Abort, Retry, Fail?

by caledonius72

Summary

Rhydygrisiau is picture perfect, a model town. Torchwood knows there is no such thing as perfection. Just what is going on?

Written for **reel_torchwood** round 2

Notes

Originally posted on LiveJournal as part of reel_torchwood.

**Prompt:** Written for **reel_torchwood** round 2; *The Stepford Wives (1975)*; based on the 1972 Ira Levin novel of the same name, directed by Bryan Forbes with a screenplay by William Goldman.

**Characters:** Jack Harkness, Toshiko Sato, Gwen Cooper, Rhys Williams, Ianto Jones, Owen Harper

**Pairing(s):** Gwen/Rhys, Jack/Ianto, implied Owen/Tosh

**Rating:** NC-17, for the swearing and darkish themes, no sex but there is innuendo though.

**Warnings:** Bad language.

**Spoilers:** Set during S2, may contain spoilers for S1 and S2, and selected back-story from S3

**Disclaimer:** Belongs to the producers (BBC Wales, Edgar J. Scherick, Columbia Pictures), the creators (Russell T. Davies et al, Ira Lewin, William Goldman, Bryan Forbes). This has been written for fun and not for profit.
Author's Notes:

- One of my favourite movies, a thriller in sunlight, great dialogue and terrifying. Paula Prentiss’ performance is mesmerizing; she steals the movie right from under everyone’s nose.
- This is the longest thing I’ve written, ever, in my life! It’s been hard but good fun. Constructive criticism is actively sought; I want to become a better writer.
- This is inspired by The Stepford Wives, rather than a retelling, and there’s a much darker story based on The Stepford Wives that could be written, I’ve got the ideas for it, but not quite confident enough (yet!) to write it.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

She didn't feel the branches of the trees whipping at her face, leaving faint lines where they struck her. She didn't feel the cold wet trickle of the rain slipping down the back of her neck, chilling her even further. She didn't feel the spasms of her leg muscles protesting as she ran. She didn't even feel the burn of her lungs as her chest heaved with the exertion of running so hard, so fast.

All she felt was the hard ball of terror in her guts and the fierce desire to protect her children. Her mind was crumbling as she tried to come to terms with what had happened in the last few hours. Her entire world had fallen apart, all her carefully constructed assumptions were disintegrating.

Where are they? Where have they taken them? Joanna let out a moan of fear. She forced herself to stop, to think. She pulled her hands across her face, pulling the thick tangle of her sopping wet hair off her face. Not at Bobbie's... oh god, Bobbie... She shuddered as the memory returned of what she had done to Bobbie. What she'd been forced to do. She bent double, her hands grasping her knees, as she shuddered with dry heaves, gulping down deep breaths to calm herself.

And Walter. How could she have married such a monster? How could she have been so utterly, horrifically wrong about him? She bit her cheek to stop herself from breaking down, the zap of the pain and the tang of her blood cleared her head of the noise of her buzzing thoughts. Get a grip!

Where? She reeled through the possibilities in her head, before latching on to one.

YES!

She stood up, looking around, getting her bearings and headed off.

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Joanna reached the grand Victorian mansion by taking the back route, avoiding the roads, sneaking across the open country, cutting through back gardens. She knew they'd be out looking for her by now, determined not to let her escape. As she walked across the immaculate lawn, her shoes squelching in the rain-sodden turf, she spotted a light, high up in one of the Gothic turrets. Hurrying forward, she was about to lift the huge iron knocker when the door fell open at the push of her hand.

Go inside, get the children, leave. She took a few cautious steps inside and pushed the door closed behind her.

* * *

“...than a Harwood's lorry! Welcome back to Sunday Soothers, you've got me, Rhodri Smith, from now until...”

Gwen flicked off the knob of the radio, studiously ignoring her husband as he protested.

“Rhys, I don't care how bloody popular your advert is, I'm sick of hearing it. And if I hear one more Sunday Soother I'll swing for someone, and you're nearest.”

“Awright pet, don't get yourself all upset. We've had a lovely weekend, let's just get home, eh?”

Gwen fell back against the passenger seat, a smile on her face. It had been a good weekend. She'd wangled a long weekend from Jack, and she'd booked the two of them into a luxury hotel outside Lampeter – good food, fantastic beds and a spa treatment for her, and clay pigeon shooting for Rhys. Now the weekend was ending, which was probably making her peevish. Tomorrow she'd be back at work, keeping Cardiff safe. She couldn't wait...

She looked over at Rhys as an enormous growl came from his stomach. “What was that, Rhys? You say something?”
Rhys laughed and glanced at her. “Man hungry, man want food. Actually, what is for tea? Shall I do one of my specials?”

Gwen tried to cast her mind back to Friday evening, when she was running around the flat trying to pack. She'd wanted to get out of town quick so Jack couldn't call her in, hadn't had the time to look around for food. What was there in the fridge? “Don't know, we'll have to get a bit of shopping in. What's the SatNav say?”

“Next town is Rhydygrisiau. Bit of a detour to stock up then?”

“May as well, the shops'll be shut by the time we get back to Cardiff.”

* * *

They were wandering around the Co-op, bickering over what to get, when Rhys gave Gwen a hard nudge.

“What? I do not want to have fish-finger butties for my tea!”

“No, get a load of that...”

Gwen followed his gaze and she raised an eyebrow. Across the aisle was a vision of womanly perfection. Young, tanned, lovely. A long skirt with an almost see through blouse, with a plunging neckline. Everything in the woman’s trolley was stacked neatly – heavy items on the bottom, fragile on the top. Gwen looked down at her own trolley to see that the tomatoes had already been severely dented by Rhys plonking a six-pack on top of them. The woman was smiling serenely as she pushed the trolley past them.

“How come you don't look like that when you're shopping?”

“Give over Rhys.” Gwen kept looking around, taking things in the Torchwood way, rather than as a tourist. The supermarket was clean, so clean you could eat your dinner off the floor. Shelves were fully stocked, no spillages or crying kids, no wonky wheels. Ianto would love this. As they moved around, she noticed more women, all similar to the first one they spotted – well turned out, happy looking, and slightly sexy.

Rhys had nipped off to get something or other, she'd stopped listening to be honest, and she was so engrossed in looking around her, she didn't spot the other trolley as she rounded the corner. There was a loud crash as the two trolleys collided, and a thump as the woman was forced back and knocked her head against a pillar.

“Sorry! You all right love? No harm done?”

“Oh, I'm fine. Sorry to be a nuisance. I didn't see you.”

“You sure you're all right? You got a bit of a knock there.”

“T'm fine. Sorry, I didn't see you.”

“That's OK, I wasn't paying enough attention.”

“I'm sorry, I'm fine, I didn't see you.”

Gwen was getting concerned; the woman wasn't even looking at her, she was gazing just over Gwen's shoulder - she found this disconcerting - she kept half turning to see if there was anyone
there. The woman raised a hand to her temple and rubbed at it.

“You have hurt yourself, I'll go and get someone.”

Just as Gwen turned around to look for someone to help, a smiling man popped before her.

“Oh dear, looks like Mrs Eberhart's got a nasty bump there. I've already called an ambulance, they should be here soon.”

“Good. She's rambling a bit, keeps touching her head, concussion perhaps.”

“Well thank you Miss. I'll stay with her until the ambulance gets here. You carry on with your shopping. New in town?”

Gwen was a bit flummoxed by the question. The man, Barry (according to his name badge) had a proprietorial hand on the woman's arm.

“No. Just passing through. It's a lovely town though.”

“That it is Miss. Now, if you don't mind...” He looked at her with an encouraging smile. She took her cue and went on with her shopping as Barry led the woman to the front of the supermarket. “Come on now Joanna, the ambulance will be here soon. We'll pack and deliver your shopping for you.”

Rhys finally ambled back with a forlorn look on his face. “They don't stock it.”

“Never mind, we can get it in Cardiff. Let's go, or we'll not get home until late, and I want to put a wash on.” She filled Rhys in on her little accident, and her opinion of the supermarket.

They queued and paid, and were just trundling the trolley to their car as they saw the ambulance leaving the carpark, no sirens, no lights.

As Rhys heaved the last bag into the boot, Gwen realised what was nagging at her.

“Rhys?”

“Mmmm?”

“Didn't we pass the hospital as we drove in?”

“Yes, you pointed out that they had an A&E which was, and I quote, 'rare for such a small town' – you spend too much time with Owen.”

“If we passed the hospital on the way in, why did the ambulance head in the opposite direction?”

“How should I know? Mebbe they've got better SatNav. Come on babes, let's go.”

Gwen frowned, not convinced. There was something about Rhydygrisiau that didn't ring true. She'd need to do some checking.

* * *

Ahhh, Monday mornings...

Toshiko Sato, slamming her door behind her, a slice of toast clamped in her teeth as she shrugs on her jacket, her bag at her feet, ready to heft it over her shoulder.
Gwen Cooper, stumbling around her flat in a stupor, slurping on the ambrosia that is a mug of tea made by Rhys, muttering “matching bra and pants, matching... is that so hard?”

Owen Harper, quietly closing a front door that wasn't his, in a street that he'd never been to before and wouldn't visit again, heading off to where the traffic sounds were coming from, “Taxi!”

Ianto Jones, a paper bag of warm pastries tucked under one arm as he struggles with a hefty bunch of keys and a seized up lock, *WD40*, another thing added to his mental clipboard.

Jack Harkness, a stick figure on the roof of the Assembly building, looking down on the Plass, surveying his domain. *7 o'clock and all's well.*

* * *

“Need a hand with that?”

The bag of pastries dropped to the wooden decking.

“Tosh!” Ianto sounded flustered “Don't sneak up on me like that. How do you manage to be so quiet when you're wearing those things?”

Tosh looked down at her feet.

“Something wrong with my shoes, Ianto?” She pivoted on one of the 3 inch heels, showing a well turned calf.

“They are beautiful Tosh, an exquisite piece of engineering, but you'll go arse over tit in them one of these days. You mark my words.”

Tosh reached for the keys, “You salvage the goodies and I'll get us inside.” She studied the lock, selected a key, and with a push, a twist and a ladylike grunt the stubborn lock shifted and she pushed open the door to the Tourist Office. Holding the door open wide, she smiled at Ianto, “After you...”

Ianto stepped through, bumping the light switch with his elbow, arms occupied with keeping the disintegrating paper bag in one piece.

“Morning! Brilliant Ianto, munchies, I'm famished.” Owen had slipped through the door behind them, and snagged a croissant from a tear in the paper bag. He stood at the door to the Hub, looking at Ianto. “C'mn thn, opn up.” Flecks of croissant flew across the room as, yet again, Owen talked and chewed at the same time.

“You are a disgusting object Owen Harper.” Ianto dumped the bag on the counter and reached over to press the button. “Those *were* for the team meeting, *not* breakfast. I *was* going to warm them again, place them lovingly on a doilied plate, with steaming mugs of coffee. Not now. Don't know why I bother with you Philistines.”

Owen laughed and moved through the doorway, a half chewed “Later!” echoing from the corridor. Tosh and Ianto shared a look and then turned as a shadow filled the doorway.

“Tosh, the very woman! Mornin' Ianto. Ooooh, pastries. Can I have one now?”

Nodding, a Pain au Chocolat in her hand, she stuck her arm through Tosh's and pulled the other
woman through the doorway. “Now Tosh, I'm wondering...” the rest of the sentence was lost in the corridor to the lift.

Ianto sighed and stared at the mess that was his counter. Scraps of paper bag, and a grease mark on the “Visit Cardiff Castle” pamphlets from where the pastries had spilled out. Turning around, he began pushing the door closed, but it seemed stiff and wasn't closing. Great, the wood's swollen. Another thing to sort out. He pushed even harder and the door was still closing very slowly, meeting resistance.

It was the grunt and a muttered “Dammit” that gave Ianto an indication that perhaps it wasn't the door. He grabbed hold of the handle and pulled the door open again. The next few moments were a blur of military blue wool as the force that Captain Jack Harkness was using to push the door open was suddenly transferred to pitching headlong into Ianto, landing in a heap of tangled limbs.

“Ianto Jones – and good morning to you. You didn't have to be the welcome mat...”

“Off Jack... get off. You're too heavy.”

“That's not what you said last night...”

“Very droll, Jack. We were in a bed with a sprung mattress, this floor is uncomfortable...”

«Oh, for the love of... What is it with you two? It's not even 8 o'clock... Ianto, there is an empty coffee pot down here...» Owen's voice crackled out of the Tannoy system.

Ianto gave an 'I told you so' look, and shoved at Jack. “Off Jack, later...”

“Busted.” Grinning, he gave his hips a thrust into Ianto's, pulled himself upright and reached an arm out to pull Ianto up. Too slow, Ianto was already upright and dusting off his suit.

“Duty calls; get the button, would you?” He shut and locked the door, scraped up the remaining pastries, and stood in front of the panel. The door swung open and he felt Jack's presence next to him.

“Shall we join the others, young Mr Jones?”

“Certainly, Captain Harkness. Age before beauty...”

Jack was still laughing as they stepped through the cogwheel.

* * *

“...got them bagged and tagged and awaiting my tender mercies in the autopsy bay.”

“Report by end of the week, Owen?” Owen nodded. “Gwen. Whatcha got, gorgeous?”

“Don't know if it's much of anything really Jack. Just a funny feeling.”

“Better come see me Cooper, might have a pill for that.”

“Har-de-har-har Owen. No... It's just... Well, we were coming back from Lampeter, and we stopped off in this little town, and things there were a little odd.”

“Odd, how odd?”

“Too clean, too tidy, too perfect. Lord knows, we know that life can be messy and brutal, but this
place was just wrong, you know?”

“Can't fault a town that's neat and tidy, we could do with more of that around here.” Ianto looked pointedly at Owen.

“I can see you Ianto, and don't think that raised eyebrow is going to convince me.”

“I have one word for you Owen – decaff”

“And I have one word for you Ianto – Starbucks.”

Gwen and Tosh shared a grin. And they're off...

“Back to the point guys. What makes you think there's something wrong? Perhaps they're going for Wales in Bloom, and want the place spick and span.”

The team goggled at Jack. Since when did Jack know anything about horticulture? An eyebrow went up. “What? You think I don't read? Shame on you all.”

“It wasn't just the town. It was the people too, all of the women were perfect. Tall, good figures, immaculately dressed, not a hair out of place, sexy too.”

“What's wrong with that? Sounds like my kinda town.” Jack's grin let his team know exactly what he was thinking.

“It was just odd. Do you mind if I borrow Tosh and Ianto to do some research on it?”

“No, we've got a quiet week coming up. Might be something, might be nothing. Your police instinct is probably right. Keep me updated.”

* * *

Ahhh, Friday mornings....

Toshiko shutting her door ever so quietly, praying that the dull throb of her hangover wouldn't blossom into something she'd need one of Owen's little blue pills for.

Gwen bidding the shop assistant a cheery good morning as she headed off to the Hub with 2 dozen doughnuts.

Owen glistening with sweat, the tsss tsss tsss of music escaping from his earphones as he warmed down from his run.

Ianto bent over sorting out piles of laundry, ready for the service wash, one of Jack's shirts wrapped loosely around him, to ward off the omnipresent chill.

Jack reclining in his bed, admiring the view as Ianto's mighty fine arse bobbed around in front of him, appearing and disappearing under the shirt-tails as Ianto bent or stood.

* * *

Owen sat in the boardroom watching his colleagues bustling around. He'd picked up that something must be up with Gwen's pet theory; there'd been conclaves around the Hub all week, little confabs and cross checking. Gwen had even checked a couple of things with him; medical records, procedures, that kind of thing. He watched them all, stifling a huge yawn that was threatening. Yawning before the kiddies had even started would not go down well. Secretly he thought there
might be something to it after all. *Must be something to get Ianto's knickers in a twist of triple checking*. Gwen hovered a bit nervously in front of the plasma screen, like a student teacher so eager for the class to pay attention. Tosh was lost, completely engrossed in whatever was on the screen in front of her. She had a half eaten Jammie Dodger in her hand that kept advancing towards and retreating from her mouth. Ianto was just tucking himself neatly into his seat at Jack's right hand, notebook squared off in front of him, and twirling his pen in his fingers. Jack was just sitting there, all twinkly eyed and avuncular, like a proud father.

“Right, best start then.” Gwen clicked the pointer and a satellite map of mid-Wales appeared, a red blinking dot in the centre. “This is Rhydygrisiau. Only a few hundred inhabitants, so calling it a town is being generous. Fairly run of the mill town up until 10 years ago, when it got some European money to develop the rural economy. Normally this would mean tourism or farming related jobs, but not Rhydygrisiau, they built themselves a business park.”

Gwen thumbed the wheel on the pointer and the map zoomed in, focussing on a group of half a dozen buildings in a horseshoe shape at the end of a track, buried in a valley, off the main road.

“It's discreet, doesn't mar the views, isn't visible from the main road, surrounded by mature forest on all sides. Only the one access road.”

“And? It's a business park, what's so special about that? Lots of towns and villages have them.”

“Ianto, perhaps you could tell Owen some more?”

Ianto cleared his throat, and glanced at his notes.

“All of the 8 units are occupied by SMEs, that's small to medium enterprises Owen, which is unusual of itself. I spoke with a contact at the Welsh Assembly, there's often at least a couple of units empty in rural business parks, and a high turnover of tenants. These units have been occupied by the same businesses since it opened. What's even more distinctive is the type of companies that have them. Not one of them is tourist, craft or agriculture related. We've got a couple of R&D companies in electronics, miniaturisation, a high end plastics concern – advanced polymers, metallurgy – but looking at highly tensile, low weight alloys, software companies specialising in AI research, speech recognition, a bio-medical organisation, and there's one building that seems to be a shared warehouse of some kind – storage and distribution going by the vans that come and go. If I didn't know any better I'd say it was a Cyberman factory.”

Ianto's gaze around the room was his usual mild mannered countenance, it had been a good length of time since That Evening, and he'd proven his loyalty time and again, but they couldn't help but wince a little at the mention of the C-word.

“I've been studying the satellite images and looking at communication traffic and there's nothing to suggest in any way that there's anything Cyberman related. Each of the companies has links with universities and larger companies, but it seems to be on a consultancy basis, they're all highly specialised. Owners and employees all live in the town, there's no-one that works there that isn't a local. Companies House records indicate each has a healthy profit – not too high and not too low, just enough to keep all the authorities happy. What I haven't worked out yet is what they're selling and to who. Where is the money coming from? Universities don't pay much to consultants, and corporations will try and pay as little as possible. Tosh, I might need your help on digging deeper.”

Ianto finished, a small frown of frustration on his face; he hated not knowing.

“Thanks Ianto.” Gwen gave him a bright grin. “Once Ianto'd told me all that, I knew that something dodgy is going on there, but there's more. I kept thinking of that woman I bumped into in
the supermarket. How she was just like all the others and a bit vague, and the way that guy from the supermarket treated her, like a dumb animal.”

Gwen clicked the pointer again, and a case file appeared, the standard driving licence shot.

“Joanna Eberhart. 33, married to Walter. Eberhart's an unusual surname so not too much trouble to find the right one in Wales. He's a lawyer, they've got two kids. He's pretty successful, moved from a big London practice and set up shop in Rhydygrisiau. The kids are doing well in school. She's the enigma, before her marriage and after she was an up and coming photographer, not high profile but her work was getting exhibited.”

Gwen paused and cycled through a series of photos of Joanna. Drunken university shots, her wedding, holiday snaps, birthday snaps, the kind of thing you'd find on anyone's Facebook profile. A pretty woman, long brown hair tucked behind her ears, or piled up in a loose knot, wide brown expressive eyes, well dressed too – not too mumsy and not too artsy.

“They moved to Rhydygrisiau about six months or so, settled in well, the kids at the local school, made a few friends. What we'd all do moving to a new town. There's no CCTV in Rhydygrisiau for some reason, but Tosh managed to get some of her from the cameras in the bank, the post office and the supermarket.”

Gwen cycled through a newer set of pictures, each one time-stamped.

“This is about a month after they'd moved.” Joanna was in jeans and T-shirt, queuing in the bank striking up a conversation with the woman in front of her.

“And a month later.” This time she was at the post office sharing a joke with the same woman from the bank – obviously now a friend.

“This is from about 3 months after moving.” Joanna was in the supermarket, looking a little more stressed. She had a short conversation with her friend, who was all dressed up, and then went back to the obviously whispered argument with a man.

“This is about 2 months ago.” Joanna looked drawn and ragged. She was in a chemists shop, standing in the aisle holding a bottle of multi-vitamins. She was staring into space, her hair a bit unkempt.

“And last month.” There was a creak of leather as Jack leant forward in his chair, and a muffled “shit” from Owen. Joanna looked spectacular as she moved around the supermarket. Her hair was drawn up into a sleek pony tail, a frilly blouse, mid-length skirt, immaculate make-up. It was quite a transformation.

Gwen paused the footage as Joanna was reaching for a can from the shelves, and zoomed in on her face.

“This is how she looked when I bumped into her. Look at this.” She brought up the image of Joanna in the bank from six months earlier. Side by side the change was more remarkable.

“Sure it's a big change. She's had a makeover. She's settled in to life in the country. Takes a while to get used to a new way of life, getting to know the locals. I can't see why we should be interested.” Jack was playing Devil's advocate.

“You'd think so, but there was something, Jack, something was missing, in her eyes. Look at her eyes.”
There was a pause as four pairs of eyes flicked back and forth between the two images. In the first there was warmth and humour, in the newer image there was a placidity, self satisfaction.

“Tosh?”

Tosh pushed her glasses back up her nose, and put the biscuit back down. She tapped a few buttons and brought up a new set of images on the screen.

“I used my back door into the NHS database and then into the local GP practice. They're not officially linked up yet, but you know me, I like to help.”

Ianto snorted, he'd benefited the most from Tosh's helpful ways when arranging cover stories and cover-ups.

“According to the records there, they all registered as a family when they moved. Joanna had an initial check-up, and then a couple of visits along with the children, the usual stuff, coughs and sneezes, nits. About 3 months ago she had an appointment with her GP, she got a prescription for anti-depressants, and a referral to a psychiatrist. She had one session, and never went back. In fact she's not been back to her doctor, in her own right at least.”

“So what? A lot of people don't go to their Doctor for the routine stuff. They only go when they need to. Bane of my life, trying to cure what could have been prevented.”

Tosh gave Owen a bright smile. “Of course Owen, so I did some sampling to see if Joanna was the only one.” Her smile dimmed. “She's not; about half the women in Rhydygrisiau don't go to see their GP, at all. Some haven't been for years, those that move into the town tend to stop going after 6 months. I also checked with local surgeries, just in case, and no sign of any appointments with any other practices. I dug deeper, out of our non-attenders, one is diabetic and two have asthma – none of them have been having their prescriptions for insulin or Ventolin refilled. Is that possible Owen?”

“I suppose so, it depends on the type of diabetes, sometimes it can be managed by diet rather than insulin, but if you're young and on insulin then that's it. You need to keep on taking it. Similar with asthma, you can manage it in other ways. Any sign of homeopathy, or other alternative therapies?”

Ianto pulled Tosh's laptop towards him and entered a search query. There was a whirr of a processor and Ianto squinted at the screen. “OK, within a 5 mile radius there's two beauty therapists, a counsellor, and a homoeopath.” The group paused whilst Ianto typed in a few more commands on the laptop. “I've cross checked against the list of women that Tosh has, and none of them have visited the counsellor or the homeopath, but plenty of bookings at the beauty therapists – Aphrodite's Mirror beats The Beauty Spot by about 2 to 1.”

Owen's interest was piqued – how could these women not be going to a doctor? “I want more information Tosh. Can you get me access to the records for all of the patients?”

Tosh nodded. “I'll set up a link on the server for you; you'll be able to click in and out whenever you need to.”

“I think I know the answer already, but is there any rift activity, any alien tech?” Jack turned to Tosh.

“I've set the search radius as wide as I can, and there's not a blip – nothing. The Rift is pretty localised to Cardiff, and there are no signs of it expanding. Alien tech, again none that I could see, it's a bit hard to do that kind of check so remotely – there might be something so small that it isn't being picked up, but it's clear so far. It would be good to get local readings though just to be sure.”
“So what have we got? Some faintly suspicious companies and a bunch of women who don't go to the doctor. Doesn't exactly sound like our kind of thing, why not hand all this over to the police?”

Gwen's nostrils flared a little in annoyance with Jack's summary. She knew that there was something bigger at work here. More than just what was being seen on the surface.

“I think we should do some more work on this Jack. All of us think there's something worth investigating. Perhaps a few more checks to make sure, and then hand it over to the police. It wouldn't be the Cardiff lot that know us, it would have to be the locals, and they wouldn't be able to cope if it was one of ours”

“Okay. I take your point. Owen, you do some more digging in the medical notes and see what you can find, you'll have a better idea of what to look for that any of us. Tosh and Ianto, get something together that will allow for remote scanning, and when you're done, our Mr Jones will be heading out for a drive in the country, a spot check by the Welsh Tourist Board. For the rest? Business as usual, there's still Weevils to subdue.”

* * *

“Oh!”

“Oh?”

Tosh's hand wrapped automatically around the cup of coffee that Ianto was offering her, a reflex reaction; but her eyes were taking in her colleague's appearance. Ianto was usually spick and span in his suit, ruthlessly efficient and poised for action. Today he looked like a student – stout boots, jeans, t-shirt, a jacket draped over one arm. It was when he was in civvies that she realised just how much younger he was.

“Is it dress down day? I didn't realise we were doing those. Did I miss a memo or something?”

Ianto chortled at Tosh, trust her to think she'd overlooked something.

“No. Today's the day for my jaunt to Rhydygrisiau. If I'm supposed to be tramping all over the Welsh countryside, I'm not going to do it in a suit and brogues.”

Tosh's face cleared as she remembered, and tilted her head to one side. “But what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be on your way?”

“I came in to get the Hub up and running, and to make myself a flask of coffee. There's only a tea-shop in Rhydygrisiau, and I don't quite trust them. Thought I'd make you all your first pot, after that you're on your own. I give you the responsibility of not letting the others near my machine, on pain of pain. I'm counting on you Tosh.”

Tosh grinned and gave him a mock salute. “Sir, yes Sir, I solemnly swear to defend the coffee machine with my life if need be, Sir.”

“Don't be daft.” He turned, and opened up the backpack to stow his flask inside.

“Have you got everything you need?” Both of them swung round to see Jack leaning over the gantry.

“Torch, compass, map, coffee, first aid kit, stun gun, car keys, mobile, wallet and a rather special camera.”
Jack nodded and gave Ianto a salacious grin. “You know Ianto, I might just have to issue a memo so that you alternate between those cute suits and those jeans. The view I've had from up here has been spectacular.”

Ianto rolled his eyes and hefted his bag onto his shoulder. “As you wish, I'll draw up a schedule on my return. I'll be back by the end of the day, can't see how it'll take me long to get some decent readings.”

“Stay on the comms and check in every hour or so, I don't want this to blow up into a major situation.”

“I'll be in touch with Ianto anyway. I'll need to point him in the right direction so there are no blank spots.”

“Righty-o. Best be off, it's a long drive.” With that Ianto walked through the Hub to the carpark under the Assembly building and was soon on his way.

* * *

Once he'd got out of Cardiff, fighting the traffic all the way and cursing himself for not getting Tosh to give him green lights, Ianto began to enjoy the drive. It was good to get out of Cardiff, and for once it wasn't raining. He had the windows down, his shades on, and was making good time. He'd have to slow it down, the further out into the country he got - the roads would be narrower and twistier.

«Ianto?»

He thumbed his headset so he could speak “Yes Tosh?”

«How far away are you?»

He glanced down at the SatNav, and then took a sharp bend.

“Not too far, I'll be in Rhydygrisiau in about 10 minutes. What's up?”

«Nothing really. The others are out, looking into a 'funny smell' coming from a flat in Cathays.»

“All the flats in Cathays smell funny. It's the students.”

«This funny smell has laid out a fire engine and two squad cars worth of emergency services personnel. Current thinking is it's more than just a corpse going off.»

“Rather them than me. Anywhere in particular you want me to start snapping?”

«Start in the middle and do a radial sweep outwards. That way I can get some triangulation points as well.»

“Sounds about right. Good job I've got my boots on, I think this day-trip is going to be hard work.”

«Let me know when you're ready to start and I'll get everything recording.»

“Will do.”

* * *
By lunchtime Ianto was weary. It had been hard work on his feet, he was sure he'd have a blister or two, and the camera had started out feeling light enough, but with Tosh's enhancements to it his wrists were beginning to ache. First thing when I get back will be a long hot soak and beer. He'd had to dissemble a couple of times when the local curtain twitchers wanted to know what he was doing. The cover story of working for the tourist board seemed to satisfy their curiosity.

The town itself was pretty standard; a long high street with terraced Victorian houses and shop fronts, a sixties precinct at one end, with the Co-op, a dry cleaners, the bakery, the butcher. Strangely there was no bookmaker, or anything on the seeder side of life. The local pub, the Slaughtered Lamb, wasn’t a dingy hole, but done out in the best gastropub style, but there was still that little circle of hardened drinkers around the bar. Ianto didn’t linger for a meal, just having a soft drink. There had been a substantial looking Victorian Gothic mansion on the outskirts as he’d driven in – very Hammer House of Horror, must’ve been the Big House at one time.

Come lunchtime, he parked up in a lay-by just outside of the town to enjoy his sausage roll, crisps and an apple. He was in the passenger seat, the door open, sitting with his feet on ground and tilted forward so that the flakes of pastry and crisp crumbs didn't land on his upholstery, when a large white van rumbled past him heading out of town.

“Tosh?”

There was a beep in his ear as the comm activated and he heard what sounded like a napkin being wiped across a mouth.

«Yes?»

“Sorry, have I interrupted your lunch?”

«Not really, just finishing the last of a Panini. What about you?»

“Just finished a mediocre sausage roll from the Lite Loaf bakery.”

Tosh snorted and there was the sound of a keyboard being dragged closer.

“I've done the town now, though it might be more appropriate to say the town's done me. My poor feet!”

«Aww, my poor wee lamb... If you head back to the Hub I'll make sure someone gives you a footrub.»

“I'll forgive you the lamb comment if you can arrange that. A big van's just gone past, and I wanted to check if you need me to get some readings of the business park too?”

«Oh... Yes. Not much point in not getting all the data we can, though I have to say that there's nothing so far from your scans.»

“I did wonder, I've not spotted anything fishy in the town, but Gwen was right, there seems to be a lot of well maintained, attractive women. But there’s something about their eyes, like… the smile doesn't reach them. Need to make sure we keep Jack on a short leash if he decides to head up here.”

«You do know I can hear you Ianto? I was going to volunteer to give you that footrub...»

“Oh hello, Jack. Nice lunch?”

A deep chuckle came over the ether. «Yes, and don't think you can get round me. How's it going?»
“Boring, tiring. Not sure I'm getting anything useful but I suppose we need to do it so we can be sure. I'm heading into the woods to check out the business park after lunch.”

«Watch out for bears. I'll see you when you get back.»
The problem with Welsh woodland was that it wasn't managed properly. How could a decent sized man walk through it without getting clobbered by branches? Not to mention the hummocks and dips in the ground that made for hard going. He'd nearly turned his ankle a couple of times, and could feel the sticky residue of pine sap on his face. Just get this over and done with and then pedal to the metal home to Cardiff. A hot bath was looking more like a necessity than a luxury.

Squinting at his PDA in the gloom of the wood, he struck out towards the business park. He'd decided that it would be harder to justify taking the “photos” of the business park for the Tourist Board, so a more covert approach was needed. He'd circle the buildings from the woodland, and no-one would be any the wiser.

“Right Tosh. I'm in position. You ready?”

«Go ahead.»

He brought the camera up, and pressing the shutter, started a slow pan across the buildings he could see in front of him.

«Ianto? Is there something wrong with the camera?»

“No, it's working fine – why?”

«I'm getting nothing. It's like the scan is being bounced straight back.»

“Maybe it's the metal cladding, could that be interfering?”

«It shouldn't be, but maybe if you could get closer and try again...»

Ianto sighed and picked his way out of the trees and into the open ground, again stopping to pause and take the readings.

“Anything?”

«No. Try another building.»

Ianto walked around the perimeter, keeping to the treeline till he reached another building and tried again. The ground between the buildings and the trees had been cleared for 100 metres; there were security cameras on each of the corners angled towards the forest, sophisticated ones, with floodlights and infrared. A lot of surveillance for a simple rural business park.

“And now?”

«Nada – you're going to have to get up right close to them, I'm afraid.»

“Okay – hopefully there isn't a burly security guard and a slathering beast on a leash doing a patrol.”

«But Ianto, you're used to a slathering beast by now...»

“Shh, Tosh, I don't want to jeopardise that footrub any more. Right, I'm right up against the building now. Are you getting anything?”
“Nothing.”

“I was in the woods, and got myself a bit lost. I was trying to see where I was.”

“You’re not supposed to be here you know – this is private property. What are you doing?”

“I’m with the Tourist Board. They sent me out to take some pictures to use in the brochures and that. We’re also doing some promotional work, attracting new businesses to Wales. Any chance I can take a walk around, take some more shots?”

“Got any identification?”

“What do you want that for?”

“Just doing my job Sir. Providing security.” The guard's tone implied that Ianto had better hand over some ID, or there would be consequences. Ianto fished about in his pockets for his wallet, and extracted a driver's licence and business card.

The guard took both and looked at the drivers licence intently, his eyes flickering up to check the face on the card matched the face before him. He pulled a robust looking mobile from his belt, and dialled the number on the card.

“Good afternoon, Welsh Tourist Board, Bwrdd Croeso Cymru, Jenny Wong speaking, how can I help?”

“Keith Dawkins, Paramount Security. Do you have an Ianto Jones working there?”

“One moment... Yes, we do. He works in the Marketing department. Is there anything wrong? Has something happened?”

Ianto felt that this was always the strange and somehow exciting part of working for Torchwood. He could hear both sides of the conversation, the security man's and Tosh's and he always marvelled at what they would do to maintain a cover story, and he felt that frisson of power of pulling the wool over the eyes of yet another member of the public. He kept a tight rein on that; power corrupts, he'd seen that first hand in London.

“No. Nothing's wrong, just doing an identity check.”

“Oh... Right... According to his calendar he's got a meeting this afternoon back in Cardiff, could you remind him?”

“Certainly, Miss Wong. Thanks for your time.”

The security guard pressed the button to end the call and looked back at Ianto, pausing before he spoke.

“Thank you Mr Jones.” He handed over the drivers licence but kept the business card. “Your colleague says you've a meeting this afternoon.”

“Damn! I'd almost forgotten. Is there any chance of a quick walk around the site then?”
The security man paused again, and then gave Ianto a wintry smile.

“I'll escort you round. The people here pay a lot of money for their privacy, so I'm afraid you'll have to turn the camera off – no photos. If you see something you like then you'll have to make a request in writing.”

A sigh of disappointment escaped from Ianto, and he pressed a few buttons on the camera. “If I must, but I'd rather have taken the photos now, saves me coming back.”

The security guard ignored him, and gestured towards the path between the buildings. Ianto walked down the alleyway, acutely aware of the footsteps behind him. His gaze flickered around the alleyway, taking note of doorways, windows, CCTV cameras. The path opened out into a circular road, each of the low units, no more than two storeys high, faced the central grassy area which held a few picnic tables and some rather scrubby looking flower beds. Ianto smiled in appreciation as he realised that the layout of each of the buildings meant that all of the entrances were covered.

As the two of them walked around the circle, Ianto tried to engage the security man in conversation, but any attempts at camaraderie were politely rebuffed. Opposite the access road was the warehouse – a small office/reception and a loading dock big enough for two lorries, but nothing bigger – no 18-wheeled rig would get down the country lanes.

The security man had set a brisk pace and before long Ianto was deposited at the main road with a firm “Good afternoon”.

Ianto squinted at the sun to get his bearings and then headed down the road to where he'd left the car. It was getting on for late afternoon now, and the shadows were longer, a little breeze was rustling through the hedges. Rounding the corner he was relieved to see his car was where it should be, and checking it over, he noted that no-one had come near it. The SUV might be loaded to the brim with technology, but each of their own cars had a certain amount of gadgetry, just in case.

Ianto clicked his key fob, and got into the car, slinging his backpack into the foot-well of the passenger seat. He fastened his seatbelt, turned the engine on, set the SatNav to “home”, checked his mirrors, indicated, and pulled out. After a couple of minutes he clicked his fob again, and activated his comm unit.

“Hello Ianto. Tosh is with Jack just now, she started cursing and thumping the computer about half an hour ago, he thinks there's something wrong with her. What'd you get?”

“Ah... Gwen... I had hoped Tosh could tell me. Best wait until I get back to Cardiff then. Can't be a good sign if Tosh lost her temper.”

*I * * 

“Why did you turn everything off when that security guard spoke to you? The last data I got was when that goon ended the call!”

Ianto was a bit startled, he'd had a smooth journey back, and had parked his car next to the SUV in the carpark, and taken the back route to the Hub. He was tired and sticky from all the walking around, and just wanted to hit the showers, grab a beer and have a sit down. That was not to be, obviously, as Tosh had pounced on him as soon as he'd walked back into the Hub.

“What do you mean? I set the camera to stealth mode like you showed me.”
“You must have pressed the wrong buttons then. I got nothing, absolutely nothing!”

“I may not be a technical whizz like you, but I **can** remember simple instructions. I set the camera to record and transmit. Here!”

Ianto’s fatigue and frustration had got the better of him, and he let his irritation show. He thrust his backpack into Tosh's hands.

“I will be in the showers, should anyone want me. You can check the camera over since it's obviously malfunctioning.”

With that he stalked off down to the locker room, leaving his colleagues staring after him. Owen gave Tosh a sardonic smile.

“Nice one Tosh. Way to piss off the guy that keeps us ticking over. You better hope that shower puts him in a better mood.”

Tosh was left holding Ianto’s backpack in her arms like it might bite her, a faintly shocked look on her face. She'd let her own frustration bubble over and had upset her friend. *Of course Ianto wouldn't have made a mistake, it's not like he's Owen.*

“Shut up Owen, you're not helping.”

She opened up Ianto's backpack and rummaged around inside for the camera. Her fingers felt the neoprene of the camera case and she pulled it out. Back at her desk, she angled the spotlight, and unzipped the case and pulled out the camera. She gave her glasses a buffing on her blouse and put them on. The camera rotated in her hands as she gave it a visual inspection, everything looked as Ianto had said it would. Even though it looked switched off, the buttons and slides were in the correct configuration. Without looking, her right hand reached for a USB cable, which she fitted to a slot in the camera. Looking up at the monitor, she opened the download program, and started to shift the data from the camera to the server.

She felt rather than heard Jack standing next to her, there was something about him. He could be loud and brash at times, but he also had his own stealth mode, he could sneak up without you even noticing. From what Ianto had let slip, and Jack’s own stories, she knew that in his past Jack had had to be unobtrusive.

“Toshiko-chan. What did our friend Ianto get for us?”

“Give me a minute Jack. We got plenty of data when he was wandering around town, but that business park...”

“Yes,” Jack's tone had that dry, wry quality to it. “I'm well aware of your thoughts on that. But is there any data? Something that failed to be transmitted.”

“No. And that's what's annoying me. Ianto did set the camera up correctly, but it didn't record anything. Well it did record, but it recorded nothing. I've got a half hour recording of zero data.”

“Equipment malfunction?” This time it was Gwen chipping in.

Tosh pivoted in her chair to face them. At least they weren't accusing her of incompetence like she'd done with Ianto.

“Can't be. I triple checked it before Ianto headed off, and we'd spent a good half hour going over how to use it. We got the data from the town – that was nice and clear and even if there was nothing
“in it, we got something.”

“Did Ianto drop it or something?”

There was a pause as Tosh and Jack looked at Gwen.

“What? He's not perfect. He could have tripped and it fell out of his hands.”

“I'll ask him when he comes back up.”

“Ask me what?”

Ianto stood there, in jogging bottoms and a t-shirt, rubbing his hair with a towel. His damp hair was sticking out in about 17 directions, and the V of his t-shirt let a few tufts of hair peep out. Not the smooth suit-clad Ianto they habitually saw.

“You're inappropriately dressed Mr Jones, and I like it.” Jack thought Ianto looked deliciously rumpled.

“Give it a rest Jack. I'm tired and not in the mood.”

Gwen and Tosh glanced at each other, and Jack opened his mouth to say something and closed it again. It was not like Ianto to shoot Jack down so bluntly.

“Erm,” Tosh was a bit tentative “Gwen was wondering if you might have accidentally dropped the camera. It did record, but there nothing there, no readings at all. It's like you recorded 40 minutes of static.”

“Gold star for Gwen for logic. It could have happened, it was rough ground, but no, I had the camera in my hands all the time, though I had to sling it over my shoulder when I got the guided tour. I set the camera like you showed me.”

“Yes you did, and I'm sorry for...” She tailed off with a sheepish smile; Ianto nodded and gave her a little grin. “The diagnostic says it's working fine so there has to have been something there at the business park that blocked the scan. What did you see?”

“Yes, Ianto, we're going to have to rely on that marvellous memory of yours.” Jack pulled over a chair from one of the workstations and sat forward, leaning his elbows on his knees.

Ianto sighed and sat himself down on the sofa. He laid his hands loosely on his thighs and closed his eyes, taking himself back to earlier in the afternoon. His photographic memory was almost scary in its ability to retain and remember information. He took a few breaths to still himself and began to recount what he'd seen and done at the business park in exact detail. As he spoke he could hear the scritching of pen on paper, the soft breaths of the people around him, the squeak of an unlatched door down in lower levels, and the muffled clanks of Owen in his autopsy bay – he tuned the sounds out and kept going.

He opened his eyes to find all three of them sitting in a circle around him.

“You know, Ianto, I'm so pleased that you're on our side. I'd hate to think what could happen if you used that power you have for evil.” Gwen shuddered in mock horror.

“And who says I don't?” He stretched his arms way above his head, “Someone get me a beer, I'm dying of thirst.”
“I'll get them. You've worked hard today. Tosh? Jack?”

Tosh nodded and Jack requested a bottle of water. “I'll see if I can find some nuts or crisps too.”

Ianto crossed his legs at the ankles and slid further into the sofa.”I can't help but think that the buildings were shielded, but they looked so ordinary. What on earth needs that kind of shielding in the middle of the countryside?”

“Someone's got something to hide. The scanner's designed to get through non-terrestrial substances. There should be nothing it can't penetrate. Oh, thanks Gwen.”

Gwen put down a couple of bags of crisps on the coffee table, and handed round the drinks. Ianto upended the bottle and took a long pull, Toshiko took a dainty swig and then set the bottle down, and then shifted it off the veneer and onto a newspaper as she caught Ianto's eyes narrowing at the thought of a ring mark.

“What did the rest of you discover while I was on my field trip?”

“Owen did some digging around in the GP practices servers. Owen? OWEN!”

A head appeared at floor level. “You bellowed, Jack? Oi, where's my beer? Bloody hell, it's out of sight, out of mind round here.”

“Shut up” Gwen dangled a beer bottle, “I've got one for you here. Come up and be sociable.”

Owen dropped his white lab coat over the railings as he came to join them. He mirrored Ianto in taking a long pull from the beer. Those two are more alike than they'll ever admit to, thought Gwen.

“We're having sharing time, Owen, come and snuggle up.”

“Bugger off, Harkness, I know where you've been.”

“Okay, kids – let's just share some ideas and then sleep on them. We'll come up with something more concrete tomorrow.”

“You mean we're actually going to have a plan, rather than blundering in and making it up as we go along?”

Jack completely ignored Owen's comment and filled him in on what Ianto and Tosh had found.

“Sounds like it wasn't a wasted journey after all... And I bet you all want to know what I found?”

Owen glanced at the group, and took another swig of his beer.

“Okay boys and girls. There is definitely something fishy going on there. I had a good dig around in the practice notes. About half the women in the town go to the doctors regularly for all sorts of things. Some mundane, some not. The men seem to go when they absolutely have to, and the children are taken as and when, the practice coordinates the school nurse, so she sees them in the school for the routine stuff. But, my friends, here's the juicy part. Of the other half of the women, not one of them goes to the doctor in their own right. Sure they'll take their husbands or their kids in, but nothing for themselves. Apart from the cases Tosh found of asthma and diabetes, there are more, some who should be seeing the doctor regularly. They've had cancer in the past, one woman had had a nasty fall from a horse and was being treated for spinal injuries. All of these are things you don't get a clean bill of health from or are miraculously cured of. I checked the major hospitals, and the specialists, and none of these have been referred. They're suddenly miraculously cured of whatever
ails them. The other thing that is ringing alarm bells is that the surgery doesn't do any follow-up. No letters or phone calls, not even a door knock from a health visitor. They should be chasing these women up. I want to know why not!”

There was a pause as they tried to consider the implications. Jack looked around his team, looking at the variations of puzzlement, frustration and tiredness on their faces.

“That's enough for tonight. Go home, go out, whatever you want to do, but get out of here. And that's an order.”

There was the usual scramble and scuffle for bags and coats, and with cheery goodbyes Tosh, Owen and Gwen left. Ianto was left picking up the empty beer bottles and crisp packets.

“You don't have to do that tonight you know. You could leave it.”

Ianto turned to Jack and raised an eyebrow. “What, and have to clear it up tomorrow when the Hub will smell like a dodgy pub? No thanks, it won't take 2 minutes.”

Jack thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and drew an abstract pattern on the floor with the toe of his boot. “So... you staying or going?”

Ianto didn't pause in clearing up. “Going. I'm tired Jack, and I want my own bed.”

“Right. Right.” There was only a tiny hint of disappointment in Jack's voice.

After a few moments, Ianto's soft and careful voice carried up from the kitchen area. “You know, you’re welcome to come back with me, Jack. It'd do you good to sleep in a proper bed once in a while. Somewhere with doors and windows and a proper kitchen. No shenanigans though, I do need to sleep, even if some of us don’t.”

Jack grinned and started to divert the rift monitor to his wrist-strap and Ianto's PDA. “I don't want you just for your body. That's only one of your charms. And stop rolling your eyes.”

There was a chuckle from the kitchenette. “You know me too well, Jack. And you know that familiarity breeds contempt...”

“You provoke lots of emotions Ianto, but contempt isn't one of them. Ready to go? Good. Shall we take the scenic route?”

Ianto joined him on the slab and in spite of the weary look on his face, grabbed a firm hold. “Up, up and away, Jack. But remember, nothing but sleep.”

Jack smiled and gently said, “Scout’s honour.”

* * *

The planning session had had to be shifted into the afternoon. A phone call in the early morning to Gwen from PC Andy had sparked off an incident that ended up involving the whole team, a milk tanker, two 20 gallon drums of detergent, and a lot of Retcon.

They were sitting at a café near the Hub, enjoying the sunshine and having a proper meal with proper knives and proper forks.

“You know,” Gwen paused as she speared a cube of beetroot from her salad, “I don't think I'll look at yoghurt again in the same way.”
“Yes – there's pro-biotic and then there's semi-sentient. I don't like it when my food fights back.”

Ianto was still reliving the part where he was covered from head to toe in milk product.

There was a clang of cutlery on porcelain and Jack dropped his knife and fork, positively thrumming with intent. “I gotta say this. If I don't I might burst.” He gazed at his team expectantly, making sure he had their attention, “There's no use crying over spilt milk...”

His voice was drowned out by the chorus of groans from the others and he had to dodge two thrown napkins. “You guys just don't appreciate my witty banter.”

“Yeah, a regular Noel Coward you are.”

“Met him, had me laughing all the way to bed. The Blitz going on around us added a certain frisson...”

“No more details! God Jack, is there anyone you've not shagged?”

“I resent that remark; I'd never get anything done if all I did was shag.”

“That's true, it's not like you're a shining example of multi-tasking. Single-minded is an adjective that springs to mind.”

“Ianto Jones,” Jack wagged a finger in his direction, “I may be very goal oriented, but I can get on with more than one task in hand. In fact, I distinctly remember you asking if I'd grown an extra pair of hands, when we were...”

“The line Jack, the line. You know we've talked about this before. You have to see the line and not cross it” Ianto was doing his damndest to get Jack to think before responding to anything resembling innuendo.

Jack threw his hands in the air in surrender, he did love provoking that blush in Ianto when he shared too much, even more so when the others tried to look away. “Right, playtime's over. Gwen, you settle the bill, and we'll head back. Get on with the mysterious case of the perfect women.”

Jack was soon striding across the Plass with Tosh on his arm.

“He's been reading the Hardy Boys again, hasn't he?” Owen was reluctant to let go of the moment.

“Yes, and be thankful he's progressed from Scooby Doo.” Ianto was checking the table for stray belongings, “You and I were going to end up being Scooby and Shaggy.”

“Not bloody likely, though we both know who'd be Velma.”

* * *

Ianto was quite proud of the boardroom; it was one of the last that they'd tackled after the earthquake of Abbadon. Even though the budget was tight by that point, he'd managed to get something professional, warm and above all tidy. Good lighting covered a multitude of sins and although the main Hub would never be up to his standards, he knew that this room would always be presentable.

Right now it was far from presentable. The team were gathered, notes and diagrams, pens and pads; a plate of biscuits in the centre of the table, and the plasma screen showing the rotating T. Jack pushed up his shirtsleeves and braced his palms on the tabletop, looking around the group, he got the ball rolling.
“Seems like we're going to have to have a two pronged attack here. We need someone to get into the business park and get some scans, and we need more information on the women of the town.”

“True. Do you think there's a link between the two?” Gwen twirled strands of her hair as she considered the idea.

“It's too much of a coincidence,” Jack gave a sceptical grin, “and I don't think much of coincidence.”

“I can see I'm going to be the one to go in to get more information on the women. But how the hell are we going to get into those buildings?” Owen's forehead had crinkled as he pondered. “From what Ianto says it looks like security is tight.”

“If the back door is locked we'll have to go in the front door.”

“What the hell does that mean Jack? You're taking this enigmatic leader thing too far.”

“What I mean, Doctor Harper, is that if we can't covertly investigate, then we'll have to be overt. I think it's time for a dawn raid.”

“That's hardly subtle. I thought we'd decided that we'd just check things out, before we do something drastic.” Gwen looked a bit shocked and excited about the idea. There were times, and she knew that the others felt this, she’d seen it in their eyes, that going in all guns blazing was such a rush. This though, this was one where they had to tread carefully.

“Jack doesn't mean an actual dawn raid. Do you?” Ianto glanced at Jack, just to make sure. Jack nodded. “He's referring to a business practice where the authorities come in and investigate without prior warning. Hence dawn raid, because that's what it feels like. Normally it's the Serious Fraud Office, or the Office of Fair Trading. What were you thinking of?”

“I was thinking that it's time that 'Takako Sato' from the Inland Revenue arrived to do some spot checks. Nothing for them to worry about, just let her have a room and some files.”

Tosh looked up and blinked at Jack, and then a slow smile spread across her face. “I see... All I need is to just get in the building; I can scan from anywhere inside.”

“Atta girl. Just a quick in and out. Maybe look at payroll. Just an hour with each one. Enough time to get what you need and not to arouse too much suspicion. You up for that Tosh?”

“I'd love to Jack. It's been a while since Takako came out to play. I'll have to do a bit of reading up though. When were you thinking of me going in?”

“Thursday. You'll be ready?”

Tosh went through what she needed to do, it wasn't just a case of getting back into Takako's shoes, there was more prep to do.

“Yes. But I'll need help in preparing the kit and my bona fides. I need to read up on payroll taxation, and that isn't light reading.”

“You're telling me. Nightmare. Give me a Hoix and I can cope. Show me a payroll ledger and I come out in a cold sweat.”

“Nonsense, Jack. All you have to do each month is sign the forms to release the money. I'm the one who does all the working out.”
Gwen wasn't all that surprised that Ianto had control of the money. And she did appreciate him for it. A nice amount in the bank every month, and expenses were paid promptly, provided she handed in all the receipts. She did seem to get through a lot of clothes and dry cleaning.

“I knew it! I wondered why I started getting paid regularly a couple of months after Ianto started. Thanks mate!” Owen gave Ianto a cheery thumbs up, which earned him a 'don't mention it' nod in return.

“So... getting back to the point. Since Ianto is obviously our payroll genius, he can help Tosh get everything together. Gwen can set up the cover for Tosh, and for Owen. You, my fine fellow, are going in to that surgery to do a check on their systems, getting ready for the national linkup, poking around in their files. Gwen, make sure something official is sent through to the practice manager.”

* * *

“Tosh, you look... ordinary.” Jack had stepped out of his office, still towelling his hair dry. “And you're early.”

“Thank you Jack. It takes a lot of work to look this dowdy.” Her grin brightened up her rather drab appearance. She was wearing an ill-fitting trouser suit, comfortable shoes, no make-up other than a shade of lipstick that didn't suit her, ugly glasses, a rather large handbag, and a trundle flight case containing her laptop.

“Where did you get that outfit? Don't tell me Ianto pulled it out of the archives.”

“No, it's Gwen's. She said it's her interview suit, and the last time she wore it was 5 years ago. We're not quite the same size. Looks hideous, doesn't it? Just what Takako would wear.”

“You're all right about this aren't you? Not worried?”

“A little... I know enough to get around them, and I can bluster my way in almost as well as you. I'll keep my earpiece in. We're field testing a redesign – the earpiece now picks up when you speak, through your jaw – so it's all in one. If push comes to shove I can pop it out and squeeze it to break it. I just worry that once I'm in, that I can't find anything, or I can't begin the scan. They will be hovering around.”

“It's all misdirection Tosh. Keep them focussed where you want them. Make them hover. They'll believe it all the more. What are you using as a scanner?”

“Ianto and I have augmented the laptop, going by his results something hand held just isn't powerful enough. I've got what looks like an external hard drive, and that'll do the scanning. The laptop is just a laptop. The scanner should transmit, but if not, it'll still record. It's still a hard drive, and it's got a lot of memory.”

“Any sign of trouble, extract and get back here as fast as you can. Owen's been told the same, he's heading straight there.”

“I'd better be off myself. I just came in to pick up a few bits, and my ID. Do you know where Gwen left it?”

Jack stepped back into his office and rooted through his desk. A couple of sheets of paper fell off, leading to an exasperated sigh from Jack. “It's here somewhere. Gwen definitely gave it to me last night. I know she did.”

“Here you are Tosh.” A laminated ID card suddenly appeared, clasped in Ianto's elegant fingers,
“I liberated it from the mess masquerading as Jack's desk.”

She jumped at the sound of his voice. “We're going to have to bell you Ianto, you're too quiet. Thanks.” She took the proffered ID and slid it into her purse. “Right, I'm off. See you later.”

* * *

Another gorgeous day thought Tosh. She made a mental note to check the weather patterns and historical data. For as long as she'd lived in Wales she'd never known a summer like it. Day after day of sunshine, no rain. The countryside looked so pretty. Green swathes of farmland interspersed with little copse, odd little hummocks of ground. I must make sure I get out of Cardiff the next time I have a day off. She snorted at the thought of having a whole day off from Torchwood. Chance would be a fine thing.

Before too long she was making the turn from the main road, and driving down the access road to the business park; the forested area seem to enclose the road, like driving down a green tunnel. She shivered a little, away from the sunshine it felt colder. She spent that final few minutes composing herself, putting on her “inscrutable” face, as Ianto called it. Hah, he should know, he had a few inscrutable faces of his own.

As she left the road and arrived at the entrance to the park, a burly security man stepped out from a small hut and stood in front of the entrance, forcing her to stop.

“Good Morning, madam. Can I help you?”

“Yes. I need you to let me through, I'm visiting here today.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“No.”

“Well I'm afraid you can't come in without an appointment. This is private property.”

“I'm aware of that; I'm here on official business.” She reached into her handbag for the ID, “I'm here to do an unannounced spot check of the businesses. That's why I don't have an appointment.” She handed over the ID and smiled shyly at the security man.

He spent some time studying the ID pass, and took it away with him to his hut. He came back a few minutes later.

“Very well, miss. You can go through. Park on the left, that's the visitors parking area.”

She drove up a little further and parked the car. She knew that the security guard would now be contacting all of the businesses to let them know she was here. A little smile to herself, and she got out of the car, handbag slung over one arm and trundling awkwardly towards the nearest building.

* * *

Owen leant back in the creaky chair he'd been given, pushing himself away from the tiny desk. God this is boring. He'd arrived just in time for the surgery to open, having taken a leaf out of Ianto's book and suited up for the occasion. There was no kerfuffle at his arrival, just a pleasant smile from the woman who was opening up.

“Oh yes, Dr Harper, we're expecting you. Your secretary phoned through yesterday afternoon to confirm. Let me get in and set up and I'll sort you out.” She then nodded to the chairs in the waiting
area, and began to move around the space, turning on lights and computers. He sat there, briefcase on his lap and watched.

As the support staff arrived there was a little enquiry into each other’s health – everyone seemed “fine”. He was used to medical secretaries being a little on the frazzled side; competent and diligent, but a swan-like air, calm on the surface but a hell of a lot of activity going on underneath. Not here though, everyone swung into action like the proverbial well-oiled machine. There were three receptionists and the woman who let him in seemed to be a team leader. All of them looked smart and well groomed, no stray hairs escaping their hairstyles, make-up discreet but alluring. If he’d had to have chosen one, he'd have gone for the brunette. Nice tits, and not shy of showing them off.

“Right Dr Harper, if you can just show me some identification, then I'll take you through to the room we've prepared.”

He blinked out of his fantasy, and reached into his jacket for his wallet. He’d double checked it last night, hoping that Gwen hadn't pulled the same trick as Ianto had the last time he needed a fake ID, having had to spend the day as “Ben Dover” had been embarrassing - thankfully Gwen either lacked the imagination, or just couldn't be arsed to muck around so he had a nice-looking NHS ID for Dr Ewan Harper.

The secretary pored over the card, and then handed it back.

“Can't be too careful Dr Harper. Sensitive data here, I'm sure you understand.”

“Of course. It's good to know you are taking this seriously, Ms...”

“Mrs. Mrs. Blodwen Parks, but you can call me Blodwen,” she gave Owen a flirtatious grin, “Now, if you can just follow me? We've set up a desk for you in the records room”

He was still in the room, and had spent a frustrating morning going through the dockets, double checking what he'd already discovered back at the Hub. No privacy to call the others, as there always seemed to be someone coming into the room, fetching or returning patient details. He'd sent a couple of texts, to Tosh and Ianto; Tosh hadn't replied, and just a basic text back from Ianto – he read between the lines and guessed they were busy.

* * *

Tosh saved the warehouse until last, though on reflection she wasn't sure this had been a very good idea. At every business she'd met with the same reaction – barely concealed hostility from the management. These people did not expect to have a lightning visit from the Inland Revenue, and were frustrated when they discovered that there was nothing that they could do to prevent her. She stayed meek but firm, making sure they saw her as a minor functionary, a drone. Stay unmemorable, Jack's voice echoed in her head, once you've gone they won't realise it was you. She was uncomfortably reminded of what she’d had to do before joining Jack at Torchwood.

Speaking of which, she’d have to check in with their illustrious leader soon, or Jack would be getting into a right state. Having been sent this way and that all morning by the disgruntled businessmen who’d wanted nothing more than to get rid of her, she’d not yet had an opportunity to do so.

Invariably they shunted her into a small room, and left her with the office manager or even the receptionist as a minder, though they were always presented to her as someone to do the fetching and carrying. And it was these people that intrigued her. They were all women, all well dressed, all pleasant and friendly, and all creepy. There was something about them which got under Toshiko's skin. She'd tried making light hearted conversation, but that always seemed to dwindle out to
nothing. And she'd started to make demands on them, just to see if she could provoke a sign of irritation or annoyance – but nothing, they smiled, nodded, went away and came back with what she asked. And that was another thing. Any normal business there'd have to be some rooting around, or delays in supplying the information. But not here, everything was at hand, easy to find.

Owen was getting twitchy. He'd had some lunch, on his own, as they'd laid something on for him and he couldn't really turn it down. He'd stepped outside after lunch and had a brief conversation with Gwen – they'd had to go out into the bay – a rift alert indicated an object had come through. Turned out to be a wing and the propeller of a Gypsy Moth, so they weren't best pleased.

“So while I've been going mad with the dullness, you lot have been for a nice trip on the bay?”

“Owen! It wasn't a pleasure cruise. Those coastguard boys go at a fair lick when Jack wants them to. I just sat at the back, clutching hold of my life jacket and trying to remember not to puke into the wind. We've only just got back.”

“Whatever. Let Jack know I've found nothing that we didn't know already. I should be back in Cardiff by seven.”

“Will do. And thanks Owen.”

“Hmmmpphh. Next time it's you that's doing this!”

And now he was back in front of the rather elderly computer, listening to it chugging away as it booted up. He'd already checked with the practice manager and his machine had no internet connection, something to do with maintaining system integrity; no way for him to send data down the line, he'd need to be Tosh to be able to manage that.

He felt into a suit pocket and found the little gizmo he'd last used at Lynch Frost estate agents. Attaching it to the PC, he waited for the little light to change from red to green. And waited. And waited. He prised it off, squinted at it, blew on it, gave it a shake, and clamped it on again. A distinct lack of green lights. Bloody tech. He'd have words with Tosh when she bothered to get in touch with him.

Time for Plan C. He took a flash drive from his pocket and started to search for a USB port to plug it into. Sighing, he got onto his hands and knees and fished around the back, fingertips groping, searching for an available slot. Bloody hell, what the hell is this place? The Ark? Finally he found one, and rammed the flashdrive in.

Clambering back onto the chair, he cracked his knuckles, and stared into space for a few seconds, dredging up the memory of Tosh's “Hackers for Dummies” session. His fingers pecked at the keys, trying different configurations to get inside the programme and see what was what.

It wasn't even hidden. He'd hardly had to do anything to stumble upon the other server. Interesting...

I wonder what's in here?
Chapter 3

Tosh had been in the warehouse for about half an hour, in a tiny room off the office. There wasn't a window, but the partition was glazed so she could at least see outside. Having sent her latest minder off to get her a coffee and some biscuits, she was taking the chance to see what the scanner was picking up. She'd tried in every other building but just as she was about to check, someone would come into the room, interrupting her.

She alt-tabbed into the laptop's secondary operating system, the Torchwood one, clicking through to access the scanner and took a sharp intake of breath. Her hand trembled a little over the mousepad as she took in what the computer was telling her. There appeared to be a powerful supercomputer somewhere nearby, drawing power from all the surrounding buildings. She scribbled a quick note to check the power bills to see if there were any anomalies there. The supercomputer wasn't the shocker, it was what it was hooked up to, what it was monitoring... *Oh my god.* Tosh pushed a finger in her ear to activate the comm.

“*Ianto? Jack?*”

There was no sound, no reassuring beep, just a ghostly hiss of white noise.

“*Jack!*” she raised the volume of her whisper in case they hadn't heard. Taking a deep calming breath, she winkled the earpiece out and twirled it in her fingers, checking it over to see if it was working. It looked fine.

She dropped the earpiece on the tabletop, and reached for the laptop, bringing up the Torchwood IM system, to see if she could send a message. She groaned at the “Unable to connect” pop-up that appeared before her. *Shit, what the hell is going on? Did this mean that none of the data was being transmitted back to the Hub?* She fished around in her handbag, searching for her mobile.

A shadow fell across the desk; her minder was returning with the coffee. Tosh quickly moved the display on the laptop back to the spreadsheet she was “working” on, and tried to calm herself into something like normal. She had to get in contact with the others, she had to do it now.

“She's here Miss Sato – milk and one sugar, and I brought you some of my home-made flapjack.”

“Thank you.” She took a sip of the coffee, it seemed a little sweet for just one sugar, “I need to make a private call. Would you mind leaving the room?”

“Oh, of course. Is there anything else I can get for you?”

“No, not just yet. I'll let you know if I need anything.” Tosh felt a little nauseous. *Nerves, this is huge. Gwen was right.*

“I'll be just outside”

Tosh nodded and smiled wanly. Once the woman had left the room she started to pat down her pockets, searching for the tell-tale lump of her mobile. Nothing. She then hefted her large handbag onto her lap and began another search. Her hands felt strange, tingly. Her vision seemed a little blurry, it was hard to focus, to see inside the bag. *They've drugged me.*

She let the bag slide off her lap, and squinting and blinking she powered down the laptop; as her vision dimmed she groped around the table top, fingers blindly searching for the earpiece. She found
it, and her last conscious act was to crush the earpiece between her fingers.

* * *

Owen was engrossed and almost bouncing on the chair with excitement. He'd begun by searching for the Eberhart woman, and found a whole batch of data; blood work, MRI scans, X-rays – a full range of diagnostic tests and scans. It was if someone was measuring her up as a template; he moved on to some of the other women and found more of the same, almost a complete body map - bone structure and soft tissue. He saved a couple of folders onto the flash drive and then returned to the root directory.

He'd spotted a large folder called “Galatea”. *Sounds promising.* He clicked in and started drilling down, jumping from folder to folder, deeper and deeper into the data. And then his heart froze. Sitting right before his eyes was a folder, a fucking *Torchwood* folder – the pointer on the screen tipping over and over with its little hourglass. *Fuck.* He clicked into the folder, and there they all were, all 5 of them. Unable to resist, he clicked his own name. Dry-mouthed he looked at the files. Clips of CCTV footage of him, estimates of his vital statistics, sound files of his voice, and more. He sat there, stunned for a few seconds and quickly reached for his mobile.

He didn't sense the door open behind him, he didn't sense the soft footsteps across the carpet, he didn't sense the person behind him. He did, however, sense the tang of chloroform as the rag was pressed over his mouth and then he sensed nothing at all.

* * *

Ianto was taking the stairs up from the lower levels when he could hear a raised voice echoing down from the main Hub. He'd finished cataloguing, indexing and archiving the flotsam from the Bristol Channel and his internal clock told him it was time for coffee. It had been a frustrating day. The stupid call-out that pulled Jack and Gwen away from the Hub, a couple of calls from Owen and no word from Tosh.

Ianto caught Gwen's eye, and received a shrug and glance at Jack as a response to his enquiring look. Jack slammed down the handset of the phone and glared at both of them.

“Coffee?” Ianto kept his tone low and calm; with Jack just this side of furious, and Gwen's tendency to jump in both feet first, he knew he'd have to remain the voice of reason, no matter how worried he was.

“Oh, yes please!” Gwen jumped at the chance to deflect any chance of Jack going off on one.

“Sure Ianto,” Jack was venting his frustration, “hell, why not have tea and scones and we can sit and have a natter like a bunch of old ladies!”

*Oh dear,* that *bad.* Ianto didn't even flinch at Jack's sarcasm. He nodded, turned about and headed off to the kitchenette, realising that someone was hot on his heels.

“Best to let him stew in his own juices for a while.” Gwen had propped herself against the counter, arms folded and giving Ianto a rueful smile.

“Should I be decaffing him?” Ianto's hand hovered over the coffee canisters, dithering a little over which blend, his hand trembling slightly.

He felt Gwen's hand rest on his shoulder. “You alright pet?”

Ianto put both hands on the counter. *Honest answer or not honest answer?* He turned to her and
moved in closer. “No... I don't like being shouted at when it's not my fault. I'm worried about Tosh, and he is too. You know he can't be seen to show fear, but what was that all about?”

“Leaving yet another message for Tosh. He's furious with her. At least Owen called a couple of times. What do you think?”

“Not like Tosh, but then there were problems with getting scans from those buildings. Perhaps there's something blocking her comms.?” He pulled the coffee from the shelf and set the machine brewing – just enough for 3 mugs.

“Yeah. But why can't she phone? Surely there can't be anything wrong with them?” Gwen was fiddling about, getting the sugar and milk together.

“Honestly Gwen, I don't know. There's no use trying to guess. I bet she's not had the chance to call.” He pulled his tray out from the shelves. “Have a look in the cupboard, see if there's some HobNobs, if they don't calm him down, then at least we'll have something to dunk.”

“I don't think biscuits'll help – but they can't hurt.” Gwen straightened up from the cupboard brandishing the packet like a trophy.

“C'mon then, bring them with you while we go back to the lion's den.” Tray in hand Ianto made his way to Jack's office.

Jack looked up on hearing the sound of Ianto's knock on his door frame. His face shifted from the pensive look to something approaching contrition.

“Thanks Ianto. Come in both of you.” That was the nearest that Jack would come to apologising; never show fear, never show weakness, that was his Modus Operandi, by need rather than choice – being bigger on the inside took its toll.

“Machu Picchu blend for Captain Grumpy, and some HobNobs, if he's a good boy.”

Jack chuckled, and grabbed hold of the mug, ladling in at least 3 spoons of sugar, stirring briskly, the spoon clanging loudly against the china.

“Sit down. We need to plan what to do if Tosh doesn't contact us. Owen's already in the same town so he'll have to go and find her, and then we...”

Jack's train of thought was interrupted by the main phone ringing. Ianto picked up the handset on Jack's desk and picked up the call.

“Good afternoon, how can I help?”

“Hello Ianto. How are you?” It was a crackly line, whistling and popping, an electronic whine, but Tosh sounded, well, normal.

“Tosh! Thank god! I'm better now. What's going on?”

“I'm fine Ianto. Is Jack there?”

“Hold on.” Ianto handed the phone over to Jack.

“Toshiko! What the hell is going on? Why the hell haven't you been in touch.”

“I'm sorry Jack, there must have been a problem with the new comms. and I didn't get the chance to ring before now. “
“Well? Did you find anything?”

“No Jack, I'm sorry. Neither of us have found anything.”

“Wait, is Owen with you?”

“Yes Jack, He's fine. We're going to stay overnight and go back tomorrow. If that's okay?”

Jack hesitated as he thought it through. “Fine, but you two have to come back tomorrow, without fail”

“Yes Jack, we understand.”

Jack put the handset back in the cradle with infinite care.

“I gather from that that we won't be expecting to see Owen or Tosh soon?”

“No Ianto. They've found nothing and they're going back in again tomorrow.”

“If there's anything to be found then they'll get it. I bet they're talking tactics right now”

“As much as I admire your optimism Gwen, I just hope that it doesn't backfire on us.”

* * *

The remains of lunch were strewn across the coffee table; the dregs of ‘Special Menu 3’ from Thai Palace smearing plates and faces alike. Jack and Gwen were discussing the merits of semi-automatics over revolvers, and Ianto was thinking about clearing everything up when the klaxon sounded, before the cogwheel began its revolve. Ianto pulled himself off the sofa and picked his way down to the inner door ready to grab whatever needed grabbing. Jack and Gwen stood too, Jack with his arms folded and Gwen with a hopeful look on her face.

Ianto's eyes widened a little in mild surprise. Owen was carrying Tosh's flight case, and was holding open the gate to allow Tosh through. Immediately after Tosh entered another alarm began to sound. Gwen stepped over to Tosh's workstation.

“It's an intruder alert,” she stared at the screen, a small frown of confusion on her face, “but it's saying the intruder has just come through the door. I don't understand?”

Tosh clacked her way across the atrium, up the stairs, and stood next to Gwen.

“If I could have a look, Gwen?” Tosh politely stood next to Gwen “I'm sure it's nothing but let's get rid of that nasty noise.”

Gwen took a couple of steps back and Tosh quickly took her place. A few key strokes and the alarm stopped. “There we are. I'll just set a diagnostic running, see if there's a problem.”

Their attention was drawn to the doorway, Ianto and Owen seemed to be fighting over who would carry Tosh's case. It seemed that Owen was going to win. Oddly there were no raised voices. Owen was being polite but firm, and Ianto was dumbfounded enough to concede.

Ianto risked a look at Jack and Gwen to see their reaction. Jack still stood there, he could almost see the fumes of irritation radiating from Jack; Gwen looked a little confused and returned his look.

Owen propped the flight case next to Tosh. “There you are Tosh, all safe and sound.”

“Thank you, Owen”

“My pleasure, Tosh”

Ianto gave a cough, and inclined his head towards Jack's office.

“Oh, thank you Ianto. We can't keep Jack waiting any longer.” With that, they both headed to Jack's office, Owen again letting Tosh lead the way. Jack pulled the door closed behind him.

“Gwen, you want to help me clear up?”

Gwen looked at Ianto, and caught the look on his face. There was some talking to be done. They gathered up the containers and dishes and headed to the kitchen area.

“What the hell?” Ianto scraped the remains of the meal into one container and shoved it into the fridge, no doubt Jack would be hungry later, and he didn't mind eating mixed leftovers.

“And what part of the last 5 minutes are you ‘helling’ about?” Gwen was filling the sink, ready to wash up.

“Oh, I don't know. Perhaps the bit where Owen has turned into a gentleman?”

“Hah, I was wondering about that too.” Gwen pulled on the rubber gloves and picked up the first of the plates. “And Tosh too, normally she just shoves me gently but insistently out of the way.”

“What do you think?” Ianto had picked up a tea towel, and began drying the dishes.

There was a couple of minutes of silence, Ianto could almost hear the gears grinding in Gwen's brain. She suddenly snapped her fingers, “I know! They've had it off. I bet they spent the night together and he's being all chivalrous.”

“Hmmm. Possibly. Though given the good doctor's track record with women, it'd have to be a fantastic shag to transform him from the cantankerous sod that he normally is.”

“Ah, but this time it's love. You know they've been giving each other those looks when they think the other isn't looking.”

Ianto gave her a slightly doubtful look.

“We'll see. I know Tosh won't put up with any crap from him, so I'm surprised she's taken this change so well.”

“We won't know until they tell us. Perhaps you could ask Tosh?”

“Can't you? All girls together?”

“Ianto, you know that she'll tell you stuff she won't tell me. Especially about Owen.”

Ianto had almost forgotten about Gwen and Owen's little liaison. He sighed. “I'll see what I can do.”

She'd pulled off the rubber gloves and gave his arm a pat. “I'm sure you'll get it out of her, you're very persuasive, and who could say no to this gorgeous face?” She grabbed him by the chin and gave his face a waggle. With that she walked out of the kitchenette and left Ianto to distractedly rub his chin where she'd touched him, and ponder how the hell he was going to bring the topic up with
“Sit.”

Tosh and Owen took seats in front of Jack while he perched on the edge of his desk, folding his arms. They sat composed, no sign of any fear of Jack's anger.

“First off you're going to debrief me, and then I'm going to chew you both new ones. Any objections?”

“That's fine Jack. Who do you want to start with? Tosh or me?” Jack studied Owen's face looking for any sign of sarcasm, the words were right but the inflection seemed wrong.

“Tosh. You can start, since we heard absolutely nothing from you all day.”

Tosh looked up at Jack, a soft smile on her face. Jack noticed that she wasn't wearing the god-awful suit from yesterday, but was back in her own clothes; sexy little heels, a close fitting skirt and blouse, made up and hair done. She looked really good, and there was a kind of glow about her – really alluring.

“Jack, I am sorry about yesterday. It couldn't be helped. I couldn't phone, and the comm didn't work. Back to the drawing board with that redesign.”

“Fine – but what did you find out?”

“I thought I hadn't found anything, I was in and out of the offices all day long, and tried scanning but I didn't find anything. But when I got to the warehouse, at first it seemed as if there was nothing there too, but I got some strange energy readings.”

“So there is something going on!”

“Yes, I'm absolutely sure of it. I'm sorry but that's all I've managed to find out. Even going back this morning I couldn't find out anything more.” Tosh looked apologetically up at Jack.

“You did your best. I hope that there's something we can glean from the scanner.”

“Oh. I'm sorry Jack. The secretary at the warehouse dropped a coffee over it. It's ruined. I don't think I can get any data out of it.”

Jack was flabbergasted.

“What the hell... Surely you of all people can salvage something from it?”

“I can try Jack, but I can't promise – the sugar in the coffee will have crystallised, and that may have damaged the circuits.”

“Do what you can,” Jack sighed in exasperation, “at least you found something, Owen?”

“Yes, Jack?” Owen faced Jack calmly, almost blankly.

“Please tell me you found something, and you've got hard evidence.”

“I did find something today, but yesterday was a washout. The scanner gizmo didn't work. Tosh says she'll take a look at it to see why not.”
Jack's face had begun to cloud over, heavy dark thunderous clouds.

“It's on this.” Owen pulled a flash drive from his pocket, “It's encrypted and beyond my skills – maybe Tosh can get something out of it?”

“At last! Something good has come out of this little field trip of yours. And I take it you both had a pleasant night together?”

“Yes. We had a nice dinner in the pub, and we had rooms in a B&B. Very restful.”

“Oh good,” Jack voice positively dripped with sarcasm, “because the two of you, especially you Tosh, had me worried. What the hell were you thinking? You must have had opportunities to get in touch with us. Even an unsecured call to let me know you were all right.”

Tosh's face took on a contrite appearance. “I am sorry about that. I never had the chance, honestly Jack. I didn't stop, and there was always someone about. And then when the comm didn't work...”

“I expected more from you Tosh. Not like you to not follow procedures. Next time...”

“It won't happen again Jack, I promise.”

“Okay. Tosh, have a look at everything and let me know. Both of you can write up reports with all the intel you've gathered. We'll have a council of war tomorrow.”

Ianto was doing a stint in the Tourist Office upstairs, which was so routine by now that he went through everything like an automaton. He enjoyed being up here, it gave him a chance to think. Down in the Hub it was all about doing and reacting, but up here he could ponder.

Something was off. There was a feeling of wrongness. Ianto hadn't quite shaken off the little watchful habits he'd got into from when he was hiding Lisa in the Hub. Keeping an eye on everyone, observing their behaviour, their actions.

He'd been keeping an eye on both Owen and Tosh since their return from Rhydygrisiau. Owen's behaviour had troubled him the most, but even Tosh was causing him a twinge or two. Tosh had always been a smart dresser, but somehow she was smarter than normal, she looked immaculate. Not a hair out of place, make-up like she'd stepped off a film set, and her clothes were overtly sexy, clinging in all the right places. He didn’t think it was for Jack's benefit; Jack liked to be surrounded by pretty things, but there'd never been a hint of anything between them, beyond Jack's usual default setting of flirtatious. Maybe it was for Owen, maybe Gwen was right, and they had shagged on their overnight stay? That might explain the change in Owen. It was as if he'd turned over a new leaf. For two days running he'd come in to work in a shirt, trousers and shoes, rather than his usual jeans and trainers – much smarter, but he'd not gone as far as wearing a suit. Suits were Ianto's territory, his USP, and he wasn't keen to share.

Setting their appearance aside, as wardrobe choices sometimes just boiled down to what was clean and what was dirty and what came to hand, he thought most about Owen's change in attitude. The chivalry towards Tosh, which on its own could have been attributed to the change in relationship between them. But Ianto remember back to when Owen and Gwen had been having their oh-so-secret shagfest, and Owen hadn't treated Gwen any differently than he did now. Perhaps the difference between lusting after someone or loving them? There was more to it than that though. Owen was being much more pleasant to everyone; and that was a big change. Owen was usually infuriating, provoking and just this side of insubordinate. But since yesterday he'd agreed to every
task that was requested, said thank you every time Ianto dropped off a coffee for him. Ianto couldn't fathom what had brought about the change. Maybe Gwen had spotted it too; Jack seemed oblivious.

His musings were interrupted by a ping from his computer. He glanced at the screen to see a reminder for the meeting Jack had convened to discuss the Rhydygrisiau issue. He locked the front door, and flipped the sign to closed, locked his computer and made his way down to the Boardroom – pad and pen in his hands.

Everyone else was already there, and it looked like someone else had made coffee. He paused and looked hard at the coffee pot, and then around the room.

“Ianto mate. I thought I'd give you a break from making the coffee all the time. Sorry if I've jumped the gun, but you've been so busy.”

Ianto was so surprised that he couldn't think of a put-down, and the expression on Owen's face was such a strange mix of hope, expectation and fear that to make a snarky comment would have felt like kicking a puppy. Shocked, he sat down, still staring at the pot and cups.

“Thank you, Owen, it's nice for someone else to do if for a change.”

Ianto took the proffered cup, and took a trepidatious sip. Not bad, not bad at all. Not as good as his mind, but a good attempt. He gave a smile and a nod to indicate his acceptance of the coffee. Tosh beamed, looking between the two of them, like her favourite boys were playing nicely. Owen appeared to have a genuinely gratified expression on his face, and Jack and Gwen were staring as if they thought world war three was about to break out.

“It's good, isn't it? I'm not that much of a coffee fascist not to appreciate someone else's attempts. If he'd ruined it, on the other hand...”

“Well since the world seems to have turned on its head, maybe I should get Janet up here to chair the meeting.” There was a round of laughter at Jack's joke “But moving swiftly on, I've read through the reports from Owen and Tosh. Tosh, anything from either the scanner or Owen's files?”

Tosh gave a cheerful grin, “I'm afraid the scanner is useless, there was nothing I could salvage, it may as well be recycled for spare parts. The good news is that I've been able to get some information out of the files that Owen found. He did a good job in recognising them as significant and for copying what he could.”

Ianto saw Owen puff up a little at this compliment, saw Owen flash Tosh a thank-you glance. Another little quirk to add to the list.

“What have you been able to decipher?”

“It seems to be a whole batch of multimedia files. Sound, movies, images, there's a pattern to the file names, so they must be linked somehow, but the encryption is stopping me from opening them, but I did get into an index document, and it's got a list of the town's inhabitants, some sort of coding, which I can't work out what it stands for – my guess is that the multimedia files are of the people on the list.”

“Surely they're encrypted because they're patient records?” Gwen couldn't quite see why the stuff Owen had got was important, “I'd hate to think that anyone could have a look at my records.”

“They weren't in the server for the practice Gwen; they were on another server, separate from the NHS records.” Owen smiled at Gwen.
“Okay,” Gwen sounded pissed off, “I didn't know where you'd found them. That list Tosh, is there a link between the names and the files?”

“Yes, there's a code number that must be an identifier, and that's the prefix on the multimedia file names.”

“Is there a higher number of files per person?”

“Not sure what you mean Gwen?” Tosh tilted her head, her hair falling perfectly into place, and gave Gwen an encouraging look.

“If you count up the number of files with the same prefix, and then match it to the names on the list, is there a pattern?”

“Oh, I hadn't thought of that. One moment.” Tosh typed in a few commands into the laptop, and then sent the data to the plasma. “Well done, Gwen there's a higher number of files for these people – this is the top ten.”

They all read through the list of names on the screen – Joanna Eberhart was one of them.

“But this is a list of women! Look, Joanna, and there's about three others whose names I recognise; they're on the list of women that Owen found last week. I'll bet that it's all women.” Gwen felt like punching the air. Now they were getting somewhere.

“So far we've got indications that there's some kind of supercomputer that's well shielded, a big batch of data on a select population, and no way of tying the two together.” Ianto looked up from summarising his notes, “Now what?”

“We plan. Thoughts?” Jack looked around the table at the team, Ianto was chewing on his bottom lip, Gwen staring into space, a slight frown on her face, Tosh smiling down at her laptop, and Owen sitting alert, ready.

“Welllll,” Gwen was drawing her thoughts together, “it seems like a quick in and out isn't enough. The information we need is too well hidden to get at quickly, and technology doesn't seem to be getting us anywhere. I'm thinking we're going to have to rely on good old-fashioned detective work.”

“But how? What is it we want? We need more evidence, even if to rule out that there's something weird going on there. But there is, isn't there?” Ianto looked quite earnest as he posed his questions.

“Perhaps... Perhaps we need someone in the town. Getting to know the locals, seeing the links between everyone and everything?”

“Good idea Tosh, but like Ianto says – How?”

“ Seems as if it's the women we need to check up on,” Owen gestured to the plasma screen, “there's your list of targets to follow up. We need to check them out, tail them.”

“Agreed, the women are key, there's too much evidence to suggest that there isn't something going on with them, but again, how?” Jack ran his hands through his hair, feeling the excitement of taking some concrete action building.

“It's all married couples you know. There's no single women affected. I think it'll have to be a couple, to avoid suspicion.” Ianto said.
“Well, that rules out me and Tosh then. They've already seen us. Ianto too.” Owen counted off on his fingers, “Looks like it's got to be you and Gwen.” He leant forward eagerly, looking almost manic.

“Hmmm. Think you're up for it, Gwen? Think you can cope being married to me?” Jack grinned across at Gwen, her face flitting between shock, delight and stupefaction. He also risked a glance at Ianto, who seemed to have a more thoughtful look on his face. *A deep one, our Ianto Jones.*

“Ha. I'll give you a run for your money Jack. We argue enough to be married.” Gwen grinned back at Jack, excited at the prospect.

“You two do realise this will have to be longer than a day, you're going to have to live there to get to know the people.” The ever-practical Ianto was going through the logistics, too busy to join in on their banter.

Jack laughed. “We're going to have to play house then.”

“But what about Rhys?” Gwen realised that Rhys might have an opinion on her going away for a few weeks, never mind the whole “married to Jack” scenario.

“What about him? Your first duty is to the job. You'll need to think of something to tell him.” Jack gave Gwen a hard look.

Gwen nodded, she'd come up with something that would make sense, besides she could still call him while she was out of town.

“Right, that's decided then. Tosh, you can create all the necessary records for the marriage of Jason and Gwyneth Harcourt. Ianto, sort us out for a house in or near the town, rent or buy, I don't care much. Make sure it's big enough though, we need to make an impression.” Jack was back in boss-mode, issuing orders.

Jack stood up and stalked out, leaving a room full of mixed feelings.

*Ianto had taken the workstation next to Tosh to do the work needed to get Gwen and Jack set up in Rhydygrisiau; it made sense as he'd have to liaise with her about the couple's history. He wasn't particularly worried about Gwen and Jack spending all that time alone together. He tried to see if he felt any jealousy, but surprisingly he didn't. He put that thought to one side to look at later, work to be done, and to be honest he was more worried about Tosh and Owen.*

Initially he'd thought that Owen had turned over a new leaf, had a personality transplant, but Tosh was more subtle. He'd spent some time thinking about it; he realised that Tosh wasn't exactly her usual self, she was a fairly shy woman at the best of times, her attempts to make conversation were sweet and awkward. Now she was more gregarious, joining in more on banter between the team, and making conversation. He girded his loins and jumped in.

“So Tosh, what is it?”

“What's what?” Her fingers were flying over the keys as she filled out the marriage certificate.

“Perfect hair, a spring in your step, very vivacious... What's up?”

Tosh gave a little giggle, and a sideways glance at Ianto. “Oh Ianto, it's wonderful. After that day in Rhydygrisiau I feel like a new person.”
“Would the reason have something to do with a certain medic?”

Tosh gave a little blush and looked at Ianto, eyes shining. “Oh yes, that night was a turning point. Owen told me exactly how he feels about me, and this, this... It’s wonderful!”

Ianto smiled back, relief coursing through him, almost making him sag under it. She’s loved up. “If he misbehaves, let me know. He’ll be on decaff before he knows it.”

Tosh gave him a strange look. “Oh no, Owen won't do anything to hurt me. He can't.”

“This is Owen we're talking about Tosh, king of the sarcastic comment. But I'm happy for you, despite the attitude, he's a good man.”

“He is. And I'm a lucky woman.” Ianto almost gave Tosh a double-take, but decided to leave it for now.

* * *

“Right. Two cars, an SUV and a Mini Cooper. I've taken a long lease on 6, The Cedars for Mr and Mrs Harcourt. You're in a 'select executive development' in Rhydygrisiau - well that's what the estate agent says. You're also 2 doors down from Walter and Joanna Eberhart. The house is ready furnished, but I've got you sorted out for linen, crockery and the rest. It's arriving courtesy of Harwoods Haulage.” Ianto paused to give Gwen and Jack a grin. Jack chuckled at the reference, but Gwen flushed and then gave brittle smile. So that didn't go as well as she'd hoped then. Ianto’d wondered why Rhys had sounded a bit off when he arranged the delivery. Ianto thought that he'd be adding credibility to the undercover. He cleared his throat and continued, “They're also delivering your new clothes. Don't give me that look, Jack. Pseudo-military gear is not what the good burghers of Rhydigrisiau are expecting from a... what was it, Tosh?”

“A research and defence logistics consultant.”

“Yes, so the coat, as much as it pains me to say this, will have to be mothballed for the duration. There are two garment bags in the locker room, I've made an educated guess about your sizes Gwen, peeking at the labels in your shoes and clothes helped.” Ianto grinned as Gwen realised that Ianto had been sizing her up “Jack, I know that everything will fit perfectly. Run along and change, and then Tosh can brief you on your cover story.”

“You're enjoying this a little too much Ianto.”

“Not at all Jack, accuracy and veracity are key to any good undercover operation. We'll also sort you out for tech to take with you. Tosh and I have been looking at lightweight and portable.”

Ianto turned to Tosh as the other two went down the stairs into the bowels of the structure. “Something tells me that there may be trouble in paradise.”

“Jack and Gwen? I don't understand.”

“No – Gwen and Rhys. She's says he's okay with it, but I think he's not. I mean, what man wouldn't be suspicious of their fiancée shacking up with their handsome boss, no matter how much it was 'work-related'?”

“I suppose you're right, but it's all about trust. I trust Owen, and he trusts me. He'd be fine if I were Gwen.”

“Things that serious?” Tosh nodded, and Ianto just didn't want to go there, “Coffee?”
“Oh yes please. I better get the dossiers ready for the Harcourts.” she gave Ianto a wink.

Ianto stuck his head over the parapet in the autopsy area. “Owen? Coffee?”

“Gladly Ianto, just what the doctor ordered.” Ianto turned to move off, but was caught by Owen's voice. “Ianto?”

“Yes?” he wondered what was coming now.

“Tosh tells me she's told you about us.”

Ianto nodded, fearing the worst of an Owen-tirade of 'mind your own bloody business'.

“She makes me happy mate, and I won't do anything to hurt her. I guessed that you might be concerned about that.”

Ianto gave Owen a grateful look, and puffed out a little sigh. “I was worried you'd be an arse with her, and she's worth more than that. You've changed Owen...”

“Yes, and for the better, no?”

“Yes... But it's been a bit disconcerting. Such a total transformation.”

“Think about it Ianto. What was I like before? A mess. Sarcastic, caustic, bitter. You came in for the brunt of it, and I'm sorry for that.” Ianto eyes almost popped out at Owen apologising. Owen gave Ianto a rueful grin. “But Tosh loves me, and for her I'll change. I'm a new man.”

Ianto really wanted to end this outpouring of 'feelings', this was not what Torchwood was about. He flailed mentally for an excuse to get away and settled on routine.

“Yes... Well... I'll just get you that coffee, shall I?”
Ianto was leaning against Owen's workstation going through his clipboard, ticking off items on the “Harcourt” checklist, when Gwen and Jack appeared through the doorway in their new outfits. Gwen looked pleased, and Jack looked mutinous.

Tosh walked over from her work station, clutching the dossiers in her hands, giving both of them an appraising look.

“Not bad at all Ianto, they look like the perfect suburban couple.”

“I just bought in bulk from Marks and Spencer.”

Gwen was in the uniform of a yummy mummy, hair pulled back into a pony tail, floral print summer dress and low heeled sandals. She looked pleased and gave a little twirl.

“What do you think? Not exactly practical for hunting down weevils, and there's nowhere for my gun, but I think I'll fit right in at the supermarket.”

“Very pretty Gwen, and I got you some big special handbags. Plenty of room for a gun and spare rounds, there's a slot in the bottom of each bag for your gun. It'll have to be a small gun though... a ladylike pistol.”

Jack leant against his doorframe and crossed his arms, and then uncrossed them, a frown on his face.

“What's wrong with you? I've tried to keep you in your uniform. It's chinos for you.”

“Don't, Ianto. I don't feel right.”

Jack was in loafers, buff coloured chinos and a pastel blue polo shirt and a navy linen jacket. No braces, no shirt and no coat. His wristband stood out, but Ianto knew better than to try and get Jack to take that off.

“You look fine, Jack. Above all you look the part.” Tosh looked him up and down, an appraising glint in her eye. ”You look like one of those sexy dads I see out and about.”

Jack perked up a little at Tosh's compliment. “Really? So what's the deal?”

“Here you are” She handed over the dossiers. “Everything you need to know is in here. I've set up the usual paper-trail. There's enough evidence to satisfy a background check but don't do anything to instigate a deep level check.”

Both Jack and Gwen had their heads down skimming through the files Tosh had put together. Ianto peered at his clipboard. “Oh good, it's the James Bond and Q section, Tosh?”

Tosh gestured to a box on the table. “In there is all the tech we think you can get away with. Slim, lightweight weapons, spare clips. Jack, the Webley will be too noticeable, you’ll have to leave it behind.”

Jack's face dropped even more. No coat, no SUV, no Webley. They were stripping of everything that made him Captain Jack, but he'd volunteered and he'd just have to buck up and buckle down.

“What else is in your box of tricks?”

“Oh, some odds and sods. Bugs, lipstick cameras, the universal lockpick, retcon, PDA, the
“Snoop-o-scope? What's that? I detect the word skills of Ianto in the name.”

“Guilty as charged. Snoop-o-scope is easier to say than 'that pencil shaped thing that turns off CCTV cameras and prevents eavesdroppers', don't you think?” Ianto looked proud of himself.

“Not bad. Any more?”

Tosh rummaged around in the box. “Not much else, everything in there you've used before. I've also made sure that both laptops are fully up-to-date, and Ianto's confirmed that the house has broadband. If that fails then the laptops will hijack any nearby Wi-Fi, and if that fails, then your mobiles will act as a dongle. Speaking of which, your mobiles will use the strongest available network, so you shouldn't get out of range.”

“Sounds like you've thought of everything. Gwen, anything you think is missing?”

“No just now, but it's not like we can't come back and fetch anything.”

Ianto cleared his throat. “I think you've both overlooked a couple of important devices.”

Gwen looked in the box, and Jack gave Ianto an interrogative stare.

Ianto reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a small burgundy velvet box. Jack and Gwen stepped forward as Ianto lifted up the lid and a selection of gold wedding rings sat in some crumpled tissue paper. “I got these from the archives. You're supposed to have been married for a few years so shiny new rings would have looked odd. 'With these rings, I thee wed...’.”

There was a sharp exchange of glances between all three; 'mixed feelings' wasn't an adequate description. Gwen's fingers were fishing around in the box, searching for a ring that would fit – it took a couple of goes before she found one that she liked and slid on and off her finger easily. Jack didn't bother looking through the box, but went to his desk, pulled out a drawer and rummaged around in it. There was a glimpse of a small tin, and then Jack returned, a solid looking wedding ring in his fingers.

“This do?” He stared stony-faced at Ianto. Ianto looked at the ring and up at Jack's face. What the hell is going on here?

“Perfect, Jack. Shall I....?”

“No – I'll do it.” With that brusque remark, Jack slid the ring onto the appropriate finger.

Determined to diffuse the tension that had suddenly appeared, Ianto turned to the desk and brought back two more items.

“Your wallet, Jack, and your purse, Gwen.” He handed them over, “All the cards are linked to the Torchwood accounts, and everything is in the right names.”

Jack shoved the wallet into his jacket pocket and as he raised his head, he transformed. The shoulders relaxed, the eyes sparkled. It was like watching a prize-fighter getting ready for round one. Gone was the moodiness, and Captain Jack was back.

“Right time to get this show on the road. Keys?” Ianto handed over the car keys to both of them. “One of us will be in touch with you regularly, Owen is in charge while I'm out of Cardiff, but call if there's anything I should be aware of. Don't take unnecessary risks. Right Mrs Harcourt, shall we?”
Jack extended his right arm, and Gwen slipped hers through his, and he led them across the floor to the cogwheel.

Tosh and Ianto watched them leave.

“You know, they do make a very attractive couple.” Ianto was looking at the door, but not really seeing it.

* * *

Gwen and Jack had moved in to number 6 on the Thursday, and it hadn't taken long for her to unpack everything that had been dropped off; she'd been impressed by the choices Ianto had made. All the clothing suited her role as housewife, and Jack's wardrobe was smart casual, nothing too gaudy, nothing too obvious. She'd set up the separate bedrooms, Jack being the gentleman and taking the spare room, but all their stuff was in the master bedroom just in case they had anyone snooping through the house.

She'd been fuming at Jack. Beyond carrying some of the heavier boxes around he'd been bloody useless. Mooching around, opening and closing doors, asking her what things were - “It's a thermostat Jack; it regulates the temperature for the central heating”. He'd then parked himself on the sofa in front of the TV and kept zapping through the channels, complaining nothing was on, and asking inane questions about the programmes he stumbled across as if he'd never seen any of them before – to give herself some peace she'd found the History Channel for him and walked off with the remote in her hand.

After that incident, she'd sorted out all their stuff, she'd done the shopping, she'd made the meals, she'd cleaned up like a proper housewife. And by God Jack was messy, clothes left lying, damp towels strewn over the bedroom floor after a shower, a trail of crumpled newspapers, mugs, glasses, bits of paper. He just left things lying when he'd finished with them. She felt that she'd spent half her time clearing up after him. I don't know how Ianto does it. It made her yearn for Rhys, who helped out, and mostly tidied up after himself, a real 21st Century gentleman.

Give Jack his due, he was thorough when it came to getting their cover story straight. The Thursday evening, after dinner, he'd gone off to the room they were calling the study, and sat and went through the dossier that Tosh had compiled, encouraging her to do the same. She'd sat in the sitting room, with a glass of wine and read and read and read. Friday morning they swapped folders and gave each other a thorough grilling. She was quite proud that she'd done better than him in remembering the details.

* * *

That afternoon, the doorbell rang and a yell of “Gwyneth! Door!” made her realise she was supposed to answer, even if he was nearer. She didn't gasp in surprise when she opened the door, at least not out loud.

“Hello?”

“Oh hello! Welcome to Rhydygrisiau. We saw you moving in yesterday, and I held back until today to come round and introduce myself. I'm Joanna, Joanna Eberhart, we're at number 8.”

Gwen shook the proffered hand, staring at the person she'd practically stalked for a week.

“Gwe... Gwyneth Harcourt. Nice to meet you.”
“All settled in? I know how stressful it can be and I just brought you something to say welcome and make you feel at home. Here you go!”

Gwen looked down and took the offered bag from Joanna. “Do you want to come in? I can introduce you to my husband?”

“Oh, if it isn't a bother? It's a bottle of wine and home-made fruitcake.”

“Did I hear someone say 'fruitcake'?" Jack appeared from behind Gwen and slung an arm around her waist, “my favourite.”

Gwen did her best not to jump at the physical intimacy, it was different to Jack's usual touches, more possessive, but then again they were supposed to be a married couple. “Joanna, may I introduce you to my husband? Jason, this is Joanna – she's from number 8.”

“Pleased to meet you Joanna. Come in, have a seat.” Jack was all twinkling charm, mildly flirting.

“That would be lovely.” The three of them moved through into the sitting room, Gwen fussing with clearing up the papers on the coffee table while Jack and Joanna sat down.


“Oh no, I can't stop for long. I've got to get back and get on with the laundry. Don't you find it takes such a long time? I try and I try and I just can't get it done any quicker.”

Gwen perched on the sofa, next to Jack. Again, Jack reached out and his hand laid on her thigh. She was going to have a word with him about that, and the laundry. “It is a chore, but I just get my head down and get on with it. Are you sure you don't want anything?”

“Oh, I couldn't put you to the bother,” Joanna gave them both a big smile. “We're having a barbecue on Sunday, as a ‘Welcome to the Cedars’ for you both. All of the neighbours and a few other people from the town. That way you can meet everyone.”

“That's very kind of you Joanna,” Jack gave her a big smile of his own, “we'd be delighted to come, wouldn't we, darling?”

“Oh yes, dear – is there anything we can bring along?”

“Oh no, don't worry at all. It's all sorted out. Everyone is bringing something. All you have to do is turn up, and be the guests of honour.”

There was a pause as Gwen waited for Jack to say something, he was obviously taking the conversational lead. Joanna sat looking expectant, as if waiting for the next thought to arrive.

“Oh, look at the time!” She peered at her watch. “I must dash. Anyway, it was so lovely to meet you both, and I look forward to seeing you on Sunday.” Joanna had risen from her seat and was making her way to the door. “If there's anything you need, just pop round. Anything at all.”

“Thanks for the offer Joanna, and thanks for this,” Gwen gestured to the bag she'd left on the hall table, “See you Sunday!”

Gwen leant on the door, and gathered her thoughts together. Test number one was over, with the multiple choice exam on Sunday. How on earth was she going to remember her own cover story and learn and remember all these new people?
Sunday afternoon, and Gwen was standing in someone's back garden, a glass of Pimms in her hand. God, but she hated Pimms - sickly sweet and full of bloody vegetation, but best to show willing.

She and Jack had gone over the plan of attack for the barbecue. It'd been a windfall for them, as it gave them the chance to check out the lay of the land, observe the movers and shakers of Rhydygrisiau society. The plan, such as it was, was to be as charming as possible, and pump everyone for information. As newcomers they could get away with asking obvious questions.

She was half listening to the women clustered around her; Joanna was a perfect hostess, thrusting the glass of Pimms into her hand as soon as she'd arrived and escorted her around, introducing her to everyone. Gwen was now in a cluster with Joanna, and two other women, Bobbie and Marie. They were talking about the local school, which Gwen couldn't really join in on. Her eyes were on Jack, who'd gravitated to the men surrounding the barbecue, watching as he turned on the Harkness charm. He had the glass of Pimms in his hand but she'd seen him tipping it out from time to time, while pretending to drink. He laughed at the jokes, not his usual loud guffaw but lower key, mirroring the behaviour around him. Gwen wondered just how often in his life that Jack had arrived in a strange place, and had to assimilate himself quickly – she'd probably never know. She decided to have a wander over, she was bored and it looked more fun. Gwen made an excuse and made a bee-line for the barbecue.

“How's it going? Any chance of a sausage?”

“Gwyneth! Let me introduce you to the guys.” Jack raised his arm and she slipped under it, “Walter, Pete, Dale, and Martin.”

Each of the men nodded in turn as Jack said their names, and gave her an appraising look. She was getting used to this now, there seemed to be an importance on appearance and looks. It still rankled though, like she was a commodity, a piece of meat. She'd been a bit mortified on turning up in jeans and a top, to see all the women in long floaty summer dresses, fully made up – she'd almost turned around to go home and change, but Jack had had her elbow and steered her into Joanna.

“Don't let Jason near that barbecue, you'll either end up with burnt offerings or food poisoning!” she gave a little laugh at her joke, and flushed a little at the response. Jack had chuckled, but the other men looked offended on his behalf. *Ooops – I've said the Wrong Thing.*

“Gwyneth's an excellent cook, I leave it all up to her.” Jack's follow up seemed to mollify them.

Dale, a tall gaunt man, gave Gwen a simpering smile. “There's something appealing about a woman who can cook, more homely.”

Gwen very nearly answered back, but there was a look in Dale's eyes that she didn't quite like, almost “dare you”. “Oh, I like to make sure my man's well looked after, and Jason does little things to help. He's very handy with a toolbox.”

“Seems like you've got a keeper there Jason,” there was a round of sycophantic chuckles at Dale's comment, “You will come along to the next Rotary meeting? We need men like you taking part.”

“Sure. Just give me the details,” Jack waggled his now empty glass at Gwen, “Honey, get me a refill will you? There's a good girl.”

Gwen gave Jack a quick look – *was he serious?* - and could see in his eyes that she was to play along. “Of course darling. Same again?”
“Nahh, just a mineral water. Don't want to be out of it, wanna make sure I tuck you in nice and tight.” The last of this was given with a trademark Harkness leer, and seemed to have the approval of the men around him.

Gwen took the glass from him, and smiling sweetly, moved back to the drinks table. Banging the glass down, she felt herself flush with anger. What the hell was Jack doing? She began clanking the bottles around searching for the mineral water. She felt a warm presence next to her, and got a whiff of Jack. She didn't look up, but started off on him.

“What the hell was that all about? Since when were you such a chauvinist?”

“Just playing the part Gwyneth. These guys are old-fashioned. They like their women feminine. I picked up a lot this afternoon. Gimme the glass, and mingle. We'll debrief this evening, but you've got to go along with me here.”

Gwen turned to Jack, and with the biggest grin possible handed it over. “There you are darling. Anything else I can get you?” She noticed over his shoulder that their whispered argument had attracted the attention of the group of men and hoped her act had thrown them off.

“No honey, that'll do for now.” He slapped her backside and swaggered back to the men. Gwen flushed, and then remembering where she was and who she was, she looked over at Jack's back and gave him an affectionate glance. Now, more bloody mingling!

Gwen toed off her sandals and tucked her legs under her on the sofa. The curtains were drawn, the door double locked, she'd gone round the house with the PDA checking for bugs, and everything was all clear. Jack hadn't wanted an evening meal, as he'd stuffed himself at the barbecue. Without the others around, Gwen was noticing how much Jack really ate.

The rest of the barbecue had continued in the same vein. Jack getting all pally with the men, and Gwen having to suffer the women. By the time they left, Jack was a firm favourite, and Gwen was ready to drop dead of boredom. Now, she was ready to drop dead of tiredness; her legs ached from standing up all day and her cheeks hurt from wearing that inane smile for so long.

Gwen could hear the murmur of Jack's voice from the study, and an occasional chuckle. Must be on the phone with Ianto. She realised she hadn't spoken to Rhys for at least a day, and made a note to call him after she and Jack had debriefed. Yes, they'd debrief, and then she'd have a nap and...

She woke up with Jack shaking her shoulder, and softly calling her name. She bolted upright and wiped at her mouth, worried about drool.

“What time is it?”

Jack looked at the mantle-clock. “Quarter to ten. It's been a long day, you must be tired.” He looked across at her, an affectionate look in his eyes.

“Not too tired to want an explanation for this afternoon's bullshit. What the hell, Jack?”

“And Gwen's back, firing on all four cylinders,” he grinned, and then his face grew serious. “This is a screwed up town, Gwen. Tell me about your afternoon.”

“Where do I start? They're nice enough people, but I couldn't live here permanently.” Gwen pulled at the band holding her ponytail up, and shook her hair loose. “The only subjects for discussion are schools, shopping, and housework. Jack, these women don't have an inner life! Not
one of them asked me about myself. Everything was about either you, or the house. How did we meet, how long have we been married, are we going to have kids?” She gave an exasperated sigh.

“And the men?”

Gwen narrowed her eyes at Jack, and started jabbing a finger towards him. “Yes Mr Harcourt. What the hell was that about? I've never felt so much like a piece of meat, not even when I used to go out on the pull.”

“Gwen, it's like these men are a throwback to 60 years ago.” Jack leant forwards, his hands clasped, a serious look in his eyes. “They seem to truly believe that a woman's place is in the home. The only women they know that work, do so because they have to, not because they want to, and it's only in menial jobs.”

“But why Jack? Is this some kind of last bastion for the unreconstructed male?”

“No idea yet, but this Rotary thing sounds promising. What is a Rotary?”

“My Dad's in one, so's Rhys. It's like a club for local businesspeople. They get together and do good works.”

“Makes sense. All the guys I met today seem to be the movers and shakers, they're the ones that own the business park. I got the feeling that it's a 'No Girls Allowed' kinda club,” Jack shrugged a little and settled down in the sofa. “I think I'll get further with the guys there, they seemed a bit on their guard at the barbecue, maybe just sussing me out.”

“Hah! I've got more invitations than you. I've got a coffee morning tomorrow at Marie's. Tuesday there's a trip to the beauticians, and Wednesday, Joanna's taking me to the WI meeting.”

“Not bad Gwen. You are going to have to suck it up and get to know these women. Perhaps they'll let something slip with no men around?”

“I bloody well hope so. I don't think I can stand much more of this.” Gwen took a sip from her wine. “We have to do this quick. Rhys'll be getting worried, bless him, better give him a ring... Everything OK back at the Hub? Tosh sounded good when I spoke to her earlier. Ianto says she and Owen are an item now.”

“Yeah... He said pretty much the same to me. I wondered what was going on. Owen so damn cheerful, and Tosh positively glowing. Might've guessed it was that.”

“I'm pleased for them though, Owen's a good man under that bastard exterior, and Tosh deserves someone, after Mary and everything.”

“We'll see. Ianto said there's not much going on, nothing they can't deal with. And the Rift's been quiet too, thank God.”

“See you in the morning. There's a certain haulage expert in Cardiff that will be chewing the furniture if I don't ring him.”

* * *

Ianto was taking his turn in the Tourist Office, his comm. open to receive but not to transmit, and he had the CCTV feed cycling through the various cameras; he took care not to move the cameras beyond their usual sweeps – keeping everything as normal.
It had been good to speak with Jack last night, their conversation ranging between work stuff, and the more trivial. *Funny, it's easier for us to talk when we're not face-to-face.* It reassured him, hearing Jack talking about the barbecue, and his observations of the townspeople. It fitted in with what he'd observed when he'd visited. Seemed like they were finally getting somewhere. Though, the one thing he really wanted to talk to Jack about, he couldn't. He wasn't sure how secure the phone line was.

In the four days since Gwen and Jack had left for Rhydygrisiau, Ianto was becoming more and more uncomfortable. There was something nagging away at him, like a picture hanging skew-whiff on the wall. With the two of them out of the Hub, the atmosphere settled down – they were both such forces of nature, they seemed to take up the space. With Jack not around, it meant his focus fell more on Tosh and Owen, and he wasn't happy with what he observed.

Left on their own he, Tosh and Owen would get on with it, a bit of banter from time to time, but they caught up with outstanding work, using it as a breathing space. This time it was different.

Owen's change of behaviour was beginning to grate on him, it seemed like Owen was trying too hard, too much niceness, and he just didn't feel like the Owen he knew. He could understand where Owen was coming from, but he felt that Owen was too set in his ways to change that much, and surely the damaged snarky Owen was the one that Tosh fell in love with, why did she expect him to change? Why was she happier with this mild-mannered, polite Owen? Ianto accepted that he was a suspicious man – if a thing was too good to be true, then it probably was.

There was a knock on the glass pane of the door which opened to reveal a motorbike courier, visor up and a package in his hands.

“Delivery for Sato?”

“I'll take it. Where do I sign?”

The courier thrust a PDA into Ianto's hands. “Just here.”

Ianto took the stylus, and squiggled a signature, handing the device back.

“Cheers mate!”

After the courier had gone, he examined the package. No return address, no postmark to indicate where it had come from. Just a neatly printed label. It wasn't overly big, but it was an odd shape. He couldn't feel the detail through the padding, just a general outline. What was it?

Ianto flicked his comm. to transmit, “Tosh? Got a package here for you, shall I bring it down?”

<<Oh, yes please Ianto. I've been expecting it.>>

“Okay, I'm on my way”

Ianto closed and locked the Tourist Office, and made his way down to the Hub, taking the stairs to check everything was in working order; lights were working, the surface was clear of grime and slime – the underground nature of the Hub made it prone to damp and mould, which made some surfaces treacherous if he didn't keep things scrubbed and disinfected. A day a month swabbing all the common routes through the Hub kept the worst at bay. Walking down the stairs also gave him time to think about his niggling problem.

Tosh was different too, not as much of a marked change as Owen, but it wasn't something he could ascribe just to being in love. She was über-confident; normally you would see flickers of doubt or uncertainty flicker across her face, especially when they were in the field, not quite trusting her ideas
or her decisions. But the past couple of days they'd been out rounding up stray Weevils, and investigating a Blowfish sighting, and she'd been sharp; giving orders, fending off a Weevil almost singlehandedly.

He had to break off his musings, and bring himself on guard now he was in the main Hub. Why do I feel the need to be on guard in someplace that should be safe? Another thought to chew over later.

“Here you go Tosh,” he dropped the package on her desk, “Coffee?”

“Mmmm – yes please.” She glanced at the package and continued with her work, rapid keystrokes, and running what looked like four different programmes simultaneously, her eyes clear and wide, flitting from screen to screen.

“Not going to open it?”

“Not just now, I want to finish this first.”

Ianto turned and made his way to the kitchen area, preparing the coffee. The motions came automatically now, allowing his brain to free-wheel. Another thing to add to the list of “Odd Things” - Tosh not opening a package like a kid at Christmas.

His vision swam a little, and he pinched the bridge of his nose to relieve some of the tension. Too much squinting at a screen. He stopped with his fingers still pinching the bridge, recalling the past few days. Bridge of my nose. Tosh. Tosh wasn't wearing her glasses. Hadn't been since she'd come back from Rhydygrisiau. Thinking about it, neither had Owen.

* * *

Gwen came back from Marie’s coffee morning, and threw herself into the housework; she scrubbed the kitchen floor as if it had personally offended her. She had to do something otherwise she'd scream. The coffee had been lovely, not a patch on Ianto's though, and Marie's house was like a show home, not a thing out of place. Marie even hovered with a cloth always in her hand. It reminded her of childhood visits to her great-aunt; too terrified to relax just in case she spilt her orange squash, or got biscuit crumbs on the carpet.

She'd tried, Lord knows she'd tried. She smiled at the hello's, she responded to the endless round of 'how are you?', said how delicious the cake was, how lovely the flowers were. She'd tried to ask the women about themselves, but all she got back was commentaries on housework, or dress patterns, or how well little Bronwen was doing at school. The only complaints seemed to be about how they couldn't get their whites white enough. She even tried to get the women to talk about their husbands, but beyond how wonderful their husbands were, she got little information. 'Oh no, I don't know anything about what he does. He goes to work and I make sure he has a lovely, comfortable home to come back to.'

Gwen could see why Joanna had changed. It really was relentless, being surrounded by such paragons of housewifely virtue; it wore you down, and in the end, she supposed, you had to join them.

After the floor had borne the brunt of her frustration, she changed into jeans and a top, and dug out the scanner, and did a sweep of the house. Nothing. Damn, she was going to be late for the GP. She found the big handbag Ianto had given her, loaded it up with everything she thought she'd need – torch, two spare magazines for the pistol, and the lock-pick gizmo, and the Snoop-o-scope - and jumped into the Mini. At last, something concrete, something that might give results.
Jack was enjoying a stroll around the town, the very picture of a wealthy man of leisure. He visited all of the shops in the high street, ambled around the Co-op, chatting for a while with people he recognised from the barbecue – mostly the women, they were heavenly to look at, but something about them set his teeth on edge. They were almost too perfect. The atmosphere of the town couldn’t account for it all. There had to be something deeper, a reason, an explanation for it. And that's what he was strolling around town for.

A casual observer would have guessed that he was killing time, *more fool them*, but his sharp eyes took in every detail. He noted a lot of details. How clean the streets were, how well-behaved the children were, how friendly and polite everyone was, how there were few old people, how all the buildings were in good repair, how prosperous the shops were. This was not normal, this was not the Wales he'd grown to know and love. There was something rotten in the heart of Rhydygrisiau, and he would find out what it was and eradicate it.

His wrist-strap beeped to let him know that Gwen had left the house, she didn't realise that he had tuned it into the house's alarm system, off for the appointment at the GPs – and to see if she could get further than Owen.

Jack had lived a long life, and a lot of that in dangerous situations, some of them of his own making. He knew there was no CCTV in the town, but he knew damn well that he was being observed. Nothing too obvious, but he could feel them watching. He was an unknown quantity, and whoever was behind all this wanted to get the measure of him. He was sorely tempted to shake things up a little, see what fell out, but his instincts told him to play a long game. He could feel the curl of disquiet settling in his gut – the town, and the people in it, put him on edge. And he did not like that feeling one little bit. Jack Harkness is always in control.

He also had reservations about Tosh and Owen, but he trusted Ianto's judgement. If there was something off there, he knew that Ianto would let him know. That was one of the reasons that he'd left Ianto behind in Cardiff. Gwen was a good copper, but tended to be a little too trusting, too keen to see the best. Ianto was a suspicious bugger like himself, and could be relied upon.

He may not tell his team everything, may not always show what he was thinking – a leader's prerogative. Need to know. But he wouldn't put them in jeopardy if he could avoid it. The trouble was that jeopardy had a nasty habit of arriving unannounced.

He was taken out of his musings by the chiming of the ornamental clock in pride of place in the middle of the high street. Crap, if he didn't get a shift on he'd be late for his appointment at the business park. Jason Harcourt was interested in seeing what the business park had to offer, so he was getting a guided tour.

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Gwen was sitting in the waiting room at the surgery, idly flicking through a six-month old copy of Country Living – not her magazine of choice, give her Heat any day – waiting to be called through.

She'd laboriously completed all of the forms, and had only drawn a blank once at giving the details, but a quick text to Ianto had given her the detail she needed. The forms had been neatly stuffed into a docket, and she'd spotted one of the receptionists rattling through the inputting of her details. Provided that Tosh had done her job well, everything would tally.

“Mrs Harcourt? Doctor will see you now.”
Gwen looked up and saw one of the receptionists gesturing to an open door. She dropped the magazine on the table and headed over.

“Third door on the left dear.”

“Thanks.”

She walked down the corridor, and knocked. She was seeing Doctor Evans, a good Welsh-sounding name.

“Come in”

She pushed the door open and walked into a modern consulting room. Clean and modern equipment, a shiny new computer, and a bit of a hunk of a doctor. Not that there weren’t good looking doctors, but it was a bit odd nevertheless.

“Take a seat Mrs Harcourt, I'll be with you shortly. Just finishing this off.”

“Call me Gwyneth, everyone does.”

“Ok Gwyneth,” he flashed her a charming smile, “two shakes.”

Dr Evans, Geraint – going by the certificates on the wall - tapped a couple of times on the keyboard, and then clasped his hands and leant back in his chair.

“Now, I see you've just moved to Rhydygrisiau. We'll need to do the full range of tests, but given the information on your form, I can't see any issues. Anything the trouble?”

“Not really. Just needing to register with a doctor. We only moved here, gosh, less than a week ago, but I like to get all these things sorted.”

“Very sensible of you Gwyneth, settling in fine?”

“I suppose so, but... well... I find the neighbours a bit intimidating.”

Dr Evans cocked an eyebrow.

“Don't get me wrong they've been nothing but friendly, but they're just so perfect. Not sure I can compete with that.”

“I think you'll be fine, you've just moved to a new town, having to make new friends, it's a period of adjustment.”

She gave him a grateful smile, “So, should we get started?”

“Right,” acknowledging her change of subject, he reached into a drawer and put a small lidded jar in front of her, “if you could just provide a sample? I'll just nip out and get a fresh coffee, you want one?”

“No, I’m fine thanks.” She picked up the jar, and waggled it, “Up to the brim?”

He laughed as he stood in the doorway, “As much as you can. There’s a WC through there.” With that he closed the door behind him.

Gwen knew she didn't have much time, so quickly fished the copy clamp gizmo out of her handbag, and attached it to the PC, waiting for the light to change from red to green. She kept the WC door
open to keep an eye on it as she did the fiddly and messy business with the jar. As she was screwing
the lid back on, the light turned to green. A knock on the door told her that time was up.

“Just a second!” She waddled through from the WC, unclipped the device, shoving it in her
handbag, and did up her jeans, “All sorted now.”

Dr Evans came through the door, a coffee in his hands. “Thanks Gwyneth, shall we get started on
the rest?”

She gave him her best smile, satisfied that she'd now got something to work with.

* * *

“Jason!”

Jack turned around from locking up the SUV to see Martin waving to him from across the carpark.

“Hey Martin, just in time, eh?”

Martin walked over and shook Jack's hand. A good firm grip, a little too firm. *Someone wants me to
believe they are completely trustworthy.*

“Bang on time. Shall we start?”

“May as well, I don't want to take up too much of your time.”

Both men began to walk around from the carpark to the warehouse. The heatwave had continued,
but here at the business park, the worst of the summer heat was tempered by a cool breeze coming
from the surrounding forest. Arriving at the door of the warehouse building, Jack took off his
sunglasses and tucked them into the neck of his polo shirt.

“What was it you were looking for?” Martin swiped a card through a reader, pulled the door open
and ushered Jack inside.

“Oh just somewhere to store some of the bulkier items that I can't at the house. There's a limit to
how much I can leave there without Gwyneth commenting on how she can't move around.”

“Right. So you won't need office space then?”

“No, there's an office at home. I tend to work from home, being a freelancer and all. But there's
some stuff that I can't store at the house, so I'm looking for storage rather than having stuff shifted.
You guys mentioned that you all use this place, so I thought why not?” Jack gave his wide
reassuring “I trust you man” grin.

“What kind of stuff? We're not geared up for storing dangerous items.” Martin led Jack through to
a small meeting room. “I didn't quite understand what it is that you do?”

Jack pulled out a chair and sat down, legs slightly apart, open and confident. “Yeah – I get that a lot.
Between us Martin, the research and defence bit is more like surveillance and security. I help other
people stay safe and out of trouble. And that means I have some specialist equipment that I don't
want Gwyneth knocking over when she's cleaning.”

“I understand, I think what we'll do is have a look round, and then you can see if what we have is
what you need. Then, if it's all okay, we can draw up the paperwork.”

“Sounds like a plan. Let's do it.”
Martin and Jack headed for a set of doors just behind the reception desk, and a Jack spotted the secretary pushing a button on the desk to release the doors.

“I like the security systems you've got here Martin. Reassuring.”

Martin puffed up a little “We've got CCTV covering the entire site, each of the offices has its own keycard system, all the doors and windows are alarmed, and to get beyond the main reception areas you need to use the keycard again, or have someone like our Kayleigh here let you through. We've also got Keith, our security guard patrolling the site. What do you think, what's your professional opinion?”

“I'd say you've done as much as you can. If someone's determined enough they'll find a way, but what you've got should put most people off.” Martin seemed pleased with Jack's assessment.

“Just through here, mind out for the doors. They've got a fierce spring to close them.”

Jack stepped neatly out of way – noticing that the doorway had a hermetic seal. “Whoa, that's fast!”

“Part security and part fire proofing, if the fire alarm goes off then the doors close, if the heat gets up high enough then the seals swell, airtight.” Jack nodded, he also guessed that the doors would seal for other reasons too.

He looked around the space; the usual warehouse shelving units, a mini cherrypicker cum forklift sitting neatly in one corner, fire exits on each wall. The space seemed smaller than it should have done. He moved off, strolling around, surreptitiously pacing the floor area.

“Is there something more secure than this? More like a lock-up?”

“Yeah, we've got a few cages on this wall.” Martin gestured to one side where a row of red-painted wire cages contained a variety of boxes, each cage secured with a padlock. Jack spotted another door on the far wall.

“What's through there? More storage?”

Martin seemed to hesitate before answering, infinitesimally so, “Longer term storage, the plant room, and the server.”

“A place like this needs a server?”

“Not just for us, but for the other businesses too, off-site data storage if you like.”

“Someone's paid attention to their IT consultant then.” Jack grinned, letting Martin think he'd changed the subject. “I like it. Any chance of one of the cages?”

“Shouldn't be a problem,” Martin looked over, “there's two free now, any particular one take your fancy?”

“No. Let's do the paperwork. Gwyneth will be expecting me back soon.”

The two of them walked back through to the office. Jack was going to use the cage as a chance to see what was behind the door – longer term storage my ass!
Chapter 5

It was the wee small hours of the morning and Ianto was on the night shift. With Jack out of town they'd had to divvy up this duty between them. He'd been at the Hub all day too, taking power naps in the lulls between activity. Being short-handed took its toll eventually, but it hadn't seemed to affect Tosh or Owen, bright eyed and bushy tailed every bloody day.

He yawned and stretched. Time for another coffee. The Rift Predictor was forecasting a quiet night, so he could afford to doze, but not fall asleep. Taking his coffee and his clipboard over to the sofa, he whumped down, grimacing at a spring that was threatening to break free. He scribbled a note on his clipboard to broach the subject of retiring the sofa. The others might mock him, call him anal, but without his lists he wouldn't get everything done; and they wouldn't get all they needed either. *Done, done, done, done.* Tick after tick down the list. He gave a grimace as he spotted the next task.

Checking the archiving of the internal monitoring, dull but worthwhile. Tosh swore blind that her archival programmes were accurate, but Ianto was a doubting Thomas. *"You can't beat the human eye for spotting something a stupid computer wouldn't."* She'd almost bitten his head off the first time he'd said it, but now even she would do a 'stupid computer' check.

He hauled himself out of the sofa, logged in at Tosh's workstation, and brought up his archive programme. He'd laboriously created a programme to aggregate the databases of the physical archives, the communication logs, salvaged data from Torchwood 1, and shared data from Torchwood 2, and was still in the process of digitising the paper versions of their records. He wasn't done, as nearly 130 years of records took time, Tosh had helped in developing the scanning technology, but the indexing and searching systems were his own babies.

Waiting for his programme to load, he brought up the programme for the CCTV logs.

**WARNING:** You do not have sufficient permissions to use this programme. Please contact your Administrator.

*What the hell?* He reloaded the programme, and used a password of Jack's that he wasn't supposed to know, but well...

**WARNING:** You do not have sufficient permissions to use this programme. Please contact your Administrator.

*Hah!* Next he brought up the communications programme.

**WARNING:** You do not have sufficient permissions to use this programme. Please contact your Administrator.

Curiouser and curiouser. Something, or *someone*, had locked him and Jack out of programmes that they had every right to use. He'd have to ask Tosh in the morning. He logged in to his archival programme, and tried to search for the CCTV and the communications archives.

**WARNING:** You do not have sufficient permissions to view these files. Please contact your Administrator.

*No fucking way!* In a rare display of temper Ianto thumped his fist on the desk. *There's no way this is happening.* Ianto went into the command prompt and executed a series of commands to let him in the back door of his programme. Standard procedure given the amount of times that Gwen locked herself out of programmes, and freezing them for anyone else using them. He checked the audit
history, and spotted that Tosh had reconfigured the programme a couple of days ago, but that the changes she'd made were due to expire the day after tomorrow. Maybe there was a reasonable explanation, maybe there was a backup scheduled, maybe not...

His hand hovered over his mobile, almost ready to press 1 and speed-dial Jack, but his hand returned to the desk. Nodding to himself, Ianto opened up the armoury, and wheeled in the trolley, he moved a few items from the trolley to the shelves, rearranging, checking, dusting, cataloguing. He then went down to his work zone in the archives, and again took a trolley of artefacts around, putting things back where they belonged – the usual Ianto tasks. He then went to a dead corridor, barely working lights and no CCTV, and stowed the items he'd palmed carefully in a backpack - once a shoplifter, always a shoplifter. He returned back to the main area, tucked the backpack under his desk, and began his usual 'search and discredit' trawl of the internet for mentions of Torchwood. *May as well get on with something that I can do.*

* * *

“Hi honey, I'm hooooome!” Jack pushed the door closed behind him, and headed off to where he could hear noise. The kitchen windows were wide open, and the radio was murmuring in the background.

“Through here! You're just in time. Dinner is on the table.” He entered the kitchen to see Gwen taking off an apron, and topping up her glass of wine. “Have a drink with me Jack. I don't want to look like a lush.”

“A small glass then. How was your day?”

“Isn't that what I'm supposed to ask you? And offer you a drink and your slippers?” Gwen's eyes flashed brightly, humour and frustration mingled in her tone.

“Not a good day then?”

“No. The coffee morning was a washout. Couldn't get anything sensible out of them. And I had thought the doctor's had been better. He's quite dishy, you should set yourself up for an appointment.”

“Really? Dishier than Dr Harper?”

“Different. I got the copy-clamp to work, or at least I thought I did, but when I got back I rang Tosh, and she said it was like before. Can see there are big files there but can't access them. I'm getting to the point where I think we should go in all guns blazing. Sod being subtle!”

“Maybe not yet. The warehouse looks promising. It's bigger on the outside than on the inside.”

“I don't follow,” Gwen picked up a fork and looked at his plate. “Well? What are you waiting for?”

Jack picked up a fork, tucked in, and began to explain what he'd seen on his tour between taking big mouthfuls. Gwen marvelled at how he managed to cram so much food into his mouth, and still be understandable. *Say, don't spray! How does Ianto stand it?*

“What're you doing tomorrow?”

Jack wiped his chin with his napkin. There was still food in his mouth. “Gonna take some stuff over to the warehouse and have a better look round, and then I'm at the Rotary in the evening. Special session, Dale said.”
“Oooh – look at you! At least it isn't the Mason's – no funny handshakes to learn. I've got that beauty parlour trip. I'll look like a new woman when you get back. I'll leave you a plate for your dinner. I don't know how long I'll be at the beauticians for.”

* * *

Ianto was waiting in the Tourist Office, waiting for Owen to arrive. He'd tidied up the Hub as best he could, but was shattered and couldn't wait for a few hours sleep.

The sound of a key in the door brought him out of his doze; he stood up, backpack in his hand, raincoat over his arm.

“Good morning Owen. Nice of you to make it!”

“Morning! I'm not late, am I? I did set my alarm clock.”

“Not at all. Bang on time,” Ianto said and yawned loudly, “I'm off to get some sleep. Everything's fine. I finished up a couple of logs, and your supplies should be delivered this morning. Just put them to one side and I'll sort them out when I get in this afternoon.”

“What time will you be back?”

“About four-ish. I'll have a few hours sleep, and I've got some domestic stuff to deal with.”

“See you later then.”

“Will do.”

* * *

Jack reversed the SUV to the bay doors of the warehouse, making sure he didn't bump the transit van parked next to him. His usual driving style didn't sit well in the countryside, and he found he had to be particularly careful about driving “normally”.

He waved through the glass at Kayleigh, the receptionist, and headed straight for the doors to the warehouse, patting his pocket to make sure the item was still there. Swiping the key card, he nipped through while the doors were still opening, and went to the loading bay. Someone, Kayleigh probably, had raised the shutters so he could get to the SUV.

He snagged a trolley, and loaded it up with boxes from the boot of the vehicle. Just some packing boxes with heavy items from the house, so that it gave the illusion of weight. Wobbling the trolley across the concrete towards the cages, he scanned the ceiling looking for cameras. One in each corner, tracking back and forward in the same arc. Good, on an automatic setting. This meant that they weren't being monitored by a human.

Jack took his time unloading the trolley. Making sure that everything was just so, checking the contents labels of the boxes all faced the same way. Stopping every so often to stretch and rub at his back, as if in pain.

All of a sudden he pulled out the snoop-o-scope and froze the cameras. He nipped across the floor, almost dancing as he zigged and zagged – just in case – to the door that he'd spotted the previous day. He pressed a few buttons on his wrist-strap and was pleased to hear a thunk as the lock released. He darted through the door, and took in the corridor. Three doors on the right hand side and one on the left, at the end was another fire door. He checked the doors on the right; a plant room humming with power for the electrics, heating and air conditioning, a store room with trolleys, sheeting,
shelving, and the server room. Jack let out a low whistle as he took a look round the room. *Oh baby, you're a beauty.* This was no ordinary server, even if it did handle all of the businesses; this was a supercomputer – high end, high spec, and way too powerful. Jack regretfully shut the door, not enough time for a good hard look, but it was on his sightseeing list when he had the time to come back – maybe a nocturnal visit?

One door left, and it had a keycard lock and a hermetically sealed door. *Hmmm, and what are you hiding?* He tried a couple of combinations on his wrist-strap, but nothing happened. Time was ticking on, and he'd have to get back to the main warehouse soon. He gave an impatient grunt, and tried a scan through the doors. Barely anything, but he could see a lot of tech lay behind the door.

He closed his wrist-strap and moved back through the door, pulling it closed behind him. A quick glance around the room told him no-one was around, so he clicked the snoop-o-scope and the cameras started up again. His watch told him he'd only taken 2 minutes, tops. Just the right amount of time to think there'd been an equipment malfunction. He went back to the storage cage, and snibbed his padlock to seal it. He adopted a nonchalant air, strolled through the doors to the reception area, and gave Kayleigh a grin – just for the hell of it. There’d be time enough to come back and have a proper look around later.

* * *

Gwen was actually enjoying herself. She’d decided to go with the flow of the afternoon, and the girls (as they called themselves) had organised a bottle of bubbly at lunch to get everyone in the mood for the pampering session.

It wasn’t a huge group, just Joanna, who seemed to have adopted her, Bobbie and Marie and herself. They’d had lunch in the Saloon Bar at the Slaughtered Lamb; Gwen had thought it was too posh looking for such a small town, but it seemed busy enough for a Tuesday afternoon, and the food was surprisingly good. They’d been dropped off by Joanna’s husband, Walter, as they were all drinking; so when the time came, after the argument over who was paying had concluded in everyone splitting the bill, they walked down the high street to Aphrodite’s Mirror.

Gwen enjoyed being pampered. Torchwood was bloody hard work, so she grabbed any chance she could to relax. They’d all chosen different treatments, but all three women had virtually forced her to have a session with Nicky, who did ‘marvellous things with her hands and some essential oils’. So here she was, hobbling down a corridor to the room at the back, her toes separated by a spongy toast rack so her nail varnish didn’t smudge. She had a bit of glow from a shiatsu massage, and her muscles seemed to be finally relaxing – it had been a tense few days, the frustrations of not being able to find out anything useful making itself felt, and that underlying feeling that she was missing something, something important.

Gwen pulled open the door to find a rather demure, but pretty young woman, folding some towels.

“Hello. I’m Gwe-Gwyneth.”

“Oh, you’re my 4.30. Come in, Mrs Harcourt. If you give me your dressing gown and pop onto the table...”

Gwen shed the cotton gown, and reclined as gracefully as she could on the table.

“Oh, what lovely skin you’ve got, Mrs. Harcourt. Very clear, and you’ve got good tone.”

“Thank you, don’t know why though, I don’t really look after it.”
“What I’m going to do is put this warm wheat eyemask over you, and I’m just going to put some oils in the burner. I’ve got to go and get something, so I’ll leave you to get nice and relaxed, and then I’ll be back to finish you off.”

Gwen nodded, and felt the soothing heat of the eyemask, and the scent of lavender, chamomile and something else wafting towards her. There was a soft click as the door shut and Gwen wriggled herself comfortable on the table.

_Gosh, I must be relaxed!_ Gwen felt quite drowsy. _Must be the champagne and the aromatherapy taking affect; Nicky’ll wake me if I nod off._

Gwen was still unconscious when she was transferred to the trolley, and wheeled out of the back door of the beauty parlour.

* * *

Ianto walked through the carpark entrance into the Hub close enough to five o’clock. Tosh and Owen didn’t leap apart as he entered, there were no phone calls abruptly ended, no browser sessions or programmes suddenly closed. Owen and Tosh were quietly working away, frowning in concentration.

Ianto held aloft a bag. “Curry?”

Both heads whipped around fast, and Tosh jumped. “Oh Ianto, you gave me a start!”

“Curry? Brilliant Ianto. Just at the right time.”

“I was going past the curry house, and I thought you two would like something.”

Ianto started pulling the cartons out of the bag, and turned to see Owen walking up the short steps carrying cutlery and plates.

There was a bit of a scramble to open up all the containers and then the aroma of spicy food began to waft around them. Tosh and Owen sat on the sofa, a naan between them, and Ianto sat on one of the chairs, picking at his bowlful.

“How was it today? Anything exciting?”

“Nah, mate. That delivery arrived and I put it away, there was nothing else to do.”

“Thanks. Any news from the Harcourts?”

Tosh peered over her plate at Ianto. “Nothing, though Gwen said something yesterday about them both being out and about today.”

“Oh.”

The meal continued in silence for a few moments longer, until Ianto stood up. “Right, time to crack on – Pteranodons to feed, and all that.”

Tosh gathered up the remains of the meal and the plates and took them off to the kitchenette, and Owen joined her to do the washing up. Ianto headed off to the cold store with a couple of galvanised buckets to get Myfanwy her dinner. Since he’d arrived there was a feeling in the air, a kind of anticipation. Owen and Tosh seemed to be waiting for something. He felt his waistband for his stun gun, and pulled on the thermal gloves and began to shovel assorted fish heads and other parts into the
buckets. No proper communication from Jack or Gwen, that made him feel a little anxious – he'd
give Jack a call after he'd fed Myfanwy.

* * *

Jack drove through the early evening streets of Rhydygrisiau, heading for the Rotary club. Dale had
told him it was the large Victorian house on the road to Merthyr. Even though it was still twilight, he
almost missed the entrance. Cloud cover was beginning to form, big bruising cumulo-nimbus clouds.
The air felt heavy and stifling, and Jack saw the hair on his arms rising from the static electricity in
the air. Thunderstorm coming. His headlights picked out the dull reflection of a brass plaque, and
Jack took the corner and drove up the sweeping drive towards the Gothic mansion.

Gwen had been as good as her word and had left him a plate of food. It had been kind of fun playing
house with Gwen, but after so long in the Hub it was hard to get back into domestic habits – he
realised that Gwen had not been impressed. She'd not been in touch with him, but then she had said
she'd be back later. And nothing from the Hub either, not even Ianto. He was beginning to feel
something was off until he realised that Ianto was taking the night shift again tonight, so wouldn't
have been in the Hub for most of the day.

He parked in front of the main doors, and pulled out his mobile phone and tried to give Ianto a ring,
but was disappointed when the call went to voicemail. He left a cheerful message and then called the
Hub directly.

“Tosh! How are you?”

“I'm fine Jack, and you?”

“Just dandy. Anything to report?”

“Not really, it's been a quiet day so far. Anything I can do?”

“I'm good, just about to head to a meeting and killing time. Ianto around?”

“He's up feeding Myfanwy. Shall I get him?”

“No Tosh, it's fine. Just wondering. Right, better get on. I don't think being fashionably late will
cut any ice here.”

“I suppose not. See you later.”

Jack ended the call, left the SUV and walked up to the studded oak door and gave the ornate
ironwork handle a pull. From within came the distant sound of bells ringing.

* * *

Ianto was making his way back down the stairway to the main floor of the Hub, swinging the now
empty buckets, when he spotted both Tosh and Owen at the foot of the stairs. Something about their
stance made him slow down.

“What's wrong?”

“You must come with us.”

“What's happened Tosh?”

“You must come with us.”
“Is it Jack? Gwen?”

“You must come with us.”

Ianto stopped, halfway down the stairs, buckets still swinging. So it begins.

“Not until you tell me what's wrong.”

There was no verbal answer; both Tosh and Owen pulled out their guns and aimed at him.

“You will come with us.”

“I don't think so.”

In the middle of speaking Ianto pulled back both hands and launched the two buckets. It wasn't going to knock them out, but it was going to slow them down. He didn't bother to see what the buckets achieved, he was off and sprinting back up the stairs, back to the higher levels. In school, Ianto had been the target of playground bullies, and had perfected a zig-zag gait when running away. Instinctively this childhood habit made itself felt, and he dodged and weaved as he clambered up the stairs, a couple of shots being fired – hearing *tsiiing* of the bullets moving past him. He heard the clatter of another pair of feet on the stairs coming behind him. Don't look round, don't slow down. He veered away from Myfanwy's nest and ran along the gantry. Crouching low would slow him down, but standing made him a more visible target. He wasn't sure how good their eyesight was, but he couldn't rely on the dark shade of his suit camouflaging him in the gloom of the upper levels.

He kept going, running down the corridor to the end, and slamming his fist against the light switch. It was now pitch dark in the corridor, only a gleam at the far end from the ambient light, which was soon obscured by one of the others. Ianto reached inside his jacket and pulled out a slim pair of goggles, and fitted them over his eyes. The gloom was replaced by the eerie green glow of night-vision – it was Owen, or rather, whoever was masquerading as Owen. Ianto reached behind him and opened the door. The impostor broke into a run down the corridor, and Ianto slipped through the gap pulling the door closed and shooting the bolts. He opened an access panel, and with trembling fingers, he crossed the wires and heard the pinking noise of the lights going off. His memory of the circuits and fuses was a little hazy, but he thought that this should have tripped the main fuse for the lights in all of the corridors.

He gasped in shock as he heard the fists battering against the door. He took a deep breath to calm himself, and thumbed his comm. unit to receive.

“-hind the door. Bolted. Lockdown now.”

Ianto realised he had less than a minute to get out of the Hub or it would be all over for him. He ran down the corridor; by his reckoning he was heading away from the Hub and Mermaid Quay. He ground to a halt at a seemingly blank stretch of brick wall, and pressed hard in the top right section. The wall pivoted with a groan of rusted metal, and beyond the opening a set of metal rungs glistened in the wall. Pushing the wall-panel closed again, he started to scramble up. He was peripherally aware of the burn in his muscles, and the nausea-inducing feel of the adrenalin coursing through his body. He focussed solely on his hands and the rungs. *Left, right, left, right, left, right.* Before he knew it he was at the top, and knocked his head against a panel. In the confined space he twisted to put his shoulder against the panel and pushed. Over the comms. he heard the sound of the Hub going into lockdown; the siren and the solid *thunk* as blast doors descended and solenoids tripped. *Shit, shit, shit.* With a fear-induced surge of strength, Ianto felt the panel shift above him and was propelled into the space, as the panel flipped open and fell over with a loud clang. Rolling over, he scrambled at the panel and closed it over the hole, satisfied to hear the reassuring sound of the bolts
sealing the panel closed as the lockdown completed.

Rising up to his hands and knees Ianto fought down the urge to just puke, and dragged himself upright. Pivoting on the spot, Ianto grinned in relief as he realised he was still in one piece and out of the Hub. Whoever it was in the Hub was trapped there for a few hours, or at least until they overrode the lockdown. He dusted himself off, and put the goggles back in his pocket. He took out his earpiece guessing that once they realised he wasn’t trapped with them, he’d hear nothing more of value. Ianto moved to the door, and turned the handle, praying that the door was unlocked. No such luck. A quick search of his trouser pockets and he soon had his rather special Swiss Army knife in his hands and was picking the lock. Two shaky-handed attempts failed, and crouching down, he pressed both hands against the door, calmed his breathing, and tried again. This time there was the reassuring click of the tumblers in the lock shifting. A turn of the knob and Ianto was out of the room and moving down the corridor. He found a stairwell, and headed up. The green glow of the emergency exit sign was a welcome sight, and Ianto pushed the bar to open the door. He was out, into fresh air and torrential rain. The Pierhead building was at his back and he was facing the Senned building. Pulling his suit jacket over his head, he joined the flurry of staff leaving the Senned – just another office worker caught in the rain without an umbrella.

* * *

Jack was met by a butler-ish man he’d never met before, but who apparently knew him.

“Mr Harcourt. You’re expected. Mr Coba has asked that you wait in the library. If you’d like to follow me?”

Jack nodded and followed the man, noting the splendour of the house, and noting the route taken to the library.

“If you’d just like to wait in here. There are refreshments on the table, and Mr Coba will be with you as soon as he can.”

“Thanks. Pretty exciting all this stuff.”

The man nodded politely and closed the door behind him, leaving him alone.

Jack took in the room. Standard country house library; floor to ceiling bookcases, a larger fireplace, a couple of reading chairs, and a large desk. The room had no windows so Jack assumed it was in the middle of the house, and it had only one visible door. Jack shoved one of the seats around to face the door, and sat down. He opened his wrist-strap, and began a scan; no other hidden doors, but the desk held a secret of its own. The desk housed a terminal. Jack looked at the desktop, and spotted the groove around the leather inlay of the desk top. He moved some papers and a lamp out of the way to clear the space and started a fingertip search, seeking the spot that would allow the terminal to appear. His fingers brushed against the marquetry around the inlay, and he felt a slightly depressed section. He pressed and held down the small piece of veneer. The leather inlay rolled away, and he was left looking at a touch sensitive screen, with a menu.

> Medical

> Status

> Personnel

> Galatea

> Security
Pressing on “Medical”, Jack began to read a slowly scrolling list of names. Heart-rate, blood pressure, brain activity. Every name seemed to have a slow but regular heart rate, blood pressure indicating the person was at rest, and low brain wave activity. It reminded him of something, from his pre-Torchwood life... Stasis! The readings indicated that these people were in stasis.

Hitting the back symbol, Jack chose Status from the menu, and a sub-menu appeared; CCTV, Obs., Reports. CCTV gave him a rolling feed of the town's CCTV footage, inside and out. *Those external CCTV cameras must be well hidden.* Obs. gave him mini reports, little 50 word situation reports, clicking on Reports gave him in depth reports, different subjects, but all relating to names he'd seen in the medical file.

He looked up at the door, half convinced he'd heard a noise, someone approaching; he kept his finger poised over the button to scroll back the inlay, but after a few seconds he guessed it was a trick of his imagination.

His finger hesitated over the other menu items, but he clicked on Galatea, as this was the file that they'd been trying to crack. Just as the sub-menu opened up, he heard voices coming towards the room. He quickly pressed the button, and had the lamp and papers in his hand, ready to put them down again. By the time the door opened, Jack was sitting in a chair, a glass of water in his hand.

“Jason! Good to see you again. Ready to meet the others?”

“Hi Dale. As ready as I'll ever be.”

“We're in the meeting room. Everyone's eager to meet you.”

Jack grinned, and left the chair, following Dale through the mansion.

* * *

Ianto had flagged down the first cab he'd seen, giving the driver the address and the offer of double the fare for getting there fast. He'd kept his head down until getting into the cab, and sat in the middle so he couldn't be picked up by the CCTV. He knew by now that the two in the Hub would be using the enhanced CCTV programme to try and pick him up. He also realised that using any communications would be fruitless, if not dangerous. Any Torchwood devices would let them trace him, and calling Jack or Gwen would either be blocked or traced. No point in heading for his own flat, or Gwen and Rhys'—those'd be the first places they'd check, and who knew what kind of support they had in the city. Whoever they were.

He paid the driver, and walked down the alleyway to the lock-up, his nose wrinkling at the stale smell of urine and rotting rubbish. He checked the garage doors to see if it had been tampered with, everything looked fine. He unlocked the combination padlock, and opened the door just enough to slip inside, the hinges squeaking. He was reasonably sure that he hadn't been tracked, and knew that there was no CCTV in the area, but it wouldn't pay to dawdle. This was a chance to catch up with himself, a pausing point.

The lock-up was one of many little backups scattered around the city, most of them known to all the team, backups in case the Hub wasn't viable, for one reason or another. There were a couple that were known to only him, though he suspected Jack knew of their existence. This one was his alone, his getaway plan. He'd set it up when he first came back to Cardiff — in case everything went tits-up with Lisa. It hadn, but in the end he didn't flee.

The fluorescent strip pinked into life and Ianto saw that everything was in place, his preparations this morning being fortuitous. He pulled the cover off the motorbike and gave a rather grim smile. The
BMW was the same model that Ewan McGregor had ridden around the world and could cope with on and off road usage. The bike was matt black and dull chrome, nothing too shiny, nothing to draw attention, no ‘Torchwood’ emblazoned on it. He’d checked it this morning and knew it was ready to go, so he quickly emptied his pockets, and shed his suit.

Standing in the chilly garage in his underwear, he pulled the two piece leathers out of the garment bag and shrugged himself in. Simple black leather, no multicoloured strips, no reflective stripes. The boots went on next and he hung the helmet and gloves over the handlebars. *Wait till Jack sees me like this.* He scooped up his pocket contents and stowed them into his leather jacket. He picked up the backpack and slung it over his shoulders, tightening the straps to keep it snug. *Ready to burn some rubber.*

Pushing the doors open with the front wheel of the bike he rolled forward into the alley and locked the garage up again. Checking his watch he saw that he'd taken about 10 minutes to get ready – time flies when you've appointed yourself as the knight in shining armour. He donned the helmet and gloves and stooping down he picked up a handful of mud and artfully smeared the number plate into obscurity. He straddled the machine, and with a throbbing roar started up the engine, a couple of throttle revs, up with the kickstand, and he was off. Off to Rhydygrisiau and the unknown.

* * *

Jack was itching. Itching for the meeting to end. He was a man of action and sitting around for too long made him antsy. He wanted to go back to the warehouse, wanted to have time to get back to the terminal in the library, wanted some action. Anything to get out of the damned chair he was in and away from all this talk!

These guys were very worthy, but so dull - middle-aged, grey men in grey clothes with grey voices. The meeting was full of the men he'd met at the barbecue, plus some others. All very formal, Dale was the chairman, and they went through the agenda with precision. Good works abounded in Rhydygrisiau.

“Agenda Item 4.1. New members,” Dale looked up and caught Jack's eye, “And I'd like to welcome Jason Harcourt. Tell us a bit about yourself.”

Jack took his cue and gave a potted history of Jason, almost reciting the entire summary that Tosh had come up with. He fielded a few questions from the men, nothing too tricky but he dug into his conman past to be convincing. While he was speaking, Dale's mobile buzzed with a text message. Dale looked down, read the message and gave a smile.

“Thanks Jason. I'm sure you'll fit right in here. Now gentlemen, any other business? No? Good, then I declare the meeting over. See you all in the drawing room. Jason, can you hang on for a moment, there's something I need to discuss with you.”

The men filed out of the room, a few laughs as they headed to the drawing room, and the drinks cabinet. Dale stood at the door.

“Let's go back to the library, more private.”

Jack’s survival instincts were screaming at him, but he gave nothing away. “Sure, something to do with membership fees? Can't be cheap this place.”

“No, not cheap,” Dale gave a chuckle, “but we manage well enough.” He extended an arm, encouraging Jack to walk ahead of him. Jack stopped just outside the door, not wanting to have Dale at his back. This man was dangerous, ruthless – a case of like calling to like. The two men walked
back to the library, polite surface chitchat between them, but Jack felt an undercurrent, Dale seemed too damn pleased about something, and Jack had a sinking feeling that it concerned him.

* * *

He'd made good time, the bike was easier to manoeuvre through the city traffic, and once out onto the country roads he opened the throttle and let the powerful engine gobble up the distance. The rain made the road difficult, but the bike handled it well, and he could free his mind to think of a plan.

Get to the house, check Gwen and Jack were okay, or like Owen and Tosh. He knew what to look for now. If Gwen and Jack weren't there, then it was off to the warehouse, Jack'd mentioned something about it being a bit suspicious, and he had a few tricks in his bag that would help getting in and out. After that he wasn't sure what else to do. He'd have to wing it.

He turned off the engine just short of The Cedars, and left the bike at the head of the path that ran along the back of the houses on Gwen and Jack's side of the street. The rain was still lashing down but the leathers had kept him dry enough. He checked his pocket for his stun gun and the plastic cuffs. He counted along the houses, and found number 6. His gloved fingers searched the fence looking for the gate, and fumbling across it, he managed to work the latch through thick gloved fingers and moved quickly and quietly into the garden. He skirted the edge, assuming that there would be a security light; he did not want to set that off.

He reached the back door, and peering inside could see all the lights on, and the fridge door wide open, obscuring the figure rummaging inside it. He guessed it was Gwen, as the hand he saw had a French manicure and a couple of rings. Taking a deep breath and ignoring the butterflies in his stomach, he opened the door as quietly as he could and crept towards her.

Halfway across the kitchen, and Gwen closed the fridge door, and looked up. A scream of fright and the bottle of milk shattered on the floor.

“W-Who's that? What are you doing in my house?” Gwen seemed genuinely frightened.

Ianto realised he still had the helmet with the tinted visor on. Damn. He flicked up the visor.

“It's me. Ianto.”

“Oh Ianto,” the relief was almost tangible, “you gave me such a fright. I couldn't think who it was.”

“Are you alright? Where's Jack?”

“Me? Oh I'm fine. What do you think? I went to the beauticians today.”

“You look great Gwen, but where's Jack?”

“Jack? He's out just now. He said he'll be back later.”

“Where? We have to find him.”

“You're wet through. I'll get you a towel, and make you a nice cup of coffee.”

Ianto almost gave a double-take. How could she be missing the point? He took a better look at her. Perfect hair, perfect nails, full make-up, a dress and high heels rather than her usual jeans and shoes.

“Yes Gwen, a cup of coffee would be lovely.” He reached into a pocket and felt for the stun gun,
his thumb sliding the lever down to stun – if it was Gwen she would be pissed off if he killed her. He
almost gave a giggle at that. *Hysteria? Not right now.*

Gwen turned round to the kitchen counter and busied herself with cupboards and coffee.

“Have you heard from Tosh or Owen?”

He saw Gwen's shoulders freeze, and her arm reach for something beyond his line of sight. He took
a step back. Gwen whirled around, a knife in her hand.

“You must come with me.”

Ianto sighed, and pulled the gun out of his pocket.

“I don't have time for this shit.” He leapt forward, and pressing the gun against her arm, pulled the
trigger.

What should have happened was Gwen slumping to the floor, unconscious. Should have. But didn’t.
Ianto leapt back, bringing up an arm as Gwen slashed at him with the knife, barely missing him as he
danced back, staying on the balls of his feet. Gwen kept moving forward, her face slack, not even
breathing hard. She slashed at him again, and he used his forearm to try and bat her hand away. The
sharp knife sliced through the leather. He pulled back his left fist, and punched her as hard as he
could in the face, his longer arms giving him a better reach. He howled in pain; it was like punching
a wall. But it did make Gwen pause, shaking her head. He took the milliseconds she was dazed to set
the stun gun to kill. No mercy, this wasn't Gwen.

Again he reached up and over and pulled the trigger. This time there was an effect. Gwen stood
there, paused mid-stab. The electrical shock coruscated around her like St. Elmo's fire. His nostrils
wrinkled at the smell of burning plastic, and Gwen toppled over, frozen in the same position.

Ianto stayed back and grabbed a kitchen chair and poked it at her. The eyes were fixed, no response.
He pressed the stun gun against her chest and pulled the trigger again. The charge dissipated into her.
He waited for the residue of the stun to earth itself, and pushed her over onto her back.

Pocketing the gun, he prised the knife out of her hand, and threw it across the kitchen. No telling if
the machine that was Gwen would reboot. He clamped down on the feeling of panic, and began
examining the construct before him. Pulling off his gloves, he touched her; the flesh was cooling, but
definitely felt like real skin, he could see pores, and freckles, and hair. *Where to start?* He knelt on
the floor behind her head and ran his fingers through her hair, searching her scalp. It was a strangely
intimate gesture, and again the panic had to be forced down. His sure fingers found what felt like a
lump, and he used his finger nails to work around it, feeling the slight indentation of a seam. *At last!*
He prised off the lump of skin, and felt again. *Fucking hell – a USB port.* He shrugged off the
backpack and reached inside pulling out a USB cable, and a PDA. He'd filched it from the stores, it
worked but it wouldn't WiFi with the Hub server and that suited his purposes down to the ground.
He'd taken the time yesterday to prise off the back and remove the tracer so there was no fear of
discovery.

Ianto fitted one end of the cable into the port in Gwen's head, and the other into the PDA. He
squinted a little at the screen, trying to decipher what it was telling him. He ran a basic diagnostic,
and there was a reassuring bleep, indicating there was no alien tech. He pulled the stylus out, and
began tapping, trying to access whatever was in there. It must be the way the robot was programmed
– uploads and downloads. He stumbled across a directory, and blanched to see that a malfunction
alert was pinging away. No doubt someone would be on their way to pick up the robot, knowing full
well what had caused the malfunction.
He yanked out the USB and stuffed the PDA into the backpack, picked up his gloves and moved as silently as he could to the door. He heard the front door opening just as he latched the back door closed. He picked his way carefully down the garden, back through the gate, and loped towards the bike. He swung the backpack over his shoulders and pulled on the night-vision goggles. Helmet on, he nudged the bike forward, the engine idling, lights off. He was ready to roar off if there was a sign of pursuit, or to tail the 'repairmen'. Either way, he didn’t have a lot to lose.

* * *

“Take a seat.”

Jack followed Dale into the library, and sat in the chair Dale gestured to, in front of the desk. He shuffled the chair a little as he sat down, angling it so he could see the door in his peripheral vision. He was reassured by the weight of the small pistol in the ankle holster, and brought his foot up so it crossed at his knee, bringing the gun to within easy reach.

Jack fell back on to the skills he’d honed as a conman; he was projecting eager interest, not a hint of worry or fear. “What was it you wanted, Dale? Good meeting – you guys seem to get a lot done.”

“Let’s drop the pretence, Captain Harkness. I’ve known who you are and what you do for a long time now.”

Jack’s face barely flickered. “Who?” His brow crinkled in confusion, “I don’t understand.”

Dale’s face darkened, “Don’t insult me. You are Captain Jack Harkness, leader of Torchwood. Based in Cardiff underneath Roald Dahl Plass.” He moved the lamp papers and activated the terminal.

Jack shrugged, seeing no further point in continuing the pretence. “You have me at a disadvantage. I don’t know anything about you.”

“That’s what was supposed to happen. You think I didn’t know when you and your little team started sniffing around?”

“If you didn’t want us to know, then you would have fed us false information. You want something from us.”

“Well done, Captain. You’re not as stupid as you appear to be.”

Jack’s hand had started to move towards his pistol, but he froze as he heard the sound of the door locking.

“Don’t bother trying anything stupid with that gun of yours. It’s just you and me in here. And I can cause a lot of damage.”

Jack grinned and brought his arms up, and put both feet squarely on the floor. He didn’t need a weapon to cause pain.

“What’s the deal? What do you want?” He paused. “What damage?”

“There’s no deal Jack, everything I want I’ve taken. There’re only a couple of loose ends left now.” Dale gave Jack a warm smile, patronising.

Jack felt his hackles rising. “Is that so? So why the hell am I here?”
“So I can indulge in some point scoring, a bit of gloating. I’ve worked hard at all this, and I need to have someone to gloat at. The men you met tonight are useful, but sycophants – I want to gloat with someone who’ll truly appreciate it.” Dale gave a laugh, not manic, but the laugh of someone who sees the joke.

“Gloat away.” Jack hoped his fuck-you attitude might goad Dale into slipping up, he needed to know more before he took some action.

“How’re you finding Ms. Sato and Dr. Harper since they came back from spying on us?”

Jack froze, and then composed himself, trying for a lighter tone of voice. “Work product is better, but a bit too loved up for my taste.”

“Ah, you noticed that. It’s a default setting, we had to work quickly.”

“So, you’ve had eyes and ears in my organisation for the past week.”

“Inside yes, but I’ve been keeping tabs on Torchwood for a while, you’re on my watch list. If your Miss Cooper hadn’t made a stop here then there wouldn’t have been anything to worry about. It’s standard business practice; you neutralise threats, convert them into opportunities.”

Jack felt he was beginning to see the picture forming. Torchwood had been compromised; two hostile agents had infiltrated without his knowledge. Granted, it was two people he trusted but the warning signs had been there. Next time, and there would be a next time, he’d take stronger action – trust his own instincts rather than be suckered by sentiment. Jack kicked himself for not acting on his instincts sooner, two hostile agents had infiltrated his Hub, damn it!

“Business?” Jack had picked up on the word that seemed out of place, “What do you mean by that?”

“Just what it is. I’m running a business here.” Dale laughed at the look of confusion on Jack’s face. “Did you think this was some kind of plan for world domination?”

“If you know that much about Torchwood, you’ll know what we do, who we watch for and how we work.”

“And you do an admirable job. Though perhaps a bit too high profile for a supposedly secret organisation, but you get the job done. Let’s just say that Torchwood is about to become a wholly owned subsidiary.”

“So you’re going to let us carry on?” Jack couldn't help but let the sarcasm and anger through in his voice, “How generous. I can't allow that.”

“What you want or don't want won't matter very much shortly. I don't want to be running around Cardiff fighting aliens. You'll continue to do that, but in a much more efficient way. Having thought about it, having an organisation so closely linked to the government will be an advantage. No more prying into my affairs, as you'll keep everyone away. My own personal guard-dogs.”

Jack involuntarily clenched his hands into fists. It wasn't Dale's arrogance that angered him, it was his nonchalance.

“Torchwood never has been a private army for hire, and never will be. We'll fight you every step of the way.”

“Don't be so tiresome. Three of your operatives are mine. The fourth is quite ingenious and has
escaped initial capture, but there's only one place he can come, and we'll be ready for him. By the
time he gets here, there'll be no-one he can turn to. What can he do in the face of Torchwood? No
place to hide, nowhere to run.”

*Three? Him?* So they'd got Gwen too, but Ianto had slipped through their net. “That's my Ianto.
Makes damn fine coffee and as resourceful as hell.”

“Be that as it may, there's a wonderful inevitability about thi...” Dale tailed off as a low chime
from the terminal attracted his attention. Jack saw the older man's face frown slightly as he read the
warning on the screen, his face eerily lit from the screen below.

“Trouble? We're like grit in an engine. We might be small but we cause all sorts of problems. And
I bet you're finding Ianto a particularly stubborn piece of grit.”

Dale's face flushed in anger, tapped at the screen for a few seconds, and then sat back smiling.

“I love a good challenge. Mr Jones is more resourceful than I first thought. He's made his
presence known, but we know he's here. It's only a matter of time.”

Jack leant back in his chair, the picture of confidence. “While we're waiting for Ianto, why not fill me
in more on your little enterprise. A condemned man's last request if you like.”

“Condemned? I'm not going to have you killed. You're going to be replaced. All your little
fumblings didn't give you much information, did they? Allow me to enlighten you.”
Ianto offered a silent prayer to whatever deity or entity was looking out for him. There were no signs of pursuit, and he'd followed an ambulance (of all things!) through the night-time streets of Rhydygrisiau. With no spinning lights and no sirens, the ambulance drove away from town. He followed at a discreet distance, the night-vision goggles allowed him to ride without lights. He tailed the ambulance until it drove into the business park. *What a surprise.*

Ianto drove on until he reached the lay-by he'd stopped at a week ago. He turned off the engine, and free-wheeled the bike into the undergrowth, hiding it from the main road. He reached inside his backpack and his fingers scrambled around inside, searching for a specific object. His fingers snagged on a fraying piece of string and he smiled; he tugged gently on the string until it came free of whatever it was caught on. Pulling the string out, he dangled it in front of him. Just a key on a string. Not magic string, but it was a special key. Jack had showed it to him not long after he'd come back.

He'd told Ianto a little of what he'd done, and who he'd been with. Jack also had had the decency not to pretend he'd told the whole story, but Ianto could wait. But the key was important. Somehow it worked just like the invisible lift. Wearing it meant you were hidden, people didn't see you. He'd tested it out one day when the others were all out. Walked out of the Hub wearing it, meandering round the Plass and no-one saw him, but reviewing the CCTV footage later he noticed that it didn't hoodwink electronics.

He slipped the key over his head, tucking it inside his leather jacket, and with backpack and stun gun, headed through the dark woodland towards the business park. He'd have to be sneaky, and that suited him. Leave it to Gwen or Jack to march right up to the front door and start hammering away; he preferred to sneak in through a side window. Disable the security and disable the CCTV, get into that warehouse and find out just what the bloody hell was going on!

He stood on the edge of the wood, facing the business park, the PDA in his hand. To get to the security office, he'd need to neutralise the guard, and that meant finding out *where* the guard was.

The scanner suddenly registered two red dots, on the other side of the site, away from the main gate. *One man and his dog.* Ianto skirted around the edge to meet the guard, and had the stun gun drawn. He stood perfectly still, with his heart in his mouth, as the guard and the dog rounded the corner. The dog began to bark insistently, looking straight at Ianto.

“So it doesn't deceive animals, good to know.”

He saw the guard stop and look at the dog.

“What's wrong, Felix? What's there, boy?” Ianto flinched as the bright light of a torch overloaded his night-vision goggles, but the torch moved on, and caught the flashing white of a tail bounding deeper into the woods.

“What's wrong with you? There's nothing there.”

Ianto held himself still as the guard and the dog moved closer to him; the guard struggling to hold the dog who was still barking at Ianto.

“Ianto reached out and fired the gun. The guard dropped like he was pole axed, but this also meant his grip on the leash was gone – the dog attacked, leaping at Ianto's neck. Ianto brought up his arm to defend himself and felt the Alsatian's teeth biting down through the leather. The pain and the weight of the dog pulled Ianto down to the ground, he fell hard and dropped the stun gun. Panting through

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the pain, Ianto reached around with his other hand and stuck his fingers under the dog's nose, digging into the soft mouth parts. The dog whined and Ianto tightened his grip, forcing the dog's jowls against its teeth. The dog released its grip on Ianto's arm, and he used the freed arm to grab hold of the dog's collar.

“Bad dog!” Keeping a firm hold of the collar, Ianto got to his feet and found the loose end of the leash. Feeding it through his free hand, he kept the dog on a short leash, avoiding the snapping jaws.

“Bad dog! Sit! SIT!” Ianto's tone was clear and firm, and somehow the dog obeyed. It sat, still growling, but it wasn't going for him anymore. “Good dog.” The Alsatian cocked one head to the side and the growling lessened. Ianto didn't want to hurt the dog; the stun gun, even on its lowest setting, would likely kill it. He stood there; boots planted firmly apart and stared the dog down. If you can cope with training a Pteranodon, then an Alsatian is a piece of piss. The dog tried to match Ianto's stare but in the end the battle was won. The dog turned its head, flattened its ears against its head before it slumped onto all fours and then rolled over.

“Who's a good dog? Eh? Is Felix a good dog?” He reached out with a gloved hand and rubbed the dog’s tummy, accepting the dog's submission to him. It wagged its tail happily as it lay there being petted, tongue lolling out of its mouth. A moment later, Ianto gave a slight tug on the leash, and the dog stood up. Spying a handy drainpipe, he looped the leash around it and left the dog to attend to the guard. The battle with the dog had lasted a few minutes and there was no guarantee the guard wouldn't recover soon from the stun. After all, he was a big healthy man. Ianto reached into the backpack and pulled out a set of cable ties and swiftly had the guard bound up. He pulled off the guard’s tie and shoved it into his mouth, securing it with a strip of duct-tape from his bag. He rolled the man over to the nearest building, patted him down for his radio and keys, and left him in the recovery position.

“You're coming with me”, Ianto took the leash and led Felix at a brisk walk around the site to the security office. The dog seemed to be happy enough with Ianto but Ianto wasn't going to take any chances that the dog wouldn't turn on him again. Ianto got the right key on the third attempt and let himself and Felix into the office. The dog padded over to a water bowl and started lapping; Ianto ignored this and sat down at the sophisticated looking monitoring equipment. Pulling off the helmet and gloves he started to investigate the set up. He'd been right; there was ordinary and infrared CCTV. He thumbed through each of the camera feeds, until he found what he was looking for. Images from the past 10 minutes were quickly wiped from the system and a snatch from earlier was spliced in. Ianto did this so often at the Hub, he could almost do it blindfold.

One down, who's next? Ianto easily found the internal cameras that covered the warehouse; clicking through, he saw two men moving about in the warehouse, manhandling a trolley to the rear doors. Another view made him smile – they'd left the loading bay doors wide open. Ianto found a segment of empty footage of the warehouse, and looped it so anyone else monitoring the CCTV would see nothing remarkable.

He grabbed his gear and shut Felix in the security office with a firm “Stay!” and ran over to the warehouse, where he slipped in the still open door and skirted the side of the space until he reached the doorway the two men had entered.

Stun gun in hand, he pushed open the door and entered the corridor. His boots sounded so bloody loud on the concrete in the enclosed space. He tried to walk on tiptoe, but the steel cleats in his boots clicked, giving his presence away. A head, and then a body appeared from a doorway, frowning.

He froze, stock still, trusting that the perception filter would camouflage him.

* * *
Jack was torn. On the one hand he wanted to shut Dale up, wipe that insufferably smug smile of his face. On the other, he was fed up of being wrong footed, seeing only part of the picture. He looked at Dale, keeping his expression neutral.

“Go on then – enlighten me.”

“It's a family business. My great uncle started it back in the early seventies, in Connecticut. He and a couple of friends decided that life would be easier, no, life would be *better* for them if women were more like they used to be, more home-maker and less career woman.” Dale gave a soft laugh.

“He used to work for Disney – that's how he got the nickname of 'Diz'; he used to develop the animatronics for the rides. He set up on his own with a couple others. The premise was simple, if you were the right kind of man, had the right kind of skills to offer, or enough money, then you'd get the perfect wife.”

“There's no such thing as perfect.”

“Interesting. Perhaps something to consider for future versions, but you're hardly our typical customer. We've got 100% satisfaction from our current customers.”

“How did you end up here?” Jack couldn't help himself, he had to know every detail, and he had to stall for time. He knew Ianto was out there somewhere, and no doubt doggedly tracking him down.

“Growth, expansion. Just like any other business. Diz had North America all sewn up. Galatea grew through the seventies, out of Connecticut, into the West, into Canada. About 10 years ago I came across to set up the European office, and where better than in Wales. No-one looks at Wales.”

“So Rhydygrisiau is your shop window?”

“In other circumstances you'd be perfect for us, Captain Harkness, brains and a certain ruthlessness. You're right, we invite prospective clients to come and visit us, see what's on offer. We don't advertise, but there's a referral process, discreet approaches – not everyone wants our product, and we have to be careful that those who approach us are the right kind of person.”

“What the hell do you do? Reprogramming? Mind control?”

“Nothing as clumsy as that. The human mind is a sensitive thing. When Uncle Diz started out it was a laborious process. We manufacture facsimiles, Captain. Perfect replicas, but enhanced. Firmer breasts, bluer eyes, less freckles, perfect chess player. We're even offering business models now – the perfect assistant, so in tune with you it's as if they're reading your mind.”

“I've got one of those already; he's as human as they come, and he's running rings around you... Robots?” Jack shuddered inwardly at the implications, too close to Cybermen for comfort.

“More or less. When Uncle Diz started out microelectronics was in its infancy, computers weren't all that powerful. The initial models were prone to breaking down and were unreliable, but the principle was sound. Each new technological discovery meant we could refine the product. We're
getting quite excited by developments in nano-technology.”

“You're lying. The technology doesn't exist yet for AI that sophisticated.”

“It does, it's taken 30 years of dedicated research, but I can assure you it does. You've been working alongside two examples of it all week, and failed to notice. We don't publish our research, ever.”

“I wouldn't say I hadn't noticed, I just hadn't got around to tackling it.”

“And there you have it, inefficient. But that'll change.”

“And where does Torchwood come in?”

“You were safe, running around Cardiff. I keep tabs on threats, and you weren't a threat... yet. But now, with the data that Tosh has so helpfully been sending through, you've been converted to an opportunity. Such a wealth of technology, and it's now mine. You will be under my control.”

Jack couldn't help but laugh. “You're not the first to want to control me, and you won't be the last. Try it, and see how far it will get you. And when you're done, I'll still be here. I'll take your little set-up apart piece by piece.”

“Bravo!” Dale gave Jack a round of applause, “Well said and exactly what I predicted. There is no choice in this. There is no deal to be made. There is no alternative.”

“You know I'll fight you. You'll have found that out.”

“I expect it. But are you willing to sacrifice your team? Are you?”

* * *

Ianto kept perfectly still, breathing silently. The lab-coated man took a few steps further forward, peering past Ianto into the gloom of the warehouse. *Just a few steps more...* Ianto pressed the squat muzzle of the stun gun into the man's side, pulling the trigger. He grabbed hold of the falling man and lowered him gently to the floor, the only sound being the crumple of cloth and the creak of leather.

One more to go. No point in subterfuge now. He stepped around the technician and walked into the room.

“Where've you bee... who's there? No. NO. Nooo!”

Ianto was relentless; he walked quickly through the room, bearing down on the other technician – he was making so much noise that the perception filter wouldn't work. The element of surprise was still in his favour as he fired the stun gun. It took a few seconds work to bind both men with his handy cable ties. He dug his arms into the other man's armpits and dragged him into the corridor to join the first. Opening a few doors, he found the storeroom and dragged the two men in, and used the guards keys to lock the door. They'd come round soon, but there was little they could do beyond shout, and he could put up with that.

He came back to the main room, and looked around properly. He gasped as he saw the similarity of the room to the mortuary of the Hub. But where the mortuary was dark and dingy, this room was clean and bright. Row upon row of drawers flanking a corridor space, the rows reaching up to the ceiling. Some kind of mechanical assembly on one side, a trolley with the Gwenbot next to a medical cupboard, and a monitoring station.
He soon disconnected the Gwenbot from the monitoring station, and had a peek into the cupboard, he laid the helmet, gloves and backpack to one side, and sat in front of the monitors; he cracked his knuckles and waggled the mouse. The screen resumed from its dormant state, and Ianto was bemused, and then gratified, to see an open session of Solitaire on the screen. Having the time to mess about meant the system was automated, automation meant computer control, and Tosh had taught him a lot about computers. He closed the game quickly and started to look around the screens, trying to make sense of what he was seeing. Two stacked screens were displaying medical data, heart rate for one, judging by the familiar spiky graph. The larger main screen seemed to have the operating system. He clicked through the menus, going down a few dead ends until he found a programme called “Stasis”.

He opened this up and as the programme loaded he wiped his sweating palms together and unzipped the jacket. He pulled the gun within his reach and listened. Not a sound, not even from the store room. On the home screen of the stasis programme was a very welcome magnifying glass icon, and he sighed in relief as a search page popped open.

He tried searching for Cooper, then Harper, the Sato - No matching results. Search again? Y/N - every time.

He stared blankly at the screen for a few seconds and clicking on the Advanced Search he entered dates; from today back to the day that Owen and Tosh first came to Rhydygrisiau – there were 3 matching results – Ianto smiled in relief.

Bringing up the first record, the accompanying picture was of Gwen; his eyes flickered across the screen trying to find out which of the drawers she was in. In the end it didn’t matter, as he found a “Retrieve” button. Cautiously, he clicked the button, and was asked to confirm his choice. After he clicked his agreement, he leapt to his feet as the mechanical assembly clunked into action – the noise seemed so loud.

It trundled along a built-in track, stopped, and then elevated itself. Pausing, there was a pop, a hiss and the rumble of a casket rolling out of the drawer and onto the assembly. Once secure, the assembly made a return journey which Ianto followed, and was ready with the trolley when the assembly ground to a halt. He pulled the casket onto the trolley and released the lever to lower it; applying the brakes, he manhandled Gwen's casket off the trolley and onto the floor. He repeated the same procedure for both Tosh and Owen and went back to the monitoring station. The upper screen now had all three listed in a separate section with a countdown as to when the retrieval process would be finished. He cursed when he saw it would take at least 20 minutes. Too slow. He went over to Tosh's casket and looked at it; there were about 6 catches on the lid of the casket, and a small view panel on one end and a series of tubes and pipes on the other. Ianto sighed and scrubbed a hand over his hair. Now what? Leave them be and rescue Jack, or help?

Coming to a decision, Ianto reached across and undid the catches of Tosh's casket and popped off the lid. His faced paled, and beads of sweat appeared on his forehead, he swallowed a few times to keep the nausea down. Tosh, his friend Tosh, was lying on a bed of memory-foam, her face clear of make-up and wearing a hospital gown. She was connected up to a variety of wires, tubes, nozzles and pipes. The ends that weren't in Tosh all left the casket at one end. Her mouth and nose were covered by an oxygen mask, a feeding tube entering her nose, her temples had been shaved to accommodate monitoring pads, and more tubes protruded from the hem of the gown. He lost the battle, and retched violently; his empty stomach twisting painfully as there was nothing to throw up. It was too much, they'd taken over every bodily function, too much like Lisa in the basement. Wiping his mouth, he reached out and ran his other hand over her cheek, not sure if he was reassuring her or himself.
Ianto's jaw clenched; the disgust being fast replaced by white-hot rage. They'd been turned into lab rats, violated – his friends! He went back to the medical cupboard and grabbed what he needed. He was grateful Tosh was unconscious for the next part. Pulling on a pair of latex gloves, he slowly and carefully withdrew all the tubes, throwing them into a bucket – he left the monitoring pads in place. He took a handful of wipes and cleaned her, wiping away any traces of her storage. He dipped his head into the casket, she was breathing unaided. He went back to the monitoring station and saw that both her breathing and heart rate had increased slightly but she showed no signs of distress. He went back and tucked a blanket around her. He went through the same set of actions with Gwen and Owen, making them all as comfortable as he could. He picked up the bucket and moved it away from them.

Ianto sat back down, rubbing the heel of his hands against his reddened eyes, wiping the sweat from his brow and eventually put his head in his hands. His eyes glanced at the time, and realised in little under two hours he'd taken out a robot, three men and a dog, and rescued three out of four of his colleagues. He was so tired, he just needed to rest a short while he waited for the others to come round...

* * *

Jack considered Dale's challenge. Could he sacrifice the team? He could, he might not like it, but he would if it was for the greater good. Being a good guy meant he had to take the right action, which didn't always coincide with what he wanted; but only as a last resort. And Jack didn't think they'd got to that stage yet.

“Can you Captain?” Dale smiled smugly at Jack, “Could you resist me, knowing that with a press of my finger I could terminate your whole team?”

Jack remained in the chair, the only sign of his agitation was his hands curling and uncurling.

“While you're thinking that one through, there's someone I'd like you to meet.” Dale picked up the phone, “We're ready for you now, come through.”

Jack sat where he was, keeping one eye on the door and one on Dale; the arrival of this new person might give him the chance to escape...

* * *

Ianto jumped up from the computer at the sound of Gwen coughing and spluttering; he'd just finished writing a note after poring over the files on the computer. He moved over to her casket and pulled her out. He sat her on the ground and gently slapped her cheeks a few times.


“'nto, wassa matt'r?”

“You're safe. Help the others. Read this. Got to find Jack.”

Gwen's eyes lolled stupidly in her head as she struggled to focus on Ianto. He repeated himself a few times over until a glimmer of awareness dawned in her eyes and then he thrust the note into her hands.

Grabbing his backpack, he ran from the room, towards the ambulance parked in the loading bay. The vehicle was unlocked, but no keys. “Dammit”, he reached under the steering column and prised off the plastic cover, exposing the wires. A couple of crossed wires later and the engine roared into life. Another handy skill he learnt growing up. Ianto floored the ambulance and hurtled off into the night.
He now knew exactly where Jack was, he just had to get there in time.

* * *

Three sharp knocks on the door, and Dale pressed something on the screen to unlock it.

Jack moved his hands to the arms of the chair, ready to push himself up and towards the door.

The door opened and Jack was already moving before he was brought short by the figure moving into the room.

“No!” The hoarse whisper escaped Jack's lips as his knees went out from under him, landing back in the chair.

“Captain Harkness, may I introduce Captain Harkness?” Dale couldn't keep the glee from his tone as he saw Jack's reaction to his doppelgänger.

It was a perfect reproduction. The same hairstyle, the same grin, the same dimples, the same cleft chin, the same crow's feet. But the eyes! The eyes that Jack looked into were not the same as the ones he saw in the mirror. There was no sign of terrible and wonderful experiences there, just empty blue eyes.

The facsimile moved towards Jack, a hand outstretched ready to shake. “Captain Jack Harkness, how d'you do?”

Am I really like that? Jack took in the mildly flirtatious tone and the wide smile aimed at him. He couldn't shake hands, every sense he had screamed abomination! He scrambled in the seat, trying to sit upright, to compose himself.

The facsimile withdrew the offered hand and stood at ease on the other side of the library, closer to the fireplace. Jack couldn't take his eyes off his double, he was mesmerised.

“How...” Jack's throat was dry. He swallowed, hoping for some saliva, “How did you...”

“How did we make such a replica?” Dale snorted, “We studied and copied you. We tailed you, we eavesdropped, we recorded you moving, walking, talking. And then we fed it into our computer and out came him.” The facsimile gave Jack a nod and a wink.

“He's not quite finished though, but judging by your reaction I think we don't have a lot left to do.”

“Not finished? What else do you need?” Jack was still off-kilter and couldn't mask the shrill tone of fear that crept into his voice.

“You. Well, your mind to be more exact.”

* * *

Ianto wrenched the wheel into a tight turn and barrelled up the driveway of the Victorian mansion. The wheels skidded a little on the gravel, and taking his foot off the brakes he was able to continue up to the house. With some relief he saw that there was only one car in the driveway, Jack's SUV. He wasn't keen on having to fight his way to Jack - he was tired, sore and angry. But he'd do it if he had to.

He parked next to the SUV and reached into the backpack, and hunted for his stun gun. He
rummaged around, unable to feel the chunky butt. Impatiently, he upended the bag onto the passenger seat and scattered the contents. *Shit.* He'd left it back at the warehouse. All he had was the pistol. Ianto check the slide and the magazine; satisfied it was in good order he found the spare clip and tucked it into a pocket. Stepping from the van, pistol in one hand and PDA in the other he scanned the building looking for life-signs. Two red dots appeared on the screen, somewhere in the middle of the building.

Ianto cautiously approached the large wooden front door, and pushed it open with the toe of his boot. The door opened easily, and Ianto stepped through into a well lit entrance hall. Keeping his ears open, he glanced at the PDA and started to move towards the dots, down a wide corridor, the thick carpet muffling his footsteps. As he reached the end of the corridor, not quite sure of which direction to take, he heard the muffled sound of a struggle, and Jack's voice raised in alarm. Dropping the PDA, he ran towards the sound, flicking off the safety.

* * *

Jack was determined that he had to end this, now. He couldn't let Dale take control of Torchwood, hell, he couldn't let Dale continue.

“Enough of this charade, I've had my fun. Subdue him, and take him to the warehouse.”

The doppelgänger lurched into action and came at Jack, arms outstretched. Jack didn't even have the chance to reach for his pistol before the facsimile was upon him, reaching for him, trying to grab his throat. Jack allowed the chair to topple back with him in it, he curled into a ball, allowing the forward momentum of the double to pitch him over his head.

The two Jack's landed in a messy sprawl. Jack raised his fist and tried to punch the other's jaw with the heel of his hand, and cried out in pain as his hand connected with the jaw – it was as hard as steel.

In the time it took for Jack to wince, the double was on his feet, towering over Jack. Jack pivoted on his hips, and scythed his legs around. He toppled the double over and again both were sprawled on the floor.

“Finish it!” Dale's annoyed voice cut through the noise.

Jack tucked his arms into his chest, and rolled away from the double until he hit the wall. Pressing his back against it he raised himself to his feet and then crouched in a fighter's stance, ready to take on his double.

He couldn't help turn as the door to the library swung open violently. All three of them stopped to look at the new figure standing in the doorway, pistol raised.

“Ianto!” two identical Jacks, spoke the same word in the same tone.

“Jack?”

Ianto's eyes moved from Jack, to some bloke to another Jack. *Is there no end to this shitty day?* He took in the two Jacks, both looked rumpled and flustered.

“Ah, Mr Jones I presume? Welcome.”

“Who the fuck are you?”

“It's me, Ianto, shoot him, shoot him!” Both Jacks shouted at him, a weirdly stereoscopic sound.
Ianto's head was spinning, too much noise and two Jacks. He kept the pistol up, his body moving into the correct stance, using his muscle memory from the sessions on the firing range.

“Everyone can just shut up. I repeat. Who the hell are you?” Ianto's gun never wavered but his eyes tracked across the three faces before him, two Jack's with relieved smiles on their faces, and the third man had a smug look on his face. He fixed his eyes on that man, keeping himself still, keeping all three in his sights.

“You don't need to know, Mr Jones. Just surrender your weapon or Captain Harkness will get hurt.”

Ianto barked out a hollow laugh, and pulled the trigger. “Hurt Jack? Don't be stupid.” Dale was screaming in agony, clutching his shoulder. Both Jacks were shocked into silence, but there was still a menace in the room.

“Now, which of you two is the real Jack?”

Ianto wasn't surprised when both of them answered yes. He sighed, and looked both of them in the eyes. “I'm sorry, Jack,” he gave a wan smile, “See you soon.”

BANG! BANG!

* * *

Gwen felt rotten. Her head was throbbing, her throat was dry and there was a metallic taste in her mouth, intimate parts of her ached. *This can't be a hangover...* She looked down and saw she was wearing some kind of nightdress and lying on the floor. In the distance she could hear shouting. She had a hazy memory of a biker who looked like Ianto talking to her. Her fingertips felt the dryness of a sheet of paper.

She shifted into an upright position and brought the paper up to her eyes, the text swam as she blinked her eyes a few times, and the words came in to focus. She recognised the spiky handwriting as Ianto's

*You've been in hibernation and/or drugged. It should wear off. Look after the others.*

There are two men tied up in the room next door. DO NOT release them.

*You're still in Rhydygrisiau. Not sure exactly what's happened. Tosh – please try and find out. Owen – please look after the girls. Gwen – please check the security of the building. Don't leave the building and don't let anyone in. I MEAN IT!*  

Jack's in trouble. I'll be back.

Ianto

Gwen re-read the note a few times hoping that it would start to make sense, and it did, although very, very slowly. Her fuddled mind started to clear, so she got onto her hands and knees and then pushed herself upright. Her legs felt light, like jelly. A groan from nearby sent her wobbling over like a newborn calf towards the nearest casket where an unholy groan, like a ghoul coming out to haunt, rose upwards.

“Bloody hell!” Owen paused in his rant to cough in an attempt to clear his lungs. “What the
fuck... Who's been at my arse?” Owen looked up to see Gwen standing over him, and started shouting again. “Don't just stand there. Help me!”

Gwen knelt down, grabbed hold of his wrists and pulled him up and over the rim, both of them slumping onto the floor.

“Someone is going to pay for this.” Owen's voice was still hoarse.

“Sit still and read this,” Gwen thrust the paper into his hands, “I'm going to look after Tosh.”

Gwen left Owen, and walked over to Tosh, shaking off the last of her stupor. Her memory was coming back. The last thing she remembered was the beauty parlour. Something about a special session with Nicky?! And now she was in some kind of lab, with Owen and Tosh, and they were all in nightgowns. And, her arse hurt. Ianto's worried face came back to her.

Gwen knelt over Tosh, shaking her shoulder, trying to rouse her. “Tosh. To-osh.”

Tosh woke with a gasp, and Gwen was eerily reminded of the way Jack came back. As she stared around the room in confusion, Tosh swallowed a couple of times and licked her lips.

“Gwen?” Her eyes widened in shock, and as she started to come back to her senses, she grabbed at Gwen, urgently and unnecessarily tried to explain what had happened. “They drugged me, we've got to stop them.”

Gwen smiled down at her. “Let's get you out of this thing first. I think Ianto's already in the middle of stopping this.”

Owen crawled over and handed the sheet to Tosh. “We've got our instructions. Gwen, let me look you over, and then you can start kicking arse.”

Gwen sat on her knees, balnket around her shoulders, and let Owen poke and prod her, his hands cradling her jaw and tilting her head from side to side, peering into her eyes, and getting her to follow his finger.

“You'll do,” he gave her a quick grin, “See if you can find some water, or clothes. Tosh?”

Gwen stood up and let Owen in to check Tosh over. She looked around the room and gave a scream when she saw herself lying on a trolley, half draped in a blanket.

“T-That's me!” Her finger trembled as she pointed at the figure, “What...”

She reached for a gun that wasn't there, and shaking her head moved forward. Tosh's head was craned trying to see, still slumped against the casket. Owen was right beside Gwen.

They both looked down at the still figure on the trolley. Gwen was too freaked out to get much closer, so Owen gingerly reached out and tried to take a pulse.

“Whatever it is, it's dead. The skin is cool and there's no pulse. Tosh, you up for some computer work?”

“In a minute.” Tosh's voice was weak and hoarse, but she'd managed to get to the chair behind the monitors. “I just need...” She cleared her throat a few times. “I need a few minutes to wake up.”

“I'll just have a look around.” Gwen shuffled nervously away from the trolley, “Water and clothes, right?”
“Yes please.” Owen had his hand stretched out, the stun gun butt first, saying, “Take this, I think it's the only weapon we've got.”

Gwen nodded as she took the weapon and padded barefoot out of the room.

* * *

Ianto's hand shook a little as he clicked the safety on. Dale's screams had subsided into low moans. Ianto looked down at the two still figures laid out on the carpet; one with a neat hole in his chest, the other with a messy, blood streaked hole, a halo of bright red surrounding him, staining the rug. He was distracted by the muttering coming from the other side of the desk.

“I'll kill you, I'll kill you all.”

Ianto walked around the desk and took in the pitiful sight of the man clutching his shoulder, blood oozing between his fingers, his face pale and sweating.

“No. You won't.” Ianto took the pistol and clubbed the side of Dale's head with the butt. He ‘missed’ the first time and had to go for a second blow, finally knocking him out cold. It wasn't the sporting thing to do, but he was tired and pissed off.

He took some cushions from the armchair and made Jack as comfortable as he could. He sat behind the desk, gun in hand, and took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He reached out for the phone, and dialled a number.

“Yes... DI Swanson, please... Torchwood... Authorisation Code Indigo Juliet 079... Yes...” He stood up a little to look down at Jack. There was no sign of him coming back yet. Ianto pushed the phone to the edge of the table, and walked back around the desk.

“Hello Detective Inspector... No, it's Ianto Jones... No, he's not available right now... I know... I'm sorry... Kathy! We need your help...” Ianto knelt down next to Jack, cradling the phone between his shoulder and chin, and hauled Jack onto his lap.

“When you're quite finished? Thank you... We're in Rhydygrisiau, about an hour from Cardiff... Yes I know, but I have reason to believe the local police force may not be trusted... I think we'll need you to bring along a couple of riot vans, and medical staff... An ambulance at least... I know, I'm sorry... could you come discreetly? No sirens... Meet us at the warehouse at the Rhydygrisiau business park... I'll meet you there... Kathy? If you could come as quick as you can, I think this is a lot bigger than it looks... Yes, I'll tell him... and Kathy, thank you.”

Ianto reached up and dropped the handset back onto the cradle, and looked down at Jack's blank, grey face. “Come on, Jack. Come back. I need you.”

It seemed to take forever before he finally saw a brightening of Jack's complexion. Closing his eyes, Ianto held Jack fast as Jack gasped and spluttered and clutched at him. Jack's legs kicked out like a hanged man. Ianto bent to murmur in his ear.

“Welcome back. I'm sorry about...”

Jack looked up at Ianto with tired but relieved eyes, “You did what you had to do. I wouldn't expect any less.”

True to form, only a moment passed before Jack elbowed his way off Ianto's lap and struggled upright, still a little woozy. Ianto stood up as well and grabbed hold of Jack's waist to keep him steady.
“What's this?” Jack's tired eyes raked Ianto up and down. “I didn't know you were into leather – kinky. I like it. My knight in gleaming leather!”

Ianto couldn't quite help grinning, Jack's back, “I'm sure there's a few things left about me you have still to discover.”

“I'll have to tell you about my time in San Francisco in the seventies... The Castro was...an experience!” Ianto saw that Jack was just stalling, getting himself together, “You look good enough to eat.” Still, they had to hurry. The enemy could be there at any moment.

“Are you ready to go? We need to get back to the others.”

Jack’s face darkened, remembering all that Dale had told him. “Where's Dale?”

“Who?”

“The guy you shot before you shot me. Where is he?”

“Out cold behind the desk. Should we take him with us? He's unconscious, I... I think my gun hand slipped and I accidentally pistol-whipped him”

Jack laughed at Ianto's little admission. “Leave him. We'll lock him in. I'm assuming you've got keys?”

Ianto reached into a pocket and jangled the keys in front of Jack.

“Good. Let's go.”

Jack swung out of the room and marched down the corridor, his shirt drenched with blood. Ianto shuddered at the sight of what he'd caused, and pulled the door closed, hurrying after him.

* * *

Gwen had secured the building, checking all the exits were locked and rolling down the steel shutters on the loading bay. She stood barefoot and huddled under a blanket, glaring at the corridor to the main warehouse space, clutching the stun gun in her hand.

Behind her Tosh and Owen were speaking in low voices, both hunched over the monitor. The men in the other room had finally shut up after she'd yelled the shit out of them and threatened them with yet another tasering.

The sound of footsteps on concrete made her look up; she saw two figures heading towards her through the gloom. Her eyes might still have been unable to focus properly but she managed to hold the gun steady. “Stop right there.” Gwen’s voice barely betrayed her nerves. Both men looked at each other and then stopped. Gwen was on edge. “Step forward, one at a time.”

Jack stepped out into the light and walked up to her slowly with his arms up at head height. “Hey Gwen, nice dress.”

“Jack! Thank god. Who’s that with you?”

“Hullo Gwen. I take it you read my note then?”

“Ianto! It was you! I thought I’d hallucinated the biker.”

“Are Tosh and Owen okay?”
“Owen’s given us a once over, he says we'll do for now. They’re both in there.” She jerked her head towards the room she’d woken up in.

“Come on, Gwen. Get inside. Ianto, secure the doors.” Finally, Jack was back in charge.

He headed straight for Tosh and Owen and stood over them with a hand on each shoulder. “What have you found? I’ve got some interesting stories, I bet you do to.”

Tosh swivelled around to look at Jack and gasped at the round hole with its bloody halo in his shirt. With a grimace, he looked down and jerked a thumb over his shoulder. “He shot me, trying to work out if I was me.”

Ianto looked a little sheepish, but mostly tired and rumpled – then his face paled. “The fake Owen and Tosh. They're still at the Hub!”

“They are, but they're not doing any damage. They're taking care of things while we're here. I've got them monitoring the Rift, and digging the bullets out of the walls.”

Jack and Ianto stared at Tosh, not quite understanding. Tosh was hoarse and looked drawn, but there was a hard glint in her eyes.

“Once we saw the Gwen-thing over there, I did some digging in the mainframe. They're robots, all of them. I got into the command programme and I've hijacked the two at the Hub.” Tosh rubbed her hands over her face. “Sorry Ianto. It must have been frightening for you.”

Jack raised his eyebrows at Ianto; there was a story there and he was damned if he wouldn't hear it sooner rather than later. Ianto, always true to form, had hardly made a fuss.

“It was, but I'd prepared myself. It wasn't you, so don't try going on a guilt-trip.”

“Seems like we're going to have one hell of a debrief when this is all over.” Jack looked around his team, worried and amazed once more at what they’d gone through and survived. But they weren’t safe yet. Far from it. Owen and Tosh looked spaced out, Gwen looked frazzled and Ianto looked like he was down to his last nerve. He’d never seen them look so vulnerable in a long time. He sighed. “What do we need to do to mop up this mess?”

“The police are on their way. While you were... indisposed, I rang Kathy Swanson.” Ianto swallowed, “This is too big for us, we need her help.”

Jack was about to tear a strip off Ianto, when he felt the pressure of Tosh’s hand on his arm. “He’s right Jack, there’s so much more, too much. Look at this.”

Tosh clicked on files, showing the rest of them what had happened in Rhydygrisiau over the past ten years, pointing out the details of what Dale and his cronies had done. Owen took over from Tosh, explaining what had happened.

“There are 68 women in these pods. Some of them have been there for over 8 years. From what I’ve seen so far, every senior member of this community,” he spat the word out, “is involved. We don’t have the capacity, Jack. Hell, I don’t even know if it’s in our jurisdiction, but we can’t just let these women out. This has to be a managed process. The shock could kill them, Tosh and I are weirded out, disorientated and we work for Torchwood! The three of us were in stasis for less than a week, and we're disorientated and below par. Gwen's doing better than me and Tosh, but I feel like I've gone 5 rounds with Mike Tyson.”

Gwen had been silent during all this, going over all she'd learnt in the short time she'd been in the
town; her stomach knotted when she thought of how much time she'd spent amongst these things, these bloody robots - how they'd done it to her, how the double could have gone back to Rhys and hurt him.

“What are we going to do Jack? We can't let these bastards get away with it.” She pulled the blanket closer around her shoulders, her knuckles whitening as she clenched her fingers around the edges.

“Since the police are on their way, we'll leave it to them to round up the bad guys.” An evil smile played across Jack's lips when he spoke again, “Tosh, you know how you've got your impostor under your control...”

“Yeesss.” Tosh's face lit up with almost deranged glee as she realised where Jack was going. “Give me two seconds, Jack.” Tosh brought up the command programme and set to work.

“Can you get the robots to contain their spouses? We might not get them all, but while the culprits are unaware...”

“Should think so. The programme's designed for idiots to use.” Tosh tapped in a few lines and hit the enter key. “Done. The robots won't harm them, but if they try to leave they'll restrain them.”

“That'll help Kathy and her team out. Any luck on identifying the ringleaders?”

“I've got the list right here. There's a lot of evidence here, they should go down for a long time.”

“Owen, is there anything we can do for these women just now?”

“Not really, we need trained counsellors and medics. It'll be like coming out of a coma and discovering that years have passed, and what's worse, that someone else has been living your life for you. Where are we even supposed to start?”

Jack nodded, Ianto had been right to get Kathy involved. This really had been too big for his team to handle. They'd suffered enough this time.

“Okay, we're going to have to do the best we can for just now, and hand it over to Kathy. Though I don't know how it'll end.”

“Someone has to pay for this.” Gwen's voice was low and icily calm. “This is... this is... god, I can't find the words.”

Jack grabbed her hand, and looked around his team. “We will get through this. They will pay. I will make sure of it. No-one messes with my people and gets away with it.”

“Perhaps... perhaps Torchwood takes the lead, perhaps we coordinate it all.” Ianto's voice cut through the quiet, “I've been thinking it through. There's no way this would get to the courts, and as Jack always says, we're above the law. Perhaps Kathy is just here to support us, we do the rest? Dismantle it all, see what we can use, maybe get UNIT involved?”

“Good thinking, Ianto. Let's get this finished and then we'll think it through.”

They froze at the sound of muffled voices. Jack drew his pistol from the ankle holster and Ianto had his weapon in his hands.

“Captain Harkness? Mr Jones?” Kathy Swanson's voice echoed through to them.
“Shit. I said I’d meet her.” Ianto pocketed his gun, and strode out of the room to meet her.

Jack watched him go, marvelling that even though Ianto was in leathers, suffering from helmet hair, rampant five o’clock shadow, had been through a hell of a night, he still managed to put on the butler persona and just get on with it. Jack perched himself casually on the edge of the workstation, readying himself for DI Swanson to meet Captain Jack Harkness and for her to do his bidding.

* * *

Ah, Tuesday afternoons...

Toshiko Sato, ploughing through reams of data harvested from Rhydygrisiau, half amazed and half shocked at the technology used; working out what they could use and what must be suppressed.

Owen Harper, cursing at the bureaucracy of the NHS, and their apparent inability to follow his instructions regarding rehabilitation and patient care.

Gwen Cooper returning from another round of interviews at the UNIT facility, battered on the inside from the self-serving lies she's been told for days on end, but glad that these men would never see freedom again.

Ianto Jones, suit jacket off and his face a blank mask, watching himself burst into smoky flames at the incinerator plant; the last of the robots to be destroyed. Another tick to the sheaves of paper on his clipboard.

Jack Harkness, hunched over his desk, phone in hand, trying so very hard not to lose his temper with the government mandarin he's been forced to speak to, repeating himself over and over again that it's Torchwood's decision, and this is how it is going to be.

* * *

Jack stood and looked down into the Hub. His team, and they were almost lost. Ianto's dogged determination through the whole thing had impressed him, Ianto is now just as much an experienced field agent as the others.

Tosh is rubbing at her temples, itching, where the hair is growing back in. Gwen is looking at the monitor, but not really seeing it. Owen and Ianto are side by side on the sofa; Owen with his feet on the coffee table, his head right back on the seat, staring up at the grimy tiles as if they held the answer, and Ianto sitting, scribbling furiously into his journal, hunched over.

Jack clapped his hands together, and four people jumped. Worried glances faded as they saw it was just Jack, grinning with affection at them.

“C’mon. Drop what you're doing. It can all wait.” Voices began to protest, but Jack's look quelled them. “Here's what's going to happen. In the next five minutes we're going to shut everything down, we're going to the pub, and we're all going to have a drink and NOT talk about work. Then we're going to go home, go out, do whatever we want to do, but none of us come back here until tomorrow morning!”

Jack wasn't surprised at how quickly they all agreed. Tosh and Gwen headed off to the locker room, presumably to primp themselves. Owen had his coat on and was banging about in the autopsy room, perhaps tidying up, perhaps just making a noise. Ianto turned off computers and lights, putting the Hub to bed.

Jack sidled over and put a hand on Ianto's hip, stilling the younger man.
“You still got those leathers? The bike?”

Ianto nodded, the confusion in his eyes being replaced by a speculative gleam.

“Fancy a moonlight ride with a pillion later?”

Ianto's lips quirked up a little, and Jack was pleased to see a half-smile replacing the frown.

“Good job I thought ahead and got you your own set of leathers, Jack. I'm riding, you're just going to have to grab hold - tight. Let's ride right out of Cardiff; somewhere wooded, outdoors. The leather can take it, can you?”

Ianto chuckled as he sauntered away to join the others at the door. Jack picked up his coat and walked across to them.

“The first round is on me. Owen, you're on call for the rest of the night. I've got a date with a leatherclad biker.”

End Notes

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