Jack find his coat?"

"It was with his socks," he informed her.

"How did he lose it in his socks?"

He just shook his head with a sigh.

"Does Nelle like the house?"

"I think so," he signed. "She likes her new bedroom. It's bigger, and it has green walls."

She frowned. "I didn't see that when I visited."

"Gwen painted them last week."

Well, that made sense.

A dog started barking in the background. That had to be Myfanwy. Rhiannon didn't know why they had a dog. No, she did know why they had it (Jack and Nelle practically begged for it), but she didn't know why it was still alive. That dog had no brain. A lot of love, sure, but not a single spark of intelligence.

"Dog," she told Ianto.

He made a face.

"Myfanwy!" he yelled.

The barking stopped. At least Myfanwy listened, even if it was only to Ianto. Jack and Nelle couldn't get her to do anything.

"Good?" Ianto asked.

"Good."

Rhiannon did feel a little bad. Myfanwy was a good dog, in the end. Rhiannon remembered when she was a puppy, asleep on Ianto's lap. Deny it as he might, he loved that dog, and he had definitely stared lovingly down at her for a good hour that night.

It was all so odd, though. Ianto had never once seemed to her to be the man who grew up to have a spouse, child, dog, or a house. Not just because of how isolated he was, but because he was just so... Ianto. Those that didn't at all sound like things he had wanted. Maybe somewhere along the line, it changed, but Rhiannon looked at him now and saw a completely different person than she saw ten, or twenty, or even thirty years ago.

Not that that was a bad thing.

Rhiannon frowned as another loud noise came from Ianto's side, but she couldn't identify this one. Ianto caught her frown and looked around him for whatever it was, and then sighed at something in the distance and shook his head.

Jack and Nelle came sliding into view then. Nelle was on Jack's back, arms looped around his neck, laughing her head off. Jack had a gigantic grin on his face. Ianto just kept shaking his head to
himself.

"Hi, Aunt Rhi!" Nelle called.

"Hi!" Rhiannon said, giving her a wave.

Nelle hopped down from Jack's back and shoved herself in front of Ianto, her face taking up most of the screen of Rhiannon's computer.

"Dads are going on a vacation next month!" Nelle told Rhiannon. "I'm staying at Ellie's!"

Rhiannon could only remember Ellie as the girl Ianto thought was a "bad influence." Rhiannon doubted anyone could be a worse influence on her than her own parents, but that wasn't for her to say.

"For how long?" Rhiannon asked.

"A whole week!" Nelle shrieked. Jack winced in the background.

"What are your dads doing?" she asked, signing along for Ianto's benefit.


"I dunno," Nelle said. "But they won't take me!"

Which was a very good thing, Rhiannon decided. Those two were rather... handsy. She could see even now where Jack's hand was attempting to go. She glared over at him and he drew back with a grin. That man.

Ianto tapped Nelle's shoulder then, and her head whipped about to face him, sending her plaited hair flying at the screen.

"Go finish your maths," he told her.

Rhiannon couldn't see what Nelle was signing back, but she knew the girl was complaining.

"Nelle," Jack said warningly.

"Awww..." She pouted as she turned back to the screen. "Bye, Aunt Rhi."

"Bye, love."

Then her face left the screen, and Jack leant over Ianto to see Rhiannon better.

"Hi, Rhiannon."

"Second honeymoon, huh?"

"We want a re-do."

Rhiannon wasn't sure about what happened on the last honeymoon they had tried three years ago. All she knew is they came home early. Probably had something to do with that job of theirs. Bloody Torchwood...

Sometimes, she felt like this was all Ianto's life, and they were all just spectators of it, getting little splinters and snippets of what he showed them. An odd thought, but valid. It had been a long time
since Ianto had really kept any secrets from her. She knew there was still one big one left, one he
hadn't shared with anyone but Jack, she gathered, but for the most part, Ianto was honest with her
about everything. It kept her feeling less detached from his life. He "didn't let it drift," as Jack would
say. However, that didn't mean there weren't still times Rhiannon didn't wish she was bigger in his
life. He seemed to have so many people who loved him, and it was it was so nice that he finally had
friends, but she missed being the one person he could talk to.

"Okay, I've got to go talk to Gwen about schedules," Jack said, looking down at his watch. "Talk to
you soon!"

Rhiannon observed with a smile as he turned Ianto's face up to him and kissed him passionately.
They might have forgotten they had a viewer in the moment, because the two of them seemed to lose
themselves into it for quite some time. Then Jack came up for air, grinned down at Ianto, signed a
rather sappy goodbye to him, and disappeared. Ianto watched him go, then turned to Rhiannon with
an embarrassed-yet-pleased smile on his face.

"Sorry," he signed.

"Don't be sorry," she told him.

And that was when it hit her.

She didn't know why it took so long for her to realize it. Maybe because it wasn't, until that very
moment, the complete truth. But looking back on the past ten years, between Jack and Nelle and the
new friends and Torchwood and everything else...

Well.

"Are you happy?" she asked him.

He stared at her for a moment, baffled. Then a slow smile broke on his face, and he raised his hands.

"Yes. I'm happy."

She sat back in her chair and grinned.

Thirty-six years ago, he had been a happy baby. The universe had done a lot to change that since
then. A lot of loneliness, a lot of pain, a lot of suffering. The world had been cruel and wicked, and
completely relentless, and it had done its best to tear him down. Yet there he was, finally happy
again. Sure, it was a different kind of happiness. A quiet, reserved happiness, but that was such
a Ianto thing for it to be. And it suited him.

Oh, the world still had so much left for this man in front of her. So much that was good, bad, and hell
of a lot worse. But, deep down, Rhiannon knew he was going to be okay. He was going to be better
than okay.

Ianto Jones was going to be happy.

Chapter End Notes

And... that's it, folks! Over 90,00 words! I friggen did it!! I'm proud of that, if nothing
else!
By the way, I didn't mention it because it wasn't important to the "plot," but Jack's tie was blue and Ianto's was red. That's just how they are. I love those idiots.
Okay, I have so, so, so many things I want to say, but I won't, because this will get very long. I just honestly hope you enjoyed it.
But, as always, I want to thank you all so very much for reading, and I want you all to have a perfect day!
See you when I write next!

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