**Noble Intentions**

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**Summary**

It's Donna's first week at Torchwood Alpha, and the Doctor and Rose have (finally) embarked on the next stage of their relationship. But when they find a strange alien artefact out of its time, the Warehouse team is thrust into the middle of an old battle between a Time Agent and 51st Century Brass.
Chapter 1

Prologue

The agent folded at the knees, falling to the ground in a lifeless heap. The man he'd been chasing—the one who'd shot back—was free to take his chances on the rainy streets. But first, he stripped the agent of his precious leather wrist-strap.

The man ran across wet pavement, dodging pedestrians and cabs. At precisely 22:00, the rain stopped. Fortuna bless the Weather Net.

He was still being followed. He couldn't see anyone, but the agent he'd taken out had had two friends, and there was no way either of them was dead. (Even if they were, they weren't the sort of people who'd let that stop them.)

He ducked into a Calvani night club. The streets weren't crowded enough to get lost in, but if he knew his holes-in-the-wall, this one would have at least one loose panel or secret exit that he could exploit. Prohibition had been helpful like that.

The music inside was loud and just a little wild—not his kind of wild, but fluttering and fast, and unmistakably smart. It sounded like a physicist on hallucips.

He sauntered up to the bar and greeted the tall androgyne bartender—shi had a long, flat head shaped like the back of a chair and the same colour as a kind of green ore he'd seen once.

Shi winked four of eight beady mercury eyes at him. "What's your pleasure?" shi asked smoothly.

He smiled back at hir. "I'll have a shot of DaVinci's Ransom," he said.

The bartender's nostrils—a long column of slits that ran down either side of hir head parallel to hir eyes—flared slightly, and shi moved hir mouth to show teeth in what shi probably thought was a convincing imitation of a humanoid smile. (Hir teeth were grey and jagged, so most of the friendly effect was lost.)

"Coming right up."

A few moments later, shi presented him with a glass of liquor that smelled like solvent but, as he knew from experience, tasted like la berries, and a small white and silver card two centimetres wide and about four long. He raised his glass in his right hand and discreetly palmed the card with the other.

"Thanks," he said, and threw back the drink.

He waited a few minutes, getting a couple more drinks and leaving the bartender a big tip. (It was a pair of earrings designed for an Iffrat, but if shi had more than half a brain, shi could get a hell of a price for them on Canal Street.)

He went to the back of the club. Most of the patrons were Calvani, of course, but there were purple-skinned Opinari and the occasional Hath. (He'd never been sure how it was that Hath could get drunk, with their re-breathers covering their mouths.) There were a handful of humanoids and near-humans, too, which was good, because he didn't want to look completely out of place. People would remember the lone human wandering in, and he did not want to be remembered.
As he passed the platform where the band was set up, he noticed that one of the musicians was apparently human. He was good-looking, and tall, with dark hair. He was playing that big guitar like a pro. The guy on the keyboard was Calvani—all those hands were an advantage. The drummer was a Hath, which explained what the other Hath were doing in here. Probably his family come to cheer him on. (Though, as he seemed to be a relatively good-looking Hath: they might have been groupies).

He'd seen weirder trios, but the human kept his eye. It was probably the smile the man gave him as he passed. Too bad he couldn't stay. He'd have to stop in again next time he was on the run in the City.

He went into the restroom with the humanoid stick-figure on the door. The walls were covered in graffiti; what had once been a stylish silver tile was now a plaster of black ink and holo-stickers. He hedged his bet on the middle stall, and locked himself in. The back wall was covered in the same general paraphernalia as the rest of the room. He was delighted to find a small, friendly cartoon scrawl smiling up at him. This kind of graffiti was everywhere in the City, if you knew where to look. Good old Wally: always there to help a guy in need.

He held the datacard the bartender had given him up to the little man in the striped shirt and was rewarded with a wink. The toilet flushed and the wall's hermetic seal hissed. He pushed and the whole thing slid easily back and to the side.

Feeling pretty pleased with himself, he stepped into the narrow passageway that had been revealed. The hidey-hole was pretty clean, which was a pleasant surprise. Most of these places were littered with discarded fix wrappers and bodily fluids of varying provenance. This one was set up like a little sitting room, complete with comfortable chairs and what looked like a sink. There was a pile of boxes in the corner, part of an Opinari liquor shipment. Good booze on Opintar.

He chose a chair facing the entryway and leaned back. He put his feet up on the little table in front of him and thought about where he was going to go first.

"Hands up," said a smooth, feminine voice with a posh Sanctuary accent. He could feel the end of the blaster on the back of his head. He sighed and slowly raised his arms.

"You do know that we know all about your friend with the glasses, don't you?" she asked.

He rolled his eyes. "I bet it's only because you cheated."

He could feel the agent leaning closer. Her breath warmed his left ear. Her perfume was heady, with a trace of what he recognised as a solvent used in pheromone distillates. Very nice, though he wondered if that was strictly Agency issue.

"Stand up," she murmured. "Slowly."

He got to his feet.

"Turn around."

He kept his hands where she could see them and obeyed. He could reach for his own gun, but she was quicker than him. And probably smarter, he thought ruefully.

The Time Agent smirked at him. She was wearing a shiny white jacket over a black cat-suit, which on most people would have been a big mistake, but on her… He looked over her frankly spectacular frame and felt a pang of regret. Her hair was blonde and very curly, and she had made no attempts to
tame it. She appeared to be somewhere in her thirties—she might have been younger than he was—but Agents tended to go in for body clock adjustments.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, not bothering to be subtle about looking her over, "if you just wanted to forget about this whole 'arresting me' thing, I'm sure you and I could find something a bit more… entertaining… to do."

Her smile took on a lazy characteristic. "Tempting. But I quite enjoy the 'arresting you' thing."

"That must be why you do it so often," he answered. "Or is that because you keep letting me get away?"

"Not this time," she said lightly. "But first things first. Where did you hide it?"

"Where'd I hide what?" he asked innocently.

"You're very pretty, Boe," she said. "But don't think that will keep me from shooting your face off."

He grinned. "No worries. I know how important your work is to you." He heard something moving in the restroom upstairs. There was a telltale sound of flushing water.

"I haven't got all day," she said, narrowing her eyes.

"You're a Time Agent," he retorted. "You've got all the time in the universe. Tell you what; we'll chalk this one up to you. Then you can let me go, and we'll see who catches who next time."

"Whom," said another voice. "It's bloody 'whom'!"

The man called Boe rolled his eyes. "You brought your pet?"

"Partner," she corrected, smiling slyly.

The partner revealed himself dramatically from behind the liquor boxes.

Should have checked behind the boxes. Amateur mistake. Just because no one was supposed to know about a hiding spot, that didn't mean they wouldn't. If this was the way things were going, he really was going to have to concede their superior intellect. Of course, they might have just teleported in. Time Agents were renowned for ignoring local teleportation regulations.

"If you can't bother to speak the language properly, Boe," the second agent said petulantly, "then you shouldn't dirty it with your tongue." He was a willowy but muscular human, with ashy brown hair and cheekbones that might as well have been carved out of marble. He had a leonine way of moving that was more than a little attractive. (He'd gone with a loose red jacket in an ancient military cut to offset the slim black Time Agency trousers. He had very nice legs.)

"I can think of a few things my tongue could d—"

"That's enough," said the woman, rolling her eyes. "You're coming with us, Boe."

"Yeah," said her partner, pulling his blaster from his belt. For someone so uptight about the language, his attempts at the Sanctuary accent weren't very good.

"I thought you wanted to know——"

Someone was coming down the steps. He wasn't sure whether to praise his luck or curse it.
Curse, apparently. It was just the human musician from upstairs. The two Time Agents stared at the newcomer; they were completely taken by surprise.

Blessing, then.

He moved quickly, grabbing the man by the arm and taking his blaster from its holster. He pressed it up to the musician's jaw.

"Don't try it," he warned as the woman took a step forward. "I know you well enough to know you don't want to hurt innocent bystanders. Let me go, or I shoot this pretty man's head off."

She raised her gun level with her eye. "You don't know me as well as you think you do."

"I d-don't want to g- to g-g-get..." The musician couldn't even get the words out, he was so nervous.

He probably ought to feel guilty about that, he thought. Instead, he backed them towards the staircase. It was hard to get the musician to follow him—he wasn't practised with up-the-stairs-with-a-gun-to-your-throat manoeuvring, which he could hardly be blamed for, but the Time Agents were creeping closer.

She was a piece of work, there was no doubt about that—not after she fired, missing both their heads by millimetres.

He ought to have abandoned his hostage at the top of the stairs, but when the agent's second shot clipped the musician's shoulder, it was a matter of leaving an innocent person to bleed on a filthy restroom floor, or, at least, getting the unlucky bastard out of that bitch's way.

He dragged the wounded man out of her line of sight and pulled the third agent's wrist strap from his coat pocket and wrestled the musician's hand over it. He was a little bit hasty with the co-ordinates, but he still had the satisfaction of seeing the look on both Agents' faces as the restroom melted away.

Their arrival was rough. He almost threw up. (The alcohol had been a bad idea.) The musician collapsed to the dirt and retched loudly.

"Sorry about that."

It was a few moments before the man could stop puking long enough to look up at him. "Who the h-hell are y-y——" He grimaced and heaved again.

"My name's not important," he replied. Then, as an afterthought, he asked, "What's yours?"

"L-Lee."

"Nice to meet you, Lee." He fought the wide leather strap onto his wrist and helped Lee to his feet. "You can call me Jack."

Chapter 1

On his twenty-third day of being human, the Doctor woke up in Rose Tyler's bed. This was, so far, one of his new favourite things.

Top of the list of new least favourites was being choked by large insects. He was going to have to try to avoid that more assiduously in the future. Without a respiratory bypass, it was far more dangerous than he was used to. And surprisingly painful. The human body did not handle pain the same way as
his Time Lord one had. It was far more… urgent.

Were it not for certain other things, his new nervous system would have become his new enemy. Lucky for him, pain wasn't the only thing it had to offer. (He might even be able to get used to the endocrine system.)

He didn't move right away. Rose's arm was draped over his back, and she had burrowed her head into the pillow. Her face was relaxed, mouth open just a little bit, and when she shifted, there were marks on her cheek from the fabric of the pillowcase.

The single heart in his chest ached a little. (Or maybe that was his stomach. Nothing was quite where it was supposed to be.) He kissed her cheek and her eyelids started a slow, reluctant movement.

"Good morning," he said. He liked saying that. He'd said it yesterday as well. (Technically, he'd said it lots of times, but it had been the first time saying it to Rose in this particular context.)

Rose took a long breath and rolled onto her back. He watched her stretch—she was as naked as he was—and wondered if maybe his endocrine system wasn't… over-doing it just a bit.

"Morning," she replied through a yawn. She blinked a few times, smiled, and rolled back towards him with wandering hands.

The Doctor lost track of approximately twenty minutes. These human hormones weren't kidding around, were they? Or his time sense was going. He tried not to think about it; Rose made that disturbingly easy.

And then, one leg draped over Rose's legs (she had really fantastic legs), he fell asleep again. He wasn't sure when that happened, either. Sleep kept creeping up on him. How inconsiderate.

"Maybe you should get yourself a watch," teased the voice of Donna Noble that lived inside his head.

He became aware again when Rose bumped his shoulder. "Wake up," she said playfully. He didn't move. He was comfortable and his body was more than happy to stay right where it was. For once, he agreed with it. This was nice.

"Wake up," Rose said again, this time with laughter in her voice.

He turned his face into the pillow, away from the light that was pouring in through the window and grunted his dissent.

"Come on, we're gonna be late."

Giving up, he squinted and wondered what sadistic little human had come up with the concept of 'late.' Who was to say if he was on time or not?

"I thought we were gonna lie in?" he complained.

Rose rolled her eyes, but she seemed amused. "Since when do you wanna lie in?"

"I've discovered that I like bed," he replied. Very suddenly, his arms and back desperately needed stretching. He rolled over lazily and bumped the padded headboard with one hand. It was probably Donna, he thought. She had habitually slept for nine or ten hours if he'd let her, sometimes more if their adventures had been more exhausting. He felt the passenger Donna's approval.
Rose knelt on the mattress with one knee. She was wearing a towel and her hair was still wet. "I've noticed," she said. Then, with a devilish grin, she said, "You've barely left it since Saturday night."

"I like your bed," the Doctor said truthfully. He propped himself up on his right elbow and reached out to touch the fluffy pink towel. She moved invitingly close. "It's much better than mine," he went on. He couldn't stop touching her. So much for the theory that finally properly kissing Rose Tyler (again) would alleviate the… obsessive… need for contact. In fact, it was much worse now. He hadn't thought it could get any worse.

Thank every imaginable god that she didn't seem to mind. The way she leaned into his hand and scooted closer suggested she didn't mind at all.

_of course she doesn't mind, you plum_, Donna said helpfully.

Grinning, Rose leaned down and kissed his nose (why his nose?) and then his forehead. "We can come back to it tonight. Meanwhile, it's Monday morning, and we humans have to go to work."

Monday!

The Doctor sat up as if shocked. "Monday? Yes! That's right! Monday!" Days of the week meant something now. He'd never understood the need for them (humans and their illogical arbitrary divisions and labels), but right now, it all made sense. Monday came after Sunday, which came before Tuesday, and Monday was the first day of the work-week, which meant that they were needed at Torchwood. Monday meant that Donna—the corporeal one—would be at Torchwood. Why didn't humans like Mondays?

Rose burst out laughing as he jumped from the bed and tried to scoop his clothes from every part of the room at once. He held up his white tuxedo shirt and frowned. "I need to figure out what to wear. I think I got too many suits."

"How many did you get?" Rose wondered. She watched herself combing her hair in the mirror. "I only saw the packages arrive."

"Five," he replied. He made a face at the long black silk of the bow tie hanging on the padded headboard. How had that got there? "I'll have to pick one to wear today. I'm not sure why I got so many. It was probably…" He paused, suddenly embarrassed to be mentioning Donna. He was also very distractingly aware that he was standing in the middle of the room without any clothes on. Time-Lord-him hadn't been exactly uncomfortable with nudity, generally speaking, but Donna was. Not where people could see her.

Funny how nakedness hadn't been a problem last night. Or this morning. Or the night before. Or most of yesterday. And Rose didn't seem to mind being naked. And he really liked Rose being naked. Liked it entirely too much.

He became aware of the funny look Rose was giving him. He muttered, "It doesn't matter."

"How 'bout a shower first?" Rose suggested. She plucked the discarded bow tie from the headboard and draped it around his neck. (Ah. Now he remembered.) She held either end of it and used it to pull him down for a kiss. "Then dress."

"My room's all the way down the hall," he said.

"So?"

He glanced down at the bundle in his arms. "I don't think Jackie would like it if she caught me
wandering the hallways in the nude."

"You could always wear a towel, you know," she said. She was laughing at him, he knew it. (Donna was rankled, but he didn't mind. Rose never meant it seriously.)

"True. Still. I don't much like the idea of your mum catching me…"

"Doing the walk of shame?" Rose suggested.

He blinked at her. "I'm not ashamed!" he cried. "Rose Tyler, that is a ridiculous imputation of… Oh… that's a phrase, isn't it?"

She kissed him on the cheek. "Don't worry about my mum. It's not like she doesn't know."

The Doctor stared at Rose. A feeling very much like horror struck him right in the single heart. "What?"

"She's not stupid."

He swallowed. Blimey. Rose's mum, her mother, knew that he was having sex with her daughter. Brilliant sex. Lots of sex. He hadn't bothered to count how many times they'd had sex in the last… thirty-odd… hours. He was only human now, but he was sure it was a perfectly impressive number. At least, he hoped so. Wait, what did it matter if it was impressive or not? Well, no, it did matter. Even if he hadn't been human, the last thing he'd want to be was unimpressive. Rose was still looking at him. He was going to have to say something. Bollocks. Wait, since when did he… Donna. She had a venerable font of rude words stored away and he was the dubiously honoured recipient of her knowledge, right? Knowledge, memories, feelings, opinions… Everything that had made Donna Donna… Well, except the hair. And the breasts. And the mouth. Well, no, he seemed to have that, just a bit. Damn. Rose was still looking at him. And he was still naked. What had she said? What was he supposed to say now?

The Doctor chose the most innocuous phrase he could think of. "I suppose not."

Of course Jackie knew. Ianto had implied that there was very little that Jackie did not know. When had Jackie become so savvy? Then again, perhaps she and Ianto were in cahoots.

Rose rolled her eyes and leaned a little bit closer. The Doctor wondered why he was still holding the clothes when she was right there, kneeling on the edge of the bed. Her balance was precarious at best. He couldn't let her fall, now could he? It wouldn't be gentlemanly. His hands found their way to the terry cloth covering her hips. She smelled like soap and shampoo and Rose and bloody hell was it ever hard to concentrate on anything. He swallowed and attempted to will the more rebellious bits of his anatomy into calming down so that he could think.

"Rose?"

"Doctor?" she said, her voice low and throaty and oh, but he liked it when she said his name like that.

"Can I use your shower?" He didn't say that he liked it better than his own, because he thought it might sound a bit… pathetic. But he did. It smelled like her—or at least, the soaps and chemicals that he associated with her. All that time and all this money, and Rose still used a lot of the same hygiene products. Or at least, they smelled the same to this human olfactory sense. She liked to smell like flowers.

"'Course." She paused and bit her bottom lip. "Would you…?"
"Would I what?"

"D'you want any help?"

"I know how to bathe myself, Rose," he said slowly, wondering what had prompted such a question. Had he given the impression that he didn't know how to bathe? Sure, he'd maybe been a little lax in that department of late, new biorhythms, new body, and all that, but... "And you already showered."

Realisation slowly dawned, prodded onward by what he was probably going to have to start referring to as his human life coach. "Ohhhhhhhhh... You mean..."

Rose grinned. "I love it when you blush," she said, which made him blush harder.

"I don't," he muttered. "Is it supposed to make my face feel so hot?"

Showering with Rose was very inefficient. He was going to do it again, of course. (Every day, if she'd let him.) But he made note of that anyway.

§

It turned out that Ianto Jones was even more fastidious than Donna had expected. A place for everything and everything in its place—which he actually said—did not even cover it.

"What is my job, exactly?" Donna asked.

Ianto paused in his preparations to explain the complex colour coding system he had devised for various types of files. "Head of office operations," he replied.

_Damn._

"What's your job?" she asked.

His lips twitched downwards briefly. "Officially, I'm in charge of maintaining the Archive, but so is everyone else here. In actuality, I'm more of a facilitator and organiser. And I make the coffee."

Donna looked at a pile of goldenrod papers. "Secretary and Tea Boy?"

"Mr. Smith used to call me the Tin Dog," he said with a wan smile. "He found it quite amusing for some reason."

"Mr. Smith?"

"He was one of the agents who worked on the cannon project with Miss Tyler. There was also Mr. Simmonds; he's head of Torchwood Three in Cardiff now."

Donna had to keep from laughing. "There's a Torchwood base in _Cardiff_?"

"And Edinburgh, Washington, Tokyo, Mumbai, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, one in Peru... A very small village, but they seem to have quite a few run-ins with aliens down there. Also, we have one very small monitoring station in Leadworth, but it's a one-man operation. You might meet him. He comes in from time to time to visit the Archive."

"Where is Leadworth?" Donna wondered.

"Half an hour from Gloucester by car." He opened a drawer in his desk and handed her a large manual. "Add this to your reading, if you like. Most people don't bother to read the entire thing, but
there's quite a bit of useful info in the non-dog-eared pages." He nodded. "Of course, you can't take
that off the premises."

Donna took the big black book with both hands, but even then, it was almost too heavy for her to lift.
"Naturally."

"I should warn you now: there's a lot of overtime. You'll be working odd hours—maybe slightly less
odd than the rest of us, unless, of course, you decide to go for a field commission, but that will
ultimately be up to Ms. Jones."

"That's Martha, right?"

Ianto nodded. "As I understand it, Ms. Jones intends Miss Tyler and the Doctor to be the field team.
However, Torchwood Alpha is primarily a research facility. And for the last year, most of our
attention was focused on the cannon project."

"What was that about?" Donna wondered.

Ianto looked at her, sizing her up. "Do you remember when the stars went out?" he asked.

Donna nodded. How could she have missed that? You didn't notice that sort of thing much in cities,
but Gramps, who went up the hill every chance he got to look through that telescope of his, had
talked of nothing else.

Ianto fixed a stack of green folders and lined them up evenly with the corner of his desk. "The stars
came back."

"That was you lot?"

"Miss Tyler, Mr. Smith. And the Doctor, I presume. I was on the home front."

It wouldn't do, she supposed, to demand more explanation at the moment. But if the Doctor was
involved, she could probably ask him.

Almost as if they had been summoned by the speaking of their names, the Doctor and Rose came
through the doorway. They were all smiles and cheerful hellos, and Donna knew right away, just
from the way they were standing close and holding hands, that they'd got over some of that
hesitation. She gave the Doctor a little wave and smiled at the enormous grin he gave her. One might
have thought he hadn't seen them in weeks for the way he bounded over to where she and Ianto
were sitting. Donna noted that he was wearing a slightly different blue suit than the one he'd been
wearing every time she'd seen him previously. (Not counting the tuxedo.) His lips were pink, as if he
and Rose had been snogging all the way up to the door. Lucky sods.

"Donna! Good morning! Ianto! How are—"

"Good morning." Martha Jones looked up from the big computer in the centre of the room. "Glad to
see you two decided to join us."

Donna had almost forgotten that she and Ianto were not alone in the office. Dr. Harper was at his
desk, quietly nursing his coffee and wincing at loud noises. Martha had been standing by the
computer—Argus—since Donna had arrived at five to nine this morning. Ianto said she and Toshiko
had been at the Warehouse all day Sunday repairing the damage done to the computer by Zzfstaz
and her kids.

She sneaked a peek at her watch. It was three minutes to ten now. And if the Doctor's wild hair was
any indication, she could guess what had delayed them.

"Sorry we're late," Rose said. "Traffic was terrible." She smiled in Ianto and Donna's direction. Donna smiled back.

Owen looked up from his mug and snorted in disbelief.

Martha gave him a sideways look before turning back to the latecomers. "Just don't let it become a habit," she said in the tone that most bosses reserved for 'never again, or you're mince-meat.'

The Doctor looked unimpressed by the ultimatum. But then again, he didn't technically work here, did he? Rose did, though, and she was looking appropriately uncomfortable.

"I want you two to head over to the London Eye," Martha said, looking away from them and pressing a touch-sensitive panel just below the large screen on the front of the Argus tower. "Toshiko is already down there. We've had a red flag."

"What about the Zvazvera?" Rose asked, looking a bit disappointed.

Martha didn't even look at her. "Torchwood One has it under control. This is your priority. Get on it."

Rose nodded. "Right."

The Doctor looked annoyed, but he didn't say anything.

"I'll see you later, then," Donna said.

He flashed her a smile, gave Ianto a friendly nod and followed Rose back out the door.

Feeling disappointed, Donna turned back to Ianto. So much for the Doctor saving her from a boring, paper-bound morning. If he and Rose were back by lunchtime, she'd try to get him to tell her about the stars thing.

"Is there anything I should do?"

Martha cut Ianto's reply off before he could even open his mouth. "You've got reading to do, I think. Ianto, have you cleared that desk off, yet?"

Donna wondered if Martha detected the chill in Ianto's expression. "I'll have it ready by lunch," he said briskly.

"Good. Meantime, Donna, you can work in the conference room just down the hall. I want you up to speed on basic security protocol first, then we'll decide on your duties. Owen, where's the autopsy report on that Hoix?"

The pale man's forehead wrinkled and he narrowed his eyes at her as if he weren't quite sure what language she was speaking. "You mean the one that Hartman sent over half an hour ago? I haven't done it yet."

"Why don't you get on it, then, hmm?" she said in a voice like honey-coated steel.

Owen leaned back in his chair and looked at her across his nose. "Soon as I finish my coffee."

Martha raised an eyebrow and stared him down. "Do it now, drink your coffee later. It's an autopsy, I don't think you need to worry about killing it."
Donna glanced at Ianto, but he wasn't giving much of a reaction. How did he control his face like that? When she looked back, Owen was stalking off like a grumpy, hung-over adolescent.

"Is there any more coffee, Ianto?" Martha asked.

"Yes, ma'am. Shall I—"

"I've got it, thanks." She made her way past the desk and said, "Donna, you go ahead. I've got a conference call with the heads, then you and I will talk."

Donna found the conference room in an unmitigated mess. There were pyramid-shaped stacks of papers, boxes full of files, and random objects that she could only assume were alien, or at least experimental. It reminded her a bit of when the Doctor had emptied his pockets on top of her car.

She cleared herself a space at one end of the table and set down her pile of manuals and forms to fill with a heavy thud.

Donna had had a lot of different jobs since she'd left uni—most of them temporary until Vitex, then temporary again until H.C. Clements, but these were some of the most unique forms that she had ever had to fill in. The secrecy agreements were even more stringent than the ones at H.C. Clements. The exclusivity agreements made her swear that she would not act as an independent agent "on behalf of the Earth, human race, or Republic of Great Britain" while in Torchwood's employ.

When she got to the payroll and tax forms, she nearly burst into happy tears.

That was a very big number.

Suddenly, she could imagine all the hospital bills evaporating. The second mortgage could be paid off in half the time. No more fear of losing the house she'd been raised in, no more worries about the next time Gramps had a heart attack. (Not on the financial side, anyway.) Her meagre savings account could start to grow again.

Overwhelmed, Donna took a few moments to just stare at the impossibly beautiful number and breathe deeply through her nose. (No wonder Ianto's suits looked so expensive.) She had a very strong urge to call Gramps right now, just so that she could tell somebody, but that would hardly be a professional way to behave on her first day, hopping up and down and screaming happily into a telephone. No, she'd surprise him at supper. Or better yet, she could wait until the first cheque and steal him away from his pub mates for a fancy dinner. She'd be able to buy him a new telescope for Christmas. He would love that.

"Only took fifteen years," she murmured.

Ianto came into the room bearing coffee. "Making progress?"

She handed over the ones she'd finished. His eyebrows rose high up his forehead. "You're very quick." He glanced over her shoulder. "Any troubles there? Canary Wharf put you down for the standard starting pay for secretary, but Mr. Tyler sent this one over this morning and said that was the one you were meant to have."

"I would have been happy with half of this," she admitted before she could stop herself.

Ianto's smile was understanding. "It can be quite a shock," he said.

Donna smirked and said, a little bit breathlessly, "I think I can cope."
He pushed the bright white mug across the table towards her. "Sorry about the mess in here. We're still recovering from the aftermath of re-organisation."

She took a sip, paused and then took a deeper drink. Oh *God*, that was good coffee.

"Mr. Tyler said you'd want help with the Archives."

"That's all down below, Subbasements Seven through Twelve. This," he gestured at the boxes and pyramids, "is the fallout from Mr. Smith's departure. Miss Tyler said she would go through them herself.‘ One glance at Ianto's face as he looked at the chaos said quite clearly how likely he thought that was. "Perhaps you or I can take a crack at it later, but I doubt we'll find the time. Not today, at any rate."

"Where did he go, this Mr. Smith?" she asked. Whoever he was, he wasn't much for keeping his things neat.

Ianto gave a tight little smile. "Miss Tyler said he went home."

That was an unsatisfying answer, but Donna told herself to let it go. It wasn't really her business, anyway. But all this… The forms, the mess, the dozen different colour file markers, the unspoken but tangible power struggle between Martha and everyone else… Donna had always been a curious person. She liked to know exactly what was going on. It had always got her into trouble at school, so she'd learned to curb her tendency to ask probing, embarrassing questions.

"Nobody seems to like Martha much," she said. Ianto looked uncomfortable—in a strangely genteel fashion, of course. So much for curbing the tendency.

"We're in an adjustment period," he said. "Ms. Jones and Ms. Sato only arrived here from Torchwood Seven last Thursday."

Donna tilted her head. "That explains why I didn't see her around here last week. She's the new boss?"

"That's correct." Ianto started to tidy one of the messier piles.

"But I thought Rose was in charge?"

"All part of the transition," he said cheerfully. "Ms. Jones has an excellent record. She was in Tokyo during the Gojira Incident last summer."

Donna faltered. "The Gojira… you mean the big lizard that was smashing buildings…? I thought that was a hoax!"

Ianto's smile was just a teensy bit smug. "Oh no, quite real. We weren't able to keep the news off the Net, of course. We did quite a lot of work to convince everyone that it was leaked footage from a cancelled film production."

Donna glanced at the big black manual. "How often does that happen? The faking?"

He just smiled at her. "I'll let you know as soon as your desk is ready. You're taking Mr. Smith's old space, so I'm afraid it's going to take me some time to scrape off all the chewing gum."

By 11:30, Ianto had returned and helped her carry her reading material to a desk in the main office. Her desk was the closest one to the door. The computer was just as flashy as the ones on the four other desks—just a monitor and a keyboard, but the whole thing gave an impression of futuristic
Doings. Everything was metal curves and heavy graphite-grey. If she sat, her back would be to the
smooth concrete wall, but she would have an excellent view of both the entrance and the rest of
the office. Argus, the Torchwood Computer, was a tall hexagonal pillar with alternating shiny and matte
panels on it. She caught her reflection in one and tucked her hair behind her ear. She could see
everyone else's desk as well. That was Rose's over to the left, and the one next to it was Owen's, she
was pretty sure. That left Toshiko on the right.

Donna sat in the surprisingly comfortable chair and took a moment of silent glee. H.C. Clements had
been posh, yeah, so much so that she'd felt like an intruder when she'd first arrived. (Once she'd gone
permanent, she'd felt a bit better.) This was far beyond posh. This was… elite. This was beyond
belief, beyond good luck… almost like the Universe was trying to make up for the last thirty-six
years.

Of course, she tried to remind herself that this could very well end up as some kind of nightmare.
(Aliens. And those Zvazvera things hadn't exactly been friendly, had they?) But for this desk, and
this pay, she wouldn't have cared if Martha had wanted her to shine shoes with her own saliva.

She went through the desk drawers and poked at the computer a little bit. Ianto promised to get her
into the system later that afternoon; he still had to create her account. The phone looked pretty
simple; nothing she couldn't handle there. Then she decided to get on those policy and protocol
documents. Thank God she had learned how to skim. She was going to have to get a few more
office supplies for her desk. Ianto had been a bit too thorough in his cleaning. She borrowed a
highlighter from him and set to work.

§

The Doctor crouched over the manhole cover and dared Rose not to smile.

"Haven't got any anti-plastic on you, have you?" he asked.

Rose flashed him that tongue-between-teeth-grin before turning back to Toshiko. "What d'you
reckon?" she asked.

"The signal's definitely coming from down there," Toshiko confirmed.

The Doctor held out his hand for her scanner and took a look at the read-out. Whatever else one
might say about the Britain of Pete's World, they were definitely more technologically advanced than
the other universe had been at the same time. (They had John Lumic to thank for that.) Even so,
zeppelins were more popular than aeroplanes (no Hindenburg disaster, and the Wright Brothers had
had some extra troubles getting their idea off the ground), and there was no such thing as ten-pin
bowling. (He'd have to start a league.)

The screen of Toshiko's scanner showed a tiny fluctuation on the zeta band. That was odd. Even in
this somewhat advanced twenty-first century world, there was no reason it should be here. That was
the sort of thing no human would see until, well, until the Hundred Thousands. What was it doing
here?

"What's wrong?" Rose asked anxiously.

"That's…" He made a few adjustments to Toshiko's scanner and then there was the explanation he
was looking for: artron energy. Only a trace of it, but it was there. Of course, there was some
interference; both he and Rose were making the scanner light up like fireworks. Still, there was the
third source blinking at him. He handed Toshiko back her scanner and went to open the manhole.
"What is it?" Rose asked again, stopping him with a hand on his arm.

He blinked. "Oh. Right." He smiled brightly at her. "Just a bit of artron energy. No idea what's causing it, though. Let's find out!"

Toshiko pulled out her gun and checked the clip for rounds.

"No," he cried. "No guns! Bloody Torchwood!"

The woman stared back at him, frozen mid-cocking of her weapon. "Standard procedure—" she began.

"'Sall right," Rose said, holding up her hands. "Doctor, is there anything alive down there?"

"Nahhh…" He nodded at the gun. "And I don't see how anything lasts long with you lot toting those around. Is that an automatic?"

Toshiko looked uncertainly at Rose.

"Use the broad-base tranqs," Rose said. "Tranquillisers, okay, Doctor?"

He nodded curtly, remembering the shouting match he and Rose had had when he'd arrived. (He wasn't eager to repeat that.) Then he bent down and turned the handle to open the portal. It was a bit harder to move than the one in the other universe had been, but he managed it by himself. Human muscles. Really. It wasn't as if Time Lords had been the Herculean Force of the Universe or anything, but he was probably going to have to start lifting weights. Bugger.

_Ooh, getting a bit salty, aren't we? Donna sing-songed teasingly._

The Doctor started down the ladder. Rose and Toshiko were close behind him. The industrial grating and scaffolding brought back memories—Rose swinging on that big chain in order to save his worthless arse for the first of many times. Mickey the Idiot cowering in fear at the foot of the TARDIS. There was the drainage pit that had held the Nestene Consciousness. He glanced back at Rose, who was engrossed in surveying the area for possible threats, her handgun raised. His smile faded.

That wasn't the Rose who had swung on a chain to save him; that was Torchwood's Rose. Torchwood's Rose carried a gun and used hand signals to communicate with her team. (She was still Rose, of course. But he hated imagining things hardening her, moulding her into a soldier. For one thing, it made him feel guilty.)

The Team (i.e. Toshiko) was holding her scanner up in front of her and was likely to fall off a scaffold, or at least run into something, if she wasn't careful. "The signal's coming from over there," she said, pointing towards the pit.

The Doctor jumped over a railing onto a lower scaffold, just to save time, and took out his sonic screwdriver. It whirred and buzzed and then it made a noise like an angry goat before turning itself off. He stopped and hit it against the heel of his hand. "Oi! Cut that out!"

"The cupboard," Toshiko said, pointing downwards.

He looked, and indeed, there was a large metal storage cupboard down by the drainage pit. He put the sonic between his teeth and climbed down.

The lock on the door would (probably) not be invented for at least four thousand years. He turned
the sonic on it. Things were going pretty well, with the help of a bit of percussive encouragement, until the damn thing decided to give up. Again.

"No! Blast!" He glared at the lock. "Either of you ladies have a hairpin?"

Rose gave him a funny look. Her hair was down, so… nothing in it. She'd used to wear her hair up sometimes. Used to let it curl a bit, too. Toshiko's hair was up, but most of it seemed to be in a big clawed clip. Right.

"Never mind," he said. Kneeling in front of the cupboard—probably ruining the knees in his new suit, Donna complained—he tried to see what was wrong with the sonic screwdriver this time. Honestly, he couldn't be that out of practice. Sure, he'd let the TARDIS manufacture the last several models, but they'd been from his own designs. The first one had been all him, as had the second with all its improvements. This one wasn't all that different from the one he'd been using before the meta-crisis, though it was a bit slap-dash. He simply hadn't had the time to really—

A set of delicate probes and jeweller's screwdrivers appeared before his face. He looked up at Toshiko. "Oh, I like you," he said with a grin.

Once the sonic screwdriver was working again, it was only a few seconds before the Doctor had the doors open.

He frowned. "That's… Not what I expected."

Rose and Toshiko looked around his shoulders. Toshiko was holding up her scanner and her mouth was slowly falling open. "I've never seen readings like this," she said, awestruck. "What is it?"

The Doctor scratched his head, and then picked the strange object up. Toshiko gasped, probably because he bolloxed up some Torchwood procedure about not touching unknown artefacts. Rose stared at it with appropriate wonder, a smile stretching her lips over her shining white teeth. She did have very nice teeth.

It looked a bit like an urn, made of glass and a silver metal that wouldn't be seen by mankind until the 45th century. The glass sections shimmered with light in every colour of the spectrum.

"It's all right," he said. "It's harmless. Mostly."

"Mostly harmless?" Rose raised an eyebrow. "There's this bloke I know that you should meet."

"Bloke?" The Doctor was no stranger to jealousy, but it was a bit alarming how sick he suddenly felt. He swallowed and tried to focus on what was in front of him.

Rose rolled her eyes and nudged his arm with her shoulder. "What's it do?" she asked.

"Usually, they're power sources," he said. "The Brindisi effusion produces a variety of different energies. In the other universe, it will be discovered by the Nop on a planet about three galaxies over." He frowned. "Shouldn't be anywhere near here." He glanced at Toshiko as she tapped frantically away at her computer. "It's travelled in time."

That made her pick her head up. Rose, too.

"How do you think it got here?" she asked.

"Somebody put it here, obviously." He nodded at the defeated lock.
Rose gave him a look. "I meant, 'how did it get here from the future'?

"Don't know yet." Then, mostly because he was curious, he asked, "Is there a rift here?"

A funny sort of look passed over Rose's face. "Not since we closed the one at Canary Wharf."

"So, it's a generator," Toshiko said.

"No… Not really. Most of them are. This…" He peered at it thoughtfully. "I'm not quite sure what this one's for. Doesn't look anything like the ones I've seen."

"Well, let's get it to the lab and you two can have a proper look at it." Rose checked her watch. "I'll be lunch by the time we get back. Thank God. I'm starved."

§

It was maybe ten past noon when Martha came out of her office down the hall.

"Sorry that took so long," she said, half-smiling. "Come with me."

Donna left her book open on her desk and followed the younger woman to her office. It had a glass wall at the front and pictures of her family on the walls.

"Getting settled in?" Martha asked as they took their seats.

"Yes, thanks."

"Good." Martha's smile was professional—she wasn't the warmest of people, Donna decided. They took their seats.

"I don't know if Ianto explained to you," Martha began, "but Torchwood Alpha's not had an office manager before. You're going to have a lot to learn in a short period of time, and things are probably going to change quickly." The smile had faded away to nothing.

"I believe in honest communication," she went on. "If there's a problem, I am going to tell you about it. Likewise, I expect you to tell me about any concerns you have. Torchwood isn't a democracy, but we're in the service of the people. Not just citizens of the Republic; the entire human race. I believe in doing whatever it takes to do our duty."

"Yes, ma'am," Donna said, and some part of her had to stop from saluting. She remembered Martha's dramatic entrance at the Tyler's party the night before last, detonator in hand, ready to bug-bomb them all to kingdom come.

"First thing: I'm not very happy that Mr. Tyler's given me a greenhorn. Torchwood Alpha's in a unique state. I can't baby-sit you."

Donna stiffened and sat up a little straighter (which was saying something). She could almost literally feel her heart sinking.

Her hackles rose. "I know how an office works. Probably better than you do." She bit her tongue.

Bollocks.

To her surprise, and relief, Martha's icy exterior cracked. "Good," she said, smiling genuinely this time. She picked up a lilac folder "Because I'm utterly hopeless with the desk stuff. I've been a field agent for the last six years."
Donna relaxed a bit. "I've worked for people who couldn't tell a stapler from a photo-copier."

"I hope I'm not that bad," Martha said, smirking. "Do you have any questions for me?"

"Not at the moment," Donna said. So far the papers were pretty straight forward. And run-of-the-mill deadly dull, other than mentions of First Contact procedure that it refused to give greater detail on or, heavens forbid, examples of.

"Well, let me know. In the meantime, I actually want you to go ahead and order some food. Ianto has the info, I think."

"Yes ma'am, no problem." Donna stood up. Same old, same old.

"If you could, check on Dr. Harper as well; I need that report for Hartman before she comes down here to get it herself."

Donna wished she'd thought to bring a notepad. "Did you want something specific for lunch?"

"As long as it doesn't have onions, I don't care. And no sushi." She smirked again. "After four years in Tokyo, I can't eat British sushi. No one does it right, you know?"

Donna nodded and smiled a bit—but it was her professional smile—and went back out into the main office. She was pretty sure that she remembered the way down to the medical section of the base. After all, she had spent a couple of days down there just last week.

She found Owen up to his elbows in dead alien intestines like giant wet liquorice ropes. The face of the thing was almost worse than its insides—it was all teeth and gums, and she had a feeling that it hadn't died pleasantly.

Owen pulled a face as he flicked his wrist to free himself from a clinging bit of the alien's innards.

"What do you want?" he demanded grumpily. He was probably still hung-over. He looked awful, even without taking into account the wet grey stains on his apron.

"I was…" Donna sniffed. What was that smell? Was that the alien? "Er…. What is that one called?" It smelled like someone had taken a very angry, incontinent tom-cat and bathed it in tar. And petrol. She covered her nose with her hand, but it didn't help much.

"It's a Hoix," he replied. He peeled off a glove and tapped a key on the laptop computer next to him. "Nasty bastards. Martha send you to check on me, then?"

"Yeah," Donna admitted apologetically. "But I'm ordering lunch, so I thought maybe you'd…" She glanced at the dead Hoix. "You might not be hungry."

"I'm starving," Owen said. "Get me a curry, would you? Something spicy. And extra papadum. And those banana things."

"Which ones?" she asked.

"Pakora," he said. He took off the other glove and wrote something down on his clipboard. "The one place does them. The tea boy knows what I mean." He glanced at her. "Do you do transcriptions?"

"I can," she said.

"Good. This program's shit. Torchwood software, and it still gets all the alien names wrong."
Donna made a note on her pad—curry, papadum, banana pakora—and put a tick mark next to "no onions." Shouldn't be impossible to find a curry without onions in it for Martha. Probably not easy, though.

"Rose and the others back yet?"

She looked up. "Not yet."

Owen's built-in frown deepened. "Well, when they get back, you tell that git—you know the one—that I can't put off that physical anymore."

"I thought he wasn't an agent?" Donna wondered how the Hoix had died. It looked like it had been shot in the head, but then why would they need to do an autopsy? Then again, it was probably more of a research thing. Wasn't it technically a necropsy, not an autopsy? Or was it still an autopsy when the subject was sentient? The Hoix certainly looked like a horrifying Hollywood monster, but that didn't mean it wasn't smart. Zzfstaz hadn't been stupid.

"He's still got to have a physical," he replied. "Admin's orders. He's been avoiding it, but I haven't forgotten, and Torchwood One's started asking about it."

"Ianto didn't mention any physical," she said. There had been some medical forms, though, now that she thought about it. Most of it had been standard medical history stuff.

Owen smirked. "I got your records last week from your GP. Who you'll have to stop seeing, by the way."

Donna's mouth fell open. "What? Why?"

"Because he's crap," he replied, matter-of-factly.

"He is not!"

"He is," Owen insisted. "Usually Torchwood employees see Torchwood doctors anyway. Simpler that way, what with the occasional extra-terrestrial bug and all the gunshot wounds."

"I'm the office manager," Donna said. "I highly doubt anyone's going to be shooting at me."

Owen snorted. "Right."

Donna straightened her back and clicked her pen. "Any particular kind of curry?" she said frostily. She wished she could have come up with something clever to say.

He turned back to the slab and paused thoughtfully. "Vegetarian."
Some lines lifted from the deleted scene from Journey’s End. You know the one. Not how you think. (I think.)

The moment they'd got below ground, Rose found herself abandoned by the Doctor and Toshiko in favour of the new toy. Even promises of impending food didn't get more than a murmur of assent from the Doctor as he turned the Brindisi thing in his hands and examined every bit of it.

"What is that?" Donna asked, looking up from her desk and paperwork to stare.

The Doctor grinned at her and started to go on about effusions and the exact cause of the shifting lights—millions of tiny organisms, a whole ecosystem of light and colour.

Donna took all of this in and said, finally, "I would have guessed 'alien lava lamp'."

Rose watched the Doctor follow Toshiko head down to the main laboratory. She'd actually hoped that they could go find lunch on their own. Having Toshiko with them had been… inconvenient.

Donna came up to her, smiling. "You're just in time for lunch."

"Yeah." Rose made herself focus. "Sorry, what?"

Donna was wearing a knowing look. "Food's in the conference room."

Rose nodded absently. So much for a little alone time, she thought. She wondered if maybe she could try wearing a lower-cut blouse, just as a distraction from shiny new alien tech. It never would have worked in the old days, (well, it hadn't the one or two times she'd been daring enough to try…) but this new Doctor had an enthusiasm for flesh. Her mind wandered to wonderful places.

She was surprised to find her favourite chicken curry waiting for her—with her name on it, even. Donna didn't say anything as she eyed the spread of boxes and left the room again.

Rose ate in silence until, to her surprise, Donna returned with the Doctor, Toshiko, and Owen in tow.

"Not another word," Donna was saying. The Doctor's mouth snapped shut and he sat down next to Rose.

She slid him a samosa and gave Donna a covert look of amusement. It was going to be interesting having her around.

Owen got his hands all in the pakora and started to munch on one.

"Ooh, are those banana?" The Doctor snatched up two of them.

Donna picked up a foam container and handed it to Toshiko. "Extra spicy, am I right?"

Toshiko looked stunned, but pleased. "Y-yes, how did you—?"
Donna smiled and busied herself arranging plastic cutlery and napkins.

"Oi, aren't you eating?" the Doctor demanded.

Donna shook her head. "I brought mine. You enjoy."

"Where's Martha?" he asked.

"In her office," she replied.

"Why isn't she eating with us?"

A fair question, Rose thought, though she couldn't clearly remember the last time that the whole team had taken their break together. Then again, she'd always been too involved in work to bother.

"What do you care?" Owen scoffed.

The Doctor frowned. "And where's Ianto?"

"Eat your own food, stop worrying about everyone else," Donna said, sounding like someone's mum.

"Speak for yourself," he retorted in the same tone.

Rose caught Owen rolling his eyes.

Toshiko looked up from her vindaloo and said, "I was thinking we should run the effusion device through the mass spectrometer."

And so for the rest of the meal, the conversation was dominated by the Doctor and Toshiko going back and forth about analyses they could run. It was good to see the Doctor excited about something. Until Zzfstaz had shown up, his usual enthusiasm had seemed dim, compared to the strong polar reactions of the other Doctor.

Though, if she were honest with herself, it hadn't been the Zvazveraz's appearance that had done it; it had been Donna's.

After lunch, the Doctor and Toshiko got to work in earnest. Rose wanted to help them, but her phone rang.

"Hello, sweetheart!"

"Mum." Rose covered her eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," Jackie protested. "I was calling to give you Jack's number. Like you asked me to."

"Oh." Rose pinched her mobile to her shoulder and settled at her desk. She brought up the Argus interface. "Yeah. Thanks." She typed in the number and wondered why her mother never sent e-mails.

"D'you really think it's him?" Mum asked. "Looked just like him and the same name and everything. When I saw his picture on the website, I knew I had to call them. I had my fingers crossed all night—I wasn't even sure they'd be any good."

"Thanks, Mum. I'm going to look into it."
"Supper at 6 tonight. No excuses this time!"

"G'bye, Mum."

Rose took a deep breath and stared at her mobile on her desk for a minute. She spun it lazily with one finger before finally running the search.

The telephone number was actually registered to a Mr. Jack Harkness. It was no trouble at all to bring up his file. One might think that he wasn't trying to hide at all.

Jack Harkness, born first of April 1976 in Riverside, Iowa, USA to Amanda and Clark Harkness. His parents were deceased as of 1997 and 1999 respectively, and Jack had spent most of the last two years playing various cities in the US and Europe with his band, 51st Century Brass, founded in 2010 in New York City.

Rose didn't believe a word of it.

No, okay, she believed the bit about the band. She'd heard them play, heard him sing; that much was real.

But the Jack she'd known back in the other universe had been from the future—the fifty-first century, in fact. At least, that's what he'd told her and the Doctor. He'd never told them his real name, though.

Rose stared at the screen—the band did have some Net presence. Their own site had quite a few pictures. Rose wondered how different this Jack's life had been. Bandleader was a far cry from renegade Time Agent. Not that he wasn't one.

Using her Torchwood phone (her mobile was in her own name) she dialled the number. It rang twice before someone picked up.

"Fifty-first Century Brass: weddings, parties, birthdays and bar mitzvahs."

"… Jack?"

"This is Jack Harkness." He sounded odd on the phone. "How can I help you?"

Rose froze. "I…" This was ridiculous. She'd met him already, why was she nervous?

"Hello?"

Rose sat up in her chair. "Hello! Sorry! My name's Rose Tyler. We met the other night…"

"Lovely Ms. Tyler," Jack said, smooth as he ever was. "How could I forget? What can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to thank you," she said. "You were really fantastic."

"Thank you!" he said warmly. "It was our pleasure. Giant insects and all." He chuckled and Rose found herself smiling.

"That doesn't always happen," she said, though that probably wasn't true.

"Certainly spiced things up, though," he said. "I hate to sound rushed, but we're actually heading out to a gig… Was there anything I could do for you?"

Just like her Jack, he made it sound like a promise. Rose blushed, and instantly felt guilty. Still, she
went on. "I was just wondering if you'd like to meet. For lunch. So..." Panicking, she blurted, "I want to learn how to sing. And I... I was hoping you could... er... help."

"Sure," he said after a short pause. "You free tomorrow?"

"Yeah," she said, hoping it was true.

"I was told to try Temple's while we were in London. Do you know it?"

"Love it," she said, and felt a bit better. Familiar territory. Good.

"Excellent. How's one o'clock?"

"It's a date," she said. Rose mimed beating her forehead with the receiver. Oh God, what was she saying?

"See you then, Ms. Tyler," he said while she was punishing herself. His voice was small, like it was coming from a tin can on a string.

She put the receiver back to her ear. "See you," she said, sweetly.

Rose put down the phone and then put her head on her arms and groaned into her keyboard.

"Everything okay?" Donna asked.

Rose sat up. Donna was at her desk—Mickey's desk. She'd probably heard everything.

"No, I mean, yes. 'M Fine," she said.

"I didn't figure you for a music fan," Donna said, a bit shyly.

"What?"

Donna shook her head. "Sorry. You said something about singing. Sorry, I shouldn't have been listening. I wasn't listening, I just heard."

Rose saw the Doctor's new-found uncertainty on Donna's face and wondered just how deep the similarities between the two of them ran.

"No, 'sokay." She hesitated, then decided she didn't care if Donna knew because she wasn't doing anything wrong. Why did she feel like she was doing something wrong? It was just Jack. Not even the proper Jack. And it was lunch at Temple's. Shaun, the owner, knew her; she and Mum both ate there at least once a week. It was safe completely and innocent.

"I've been thinking of doing something creative, you know? Like a hobby." This was not true. Mum had been saying that she needed something in her life other than Torchwood for ages—but that had been more about the dimension cannon and the stars and finding the Doctor. "Do you remember the band at the party on Saturday?"

"Oh yes!" Donna said, smiling eagerly. "That singer! Like Sinatra meets Calloway and Astaire all at once. But even better looking."

"Yeah, him," Rose agreed. Sinatra and Astaire she knew, but she had no idea who the middle one was. "I was hoping he could give me some pointers on singing." Was she really going to go with that?
"Oh, you sing?"

"Not really. Just in the shower. Or if I've had a few too many."

Donna laughed good-naturedly and turned back to the giant book open on her desk. It looked like the Protocol Bible. She wasn't trying to read the whole thing, was she?

Rose frowned. "Have you seen Ianto?"

"Loo, I think," Donna replied.

"Donna?"

The other woman looked at her. Rose bit her lip for a second, then asked, "Want to come with me? I'm having lunch with him tomorrow. With Jack, I mean."

"Really?" She seemed surprised. "Oh. Yeah! That'd be brilliant."

Rose felt better. "Good! One o'clock." There, now she didn't have to feel guilty. Jack wouldn't get the wrong idea if she brought a friend.

Right, she thought, and smirked to herself. But he might get a few other ones.

§

The Doctor spent most of the afternoon trying to shift the diagnostic laboratory around to his liking and almost none of it actually looking at the effusion device. This fact, plus the dust, served to make him quite irritable. He'd never minded dust this much when he'd been a Time Lord. Well, it had annoyed him when it had got in his way, but there were things one could learn from dust, and such information had saved his skin on at least one occasion.

Right now, the grit sticking to his neck, and the black… stuff… on his fingers only made him feel dirty and ill-used. Whoever had been in charge of this lab before had been a pig.

Not that you'd know tidiness if it danced naked in front of you.

"Oi," he grumbled under his breath. "Not helping."

Toshiko was sitting cross-legged on the floor, surrounded by bits and pieces of what looked suspiciously like dimension cannon cast-offs. She had one long, narrow bar of silvery metal up to her face. Her dark eyes were focused and framed by her glasses. The Doctor stared long enough that she actually noticed and looked up.

"Did you need something, Doctor?"

"What? Oh. No." Toshiko smiled at him. He suddenly felt an overwhelming urge to look away.

"Did you find the scanner you were looking for?" she asked.

"No." He occupied himself by cleaning grit from under his fingernails with a small probe he found on the workstation closest to the x-ray machine. "I'll have to draw up some plans."

"I'll help you!" Toshiko got to her feet and came over to him. His eyes were drawn to her breasts, almost as if there were magnets in them, and his eyes contained their polar opposites. Maybe it was the movement that did it. He quite liked the way breasts moved.
He quickly shut his eyes and admonished himself. What was that? That wasn't Donna, surely.

You are a bloke, Donna teased. I always knew it.

Am not! he thought. Not like that, anyway. Yes, Toshiko was a very attractive woman. But... but, no! If he was going to have any of those sort of thoughts, they were going to be about Rose. He loved Rose. If he was going to stare at breasts, they ought to be her breasts. They were the standard by which to measure all other breasts. He was most certainly not going to be distracted by other human females, simply because they had beautiful skin or they smelled like lavender and electrical circuitry or had a really fabulous...

Rose. Think about Rose.

He got lost in the recollection of their shower that morning and there went the hormones again.

Bad plan. Don't think too hard about Rose.

The Doctor cleared his throat and opened his eyes and hoped that he hadn't been standing there for too long. (Only a few seconds. He was nearly positive.) Toshiko wasn't paying him any mind, thank goodness. She was too busy shuffling through the papers that were spread across the desk. He sat in the only available chair. Damn endocrine system.

Toshiko bent forward and leaned over the desk, grabbing a bit of paper off of the bulletin board. Unfortunately, this meant that the Doctor got a spectacular view of the way her pearl grey trousers pulled over her bottom.

He jumped out of his chair and turned away.

She turned around and looked at him, frowning a bit. "You okay?"

"Yeah," he lied. It was nearly five o'clock. Maybe Rose'd be ready to head back to the Tyler residence. Come up with an excuse. "I'm going to wash my hands."

She nodded. "I'd like to try those goggles we found this morning, see what sort of readings we get. What do you think?"

He nodded and shoved his hands in his pockets, then remembered the dirt and took them out again. "Yeah. Fine. Good." Rose would be at her desk. He'd wash up, and they could go straight back to her bedroom and have more intercourse. That ought to take care of the hormone imbalance.

Owen found him in the corridor on his way to the main office.

"Thought you'd escape, didn't you?"

The Doctor blinked. "Er... I'd hoped to." Then he frowned. "Wait, what?"

"You. My lab. Now."

The Doctor held his ground. "Why?"

"Torchwood One wants your physical on file ASAP."

"Oh. That."

If there was one thing he'd hoped to avoid, it was the medical exam. After all, it was still Torchwood, even if it did seem to be a less... worrisome... strain of it. He was only part human—who was to say
they wouldn't try to take the alien parts of him under the auspices of 'Ours'.

"Maybe tomorrow," he said, sidling around Owen, careful to keep his back turned away from him.

"This week," Owen said, gesturing emphatically with his pen. "I'll hunt you down if I have to." The Doctor got an unpleasant mental image of Owen Harper with a large shotgun and a red plaid hat, stalking him from the shadows.

"Right." He turned and fled.

He made it to the loo without being vivisected, which was good. He made use of the toilet (another set of bodily functions that had increased in urgency and frequency) and washed his hands in the sink. He checked his reflection in the enormous mirror. It was a very posh bathroom for a secret underground base, Donna's voice told him. All stainless steel and cherry-stained wood. Still, the lighting made him look a bit ill. He ran a hand over his hair, taking care to remove one or two dust bunnies that had latched onto him.

He liked the new suit, he decided, adjusting the darker-than-usual-blue jacket and pondering the reasons that stripes that had looked brown in the lights of the shop looked black here.

Martha was coming out of her office just as he was coming out of the bathroom.

"Did you talk to Owen?" she asked.

He held up his hands. "Yes, yes, later this week."

"Tomorrow," she said, looking at her watch. "Unless, of course, you're free right now?"

"Can't. Got plans. Very important, can't possibly be changed. So sorry." He hurried on by, so as not to give her an opportunity to insist.

"Nine a.m.," she called after him. "Sharp!"

He pretended not to hear her. The voice in his head muttered critical comparisons between this world's Martha and the other one, using words that he would have assumed that Donna would find offensive to the point of misogyny. Another surprise there. He shook himself and made a beeline for Rose's desk.

She wasn't there.

He did not like that his first thoughts and feelings were panicked. Something in his chest clenched. (Lungs? Heart? Spleen? No, wait, that was lower.) Where was Donna? And Ianto? Had they all gone? Where?

He heard a peal of laughter behind him. That was Rose. He followed the sound and found the three of them in the conference room, sorting through stacks of papers and file boxes.

Rose was telling a story. Her back was to him, but he could imagine the wide-eyed expression as she mimed a hands-up surrender. Donna had taken off her black-with-white-pinstripe blazer (damn, he had that same pattern!) and found a spot on the floor to do her sorting. She was laughing. Ianto was stacking boxes, and even he was chuckling.

The Doctor stayed in the doorway, not wanting to break the spell.

"So, Mickey's stuck against the wall, and the Galfo's pointing this thing at him, and he's sure he's
about to get shot. Jake's covered in mucous, and it smells like cabbage and moth balls and… Ooh, what's it called? The cleaner…” She searched for the word.

"The purple stuff?" Donna supplied.

"Industrial or domestic?" Ianto asked.

"No, no… It's simple. Ammonia! Well, Jake's sleeping in a puddle of this stuff."

"Ugh!" Donna said appreciatively.

"And I'm trying to sneak up on the Galfo bloke with a bucket full of flat lager. But I slip in the mucous…” Ianto pulled a face and Donna 'oooh-ed' sympathetically. "And I'm—bam—right on my arse and the bucket spills all over me, so now I smell like a pub, plus the Galfo turns around, 'cause there's no way it's going to miss me swearing." Ianto chuckled.

"So, Mickey…" Rose grinned. "So Mickey's standing there, and I guess he just couldn't think of anything else to do, so he grabs the Galfo by the shoulders and he's trying to wrestle him, but…” She was laughing too hard to talk coherently.

"He what? What happened?" Donna cried.

Rose gasped for breath and waved at Ianto to take over.

"Mr. Smith had accidentally engaged the Galfo in a mating ritual," he said, smirking.

Donna's eyes went wide as saucers. "No!"

"Yes!" Rose doubled over. "The bloke tried to snog him and…” She was lost to paroxysms. Donna joined her, screeching with laughter.

"Oh, oh…” Donna managed to stop laughing after a few moments. "That's not funny. Poor Mickey."

Rose sobered with some difficulty. "Yeah, poor Mickey."

The three of them burst out laughing again. The Doctor leaned on the door and crossed his arms and wished that he'd heard the beginning of the story. Anything that could make Ianto crack a smile was not to be missed. This had him in open-mouthed guffaws.

"Doctor!" Rose had spotted him at last. "I didn't see you. We were just talking about…” She hesitated. "You know. Torchwood stuff."

"Galfo, eh? I'm assuming it was the dream slime?"

"Yeah." She wiped at her eyes. "Poor Jake was asleep for a week."

"Don't suppose you're ready to head home?" he ventured, glancing at Donna and Ianto.

Ianto pulled out his fob watch. "Eleven past five. I was planning on staying until six." He turned to Donna. "I've a few things I need to show you before you go, if you don't mind staying a bit longer."

"Not at all." Donna got up off of the floor. "We've made a bit of a dent in the mountain, I think."

"More than a dent," Rose said. "You're really quick with this stuff."
"Best temp in Chiswick," the Doctor said. They all looked at him, expressions ranging from bemused to uneasy. He realised that he and Donna had said the same thing at the same time.

Donna shook off her confusion and rolled her eyes. "You two hurry and get out of here."

"Good idea," the Doctor said, taking Rose's hand and pulling her through the door with him. He waved. "See you tomorrow!"

Rose bumped him with her elbow. "What was that?" she asked once they were in the corridor.

"What was what?" he said, playing dumb. (It usually worked.)

"You and Donna."

He pulled his ear. "Well, it's not like it isn't true."

"It was still pretty... odd."

"Rose Tyler," he said, fixing her with a mock-serious look. "Are you not accustomed to odd? What was all that running around for?"

Her smile was unsure. "I guess. But what you said about..." Her eyes darted back towards the conference room, where Donna was still talking to Ianto.

"It's hardly the first time two people have spoken in unison. You and I used to..." He trailed off. Rose wasn't looking at him anymore. In fact, she'd walked over to her desk. Frowning, he followed her. "Rose?"

She picked her mobile off of the desk. "I'm going out for lunch tomorrow," she said.

"Oh?"

"With Jack."

He wasn't sure how to respond. For a moment, he stood there, trying to decide between jealousy, pleasure, and caution.

She pushed her hair behind her ear. "It's just lunch," she said. "I wanted to see what I could find out about him. See how much he's like our Jack."

"I don't think it's a very good idea," he said, scowling as he remembered the way the con man had tried to sweep Rose off her feet, back when they'd first met him. This world's Jack might be nothing like the one of the other universe, but he'd lay good odds that he wouldn't be that different.

"I'm not sure it is, either," Rose said. "That's why I've invited Donna to come with me."

That honestly surprised him. "What?"

"Oh, that is not fair!" cried Donna.

"Apparently she loves swing music, and she thinks he's gorgeous..."

He sighed. "Of course she does." Donna and Jack in a room together. Well, at least that meant that Jack would be too occupied to put the moves on Rose. Then again, he'd probably take Donna's presence as a sort of special invitation.
"I could tag along," he said, trying to sound casual about it.

Rose raised an eyebrow. "Are you jealous?"

_Don't lie this time_, Donna advised.

"Yes," he said, squirming under her gaze. _There, happy?_

Rose took him by the hand. He focused on that, then on her breasts a moment (as he had permission now, he might as well enjoy them), before she touched his chin and forced his eyes to her face. Why was she smiling? "Sounds like a plan, then," she said.

_See? Good things can happen when you tell the truth._

_You needn't be so smug about it._

Rose took her jacket off the back of her chair and proceeded to pull him towards the door. "I've got a surprise for you," she said.

"A surprise?" he repeated, hopefully. "A good surprise?"

"I think you'll like it," she said and put tongue between her teeth. Oh, he'd missed that look.

When they made it back to the Tylers', the Doctor hoped to abscond with Rose and lock the both of them inside her room (the new sonic worked well enough on simple things). However, Jackie caught them at the door and started to make a fuss about how they'd missed every single 'family supper' since they'd come back. The Doctor went back in his mind, in order to construct an argument.

_Week one: travel back from Norway and a good, thorough exploration of London, just for the sake of acclimatisation. Lots of awkward silences between him and Rose while they rode around in cabs and did almost no proper running or walking. He'd had to tell Rose that he had Donna's memories in his head, though he had tried to avoid admitting to the voice itself. That hadn't lasted long. No dinners with Jackie and Pete and Tony at the Tyler house._

_Week two: Rose had gone back to work at Torchwood. After two days of moping about the house, bored out of his mind, Jackie had thrust a credit card into his hand and kicked him out of the house just to keep him from trying to improve any of the appliances. Why she thought he'd have a go at her toaster, he couldn't imagine. Even with jam on it. Then he'd been 'invited' to see the Warehouse—meaning he'd shown up there and broken in in about forty seconds and Rose hadn't kicked him out again. He'd spent a lot of time in the Archives, eager to learn everything he could about the universe that he was now stuck in. (Didn't want to be caught getting basic historical facts wrong, now, did he?) Still no dinner with Tylers. A few awkward meals with Rose and quite a bit of take-away._

_Week three: He'd met Donna (again), there had been a lot of Zvazvera, some very good chips, and the week had ended in a party (which had included nibbles and champagne and more Zvazvera). And then there'd been Rose's bed. He couldn't even remember what he'd had to eat on Sunday. (Donna's mind supplied alternate definitions for common words, and the Doctor was suddenly hard pressed not to blush.)_

Okay, so Jackie was right. Also, time moved a lot faster when he was human. Or, time really did move at a faster rate in this universe. It was hard to tell without the basis for comparison. It wasn't as if Rose or Jackie still moved at the old speed. Everyone was settled into their environment, for better or worse.
Rose tried to pull Tony off of her legs. (He was determined to hug both of her calves at the same time.) "At least let us get cleaned up first? We spent half the morning underground."

"Ten minutes," Jackie said, glaring at the Doctor in particular. "I know you can tell time. Don't be late."

Rose picked up the toddler and handed him to her mother. "Yeah, fine."

"I mean it," Jackie called up the stairs after them. "Ten minutes! I'm timing you!"

Rose pushed her bedroom door open and groaned. "She is killing me."

The Doctor glanced over his shoulder before he shut the door gently behind him and muttered, "I think it might be me she wants to kill."

"We can do ten minutes, right?"

He grinned and pulled her against him. "Oh yes. Finally.

"What are you doing?" she wondered, laughing a bit and squirming away.

"Ten minutes!" he cried, confused. What were they up here for, then? "Limited time!"

She headed for the bed, so he followed her, tearing off his jacket and tie on the way. However, instead of doing something that made sense, like taking off her clothes, Rose got down on her knees next to the bed and reached under it. She produced a shoe box, and, in a somewhat disturbing turn, Donna provided a plethora of… interesting… items that might be contained therein.

The things you learned about a person when you had a copy of their mind stored inside your brain.

Rose pushed the box towards him. "Go on, open it."

He sat at the foot of the bed, took the lid off of the shoe box, and discovered… shoes. His (unexpected) disappointment faded quickly, though, when he realised what kind of shoes they were.

"You got me new trainers!" He pulled one of the Converse out and looked it over. It was blue, which was different, but in a good way. "Oh, brilliant!"

"You like them?" Rose looked relieved. "I wasn't sure. I know they're not the right colour."

He held the new shoe sole to sole with the red one on his foot. "You guessed my size!"

"Didn't have to guess," she said, quietly. "Just remembered."

The Doctor put the shoe back in the box with its mate. He looked at Rose, reached out for her hand, and felt the exquisite, not-quite-painful plunging sensation in his stomach. (This was one of the few feelings he didn't have to wonder about. Rose had always made him feel that.) "They're exactly the right colour," he said. "Thank you."

Rose's smile could have burned retinas. She touched his face; that was all the invitation he needed. He kissed her, tasting her lips and her tongue (and the peppermint she'd eaten in the car) and decided that whatever punishment for tardiness that Jackie Tyler could devise for them would be entirely worth it.

§
Dinner was relatively painless. They were late, but it seemed that Jackie was too involved in her telling the tale of the builders who were supposed to be fixing the damage to the house to take much notice. Pete looked more than a bit relieved when the two of them appeared.

While they ate, Rose let her mother witter on about the builders some more, while Pete put down his own knife and fork and helped Tony to feed himself. The Doctor wouldn't have been able to get a word in if he'd tried. Not that he had anything to say (an odd feeling). What did one talk about at a 'family supper'? (Christmas dinner hadn't been like this.) It seemed to be all going on about the mundane details of the day or small talk about the news, punctuated by one or two attempts by the toddler to escape the towering prison of his high chair.

Tony had the right idea, the Doctor thought. It was mind-numbing. Even the Donna bits of him were bored by the so-called conversation, which was saying something, because she should have known how to get by in this kind of setting.

You ruined me for all this stuff, she told him.

Rose bumped his knee with hers.

"Not hungry?"

"Hmm? No, I mean. Yeah. I was just listening to… about the builders," he lied.

Jackie gave his plate an almost hawk-like glare. "You've hardly touched your vegetables," she said. "Cook went to a lot of trouble to get those. Who'd have thought broccoli would be so hard to come by, eh?"

"It's that farm worker's union causing trouble again," Pete said absently as he wiped bits of purple carrot from Tony's chin. Tony made faces and systematically tested the side of his tray for weaknesses.

The Doctor skewered a particularly large broccoli stalk and held it up to closer scrutiny. He'd liked it before. Loved it, in fact. Now, it just tasted like… well, horrid. Was that the new taste buds, or Donna? Oh well.

Rose eyed him as if she knew what he was thinking. "There's carrots," she said, handing the dish over to him. He took it and served himself a generous helping.

When supper was over at last, the Doctor thought that he and Rose might be able to escape to the comfort of her bedroom.

"Come watch telly," Jackie wheedled.

Rose grimaced. "Really, Mum, we're knackered."

The Doctor decided that they were going to just have to make a break for it. He grabbed Rose's hand and started to pull her along, but she didn't move her feet.

"But it's Song for the World! And Britain's in the finals."

"We're always in the finals," Rose said. She darted a glance at him. "No Eurovision."

"Taiwan won last year," Jackie said as she tried to lead them down the hall to the lavish entertainment room. (The television in there was bigger than the couch, and that was sectional.) "They were such snobs about it, too. I'd be fine if Soweto won, though. They've had a hell of a
He darted a pleading look at Rose, then Pete. "Well… that's… nice. If you care about that sort of thing. Ever."

"Let them go, Jackie," Pete said, answering the Doctor's silent prayer. "Busy day tomorrow. Make sure you get plenty of sleep, Doctor."

"Yes." The Doctor wondered what that was supposed to mean, exactly.

"We'll see the results by Friday, then."

"Results?"

"Medical exam? Nine a.m.? Didn't Dr. Harper mention it?"

The Doctor winced. "Er… Yes."

"Night, Mum." Rose kissed her mother's cheek, then Pete's, and gave Tony a departing tickle. "Night night, Tony-tony."

"Story, Ro!"

"Daddy will read you your story tonight, lamb," Jackie said.

Tony's whines of protest followed them as Rose led the way back upstairs. The Doctor followed on autopilot, preoccupied. Why were they all so keen on the medical exam now? It had been mentioned right away when he'd arrived, but hardly a word had been spoken since. Now, suddenly, they were all over the idea.

"You okay?" Rose asked him. She locked the door to the suite and knitted her eyebrows at him.

"Fine," he said automatically. Then, seeing the crease between her eyebrows deepen, he said, "Exam."

"Don't worry, they're not going to go Roswell on you." She took off her necklace and put it on the vanity.

"Why now?" he wondered, glaring at the thick-piled ivory carpet. "I'll have to find a way out of it."

She looked at him via the reflection in the mirror. "It won't be that bad," she said. "It's just a physical. I had to get one when I joined up."

"I haven't joined up," he reminded her.

"I know you haven't. But it's a bit different with you."

He caught himself in the mirror over her shoulder and wondered where he could find a better hair gel. The stuff he'd found in his en suite left his hair feeling dirty and stiff, though it did do the trick as far as lift and spring was concerned. "Pardon me if I don't exactly trust Torchwood doctors."

"Owen's a good doctor," she said. "He's obnoxious, but he knows what he's about. You can trust him."

He decided not to argue about it. He'd simply have to find something to do that would keep him busy. Or he wouldn't go. He wasn't their employee; he didn't have to submit to them.
Rose disappeared into the bathroom and he heard water running in the tub. With a sigh, he took off his socks and his jacket and dropped onto the bed. It was still rumpled from before supper. He could smell them on the sheets. He looked up at the white ceiling and felt a pang of longing for the bronze dome and the roundels of the TARDIS console room.

The part of him that was still fully Time Lord ached at her absence. Mostly, he'd tried not to think about his ship. (Like he'd used to try not to think about Rose.) He'd been largely successful. Maybe being dragged into "family" activities had done it. Or finding the Brindisi effusion device. He couldn't just pick up and go anymore. He was stuck here. It was making him feel uneasy.

He'd got used to the absence of Time Lords, he thought. (Sort of.) He could get used to no TARDIS. Of course, having that bit of his brain that was Donna chiming in probably made the transition a bit easier. He wasn't alone in his own head, that was what mattered. He shuddered at the thought of silence.

The bathroom door opened a crack. "You coming or not?" Rose called.

He rolled across the bed, and bounded to the door. "Oh yes!"

§

He woke up in an empty bed. Sunlight was pouring in the window, hurting his eyes. He groaned and sat up, rubbing sleep from his eyes and scratching his head. Rose was in the shower again. (She bathed even more often than he remembered.) He got out of bed and pulled on his trousers and t-shirt.

There was a bird singing outside the window, just there on a branch of a nearby tree. It was bright blue and crested; a jay, he supposed. The song was strangely operatic for a bird. And blue jays didn't live in the south of England. He watched it as it hopped along the branch, singing loudly enough to drown out even the sound of Rose's shower.

He turned around and walked towards the door to the corridor. He went downstairs and stopped in the foyer for a moment before deciding to go outside and investigate the strange bird.

The Tyler mansion bordered a long expanse of sand and rocky shoreline. The air was cold, far too cold for September, and the sound of ocean waves roared in his ears.

There was another roaring sound, and he turned on his heels in the cold, wet sand and stared as a tall, blue police box materialised only a few feet away from him.

A familiar face popped out. "Ah, there you are!" said the other Doctor, the real Doctor, giving him a friendly smile. "It worked then."

"What are you doing here?" he cried. "The walls are closed!"

"Ohh… You don't really think I'd let that stop me, do you?"

"Yes," he replied. He rubbed his arms against the Norwegian sea winds. Why hadn't he put on his jacket? Oh, he missed that coat. "It did before."

"Welll… I thought I'd take another crack at it. Wasn't so hard after all. Now I can come take what's mine."

"What do you mean?" he wondered, as the chill in the air settled in his chest.
The Time Lord's friendly mask faded away completely. "You know what I mean."

"No," he said, panic searing through him, leaving him feeling frozen and empty. "You left us here. Rose is here with me."

"That was a mistake. I've come to correct it."

"No!" He clenched his fists and took a step closer to the TARDIS. "You can't!"

"I already have."

The door of the TARDIS opened again and Rose stepped out. "Sorry," she said, giving him a pitying look as she took the Doctor's hand in hers. "You understand, though. You just sort of… happened."

"Rose…" His heart was racing. "Don't, please! He can't—"

"Bye!" she called over her shoulder as the two of them got back inside the TARDIS. The doors slammed shut and it started to fade from view.

"ROSE!"

He ran towards the TARDIS, or at least he tried to. It was impossibly far away, the sand shifted under his feet, and the distance kept growing.

"You'll never catch them now, Spaceman." Donna cocked her head to one side. She looked just as she had at Bad Wolf Bay, after the meta-crisis, in her grey jumper and that wide leather belt. "Come on, you knew she wasn't going to stick around."

"I have to get her back," he panted, pulling at his hair as he crouched on the sand. "She can't leave me, not again. I can't lose her again!"

"Tell you what, Spaceman," Donna said. She knelt beside him. "There's one way. You won't like it, though."

He looked up at her. "How? Anything!"

"If you shatter-fry the plasmic shell and modify the dimensional stabiliser to a fold-back harmonic of 36.3, you can accelerate the growth by the power of 59."

"Plasmic shell of what?" he cried. "What are you talking about? What about Rose?" He got to his feet and shouted at the spot where the TARDIS had been. "Rose! ROSE!" He started to run again, but the sand shifted out from underfoot and he fell.

He was in darkness, flat on his back. He opened his eyes and gasped for air.

"Doctor!" Rose's voice was frantic. "Doctor, are you awake?" Suddenly there was light. She'd turned on the lamp on the night stand.

He sat up and rubbed his face. He was sweating and trembling, and he couldn't escape the feeling of foreboding or the cold claws of fear clenching around his isolated heart. Rose's arm circled around his head and she pulled it to her breast.

"You were shouting," she said. He pulled away to look at her, digging his fingers into her shoulders. She was solid; this was real. She looked shaken; her eyes were wide, her hair askew. "Were you having a nightmare?"
A nightmare. It must have been. Time Lords didn't dream often, and nightmares were even less common. He hadn't had any since the aftermath of the Time War. (Maybe a few after the Master.) Humans, however…

His voice came out in a crackle. "Rose?" Part of him couldn't believe she was really there. He clutched her arm; it was warm and soft under his hands. He kissed it, up it, and then pressed his lips to hers, desperate to make the dread go away. His heart was trying to burst from his chest. She kissed him back gently, then pulled away and tried to take his face in her hands.

"Are you all right? What—?"

"Need you," he murmured against her cheek. "Rose…" He kissed her again. She clutched his hair between her fingers.

He worried that he was too rough, but the adrenaline was making it hard to control himself. He was too frightened to let her go, couldn't stop touching her. He kept talking, but he wasn't even sure what he was saying anymore, only that, between kisses, there were words tumbling out of his mouth. She said his name and gasped into his ear and swore and moved on him, under him, as earnestly and desperately as if they were running for their lives.

After his climax, he collapsed with his face against the curve of her neck. He felt her arms tighten around his chest, solid and real and comforting.

"Rose…" he began, intending to apologise. She hushed him and kissed his neck and soothed him with whispers until sleep caught up with him again.
Chapter 3

It was seven a.m. when Toshiko walked into the stainless-steel corral that some designer had called a kitchen. It was more like the kitchen in a restaurant than the sort that belonged in a flat, but it had probably been designed by some Torchwood architect and Torchwood architects had no appreciation for old, warm things.

She opened the metal fridge, took out a small carton of milk and set it on the cold metal counter. There wasn't much in the way of food, since she'd had no time to do any real shopping in the few days she had lived here. Most of her things were on the Torchwood freight airship, which had been delayed. It wasn't due to arrive in London until tomorrow. (Torchwood had wanted them in London ASAP—critical situation in London, Torchwood Alpha in shambles, etc. Their comfort was less of a priority.) As she fantasised about the most efficient arrangement for her belongings in this converted loft, she finished making the tea and took it back to the bedroom. To do so, she had to cross a large, empty space that would soon become her living area.

When she'd been told the flat was a loft, she had expected only the one large room; however, the master suite had walls built around it. It had probably been an office once; it still had the original black enamel painted wooden door, complete with eight and a third panes of wavy, mismatched glass. She wondered if there was a glazer in the area and decided that she would repaint the door a deep red.

The big factory window in the bedroom was curtainless, so the early-morning sunlight poured onto the black-and-white square-patterned down duvet that she had bought Saturday morning. (Her bed in Tokyo had been smaller than the one here. She'd had to buy all new linens.) The lump under the covers stirred and tightened its cocoon after the glass in the door shuddered with the soft impact of closing.

"I made you some tea," Tosh said, setting her own cup on the floor next to the bed and sitting next to the lump, still holding the second cup. "I don't have any food. Sorry."

The lump groaned. "My alarm isn't set for another hour."

"I thought it'd be nice," she replied, looking at the plain white mug in her hands. She'd bought two at the little housewares shop. They were simple 'U' shapes without handles, and they fit nicely in cupped hands. "First morning together. Here, I mean."

Martha pushed the duvet away from her face and looked at her with sleep-blurred eyes. Her braids were caught in clumps until she sat up and ran her fingers through them. "That is nice," she said softly, voice scratchy. She blinked and reached out for the tea. "Thanks."

"Did you sleep well?"

Martha smiled slyly. "Better than I have in a week."

"Good." She picked up her own mug and went around to the other side of the bed. She closed her eyes when Martha leaned her head on her shoulder.

"I'm sorry," Martha said for what was probably the eighth time.

"You don't have to be," Tosh said, a little bit surprised that they were having this conversation now. Usually Martha didn't like to talk until after she'd had her tea and a trip to the loo. Maybe the early waking had shifted her out of her routine. "It's not as if I don't understand."
"I just don't want you to think I'm ashamed or anything."

"You're the boss," she said. "I understand."

Martha kissed a bare shoulder and one of her hands moved to cup Tosh's left breast through the loose material of the satiny blue camisole.

"Can't be seen to be breaking the rules," Tosh murmured.

Martha's hand moved and settled around her waist. It was warm and comforting, and just a little bit possessive. Tosh turned her head to look down at her lover's face. Martha's eyes were closed; she looked calm and happy. Then her brow furrowed. "Do I detect sarcasm?"

"No." Tosh hesitated. "...Maybe a little."

Martha's voice went low and soft. "If it wouldn't get us both sacked..."

Tosh made a noise that sounded like agreement, but inside her head, she was wondering if that were really the case. Pete Tyler didn't seem to have the same feelings about Torchwood Code that Onigawa had had. If Onigawa had ever discovered that one of her field agents was sleeping with one of her techs, they both would have been dismissed on the spot. If she'd found out that a team leader was sleeping with a tech, and had gone so far as to falsify documents and manipulate human resources so as to have that tech transferred with her to another jurisdiction, simply so that they could continue to sleep together... Her own memory of the details of the Torchwood Code weren't specific enough to provide the exact thing that would happen, but being sacked would have probably been the least of it.

Martha left the flat first, as she had to visit her own so she could shower and get ready for work. Torchwood had placed them in the same building for their 'convenience'. Torchwood had had their own set of flats set aside for agents in Washington, too. (Though those'd been much larger than these.)

They had no idea how convenient it really was. Having the woman you were seeing live just down the hall from you, could have its advantages. Everyone had their own personal space, so there were no worries about treading on each other's toes or feeling over-crowded... And it gave them a nice excuse to carpool if they wanted.

Today, Toshiko went in alone. There were quite a few questions to answer about the effusion device, and she wanted to dive right back in.

Thus far, working with the Doctor had been very enlightening, if a bit confusing. Tosh was used to being the brightest bulb in the room, at least when it came to hard science, but this man blew her out of the water. He was fascinating. He was also very odd. Martha had hinted that his origins were very out-of-the-ordinary, though there wasn't much she could say since there were levels of clearance and basic privacy and simple good manners to be considered. Tosh considered it possible that the real reason was Martha didn't actually know the details.

Tosh found the lab empty, which was fine. As entertaining as the Doctor was, she was used to working alone; for the most part, she preferred it. Other people usually slowed things down, or got in the way.

Yesterday, while she and the Doctor had been cleaning, Tosh had found a pair of goggles. They looked like something out of Jules Verne, but the leather straps were blue-black instead of a more traditional brown. The metalwork was brass—or at least, it looked like brass. She put them on. It was
hard to resist playing with all the settings, just to see what they could do. The Doctor had said something about them giving a pretty good light show if you looked at a microwave oven. One setting seemed to measure spectral density—that seemed as likely a place to start as any.

Tuning the lenses for focus—the goggles weren't necessarily designed for human eyes, and she wore corrective lenses—she took a closer look at her own hands, inspecting the squared-off ovals of her fingernails and looking at the brightly coloured heat patterns.

The Brindisi effusion device—the Doctor had said that was its proper name—was exactly 39.687 centimetres tall, and 13.335 centimetres at its widest point. She'd heard the secretary, Donna, say that it looked like a lava lamp. It was a pretty good description, though the shape of the metal piece on top had a centimetre wide channel in it that ended in a round depression. Tosh surmised that this was probably how the piece was locked into a larger assembly. The base was far more solid than any lava lamp she'd ever seen, and it was nowhere near as hot. The glass was warm: a consistent 29.45º Celsius.

She'd spent some time yesterday making a rough sketch of the device on graph paper, just in pencil. There were detailed spectrograph readings to add to the Archive database entry, but sometimes it was nice to have a plain-and-simple diagram to look at. Especially when it came down to the inevitable "explain it to the non-scientists" portion.

The Doctor had gone on for about an hour about the general application of the technology; lucky thing she'd been smart enough to turn on the record function on her mobile. She put on her single earpod—Sony was putting out more tech these days, since Lumic Industries had stopped cornering the market—and listened to the recording. The Doctor's voice spoke into her ear as she adjusted the settings on the goggles, took a closer look at the device and made notes on her laptop about the read-outs.

"...A million tiny organisms suspended inside a jar... It's a biosphere, a whole ecosystem living and dying and giving off massive amounts of energy. It's the cleanest fuel you could ask for, really. Except, of course, they're very, very hard to come by, even in their own time period. Nobody knows where they come from, but the people who discovered it—not humans, they'll be called the Nop. Probably. Called them the tears of the gods."

She could hear people moving about and talking in the corridor. Unless they decided to ask her for something, she had no intention of stirring. She adjusted the goggles, clicking through different settings, with all sorts of colourful results. She stopped before she found the spectral density setting she'd been looking for, and clicked back.

The effusion device was shrouded in a golden shimmer of light. Tosh stared, captivated for a moment by its beauty. What was it showing her?

The field of golden light seemed to follow her hands if she touched the device; whenever she pulled her hands away, tendrils followed her fingertips. There was also a long curling trail, like a curl of smoke, though whether it was moving toward the device or away, she couldn't immediately tell.

Holding the device in front of her, she walked around the lab, watching to see how the readings changed. The energy field rippled like water, but it never dimmed. On the inside of the goggles, she could see numbers and symbols she didn't recognise. She'd have to get the Doctor to translate. (He was good with languages, he'd said, and he had been able to read those alien schematics.) She set the device back down on the table, so as to concentrate on the trail.

It led out of the room, so she followed it. Every footstep echoed in the long white corridor, while on it went, winding and floating on the air like incense.
Tosh stopped when the trail stopped. She looked up and saw the glass wall of Martha's office. Inside, the energy was hovering in a cloud over the desk.

Before she could push the door open and get a better look at the room, she bumped into someone.

"Sorry," she said automatically. She looked up.

The Doctor grinned down at her. "Hello, Toshiko! Taking the Spectro Specs out for a spin?"

"Doctor..." Martha's voice was pointed. Tosh realised that she'd interrupted their conversation. Martha's arms were crossed and one eyebrow was raised. That was her 'stop arguing and do as I say' look.

It was only milliseconds before the Doctor and Martha started to argue again. Tosh glanced between them, taking note of the tiny glimmer around the Doctor's hand as he gesticulated and the way that Martha's eyes flashed with irritation. Curious, she clicked through to a different setting. Now both of them were in full-spectrum colours, temperatures rising as they continued to fight.

Two more figures appeared. It took Tosh a moment to recognise Rose and Owen by their heat signatures. (She wondered if Owen felt as cold as he looked.)

"Oi! There's no need to shout," Rose said.

"I am not submitting to this!" the Doctor said.

"You are!" Martha snapped.

"It's just a physical," Rose said, putting a placating hand on the Doctor's arm.

Tosh pushed the goggles up onto her forehead. Was that what all the shouting was about? She gave the Doctor a looking-over. Was he hiding something, or did he just not like doctors? (Ironic.) She pushed the goggles back down and wondered if there was an X-ray setting. She clicked back, pretty sure she'd noticed one, but stopped on the setting that had shown the golden light. The effusion device's energy trail was still there, and funnily enough, Martha's office wasn't the only place it was going anymore.

The Doctor's right hand was glowing. Without thinking, she reached out and grabbed it, pulling it closer and trying to keep it still as she stared at his palm.

Everyone stopped talking abruptly. It took her a moment to realise that they were all looking at her.

"Do you mind?" the Doctor said, sounding like he was torn between being cross and amused.

The energy was pulsing in time with his heartbeat, swirling as she turned his hand over to look at the back of it. It was definitely the same gold field that was collecting behind the glass wall of Martha's office.

"How are you doing that?" she wondered aloud. He hadn't handled the device any longer than she had. Her hands hadn't attracted the energy for more than a few seconds.

He stared at her and pulled his hand back. "Doing what?"

Martha frowned at her. "Can it wait, Tosh?"

"Of course," she murmured. She glanced back at the Doctor—who was obviously put out. "Sorry."

The Doctor spared one more glance at Toshiko before he and Rose followed Owen to the stairwell. Her new line of enquiry was effectively curtailed—for now—so her attention returned to the previous one.

Martha called her name and she turned away from the office door.

"Yes?"

"What is that thing you're wearing?"

Blushing, Tosh pushed the goggles up. "He called them Spectro Specs."

"Please tell me they've been cleared for safe usage?" Martha was smiling knowingly, but she looked a little bit worried.

"I'm pretty sure," Tosh replied, as honestly as she could. If they weren't safe, they probably wouldn't have been lying about in the lab. Probably.

"Make sure you take breaks. And no crazy experiments this morning. The Doctor will be done with his physical by lunchtime."

"Is there something wrong with him?"

Martha shrugged. "He's an alien, so who knows?"

"Really?" Tosh looked down the corridor after them. She pulled the goggles down briefly and saw that the gold trail split off around the door to the stairwell. "That explains a lot. Which kind? I've never met any that looked like us before."

Martha shook her head. "No idea. The Tylers know a lot more than they let on. He's even living with them."

Tosh looked at Martha's desk. "Do you mind if I take a sweep of your office? There's a funny energy signature I'd like to trace."

Martha shook her head and smiled. "Long as you promise not to blow anything up."

§

Rose gave the Doctor a sympathetic look. "It'll be okay," she said.

He glared at her a moment, then muttered something about 'bloody Torchwood' before turning to Owen and jabbing a finger at him. "Anything I don't like, and I'm walking out," he said.

Owen rolled his eyes, clicked his pen and picked up his clipboard. The Doctor darted a glance at her. She touched his arm. "See you in a bit."

"All right, Doctor," Owen said. "Examination room number one, and strip."

"Rose..." the Doctor pleaded.

"I'm sorry," she said, wincing.
"Dibs on the extra organs," Owen said, smirking.

The Doctor bristled. "I haven't got extra—"

"Room one, hurry up! I'm not having Jones riding my arse all morning!" He jerked his head at Rose. "Off you go, Tyler." He turned back to the Doctor and said, mockingly, "Unless you want your girlfriend holding your hand the whole time?"

The Doctor's face turned pink and he stalked to the exam room.

"Oi, go easy on him," Rose said.

"He's a big boy, Tyler. He can see the big bad doctor by himself," Owen said snidely.

She crossed her arms and watched him write something at the top of his fresh form.

"Is the secretary here yet?"

"She's got a name."

"Is she or isn't she?"

"Donna is in the Archives with Ianto."

Owen's forehead furrowed. "She knows he's a poof, right?"

Rose tried to think of something biting to say, but couldn't come up with anything. "They're working, Owen."

"Just saying. She'd be barking up the wrong tree."

"Why do you care?" she snapped. "Mind your own business and do your job. You're just making him wait on purpose."

"For your information," Owen said, looking offended. "I had a work-related question to ask her."

Rose considered the likelihood that this was true against the likelihood that he was just trying to make the Doctor feel less at-ease by making him wait. She rolled her eyes and left the office.

Back at her desk, she found a pile of various-coloured file folders with a bright sticky Post-It note on top reading, "Need completed ASAP." She groaned and fondly thought back to the days of Mickey and Jake. Even the fraught, nervous tension of the Dimension Cannon tests had been better than this.

Donna came over to her desk at twelve-thirty. "Ready to go?"

She looked up from a very dry file on an alien-run Ponzi scheme that the D.C. branch had sent for them to archive and blinked a few times, just to make sure that she still could. "Sorry?"

"Lunch?" Donna already had her handbag on her shoulder. "At one o'clock."

Rose checked the time on her mobile. "Yeah, just a minute." She closed the file and threw it onto the 'done' pile. She didn't understand a word of it, anyways. "Has the Doctor come up?"

Donna shook her head. "No, I think Owen's still got him downstairs."

"Still? It's been three hours!"
"Must be a lot of tests," Donna mused. She tilted her head. "Should be nearly done now."

Rose marched down to Owen's office and found it empty. Examination room one's door was closed. She knocked lightly, then, when there wasn't an immediate response, a bit harder.

Owen opened the door a crack and blocked it with his body. "Oh. It's you."

"Rose?"

He opened the door and let her in. The Doctor was sitting on the exam table in a white hospital gown, his bare legs dangling.

"Doing all right?" she asked. He looked whole, at least.

"I've got about eight more tests to run," Owen said and wrote something on his clipboard.

"Eight?!" the Doctor cried. "You said there was just the one!"

"Yeah, well, that was before I saw what happened during the last one."

The Doctor groaned.

Her heart almost stopped. "Is everything okay?" She grabbed the Doctor's hand. "Is there some sort of problem or...? Is it something abnormal?"

"I'm still running tests," Owen said irritably. "I don't even know what 'normal' is for him, yet. Now, if you'll please get out and let me do my job?"

Rose bit her lip. The Doctor squeezed her hand. "Don't worry about me," he said, smiling bracingly.

"We were going to go to lunch..." she began.

He blinked. "Oh. *Oh.* Owen, you've got to let me take a break."

"Not a chance! How do I know you'll come back?" He snapped on a fresh glove. "Besides, I've still got to check your prostate."

There was a brief moment where the Doctor didn't seem to know what Owen was talking about. Then, horrified realisation dawned. "My what?"

Owen pointed at the door. "Out, Tyler. Men only."

"Oh, come on!" the Doctor cried, indignant. "That can't actually be necessary!"

"You're less than a month old, and you've got the body of a man in his thirties," Owen said, fixing his eyes on him. "I've got to get all of your baselines. All of them." He shook his head and grumbled. "You think I enjoy this?"

"What do you do for fun?" the Doctor asked peevishly. "Torture small animals?"

"No, just half-alien clones. Much more entertaining. I said out, Tyler."

Reluctantly, Rose let go of the Doctor's hand. After a brief internal struggle, she kissed him on the cheek. Owen could keep his opinions to himself. "I'll see you later."

"Be careful, Rose!" She turned back. He looked worriedly at her. "I mean it. Don't trust him."
She nodded and left the room, letting the heavy metal door close behind her.

Temple's was a bistro with seating on the pavement out front. The restaurant itself was crowded with mostly middle-class people eating scrumptious smelling food in a tastefully cosy dining room. Donna followed Rose inside and over to a table by the window. Jack Harkness was sitting alone with a glass of water and a fancy-looking menu. He looked marvellous in a dark purple shirt and grey trousers. He flashed them a red-carpet smile and stood up to greet them.

"Ladies! Pleased to see you again," he said.

"Mr. Harkness." Rose gave him her hand. He kissed it, then he held out his hands for Donna's. Blushing, she gave it to him and felt a flutter in her stomach when he pressed his pleasingly soft lips just behind her knuckles.

"Jack Harkness," he said, peering up through his eyelashes and smiling. "Donna Noble, am I right?"

"That's me," she replied. He pulled their chairs out for them. "Look at Cary Grant over here," Donna said appreciatively.

Jack took his seat. "He's as good a role model as any. So, Ms. Tyler..."

"Rose."

"Rose," he said, drawing the name out ever so slightly. "Are you looking for voice lessons, or just a few pointers?"

"I don't know," Rose replied, looking a little bit stunned, as if she'd forgotten her excuse for making a lunch with him.

"How about you, Donna?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't sing," she said hurriedly.

"Really? I bet you have a great voice." She blushed and shook her head. "You sure? I'm an excellent teacher."

"Donna knows a lot more about jazz than I do," Rose volunteered. Donna wasn't sure what prompted it.

"Really?" Jack seemed pleased. "Who's your favourite?"

"Depends," Donna replied, keeping a firm rein on her sudden urge to swoon. He had the most gorgeous smile. "Singer, band or composer?"

"How about one of each?"

A young woman in a bright pink blouse came and brought them two more glasses of water. "Good afternoon, Ms. Tyler. Brought a couple friends with you, today?"

"Llo Clarisse."

"Your mother was in here with a handsome man the other day." Clarisse the waitress smiled slyly. "Said he was a friend of yours."
Rose looked like she was wondering what her mother had said. Oh, God. "Oh. Yeah."

"You know what you'd like, or do you need a minute?"

"What's good here?" Jack asked.

"Everything," Clarisse said with a smile. They chose their meals—Rose directed them to her favourite sandwiches—and Clarisse took their orders.

Donna handed her menu to the waitress and said, "Ella Fitzgerald, Artie Shaw's Orchestra, and Billy Strayhorn."

Jack raised an eyebrow, but he looked pleased. "No bebop for you, huh?"

"Well, I like Coltrane and Parker and all them, but only sometimes."

Rose nodded, a bemused look on her face. "I've heard of them."

"Frank Sinatra," Jack said, leaning forward in his chair and ticking off a finger.

"Could have guessed that," Donna said.

He held up his hands. "Let me finish! Glenn Miller."

Rose's eyes lit with recognition. "Like him, too."


"Not bad," Donna allowed. Those had been some of her favourites when she'd first started listening to jazz on purpose while she was at university. She still liked them, of course, although she'd been looked down upon by the people she'd tried to strike up conversations with the one time she'd gone to see a live show. They'd gone on and on about Thelonius Monk and the revelations of Ornette Coleman... She did like Monk, but only if she was in a certain sort of mood. She'd tried listening to Coleman, and it had just given her a headache.

"Of course that's leaving out a hundred people who deserve better," Jack added. "Who do you like to listen to?" he asked Rose. "Doesn't have to be jazzy, of course."

"Don't really have time to listen to anything much," she admitted. "Always working."

"Bad answer." Jack shook his head. "There's always time to listen to music."

"Well, I mostly liked pop, rap, and R&B stuff when I was a kid... Nothing high-brow."

"Nothing wrong with that." He held up his water glass. "Never be ashamed of your musical taste. People think jazz is stuffy, just for intellectuals and grandparents, but truth is, a lot of it was pop music."

"I do like the swing stuff," Rose said. "Had a friend who listened to a lot of it. I took dance lessons when they offered them at school; it was fun." She tilted her head. "Where are you from then, Jack? Tell us about yourself."

Donna glanced at her and tried to decide if she was flirting or not. She hoped not, for the Doctor's sake. (And her own; she'd never be able to compete with Rose.)

Jack shrugged his broad shoulders. "Grew up in Iowa. Little town called Riverside, population under
a thousand. Did a whole lot of nothing, and then I moved to New York. I met some people and we started a band."

Rose's smile widened, but there was an odd sort of look in her eyes. This wasn't an interview for a music teacher, Donna thought. Rose was after something else. And it wasn't sex. (Good.)

"And now you travel all over the world," she said. "Sounds nice."

"Travelling's nice," he said. "I like London, though. A little damp for my taste, but nice."

"I've always wanted to go to New York," Donna said.

"Best city in the world," he said with a confident grin.

"You sound like a New Yorker," Rose said.

"In my heart of hearts? Definitely."

"Been there a few times. 'Sall right."

"All right?" Jack cried, pretending to be deeply offended.

Their food arrived. Donna listened as Rose and Jack swapped New York stories. Rose told an odd story about nuns and then she tried to get him to go on about his family. The conversation was friendly, but at some point, Donna felt a shift in the mood. She glanced up from her chicken and bacon sandwich—which was mouth-wateringly divine—and watched as Jack's charming smile became almost imperceptibly cooler.

"How's your dad doing, if you don't mind me asking?"

Rose swallowed her chip. (Donna envied the under-thirties who could eat chips and fit in a size ten.) "He's much better, thanks."

"That's good. Those bug guys were pretty bad news." Donna remembered the way Jack had tangled with a Zvazveraz that had been posing as a middle-aged woman. Funny thing though; as she thought about it, she realised that he hadn't seemed that surprised by the whole thing at the time.

"Lucky no one got killed," he went on. He met Rose's eye and said, "Torchwood must be a pretty interesting gig."

Rose smiled coolly. "Can be."

It was like watching people play poker. Jack's smile betrayed nothing that Donna could pick up on. She managed not to shift in her seat or stare.

"How is everything?" A man in a white apron had come up to their table. He was dark-skinned and slightly cute, with short, curly hair and an open, friendly face. He resembled Clarisse more than a little bit. Siblings, Donna decided.

Rose looked up at him and, suddenly, her smile was genuine again. "'Sgreat, Shaun. Thanks."

Shaun inclined his head. "Anything you want for dessert, today? On the house."

"No, thank you," Jack said, politely. "Just coffee."

Rose shook her head. "I think we're all right. Time we were heading back to work, actually."
Donna nodded in agreement, though she would have liked to try the coffee, at least. Shaun brought Jack's coffee.

"Jack? Jack Harkness, it is you!"

Shaun looked over his shoulder and smiled a greeting at the newcomer.

Donna turned in her chair and saw a man with wavy brown hair and thick-rimmed glasses pause as he passed their table. He was dressed like some sort of bohemian hipster, in black trousers and an old red military jacket. And a completely unnecessary scarf. (It was a mild day: a little overcast, but not cold.)

Something harder than annoyance flitted across Jack's face before he smiled. "Hello, John. Fancy seeing you here."

John leaned over to clap Jack on the shoulder. "God, it's been, what? Six years? Feels like a thousand." He stopped and took note of Donna and Rose. "My, my, two lovely ladies. Introduce us, Jack!"

"Donna Noble, Rose Tyler," Jack said. His smile was thinning out. "What brings you here, John?"

"Oh, don't be so rude, Jack." He proffered his hand and they shook. "John Hart. We're old friends, Jack and me. We go way back, don't we?"

Rose smiled politely. "Very nice to meet you," she said. She nudged Donna's arm gently with her elbow. "Getting to be that time."

It was past two, Donna realised. "We had better get back."

"Oh, don't let us keep you!" John Hart said cheerfully. "Lunch is on old Jacky boy, isn't it?"

Rose glanced at Jack. He smiled, all politeness and silver screen charm. "No problem. Nice to talk to you both." He settled his eyes on Donna for a moment, then turned back to Rose. "Hope to see you again soon."

They left the restaurant and walked around the corner before Rose turned around and said, "Did that feel funny to you?"

Donna blinked. "Not really. Course, whenever I see people I used to know, I run in the other direction."

Rose furrowed her brow. "Jack didn't seem very happy to see him."

"Maybe he didn't want to admit he knew such a bad dresser."

Rose let out a short laugh and started to say something else when her mobile rang. She pulled it from inside her purple leather jacket and answered it. "Rose Tyler." Her eyes widened as she listened. "Where? Text me the co-ordinates, I'll find it. Be right there." She hung up.

"What's wrong?" Donna asked.

"Argus picked up a temporal disturbance nearby. Martha wants me to check it out."

Donna settled her handbag over her shoulder. "Let's go, then!"

Rose glanced up from her phone. "You sure?"
"I'm sick of reading protocol books," Donna admitted. She paused a moment, then said, "Did you say 'temporal'? Temporal as in time?"

Rose smiled broadly. "Yeah."

"Oh." Donna could feel her heart start to race in excitement. "Oh. My. God."

"Come on, then," Rose said, leading the way back to the SUV.

§

Jack Harkness felt the barrel of a small blaster press against his waist. John 'Hart' (the last name was a new one) smiled silkily at him.

"You really don't even try anymore, do you?" John sighed. "I mean, there's something to be said for hiding in plain sight, but really?"

"Speaking of plain sight... You going to shoot me in a public place?" he said through a smile.

"Nah, no fun that way. Besides, the Church would much rather have you alive. Of course, there's that reward for your head on Zircon..."

"Zircon?" He laughed. "Oh, come on! Like I'd waste my time."

John's smile soured into a grimace. "You fucked up," he said casually. The hand that wasn't holding the gun was gripping the base of Jack's neck and half-throttling him. "I mean, you had to know we'd find you."

"Where's your partner, then?"

"She's creating a little diversion for your Torchwood friends."

He opened his mouth to disavow any connections or knowledge.

"Oh come on," John said. "Common knowledge. Besides, even in this backward little era, everybody knows the names Tyler and Noble. You've stuck your foot in it, Boe." He pressed the blaster a little deeper into Jack's side and raised his other arm into the air. "Cheque, please!"
Chapter 4

The temporal disturbance had been located in the middle of Henrik's department store, of all places. Rose grimaced at the storefront as people milled in and out of its doors. Donna looked at her, concerned. "What's the problem?"

"Nothing," Rose said, hurriedly. "It's only..." She slowly put her mobile away. "I used to work here."

Donna frowned. It was funny to think of the heiress to the Vitex fortune working in a shop. (Fighting aliens didn't seem so strange, if she thought about it. Rich people did all kinds of odd things to stave off boredom.)

"It was before my family got put back together," Rose went on hurriedly. "I haven't been in the shop since." She shook herself. "All right, let's find this thing."

Donna and Rose ended up taking a tour of the different departments. Rose carried a fancy mobile-sized computer that had some kind of scanner inside it that she said would detect the source of the disturbance.

"Time travel's real, then?" Donna asked casually as they scanned the lingerie.

"That's right." Rose turned and surreptitiously scanned another mannequin.

"Time travel," Donna said, trying to make herself believe it as she pretended to be checking the tag on a lacy green bra. "Isn't that impossible? I mean, think of the paradoxes."

Rose shrugged. "They don't crop up that much."

Donna looked at her and frowned. "What do you mean? How do you know?"


"'Not fixed', meaning some of it is? Meaning some things are meant to happen?"

Rose pursed her lips at her scanner. "I s'pose so."

They got off at the top of the escalator. "Still not close enough," Rose muttered, "but we're getting there."

They were at the top floor when Donna asked, "How do you know about this stuff? Does Torchwood have a course, or did you take physics at university?"

Rose smirked. "Not likely. I never even got my A-levels."

The life of Rose Tyler before Torchwood had found her must have been a dull one, Donna mused. "Where'd you learn it, then?"

"Friend of mine," she replied breezily. Then, as if remembering who she was talking to, she amended, "The Doctor, actually. He's an expert."

Donna thought back to a time when Rose Tyler had been a tabloid curiosity—forgotten child of the Vitex empire, discovered three years after Lumic industries had tried to create monster machines
from human beings. If she hadn't already spent time in the company of the Doctor—who was half-mad and definitely had a few stories to tell—Donna would have thought that Rose was more than a bit eccentric.

"He said you two used to travel together."

"Used to," Rose said wistfully. Her eyes clouded over a moment, then she said, "This is where we met. I was working late, and he showed up and..."

The scanner beeped again. Startled, Rose blinked and held it up. "We're less than 10 metres from it," she said. She held the device in front of her like a dousing rod. "Keeps fading out... That's..." She looked up at the ceiling. Donna followed her gaze.

"Is it on the roof?" She looked back at the younger woman; Rose was definitely unnerved.

"On the roof, then."

Donna wondered if she would ever get a gun. She didn't want one, per se, but there was something thrilling about watching Rose shoot the lock off of the door that led onto the roof. The noise was painfully loud in the narrow stairwell, though.

They followed the signal to the side of the exit. There was a brick wall with graffiti painted all over it. Rose honed in on a small, rectangular device stuck to the middle. It had a few small blinking lights on it, and a worrying number of wires coming out of a little panel on the front. When Donna got closer, she could see numbers counting down.

"Fuck," said Rose.

Donna was about to agree when she realised that Rose wasn't even looking at the device. The graffiti was mostly tags, all jumbled up and painted over each other. The largest was one she'd seen before. The words were in black, fanciful block letters, stroked with gold.

BAD WOLF

Of course, there were more important matters at hand.

"That looks like a bomb," Donna said, hoping very much that she was wrong and that she watched too much television.

Rose took out her phone. Donna watched the seconds ticking away until Martha answered.

"We've got a big problem. Get the bomb squad to Henrik's; someone's placed an explosive on the roof. It's got less than fifteen minutes on the counter."

"What do we do?" Donna cried.

Rose closed her mobile and directed her to the door. "Evacuate the building. Downstairs! Go!"

Considering the size of the building, they managed to get it emptied pretty quickly. (Words like 'bomb' were excellent motivators.) Given the way that Rose handled the situation, Donna got the feeling that there was very little that she couldn't do. She moved and shouted like an action film hero.

Donna felt utterly useless, of course. Rose had ordered her to stay outside, and she'd obeyed (Rose was technically her boss, after all). So she waited just behind the police barricade and watched the
Less than one minute to the countdown's end, the bomb squad retreated, stumbling out of the building with their hands over their mouths and coughing. Rose followed close behind, her black shirt pulled over her nose.

"Back!" Rose cried.

The people who had stuck around to see the action started to panic and some scattered. Donna held her ground at the barricade.

Rose was still running when the bomb went off, tearing through the roof of the building. Then there was a cascade of explosions, starting at the top and taking out each floor. People screamed as glass and bits of brick shot into the street. Donna hit the dirt and by doing so, narrowly avoided being hit by a stray bit of shop window dummy.

When the explosions stopped, Donna picked herself up and ran to where Rose lay face-down on the street. Fearing the worst, she doubled her pace. She almost tripped on bits of rubble. She knelt on the ground next to Rose, who turned herself over and started coughing.

"Are you hurt?" Donna cried.

"'M fine," Rose said. She looked at her palms and winced at the bloody scrapes. "Nothing broken, anyway."

Donna helped the other woman to her feet and then surveyed the scene. There didn't seem to be much in the way of injuries, thank Heaven, but emergency services were already arriving on the scene.

Rose waved off the paramedic who tried to take a look at her. When he insisted, she whipped out her ID.

"Torchwood," she said stonily and shoved it in his face. He gave Rose's ID a distasteful look.

"I'll take her to the hospital," Donna told him.

"I'm fine," Rose said testily, and pulled away from the man as he held out a blanket.

"Sorry. Thank you," Donna said. She gave him an apologetic smile and hurried after Rose.

"We've got to go back to the Warehouse," Rose said when they were within a couple of metres of the car. She took out the keys and hit the button to unlock it.

"What do you think you're doing?" Donna cried.

Rose stared at her. "What?"

"You are not driving," she insisted. "What if you have concussion? And what was that stuff you were choking on before?"

"I planted a smoke bomb," Rose answered. "Bloody bomb squad wouldn't leave."

"You called them!"

"Yeah, and then we discovered that the whole building was wired to blow. The technology was too advanced. I should have known better than to involve them."
"You should still go to hospital," Donna said.

"Owen can check me out when we get back. I know what I'm doing."

Donna snatched the keys from her hand. "You're not driving."

Rose's mouth hung open. "Hey, what are you—?"

"Get in the car," Donna commanded. "Right now, or I'll put you there myself! If you are hurt, you could get us both killed."

Rose's mouth snapped shut. She went to the passenger side and slammed the door behind her.

Donna made fists in an attempt to stop her hands shaking. She turned her face away from the car windows and gave herself until the count of ten to be terrified. Then, she took a deep breath, plastered a smile on her face, and got inside.

§

The cabinet was empty.

He had more than one colourful phrase that would have nicely summarised the situation he was in; several came to mind. The curly-haired female Time Agent raised her blaster just a bit higher, bringing the aim to right about jaw level.

"Very cute, Boeshane," she said. "Now how about you stop playing games and take us to the real hiding spot?"

He grimaced in exasperation. "This is it," he growled. "Somebody's stolen it."

John Hart tilted his head. "How's that for irony?"

The female agent—the only name he knew for her was Carmen, but that was definitely an alias—glared at her partner.

"Who else knows about this place?"

"Nobody," Jack said. "I hid it here myself. I was alone."

She narrowed her eyes. "What about your friend McCoy?"

"I don't know who you mean."

She moved so fast, he only felt the blow to the side of his face. He imagined the pistol-shaped bruise he'd have tomorrow. Why couldn't she hit him somewhere it wouldn't show?

"You and your little band have been busy," she said. "I know you've got Fish and Samsa working for you. We'll find them. We found you easily enough. Just be glad it was us and not the Shadows. They're looking for your little friends now."

"Leave them out of this," he said. This was getting worse and worse. He wriggled his jaw back and forth experimentally. Not broken. "I told you; I'm the only person who knew it was here. No one else would even be able to detect it. They don't have the tech in this era."

'Carmen' peered at him. It was obvious that she didn't believe him (which only proved that she was smart). She gripped his left arm just above the elbow and put her gun against his left kidney.
"Be a good boy now," she said sweetly, leaning to speak into his ear. "We're going to go for a little ride."

The Doctor pulled his jacket back on and wondered why, after all the poking and prodding and scanning, Owen bothered to leave the room when it was time for him to put his clothes back on. Surely the mystery was gone.

He slipped into his blue Converse and adjusted the bright orange tie over the white shirt. It was surprising how much he liked the grey suit; the orange stripes were kind of brilliant.

Owen stopped him as he passed his office. "Where are you going?"

"Back to the lab. The tech lab, that is."

"In here." Owen went and sat at the desk.

"Can I ask you something?" the Doctor asked from the doorway. "Why do you have a desk out in the main office when you've got one here?"

"Because I've got seniority," Owen replied with a scowl. "Not that it matters. Sit down."

"Why?" the Doctor grumbled. "Going to give me a written test, as well?"

"Why don't we pretend," Owen said, "that I am a doctor and you are my patient, okay?"

The Doctor bit back a sigh and, very grudgingly, took a seat in the chair next to Owen's desk.

"Super." Owen pulled his laptop in front of him. "It's going to take me some time to look at all the results, but I do want to say that you seem to be in perfect health."

"I could have told you that," he grumbled.

"Course, since you're only part human, I can't be sure of that. I want you to explain this meta-crisis thing to me. Completely."

The Doctor gave Owen a level look. "Completely," he repeated.

"That's right. And please do me the courtesy of remembering that I am a medical professional, so I'm not an idiot. Also, as you are my patient, that means I have your best interests at heart. So don't lie to me, and don't leave anything out."

"I'd have to explain Time Lord physiology before I could even start," the Doctor said. "That would take days. Weeks, even! And that'd just be the—"

"I've helped catalogue more than thirty new sentient species since I joined Torchwood. I think I can handle it. But for now, why don't you just start by telling me how it was even possible for you to be cloned from a hand and retain intact memories?"

The Doctor did not reply for a few seconds. He had started by dying; he remembered that vividly. Seeing Rose and then running towards her, too wrapped up in the hope and disbelief and the joy at seeing her to notice the Dalek until it had been too late. The pain of the Dalek's blaster cutting through him. Rose's face above him as he lay on the ground.

"I was shot," he said. "The original me. Time Lords can do this thing where we—they—regenerate."
Every cell in the body renews itself. Everything changes, new face, new voice. Personalities change, though that varies."

Owen's forehead was furrowed. "How is that even possible?"

The Doctor gave him a long look.

The physician rolled his eyes. "Fine, fine. Go on."

"I was regenerating, but I... I didn't want to. Didn't want to change. It was too soon."

"Too young to go?" Owen guessed.

The Doctor scratched his head and leaned on his knees. "Well... I was over nine-hundred years old, technically. Counting all my regenerations together. Maybe older. I wasn't that good at keeping track, and there were one or two gaps I can't... couldn't... can't account for."

Owen narrowed his eyes. "How many times had you..."

"Nine. It was my tenth body. The ninth one... I barely had it for any time at all. I was only just settling into it, you know? But... Well."

"So what did you do? After you were shot."

"Had an extra hand laying around." He waggled the fingers of his right hand. "Sycorax cut it off with a sword. You ever have the Sycorax come here?"

"Not that I know of. Keep going. What happened next?"

"I grew a new one, of course."

Owen stared at him. "Of course you did."

"The hand—the one that got cut off—got picked up by a friend of mine. He kept it in a hyperbaric status chamber—a jar, really—for a few years, kept it from decomposing... well, not entirely... But it turned out to be a pretty good thing to have around when I was regenerating again—I channelled my regeneration energy into the hand, kept just enough to heal myself..." He stopped. This was where it broke away.

"And that made the hand grow?"

"Nah. That happened a little while later."

She'd been terrified and alone in the TARDIS, sure that she was about to die. The room was burning around her. But that sound, like a heartbeat... And she'd seen it there on the floor by the console. The jar had been glowing, the hand was letting off gold light, like the Doctor had before he'd exploded in front of them. Bidden by something she couldn't understand, or maybe it was only curiosity, she had reached out and touched it. The golden energy had enveloped her and the jar had broken.

"A friend touched the hand. The regeneration energy was still trying to work, but it didn't have enough to work with, just a dead hand in a jar. When she touched it, it used her DNA to extrapolate and regenerate an entire body." He waved his hand in the air. "And there I was. Gave her quite a shock. I was pretty surprised myself, to be honest."

Owen sat there with a bland expression for almost two minutes before he spoke.
"You have got to be fucking kidding me."

"That's what she said. Well... No. Same idea, though. Less profanity."

"You mean to tell me..." Owen leaned forward in his chair. "That you grew out of an alien hand because a human woman touched it? She was human right?"

"Oh, exceedingly."

*Thanks, Spaceman*, Donna said drily.

"It's perfectly valid," the Doctor said, jerking his chin a bit. "It makes sense if you understand Time Lord biology."

"Another reason you'll be explaining to me. But for now..." Owen brought up the MRI pictures on his laptop. "Your brain's not human."

"Nope." Thank heavens.

*Watch it, Martian Boy.*

"But you've got a human heart, liver, lungs, pancreas... Everything else, at least to all appearances." He narrowed his eyes at the Doctor's hands. "I'm going to have to take a few more blood and tissue samples next week, just to see what else is going on." He tapped the spacebar. "Oh, and I'm ordering you to go to psychiatric counselling."

The Doctor's mouth fell open. *"What.*"

Owen didn't even blink. "Don't get your knickers in a twist. It's just an hour a week. It won't kill you."

"I am *not* doing that."

"All right then, no problem." He opened a drawer and pulled out a syringe. The Doctor watched as he pulled a glass bottle from his lab coat, uncapped the syringe and stuck the needle into the battle.

"What is that?"

"Hold out your arm, please."

The Doctor jumped out of his chair; it fell backwards with a clatter. *"Oi! What d'you think you're doing with that?"

"This is very simple," Owen said. "Either you co-operate with me and go see a company shrink once a week for a few months like half the people in Torchwood already do, or I sedate you and lock you in a cell and keep you under quarantine for one, three, twelve months? Which would you rather do?"

The Doctor backed away. "You can't do that." The office wasn't very large, so it wasn't long before his back hit the door.

"Yes, I can. I'm a doctor. If I say you're a danger to yourself and others due to PTSD, even people like Pete Tyler have to go along with it."

"I don't have post-traumatic stress." He looked at the needle. With his human physiology, there was no way for him to combat a sedative internally. Why weren't Rose and Donna back yet? Did he dare to shout for help? Ianto would help him. Maybe.
"No?" Owen looked thoughtfully at his syringe. "Your second week here, you killed a Zvazveraz with a fire extinguisher. Looked to me like Rose had to stop you from killing the ones at the Tylers' a few days ago."

"What's abnormal about that?" the Doctor demanded, anger burning in the pit of his stomach. "Humans kill things all the time."

"But you're not entirely human, are you? Your brain doesn't even look like a human brain. Far as I'm concerned, that means you're not human. You aren't a Torchwood agent; you're not even a British citizen. Under the rules, you're an alien confederate with basic asylum privileges. Even sleeping with the boss's daughter doesn't change that."

What a prick! said Donna.

"Is that what this is about?"

"Don't care who you fuck," Owen said as he casually squirted the air bubbles from the syringe. "Roll up your sleeve, please."

Obviously, Owen was out of his mind and would not be reasoned with. The Doctor put his hand on the door handle and made to leave, but found that it was locked. He patted his jacket for his sonic and discovered that it wasn't in his pocket. Where had it gone? He turned back and glared at the smaller man and had a series of thoughts on how he was bigger and (most likely) stronger and how he'd have to fight him off.

However, before he could win his own internal battle of Violence is Useful vs. Violence is Wrong, Owen had got too close. The Doctor opened his mouth to start a proper argument and got a face full of some strange, sweet smelling mist. Immediately, his vision blurred and after only one breath, he was light-headed. Sleight of hand? How had he not seen that?

"You bastard," was the last coherent thought he had before he fell over.

§

It was all that Donna could do to keep from dragging Rose bodily to Owen's office when they arrived. Sure, there was obviously something going on and yes, it was most likely bad and needed tending to, but taking five minutes to make sure that nobody had bruised their brain was not going to be the cause of Armageddon. She was saying as much when they entered the office. Rose spotted Ianto standing next to the Argus tower and marched over to him.

"What have we got?"

Ianto glanced at Donna then back at Rose. "Something wrong, ma'am?"

"The bomb? Do we know where it came from?" Rose asked, exasperation making her shrill.

"I meant..." Ianto took in the pale patches of dirt on the knees of Rose's black trousers, and the blood on her hands before he said, "Owen is down in the autopsy lab."

"I don't need Owen," Rose snarled.

"But—" Donna began.

"Enough!" Rose took a deep breath. "Look, I know you're just trying to help, but there we have work to do. Ianto, where's the Doctor?"
Ianto paused and then, with an expression that was strangely not neutral—in fact, he looked truly annoyed—he said, "He's in a holding cell."

Donna gaped. "He's what?"

Rose was already running. Donna groaned. "Is she always this difficult?"

Ianto gave a clipped sigh. "She has her moments. Somebody blew up Henrik's?"

She nodded. "Rose seems to think it was someone from the future."

"Oh, good." Ianto tapped a button on Argus. "I think we'll find the scene downstairs interesting."

Donna followed Ianto to the holding cells on Subbasement 5.

The Doctor was standing behind thick Plexiglas, looking aggrieved. Rose had her hand on the door.

"What happened?" she asked him.

The Doctor clenched his jaw. "Owen is a— Donna! Ianto! One of you let me out of here."

"What did you do?" Donna wondered.

"Me?! I didn't do anything! Owen drugged me and put me in here!"

"Are you sure?" Donna asked him, raising an eyebrow at him and fighting a smile.

Rose punched a code into the outside panel. The light at the top turned from amber to red. Her mouth fell open. "He changed it?!"

"No, I did." Martha was standing at the base of the stairs.

For a moment, it looked like Rose was going to go and tear Martha's face off. Her face was turning different colours and her eyebrows were practically one thick black line.

"Why did you do that? Let him out!"

Martha was not perturbed. "He's under quarantine, according to statute 982-3 of the Torchwood Operations Code."

Donna thought for a moment. She'd just been in the 980s right before lunch. "That's about asylum, isn't it? Aliens seeking asylum on Earth have to..." She frowned as she tried to remember the rest of it.

Ianto filled the rest in. "Any extraterrestrial or extra-temporal subject seeking asylum must submit to medical examination. Section 982-3 states that if Torchwood medical personnel determines that quarantine is warranted, the subject may be held in custody up, but not limited, to twelve months."

Rose looked at Ianto, then back at Martha. "I don't care what the code says, you let him out! Right now!"

Donna looked at the Doctor, confused. "You're an alien?"

The Doctor ran a hand over his hair. "Er... Sort of?"

She couldn't quite decide whether she was surprised or not. Then, she had a horrible thought. Something that Zzfstaz had said at Pete Tyler's birthday party replayed in her head: You're not even
"one of these apes."

"What are you?" she breathed, suddenly afraid. "Are you a... You're not a Zvazveraz are you?"

"No, Donna!" He put his hands on the glass. "It's not like that! I promise."

She backed away, unable to look at him. He'd lied to her. She wondered how Rose could deal with it. She must have known.

Martha didn't look like she was particularly enjoying this, but she didn't seem too troubled, either. "When Owen finishes his tests and determines there's no threat to anyone, the Doctor will be released."

"There's nothing wrong with me," the Doctor snapped. "This is spite."

"What happened?" Rose asked.

"Nothing happened, Owen's just asserting his dominance. Martha, please, there's no reason for me to be in here."

Martha shook her head. "I'm sorry Doctor, but I can't make exceptions."

The Doctor looked at Martha as if she'd cancelled Christmas and told him that his parents had never loved him.

Rose seemed ready to cry. She put her hand over his; his fingers were straining, as if to grip the flat surface of the glass. "Don't worry, I'll get you out."

With a hangdog expression, he nodded. Rose turned and glared at Martha so hard that it was a wonder that the other woman's hair didn't catch fire.

A siren went off and Donna nearly jumped out of her skin.

"Argus," Ianto said, for her benefit. He glanced at the Doctor and frowned slightly before going with Martha back up the stairs.

Donna reckoned that she should have followed them, but she wanted to have a word with the Doctor. When she turned to do so, she saw Rose and the Doctor standing with their foreheads pressed against either side of the glass.

"...worse prisons than this," he said, almost too quietly to be heard. "At least it's clean."

"Don't you have your sonic?" Rose murmured.

"No, he must have taken it."

Rose shut her eyes. "I am going to throttle him. Really, this time." For a moment, she looked like she was going to kiss the glass, but instead she turned and met Donna's gaze. Donna felt like she'd been caught spying.

"Keep him company?" Rose asked. "I'll be back soon." She gave the Doctor a loving, determined smile and then hurried up the stairs.

The metal door closed with a thud and left Donna alone in the corridor.

The Doctor stepped away from the glass and went to sit on the bench on the left hand side of his cell.
It was solid, grey, and it looked uncomfortable.

Donna crossed her arms and ventured a little bit closer.

"Why didn't you say anything?"

He looked up at her, embarrassed and a little bit nervous. "It slipped my mind."

"Slipped your mind?" She narrowed her eyes. "You're a flippin' Martian, and you just forgot to tell me?" He winced. "I had you in my house!" she cried. "I left you alone with Gramps! We were running away from giant mosquitos from space and it didn't occur to you that maybe you should tell me that you're not even human!?"

"I am human!" he said, exasperated. "Why is it always Mars with you? I'm like you: human, one heart, two lungs, spleen, everything! I'm just... a bit... more."

"What the hell does that even mean?"

"It's... It's complicated. Donna, I swear to you, I wasn't trying to keep it from you, I... It never came up. I suppose I forgot that you didn't know."

"Everyone else knew," she realised. "Rose, Ianto, Martha, Rose's mum. Oh god, does Rose's mum know?"

He looked offended. "Of course she knows!"

"And she doesn't care?"

"Well... Not anymore. She wasn't too happy about it before, but I don't think I handled it in the best possible way. It's usually a bit of a shock."

"You think?" she said sarcastically. Then, "Does Rose's father know?"

He rolled his eyes. "Yes, Pete knows. It doesn't..." He ran his hands vigourously over his head, making his hair stick up. "Besides, I'm only part alien."

"How can you be part alien?" Donna asked. "Was your dad... I mean, you said you used to live in Chiswick."

"Did I?" he frowned. "Oh... I did. Wellll..."

"You were lying."

"Not exactly. That depends on what you mean by 'I'."

Donna glared. "What are you, a politician?"

He pulled a face. "No! Definitely not. It's actually a funny story... Well, no, not funny..." He rubbed his eyes with one hand. "This isn't really how I imagined this conversation taking place." He looked around his cell. "Certainly not here."

Donna realised that she was tapping her foot and she made herself stop. "Why not here?"

"For one thing, we're on camera..." He looked up at the corner of the cell where the security camera stared silently down at him. "For another, I'd kind of hoped to... Never mind. Doesn't matter. I promise, I'll explain everything. Only... Not right now."
Donna raised her chin. "I don't see why I should believe you."

He stood up and came closer to the glass. Donna backed away. He noticed, and suddenly he looked utterly miserable. Heartbroken, even. "Donna, please. I'm sorry, I am. Please, I couldn't stand to have you hate me. We're mates, right? Trust me."

"I don't even know you!" Her voice echoed in the corridor. "How can I trust you? You're worse than..." She swallowed. "Just forget it, Martian Boy. All right?" She headed for the stairs.

"Donna! Wait! Please!"

She kept walking.

Back in the office, the others were at their stations. Even Owen was there.

Martha stood by Argus and was giving out assignments. "Rose, Tosh, I need you to head east. There might be more explosives. Owen, you and I will go north. Ianto, I want you here. You're going to be our eyes and ears."

"Ma'am." He touched his wired headset and listened intently. "Canary Wharf reports police down at King's Cross. Several explosives discovered, all but one of them disarmed." He checked the largest touchscreen display on Argus's front. "Explosive schematics uploading now."

"All right, people, you know what to do. The Met are going to have uniforms in the target areas. They have orders and they know we're coming."

"Martha." Rose turned away from the computer at her desk and glared. She spoke just quietly enough that Donna had to strain to hear. "The Doctor can help," she said.

Martha shook her head. "I'm sorry. No."

Rose raised her voice. "People's lives are in danger! If you'd really listened, if you read the files, then you would know. If there was only one person you'd want in the room, it'd be him."

Martha's face hardened. "It's not up to debate. Now get out there. That's an order."

Rose turned on Owen, who was busy putting together a silver case that held a laptop. "You could fix this," she said viciously.

His face remained expressionless and he said nothing.

The teams dispersed, leaving Donna and Ianto standing by the terminal.

She hadn't been given an assignment, so she kept nearby, in case Ianto needed her to fetch anything. After a while, it became clear that he wasn't going to ask, so she went to her desk and sat.

She wished that the Doctor's lie of omission didn't bother her as much as it did. After all, he didn't owe her explanations, he barely knew her. (And if she were some kind of alien-human hybrid, she wouldn't exactly go around telling everybody.)

However, and it was a very large however, being the last to know made her furious. People not telling her important things that she needed to know? Another big one. She'd paid her dues on so-called friends who kept things from her.

She looked up from the desk and realised that Ianto was looking at her.
"Everyone's in transit," he said. He pushed the microphone away from his mouth. "Are you all right?"

Donna took a deep breath and smiled. "Fine, yeah. Do you need any help? Feeling a bit useless."

"Yes," he said. He took off his headset and came over to her desk. "Open your Argus interface."

Donna tapped the screen of her computer and logged in. "What do you want me to do?"

"We're going to override the passcode on the holding cell."

"Are you serious?"

Ianto looked back at her, face utterly calm and... well, Ianto.

"Stupid question," she said. "What do we do?"

§

The cells were silent, if one didn't count the buzz of fluorescent lights. Or the high-pitched whine of the lock mechanisms. Neither of which he'd really heard until he'd noted how quiet it was. Now the sounds were unignorable and rapidly becoming very annoying. The Doctor hoped that the Argus alarm hadn't been anything too serious. He also realised that it had been some time since the Donna bits had said anything. He missed her, perhaps more so because he'd possibly ruined his chance at having this world's Donna as a friend.

For a few days, it had looked like maybe he would get everything he could want out of a human life. He and Rose had finally over their hesitation, Martha's alternate had proven to be brave and brilliant, and Donna—a Donna he could see—had become a sort of companion. He was even starting to like Jackie's company, after a fashion, and there was Wilf, and Pete was a really decent bloke, and there were even new people and adventures to be had, even without a TARDIS and the fact that he fully expected to be saddled with a mortgage and carpeting at any moment. He could take all that for the sake of Rose and people to care about. It was almost as if the other Doctor had known what he was doing after all.

He was in danger of actually being happy, so of course things had to go tits-up and dump him in a Torchwood holding cell.

He rubbed his eyes and cursed the lights and decided that he truly did not care if they were ahead of their time, he was going to bloody well 'invent' a light source that wasn't so headache-inducing. As soon as he could get out of this damn cell.

The lights went out.

"S'pose that's just as good," he said to himself. He looked across the corridor to the opposite cell and noted that the amber status light above the lock had gone out. He tested the door to his own cell and found it was still locked. Probably a safety.

"Figures," he sighed.

He heard a noise, something like music. It was so faint that at first he assumed he was imagining it. He held his breath and tried to figure out what direction it was coming from. His directional hearing not being what it used to be, he wasn't very successful.

Before he could finish cross-referencing the melody against songs he was familiar with, there was a
buzz and the lights returned. But only for a moment. They flickered until, finally, he was bathed in the hated artificial light once more.

The locks glowed amber, but to his surprise, the door at the top of the stairs opened. Ianto appeared and came down the row, stopping in front of his cell.

"Good afternoon, sir," he said pleasantly.

"Somebody forget to pay the bills?" the Doctor joked.

Ianto's genteel smile spread into something like mischief. "Not at all." He pressed an eight-digit code into the cell lock. There was a hiss and the clink of magnetic clamps releasing.

Ianto pulled the door open and held out a gracious arm. "After you, Doctor."

The Doctor grinned. "Ianto Jones, you magnificent man!" He stepped out. "You reset the system, didn't you?"

"We were unable to crack Ms. Jones' new passcode."

"Ooh, she's going to be cross with you," he predicted, unable to hide his pleasure.

"I wouldn't worry, sir. I do have friends in high places."

"Right," he said remembering. "Pete's valet."

"I was actually thinking of Mrs. Tyler."

The Doctor paused, torn between disbelief and admiration. "The power behind the throne, eh?"

"Mr. Tyler has remarked that his wife could be considered the Shadow Empress of Torchwood."

"That's... disturbing," the Doctor decided.

"She takes much more of an active interest than her late counterpart. Allow me to bring you up to date on events." The Doctor listened as Ianto led him back towards the office.

Before they reached Argus, he had made his plan of action. (Go, of course. He could borrow Ianto's car.)

That was when Ianto got a message over his headset. He broadcast the feed to the main speaker so that they could hear it. Rose's voice filled the room.

"There's a woman in a white jacket. She's got a man with her... It's Jack Harkness. What's he doing here?"

Donna was running Jack's name through the second screen. The Doctor scanned the information.

"Where are they? Rose, where are you?"

"Doctor?"

"I've been liberated," he said. "Tell me what's happening!"

"We're at King's Cross. People were hurt when the bomb went off, but we've evacuated and the trains are stopped." There was a percussive outburst of gunfire in the background. "This woman is
"What does she look like?" Donna asked. "Has she given her name, or said who she's with at all? Any demands?"

"She hasn't said anything, she's just sort of... standing there... Blonde, curly hair. About five foot five. Judging by her clothes, she's definitely out of her time zone. She's either from the future or the '80s."

"Is she armed?" the Doctor asked.

"She must be. Jack has an 'I've got a gun to my back' kind of look on his face."

"I'm coming, Rose," the Doctor said.

"Hold on. I'm going to—" The line cut out.

Donna made a strangled noise of surprise. "There's another temporal blip. How are they doing that?"

The Doctor looked at the readings. "Probably a time vortex manipulator."

"Or a teleport," Ianto said. "Unfortunately our scanners can't always tell the difference."

"How many of them are there?" Donna wondered. "And if they've got Scotty beaming them all over the city, how the hell do we catch them?"

"Ianto!" The Doctor grabbed his shoulder. "Do we have any teleports? Transmat? Anything like that?"

"In the lab," Ianto replied, looking slightly stunned. "But there's only one left, and it's broken."

"Show me!"

They left Donna to keep an eye on the computer and ran to the lab. In a great big pile of junk, Ianto found a flat disc, about four inches across, topped with a bright yellow button. The silver chain was broken. The Doctor's mind flashed back to Canary Wharf all those years ago, the Cybermen and that cold white wall that had separated him from Rose in the first place.

"All the other ones were cannibalised for parts to make the cannon," Ianto explained. He had told the Doctor about the year Rose had spent helping build the cannon, working herself half to death, going alone on tremendously risky journeys to parallel worlds, all in the name of finding him again. (He wondered, ironically, if Owen had tried to force her to talk to a psychiatrist.)

"The walls between the universes are closed," he murmured.

"Those bits stopped working ages ago. But the basic teleport might still work."

"Brilliant!" The Doctor took the dangling thing from Ianto's hand. "Now, where's my sonic screwdriver?"

He found it on Owen's desk. Re-calibrating the teleport didn't take long, though it was entirely probable that the navigation was off. However, there wasn't time to test it.

"All right, off I go," he said, using the sonic to repair the broken chain. He draped the device over his neck.

"Wait!" Donna cried, face going pale. "You're just going to go? Alone?"
"I've got to get to Rose," he said.

She grabbed her brown leather coat off the back of her chair. "I'm coming with you."

He couldn't help but stare at her, hope squirming in his stomach. "I thought... I thought you were cross with me."

One arm still outside of the coat, Donna paused and looked at him. "I'm furious." His heart sank. She pulled her other sleeve on. "But I figure any man Ianto would break rules for is worth a fair hearing." She straightened out her hair. "Later, you'll tell me everything. Right now, there are insane future-people blowing things up."


"You're barmy," she told him. "All right, how does this thing work?"

He extended a hand. "Push of a button." He used the sonic to expand the range a bit. (These things had been intended for single-person transport before, if he remembered right.)

Donna pursed her lips. "I better not get splinched." She took hold of his fingers.

He waggled his eyebrows. "Alakazam." He pressed the big yellow button and they disappeared in a flash of light.
Chapter 5

Donna felt queasy when King's Cross appeared around them. They were on a train platform, which was very empty for the time of day. She checked to make sure she hadn't left behind a nose or anything, and then she turned to the Doctor. He seemed untroubled by the shift in scene. (Of course he was.) Immediately, he took her by the arm and pulled her along.

Two people were coming towards them, pointing guns. Donna froze; the Doctor put out his arms.

"Not armed! Don't shoot!"

The shorter of the two was a thin woman with thick-rimmed glasses and short, gently curling blonde hair. She was dressed in army greens and her gun was silver and blue. Her associate was a tall, fit man with black hair and a hunted expression. He wore jeans and a black military-style jean jacket. His gun was steady in his hands.

"Who are you with?" the blonde demanded. "Identify yourselves."

"I'm the Doctor, this is Donna. We're with Torchwood."

The woman narrowed her eyes, then lowered her gun slightly, though not enough to make Donna feel less nervous.

"Io!" The man was looking down the platform behind where she and the Doctor were standing. "I see them!"

"Get down!" the woman shouted, swinging her gun around. The Doctor side-stepped and Donna ducked.

The blast from the gun was white hot light. It didn't hit its intended target: a man in a red jacket, who seemed to already be engaged in a fire-fight with someone hiding in an abandoned train on the platform.

"Bloody guns!" the Doctor complained.

"Oi!" shouted the man in red, turning to see where the new attack had come from. "You almost hit me!" It was John Hart. Rose had been right to be suspicious.

"That's the idea!" the blonde shouted back. Hart had to dodge more fire from the train carriage.

Donna watched in amazement as another man appeared out of thin air. He was short and completely bald, but he was carrying the biggest gun Donna had ever seen, aside from things on tanks or the decks of battleships.

Hart turned and fired at the newcomer's back, but the bald man spun around and opened fire, then, almost as if in slow motion, he jumped to one side and dodged Hart's continued fire.

The Doctor pulled Donna behind a pillar. "Keep out of sight," he told her.

"Where are you going?" Donna hissed.

"Just stay there and don't wander off!" He left her then, barely keeping his head low down enough to avoid getting shot.
"Doctor!" she shouted after him, but he was already out of sight.

Donna shrieked as someone’s shot hit the pillar she was hiding behind. She got a spray of hot pulverized brick and mortar in her hair. She huddled on the ground, too terrified to move, let alone wander anywhere. The dark haired man moved from his hiding spot to hers.

"C’mon!" He held out his hand. "With me!"

She shook her head—mostly out of reflex—but he grabbed her hand and pulled her away. She was sure that they were nearly killed as they went from barrier to the empty train on platform 9. He pushed her through the open door and they entered the first compartment they came to.

Donna collapsed on the seat. She felt stupid to be so scared, but she hadn’t expected to be transported into the middle of a fire-fight.

"You ok-kay?" the man asked.

"Fine," she said, still out of breath.

He was a handsome figure, tall and very nicely built. For a moment, Donna thought about how she seemed to be meeting more attractive men than she’d used to, and then she realised that she’d seen him before.

"Do I know you?" she asked.

"Lee," he said, smiling gorgeously. He wasn’t as handsome as Jack Harkness (such things were not possible) but he fit the tall, dark and handsome description to a tee. "I was at the p-p..." He paused and gave the air a look of consternation.

"You played the bass," she said. He had a stammer, poor thing.

He smiled a little gratefully and nodded. "Yeah."

"I'm Donna."

"Nice to mmeet you." He pulled a second gun from the back of his waistband and handed it to her, butt-first.

She held up her hands. "Oh, no. I couldn't!"

"P-please. For your protection."

"I don't know how to use it."

"Easy," he replied. He aimed his gun at the door to the compartment. "Point and ss-shoot."

"I don't want to kill anyone!"

He holstered his gun in his waistband and fiddled with a dial on the one he’d been offering her; then held it out again. "S'on stun."

"Your last name isn't Kirk, is it?" Donna joked nervously, taking the weapon with one trembling hand.

He seemed startled. "N-no... McCoy."
Donna's mouth fell open. "You're joking!"

His eyebrows scrunched worriedly and he shook his head.

"That's wizard!" she declared. He gave her another fabulous smile and her stomach did a tiny backflip. "Noble. Donna Noble."

§

On top of a train carriage, the Doctor took out his sonic screwdriver and tried to pinpoint Rose's comm signal. When he turned, ready to go back to get Donna, he saw her ducking inside one of the carriages on the other side of the platform, just ahead of Lee McAvoy.

Given that the Blossom Dearie look-alike hadn't had a bad reaction to the name Torchwood, and knowing that she and Lee were probably with Jack, (who was being threatened by a different blonde) he decided that Donna would be safe in their hands.

He turned around and climbed down the side of the carriage and hopped back onto the platform before heading for Rose's signal, sprinting all the way.

He found her on platform 5. She had her weapon pointed at a woman in a shiny white jacket. The woman had wildly curly hair and a familiar smug smile. The Doctor was shocked enough at the sight of her that he nearly tripped. Recovering quickly, he increased his speed. The woman spotted him and adjusted her aim slightly. Rose appeared to be unhurt, but Toshiko was on the ground, leaning against a column.

"My, there certainly are a lot of you," River Song said in a silky voice. Beside her, Jack was looking shifty, but he wasn't making a break for it.

The Doctor came level with Rose and stopped. He wondered if he ought to be getting some kind of cosmic hint. Things had moved far beyond coincidence if River and Jack were here. (If Daleks started appearing out of nowhere, he was going to get very upset. And pray that he was about to wake up.)

"What are you, then?" River asked. "One of the Merry Men, or a Torchwood monkey?"

"Neither," the Doctor replied. "Jack, are you all right?"

River's smile became ironic. Slowly, she pulled aside the black leather of Jack's jacket and revealed what appeared to be an explosive attached directly to his chest. There were metal claws pulling at bloody holes in his shirt and skin.

Rose clicked the safety off. The Doctor glanced at her gun and saw that she didn't have the yellow-ended tranquiliser clip in, but a standard black one. His blood ran cold. He looked at Toshiko, who was burned and bleeding badly from a wound in her side. She was biting her lip and tears were streaming down her face, but she wasn't making a sound. Shaking with fresh rage, the Doctor stepped forward.

"Let him go, River," he commanded. "This is your only chance."

River Song turned almost as white as her jacket. Rose glanced at him, startled. He supposed he hadn't got around to mentioning that particular adventure to her yet. As she hadn't told him much of anything of the different dimensions she'd visited, it was probably only fair. Still, he'd been dreading talking about some things, like the Master and Jenny and Joan, and he'd dreaded talking about River even more. But, as she was now here, there wouldn't be any avoiding it later. Perhaps he should just
take Rose and Donna and sit them down with a bottle of whisky and pour his guts out. Better than talking to a... a **psychiatrist**.

"Who are you?" River's voice was cold, but he saw a glimmer of fear in her eyes. He imagined that he'd looked much the same when the River Song of the other universe had whispered his true name in his ear. River's weapon was aimed squarely at him now.

"I'm not telling you anything while you're pointing a gun at me. What do you want with Jack?"

"She's a Time Agent," Rose said. "Apparently Jack stole something."

"Is that all?" The Doctor looked at Toshiko, who was whimpering now. She was in bad shape; she would die if she didn't get medical attention soon. "You're blowing up buildings and shooting people over what exactly?" He glared at Jack. History kept repeating itself; he was starting to think that this universe was a little **too** similar to the old one. "What did you steal, Jack?"

Jack looked exasperated. "Nothing! This woman's crazy! I have no idea what she's talking about!"

River rolled her eyes. "Oh, please! Do you really think they're going to buy that innocent home-grown country boy act?" She looked at Rose. "This is a very dangerous man, Ms. Tyler. Why don't you just give us what he stole, and we'll be on our way."

"What makes you think we have it?" Rose asked.

River's smile insinuated itself like a snake across her face. "Simple logic. Why else would you have sought him out if you hadn't suspected he was hiding something?"

"Maybe I just wanted in his pants," Rose replied flippantly. The Doctor couldn't help but frown at that.

"Possible, but Torchwood is infamous for never having single motives for anything. And they don't play well with others." River's eyes went up and down; the Doctor realised that she was sizing him up. "Which makes you a variable element, sweetie." Her gun was powering up. "I don't like variables."

Just as River's finger was about to pull the trigger, a bald man with a laser cannon came sailing over the roof of a train carriage and skidded across the concrete of the platform between them. The Doctor ducked and narrowly missed having his head shot off. Unfortunately, even startled, River's aim was pretty good. The blast clipped his shoulder. Shocked by the pain, he stumbled and met the floor with a crash.

The bald man rolled to his feet and aimed at River. They fired at each other, causing pyrotechnics and almost deafening sound as the beams of their weapons met mid air.

"Doctor!" Rose knelt beside him. "Are you—"

"Fine," he grunted. "Just a graze." It hurt like hell, but he'd have to ignore it somehow. He pulled his sonic screwdriver from his pocket. Several others were arriving on the scene, including Blossom and Lee. He spotted Donna and another man—this one had close-cut blond hair, ebony skin, and a football player's build—who was fighting the man in red from the other platform. Donna crossed the platform and knelt by Toshiko.

"Toshiko! Toshiko, sweetheart, can you hear me?" She caught sight of the Doctor. "Where are Owen and Martha? She needs a doctor."
He looked at Toshiko, then at Donna. "Get her out of here," he said. "Stay safe." He could see Jack pinned behind River. His face was white. "I've got to get to Jack," he said to Rose.

She nodded curtly. "I'll cover you."

Lucky for him, River more than had her hands full dealing with Jack's friends. He ran past her to where Jack was ducking behind another column.

"Let me see that bomb," he said.

Jack stared at him and the sonic screwdriver. "You can't use that on this! It's rigged to explode if—"

He grimaced as the Doctor scanned the device.

"Remote detonator. If I can just block the signal..."

"That'll set it off!" Jack hissed. "I don't know about you, but personally, I was really hoping not to die today."

The Doctor turned his head towards the sound of projectile gunfire. Rose was shooting at the man in red. One of her bullets got him in the leg and he dropped like an apple from a tree.

"Trust me," the Doctor said. "I have no desire to die, either." He adjusted the screwdriver and grit his teeth as it made a grinding noise.

Jack stared at him, spooked. "How do you have a sonic device? That technology—"

The Doctor glared at him and spoke through his teeth. "Do you want to have a chat, or do you want me to keep you from exploding?!"

"By all means," Jack replied, laughing nervously.

The sonic whirred and finally, there was a beep. Jack closed his eyes as if to prepare for the end. A second beep and the display on the bomb went blank.

They both let out a sigh of relief.

"Thanks," Jack breathed.

"Don't mention it." He fixed the other man with a glare. "Now, what was it that you stole?"

"Nothing important!"

"Was it a Brindisi effusion device?"

All the blood drained from Jack's face. "How do you know that?"

"Not really the cleverest of hiding places, a cupboard," the Doctor replied, "even if it is underground. You must be new at this."

"I need it back!" Jack cried. "Please! This doesn't involve anyone else."

"Maybe it didn't," he shouted back. "But people have been hurt. You've brought this down on people I care about, and that is never something you want to do."

Jack looked mildly stunned. "Who are you?" he wondered.
Donna was calling him. He stood and looked to where she was standing guard by Toshiko. River had a blaster to her head. No.

"Donna! River, let her go!"

"You tell your people to let my partner go," River said. She looked afraid. She'd been cornered; the man in red was on the ground, his hands and a really big laser cannon to the back of his head. Rose and Blossom (he was going to have to learn her name, just to avoid future flower motifs) were less than a metre away from River; both of them were aiming at her.

"Put your gun down," Rose commanded. "Nobody else is getting killed today."

Jack got off the ground, dusted himself off and went over to Lee McAvoy. Lee smiled at him.

"G-glad you're okay."


He took two strides towards River and for a moment, the Doctor was afraid that he was going to try to kill her. Poor Donna was shaking and paper white. Toshiko seemed to have lost consciousness. Oh, please, just let her be unconscious. Rose was inching closer. She was within point-blank range of River now. Part of him wanted her to shoot. (It wasn't the Donna part.)

"River," Jack said slowly, placing himself behind her and murmuring into her ear. "Nice name. Definitely suits you better than Carmen. How is it on the other side, River?" He grabbed her gun from her hand and tossed it over to Lee, who caught it deftly. Donna looked like she wanted to faint in relief.

River glared defiantly at Jack as he went to stand in front of her, raising the blaster and pointing it right between her eyes. "Bssh," he said, mimicking the sound of gunfire. "That'd be messy." He glanced at Donna. "Sorry you got mixed up in this, Ms. Noble, Ms. Tyler. I really am."

Rose lifted an eyebrow, then gasped as Jack spun around, hit her across the face and then disarmed her. He wrapped one arm around her neck and put his blaster to her temple.

The Doctor surged forward, ignoring the fact that he was in Blossom's sights. (Now only Jack's people were armed.) "Rose!"

"Stay back!" Jack roared. Rose clutched his forearm as it pressed against her windpipe. Her lip was bleeding. "I will shoot her, Doctor."

He stopped and stared, terror and human hormones wiping his mind completely blank. Even the anger was startled out of him. What should he do? Why couldn't he think of anything?

"Jack, what are you doing?" murmured the bald man. "This wasn't part of the plan."

"We're off book now, Fish," Jack replied.

Donna knelt by Toshiko again and felt for a pulse. Did she find one?

Blossom had grabbed River and pressed a gun against her back.

"Interesting tactic, Boe," River purred, as confidently as if she were still in charge. (It's River, Donna said. She must have something up her sleeve.) "Not really sure what you're hoping to accomplish by threatening the Tyler heiress."
"Jack, don't d-d..." Lee pleaded. "You're mmmaking it worse."

"Well said," muttered River's partner from where he sat on the ground. "Well, sort of."

The man named Fish kneed him in the back. "Shut up!"

"Let her go, Jack," the Doctor said. He was shaking with rage and fear and he didn't even know what all else. It was probably good that he only had a sonic screwdriver, because if he'd had a gun right now, he would have shot Jack in the head. Fuck pacifism.

"Why? So you can let them take me? You don't know the Time Agency like I do."

"You're a selfish bastard," Donna said shakily, glaring up at him through narrowed eyes.

"Yeah," Jack said, ruefully. He pushed up the cuff of his leather jacket, being careful to keep Rose pinned. The Doctor's heart stopped. Jack had a vortex manipulator.

"No, Jack! Don't!" He leapt forward, hoping to catch hold of them before it was too late.

Jack pressed a button and he and Rose disappeared in a flash of yellow light.

"ROSE!"

She was gone.

§

When Martha arrived on the scene with five other Torchwood agents, and Pete Tyler, the situation was nothing short of a shambles.

Donna was still shaking, due to having had a gun to her head, but the blanket that the paramedics had given her did nothing but make her itch. She watched in silence as Toshiko was loaded into an ambulance with Owen as an escort, and also the agents that Martha had brought with her arrested River and John Hart.

Jack's friends had disappeared seconds after the Torchwood people had arrived, all of them, even Lee McCoy. Donna wasn't sure whether she should feel sad that he was gone, or betrayed, or just plain furious. Being angry felt less helpless.

Speaking of helpless. Donna clutched her blanket around her and watched from a safe distance as Pete Tyler and Martha Jones took the Doctor to task, as if it were his fault. It didn't take long for it to dissolve into shouting. (Rose and Jack were gone; what did it matter whose fault it was?)

"If you hadn't let Owen lock me up," the Doctor cried, getting in Martha's face, "then I could have been here earlier!"

"If you'd stayed in your cell where you belonged, we could have kept things under control!" she shouted back.

"That's enough! Doctor! Martha!" Pete Tyler didn't have the most imposing voice, but he was angry and loud enough that they stopped. "Martha, you and I will have a talk later. Doctor, go home."

The Doctor stared at him, visibly shocked. "What?"

"Let the paramedics take a look at that arm, and then I want you back at the house. You're not to leave there until I figure out what to do with you."
"Sir!" Martha cried. "He should be in a holding cell!"

"Are you questioning my authority, Ms. Jones?" Tyler asked, his tone sharp and dangerous.

She stammered, "No, sir, I—"

"The Doctor will remain in my custody. You've got a mess to clean up." He turned and caught Donna looking at them. "Ms. Noble."

She shook herself. "Mr. Tyler."

He looked her over, then turned back to Martha. "You know what you've got to do."

Martha nodded curtly and went to talk to the police gathered at the far end of the platform.

Tyler said something to the Doctor too quietly for her to hear. The Doctor's pale face went rigid. Then Tyler walked away. Donna watched him go. When she turned back, the Doctor was gone. She spun around, trying to see where he'd got to, and caught a glimpse of bright blue trainer as it disappeared around a corner.

Not sure what else she ought to do, since sounding an alarm seemed unhelpful, and possibly childish, she left her scratchy yellow blanket in the back of the ambulance and followed.

It took several streets for her to catch up with him. He was a natural born sprinter, this one, but she had the advantage of not being wounded. (Thank heavens she'd worn the flats today.)

"Doctor!"

He stopped running, but he seemed to hesitate a moment before turning around to see her. "You should go back," he said. His expression was stony.

"Where are you going?"

"I—" He shook his head. "I don't..." Suddenly, he seemed to be on the brink of tears. "It doesn't matter, I've got to..."

He'd scanned the spot where Rose and Jack had stood with that weird screwdriver thing of his for ten minutes before he'd even talked to anybody. Only Pete's arrival had shaken him out of it. Donna bit her lip. The shoulder of his grey suit jacket was burned black and there was blood on his clothes. He wasn't in any condition to go running around, physically or emotionally.

She made her decision and put her thumb and finger to her lips. She let out a loud whistle and then raised an arm. "Taxi!"

A black cab slowed to a halt at the kerb next to her.

"What are you—" he began, but she had already grabbed him by the uninjured arm.

"C'mon, Martian boy. Get in."

"Where are we going?"

"Shut your gob and get in the bloody car!" she bellowed.

The Doctor obeyed. "All right, all right, you don't have to shout..." he muttered as he ducked inside.
"Apparently, I do," she said to no one in particular.

Donna had the taxi take them within a couple of streets of the Warehouse (which was back in Battersea), so that she could pick up her handbag. She promised the cabby a huge tip and made the Doctor swear that he wouldn't run off again.

Inside, she grabbed her handbag and managed to slip out of the office with nobody but Ianto noticing that she'd even been there. When he'd raised a questioning eyebrow at her, she'd shaken her head and mouthed, "Later." She was outside again in minutes.

She drove her own car back to where the cab and the Doctor were waiting, paid the driver, and then cajoled the Doctor into the passenger seat of her car.

"All right," she said, once he'd done up his seat belt. "I'm assuming that you don't want to go back to the Tylers'."

"No," he said, shaking his head firmly.

"Your arm needs tending," she said. "We should go to a clinic or something, get it looked at."

"I'm fine," he growled.

"You're as bad as Rose," she snapped. Stubborn git.

He goggled at her. "Why? What happened?"

"Henrik's blew up and the paramedic wanted to have a look at her, but she wouldn't—" She stopped talking. The Doctor's hand was gripping the door handle so tightly that his knuckles looked like they were ready to burst through his skin. "She was fine," she finished. "Just a couple scrapes." No point in telling him that she was reasonably sure that Rose had never gotten Owen to check her over, what with the Doctor getting himself locked up and all the distractions.

"I have to find a way to trace the signal," the Doctor murmured, looking at the dashboard as if it were to blame for the events of the day. "If my screwdriver worked properly, I'd be able..." He rubbed his eyes. "I need the TARDIS."

Donna shook her head. "You're getting harder to understand by the minute," she muttered. "Screwdrivers and tardiness." She started to drive, the thought occurring to her that the longer they sat there, the more likely someone leaving the Warehouse would spot them. "Do you think they're still in London?"

"London, perhaps." He was watching the street. "This century? Not likely."

"That thing was a time machine?"

He frowned at her. "Vortex manipulator. It's a very dangerous and unreliable way to travel through time."

"You knew that woman," she said, shutting off her GPS and checking the rear view mirror. "River."

"Not really," he said, sullenly. "It sort of falls under the umbrella of 'complicated'."

Donna gave him a look before putting her eyes back on the road. "Is this the same umbrella sheltering 'I'm an alien hybrid'?"

"Pretty much."
They drove in silence for a time, and then she asked, "Is there anything you can do right this minute to find Rose and Jack?"

He let out an unhappy grunt and murmured something she didn't catch.

"Is that Martian for no?" she wondered.

"Not Martian," he muttered, almost too quietly for her to hear. "Time Lord."

"Is that a species or a state of mind?" she quipped.

He looked like he wanted to snap back at her, but then the tiniest of smirks curled his lip. "Depends who you ask."

"Asking you," she replied. Then, thinking better of it, she said, "Not that you have to get into all of that now. There'll be time later for explaining 'time lord' and how on Earth a screwdriver is good for anything other than putting up shelves later. First, I'm taking you home and seeing to that arm."

"I'd really rather not go to the Tylers' right now," he said.

"I didn't say the Tylers', now did I?" she replied and made a right turn.

She could feel him staring at her. "Oh."

"Just for a little while, until you figure things out."

"Yeah." There was a long pause. "Thank you."

She gave him a small smile. "Can't imagine house arrest would be much fun."

"Not with Jackie around, no."

Gramps was more than happy to have a house guest. Donna tried to get him to give the Doctor some space, explaining that there'd been an incident at work and that the Doctor's girlfriend was missing in action. However, the Doctor ruined all of this by actively seeking out her grandfather. He practically followed him around like a puppy, much like Donna had when she'd been a little girl.

She wondered if the Doctor had any family at all. Did alien hybrids have parents, or had he been grown in a vat or something?

Too tired to do anything in the way of cooking, Donna ordered Chinese take-away. Then, she managed to get the Doctor to sit at the kitchen table and submit to having his arm cleaned while they waited for it to arrive.

"I liked this suit," he complained as she draped the jacket on the back of the empty chair. She then laid out the first aid kit on the table.

"Take off your shirt," she said. She picked out the gauze and the scissors.

He blinked at her. "What?"

"Or we could just cut your sleeve off," she said as she hunted for the Germolene. "I suppose you're hiding tentacles or something."

"No," he said, giving her a glare. "I do not have tentacles. Everybody always goes on about tentacles! Science-fiction has warped your minds."
Donna rolled her eyes. "Just take it off. I promise to control myself."

"Ha ha."

Getting the shirt off proved to be more difficult than one might have thought. Parts of the singed fabric had stuck to the burned and bloody skin of his shoulder. He kept yanking at it and yelping, until finally, Donna attacked the shirt with a pair of scissors and just cut around it.

"You've made it worse," she said, wincing at the ugly burn. The shot had only grazed him—most of the damage had been done to the suit jacket—but there was still an oblong burn about four or five centimetres long streaked across his freckled skin.

"I never used to go through clothes like this," he moaned, going over the ruin of his shirt with one hand.

"Did you used to tangle with mad people holding phasers?"

"All the time! And it was a blaster, not a phaser."

"Pardon me, Mr. Spock," she murmured. She pulled her chair closer and picked up a piece of gauze. "Should we run it under a tap, first?"

"Yeah." He gave her an appraising look. "Star Trek fan?"

She shrugged. "Watched it when I was a kid. It's funny how that kind of thing sticks in your head."

"I would have guessed you were more of a Coronation Street kind of girl."

Donna raised an eyebrow at him. "What's wrong with Coronation Street?"

"Nothing!" he said hurriedly. "Just... you know... pretty different from Star Trek."

"Right, because it's impossible to like both. But speaking of Star Trek," she said, leading him to the sink so that she could rinse the wound. "You will never guess what that handsome man with the stutter was called."

"What?" the Doctor asked.

"Lee McCoy."

He gave her a funny look and leaned over to get under the running water. He grimaced. "Ah! Ow! McCoy? Not McAvoy?"

"No." She frowned. "Did you know him?"

"Nah, saw him at the party," he said with a sniff. "McCoy..."

"Too bad he's one of the mental ones," she said with a sigh. "Just my luck." There were a few bits of burned fabric stuck to the burn, which she gently pulled off with a pair of disinfected tweezers. "Do you think Toshiko will be all right?" She patted his shoulder dry with a clean white flannel and directed him back to the table.

He glared at the air as he sat. "She had better be," he said.

Once the Doctor was bandaged up, Gramps lent him a clean jumper that was far too big on him. Donna was tidying the table when the food arrived. They sat down together and ate in relative
silence, which felt odd, mostly because the Doctor kept staring at the Chinese writing on the folded cardboard boxes, sometimes mouthing words. Gramps glanced at her a few times as if he wanted to ask questions, but she shook her head. She got him to tell the Doctor about his telescope instead, which seemed to cheer both of them immensely. The Doctor seemed to know every constellation by heart, though he had one or two things backwards, by Gramps’ reckoning. He wanted to take the Doctor up the hill, but Donna put her foot down.

"Not tonight," she said. "Did you take your pills before supper? You're not staying up all night out in the cold." She felt guilty when she saw the disappointment on their faces. "Another time," she relented, patting Gramps on the shoulder.

She wasn’t sure if the Doctor was going to be able to sleep tonight, and it wasn't even eight o'clock when they finished eating, but she cleared off the couch and brought out the extra pillows anyway.

A few hours later, the Doctor was sitting at the table with the grey and yellow disc that had teleported them to King's Cross.

"What are you trying to do?" she asked. She'd convinced Gramps to go to bed about an hour ago, and she'd gone about her own evening routine, in so far as showering and changing into her comfortable pyjamas and dressing gown. When she'd left the kitchen, the Doctor had been at the table, and it seemed he hadn't moved. It was after eleven; she'd assumed that the Doctor would have either fallen asleep or run off by now.

He slammed the sonic screwdriver thing down on the table and ran his hands through his hair, making it go wilder than ever. "Not that it matters," he growled. "This... this... piece of...!"

"Easy there, alien boy." She glanced at the kettle. "Tea? I'm guessing that you have no plans to sleep."

"No," he hesitated. "Tea'd be lovely."

She patted his good shoulder. "You'll get her back." She started the tea, humming to herself and wondering if Torchwood had time travel technology. Everything was mad science-fiction these days. Rose had all but said she'd travelled in time herself.

When she turned back, the Doctor had his head in his hands. She could hear him sniff and realised that he was crying.

This was not something she'd been ready for. Certainly, things didn't look particularly good at the moment. If she saw Jack or any of his friends again, she was going to... Slapping wasn't enough, but the fact that she thought of the phaser—blaster—she had stuffed in her handbag was more than a little unsettling. (The way Jack had hit Rose across the face had made her feel sick.)

The Doctor's head sank towards the table. His fingers were locked into his hair and he was hyperventilating.

"Bloody hell," Donna muttered. Unable to help herself, she went over and put a hand on his skinny shoulder. "C'mon, Spaceman, it's not your fault."

"I can't lose her," he gasped. "Not again, I can't...!"

Donna pulled his head against her stomach. "Shhh..." He sobbed against her, holding onto her with both arms and letting out great earth-shattering moans of pure misery. Her eyes watered in sympathy and she stroked his back and his hair and let him cry.
Gramps poked his head into the kitchen. He was in his dressing gown; he'd have been woken by the noise.

"D'you need help?" he mouthed.

Donna indicated the kettle with a jerk of her head. Gramps moved quietly, finishing the work and settling the cups on the table for her. She mouthed a thank you and shooed him off with one hand. Gramps looked like he wanted to stay. She promised to call if they needed him.

When the worst of the storm passed at last, their tea was over-steeped.

"I'm... sorry," the Doctor murmured, face flushed from crying and mortification. "I..."

"Don't apologise," she scolded. She brushed his hair back from his face. It was odd to have a grown man crying in her kitchen—what was even odder was that it wasn't as uncomfortable as it should have been. It had been a hell of a day.

He was looking guiltily at the wet patches on her dressing gown. "Er..."

"What, that?" She waved a hand. "Nothing. 'Sjust a rag anyway. C'mon now, sweetheart, drink your tea." Maybe he really didn't have any family. Why else would he be living with the Tylers, instead of with them or in his own flat?

He rubbed his eyes. "I really didn't mean to do that. I never used to be so... I..."

"Stop it," she chided, gently. "That was nothing. You should see me when I'm watching some sappy drama. You'd think the Thames was running through the house."

He smiled half-heartedly. "I don't deserve you... being nice, after..."

"Course you do. You did save my life. At least once." She ruffled his hair before sitting down. She considered saying, "You could just tell me, then," but she simply couldn't. His face was all red and his nose was running; he was a complete mess. "Hold on a tick." She went to the bathroom and brought back a large box of tissues. He took three and started to clean himself up.

She sat down and pushed a cup towards him. "You don't owe me explanations. It's your business what... species... you are, all of that." She took one of the tissues and blew her nose. "If there's one thing I learned in therapy, it was that I sort of..." She paused. "Take things personally."

"Therapy?" he wondered, peering curiously at her.

"After mum and dad died, the post-trauma of the Cybermen... then there was the divorce..." To his frown she said, "My husband cheated on me."

The Doctor's eyebrows lowered dangerously. "Would that be Lance?"

She was doomed to never have secrets, wasn't she? "Did Gramps blab about him to you, then?"

"Nah, not really. But you mentioned him the other day..."

"You've got a good memory."

He looked at her, sympathy in his eyes. "Sort of."

"I was well shot of him." She sipped her tea, then put a little more milk in it. "Doesn't matter. My point was, that I don't have the right to make you tell me anything you're not comfortable—"
"I'm a clone."

"—telling me—a what?"

§

Jack had probably expected her to be in shock from the sudden jump through time; maybe she'd be sick or light-headed. What he didn't know was that she'd spent a year jumping from universe to universe using a device that had all the finesse and good manners of a wrecking ball through concrete.

The moment his arm loosened its hold on her windpipe—the vortex manipulator did put some shock on his system, judging by the slight wobble—she took one gasping breath, pretended to pitch forward, and then threw her head back. She connected with his nose, heard what might have been a snap, and went for his gun.

Unfortunately, Jack anticipated the move and he evaded. Rose caught another blow to her cheek and before she could do much more than turn her head, he knocked her off her feet. Her back hit the black, sandy ground hard and the wind left her with a painful whoosh.

"Sonuva bitch," Jack said and then he laughed. "I dink you broke my nose."

When she could breathe again—the atmosphere was thin—she coughed, "Good!"

He stood over her, blaster pointed at her face, one hand holding his nose. There was a stream of blood leaking between his fingers.

She glared up at him. "Your mother teach you to hit girls?"

"Ah didn't wanna do dat," he said. He looked down at her over the barrel of his gun. "Needed a bargaining chib."

"Against who? We were on your side!"

He looked at his bloody hand. "Just pushing forward the inevitable," he said. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a handkerchief. "Everyone switches sides eventually. And as for hitting girls..." He blotted at his face. "Girls with guns don't count. Go on, get up."

Rose sat up. They were outdoors. The sky was black and filled with stars. The ground was dry, gritty and flaky black, like coal. "Where did you take us?"

"Just a pit stop," he said. "Vortex manipulator needs a minute to re-calibrate before we move on."

"That doesn't answer the question."

"Come on, Ms. Tyler, you don't actually think I'd tell you the truth, do you?"

"Probably not," she said. She set her teeth and hissed in pain. She wondered if he'd cracked a cheekbone. "But I know what you are."

"This oughta be good," he said

"You were a Time Agent," she said. "They did something to you, so you left."

"Interesting theory. A few points for creativity, but no. Not a Time Agent. Never was, never will be."
"You're just a thief, then."

"Pretty much."

"What did you steal?"

Jack's wrist strap beeped. "Ready to go," he said. He dabbed at his nose some more and then put the handkerchief back in his pocket.

Rose glared at him and winced when he grabbed her by the arm and yanked her to her feet.

"Take me back," she said.

Jack laughed. "Not a chance." Keeping a firm grip on her, he pressed a button on his strap and they were off again.
Donna wondered if she might be carried away on a sort of verbal tidal wave. The Doctor started at what he called a 'sort of' beginning, telling her a 'very brief' history of Time Lords. (No joke, that was what they actually called themselves. *On purpose.* She thought Gallifreyan sounded so much better.)

He also told her about TARDISes, vast living ships that could travel to any place or time in the universe, and at the same time, fit inside something the size of a police box. He'd been born, gone to school, and had a family on Gallifrey. Then, one day, he'd stolen an old TARDIS and he'd left. (When she'd asked why, he'd simply shrugged and said it didn't matter, point was he *had.*)

All of this unbelievable information was only a prologue.

He fast-forwarded nine hundred (give or take a few hundred) years, to when he'd been in his ninth body (Time Lords were like cats, far as she could tell, just with thirteen lives instead of nine) and he'd met a girl called Rose. She listened as he told her how Rose, then a nineteen-year-old shop girl, had come with him in his ship. He didn't have to say that he'd fallen in love with her. For one thing, Donna already knew that the two of them were mad about each other, but the way he described their adventures and his smiles and the excitement as he recounted the *fantastic* things they'd done, it was obvious.

She started to lose the thread of the tale a bit when he told her about how he'd started in on the tenth body; he was very vague on the details of *how* or *why* it had been necessary for him to regenerate, but he claimed it didn't matter, so she didn't argue with him. (Also, it was nearly two in the morning. Lucky for her that he talked fast, she thought, or it would have been dawn.)

Then it was him and Rose and it was brilliant, but then they'd accidentally broken away from the universe they had belonged in and crashed into this one instead.

Donna stopped him there and made him explain how it was even *possible* to be from an alternate universe. He acted like it was perfectly normal, and proffered the example of Spock's beard. ("He didn't have one in *Star Trek* here, right? Just the mirror one? Mind you, I have known evil types who favoured goatees.") One universe could easily split off from another. All it took was one difference, one road travelled instead of another. It started to sound a bit like Robert Frost.

When she let him continue, he dropped a bomb on her. Her chest tightened at the very mention of Cybermen, though she was glad that he and Rose (and Pete Tyler and their friend Mickey Smith) had put a stop to it. She told herself that she'd make him give greater details later.

He told her how Rose had later been trapped in this universe, and he'd been left alone in the original one.

Then he told her that he had been friends with the Donna Noble of that other universe. (There'd been a Lance there, too. At least hers hadn't cheated on her with a giant alien spider. Though... Nerys was the next worse thing.) That other Donna had travelled with him in his ship, and she'd saved them all, the whole universe, and this one, and that if it hadn't been for her, he wouldn't exist. He showed her his right hand and explained 'meta-crisis', including, most disturbingly, that he was half *her*, and by virtue of the messy process of hybridisation-on-the-fly, he possessed 'pretty much all' of the other Donna's memories.

Feeling nauseated, she quizzed him on mundane details like favourite colours and films.
"Pink, until she realised it clashed with her hair, then purple. Moulin Rouge because she fancied Ewan McGregor and Titanic, but... I was never ever supposed to know that."

"Why do you keep using past tense?"

The Doctor's smile hitched. "Was I?"

"Yeah. Did I... she... is she dead?"

He looked like he very much wished that she hadn't asked him that. "No," he said. She could hear the silent 'but' floating over the table. Then, voice getting hoarse, he told her that because the other Donna (the Doctor Donna) was human, she couldn't survive holding a Time Lord's consciousness alongside her own. For him, with his Time Lord brain, wedging in all those memories and knowledge was no problem. A human brain could only stand the strain for so long.

"So what happened?"

"The other Doctor... the original... he... we would have had two options. One option would be to wipe her memories and lock away the Time Lord consciousness, thus keeping her alive. The other would be to let her die."

Donna felt a shiver on behalf of her counterpart. She whispered, "That's it? Forget everything or die? What kind of a choice is that?"

"I know." With a look like he had the entire universe pressing down on his head, he said, "He could never let her die."

She was going to be sick. "But he'd... That's... She couldn't have wanted— Everything she saw, everything the two of you did? I wouldn't—"

"No," he agreed. "She wouldn't. But if it's a choice between getting what you want or death—"

"Death," she said without hesitation. "At least it would have dignity! Would you do that, if it were you instead of him? You say that you are him; you have all his memories. You would do that?"

The clock on the wall ticked and ticked and ticked. Donna stared at his face, waiting for an answer.

"I don't know," he said. She wasn't sure if he was telling the truth or just being chicken. "But that doesn't mean he didn't do the right thing."

Donna pushed her chair away from the table. She could hear her own heart beating. "Right? Right?"

He grasped her hand much too tightly and leaned towards her, eyes wide and jaw tense. "Donna. Listen to me. She's my best friend. She's his best friend; do you honestly think it's right to let someone you care about die if you can save them?"

"From what you've told me," Donna said shakily, and twisted her hand in his grip. "I don't know if I'd want to be friends with someone like him." He pulled back as if she'd slapped him. He let go of her hand, as well. "What's the point of friends who don't respect you?" she went on. "You tell me he—you—when Rose had to choose between her family and you, you made her go with them." His face turned red, but he said nothing. "Running around the universe saving people, defeating the monsters and bad guys, but you're just playing God... You killed those Daleks."

"Yes," he spat, anger bursting out of him. His face twisted into an ugly picture of rage. "I killed the Daleks! Same thing he would have done, if he'd had the guts. Daleks never did anything but kill and
destroy and hate, but because I fought back, I'm the dangerous one. Never mind how many times he'd done the exact same thing."

Donna couldn't hear anymore. She left the table, gathering their dishes and going over to the dishwasher. The sky was just starting to lighten. She touched the white curtains and looked at the bright yellow walls and tried to imagine going back to only two weeks ago, back when aliens had been the stuff of science-fiction. The other her had to come back to... to this... and she didn't even know that she'd walked on other planets. The injustice of it ran right down to her centre and made her feel... ill... though that didn't really begin to describe it. It was almost like she'd just been told that a relative had died. Which was true. Sort of.

She glanced back at the table. "Have you decided what you're going to do?" He was glaring at the wood like it was that other Doctor. It was bad enough knowing there was another you in another universe and she'd been betrayed by someone she'd trusted. Probably worse if that other you had exiled you for genocide. (Bloody hell, why couldn't she just be angry at him? He deserved a little anger.) "About getting Rose back. Only, I wouldn't be surprised if you're going to have problems going back to Torchwood tomorrow."

"I'll figure something out," he said. "I always do."

She leaned against the sink and faced him with her arms crossed. "Probably have an hour or two... You could sleep, if you want."

"Might do. Thanks." He seemed even more unhappy than he had been at the beginning of the evening. He got out of his chair and started to head for the couch. Why did she feel guilty?

"Can I ask you something?"

He turned back to her, all hunched shoulders and pale, pointed, anxious face. "Yeah."

"If I were to think of a number between one and one million..."

"It doesn't work like that," he said. "But five hundred thousand two hundred and thirty-seven."

"That's pretty uncanny."

He stared at her in disbelief. "I was right?"

"No," she admitted. She allowed herself to smile a little at his embarrassment. "But you were only off by two."

"Oh. Good for me." Then, gesticulating emphatically, he said, "It's not exactly easy for me, you know! One minute, I'm a Time Lord: two hearts and at least three regenerations left, which is just shy of immortality, if I would ever manage to actually take care of myself. Next thing I know, I'm human, with sweaty palms and bloody-minded hormones and... well, this was one of my more emotionally volatile regenerations, but I don't usually..." He tugged on his ear. "And this blushing thing is very annoying. And now I'll never be ginger."

Donna tightened her arms across her chest. "It's not all it's cracked up to be."

"I got extra freckles," he muttered, as if he hadn't heard her. He scrubbed at his head. She had assumed that the messy hair was some kind of vain affectation, but it seemed more like a mood indicator. "I was this close to ginger, I could feel it."

"Get some sleep, Spaceman."
The ghost of a smile passed over his face. "She always calls me that, you know."

"Who? Oh... the other Donna." Her stomach lurched unpleasantly.

"Yeah."

"I won't again, if you don't want me—"

"No! I mean, it's... It was irritating at first, but I sort of... Not a lot of people have bothered to give me nicknames I actually like."

"What is your name? Your real name. You said you... gave it up?"

His smile was sad and mysterious; it did not mesh well with Gramps' baggy old brown and green jumper. "Time Lord name," he said. He shook his head. "I'm not a Time Lord."

"You can't just go about calling yourself the Doctor," she replied.

He knitted his eyebrows. "I don't see why not."

"Because humans have got names," she said. "First names and surnames and middle names and nicknames. You can't coast along with a title. Not for long."

"Used to go by John Smith sometimes."

Donna gave him a pointed look. "Don't call yourself John Smith," she recommended. (He'd already introduced himself as such to Gramps, of course.)

He smirked. "G'night, Donna."

"Good morning, you mean," she muttered, glancing at the window. She could see sunlight.

She turned on the dishwasher and then retired to her bedroom, still thinking about the other Donna. There wasn't much point in going to bed when there were only three hours before she would have to be ready to leave for work, but she was too exhausted to care. She set her alarm, pulled down the blackout shades and crawled into bed.

She had barely closed her eyes, it seemed, when she felt a hand gently shake her shoulder. She groaned and turned over. If that was the Doctor, he'd better have a damn good reason for waking her up.

Slowly, she opened her eyes and peered into the darkness. There was an unfamiliar man-shape standing over her. Fear jolted through her like electricity and she sat up, but the man put a hand over her mouth before she could cry out.

"D-Donna," stammered Lee McCoy, "it's me. D-d—" He grimaced. "Don't scream."

Someone else was in the room, too. They must have used their teleports.

A woman's voice, low, with a lightly twanging American accent said, "We're not here to hurt you."

The lights came on. The woman was tall, willowy and dark skinned, with chestnut hair down her back and a lime green coat over her jeans. Donna could not help noticing that she was armed, though her weapon was in its holster.

She relaxed slightly and Lee took his hand off of her mouth. That was his first mistake.
"Doctor!"

The woman pulled out her gun and aimed it at the door.

"No!" Lee cried, pushing her arm down.

Half a second later, the door burst open and the Doctor appeared, the old jumper hanging off of him the way it would a hanger. He was holding his sonic screwdriver up like a rapier.

Lee put his hands up. "Friends!"

The Doctor was looking very unforgiving. "What are you doing here?" he demanded, perilously close to shouting.

Lee tried to give an explanation. "We nn-n—"

"Need your help," the woman finished for him. She carefully put her gun at the foot of Donna's mattress.

The Doctor did not look like he believed her. Donna, for one, was still trying to gather her wits from the tangle of half-sleep and fear.

"You're Jack's people," the Doctor said coldly. "At the moment, I'm not feeling all that charitable towards Jack, so perhaps you ought to tell me who you really are and what you're doing in this time period?"

Lee and the woman exchanged glances. Lee nodded.

"All right," said the woman.

Her name was Lola Enkidu, and she was from the nineteenth century. Donna doubted that 'Enkidu' was her original name. Everyone in Jack's band had some sort of weird alias: Peter Staker, Gregor Samsa, Io Freeburn, Arnold Fish.

"Jack found me in Deadwood, South Dakota," Lola said. "He got me out."

"And so now you steal for him," the Doctor said.

The kitchen was acting as an impromptu interrogation room. Donna stood by the sink and stifled a yawn while the Doctor loomed over the two time travellers sitting at her table. (She'd convinced Gramps that everything was all right—blamed a giant spider for her shouting—and sent him back to bed.)

"It's better than whoring," Lola replied coolly. "Which was about the only thing a woman like me was good for out there."

The Doctor didn't reply to that, but something in his face softened an almost imperceptible amount. "What about you?" he asked Lee.


"You mean New York still exists in the fifty-first century?" Donna said, surprised. As often as it got destroyed in films, it was a little hard to imagine.

Lee blinked at her.

Donna flushed. She'd assumed the repetition had been down to the stammer. "Oh."

The Doctor turned back to Lee and Lola. "You helped him steal the Brindisi effusion device."

The two thieves exchanged worried frowns. "I don't know about any device," Lola said, shaking her head. Lee mirrored her movement, though he looked considerably more troubled than she did.

Donna felt a fresh trickle of worry spring up. "Doctor, you said it was a generator."

"Most of them are," he agreed. "But this particular one isn't like the ones I've seen before. Most of them are designed to give off massive controlled bursts of energy—the kind that could power a hyper-drive. This one doesn't have any particular release mechanism." His brow furrowed. "I can't imagine what it's used for."

"Why would Jack steal something like that?" she wondered.

Lola appealed to Lee. "You've been with him longest."

Lee looked uncomfortable. Donna imagined that he didn't particularly enjoy being forced to talk more than he had to. She'd known a boy with a stammer when she was a kid; he'd been picked on mercilessly by some of the nastier children, to the point where he rarely spoke at all.

"I don't know," Lee said quietly. "He's never mm-mentioned it to me."

"Why are you here?" the Doctor asked.

"Because you knew the lady Time Agent," Lola said. "Io said you scared the devil out of her. That you called her 'River'."

The Doctor looked thoughtful. "What do you expect me to do?"

"We've g-g-got to g-go after Jack," Lee said.

"I do agree with you there," the Doctor mused. "But it's not as if I have much in the way of resources." He held up the sonic screwdriver. "I don't even have a time machine. I'm assuming that none of you do, either, if you're coming to us for help."

"Jack only had the one wrist strap," Lola said. "But the Time Agents have one each."

"They're in Torchwood custody," the Doctor said, shaking his head and frowning. "Though, honestly, I'm not quite sure how they managed to get themselves captured. Time Agency must be sloppier in this universe."

"D-Donna's in Torchwood," Lee said. Everyone looked at her.

Donna shook her head. "Oh no! You're not sucking me into this. I don't want to have anything to do with Jack!"

The Doctor glanced at her. "He's got Rose." She sagged under the weight of his puppy-dog eyes.

"It's only Wednesday! I haven't even been there a week!" Donna cried, even though she already knew that she wasn't going to be able to argue her way around this. She pinched the bridge of her nose. "So much for this job."
The fact that the proud smile on the Doctor's face made her feel like she was doing the right thing only proved to her that she was losing her mind. That, and she was smiling back. (Just a little.)

The Doctor turned back to the bass player and his friend. "Okay, you two. You know him best; where will he have gone?"

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The Warehouse office seemed deserted when the four of them came out of the lift. Donna, Lee, and Lola followed a pace behind him.

There was a shadowy movement on the other side of Argus and it made them jump; however, it turned out to only be Ianto. The Doctor wondered if he had some sort of stealth tech he hadn't told anyone about.

Ianto gave the Doctor a sombre look. "Mrs. Tyler is very upset with you."

"She usually is," the Doctor replied flippantly. Right. Jackie. Damn. Pete was probably furious. Though what could he do to him? Other than lock him up again.

"Did you get what I asked for?"

Ianto nodded curtly and led them down to the tech lab. River and Hart's vortex manipulators were in clear evidence bags, labelled with little red stickers and sitting on the table.

"I presume you know what you're doing, sir?"

Is he serious? the inner Donna chuckled.

"Of course I do," the Doctor replied. He pulled one of the bags open and activated the vortex manipulator's computer.

"You have a plan then?" outside-Donna asked.

That'd be a new one, said inside-Donna.

Maybe you should pipe down? he suggested. I can't keep track of both of you at once. I'll start answering you out loud and everyone will think I'm a nutter!

How is that different from usual? she wondered.

"Not as such," he admitted. He frowned at the wrist-strap and fiddled with the co-ordinate entry.

Ianto's forehead wrinkled. "Oh, good."

"Give me the other strap," Lola said, eyeing the second bag with barely-concealed avarice. "That way we can all go together."

Ianto frowned slightly as the Doctor made a couple of adjustments to the strap he was holding and handed it over to her. She buckled it with trembling fingers while Lee looked on, his mouth set in a worried line.

"What about your friends?" Donna asked. "Won't we be wanting their help as well?"

"They're already on their way here."
"That will make things a lot neater," said a familiar voice.

The Doctor looked up from making his adjustments to the second manipulator. Martha was standing in the doorway and she had her gun out. Fantastical.

"You are all under arrest," said Martha Jones. "Doctor, put down the strap and step back."

He looked down again. "Not gonna happen," he said. "I'm going after Jack, I'm getting Rose back, and you and your rule book are not going to stop me."

There was a click of a second gun. The Doctor turned and saw Owen standing in the doorway that led to the emergency stairwell. He was pointing a weapon at him, too.

These people and their guns. "Oh, come on!"

"Owen, if they move, shoot."

Donna had already put her hands up. "What now, Spaceman?" she muttered just as the voice in his head said the exact same thing. It was very disorientating.

He looked squarely at Martha. "I think we need to talk."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "I think you're right."

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"And then you hand evidence over to one of Jack's people!" Martha finished, voice raised enough that the little white coral on her desk seemed to shiver with the vibrations.

"She's not going anywhere," the Doctor promised.

She looked at him like he was a particularly stupid child. "You gave her a portable time machine!"

"I locked out the commands. That thing's not going anywhere that I don't want it to."

"Oh, that makes me feel so much better." Martha sat heavily in her chair and covered her eyes with both hands for a moment before going on. "What am I supposed to do with you?"

The Doctor bristled. "I don't see why everyone is so keen to 'do something' with me, or to me. I might be a hybrid clone from another universe, but that doesn't make me some sort of freak."

He hesitated. To his surprise, inner Donna made no comment. Too easy? he asked.

"Okay, wellll... Maybe it does."

Martha's expression was desperate. "You can't possibly trust these people! Their boss kidnapped Rose. Look what happened to Tosh! I'm not going to let..." She stilled and swallowed. The Doctor's chest tightened. He hadn't even asked about Toshiko.

"Is she...?"

"She's not dead yet," Martha said, her voice shaky as she very deliberately did not look at his face.

He frowned as something occurred to him—though he wasn't sure if it was Time Lord or human observation that led him to the conclusion. But there was definitely more than just a captain's concern for her lieutenant in her eyes.
"Are you and Toshiko...?"

Martha looked startled, then a little bit frightened. He'd hit the nail on the head, it seemed. Martha and Toshiko. Huh.

"Martha..." He leaned forward in his chair. "It wasn't your fault she got hurt."

"She's not a field agent, she's a tech. She wasn't prepared for the situation. That's my responsibility. If she dies, it will be my fault."

The Doctor's heart went out to her. It was never a good idea to fall in love with people you were responsible for... Certainly not in organisations like this.

"She's going to be fine," he said, hoping that she would believe him and that he wouldn't be proved wrong. "Martha." She blinked wide brown eyes at him and stared. For a moment, she looked like the Martha he'd known in the other universe. "Trust me."

She shook herself, took a deep breath, and suddenly the vulnerable young woman was gone and only the hardened agent remained. "I've still got my duties, Doctor. One of which dictates that I keep you in custody."

He bit back a groan. "And what good will that do, do you think?" he snapped.

"I can't trust you any more than I can trust those people in the cells," she said sharply. "Or my own agents, apparently. Donna, I can understand. Considering the pre-existing relationship between the two of you, it's no surprise that she'd side with you. Ianto's behaviour is a bit more worrisome. I was told he was very loyal to the Institute."

He scoffed. "Yes, well, he also has a brain."

Martha narrowed her eyes. "The only thing that has kept this country, this planet, safe, are the efforts of the Torchwood Institute. You have no idea how many times the human race would have been destroyed if it weren't for us."

"Actually, I know exactly how many times," he countered. "Come on, Martha, you've read the files on Lumic and I'm sure you've looked at Owen's reports by now. I'm not just some foundling on the doorstep. I know what I'm doing. Whatever Torchwood's handled in the past, it doesn't compare with the kind of things that will be coming." He paused, remembering the other Martha in her white coat, her initial disbelief, her refusal to call him 'Doctor' until he'd earned it. "You need me."

He could almost see the calculations and balancing scales behind her eyes. "You need us," she said at last. "You might be a genius, you might have a thousand years of experience, but you're on your own here. Without the Tylers, without Torchwood, you've got nothing, not even a name."

That stung—and it stung badly—but he was careful not to let it show in his face. Martha stared back at him, unblinking, testing his resolve. She had steel in her blood. Unlike the medical student he'd met in Royal Hope Hospital, this woman had already been through the crucible and come out the other side a warrior.

Regretfully, he thought about parallel worlds where she might have had a nice, normal, safe, boring life. It would have been nice to see her soft toward the world again. At the same time, it might have comforted his Time Lord counterpart to know that he wasn't the only thing that could turn Martha Jones into a soldier. Or maybe not.

"I have a proposal," she said after they'd stared at each other for a minute or so. "Quarantine
procedures for Torchwood agents are different from those for alien confederates. If you sign on as a full agent, then I might see fit to overlook Dr. Harper's recommendations until the current crisis is resolved."

"How about this?" he said. "Why don't I just agree to go to counselling? Be a bit simpler." If Donna could do it, so could he. At least, once or twice. Just until he could find another way out of it.

Martha raised an eyebrow. "Interesting," she allowed. "But that's not enough. If you want unfettered access to Torchwood property and facilities, I need you on the official roster."

Damn. "Ooh... you're good."

Her eyebrow twitched a little bit higher. "I am," she agreed.

"And if I say no?" he asked, raising his own eyebrow in challenge.

She shrugged. "Then you're just going to have to find a way to travel through time without a machine, and then find Harkness without the help of any of the people that we have in our custody."

"Doesn't Torchwood have any interest in retrieving one of their top agents? I'd think that Pete at least has some investment in the mission."

"He might be board chair," Martha replied, "but there's more than one man's daughter at stake here. The board have other things on their minds."

"Rose saved this universe!" he cried.

"Rose is only one person."

He tried his best to clamp down on the human bits of his brain that were flooding the rest of it with adrenaline. Testosterone fuelled his anger until he could hear his blood pounding in his ears. (Anger wasn't new, not by any means, but this wrath was hard to keep under control... and that was saying something, considering how hot-tempered his tenth self could be.) "She's more than that!" he shouted. "Much much more."

Her expression was cold. "If you believe that, you'll do whatever it takes to get her back."

He jumped out of his chair. "I'd die for her!"

Martha's slow smile was triumphant. "Then getting a job should be nothing."

The Doctor's mouth fell open.

"I'll get the forms," she said pleasantly. Then she held out her hand for him to shake. "Welcome to Torchwood, Doctor."

§

Jack let go of her arm when they arrived in the abandoned bunker. It was the last of at least a dozen jumps, and Rose was exhausted. Her treacherous knees gave out from under her, and she landed on her sore hands.

Jack didn't say anything. He only pressed a button on the manipulator and peeled off his black leather biker jacket.

Rose glared up at him. "Where are we now?"
"Somewhere safe," he replied, dropping the jacket over the back of a battered metal chair. He pointed at a couple of cots—they were grey-green and looked like they'd been through several wars. "Get some sleep."

"No, thanks." She pulled herself to her feet, wincing at the protest that every muscle in her body was shouting out at her.

Jack raised an eyebrow at her. "There's nowhere to go," he told her. He pointed at the corrugated metal roof. "There's enough xtonic radiation outside to reduce you to your base atoms."

"Where are we?" she asked again.

"Little planet called Midnight," he said. "Absolutely beautiful place; used to have a pretty good tourist trade, people coming from halfway across the galaxy to see the diamond canyons and sapphire falls... But things went south, and then the colonial economy collapsed. Whole operation was abandoned." He gave her a knowing look. "And you're not even a little bit impressed, are you?"

Rose stuck out her chin a little. "No, not really."

"Let me guess; time traveller? When I scanned you at the restaurant, you had traces of artron energy on you." He looked up from his wrist comp and paused. "Among other things."

"Why'd you bring me here?"

"It's always nice to have some company." Rose gave him a cold look and he laughed at her. "Somebody's got a filthy mind," he said, appreciatively.

"Look, I can help you, Jack," she said, dismissing the blush that flared in her cheeks. "Let me at least try. River and John are after you, but we've got what they want back at Torchwood. We can help."

His smile twisted. "You have no clue what you've gotten yourselves mixed up in."

"Why don't you just tell me, then?" she suggested. "Jack..."

"That isn't my name," he said shortly.

Rose hesitated. "What is your name, then?"

"Sit down. I'm going to get some water. You're probably dehydrated."

He left her alone in the room; a metal door creaked and screeched as it closed behind him.

Rose gave in and sat on the edge of one of the cots. They smelled like old sweat. The walls were plastered with papers. Most of them looked like alien scribblings. She missed the TARDIS' translation so much.

Once in a while, something on the wall looked like English. One thing that she could read was a list of names typed out on a yellowed sheet of ancient, laminated paper. She got to her feet and scanned it quickly, until she noticed one that she knew.

Captain Jack Harkness. An American volunteer who had died in World War II. He hadn't been from Iowa, and he'd been killed in action in 1941. Still, it seemed that she'd found the man whose name Jack had stolen.

The door screeched again, and she turned around. The man who called himself Jack tossed her a silver pouch with a blue teardrop symbol and "H₂O" written on it. She caught it and hissed at the
pain in her hands.

"Let me see," he said. Rose looked up from the scabs on her palms and saw that he was practically on top of her. It wasn't a large room, but there was enough of it to allow for personal space. But this was Jack, wasn't it? He insinuated himself right in front of her and, with a gentleness that belied the violence she'd had to put up with today, he turned her hands up so that he could see them.

"Not too bad. Looks like it hurts, though," he murmured.

Rose pulled her hands away and wished that she could stop thinking of Glenn Miller and Big Ben. "I'm fine."

"I've probably got a dermal regenerator in the med kit." He smiled ruefully. "We could both use a touch-up." She resisted the urge to yank her head away as he brushed a finger along her jaw before moving away again.

She sat on the cot and struggled to open her pouch. He watched in amusement as she resorted to using her teeth to puncture it. She sucked on the plastic until the pouch was flat and all the stale-tasting water was gone. She felt a bit better now, but that small amount of water had only awakened her thirst and made her realise how hungry she was.

Jack examined the awful metal disc that was still digging its claws into his chest. The Doctor had deactivated it, but it seemed he hadn't had a chance to remove it completely. Rose supposed that Jack would have to visit some kind of hospital or something to get it taken care of. But then, Jack pressed a few buttons on his wrist strap and the claws disengaged. He hissed in pain as the bomb dropped into his waiting hand.

After healing the damage to his chest, Jack looked at himself in a broken mirror that hung on the opposite wall. He went over his face with the medical device the way one might run a razor, slowly and methodically. A sliver of orange light ran over his skin and the bruising on his face faded.

Rose thought of that morning when she'd watched the Doctor shave with the electric razor Mum had picked up for him. It might have been Mickey's old one, really, but Rose hadn't let herself think about that at the time. The Doctor was already in Mickey's old bedroom.

She was happy for Mickey if anybody asked her, but she did miss him. After Ricky's grandmother had died, she'd known that the main thing tying Mickey to Pete's World was gone. Rose had thought, in those few hours that she'd had the Doctor back before he'd dropped them off in Bad Wolf Bay, that she'd be able to have what they'd had before; the two of them would be in the TARDIS, and Mickey would be back in London, calling them back whenever he needed their help to defend the Earth. Mickey'd as good as said he'd go back to stay if he had the chance.

So much for that childish hope. She ought to have known better. She should have known that the Doctor would make her do what he thought was best.

Still, things hadn't turned out all bad. She had her Doctor—a Doctor—and he needed her as much as she needed him. Just the same, she couldn't help but wonder what the Doctor was doing, back in the other universe, him and Donna and the TARDIS. Same old life, probably. What was her human Doctor doing, back on Earth in the twenty-first century? It wasn't like he could build a new TARDIS from scratch, could he? Still, she knew he'd be trying everything to find her.

Or would he?

Jack had finished fixing his face. He gave his jaw a looking-over and then turned to her. "Let me
take a look at you," he said.

She wanted to tell him to sod off, but her face hurt, and she couldn't think of a real reason to refuse him that wasn't based on spite.

He healed her hands first, and she thought of nanogenes and her big-eared Doctor. The Doctor had said his clone would be like that; born in war, angry like when she'd first met him. He'd been wrong. This Doctor wasn't anything like that first one. He wasn't the same sort of hard that that one had been and he wasn't cold like he had been on more than one occasion. He had anger in him, yes, and fear, and a clinging desperation that frightened her even as she tried to comfort it. Last night, he'd woken from a nightmare, shouting out her name and clutching her as if he'd been sure she was about to disappear. It had echoed her own fears so closely she had been helpless to do anything but try to reassure him that she wasn't going anywhere.

She let Jack heal the bruises on her face and wondered if the Doctor remembered anything he'd said last night. She hadn't understood half of it, probably because it hadn't been English, or simply because she'd been too frightened, too wrapped up in what they were doing to focus on it.

"Good as new," Jack said, with a small smile.

Rose moved her jaw and touched her cheek. The pain was gone, but the bones of her face felt like they were buzzing a bit. The feeling would probably pass in a minute or so.

"Thanks."

"No problem." He stood and went to put the medical device away. "So, what's the Tyler heiress doing working for Torchwood?"

"Can I get more of that water?"

He tossed her a couple more pouches from the pile he'd made on the desk by the wall. "Family business?" he asked.

"You could say that," she replied. She had a little more success opening the second pouch.

"What about the Doctor?"

She waited until she'd drained the water before she answered. "What about him?"

Jack raised an eyebrow at her. "I saw what he did at the party," he said. "It was pretty obvious then that he wasn't a local boy."

Rose gave him a cool smirk. "Why don't we do it this way: I ask a question, you give me an honest answer. Then, you can ask me a question, and I'll give you one."

He shrugged. "Deal."

"What's your real name?"

He waved a finger at her. "Nuh-uh, I asked first."

"The Doctor's an alien," she said.

"What kind?"

"My turn, remember?"
Jack rolled his eyes. "Fine. Sun."

Rose blinked. "Your name is 'Sun'?" She couldn't keep the incredulity out of her voice.

"Your name is 'Rose'," he pointed out. "You've got a boyfriend named 'Doctor.' Nouns can be names."

She crossed her arms. "Good point. All right then."

"What kind of alien?"

"Time Lord," she replied.

'Sun' frowned. "Never heard of them."

"They don't exist in this universe."

"Well, that settles what my next question's going to be."

Rose smiled a little. "What's the Brindisi device for?"

"Power," he said simply. "The Doctor's from another universe?"

"Yes," she replied. "Where did you get it?"

"Little planet on the outskirts of the Rewtas Amalgam. Are we talking parallel or perpendicular?"

"Parallel," she said, not quite sure what he meant by 'perpendicular'. The Doctor had said before that some universes intersected each other, but he'd never got into the details of it. "Why did you steal it?"

Jack's handsome face darkened and he crossed his arms. "Because I wanted it, and they didn't need it."

"What—"

"My turn," he snapped. "Have you been to that parallel universe? The one he's from?"

She hesitated, not sure if it was really the smartest thing to be telling him the truth, but she'd said she would. "That's where I was born."

He laughed. "Oh, that's... Wow." He shook his head.

"What?" she demanded hotly. "You don't believe me?"

"I do believe you," he said. "Besides, it explains why all your records have been falsified."

She was surprised by how surprised she was. "You been checking up on me?"

"Of course. Just like I'm sure you checked up on me. Next question: how the hell did you get here?"

"The Doctor had a ship; we came here by accident."

Sun looked disappointed. "You're trapped." He must have picked something out of her facial expression, because she was pretty sure she hadn't said that.

Rose glanced down at her hands. "Yeah, I s'pose we are." Then, remembering that she had another question, she asked, "What do you need the device for?"
He spun the old metal chair around and sat in it, knees wide apart. "It generates massive amounts of power. It's very, very valuable."

Disgusted, she said, "So it's just about money, then?"

"Ah-ah, you're breaking the rules, Rosie-posie. Tell me, this ship of the Doctor's..." He fixed her in a firm stare. "Does he still have it?"

"No," she replied, trying not to show the pain on her face. "It's still in the other universe."

"Too bad. And to answer your question; yes, it's about money. I'm a thief. That's what thieves want."

"If River gets it back, she'll stop chasing you?"

"You're cheating again."

"Ask me something, then!"

"What's it like there, in that other universe?"

Rose was stumped. "I dunno. Different. Fewer zeppelins. Carrots are orange." She shook her head and picked up the last pouch of water. "Why?"

"You want me to answer that question or the first one?"

She rubbed her eyes. What had she asked him? "The first one," she said.

"River—" he said the name like it had a bad taste "—doesn't give a shit about the Brindisi effusion. She's a hound chasing a fox." Rose wondered how literally he meant that. She'd witnessed a fox hunt once, back in the old days; if the hunters hadn't pulled the dogs off the fox, they'd have torn it to shreds. She shuddered at the thought.

"Is there any way of getting back to that universe?" he asked.

"No," she said feeling the regret pool in her stomach like poison—mercury, maybe. "The walls are closed. Why, do you want to go there?"

"You've travelled in time, right?"

She nodded.

"Have you ever been to the fifty-second century?"

"Not in this universe," she admitted. No point in being slavish to the format; better to let him talk.

"Be glad," he said fiercely. "It's not pretty. Warlords have taken over most of the free colonies; half of them have been destroyed in wars with various alien races. Then you have groups like the Time Agency; they're based on Earth, so they have no sense of what the rest of humanity has to do just to survive. Governments that..." He stopped and looked away from her.

"What makes you think it's any better in my universe?"

"Because it has to be," he said, shaking his head. "It just has to be."

Rose felt a pang of sympathy; she had to remind herself that this man had kidnapped her at gunpoint... That if it weren't for him, the Time Agents wouldn't have come to London and planted
their bombs, Toshiko wouldn't have been shot...

She looked at the wall because she didn't want to look at Jack... Sun... anymore. Her eyes wandered over words that she couldn't read and she wondered what she was supposed to do. The Bad Wolf had given her—she had given *herself*—a sign there on the Henrik's rooftop. It had always meant something in the past. Bread crumbs on the trail leading her to the Doctor. She had only seen it a few times since she had looked into the Heart of the TARDIS. The name Dårlig Ulv Strand. The sign on the street corner right before she'd found Donna Noble in her pocket universe where the Doctor had been dead... The rooftop of Henrik's. *It meant* something. There was something she was supposed to see. What if she'd missed it? Had it been about Donna again? Was it River? Was it Jack?

She turned back to the man in the chair and considered asking him point blank if he'd ever heard the words, or seen them anywhere. But they were dangerous; she had to be careful with them.

"Why don't you get some sleep?" Jack suggested, nodding at the cots. "I promise I won't touch you."

"Thanks," she said sardonically. He probably wouldn't, but then again, if he tried anything... She swallowed and pushed the thought away. Jack settled in the chair and put up his feet. She lay on the cot and faced him, intent on keeping watch.
Chapter 7

Owen Harper was looking at her, and his eyes were not on her face. Most of the time, that would have had Donna up in arms, however, given the current circumstances—the Doctor in trouble with the boss and Jack's time travelling friends (all five of them) in the holding cells—she was too busy wondering how she could use the distraction to her advantage in some way. Donna was under Owen's guard and Ianto was under Lalit Mehra's; the four of them were in the conference room. She pulled at the handcuffs that tethered her left wrist to the arm of her chair.

"I'm gone less than a week and you let the place fall apart," Lalit said to Owen, giving him a sidelong look. Lalit was younger even than Rose and, like all the other agents that had come to the Warehouse at Martha's request, he wore black leather. Donna wondered if she was going to be expected to wear black all the time. She did have a leather coat, but it was brown. It had been bloody expensive, too. She wasn't going to not wear it.

Owen's eyes finally left her cleavage and he glared at Lalit. "Blame Jones. She's supposed to be in charge."

"It's always the boss's fault," Ianto said mildly. "No part of the current situation could possibly have anything to do with you drugging the Doctor and putting him in a holding cell."

Owen scowled. "I was just doing my job. If you hadn't broken him out... Which is treason, by the way..."

Lalit was shocked. "Ianto? You didn't!"

Ianto sat with his hands calmly folded in his lap, at least insofar as that was possible, given that he was cuffed to his chair, too. "You've been blaming the Doctor for Faye's death," he said, his voice utterly calm and surprisingly free from recriminations. His eyes, however, were sharp. "So you made up a reason to keep him locked up."

Owen's face paled—an achievement—and his mouth turned downwards into an ugly line of bilious rage. "If Tyler had even half a brain in her head, she wouldn't have let her cunt make staffing decisions for her. He's dangerous, he's violent, and he's unpredictable."

"He's been through a lot," Donna said, surprising herself. (But not, from the look of disdain on his face, Owen.) "And I'll thank you not to use language like that!"

"He's not even human," he spat back at her. "He didn't tell you that, did he? And you trust him?"

"Put yourself in his position," she snapped. "Imagine everything you knew was suddenly different, even your body. You could try having some sympathy."

"The thing we ought to be focusing on at the moment is getting Ms. Tyler back," Ianto said. "Faye would tell you—"

Owen snapped. He took his gun from its holster and fumbled it into his shaking fist. Ianto sat straighter in his chair, but he didn't flinch.

"You have no idea what Faye would have told me to do! You didn't even know her!"

Lalit put out a hand. "Owen..." He was easing his gun out now. Donna swallowed and pulled at her handcuff and felt the trembling begin. Whose office worked like this? This wasn't immigration and
bureaucracy, this was straight-up police drama. Lalit's dark eyes were wide, but he kept his voice even. "Maybe you should go take a break. Cool down."

"You have no idea," Owen said again. If he had been anyone else, Donna would have expected to see tears in his eyes. Dr. Harper only looked crazed.


Owen's hand was trembling as he set the gun on the table between them. Lalit slid it across the glass, put his gun away with one hand and then took the clip from Owen's.

"Why don't you go get a cup of coffee, mate," Lalit said, calmer now. Sympathetic, even.

"Actually," Ianto said, "there isn't any." Everyone looked at him. Slightly sheepish, he went on. "It's been a busy morning."

Owen gave Ianto and Lalit dirty looks and skulked from the room.

Lalit sighed. "And this is why it's a bad idea to sleep with your team mates."

"True, but that's an old rule," Ianto said. "It's unrealistic. No one outside of Torchwood can put up with the lifestyle."

"What, you think they should change it?" Lalit seemed surprised. "After he just pulled a gun on you?"

"I think that reality and the rule book have less in common than the Board would like us to believe."

"Owen and Faye..." Donna had never met the woman, but she'd been in the next room when Faye had died. She could remember how Owen had raged at Rose, blaming her. And how Rose had taken it. "People knew about it, though, didn't they?"

"Of course they did," said Ianto, just as Lalit said, "No, not really."

Lalit looked embarrassed. "Okay, maybe I was a little behind. But I wasn't here very long."

"Neither was Faye," Ianto said quietly. He glanced at Donna and she thought she caught a hint of warning in his face. "Owen moves quickly."

She decided not to mention Owen's stares.

Martha came into the room. "Where's Harper?" she asked, frowning at Lalit.

"Told him to take a minute. You should probably send him home."

Martha considered this. "I'll talk to him. In the meantime, you can un-cuff them."

"Really?" Donna and Ianto said.

"Disciplinary measures can wait," she said, giving them a significant stare. "For now, we have a missing agent to find."

"Where's the Doctor?" Donna asked. Lalit unlocked Ianto's handcuffs, then came over to do hers.

"In my office. Ianto, I need you to show Donna where the entry forms are; standard field agent
contract."

Donna rubbed her wrist. Did that mean what she thought it meant?

Ianto seemed as surprised as she was. "How did you convince him?" he asked.

Martha smiled. "I'm very persuasive."

Donna found the Doctor in Martha's office, alone, looking at the photograph propped up on the desk. He started guiltily when she walked in.

"Got the forms Martha said you needed," she said.

He held out his hand and flipped through the thick packet at high speed, making a face. "She has got to be kidding."

"Are you really joining up?"

He looked at her and tightened his jaw before sighing. "Apparently, I'll give her what she wants for now." He plucked a pen from the holder on the corner of the desk. She looked at the coral sculpture. It was probably her imagination, but it seemed to be bigger than it had been on Monday.

"Well, I think we're lucky we're not being arrested for treason," she said wryly. "Yet."

He huffed. "Oh bloody hell."

Donna crossed her arms. "What now?"

The Doctor blinked and looked at her, stricken. "Er... it wants me to give a name."

"So put down 'the Doctor'."

He sat down in Martha's chair and leaned on the desk. "Yeah, well, that's just the thing, isn't it? You're right. It's not a name. If I'm going to do this human thing properly, I ought to have one. Just for papers and such. Blimey." He made a face. "I'll probably have to get a passport."

"Aren't you in a hurry? Use John Smith."

"You said not to use John Smith!" he cried, glaring at her. "You're right; it's rubbish! I've known some real Smiths. Old friend of mine, Sarah Jane Smith... she was marvellous. Really brilliant. I wonder if..." He shook his head, dismissing the question.

"Wasn't Mickey's name Smith?"

The Doctor winced. "Oh God, yes, you're right. Don't want to have the same name as Mickey the Idiot. That wouldn't be right. Plus, it's terribly awkward, considering the history..." He scratched his head.

"Just fill in the rest and put the name in when you're done," Donna suggested.

"But that's all it is! Fill in the name, put initials here and there, sign at the bottom. I'll need a signature, too. Damn."

She shook her head. "I don't want to be insensitive to your existential crisis, Doctor, but not too long ago, you were chomping at the bit to go and save your girlfriend."
He acted as if he hadn't heard her. After a few moments, he looked up from the papers. "Donna... would you..." He cast his eyes downward again.

"Would I what?"

"Would you mind if I... if I used 'Noble'?"

Donna was stunned for a moment. Then, in a small voice, she said, "You want to use my name?"

He tugged on his ear. "Well... Technically... Depending on how you look at it, we are sort of related. I mean, I haven't looked at the blood work, but I'm sure I share a reasonable amount of genetic material with..." He swallowed. "I'm half... That is..."

"Half Donna Noble," she said tightly. As if she'd forget that so quickly. After a protracted silence, she said, "There are better surnames."

"It's fine," he said hurriedly, obviously very disappointed. "I can use Smith. I've used it so often, I might even remember to respond to it."

Donna sighed. She wondered if his knowledge of her counterpart had given him a special talent for making her feel bad so that she'd do what he wanted.

"Oh stop it," she moaned. Might as well give in to the inevitable. "You can be Doctor Whatever Noble if you want. It's not like I own the name."

He brightened instantly. "Really? You don't mind?"

"'Mind' isn't really the word," she said.

He grinned at her. "I'm half-tempted to write 'Whatever'," he joked.

"Do and I'll smack you," she promised.

He started to write furiously. "I'll just write 'Doctor' and leave a big blank space and 'Noble'. I can come up with a first name later."

"You do that, Spaceman."

His smile widened to ridiculous proportions. "Did you know that this contract obligates the undersigned to work any and all holidays if required of them?"

"I did read it before I signed mine," she said. "While you finish that, I'm going to go check on something."

"Just as well. I've witnessed a fair few incidents around the holidays. Oooh! I'll have to tell you about the time I saved London from the Titanic at Christmas. Wellll, Space Titanic." He paused and looked up at the empty room. She could hear his voice follow her down the corridor. "Check on what?"

Jackie Tyler was tired of waiting at home for someone to tell her what was going on. It was just like the old days again, having the Doctor around, because it meant that they were out there somewhere and she didn't know where they were, or when, or if she would see them again.

Well, she would be damned if she was going to let them treat her like that again. Pete included. He meant well, he did, but sometimes he was just as thick, and so wrapped up in "Torchwood" that he
forgot that there were more important things. Like telling your wife where her daughter was and what was being done to help her.

When she'd been told that the Doctor had run off, she had assumed that he'd gone after Rose. It was exactly the sort of thing he would do; run off half-cocked and without bothering to tell anybody. She'd been livid anyway, but God help her, it was normal. She was in the Warehouse lift now because she'd just been informed that the Doctor was there and Rose was not.

Ianto greeted her at the door with a cup of tea and a small smile. He was a very nice young man, only a little bit older than Rose—okay 6 or 7 years older, if you remembered that Rose's actual age didn't match the year on her made-up birth certificate—but still young. There were a few people she recognised from Torchwood One milling about, as well.

She took the tea. "How are you, sweetheart?"

"Doing fairly well. Thank you for asking," he replied. "If you're looking for the Doctor, he's still in Martha's office."

"What's he doing in there?" she cried. "Isn't he trying to find Rose?"

Ianto nodded. "Yes, but there have been a few... hitches."

That was when the Doctor appeared in the office with a bundle of papers under his arm and looking like he'd been dragged over the pavement. His suit jacket was bloody and burnt. Under that, instead of his usual shirt and tie, was a thin white t-shirt that was too big on him. His hair was a mess—a real mess, not that silly 'look how cool I am' mess—and he had enormous dark circles under his eyes.

When he saw her, his eyes widened in fear.

"There you are!" Ianto took her tea from her hand as she brushed by, deft and graceful as ever. "I ought to smack you! Where have you been? I've been worried sick about you! You just run off without telling anybody, and what am I supposed to do? Where'd he take her? I'll wring his neck, the —"

"Jackie." The Doctor had that wide, bug-eyed look he got when he was vexed. "Now really isn't the best—"

"Oh no, you don't!" Jackie marched right up to him and prodded him in the middle of his chest. "You better tell me right now what you're doing here while my daughter's out there somewhere with that bastard!"

He grimaced. "I'm trying, Jackie, I really am. Trust me."

"I do trust you!" she wailed, trying to hold back tears now. "But where is she? Where's Rose?"

"They travelled in time," he answered. "Without the TARDIS, I have no way of tracking them. Yet. I promise you, I will get her back."

She believed him, but... "What can I do to help?"

"There's nothing you can do." He frowned, then asked, "Where's Tony?"

"Sarah's with him," she said. She crossed her arms. "You don't think I'd leave him alone, do you?"

He had the sense to look ashamed. "No," he said. "Sorry." He lifted his head and pointed a finger at
Ianto. "Ianto Jones, I need you!"

Jackie crossed her arms, forced to stand quietly and listen to the Doctor blab on and on about
supplies he needed. Ianto nodded and set off.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Something spectacularly brilliant," the Doctor said, all flip and bounce again. He went to the Argus
terminal and started looking at files. Jackie saw a number of familiar faces flash across the screen.
Most of them looked like people from the band that had played at Pete's birthday party on Saturday.

"Have you eaten? Do you want anything?"

He looked at her as if she'd suggested taking a holiday to going skiing in the Alps, or something.
"This is hardly the time for a sandwich, Jackie."

Typical, Jackie thought. "Is Donna here? I heard she was at King's Cross yesterday."

"She's in the lab with Owen," Ianto said.

The Doctor's expression soured. Rose didn't like Owen much either. Jackie had only met him a few
times. He'd always been polite and charming, in a grumpy sort of way.

"Where were you last night?" she asked the Doctor.

He hesitated just a tiny bit. "I spent the night in Chiswick."

"Chiswick?"

"Yes, Chiswick!" he snapped back. "That house is more my home than—" He stopped abruptly and
grimaced at the Argus terminal.

Jackie hesitated. She wasn't stupid enough to think that the Doctor would think of the Tyler house as
his home. Still, it hurt a bit. After all this time, you'd think he'd understand that he was part of the
family. "You don't have to live with us, you know," she told him, lifting her chin and digging her
fingers into her arms, partly so she wouldn't throttle him. Why did he always have to be difficult? "I
certainly won't force you."

"I didn't mean—" He rolled his eyes and signed off the Argus screen. "Look, this is a bad time."

"Yeah," she agreed. "You go and you find my daughter."

He met her eyes at last. "I will get her back." He glanced back once as he disappeared down the
corridor, leaving her standing alone in the middle of the office.

Jackie crossed her arms a little tighter. Mickey would have let her help. She tried to think of
something that she could do. Pete had said that one of the new girls had been hurt at King's Cross
yesterday, though she couldn't remember the name. Maybe she'd just go pop by, see how she was
doing.

Ianto had come back to his desk and was typing away, hard-working as ever. "Is there anything you
need?" she asked him.

Ianto treated her to one of his rare smiles. "No, ma'am. I'm doing all right."

"Good." She glanced over her shoulder and wondered if they were treating him okay down here.
He'd been miserable at Torchwood Tower, but he had been too polite to say anything. Pete hadn't needed the bodyguard anymore, or so he'd said, but Ianto wasn't meant for the bureaucratic bustle of that big office. He liked intimate settings, work that could keep his attention, stuff with lots of detail. She'd had to lean on Pete to get him transferred to the Warehouse—he'd thought Ianto was too valuable where he was—but she hadn't let up. "Poor lamb deserves to have a job that makes him happy," she'd said. "He's drowning in that big awful place. Let him go with Rose."

"Do you need anything?" Ianto asked her. Bless him.

"What was the name of the girl who got shot yesterday?"

"Toshiko Sato."

"Is she at Royal Hope?" That's usually where Torchwood agents were put when they were sent to hospital.

"Yes, ma'am; room 417, in the new building."

Jackie took out her mobile and typed the number into the notepad thing. "Thanks, love. I'm useless around here. I'll just go check in on her."

Ianto nodded. "Shall I call ahead, let them know you're coming?"

She waved her hand. "Nah, it's just me. I'll wear big sunglasses."

She had Morris drive her to hospital, with one quick stop at a florists for something bright and cheery. She found Ms. Sato's room without any trouble, and was pleased to find her awake.

"Hello!" she said when the young woman turned her head and saw her. "Toshiko?" She recognised her: she'd been at Pete's party.

The woman nodded and started to sit up. She whimpered.

"Oh, don't hurt yourself!" Jackie said. She went and put the flowers on the bedside table. "You just lie still, don't go pullin' your stitches." She held out her hand. "I'm Jackie Tyler, we met on Saturday. Just wanted to stop by and see how you were getting on."

"Fine," Toshiko stammered, taken aback. "I'm sorry, did you say you're Mrs...."

Jackie took off her sunglasses and put them in her handbag. "Tyler. That's right. Pete's my husband."

"And you're... delivering flowers?"

Jackie looked at the flowers, and then glanced down at her clothes. She hadn't bothered to dress in anything fancier than a blue blouse under a favourite white hoodie and her most comfortable pair of jeans. They'd been very expensive, but you probably couldn't tell that just by looking. Her hair was pulled back and up. She might as well have been delivering flowers, she supposed. She'd been too worried about Rose to bother with much this morning. Toshiko was lucky that she wasn't still in her pyjamas.

"You were at the station yesterday," she said.

"Yes," Toshiko replied. She reached for her water glass, wincing. Jackie handed it to her, waited for to finish drinking, and then helped her put it down again.

"Did you hear who they were? The people who were planting the bombs?"
The young woman frowned. "I'm afraid I didn't. Rose said something about Time Agents, but I was a bit..." She looked down, embarrassed. "I'm not very good at fighting."

Jackie looked at one of the chairs. "D'you mind if I sit down?" Toshiko shook her head, so she sat, putting her bag on the floor next to her. "I might have known it would be time travellers or something like that," she said. "It's always non-stop trouble with the Doctor around. Mind you, there was plenty of trouble without him. My daughter goes and looks for it these days. What do they want?"

"The Doctor and Rose?" Toshiko wondered, blinking. Maybe she wasn't as alert as she seemed. She was probably on lots of painkillers, poor thing.

"Don't I know what they want," Jackie muttered. "Waking us up at all hours, shouting and making all that racket. As if me and Pete weren't just down the hall, and Tony, too. Probably would be best if they got their own flat somewhere. Not too far away, mind you." She paused. "The Time Agents... Did they say what they wanted?"

"They wanted the effusion device," Toshiko answered in a dreamy tone.

"Who has that, then? Jack?" Jackie wished she'd never even heard of that band. They were only trouble. She hated to think that this was really her fault, but Rose had always spoken so fondly of her friend Jack. She'd said he was a bit of a scoundrel, true, but Jackie had always assumed that was a Don Juan sort of scoundrel, not a kidnapping bomber type.

"They've got it at the Warehouse."

Jackie nearly shot out of her chair. "Torchwood's got it?"

"Very strange," Toshiko murmured. "I couldn't identify the energy signature, but that other stuff was there, too." She frowned at the I.V. needle in the back of her hand. "The Doctor called it... what did he call it? Said it was time... timey-wimey? He talks a lot."

"If Torchwood's got what they want, why on Earth did they take Rose? Some kind of ransom?"

Toshiko lifted her head, but she looked through Jackie, as if she was seeing something else. "Maybe the field's attracted to the timey-wimey stuff... Or it's something else. I can't remember..."

Jackie stood up. "I'm sorry," she began. "But I think I've got to go."

"I'll come with you." Toshiko started to pull her I.V. out.

"Oh, don't do that!" Jackie cried, quickly going over and gently pressing the tape back down onto the back of Toshiko's hand. One of the monitors had started to beep. "You've got to stay here for now. Just until you're better."

"But the Doctor doesn't know," the woman argued. "You've got to tell him."

"Tell him what?"

A nurse came into the room, wearing a frown and sea-foam green scrubs. "Is there a problem in here?" he asked icily.

"It's nothing, she's just a bit confused," Jackie said hurriedly. "What do I need to tell the Doctor, sweetheart?"
"I think it would be best if you left, ma'am," said the nurse firmly. "I'll call Dr. Ellis. She's keeping a close eye on Ms. Sato."

"Just wait a minute," she cried. "Toshiko, what—"

The nurse gave her a very firm look. "Madam, I can have you ejected."

Jackie glared at him and grabbed her handbag. "Fine." She took a good look at the name on his ID and repeated it to herself a few times to commit it to memory. "But if she says what it was she needed to tell the Doctor at the Warehouse, you call me." She took her card from a little silver wallet and gave him one. "Jackie Tyler. My number's on there." She let the information sink in a little bit and enjoyed the glimmer of intimidation in the young man's eyes. She put on her sunglasses and, head held high, walked out of the room.

§

Owen wasn't in his office, nor was he at his desk out in the main office. Donna found him in the large exam room where she'd seem him doing the autopsy on the Hoix.

He was sitting on the floor against the wall, his knees up, head bowed between them and his arms were folded over his head. From the looks of the room, he'd knocked a few things over in a tantrum. She wondered if Martha had talked to him yet. She also wondered why she was down here. He wasn't likely to want to talk to her at all.

She approached with caution, but made sure not to be too quiet. Didn't want to startle him, did she?

"Owen?"

"Fuck off," he said without moving, but his words had no venom.

"I know you're not all right," she said after a moment. He wouldn't like platitudes. She looked at the scattered probes and scalpels and half-undone rolls of gauze. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Owen lowered his arms and gave her an incredulous look. "Why would I want to talk to you?" he said scornfully.

"I know what it's like to lose someone," she said simply.

"You're just another member of the Doctor's fan club," he spat.

"Doesn't mean I'm not serious about wanting to help."

"I don't need your kind of help," he said shortly.

Donna crossed her arms. "You should go home," she said. "You're obviously not going to be any good around here. Not if you're just going to throw fits and feel sorry for yourself."

"Fuck you," he drawled. "What the fuck do you know? You haven't even been here a week."

"You kiss your mother with that mouth?" she barked, temper flaring.

Owen stared at her and then, in a surreal turn, he buried his head again and started to laugh. Donna suspected that the choking laughter was really sobbing after a moment, but she didn't say anything. Nor did she move any closer.

He stopped making any noise at all after a few minutes. "Right. Get out of my lab now."
Donna went and sat on the floor next to him, careful to avoid the blue puddle of what smelled like formaldehyde.

Owen glowered at her around his forearm. "I said get out, Noble. Don't you have work to do?"

"I'm on break," she said loftily.

He gave her an appraising glare. "I ain't telling you shit," he informed her.

"Fine. I don't want to know about your sordid little work affair, anyway. I was just being polite."

He snorted in disbelief. "Nah, you were all bleeding heart, coming to comfort the sad bastard with tea and hugs and all that shit."

"Do you see any tea?" she asked, matching his insolence drop for drop. "Now shut up. I only got half an hour of sleep last night. I need forty winks."

§

Seeing 'Doctor Noble' down on paper gave him a surprisingly settled feeling. At least, he thought it did. The Donna bits of him were satisfied, though he suspected that the actual Donna was uneasy. She was taking things pretty well, considering. Maybe using the name was taking it too far?

He handed the thick packet of paper to Martha. "I need to talk to them."

Martha glanced over the papers, checking each one for the signature and initials, and raised an eyebrow. "Which ones?"

"All of them."

"Right this way. Doctor... Noble?"

He gave her a warning look and she let it go. She deposited the packet in the top (locked) drawer of her desk. He wondered if she thought he would try to steal it. (As if a tiny drawer lock could stop him if he tried.)

Did Torchwood agents really spend this much time capturing people? The extra agents that Martha had called from Torchwood One were lining the corridor on the way to the cells. He recognised Lalit Mehra standing closest to the door.

"Lalit!"

"Wotcher, Doctor," the young man replied: he enjoyed the rhyme. "Been busy?"

The Doctor let Martha open the door. (His psychic paper did the trick on the palm scan, but he didn't need her to know that just now.) "Little bit, yeah."

"They really time travellers?" Lalit asked them.

The Doctor flashed a grin at him. "Yep."

Only a few days before, these cells had been full of Zvazvera. The Doctor wondered how often they had humans in captivity; he didn't like the probable answer.

You're the one who signed up.
It's for Rose, he told her... himself... whoever it was. The moment I have her back, it's done.

Not according to that bit of paper you just signed half a name to.

River Song sat on the bench in the same cell he'd occupied yesterday afternoon. She had handcuffs on and her legs were crossed. From the curled position of her fingers he assumed she was engaged in some sort of meditation.

When he and Martha stopped in front of her cell, she smirked knowingly, but she didn't open her eyes.

"Let me guess," she drawled. The Doctor could hear something, like a tiny glitch in her translator. Her accent was different than it had been in the other universe. Not a lot, but enough that it made her seem all the more foreign. (Galactic Standard, fifty-second century, probably brought up on Earth, but there was something else he couldn't identify. Interesting.) He hadn't even known that other River Song, but it still made him feel... what? Loss? Unease, certainly. "Come to question the prisoners, have we?" She was mocking them. The other River hadn't mocked; teased a bit, maybe.

"You know everything, don't you?" Martha cooed. "Care to tell me next week's lottery numbers?"

River opened her eyes and smiled and opened her mouth to say something smart, (Spoilers?) but when she saw him standing there, the superior attitude evaporated.

"I didn't think you were one of the monkeys," she said coldly.

The Doctor shrugged. "Wellll... I decided, what the hell? I do love bananas."

"Hey!" Someone down the row knocked insistently on the Plexiglas. It was the bald man who'd had the biggest gun. "Don't bother talking to her. She's not going to tell you anything."

The Doctor strolled over, hands in his trouser pockets and bounced on his heels as he looked the man over. "I know you! You were the drummer!"

The bald man shrugged and gave him a canny look. He wasn't very tall, a bit stocky, and he had an accent that screamed New New New York. Jack must have liked the place a lot, if he'd picked up two of his friends there. "That's right."

"I'm the Doctor," he said. "Jack called you 'Fish.'"

"Yeah, that's right," said Fish.

He raised his eyebrows. "Drums and guns."

Fish shrugged. "That's what Jack hired me for. Look, man, you're making a big mistake locking us up."

"Wouldn't want to do that," Martha said mildly.

"We didn't do anything wrong," said Lola Enkidu, glaring mutinously at them from her cell between Fish and River.

"Speak for yourself," said River's partner, Hart, from across the way. His head lolled against the wall. His pupils were dilated; he was probably high on the painkillers Owen had given him for the gunshot wound in his leg. "Your friends all have plenty of black marks on their scorecard. They've done the right thing! Keep 'em off the streets, I say!"
"Shut up," Fish cried, giving Hart a long-suffering look. "You always gotta chime in, don'tcha?"

Io Freeburn, Jack's blonde pianist, stood next to the door of her cell, looking unconcerned by the situation. "Ignore them," she advised. "I usually do."

"Who can tell us where Harkness took my agent?" Martha said.

Everyone was silent. The dark black man with the short-cropped white-blond hair was watching them. He had striking golden-yellow eyes and his pupils were slightly oblong, though not so much that a person would notice unless they really looked. Near-human, the Doctor surmised. He called himself Gregor Samsa and, according to Lee, he didn't talk much. (He also played the tenor saxophone.)

Lee McCoy crossed his arms and looked guiltily at the ground. The Doctor found himself wanting to go up to him, wanting to trust him. The feeling was so strong that he actually took a step in Lee's direction before he could stop himself.

_Oh, Donna,_ he sighed. _It's not him._

Behind him, Peter Staker (trombonist) lay sprawled on the floor of his cell, rocking his feet from side to side at a frequency of exactly 120 beats per minute. He sat up suddenly and cried, "Okay! I admit it! It was all me!" Io, Fish, and Lee all rolled their eyes; Fish also groaned and Lee pinched the bridge of his nose. Laughing, Staker got to his feet. "All right, I'm lying. I have _no_ idea what's going on."

Lola glared across the corridor at him. "Shut your mouth, then."

"Funny sort of interrogation," River observed. "If you really want to get information out of them, why don't you put me in a room with one of them." The Doctor turned and saw her standing by the door, an unpleasant smile on her face. "Start with the prostitute."

Lola glared at the wall to her left as if she could burn River with her eyes. Fish turned angry red and snarled, "Don't even think about it." Samsa sat quietly on his bench and started to hum.

Martha gave the Doctor a significant look and darted her eyes at Hart. He was drugged and likely to have his guard down, but there was just as much of a chance that he'd be incoherent.

"Don't have the stomach for it, do you?" River said softly. "That's disappointing. I thought Torchwood was all 'defending the Earth from alien scum'. You can't even interrogate prisoners."

The Doctor planted himself in front of her cell. "River Song," he said softly and he watched as her eyes widened just a little bit. "I bet you could have been somebody spectacular." She stared back at him, unblinking, but he could see that she was shaken. It was very satisfying, but Donna volleyed prickling disapproval at him. He turned away and pointed at Lee. "Mr. McCoy!" he cried, "you're coming with us."

Lee seemed startled. "Why mm-me?"

"You've been with Jack the longest."

Martha raised an eyebrow at him, then went to unlock Lee's cell.

"Oh right," said Hart, chuckling to himself. "Take the one who can barely talk. That's a _brilliant_ idea."
Lee turned red and the Doctor glared at Hart, who actually shut up, though he kept giggling quietly.

"What about us?" Lola asked, looking fearful.

"D-don't worry," Lee said quietly as he passed her cell. "Everything will be o-k-k..." Unable to finish the word, he ducked his head and kept walking.

The Doctor insisted that Martha take Lee's handcuffs off when they reached the conference room. She looked at him like he was insane, but she did it, which was the important thing.

Lee rubbed his wrists and looked blankly at the glass table top.

"Tell me everything," the Doctor said, sitting down across from him. "Don't leave anything out. Where would Jack go if he was on the run?"

Lee shook his head. "There'rerrr too mm-many places." He glanced nervously at Martha, who was still standing with her arms crossed over her bright white button-down blouse and looking forbidding. Rose had said something about her being a former police sergeant. (She must have been very young. Odd universe.) "We ran a lot."

"You're sure that he never mentioned the effusion device to you?"

"I n-never heard of it unt-t-til this mm—" He was nervous. His stammer always got worse when he was stressed.

The Doctor glanced at his new 'boss'. "Martha, would you mind getting us some water?"

She stared at him. "I beg your pardon?"

"Some water," the Doctor said again.

She set her shoulders and her jaw, but she left the room.

Once she was gone, he tried again. "I promise you: we're not going to hurt you, or any of your friends," the Doctor said, trying to make eye contact.

Lee darted his eyes back and forth between his face and the table. "Why are you t-talking to mm-

The urge to put out his hand and touch the other man's arm was overwhelming. However, Lee was keeping his hands in his lap underneath the table, rubbing his wrists. He was terrified.

"Lee." Lee looked up and met his gaze at last. The Doctor swallowed as, inside, his heart was breaking. It hurt so much seeing him again, especially like this. Couldn't touch him, couldn't tell him anything... He wanted to hold him and tell him that everything was going to be all right. "I need your help. Jack took my... Rose is important to me. Anything you can tell me. Please."

Lee's broad shoulders slowly unfolded from their hunch. "He was running from them when I met him," he said at last, speaking slowly and deliberately. "He'd stolen something, but he never told m-

Lee shrugged and looked at the tabletop again. "At first, I didn't trust him, but... He hired Fish and Samsa for a m-museum heist. I knew Io from the c-c-c... clubs. J-J-J-Jack had the wrist-strap—said he stole it from a Time Agent. One of her partners." He hesitated. "We met Peter in the Fleming
nebula—his ship's engines had gone out. We r-rescued him before his power cells drained—he's a cyborg from a planet called S-S-Sto. Jack found L-Lola on a sssssolo grift in Deadwood and he brought her back with him."

Jack was quite the collector, it seemed. The Doctor smiled encouragingly. "How did you come to be here?"

Lee glanced up. "Jack said he was tired of the sssame old stuff. Needed a new angle. Io and I already knew how to play. Lola liked trumpet. Peter can play anything—he's half-positronic anyway. It was harder teaching Gregor the sax, but he's not half bad n-now, and Fish goes through sticks like crazy. It was a lot of fff-ffun. We kept waiting for the next job, but I think Jack was enjoying himself. We just kept playing, and we got a lot better, and then we started to make money. It was easier than stealing. I was really h-happy."

Was it possible that Jack had just settled into the routine, that he had enjoyed playing the part of bandleader? More likely that he'd been biding his time, waiting for something—or someone. But what? Who? River and Hart? He'd hidden the device in a cupboard, of all places. He'd probably thought that no one would bother poking his nose around down there. He would have been right, except they'd picked up the energy signature...

The Doctor rubbed his face. If only he knew where Jack had got the device, or at least what kind of place...

Martha re-entered the room with two glasses of water. She gave one to Lee and set the other one on the table. "Jackie Tyler's on the phone for you, Doctor. She says it's important."

"Ianto says you should take it. I can take over for a bit."

Damn. He gave Lee a reassuring look, stood, and then shook a finger in Martha's face. Her mouth dropped open. "Be nice," he said.

Out in the office, Ianto was already holding out a sleek black mobile at arm's length. "Mrs. Tyler for you, sir."

The Doctor took the phone. "I'm still working on it," he said.

"I'm coming back over there," Jackie said, ignoring him. "I went to visit the girl who's in hospital. Toshiko. She said she had something she needed to tell you."

Suddenly tense, the Doctor held his breath a moment. "Is she all right?"

"She's fine. A bit loopy from the medication, but she said there was something timey-wimey she needed to tell you about."

"Timey-wimey?" What on earth? "Jackie, what are you talking about?"

"I don't know, the nurse kicked me out. I'll remember him, though, no mistake."

"Jackie," he said, trying to keep his composure. "Tell me exactly what Toshiko said. Word for word."

"I'm not a bleeding myna bird!" she protested.
"Jackie," he warned.

She let out a peeved sigh. "She said something about Time Agents and a fusion thingy that Torchwood has, and that's why Jack took Rose. What I want to know is why does Torchwood have it? Can't they trade it and get her back?"

"The people who want the device aren't the ones who took her. What else did Toshiko say?"

"I don't know, something about fields being attracted to timey-wimey stuff."

He frowned. "You're sure that she said 'timey-wimey'? Jackie, it's important."

"You don't have to tell me about important! I've gone through my fair share since I came here. I haven't been sitting on my arse just watching everything."

The Doctor rubbed his eyes. "Yes, I know. I'm sorry. Just tell me; is that what she said?"

"Of course that's what she said. I knew it was something she got from you. Who says 'timey-wimey', honestly? What does that even mean? It sounds like rubbish to me. Course she's probably up to her gills in pain medication, so who knows..."

"Fields attracted to timey-wimey... What kind of field?"

Ianto was watching him; he was also wearing an earpiece. The Doctor suspected that he was listening to the whole phone conversation. Subtle, Donna murmured. "What kind of field would..." His eyes went wide as realisation hit. Toshiko had been using the goggles!

"Oh. Oh!" He almost dropped the phone in his excitement. "Jackie Tyler, you're amazing!" He ended the call and tossed the mobile back to Ianto.

He ran down to the tech lab and found the effusion device sitting at one of the work stations. Right next to it were the Spectro Specs. He pulled them on and they came to life. Immediately, he picked up the device.

He hooted with excitement. "Oh, Toshiko, you brilliant thing! I could kiss you!"

Ianto came into the lab and raised an eyebrow. "I don't think that Ms. Tyler would appreciate that very much, sir."

The device was glowing with golden energy field bright enough that, had the particles been visible to the naked eye, they could have illuminated the entire room. He put it down again and fished in his jacket pocket for the sonic screwdriver. Finding it, he adjusted the setting, pushed back the goggles and gave Ianto a triumphant smile. "Take a look at this, Ianto Jones!"

He activated on the screwdriver and soon, there was a barest glimmer around the twinkling rainbow lights floating inside the glass. He pushed the goggles back down over his eyes. "Do you see it?"

"What is it?" Ianto wondered.

"I have no idea!" he replied, delighted. He bent over the device and adjusted the focus on the Specs.

"Doctor..."

"What?"

Ianto pointed and the Doctor looked down at his right hand. It was glowing. Fascinated, he waved it
back and forth and watched as the particles danced around his fingers. That explained Toshiko's sudden interest in his hand yesterday morning. The particles were coming from the effusion device.

Ianto asked, "What is it effusing, exactly?"

The Doctor was about to try to come up with a theory on the fly that didn't go into too much detail about Time Lord physiology (not because he didn't want Ianto to know, he knew that Ianto knew, Rose had told him ages ago); however, he was distracted by the trail of golden energy particles that led out of the room.

"What?" He picked up the device and followed the trail. It kept going through the corridors, all the way up to the main level. Ianto kept close behind him.

"What," the Doctor said again, standing agog outside Martha's office.

The room was full of particles. Completely stuffed with them.

"What is it?" Ianto asked. The Doctor whipped off the goggles and handed them over. Ianto held them up to his eyes. "Goodness," he breathed.

"I know!"

The Doctor took the goggles back and pushed the door open. The particles swirled as the air moved around him, like eddies in a brook. \textit{Rose would love this}, he thought with a sick stab to his gut.

The brightest point in the room was just over the corner of Martha's desk. He put down the device and watched the patterns as the particles moved and danced around the bright source. The rainbow lights inside the glass seemed to move faster. He put his right hand on the glass and their speed increased.

Ianto watched in awed silence. "How are you doing that?"

"I'm not," he replied. "What's this desk made out of? Is it...?"

He stared at the pencil holder and the little white branches of coral sitting just to the right of the picture of young Martha and Tish Jones. Golden particles were dancing merrily between the branches. And he could hear humming. No. \textit{Music}.

"Can you hear that?" he whispered.

"Hear what?" Ianto whispered back.

The voice of Donna Noble in his head whispered reverently: \textit{It's alive.}

Carefully, so carefully, the Doctor reached out his right hand toward the tiny coral creature sitting on the rosewood pedestal. The particles swirled in excitement as his fingers came closer. The music grew louder.

It was singing to him.

Ianto's eyes went wide. "It's beautiful," he murmured.

The Doctor realised that something must have been visible, some play of the light perhaps. His fingertips were tingling with a feeling almost like electricity. A few inches away, the effusion device began to pulse, steady as a human heartbeat. His own heart beat faster, and the pulse hurried to match it.
"What is it?" Ianto wondered, eyes alight with wonder and curiosity as he looked at the coral.

The Doctor blinked back tears. He could hear her singing to him, a tiny joyful symphony. His voice was almost a whisper. "It's a TARDIS."
Chapter 8

Rose's heart worked like an angry piston, and still she was losing speed. The acid in her muscles burned and her lungs were over-extended balloons. She wasn't going to make it. The Dalek was rolling closer and the Doctor was running towards her, oblivious to the threat.

She screamed when the Dalek's disruptor beam cut through the Doctor's chest, lighting him up as he spasmed and then fell to the wet pavement.

Rose tripped over her own weary feet and rolled forward. She had to reach him. She struggled to her feet.

Her hands finally found his face and clutched the blue fabric of his jacket. His eyes were closed and his skin was cold—too cold. Dead.

She shook him, moaning and crying. Not now, not when they were so close.

She kissed him, breathed into him and prayed and cursed God and felt every star burning above their heads wink out of existence in spectacular rings of light, until only the Earth remained, alone in the dark universe.

The Doctor gasped to life; his brown eyes drilled into her, angry and disappointed. "What have you done?"

A voice she knew, the same one that scared the shit out of her and made her feel so powerful, whispered in her ear.

_I bring life._

Rose woke up screaming.

Jack—Sun—dropped his heels from the desk and clutched the arms of his chair. "What the hell?"

Rose gasped for breath and tried not to hyperventilate or sob.

The Jack she'd known back in the other universe would have tried to comfort her—he'd always been good for a hug or a cuddle back when they'd been on the TARDIS together. The Doctor hadn't been so eager for touch in those days—what he gave had always been enough to let her know he was there beside her, that he was afraid or happy just like she was. But Jack had touched her all the time (when the Doctor wasn't watching) with and without intent.

After the Doctor had changed, he had held her hand and hugged her at any opportunity, but he'd held back the feelings she'd been hungry—but too afraid—to ask for. Pushed her away, pulled her close, pushed her away again.

The man who had Jack's face looked her over warily, concerned, but he made no reassurances or soothing sounds like Jack or the Doctor—any Doctor—would have.

"I guess that's enough sleep," Sun said wryly, standing and pulling his black leather jacket over his tightly muscled shoulders.

Rose scrubbed at her eyes and dragged her legs over the edge of the cot. How long had she been asleep? It didn't feel like it'd been very long. She checked to see if her mobile had the time—relative
to when she'd left the twenty-first century, of course. The clock blinked zeroes at her.

Sun pushed his chair under the desk.

"Do you have a plan?" Rose asked him. "Or are you just going to keep running?"

"I can run forever," he replied.

"Not much of a plan."

He smiled at her. "Oh, I don't know. You and me, we could be the next Bonnie and Clyde."

Rose tilted her head. "Sounds nice," she said. "Up until the point where we... What was it?" She bit her lip and narrowed her eyes. "Die in a hail of gunfire?"

Sun laughed and gave her a roguish smile that was just like her Jack's. "But what a ride!"

Rose wondered if he could be serious. He didn't sound it. "What about your friends?" she asked. "Torchwood will find them, eventually. You're just gonna leave 'em to rot?"

His smile faded. "We've got to keep moving."

"What makes you think I'm coming with you?"

Sun looked at her. "Are you serious? There's nowhere else to go. No atmosphere, only enough rations to last you a few days. Your boyfriend can't be that good."

"You don't know him."

He looked at her thoughtfully. "So that's Rose Tyler, then? From an alternate universe with an alien boyfriend who'd travel to the ends of the universe to find her?" He leered at her. "What's he got, besides that tool he flashed at me?"

She tightened her jaw and said nothing.

"That's what I figured." Sun shrugged. "Suit yourself." Rose watched as he set co-ordinates on the manipulator. "Water and rations are down the hall, medkit's in the third drawer. Oh, and if you hear any knocking, don't answer it."

"Knocking?"

"Didn't I mention? One of the reasons this place went out of business. There were stories about some sort of entity possessing people. People said it spoke with the voices of the dead."

Rose glared at him. "You're just trying to scare me."

He raised an eyebrow. "Is it working?"

"Not really."

"I might be trying to save your life, you know."

"Why? You didn't give a damn about your friends—they came to help you when River had a bomb clamped to your chest. I was trying to help you."

Suddenly, he was angry. "If I'd stayed, I'd have gotten everyone killed. They're going to catch up
with me soon."

"They can track you?"

He held up his wrist. "River reactivated the tracer. I haven't been able to re-scramble it. Why do you think we were jumping so much?"

"I just assumed it was because you were trying to get as far away as possible."

Sun smiled bitterly. "Before they brought me to King's Cross for that little theatrical display, River gave me a taste of what's coming next. Have you ever heard of the Shadow Men?"

She shook her head.

"Be glad. They're black ops. Assassins, really. Some of the people I've pissed off... Let's say they've requested the big guns."

Sun's wrist-strap let out an alarm. He pulled back his sleeve and stared at it. "They've found us."

Rose got to her feet. "Good."

He looked at her like she was insane. "No, not good. It's not your boyfriend."

There was a flash of yellow light and a tall humanoid figure resolved in the air between the two of them. Rose didn't have much time to register size or gender, only a tall, thin grey blur that immediately swung strong limbs out in a wide arc, catching her across the face and sending her falling into the cots.

Sun started shooting, but he didn't keep it up for long. Rose pulled herself up and watched as the dark grey spectre and Sun fought hand-to-hand. He knew what he was doing, that much was obvious, but his attacker was lightning fast and it wasn't going to be long before he was either unconscious or dead.

Even as she thought this, Sun's back hit the wall, and it was just her and the stranger.

It turned slowly and looked at her. Rose stared back, unsure if she ought to thank her or not. It was a her—wide hips and small breasts—dressed in tightly-wrapped grey fabric.

"Who are you?"

The woman said nothing—most of her face was covered by a sort of balaclava—but her cobalt eyes were calculating. Her skin was the same grey as her suit, but it may have only been make-up.

"Are you a Time Agent?"

The grey woman tilted her head, slowly, like an owl regarding its prey.

"My name is Rose Tyler. He—"

The woman struck her across the face, almost knocking her down again. She dodged the next blow—barely—and dove to the ground. Jack's blaster was only a few feet away. The grey woman pulled out a small, spindly weapon and fired. Rose cried out as her back burned. She almost had the gun.

"Rose!" Jack was trying to rejoin fight. The grey woman fired at him, hitting him in the left shoulder and knocking him back again.
Rose had the gun now. She rolled onto her side and aimed, only to see the narrow barrel of the grey woman's gun pointed right at her.

The assassin tilted her head in the other direction and regarded her like a bird of prey eyeing a field mouse.

"You're not after me!" Rose told her angrily.

Jack inched closer to her. "She won't answer you. They don't speak."

"Listen, then!" Rose snapped. "If you're going to arrest him, fine, but I don't belong in this time. I need to get back to the twenty-first century. I can give you the date. Do you understand me?"

The assassin turned her head again, raised her gun a little bit higher, and fired.

§

The day had started interestingly; how could it not considering the events of the previous one? He hadn't had a chance to go over all of the available information yet, the Doctor having called him at 5 a.m. and all, but this was what he knew: two Time Agents, circa approximately 5000-5200 were on a mission to retrieve a fugitive, alias "Jack Harkness", with less emphasis on his various out-of-time cohorts and the so-called Brindisi effusion device.

Now that Harkness had escaped with Rose Tyler in tow, there was an extra element of personal urgency to the situation. But Torchwood had the cohorts—a motley crew of heavily-armed criminal characters—in custody, as well as the two Time Agents.

Ianto thought it was rather telling that the poetically named 'River Song' did not abandon her partner—John Hart of the beastly fashion sense—to his captors. Ms. Jones had a lower opinion of her, but that was hardly surprising. The new boss's tendency toward hard-line by-the-book behaviour—produced by her history in law enforcement, most likely—made her predisposed to hate any person who operated outside of law and order.

Not that he was particularly fond of people who blew up department stores. (He'd had a shirt he had been meaning to exchange. He supposed that wouldn't be happening now.)

There were advantages to Martha Jones's way of doing things, of course. If the Doctor had succeeded in absconding with the two vortex manipulators, then he would not have been in Martha's office now and he would not have discovered the connection between the effusion device and the thing on Jones's desk.

"I thought TARDISes were bigger," Ianto said, frowning critically at the little coral. It looked more like a miniature tree than anything else, white and skeletonised, and no bigger than a hand. Now that the effusion device was so close, it was a glowing tiny white tree, but it still looked nothing like the time machine that Rose had talked about.

"It's an infant," the Doctor replied, quietly, as if he were trying not to wake a sleeping baby. He cooed at it. The shimmering light brightened as he gently brushed the trunk with his fingertips.

"Where did it come from?" Ianto asked.

"No idea," the Doctor replied distractedly. "Hello there, little one! Where did you come from?" He wore a contented smile. "The TARDIS, my TARDIS, when she was over here, she couldn't draw any power, couldn't breathe—wrong universe, wrong time stream. But this, this tiny beauty, she fits right in. Don't you, you gorgeous miracle you?"
Part of Ianto felt that the man before him was fussing over a bit of dead sea creature like some would over a beloved pet; it was an adorable sort of madness. Several years of exposure to Torchwood helped him to get over the initial incredulity. He considered himself a inimitably practical person. He had to deal with what was before him, learn everything, make plans, and adapt them as necessary.

"Is it drawing power from the effusion device?" he asked.

"I can feel her growing. She's a thirsty little thing." The Doctor grinned like a proud father and waved his fingers over the crown of delicate branches. The white glow danced through and around them, like impulses through neurones.

"I think she likes you, sir."

"D'you think?" the Doctor asked, pleased. "She's been all alone for hundreds of years. Hungry and confused. So lonely..."

"Hundreds?"

"Takes a TARDIS thousands of years to grow into adulthood. Course, those were the ones that the Time Lords had cultivated for aeons. This little girl, she hasn't had any of that. She grew in a crèche cluster with millions of her sisters all around her." His eyes clouded over. "Something happened... a disturbance in time. Like a... rift? A crack? What...?"

"Is it talking to you?" Ianto crouched closer. "It's telepathic, yes?"

The Doctor shook himself. "What? Oh. No. Feelings, mostly. She's too undeveloped to do much more than that. When they're fully grown, they're capable of bonding with..." He paused. "Oh yes, that's brilliant." He gently lifted the coral from the desk, leaving the soapstone pencil cup behind, and then he gathered up the effusion device and ran from the room. "I know what to do!" he cried.

Ianto followed him to the tech lab. "What's the plan, then?"

"Where are those blasted vortex manipulators that Martha took from me?" The Doctor put the effusion device and the TARDIS coral side by side on the workbench and adjusted something on the side of his goggles."

"What are you going to do?" Ianto asked.

"You'll see in a minute. Find Lee for me, would you? I'm going to need him."

Ianto nodded and did as he was bade to do.

Lee McCoy—age 38, formerly of New New New York in the fifty-first century, currently resident of Hoxton—was in the conference room with Martha Jones. He was jittery.

Ms. Jones was sitting calmly on the other side of the table, drumming her fingernails on the glass.

"I take it the Doctor has been called away?" she said. From her expression, it was clear that she really meant, "He's run off again, hasn't he?"

"There have been some interesting developments," Ianto said. "Were you aware that you had a living extraterrestrial entity on your desk?"

Ms. Jones's eyes widened. "A what?"

Ianto nodded at the prisoner. "The Doctor asked if you might come with me to the laboratory, Mr.
McCoy.

"Me?" McCoy looked bewildered. "I'mmmnot any good with t-t-t-tech..."

"Come on," Ms. Jones said, her tone clipped and commanding. McCoy got out of his chair and walked to the door.

"The Doctor also needs the use of the vortex manipulators," Ianto said.

She did not look pleased. "What, both of them?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Fine, then. Locker four."

"Thank you, ma'am."

After he retrieved the vortex manipulators from the high security locker, Ianto brought them to the lab. Ms. Jones and Mr. McCoy had got there before him. The mood in the room was less aggressive than usual. His best guess was that Jones' victory had mollified her.

"I've had that since I was fourteen," Ms. Jones said, arms crossed. "I got it from my grandmother as a present for getting good marks in biology."

"Lucky thing," the Doctor replied airily. "Kept it safe. Physically, anyway. Didn't do much for her otherwise, but you couldn't have known, I suppose. Just some piece of bric-a-brac to you." Ianto watched Martha's face throughout the Doctor's passive-aggressive scolding. She did not miss his point, judging by the way her eyebrow crept up her forehead. (Not that she had had any reason to suspect that her grandmother had gifted her with a living alien life form and not the skeleton of a deceased terrestrial one.)

McCoy bent over so that he could look at the glowing coral. "Did it always d-do that?"

Ms. Jones shook her head. "Definitely not. Why is it doing that, Doctor?"

"The effusion device is feeding her. She can pull energy right out of the time vortex, but that's a slow process, takes thousands of years. But these brilliant little microbes..." He picked up the device and held it up, peering at it like one might examine a fine wine. "Whatever it is they're doing, it's supercharging her. She's growing at a rate of two thousand to the tenth faster than she would normally." He mimed a violent blow to the chest with his free hand. "Boom! Like a shot of adrenaline! And this, this marvellous thing," he held up the device like a trophy, "this is going to lead us to Rose."

Ms. Jones was skeptical. "How?"

"Simple!" He scooped up one of the vortex manipulators. "I pair her..." he pointed at the TARDIS coral, "with this, and I can trace where this has been." He waved the device. "Easy-peasy. Here, Lee, hold this. Ah-thankyou!"

McCoy looked at the effusion device in his hands with nervous awe and swallowed. The Doctor wrestled the leather wrist strap on and started fiddling with the buttons.

"You're just going to go?" Ms. Jones said, completely unsurprised.

Ianto wasn't surprised, either. He was glad that a solution had presented itself before Mr. or Mrs.
Tyler could come back, though. Mr. Tyler had wanted to mobilise all of Torchwood, even bringing in teams from other cities; only the President's direct order to keep their personnel recovery measures 'reasonable' had prevented it.

Mrs. Tyler was likely to grab a vortex manipulator and charge after Rose herself. Again. Mr. Tyler still hadn't quite forgiven him for allowing his wife to go with Mickey, chasing Rose across the void a month ago. (Personally, Ianto hadn't thought it was worth his life to get in Mrs. Tyler's way. Where else had Rose got her stubborn determination from?)

The Doctor gave Ms. Jones a cocky smile. "Well, I am the best man for the job. Trust me, Martha Jones. This is where I really shine."

It was no surprise that Ms. Tyler was so enamoured of the man, really. Ianto found himself compelled, and a little flustered, even. Martha Jones raised an eyebrow. She picked up the second vortex manipulator from the table and started to put it on.

Ianto was intimidated by how quickly the Doctor's demeanour could change. Cheerful arrogance was suddenly forbidding chill.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm coming with you," she said.

"No, you're not."

"I'm your boss, so I say who goes on missions," Jones said. "And you'll need back-up, anyway."

"I'm taking Lee," the Doctor retorted. He held out his hand for Jones' wrist strap.

"He's not Torchwood."

"That's why I'm taking him. Plus, he knows Jack. I'll need him."

She gave McCoy an appraising look. "You're right. He's a good hostage." McCoy winced and the Doctor's glare darkened. "Might do for a trade, if it comes to that." She finished tightening the buckle. "All right, let's go."

"I'm not taking you," the Doctor said stubbornly.

"Shut up and set the co-ordinates," Jones commanded. "One of us just needs to be touching him, right? Or do we both have to touch the strap?"

Ianto decided that if he didn't speak up now, he might never have the chance. "What shall I tell Mr. Tyler?" he asked. He glanced at his fob watch. Mr. Tyler was due here in less than ten minutes.

"Tell him I've gone after Rose," the Doctor replied.

"We'll be back in a bit," Jones said with a room-temperature smile. She put her arm through McCoy's, ignoring his uneasy stare. "All right, Doctor. Work your magic."

The Doctor grumbled what sounded like very mild profanity. "Ianto, I need a... a satchel, or something."

Ianto cast an eye across the room and spotted one of the Dimension Cannon cast-offs—a harness. Ms. Tyler had found it uncomfortable, so it had been set aside, but it could probably be of use if... He picked it off the pile of detritus and picked up a large holster that had been left behind by an alien
mercenary (Judoon, if memory served). At last, the mountains of junk that had littered this room for the last year could start being useful. The two pieces were easy enough to cobble together, especially since the Doctor seemed to have a nylon-melting setting on the sonic screwdriver.

Once the harness was strapped over his shoulder, the Doctor put the effusion device into the holster and took the TARDIS coral on its rosewood base in hand. He aimed the sonic screwdriver and let it whirr for a moment. First he removed the coral from the wood. Then, the coral pulsed brightly once before starting up a steady natural rhythm.

"How long will you be gone?" Ianto asked. "I'm sure Mrs. Tyler would like to know when she should start to worry."

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. "With any luck, we'll be back in five minutes." He looked at Jones and McCoy, smirked, and then let out a little sigh. "Best not to wait up. Tell Donna I said..." He paused. "Never mind. I'll see her later."

He held out his wrist to Ms. Jones. She seemed a little bit wary at first, but she put her hand on the strap.

"Allons-y, Martha Jones."

There was an almost blinding flash of light and then Ianto was alone in the laboratory.

Argus's klaxon sounded. Pushing his initial shock aside, Ianto walked quickly back to the main office. Lalit Mehra met him there.

"What was that?" Lalit wondered.

Ianto looked at the readout. There was a blip of temporal energy—right here in the base, thus the alarm. "No matter," he said. "That was just Ms. Jones and the Doctor gone after Harkness."

Lalit relaxed. "Thank God. I was afraid we had another bomb on our hands."

Another siren sounded. Another temporal energy spike. Were they back already? Ianto's eyes widened as he heard gunfire, muffled, but recognisable.

Lalit swore and the two of them hurried down to the holding cells.

§

It was only luck that he didn't vomit all over their shoes. He'd been on some rough trips through the vortex, but that had been bad. What was wrong with this universe? The vortex manipulator should have given them a better buffer than that.

Martha was gasping and bent over, hands on her knees. Lee stumbled and sagged against a nearby rusted metal wall.

"Oh God, that was horrid," Martha moaned.

"W-worse than usual," Lee said, rubbing his eyes.

The Doctor swallowed and concentrated very hard on keeping his stomach from expelling its contents. (Not that there would be much.) The smells weren't helping.

He looked up at their surroundings. They were in an old metal bunker. Probably an annex to a hangar, given the architecture, which was 27th century Earth colony, but by the poor condition of the
beams and the discolouration of the fittings, it had been abandoned for quite some time. The air smelled of old decay.

Martha seemed to have recovered herself. She was looking around the room. "Where are we, Doctor?"

He looked at the vortex manipulator on his wrist. "2791, by your calendar. Planet's called..." He felt an involuntary shiver run through him as the name appeared on the little screen.

"What's wrong?" Lee asked.

"Nothing," the Doctor lied quickly. "It's called Argo 2."

"Over here." Martha was crouching next to a dry puddle of blood and desiccated flesh that surrounded a partially skeletonised humanoid body.

Lee covered his mouth and groaned.

Martha took a pen torch from her pocket and shone it on the exposed bone of a skull.

He couldn't think about that right now. He held the infant TARDIS (proto-TARDIS, really) carefully against his chest, and put his other hand on the top of the bag that held the effusion device. It had been here at some point in time, that was certain, but if the corpse was any indication, no one had been here for quite some time. There was no sign of scavengers. No wonder, though; there were no animals on Midnight. Even the ones that humans always brought with them wouldn't last here for long.

The TARDIS shivered in his palm. It was tired and hungry. He'd have to give her time to feed before they moved again.

Martha stood and put her hands on her hips. "Humanoid, probably human. I'd say she's been here for a long time."

The Doctor's mind immediately went to Rose. God, no.

"I've been here b-before," Lee said. He was averting his eyes from the remains and concentrating on the blank walls. "It's one of J-Jack's hideouts. There's t-t-too much radiation outside, so nnnno-one else ever comes here.

"Someone obviously did," Martha said. "Unless this was a friend of yours."

The Doctor made himself look at the slack-hanging mandible. There was long hair matted against the remains of scalp, but the colour was indeterminate from where he was standing. He tried to make himself get closer, to fight what must have been Donna's revulsion, but his feet wouldn't move. He managed to stare the skull in the eyes and tried to look beyond the horror of decay to try to see the underlying structure of the face, and maybe perceive the time around it.

Everything was a blur. He blinked and realised that he had the beginnings of tears in his eyes.

"I don't think so," Lee said.

The Doctor looked around the room. There were splatters of dried blood on the wall behind the body —probably sprayed by the shot that had killed the woman. The was very little furniture in the room. Just an overturned worn military cot, a rusted desk, and an empty cupboard with its door hanging open. The Doctor could make out bits of adhesive on the wall, like the faint outlines of sellotape
residue.

He could imagine a struggle. Whoever it was who'd shot her, they had left her alone—dying or dead. He clutched the TARDIS to his chest, afraid that he might drop her. He couldn't think straight, let alone analyse time lines. What was wrong with him? Was this human? He couldn't stop thinking about Rose in pain, dying alone...

"It's not Rose," Martha said after a long, painful silence.

The Doctor jolted from his nightmare imaginings and stared at her. "What? How can you be sure?"

"Too tall." Martha nodded at the body. "Look at the length of the femur. The hips are too wide. Owen would be able to make a better case, but that's enough for me."

Bloody hell, she was right. He took a deep breath, then another, trying to slow his heart. Why hadn't he seen that right away? He was too blinded by emotions; it was making him stupid. He ought to have sensed the TARDIS coral earlier. Should have known Jack would try something. Humans were so thick.

He rubbed his eyes and forehead; his hand came away sweaty. It was wrong for him to feel so relieved—it wasn't Rose, couldn't have ever been her, he was being stupid—because someone was still dead, and she had died violently and been left to rot on this evil rock of a planet.

Martha looked thoughtfully at the corpse a moment longer before stepping away. "What next, Maverick?" she asked him, teasingly. Her frown deepened. "Doctor?"

"I'm fine," he snapped. He checked the vortex manipulator and the connection to the coral. They could probably risk another jump. "You two grab hold of me. We're trying again."

§

Rose had barely registered the finger squeezing the trigger before Jack was in front of her.

"No!"

He flew back, sending her into the wall and knocking the air from her lungs. He was too heavy for her to lift and the pain in her back was excruciating. Her eyes filled with tears. She tried to clear the water away by squeezing her eyes shut.

She still had Jack's blaster in her hand. She struggled to free her arm, howling with pain and the effort.

Trembling, she raised the gun and shot back.

Only when the vibration in her hand subsided did she realise how quickly it had happened—what had happened.

The assassin was on the floor, spread eagle, and definitely dead. Her blood was red and starting to form a puddle beneath her.

Jack was sliding to the ground. She grabbed his shoulders and tried to think of what to do.

"Jack? Jack, can you hear me?"

He had a burn on his chest the size of a grapefruit. It looked like the leather jacket had absorbed some of the blast, but he was very badly hurt. He opened his eyes and looked at her.
"Sorry," he said.

Rose held his face in her hands. "Don't," she choked. "Don't you die on me, Jack!"

He laid his left arm across his chest. "Take it." He tried to undo the buckle on the wrist strap, but he was getting weak. "Go home."

"I'm not leaving you!"

"My fault," he murmured. "Tell Lee to—"

Rose let out a sob before fumbling the strap from his wrist. She punched in a date and location, and prayed that luck was on her side. Clutching Jack's hand around the strap, Rose pressed the execute button.

§

When the alarm sounded, waking her violently from her nap (again), Donna thought that there must have been a fire or something. Then, remembering where she was, she got to her feet.

Owen was wide eyed and picking through debris. "Problem in the holding cells," he said. He held up a syringe, then discarded it with a look of disgust. "Stay here."

Donna followed him out of the lab and down the staircase. Owen glared at her, but he didn't tell her to go back. They ran into Ianto and Lalit just outside the entry way to the cells.

"What's going on?" Owen demanded.

Ianto cocked his gun and held it up, special-agent-style. Without speaking, he nodded at Lalit, who used his hand to try to unlock the door.

The hand scanner turned from amber to red and buzzed a denial. Owen pressed past him and tried. The scanner turned red again.

"We're locked out," Ianto said. He took one hand off his gun and pulled out his mobile. "Who's in there?" he asked Lalit while he waited for someone to pick up.

"Should be Genovese," Lalit answered. He was checking his gun. Owen held out his hand. With a sigh, Lalit handed him the one from his holster. "Keep your head, mate."

"Yes," Ianto said into the phone. "Ianto Jones, ident: 3-0-2-8-4-Tango-Charlie. Requesting superseding override, door mechanism Alpha 5-7."

A second later, the red light on the lock turned green.

The four of them rushed into the corridor; Donna was careful to keep to the back. (She wished suddenly that she had her purse with her. Lee's blaster was still tucked inside.)

There was a man in grey, ninja-like clothing that covered almost every inch of his body standing outside River Song's cell. Donna glanced down and saw a black-coated woman laying face-down on the floor. Genovese. There was blood pooling beneath her. Owen hurried and knelt beside her, leaving his gun on the floor by his knee.

"Stop what you're doing and put your hands up," Ianto said, aiming at the grey man's head. "Or I'll shoot."
The man turned his head slowly. Electric blue eyes peered out of his grey face. Only the skin around the eyes was exposed. Donna wondered if mummy might have been a better description than ninja, but then the man moved.

Long, thin arms swung like deadly blades as the man took a step towards Ianto. Donna thought she might go deaf from the sound of gunfire. She covered her ears.

There was a hiss that could be heard between shots. When she looked up, River was stepping out of her cell and crossing behind the grey man to open Hart's.

Ianto was closest to the intruder—eventually, his gun was slammed from his hand and he was forced to try to fight hand to hand. How had none of the bullets hit? There was almost no distance between them. Was he moving that fast?

Owen had turned Genovese onto her back and was performing CPR. Donna tried to watch that at the same time as she tried to see all that was going on between Lalit and Ianto and the intruder, the fight that they seemed to be losing. Lalit fell to the ground after a forceful down-stroke to his back, and Ianto took one blow after another to the face.

She saw River picking up Ianto's gun.

Without thinking, Donna ducked down and picked up Owen's gun. As her blood roared in her ears, her finger found the trigger and she raised the barrel. Terrified that she'd hit Ianto or Lalit, more afraid that she'd miss her target, she tightened her grip, raised her other hand to help steady herself and held her breath. The shot pushed her back into the staircase and she closed her eyes out of reflex.

When she opened them again, the grey man had stopped his attack and turned his back on Ianto and Lalit, though neither of them was in much shape to take advantage of it.

At first she thought perhaps she'd actually hit him, but then she saw him stoop to catch someone else.

There was a wet patch on River's tight black cat-suit, just below her ribs. Donna watched, horrified, as the woman twisted and collapsed into the grey man's arms. It looked like the bullet had only clipped her in the side, but there was already a lot of blood.

Oh God, what had she done?

John Hart hobbled from his cell and pulled River from the grey man's arms. "Get us out of here!" he shouted.

The grey man pressed a small silver disc on the inside of his wrist. There was a chirping sound. Donna shielded her eyes against the bright light and then they were gone.

It took a few seconds for that final shock to wear off. When it did, Donna looked at the gun in her hand. It was heavier than it looked, and black and hard and she could smell gunpowder. Feeling like she was about to be sick, she almost dropped it, but she managed to put it on the step and move away.

Owen had abandoned Genovese and moved on to Lalit, who didn't look dead... Just like he'd had the crap kicked out of him. Ianto's face was a bruised and bloody mess. How were they all not dead? Donna closed her eyes and took deep breaths.

Someone touched her arm and she started with a small shriek. It was Pete Tyler. "What happened?" Donna opened her mouth, but nothing came out but a quiet squeak.
Intruder, sir." Ianto wiped blood from under his nose and looked at his hand. He was wobbling and he moved like he was in quite a lot of pain. "He got in with a transmat."

Two Torchwood doctors were looking over Genovese. She looked dead. When Donna saw the bloody wound in her chest, she looked away and pressed herself against the wall to her right for support.

"Are you hurt?"

It took her a moment to realise that Pete Tyler was talking to her. She glanced at him, then said, "No, sir."

She wasn't sure how to interpret the look he was giving her. "Good. I need you to go upstairs and call the President's office, tell her what's happened. Don't let them hassle you for details. Just keep it simple. We'll be updating them when we can."

"Yes, sir."

"Okay, Ianto. Details."

Donna clutched at the railing as she went up the steps. Keep it together, she told herself. You're not hurt. Focus. Don't be such a baby.

By the time she'd reached the office, she felt calmer. There were a dozen more agents she didn't know up here now, all of them gathered around Argus like animals at the watering hole.

She made the call, and gave the President's aide a terse, no-nonsense information byte.

Jackie Tyler entered the office like a whirlwind. "Where is he?" she demanded. Most of the agents glanced up and hurriedly down again. Donna got out of her chair.

"Who?" she asked.

"The Doctor, of course!"

"I don't know," Donna replied. "Ianto probably knows."

Jackie paused and looked at the crowd. "Looks like you've got half of Torchwood Tower here. What's going on?"

Donna told Jackie what she could remember, even the bit about picking up the gun. Jackie listened, making shocked and pained faces, but staying largely silent.

"Did they take the fusion thing?" she asked.

"The what?"

"The thing Rose and the Doctor found. The fusion thing."

"I don't think so. It was in the lab last time I saw it."

"They're probably off after Jack." Jackie glanced up at Argus. Donna looked and saw Pete and Ianto emerging from the corridor to the lower levels.

"Jacks?" Tyler looked dismayed. "What are you doing here?"
"I came to help."

Mr. Tyler sighed in exasperation. "I told you we'd take care of it, didn't I?"

"She's my daughter; I'm not sitting at home waiting!"

"What about our son, eh? He's just at home with the nanny? What if something happens? It's too dangerous for you here. I've lost enough people today. I'm not losing you. Go home."

Jackie crossed her arms. "Not a chance!"

"Jackie!"

"If I might," Ianto said quietly. His normally smooth voice sounded like a patch of rough pavement. "Mrs. Tyler did help the Doctor find what he needed in order to go after Harkness."

Tyler gave his wife a sidelong look. Jackie smiled smugly, then looked at Ianto. Her jaw dropped; she went over to him and started to fuss.

"He's gone, then?" Donna asked.

"He took Ms. Jones and Mr. McCoy with him," Ianto said. Jackie started dabbing at his face with tissues.

"What do we do now?" Donna wanted to sit down, but Pete Tyler was looking at her again. He'd thought she kept her head in a crisis, and here she was, freaking out in her first week.

Jackie put her purse on Donna's desk. "We put the kettle on and we wait."

"I need a cigarette," Donna muttered. She looked at the group over by the computer tower. "Any of you got a fag?"

§

Thomas Kincade Brannigan had had all sorts in his cab; that was how you made a living. So he had to work long hours, and it was hard to spend any quality time with the kittens, let alone his wife... but he was a people person, always had been.

If someone asked him to go to the Undercity, he would take them, even if it was terribly out of the way. He wasn't the sort to discriminate class. He didn't particularly like being used as an ambulance, but what sort of Cat would he be if he turned down someone in need?

The yellow-haired human female flagged him down to the ground—funny, finding someone like her in the Undercity—and she pushed the door to one side.

"Help me!"

"Where can I take you, miss?" he asked cheerfully.

"C'mon, out here!"

Brannigan's fur bristled nervously. "What's that?"

"Help me!" she shouted, again, like somebody used to being listened to.

Taking requests was one thing: it was voluntary. Orders were something else entirely. He was a Cat,
after all.

The woman left the door open and disappeared into the nearest alley. She'd assumed he'd follow.

It was always a bad idea to leave the cockpit, you never knew what somebody was going to try, but Brannigan found that he was curious. He undid his safety harness and put on the parking brake.

Of course, once he smelled the blood on the male human on the ground and saw the blaster mark across the female's shoulder blades, his ears folded backwards and twitched inside his helmet.

"Been in some trouble, then?" he grunted as he got the unconscious fella's arm over his shoulder. The woman helped them get back to the cab.

"Hospital," she ordered. "Hurry!"

Brannigan's ears twitched once more as he closed the door of his big yellow cab behind them.

He got them on course for the nearest hospital. The yellow-haired woman was stooped over the man, checking his neck and pressing on his chest.

"He's still alive, then?"

" Barely." She pushed her long hair so it caught behind her ear. Valerie did that. It was one of those little things human women did that was just so damned adorable.

He looked in the large rearview mirror that hung across the front windscreen. "You hurt badly?"

She grimaced and pointed forcefully at the sky before them. "Hurry; he's dying."

Brannigan rolled his eyes. "Only trying to help," he murmured and looked out the windscreen again.

He had his emergency lights on and CTC didn't give him any trouble when he requested access to the upper routes. Fewer cars up there. It was mostly official traffic.

"Almost there," he said. "Closest hospital is across the water. Five minutes and we'll be there."

When she didn't reply, he turned to see what the matter was. She was holding the man's head in her lap and one of her hands with its pink fingernails—these humans and their funny ways!—in his brown hair and the other was clutching the front of this jacket. Brannigan got the feeling that five minutes was six minutes too late.

"Miss?" he said, anxiously.

She didn't answer him right away. "What year is it?"

An odd question, but she was upset, so he humoured her. "5.5/Apple/80."

"This is New New York, yeah?"

"That's right." He signalled a lane change and considered tourists.

"The hospital we're going to... is it run by nuns?"

"The Sisters of Plenitude," he said. It felt a bit odd to be playing tour guide at a time like this, but it soothed his nerves a bit.
The human, however, grew excited. She shifted her male into a sitting position and pushed her way out of the seat. She thrust her arm over Brannigan's shoulder. "I see it!" The great white building with its green crescent symbol could just be seen between the spires of the Upper City. "Why are you going this way? It's right there!"

Brannigan shook his head. "We'll get there soon enough. We're on the direct route."

"Direct? We're following a bus!"

"He's got places to go, too, you know."

"We're flying!" she cried. "You can go over him!"

"You're mad, you are," he muttered. "That'd be my license!"

"Listen to me." Her voice was deadly serious, so he really did. "I've got people's lives in my hands and this man's the only person in the universe who can help me. What does that say about you?"

She was obviously out of her mind. Probably escaped from one of the psychiatric asylums deep in the Undercity. She had a predator's expression on her face. There was something inside of him that responded to that, the angle of her thin cheeks, the angry slant of her dark eyebrows. For half a moment, he was thinking of the strange tales that Valerie liked to tell the kits before bed. Old stories about dark forests and the dangers that waited there.

Sighing loudly enough so that she'd know he was doing this because he wanted to and not because he was a little bit frightened of her, he took them higher.
The last jump was especially painful. It seemed like the Doctor's control over the vortex manipulator was minimal and getting worse. When they arrived, the Doctor was the first one on the ground, retching and shaking just with the effort of breathing.

"Stop!" Jones took a few gasping breaths before she knelt by the Doctor. "Just stop," she said. The Doctor wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and fell onto his backside, still clutching the white branched creature like a child against his breast.

"It's getting stronger," he said, coughing. He spat on the sandy ground.

"You're not," Jones replied. She looked over at Lee. "And I don't think either of us is, either."

Lee shook his head. He felt like he'd just run a marathon while hungover. The Doctor was sweaty and pale. Jones flopped back onto the ground and lay there, panting.

Lee rubbed his eyes and tried to focus on their surroundings. They seemed to be in some kind of forest. The trees had long, thin orange needles; many of which were pale grey and littering the ground. He pinched a few between his fingers and looked closer at them, then flicked them away. The trees were tall and thick enough so that he couldn't get a clear view of the sky, although it felt like twilight. Of course, that didn't mean much, since he had no idea what planet they were on.

The only thing he knew for sure was that they were not alone.

"Look," he said, and raised a heavy hand to point into the distance. There was a light, a tiny fire bobbing in the darkness, and it was coming towards them.

§

He jerked awake, startling a cat-faced woman in a white wimple. She hissed quietly, whiskers twitching. Then her face smoothed out and she gave him a serene, queenly look before adjusting a bag of intravenous medicine that, as he discovered when he flexed his arm, was connected to him.

"Where am I?" he asked. His throat was dry. The nurse held up a glass of water and waited patiently as he gulped it down.

"You are in the recovery ward," she purred. She had lovely green eyes.

Then, suddenly, a human face appeared on the other side of his bed.

"Jack!"

He gathered his wits as quickly as he could. "Didn't expect to see you again," he said.

Rose Tyler's mouth warped into a half-smile. "You nearly didn't. You were dead for a couple of minutes."

The nurse bowed her head politely. "Please call me if you need anything."

"Will do," he said, giving her a flirtatious smile. She turned her head bashfully and walked away.

Rose looked thoughtful. He considered asking her if she was okay, but she looked more than okay. There was colour in her cheeks, and despite the line of worry between her eyebrows, she looked like
she was well-rested.

"How long have we been here, whereever here is...?"

"New New York. I reckon it's not one you've been to."

"What year?"

"Five billion," she said casually. "Give or take a few decades."

He gave her an incredulous look. "You brought us here?"

"I wasn't sure we'd make it, to be honest," she replied. Her hands were smoothing the creases out of the sheet where it spread over the edge of his narrow bed. He seemed to be suspended on a soft slab that hung at a forty-five degree angle. It gave slightly whenever he moved; it felt like there was some kind of anti-grav on it. "But I knew there was a hospital."

"We were in the twenty-seventh century, and the closest hospital you could think of was in the year five billion?"

Rose smiled. "You're just lucky that I was right."

'Lucky' didn't remotely cover it. That wasn't luck, that was Fortuna Herself taking them by the hand.

"How long have we been here?"

"Got here yesterday afternoon. They resuscitated you." She wasn't looking at his face, and he could see her hand twitching and clutching at the sheet near his hand, almost as if she was restraining herself. "I blacked out and woke up a couple of beds over, but they told me I could go, if I wanted."

That was when he looked down and saw the leather strap on her left wrist—it looked too bulky next to her slender hand. He remembered dying—or thinking that he was going to—and telling her to go home. Why was she still here? She must have known how to use it. (Fortuna must really have been looking out for him. He ought to try being more religious, just as a thank-you.)

"You could have left me," he said, watching her face carefully, looking for the tics and tells. Her eyes widened—she had big, warm hazel brown irises—and her pupils dilated slightly.

"No I couldn't," she said, tone cold. She was insulted. That was interesting. She probably thought of herself as incapable of such a selfish act. (People who thought that were often wrong. It was never good to be around when they figured that out.)

"Was she dead?"

A muscle seized in Rose's jaw. "Yes." She'd killed it, then.

"Good."

Rose did not like hearing that at all: in fact, she was disgusted. Ashamed too, probably.

"She would have killed you," he said, gently, surprising himself. He wanted the lines on her brow to smooth out, wanted her to smile. No one that beautiful should ever look that unhappy.

"I know," Rose replied. "I'm not stupid."

He was going to ask if it was her first, but he didn't have to. It was in her eyes. She was young, but
not as young as he'd been when he'd joined the Holy Corps. He'd killed so many by the time he was her age that he had stopped bothering to count. (It had gone against the training to obsess like he had. Good soldiers didn't think. Maybe that'd been why he'd been so colossally bad at it in the end.)

"Sorry," he said. Again, the word was out of his mouth before he was able to stop it.

She pushed her straightened golden hair behind her ears and went to grab stool from the other side of the privacy curtain and sat down. He wondered what she'd look like with her natural hair colour.

"Don't you think it's time you told me the truth?" she said, settling in and crossing her arms over her white shirt. It looked like they'd given her something to replace her own clothes. Her trousers were loose and white, too, but she was wearing her own black boots. He could see the outline of her bra through the white material and he smiled. It was black; very sexy, yet practical. How very Torchwood.

"Truth is beauty," he said, "according to some people."

"I've read the poem," she said, brow furrowing. "Look, I'm not kidding around. This thing you stole... Where's the Rewtas Amalgam? Who did you take it from? Why?"

"I wanted it, so I took it," he said. He smiled and shifted on the bed, experimenting with leaning on his arm. The bed bobbed slightly and he felt the pitch shift slightly to balance out the movement. Nice.

"You wanted to get people killed, too? Is that part of the game for you?" Such disapproval! It was like getting a lecture from your mother.

He wiped the smile off of his face almost without thinking. "People die, Ms. Tyler."

"You came to my home," Rose said, narrowing her eyes. "You brought hell down on my friends—my family—and you kidnapped me. Not to mention the violence. And I still saved your life."

He looked at her fingers where they nestled in the crook of her elbow, waiting and curved like claws.

"So you expect a favour, then?"

"I was hoping that there might be some honour among thieves, yeah."

"I don't believe in life-debts," he said. He did; he sure as hell should. He had counted on favours and debts most of his life. Just, usually, they were his to collect.

Her smile said that she knew he was lying. (Lucky guess. He lied a lot.)

"Tell me why you took the Brindisi effusion, and I'll call it square."

"You call that a fair trade?"

She shrugged. "You could tell me where you get your hair gel. I'm sure the Doctor would appreciate it."

"You two are serious, then. Too bad. I was kind of hoping you'd sweeten the deal with a sponge bath."

The corner of her mouth twitched. "Serious as the plague."

"I know a cure for plague. One taste, and you're footloose and fancy free."
Rose raised an eyebrow. "Tell me where to go, and we'll see."

Not a flat no. That was a pleasant surprise. "Do you keep your promises, Rose Tyler?"

"Do you?"

"I don't make promises," he replied.

There was a long pause and he was dismayed to see pity in her eyes. "What happened to you, Jack?" she murmured.

"Sorry," he said. He felt his smile slipping. "I'm afraid that the going rate for my life story is one sponge bath."

She fell silent. To avoid the discomfort of her stare, he closed his eyes and lay back, hands behind his head, and pretended to doze.

Lee tried the silent guilt trip on him from time to time. He did it less these days, since they'd stopped jumping around time. He had less to complain about now; he liked being settled.

Problem was, he was starting to think that he did, too. Staying in the twenty-first century had seemed like a good plan—high populations to get lost in, busy and delicate political atmospheres that the Time Agency usually tried to stay out of. Maybe using the name 'Harkness' had been too much, but how were you supposed to resist the allure of famous names? It was just too much fun. Should have known it would attract attention, though. (Still, that wasn't as bad as Peter's choice. But then again, he had the equivalent sense of humour of a twelve year old boy.)

"I knew you," Rose said.

His eyes snapped open.

Rose's head tilted to one side and she had wistful affection in her smile. "Back in my universe," she went on. "The Doctor and I met him during the London Blitz. He tried to con us into buying a Chula warship from him. What he didn't know was that it was full of nanogenes. They were mutating people, turning 'em into these gas-mask-wearing zombies... He didn't mean to cause so much trouble, and he tried to help fix it. He thought he was just gonna play us and move on." She looked him in the eye. "But he didn't. He was better than that, when it came down to it."

"Different universe, different man," he said.

"Oh yeah?" she said, defiant. "You could have let that assassin kill me."

"I'm not that heartless."

Her hand found his and she squeezed his fingers tightly. "Let me help you," she begged. "Together, we can fix it."

"How? By saying, 'pretty please don't execute me'?"

"So you're just going to let them hunt you down like an animal?"

"As if I could stop them," he laughed. They wouldn't stop; they would never stop. He never should have stayed on Earth for so long. Shouldn't have let himself get comfortable.

Rose let go of his hand. "I should have left you, then."
He smiled darkly. "Now you're getting it." She'd known him—another him. They must have been friends, maybe even lovers. So it wasn't just her twenty-first century idealism that made her act so foolhardy. She cared about him, and she didn't even know him. How crazy was that?

The wrist-strap's proximity alarm sounded. Startled, Rose opened the flap and suddenly, she was afraid. He sat up and held out his hand. She showed him the alert.

_Vortex activity, ten metres._

His chest clenched in fear. "Run," he said. "Just go!"

"Why do you want to die?"

He stared back at her, stunned. "What?" Of course he didn't want to die! What would be the point? He just needed to outrun them a little longer. But she was going to get herself killed if she stayed with him. He couldn't let that happen.

The strap beeped again. They were here. _Shit._

But when they turned to see where the Shadow Man had appeared, they saw no one. It was an open floor, divided by white curtains and spotless glass. They should have seen or at least heard _something._

Rose looked at the strap. "They're upstairs," she breathed. "C'mon, we've got time." She flagged down a passing nurse. "Sister Hame! We need his clothes! Quick!"

He wasn't entirely sure why he let Rose stuff his legs into his trousers, though he did like the look of her from that angle, crouched at his feet as she shoved his shoes on and hurriedly tied them. (When was the last time someone else had tied his shoes? He couldn't even remember.) Sister Hame shyly informed them that his shirt and coat had been defabricated during his treatment. He tucked the white hospital gown into his waistband and silently mourned the loss of his leather jacket.

Rose checked the wrist-strap. "They're on this level. Hurry up, Jack. Give me the co-ordinates."

There was a moment there, where he refused and they both died when the Shadow Man came into the ward. Sister Hame died with a screech and a look of shock on her lovely face.

_Blinking_, he reached out for Rose's arm, and punched in a destination: _250814075106-1 ΠΠ-2Λ4_ §

The man leading them through the forest was dressed in faded camo, like a soldier of the Church, and a dusky green jacket that had seen far better days. Lee knew, however, that Clerics had better boots.

They were being forced to walk single-file. The man who held the torch and had stripped them of the vortex manipulators led the column. His three compatriots each had a weapon pointed at their captives. Martha Jones walked between the Doctor and Lee, hands behind her head. The Doctor had refused to put his hands up, babbling something that sounded very important and frightening and complicated as a reason that he could _under no circumstances_ let go of the coral. He clutched it to his chest, using both hands to guard it from the eyes of the man walking next to him. The Brindisi effusion was still in its make-shift sling. The glow of it was obscured by a flap of black material, which was probably a good thing. Their captors probably wouldn't have bothered keeping them alive if they'd seen it.
Lee was not a scientist, nor was he an historian or a time traveller by trade. He'd grown up on Tiree, a small colony on the edge of the Terran sector; a planet that was probably not too different from this one, whatever it was. Though it had been more grass than trees.

The minute he'd been old enough to leave, he'd made a break for it, hoping for the throngs of people in great cities, and dreaming of bright stage lights and intimate clubs like the ones he'd grown up watching on ancient vids from the time before the Flesh Wars and solar flares. He'd thought that they were romantic. Life had been gentler then, slower... Not slow like Tiree, with its long growing season, gentle hills, and endless sheep... There had been music everywhere. He wasn't foolish enough to think that people had really burst into song on a whim, engaging entire towns in melodies about trombones, or actually danced with reanimated corpses in the street. But it had been a musical time. Singers and dancers were called "artists" and there was money to be made, fame to win, and tumultuous love affairs to drown in.

Of course, when he had finally made his way to New New New York—third of the name, built over the ruins of the second one, sometimes in museum-perfect replica of its namesakes—he had found that Earth wasn't full of song anymore. Sure, there was music, but it was all advertisements, or background noise. The only ones who wanted to hear musicians play music in person were the aliens.

Being on Earth back in the twenty-first century, that was a gift unlike any he could have hoped for as he'd played his great-uncle's fiddle to bored sheep on the hillside.

If he'd been a scientist, he supposed that he would have asked Jack more questions than he had. He wasn't stupid enough to think that, even after five years, Jack would ever tell him the whole plan. That wasn't how he operated.

Still, he ought to have said, "Hey, Jack... I've been wondering: other than all those grifts and cons and the occasional maiming... and that Time Agent that you really shouldn't have killed... Is there anything in particular that you've done that might bring the wrath of the gods down on all of us?"

Of course, he would have been lucky to make it through the first sentence.

The forest thinned out as they were marched along. Eventually, the trees opened onto a clearing and a large camp populated by one, two hundred people. They were going about their business, dressed in rough-spun clothes or worn-out Church fatigues. Lee looked up and saw a gravity globe floating overhead, casting the tents and the ramshackle buildings in a bluish-white glow.

"Do you know where we are?" Martha asked.

Lee shook his head.

"No talking!" one of their captors said. He prodded Martha with the business end of his rifle.

"Oi, you leave her alone," the Doctor warned.

"Shut your face, or I shut it for you!"

"What are they saying?" Martha murmured.

Lee frowned at the back of her head. She must not have a translator. Still, she ought to be able to understand; she had understood him well enough. Maybe the man with the gun didn't have an implant, either. Lee had tried learning Pre-Colonial English even before he'd arrived in the twenty-first century, but it was clunky and inelegant compared to Galactic Standard. And the spellings were illogical and overly complicated. The two languages were related, if he remembered correctly, but
three thousand years of colonisation and warfare did a lot to words.

"They're speaking a dialect of Galactic Standard," the Doctor said, probably in English. "Just keep calm and quiet for now. I'll think of a way out of this."

"No talking!" The Doctor's personal guard hit him across the face with the butt of his rifle.

Lee was impressed that the Doctor didn't go down, but he still spat a large gob of blood onto the ground. Luckily, the Doctor was smart enough not say anything else.

They were taken to the largest of the run-down buildings. Inside, it was all shipping crates and people with guns. Lee wondered what they'd landed in the middle of. The Doctor had said that he was tracing the path that the Brindisi effusion device had taken. Gods only knew how. He hadn't bothered to explain it.

A young man in an old Bishop's jacket was watching them approach. Lee supposed that he was probably the one in charge, though he looked much too young to be a Bishop.

"Who are these people?" he asked the Cleric with the torch.

"Found them in the woods, sir." He took the wrist straps from his jacket and handed them to the younger man. "Time Agents."

"We're not Time Agents," the Doctor said quickly.

The Bishop raised an eyebrow. "You certainly don't look like one." He opened one of the wrist straps and looked more closely at the manipulator inside. "But these are standard issue."

"We took them," the Doctor said, "from two agents we captured."

The Bishop looked intrigued. He was handsome, with dark hair, and there was something familiar in his smirk. "Captured?"

"We're looking for a man who calls himself Jack Harkness," the Doctor went on. "Please, I need to find him."

The Bishop's smirk faded. "You're kidding me."

"No," the Doctor said seriously. "I'm really not."

"Jack Harkness?" the Bishop repeated, incredulous. "What other name did he give you? Robin Hood? Da Vinci? Man's a myth."

Lee felt the Doctor looking at him. He shrugged his shoulders as best he could with his hands behind his head and a gun between his shoulder blades. Jack had an odd sense of humour. Lee hadn't got the joke at first, being from the Terran sector, and all. Captain Jack was a hero from children's stories out in the far colonies. He was about as real as the Big Bad Wolf.

The Doctor paused thoughtfully. "He might also be known as the Face of Boe."

*That* name worked on their captors like lightning. The Bishop charged the Doctor, who held the coral closer to his heart and stood a little bit straighter as the other man grabbed him by the lapel and snarled up into his face.

"How do you know him?"
The Doctor gave the other man an imperious look and put his left hand on the Bishop's straining fingers. "He got one of my friends shot and kidnapped the woman I love. How do you know him?"

The Bishop let the Doctor's jacket go and took a step back as he tried to reign in his temper.

"He's my brother."

§

Things got a bit more hospitable once the young Bishop ordered his men to put their guns away. The Doctor glanced at Martha and Lee, both of whom seemed to be unhurt.

"How is it you can understand him?" Martha asked him quietly.

He held the infant TARDIS up and inspected her. She'd grown another thirty-seven percent since they'd left the Warehouse. He'd worried that the travel would put a strain on her, but she seemed to be thriving on it. At this rate, she'd be mature in only a three or four hundred years time.

If only he had another few centuries in him, he thought dully.

Now you're just getting greedy, Donna sighed.

"I know a lot a languages, Martha Jones," he said. He looked at her. Her dark eyes were bright with curiosity and calculation. "I used to walk in eternity."

Lee quirked an eyebrow but remained silent. Donna, however, was chuckling at him. Oh, what a pair they would have made.

"Introductions," said the young man who'd tried to throttle him. He indicated at a few convenient crates. "And you're probably hungry."

"A bit peckish, yeah," the Doctor admitted.

Understatement of the millennium, Donna grumbled. His stomach didn't, this time.

They each took a crate in the circle and Jack's brother gave them a perfunctory smile before settling back into his serious leader face. "Who are you?"

"I'm the Doctor," he replied. "This is Martha Jones, and Lee McCoy. He's a friend of your brother's, actually."

"Bishop Nicodemus." The Bishop looked at Lee. "You know my brother?"

Lee nodded. "For about five years."

Nicodemus processed the information and then turned to Martha. "What about you?"

"She doesn't have a translator," the Doctor said. "I'm afraid you're stuck on a one-way channel."

Nicodemus grimaced. "Well, she's in the wrong place to get one. We ran out of implants about five months ago."

"What is this place?" the Doctor asked. "Your people are—"

"Rebels," Nicodemus said simply. He looked over his shoulder at a group of men and women going through a weapons check. Out of the group of six, only two were apparent humans. When
Nicodemus turned back, he had the hint of a smile. "I've got one hundred and eighty-two souls here, but there are over two million down in valleys."

The Doctor frowned. "Mind if I ask who you're intending on fighting?"

Nicodemus smiled wider, and suddenly the family resemblance was impossible to miss. "Buddy, we've been fighting. We were doing okay, too, for a while."

"Who are you fighting?" the Doctor insisted.

Nicodemus's forehead wrinkled. "You really don't know?"

"If I knew, I wouldn't ask!" he said testily. The coral shuddered in his hand.

Nicodemus shook his head. "And here I was hoping we'd get at least a little bit of media attention."

"They're n-nnnnot from around here," Lee volunteered.

Nicodemus looked at him. "What about you? That sounds like a Sanctuary accent."

Lee shook his head. "M not from Earth."

"Outlier, huh?" Nicodemus nodded thoughtfully.

The Doctor was getting impatient. "The Time Agency's after Jack—your brother."

"Of course they are," Nicodemus said.

"Do you happen to know why?"

Nicodemus got to his feet. "Here comes Varna with the food. I hope you like rations."

The Doctor peered at the Bishop. "If I knew what you were doing, I might be able to help you."

Nicodemus shook his head. "You're pretty funny. The woman can't understand anybody, the Outlier no one can understand, and a dead plant?" He chuckled derisively. "You sound like a Sanctum-bred linguistics professor. I've got my own people to look out for."

The tethers on the Doctor's temper snapped. He shot to his feet. "I'm sick of playing games with everybody. Bloody River Song and Jack Harkness and Torchwood and that toad Owen Harper! Tell me what's going on."

Something flickered in Nicodemus's eyes. After a moment of what probably amounted to some sort of male posturing—Donna found the whole staring contest of wills to be tiresome—the young man shrugged.

"Fine. Let me show you."

The Doctor nodded at Martha and Lee to follow with him. Nicodemus led them through double doors to a command centre. The rebels were pretty well-equipped, technologically speaking, it seemed. Or at least, they had been a couple of hundred years ago.

Nicodemus stopped by a large holo-display table and activated it with a touch to the air. A three dimensional image of a planet appeared.

Martha's eyes widened. "Is that where we are now?"
"This is the Gemini system," Nicodemus said. He made a pushing motion and the little planet shrunk and took it's place in a five planet system. There was a binary star, two small white dwarfs labelled Gemini 1-2. They were on the fourth planet, out at a distance of 1.52 AU's from the stellar centre.

"The first colonists settled here in 4778; they were passengers on the Kansas."

The Doctor frowned. "The Kansas? Is that one of the Ark Class ships?"

"You got it." Nicodemus manipulated the hologram again. Now it showed a nebula and a neighbouring cluster. It looked like the Gemini system was on the edges of the Rewtas Amalgam.

"What's going on?" Martha said pointedly.

The Doctor blinked. He switched over to English. Nicodemus probably had a translator, being the leader and all. "Oh. Right. Er... We're on a planet that was colonised by an Ark ship in the 48th century."

"An Ark ship? Is that what it sounds like?" she wondered.

He nodded. "In the twenty-second century there was a mass emigration from Earth. Solar flares, pollution, famine, plenty of reasons why, assuming this universe is as similar to mine as I think it is, of course. Most of the nation states built massive ships, meant to travel for decades, sometimes hundreds of years. At the time, faster than light was still pretty spotty, and not every country had access to the technology. Blame petty human politics for that one. Whole nations on enormous ships! All of Britain. Wellll... not Scotland. I'm sure they got their own ship."

Lee smirked. "My g-great-great... and more... grandmother was on the Alba."

The Doctor grinned at Lee and then he nodded at the display. "Anyway, the United States—what was left of them—had fifty-two Ark Class ships. Most of them stayed in a flotilla, colonised new planets... some of them even went back to Earth, once the radiation cleared up a bit."

Nicodemus crossed his arms. "How do you know all that?"

The Doctor gave him a look. "Time travellers," he said, hearing Donna in his tone. "Obviously. Though I admit, I might be wrong on some of the details. Tell us about the Kansas."

The Bishop shrugged. "The Kansas was one of the ships that found a new planet and settled in. Took them longer than most of the others. For almost two thousand years, everyone assumed they'd all died. Turned out they'd fallen through a wormhole."

The Doctor translated and Martha looked around them. "What about the aliens?" she asked in a hushed tone.

He shrugged. "It's the fifty-second century. The people on the Kansas would have met up with all kinds of different species, out here. Made things a bit easier, I'm sure. Humans have this, Trex have that, and on and on." He smiled. "I like a bit of teamwork, me."

Nicodemus pointed picked a bright spot in the neighbouring star cluster. "Meet the opposing players," he said.

The display zoomed through clouds of star dust and across star systems until it found a fiery looking red planet. The information clip to the side of the image called it Oa'we.

"The Oa'n Paldra have been petitioning for permission to colonise a new planet for the last twenty
"years," he said, voice flat and cold. "A year ago, the Sanctum, in its infinite wisdom, granted their request."

The Doctor translated for Martha. "So, what's that got to do with them?" she asked him.

He looked at the hologram. For a moment, Oa'we looked a bit like a smaller sister of Gallifrey after the ravages of the Time War. They were suffering from seismic instability, their atmosphere had turned to poison. The Oa'n Paldra had lost their home and more than a billion people were adrift in ships and low on resources. They weren't going to last much longer.

"The Sanctum gave them Gemini 4," Nicodemus answered.

The Doctor related the information and tightened his jaw.

Martha frowned at the display, taking in the little planet and the burning white stars. "And you don't want them here."

Nicodemus smiled sadly and shook his head. "If it were just a matter of scooting down the bench to let a few people have a seat at the table, do you really think we'd be fighting?"

Martha listened to the translation and her frown deepened. "People have killed over less."

"Yeah," the Bishop admitted. "But that's not what this is about." He brought the image of Gemini 4 up and put it next to the one of Oa'we. He pointed out the atmospheric statistics, the gravity ratings, the temperature differentials. "There's no way that the Oa'n Paldra could live here."

Lee looked deeply troubled. "The Sss-Sanctum didn't...?"

"What?" Martha demanded. "What did he say?"

The Doctor looked down at the TARDIS in his hand. "The Sanctum wants them to relocate."

Nicodemus shook his head. "Wrong," he said. He replaced the images of the planets with a block of text.

The Doctor read it and he could almost feel his blood pressure rise. That couldn't be right. "No!"

The young soldier nodded grimly. "We intercepted this message about three standard days before the Former was scheduled to roll out."

Lee looked like he wanted to be sick. Martha was looking at the Doctor, fear in her eyes. "What's wrong? What does it say?"

The Doctor swallowed. "The Sanctum ordered Gemini 4 to be terraformed to suit the Oa'n Paldra's requirements."

Martha shook her head. "So? Then it hit her and her eyes widened. "Wait... just like that? What about the people living here?"

He pointed at the salutation in the order. "This message was sent from directly from the highest council of the Sanctuary Government to the Former fleet." The Doctor met Father Nicodemus's eyes. "The colonists would never have known they were coming. They would have been reduced to their base atoms, reconfigured... recycled..."

Martha covered her mouth. Lee had his fists balled on the edge of the holo-table, and his head was bowed.
"How did you get this?" the Doctor asked.

Nicodemus averted his eyes. His voice was rough with restrained emotion. "A friend intercepted the transmission and sent us a warning. Saved everyone."

"But that was a year ago," Martha said.

The Doctor looked at her. "Yes?"

She shook her head and pointed at the message. "This was sent a year ago, he said. Right?"

"Right..."

"So how is it that they're still here?" She looked at Nicodemus. "No offence to them; but a tiny paramilitary group like this couldn't possibly hold out against a fleet of ships capable of reducing them to nothing for an entire year. So how are they still here?"

"Good point," the Doctor mused. He gave Martha a proud smile. "Very good, in fact." He turned to Nicodemus. "Over to you, then, Bish."

Nicodemus brought up a picture of a grey slab of a ship. It was small, probably less than ten decks. The stern contained the bridge and engineering; the forward sections were dominated by a large lens-like apparatus. The ship appeared to be dead in space, adrift in orbit of the planet.

"That's where my big brother comes in. The Former ship, the one that does the actual terra-forming, has a top secret power source. It's tech beyond anything else the Sanctum's ever put out. We've heard stories that the Time Agency itself stole it from some point in the future."

The Doctor raised an eyebrow.

Those dirty, cheating bastards! Donna cried.

"If it's true, yeah," Nicodemus agreed.

The Doctor realised that he'd spoken aloud. Oops. He resisted the urge to clear his throat or smack himself and did a quick translation for Martha's benefit.

"Let me guess," she said, a wry smile spreading across her face. "Jack stole it."

Nicodemus frowned. "How do you know that?"

The Doctor gave Martha a tiny nudge with his elbow and hoped she'd get the hint before he translated this time. He wasn't ready to let them know that he was carrying the very thing that everyone was after until he was ready.

"There's a reason that the Time Agency's after him," she said.

"Five years," Lee said, suddenly. The Doctor looked at him. The other man was red in the face and trembling with what was probably anger. "He could have said! Those p-people, those fucking people... They're m-mmurderers. Why didn't he say?"

"He disabled the Former ship," Nicodemus looked at Lee and hesitated a moment. "Until today, I wasn't sure he'd made it out alive. I'd always assumed he'd died for us."

"Oh, he's alive all right," the Doctor said. "At least he will be, until I get my hands on him."
Nicodemus's face hardened. "Look, I don't know what all he's done—"

"Enough," the Doctor growled. "I'll admit, disabling that ship was a heroic move. I'm even a bit proud of him. But he..." He bit his tongue. Maybe it was all right. Wherever Jack was, wherever he'd taken Rose... If he was the kind of man who'd risk his life for more than two million people, maybe he... But he'd just run away, and he'd taken the one thing that could make being stuck in this stupid universe and this stupid body worthwhile.

_I want her back, too, but there are slightly bigger things right now..._ murmured Donna.

Martha was looking at him. He started to turn his head away, but there was real sympathy in her eyes. He thought of Toshiko lying in a hospital bed and how helpless that must have made Martha feel... Probably as helpless as he had felt, standing on that platform, knowing that Rose was out of his reach and there was nothing he could do to help her.

Martha put her hand on his arm for a moment and then she looked back at Nicodemus. "Do you know where he might have gone?"

Nicodemus shook his head. "I always hoped he'd come back here. But with the Time Agency on his ass, this is probably the last place he'd ever come. He wouldn't want to lead them back here."

At that moment, the Doctor felt a jolt in his hand. It startled him so badly that he nearly dropped the TARDIS coral.

Nicodemus, Lee and Martha stared at the coral, eyes and mouths going wide as the white light pulsed like a firework. Nicodemus clutched the edge of the holo-table and the images flickered before going out completely. Must have blown the circuit. "What is that?" he demanded.

The Doctor didn't answer. He was too busy trying to figure that out himself. His right hand was burning from the inside out; the pain was almost unbearable. He could see traces of golden light—almost like regeneration energy rippling under his skin. The coral pulsed again and he heard a message, loud and clear.

He looked at Martha, filled with the completely irrational hope that she could make it stop, somehow. It _hurt_. It was wrong, and it hurt. But these weren't his own thoughts, and they weren't Donna's either. They must have come from the TARDIS.

He managed to swallow and speak before another wave of pain crested. "Somebody's coming."

§

They materialised on the deck of a ship. Rose was pretty certain that they were in space—something about the way her balance took a moment to settle in. Some ships' artificial gravity took some getting used to.

What she expected to feel and did not was the hum of engines. She looked at Jack, who was holding her arm for a better look at the manipulator.

"Perfect," he murmured.

"Where is this?"

He took her hand in his and mock-bowed. "You want to see?"

They walked through corridor after silent corridor. The air was stale, but they could breathe, so life
support was working. Still, the only lights in the black tubes they were walking through were amber emergency lights. It was a few minutes before they reached the room that Jack seemed to be looking for.

"Where is everyone?" she asked.

"They abandoned ship," he said. He glanced at her as if he wanted to gauge her reaction.

"What kind of ship—"

"Terra-former," he said. "This is the Genesis. She was the flag ship of the Former fleet, sent here on a mission to make the planet ready for new colonists. Crew of 53, most of them scientists." Jack's smile was cold. He held out his hand.

"What?"

"The manipulator? I need it to boost the power. Then I can control the whole thing from here."

Rose hesitated. For all she knew he would try to run off again... But what could she do? She took off the wrist-strap and handed it over.

Without putting it on, Jack started punching in commands. Within moments, the deck lighting had come back on to full, and the computer consoles came to life with almost cheerful chimes. It was a command centre. All of the work stations were centred on a central chair. It looked a bit like the Enterprise bridge. Everything was dark grey and silver. Rose wondered how practical the arrangement really was.

Jack went up to the command chair and sat down. There was a small control station there; he pulled it in front of him and started to work. Rose looked at the large screen at the front of the room. It flickered and was translucent, like a hologram. It showed the edge of a planet. It was mostly green and brown, with long, thin stretches of turquoise sea.

"The planet's called Gemini 4," Jack told her, without looking up. "Current population... 2.3 million souls. Most of the original colonists were human, but over the last couple of centuries, other species have moved in. Plenty of room, good farmland in the valleys."

Rose turned to look at him. "So it was terra-formed."

"No." Jack concentrated on the wrist-strap, punched in a few more commands. "Gemini 4's always looked like that. There was some modification when the colonists arrived, but nothing major. A few local plant species were spliced with Terran ones to help get just the right carbon dioxide/oxygen mix, but other than that, it was already perfect."

"So why is this ship here?"

Jack pushed the controls to the side and went to the one that Rose assumed was the navigational station. "Because I brought it here."

Rose looked at him. "Why?"

"I was following orders." He glared at her, defiant, daring her to say something. "It was my job."

She glanced at the screen. "What happened?"

He didn't answer her at first, he just kept working. She looked past him at the display. She couldn't
Then, with a pained look on his face, he settled back into one of the chairs. "I was in the military—well, you'd call it that. They called it joining the Holy Corps. The Church has kept the peace in the outer colonies for the last thousand years. I joined up when I was still just a kid, worked my way from Deacon to Cleric, until I had command of my own ship." He spun slowly in the chair. Cautiously, Rose took the chair next to him. "This ship, as a matter of fact. We were the crown jewel of the Former fleet. It was a good gig." He leaned on the console and held his hands in front of his face, moulding the air with his fingers. "We would take lifeless hunks of rock and make gardens out of them."

Rose waited. When he didn't speak again, she said, "What went wrong?"

"Got orders direct from the Papal Mainframe, passed down the Sanctum itself. They gave me the co-ordinates, and I brought my men here." He looked at the planet on the screen. "A whole colony that had been out of contact with the rest of humanity for more than two hundred years. Sanctuary fleets only rediscovered it fifty years ago. There were almost three million people living here. Citizens. They weren't enemies. They had homes and families. But my orders were to terra-form the planet.

"I sent back a message. I was sure that there'd been some mistake; the planet was already inhabited. They told me, no, no mistake, and I was to carry out my orders immediately."

"What about the people?"

"Somehow, they already knew." Jack smiled wanly. "I don't know how, but they'd gotten ahold of the order. When the Genesis arrived, we were hailed by the planet. They begged us to go, to leave them in peace." The smile died. "When the men heard what happened... You've gotta understand, most of my men were like those people. Born on far-flung planets, sons and daughters of farmers and traders... They only joined up so they could defend their homes, and here we were, supposed to wipe all those people from the face of their world, just so someone else could take their place. At first, I'd tried to keep the whole thing quiet, just do my job, but it... My men found out what was happening, and I had a mutiny on my hands, and not just on the Genesis. There were three other ships with us, escorts. Things got bad really fast. People fighting on the bridge. I had to..." He glanced at her. "Long story short, one of the escort ships took a defensive position between Genesis and the planet. There was a battle. We won."

The computers hummed in the sudden silence. Rose wasn't sure what she was supposed to say. If he'd already had doubts, why had he kept going? An officer didn't have to follow orders that went against conscience, did he? A captain on his own ship, he was supposed to have the authority to say no.

"And then Gemini started fighting back. They had their own regiment there, and fighters. I didn't blame them. It kept going like that. I should have just started the terra-forming, but I didn't. I should have followed my orders."

Rose put her hand out and touched his. After a moment of glassy-eyed staring, he shook himself and pulled his hand away. "I'm boring you with details. Suffice to say, I disobeyed my orders. The ship was badly damaged, and I sent a distress call out to the Mainframe, said we'd met resistance, and we'd incurred too much damage to go forward. And then I evacuated my men to one of the other ships. Course, there were a few who wouldn't go. Brother Nicodemus was a particular pain in my ass. He kept insisting that we had to keep them from going forward, that it was murder.

"Everyone who wanted to go, I let them teleport down to the surface. I let them take weapons, supplies, whatever they needed. And then I went down to the emitter array, and I took the one thing
that makes the process work."

"The effusion device."

Jack nodded. "And then I ran. Didn't have a plan, I just... It was treason. But I'd already fired on my own men. What was theft compared to that?"

Rose blinked furiously at the tears forming in the corner of her eyes. "You saved all those people on the planet."

He looked at her, shame and curiosity and astonishment on his face. "And that makes it okay to you, doesn't it?"

"I don't mean that there weren't consequences," she murmured. "Just... You did the right thing."

"That's what Nicodemus said over the comm before he left. Said I was making the moral choice." He chuckled darkly. "Before that day, there wasn't anything in the universe that I would have run away from."

It was a long while before either of them moved or said anything. Rose became lost in thought, trying to imagine why a government would kill its own people for no reason. There must have been a reason.

Jack sat straighter in his chair and checked a light that was flashing on the console. "Shit."

Rose got out of her chair to look. "What is it?"

"There's a Host coming in. They've got ten ships, Avenger class."

She watched the display. It showed a flock of silver, streamlined warships coming out of warp. The computer said they were less than thirty minutes away.

"They followed us?"

"Possibly. Time Agency might have traced us again already. Or they were just waiting for me to come back."

"Do we have any weapons left?"

He looked surprised. "You want to fight them?"

She glanced at the screen. "Is there another option?"

"Die?" he suggested. "Even if I wanted to fight, this ship's been derelict for a year. And I don't have a crew. I could pilot her myself, but engage an enemy?" He shook his head. "No way."

"So we get more people."

Jack threw up his hands. "From where?"

"From the planet! You said yourself, you left men down there."

He hesitated. "Assuming any of them are left alive..."

"We find out!"
Jack shook his head, looking both annoyed and amused. He jumped out of his seat and went back to the captain's chair. "Gotta love a hopeless cause." He hit a panel and Rose heard a crackle, like a bad connection. Cursing, Jack threw himself over to another work station. After a minute's work, he tried again.

"Gemini 4 Colony, this is Starship Genesis, do you copy?" They waited for a tense moment. Jack repeated the hail.

"Genesis, this is Gemini 4," said a male voice cautiously.

Jack grinned. "Good to hear your voice, little brother."

"What the hell are you doing here, sir?"

"I don't know if you've noticed, but we've got ten avenging angels heading this way, ETA twenty-six minutes. I've still got a ship up here, but she's limping and I could really use a few helping hands."

There was a longer silence, punctuated by what Rose thought might have been whispering.

Another voice came on the speaker, and she almost passed out with relief.

"Jack, this is the Doctor. Have you still got Rose with you?"

She scrambled over to the comm. "Yes!" she cried. "Yes, Doctor, I'm here! I'm okay. What are you doing down there?"

"Long story. I'll have to fill you in later. We're actually a bit occupied ourselves. There are scouts reporting an outfit of Time Agency foot soldiers less than a kilometre from camp. Though, what the Time Agency needs foot soldiers for—" Someone in the background barked unintelligibly at him.

"Yes, yes, all right! Jack, the Bish says he can't spare anyone, but I've got Martha and Lee with me. I can tele—" The line went dead.

"No!" Rose pounded buttons on the console. "Doctor!"

There was no response. Jack growled and hit the panel when it didn't respond to his fiddling. "Their comm signal's been blocked." He rubbed his face. "At least we know they're alive."

"Who was that man?" she asked. "The one who answered."

Jack went back to the nav panel. "Worst soldier this side of the Varas Nebula." He smirked. "He always did want to follow me everywhere."

"We've got to find another—"

There was a flash of light and the Doctor appeared, looking exhausted and a little bit bemused. Without even thinking, Rose went to embrace him, but the Doctor, overjoyed as he looked, stopped her before she could get her arms around him.

"Careful!" He was holding a funny ivory-coloured thing. It was the size of a biscuit barrel and had about a million branches. He held it aloft and winced. "That would hurt." He glanced at Jack and a dark shadow fell over his face, but it quickly passed.

"What is that thing?" Rose wondered.

"This?" The Doctor carefully set the thing down on the captain's chair. "Martha's pencil holder." He
turned and grinned at her. "Okay, now."

Rose barely had time to react before he'd picked her up in an exquisite yet painful hug. All she could do was hold on until he finally put her down.

"I hate to interrupt," Jack said before she could snog the Doctor good and properly. "But we've got Avenger's incoming?"

The Doctor looked torn. He glanced at her, raised an eyebrow that seemed to say, 'later', and then he straightened his jacket. He looked a fright. Rose worried, wondering how long he'd been chasing after them, how he'd found them. All these questions and more crowded together at the tip of her tongue. She couldn't decide between them.

"I love you," she blurted instead.

The Doctor and Jack both stared at her. Jack was incredulous, of course, but the Doctor was stunned. Pleasantly so, by the way his pupils dialated and his slack jaw slowly turned to a smile. Rose tried to pretend that she wasn't blushing.

"Twenty-three minutes," Jack said peevishly. "You kids are adorable, but seriously?"

"Sorry," she murmured.

"Right!" The Doctor cleared his throat. "Twenty-two minutes, forty-three seconds. Who do you need, Jack?"

"I need a fully trained crew crazy enough to go up against them."

The Doctor picked up Martha's coral paperweight and quickly kissed Rose on the lips. She grabbed his jacket, trying to draw it out, even though she knew they were in a hurry. She just didn't care: he had come for her. Let those ships come; they'd never know what hit 'em now that the Doctor was here. She almost laughed with relief.

"Oi, Jack give me your vortex manipulator," the Doctor said once she let him go. Jack took it off and tossed it over to him.

"Where are you going?" Rose asked.

The Doctor waggled his eyebrows. "Just a quick trip. Be right back."
Chapter 10

Donna took a long drag and wondered what was wrong with her GP. What about him made Owen say he was crap? She'd have to find a new one, she supposed. Torchwood probably had a list of available ones. She could make some calls. It couldn't be that hard to find a good doctor.

She dropped her fag when a loud 'woosh' seemed to suck all the air from the vaulted warehouse.

The Doctor was standing in front of her now, a black sling over his shoulder and Martha's desk ornament in his hand. It was twice the size it had been on Monday.

"Donna!" he cried and rushed towards her, treading on her half-smoked fag and grabbing her shoulder with his free hand. "Thank heavens! I missed you by about forty years last time. I'm pretty sure it was the 70's: everyone had a moustache. She's a lot harder to steer going this way. How long have I been gone?"

Donna pulled her chin from her collarbone and swallowed. "Twenty minutes?"

"Oh good. From the look on your face, I was afraid it had been a few years." Then he sniffed at her head and made a disgusted face. "Ugh! Have you been smoking?"

"Oi! Don't you start! I get enough of that from Gramps." She straitened out her blouse. "What's happening? Did you find Rose? Is she okay?"

"She's excellent! In a spot of trouble, of course. Jeopardy friendly, that's my Rose." He grinned. "Okay, downstairs! Gather all the boys and girls. I'm going to need some volunteers."

Donna called everyone to the main office to listen as the Doctor explained events that were taking place three thousand years in the future. She felt a creeping nausea and the backs of her eyes were burning with angry tears before he was done.

The Doctor looked at Pete Tyler, waiting for some response. Soon all eyes were on Tyler. His forehead furrowed. "You want me to release prisoners so that they can go into the future with you to fight a battle?"

"Them and anyone else who's willing to come."

Jackie crossed her arms. "You just left Rose there?"

The Doctor gave her an exasperated look. "Jackie, Rose can handle herself. There are more than two million lives at stake!"

"You might find it surprising, Doctor," Tyler said carefully. "But there actually are guidelines when it comes to time travel."

"You don't say!" the Doctor cried sarcastically. He grimaced. "Pete, these people need help, and we're the only ones who can give it to them."

"I volunteer," Ianto said, looking up from the floor. Pete looked at him and Ianto inclined his head. "Sir."

Lalit raised a hand. "Count me in."

Donna glanced at the stoney look on Pete's face and thought about the contract she'd signed only two
days ago.

*I shall not act as an independent agent on behalf of Earth, the human race, or Republic of Great Britain while under Torchwood's employ.*

She'd already risked being accused of treason today. And shot somebody. And broken her five day no-smoking streak.

"Me too," she said. The Doctor looked at her. "I don't know if I'd be any good on a space ship, but..." He cracked a smile. There he went making her reckless and embarrassed again.

"You all know that this is a direct violation of Code," Pete said grimly.

"Begging your pardon, sir," Ianto said, calmly. "But I think this is one of those occasions where the Code can go fuck itself."

Donna stared at Ianto and had to cover her mouth to keep from laughing. She'd never heard that word said so politely before.

Jackie tilted her head and narrowed her eyes at the Doctor. The focus shifted to her, heads turning in series like dominoes. "If the Doctor thinks we should help..." she said.

Pete shook his head. "Fine. Take them." He sighed in exasperation at his wife. "Do what the Doctor orders, eh?"

While the others made preparations, Donna's stomach felt like somebody had dropped a brick into it. Jack's friends gathered in the office as if they were getting ready for a funeral. Donna wished that they wouldn't be so grim. It made her even more nervous.

Maybe it was a stupid thing to do, like tempting fate, but Donna took a moment at her desk to call home. After four rings, she almost hung up, but Gramps picked up before the fifth.

"Hello?"

"Gramps?" Donna cleared her throat and turned so that she couldn't see her reflection in the reflective panels of Argus.

"Donna!" His cheerful voice made the brick feel all the heavier. "How's it going, sweetheart? They working you too hard?"

"No," she said. "Not too hard."

"I was thinking, you should have the Doctor come by for supper. Supposed to be a clear night and I thought we might go up the hill. All three of us. Might cheer him up a bit. Or at least take his mind off of things... They have any luck finding Ms. Tyler, then?"

Donna rubbed her cheek. "Yeah. He found out where she is. We're just on our way to fetch her."

"Well, you be careful, my love. That's big stuff you're a part of now. You do me proud, but you be careful."

"I will," she said. "Love you, Gramps."

"Love you too, sweetheart," he replied, tone suddenly concerned. "Is everything all right?"

"Fine," she said quickly. "I just... just wanted to hear your voice. I don't know when I'll be home
tonight. Might have to go up the hill tomorrow. You should go down the pub with Bernie. His wife won't mind."

Gramps chuckled. It was an old battle, Bernie's wife and the pub. "She keeps accusing me of corrupting young people. I says, Mattie, your husband's seventy-two!"

Donna laughed with him. "You go have fun. I'll see you later."

"G'bye, sweetheart."

"Bye, Gramps."

She put down the phone. She could do this. It was her job. More importantly, it was right. Gramps was a soldier, he'd understand if...

"Donna?" The Doctor's voice was gentle.

She blinked a few times and wiped her cheeks. "Yeah?"

"Everything okay?" He was looking down at her, quiet concern on his face.

She gave him a big phoney smile. "Absolutely. We off then?"

"Nearly. I'll have to take people in shifts." He hesitated before putting a hand on her shoulder. "It'll be okay."

She figured that he was probably lying, but it was nice to hear just the same.

She picked up her purse, then thought better of it and set it back down on her chair. She was hardly going to need her car keys on a space ship, was she? Still, she pulled out the gun that Lee had given her earlier. She wasn't sure what to do with it, so she just stuck it in her coat pocket. She went to stand with Ianto and Lalit. The Doctor was using his sonic screwdriver on the wrist-thingy he had given to Ianto.

"You're going to help me ferry everyone over," he explained.

Ianto peered at the computer. "How does it work?"

"Just press the largest button when you want to go. I've pre-programmed all the co-ordinates. Your arrivals will be staggered in thirty second intervals. Don't want you crossing paths with yourself. You take Donna and Fish first. I'll get Freeburn and Staker."

Freeburn tilted her head. "I don't suppose you're going to give us our weapons back?"

"Good point," said Fish. "That thing cost me a lot of money."

The Doctor glowered and opened his mouth, no doubt to tell them 'no', but something must have changed his mind. "Ianto, Lalit, could you get their property for them?"

Ianto nodded. "Not a problem."

That seemed to lift the mood of the band a bit, though Donna was now imagining a funeral where all the guests stood on either side of a coffin, opened their trench coats and let loose a hail of bullets.

"Hang on." Owen was standing with his arms crossed, watching Lalit and Ianto go back and forth with gun after gun. The band were all filling holsters and loading chambers and adjusting sights.
Donna shuddered.

"Unless you have something useful to say," the Doctor snarled. "I don't want to hear a bloody word out of you."

Owen sneered back at him. "Actually, I was going to volunteer." He caught Ianto's raised eyebrow and glared back. "I hardly want to be out done by the secretary and the tea boy."

"Hey," Lalit said, sharing a sidelong look with Ianto, "don't I get an insulting epithet?"

"Manchild?" Owen offered.

The Doctor rolled his eyes. "Fine. But only because they're going to need a medic. Bring your supplies."

Jackie came over to where Donna stood. "You know that you don't have to go," she said, looking at her with motherly concern.

"Yeah," Donna replied. "I know."

And then, Jackie hugged her. "You be careful! Stay with the Doctor, he'll keep you safe. He knows what he's doing, believe it or not."

Donna glanced at the Doctor out of the corner of her eye. "Yeah. How does he do that?"

Jackie followed her gaze. "It's a Time Lord thing, I guess. He's always been like that. He's a bit more polite than he was, at least. Rose must have taught him some manners."

"Okay, Jackie, out of the way," the Doctor said, coming over to them. "You need to go home. Tony's waiting for you, and Rose and Pete will kill me if anything happens to you."

She crossed her arms and started to argue, but gave up with a sigh and threw her arms around his neck. The Doctor made faces like an embarrassed little boy and seemed unable to decide whether to hug her back or pull away. "Don't do anything stupid," she said.

He wriggled away. "I make no promises. Go home!"

Once Jackie had gone out of earshot, Donna said, "Everyone's acting like we might die."

The Doctor was looking at her pocket. "I don't think you're going to need that," he said.

Donna glanced down and hesitated. She took out the gun and looked at it. If only she had a holster or something.

He looked dismayed, but he nodded. Then, he sighed. "Bloody hell. A month ago I would have told you off. What's happening to me?"

She shrugged and put it back in her pocket. (Good thing they were roomy.) "We're going to war, aren't we?"

A muscle in his jaw jumped. He sniffed and turned to Ianto, who had just handed a wicked looking knife over to the black man with the yellow eyes. "All right Ianto! Two at a time. Get 'em to the ship, come back here and take two more. Remember, you're only going to have a few minutes to learn your stations. Do as Jack says; he's the captain. Right!" He went over to the bloke with the idiotic smile and Freeburn and held out his arm. He examined the coral thing one last time.
Ianto came over and Donna put her hand on the wrist-strap. "All right?" he asked her.

"You can all stop asking me that. Let's just go, already."

The bald man, happily reunited with his enormous gun, put one hand on Ianto's shoulder, the other on the strap.

"Hold on tight," he advised Donna, looking around Ianto at her. "The ride gets rougher the more people you got."

"All right everyone," the Doctor said. "On the count of three. One... two... three!"

Ianto pressed the button and the Warehouse disappeared.

§

Martha Jones watched carefully as the scaly pink woman put the chamber in the gun and handed it over to her. The woman spoke slowly, but not too loudly, and her voice was mellifluous. Martha wished that she understood what these people were saying—any of them. She was sure that half of them weren't even speaking the same language as each other.

But Lee McCoy had a translator, so she could understand him. Other people had them, and she couldn't. The Doctor had said that they were different types—Lee probably had one that telepathically linked into his brain and allowed two-way communication. The soldiers here had basic one-way units that relied on everyone else having one.

Lee cocked his new rifle and glanced over at her. "Okay?" he asked. She could read the nerves on him, but his hands were steady. He'd been in battles before, that much was obvious.

"Looks simple enough." She settled the gun in her arms so that it was comfortable. It was old. There were tally marks etched into the barrel—a scorecard?—and parts of the casing were shiny where they'd been worn by God knew how many hands.

"Yeah." He hesitated, then said, "You don't have to fight."

"Neither do you," she pointed out.

"Yeah, I d-do," he stammered. "This is my time. Not y-yours."

She cocked the weapon and heard it begin to charge. "If I were likely to ever have any children, I'd say I'm just protecting my descendants." She stopped, thinking of Tosh, who was still laid up back home, three thousand years ago. She was long dead. So were Mum and Dad, her brother, her nephew. She shook her head. No point in wasting mental energy on the things she couldn't change. There was work to be done.

Martha kept close to Lee, and they watched each other's backs. She wondered why the Doctor had thought he needed to tell them to do so. She wasn't stupid; assuming that people had explained it properly, she knew who her enemies were. The quiet thief wasn't one of them. The Bishop—military terms translating to religious ones was new—had ordered them to the north side of the camp. That was where the Time Agency squad was going to hit.

Hit they did, hard and fast. Soon, all Martha could see were long limbs swathed in grey coming out of the trees and soaring about in kung-fu acrobatics, and the white-hot blasts from people's weapons. It wasn't her first fire fight, not by half. Sometimes diplomacy failed. Sometimes it wasn't even an option. But, skilled as she was at hand-to-hand, she wasn't Bruce Lee. These grey people—she
wasn't convinced that they were human—moved like nothing she'd ever seen in real life. They were graceful. Dancers with fire coming from their fingertips. They scared the shit out of her.

Lee had taken cover behind a large container. There was a symbol on it she didn't recognise, but it didn't seem to mean 'explosive.' She assumed that Lee could read it. She joined him there and resumed firing.

He shouted over the din. "Where's the D-Doctor?"

"He said he'd be back," she shouted in return.

Lee ducked down and took a breather while he checked the settings on his gun. "You trust him?"

Martha fired once more and ducked a shot to her head. "Don't know yet."

Lee looked confused. "Why do I?"

There was a hiss and a bang and the Doctor appeared, suddenly standing behind them. Immediately, the enemy focused their fire on him. He dropped to the ground, and crawled toward them. (Awkwardly, as he only had one hand free.) Martha spared half a second to goggle at the coral. How big was it going to get, exactly? He wouldn't be able to carry it soon, at the rate it was growing.

"Hello, you two!" he cried, nudging his way between them and settling on his elbow in the dirt. "How are you holding up?"

"Where have you been?" Martha cried.

"Getting a crew for Jack, repairing the ship. Who the hell are these people shooting at us, anyway?"

"Shadow Men," Lee said. He popped up to fire off another round. He was an excellent shot: he actually hit one, which was more than she'd been able to do thus far. The Shadow Man spun and crashed to the ground. "They're engineered by the Sssss-Sanctum; human weapons."

"They're human, then?" Martha said.

"Mostly." Lee fired again, but missed this time. His opponent hit the other side of their shelter and there was a cascade of sparks.

"Can they be reasoned with?" the Doctor asked.

Lee shook his head. "They don't t-t-talk. They c-carry out their mission, and then they leave."

"And I'm guessing that the current mission is to obliterate us." The Doctor grimaced as more sparks flew.

Martha dared to look over the crate. There were far fewer green uniforms out there than there had been a minute ago. "I think their bosses are going to be happy."

"Weak points?" the Doctor demanded. Lee stared at him, a little stunned. "Any way to stop them short of killing them?"

"They're the p-perfect sss." Lee bared his teeth and shook his head.

"All right then," the Doctor said. "Off I go. They've got some rather large ships up there and I've got a new plan. You two: no dying." He screwed his eyes shut and then he was gone again, literally disappearing into thin air.
"He didn’t—" Lee began, but Martha had spotted something over his shoulder. She forced him onto his belly, shouted, "Down!" and fired in a single motion. The Shadow Man staggered back. She'd only got him in the shoulder. She fired again before he could regain his footing, and again, again, until he fell to the ground. It wasn't until she stopped shooting that she realised that she was standing and that she was screaming.

"Martha!" Lee grabbed her by the arm and pulled her towards him. They were surrounded.

"Put your back to mine," she said. He was much taller than she was, so there was only so much she could do in the way of shielding, but at least this way they could cover each other.

"Gods save us," Lee whispered, pressing against her and staring at the slow-approaching enemy.

There was a ring of six Shadow Men around them, and more were coming. Martha wondered what had happened to everyone else—their front had started the fight with more than thirty people. Were they all dead, or had some of them run?

One of the Shadow Men tilted his head and looked at them with intense blue eyes. There was blood spattered across his chest; she very much doubted that it was his own. Martha glanced down at the notches on the barrel of her rifle, counted them in the space of a breath to steady herself, and then raised her eyes to the man in front of her.

"Ready?" she asked Lee.

"Not really."

"I thought you were Scottish."

"W-w-what does that have to do with—?"

"Be ready!"

The first shot might have been hers, or it might have been from any of the Shadow Men. What she didn't understand was how she didn't die in the first second, trapped as they were, fish in a barrel as they were. But they weren't dead in the first second, or in the next one, and they kept not being dead until, suddenly, there was a bright purple thing flying in a high arc through the air toward them, like a grenade.

She didn't see it at first, preoccupied by the fact that her gun had suddenly stopped working. Screaming in frustration, Martha threw it away and pulled out her own handgun.

Lee bore her down to the ground, saving her from being hit by the grenade. It exploded, but not in fire and shrapnel. In her peripheral vision—the rest was blocked by dirt and colourless pine needles—she caught the umbra of purple light.

Lee, who was mostly on top of her, lifted his head to look. Martha dared to do the same and was shocked to see that there was no one left standing.

"What—?" Lee began.

Martha watched as a pair of bright blue Converse trainers walked towards them. She prodded Lee until he got off of her back, then got onto her knees. The Doctor looked down at her with a smile. (He was lucky she hadn't shot him, in that grey suit and skinny as he was.)

"Like it?" he asked.
"What is it?" she wondered, looking up at the dome of purple over them. The Doctor's t-shirt was glowing like it was under a black light, and her own blouse was almost painful to look at, where it wasn't stained with dirt and God knew what else.

"Just a little sleep bomb I whipped up." He held out a hand to help her up, then did the same for Lee.

"Why aren't we...?" she began, looking in disbelief at the gentle rise and fall of the Shadow Men's chests.

"Different brain patterns," the Doctor replied.

Martha looked at him, in shock. "You're ridiculous," she said.

He looked offended. "I think you mean, 'stupendous'." He pointed a finger at Lee and shifted the coral under his arm—it was the size of a large melon now. "See you..." He looked at his wrist strap. "Twenty minutes ago!"

And then he disappeared again.

"What," Martha said, "is going on?"

Most of the problems on the Genesis were easy enough to repair with a sonic screwdriver—even a temperamental one. However, the amount of time needed versus the time available... that was presenting a problem.

Peter Staker was the closest thing to a mechanic around, but he lacked imagination. He just wanted to be pointed a direction, and off he'd go, fixing thermo-couplings and welding and realigning. He moved at an impressive pace, at least.

What they needed right now was someone (besides himself) with vision and imagination and...

"Hang on a minute!"

Staker looked up at him from the open panel in the wall and pushed back his welding mask. "What?"

"Did you do deck 3 already?"

"Deck 3?"

The Doctor sighed in exasperation. (Sounding not at all unlike Donna, in fact.) "You know! That giant focusing lens... thing... that half the ship is made of?! The controls are on deck 3!"

"No. I thought you did?"

"I haven't even been..." The Doctor looked at the readout again. According to the computer, someone had repaired and refit the entire array for a high-energy pulse. Why would they do that?

He checked the log, wincing once when Staker's welding torch sent off sparks a bit too close to his leg. There was an entry labelled: Attn: Look here, Doctor from a user called thedoctor.

"I didn't!" he breathed as he opened it and started to read. "Tell me I didn't... Oh, but that's brilliant. Cheating, really really dangerous and exceedingly irresponsible, but oh... that is a good idea...!"

"What is?" Staker wondered, pushing back his mask again.
The Doctor clapped him on the shoulder. "I've gotta go. There's somebody very important that I forgot!"

He grabbed the TARDIS coral from the chair by the main engineering station and adjusted the shoulder strap on the effusion device's bag. The coral hummed contentedly under his fingers, and there was a frisson of excitement in his head and his hand, almost like she was asking him a question.

**Going now? Love going! Go go go!**

Smiling, he started to set the co-ordinates on the vortex manipulator, but she was pulling him in a different direction.

**Wait!** he thought at her, panicking at the realisation that she might be flinging them *anywhere*, but the trip through the vortex was short. And decidedly smoother than most of the previous ones had been. Either the infant TARDIS was getting stronger, or she was a better pilot than he was.

**What the hell was that?** Donna wondered.

And now someone was shooting at them.

He threw himself to the dirt and crawled toward the only two people he could see that weren't shooting at him. In his hand, the TARDIS was vibrating and letting out a psychic song that was almost loud enough to drown out his own thoughts. She was as excited as a child in a new sweet shop.

*Oi, kid!* Donna grumbled. *Trying to think over here!*

Strangely enough, the TARDIS's ebullient noise did come down a bit. She even seemed to feel... chastened.

The two people who were not shooting at him were Martha Jones and Lee McCoy.

"Hello, you two!" he cried, joining them behind their conveniently placed storage crate. "How are you holding up?"

He listened to a few not-very-useful things about the so-called Shadow Men, other than the fact that the Sanctum had made them. Interesting. He couldn't recall any organisation in the other universe called the Sanctum or Sanctuary; at least, no Earth and Colonies governing body, certainly not in the fifty-first or fifty-second century. It was fascinating (and a little unsettling) to know so little of the world he was trying to move about in. But then again, it was kind of nice. It had been centuries since he'd been the one who didn't know what was going on. It made things terrifying and dangerous and exciting.

*Poor jaded Spaceman,* Donna said sarcastically. *Getting bored with all of time and space, were you?* Not bored... Just...

"All right then," he said aloud. "Off I go. They've got some rather large ships up there, and I've got a new plan. You two: no dying."

He closed his eyes and mentally nudged the TARDIS. *I've got to go back to London now, sweetheart. Can you get me there?* He thought of the destination and within milliseconds, he could feel her opening the way to the vortex. *Clever girl!*

He was still lying on the ground when they arrived, but he seemed to be outside some kind of
converted warehouse. There was a buzzer and a list of names next to flat numbers. Lucky him, one of the names jumped out as the best possible solution to the current problem.

He used the sonic to get into the building, and went up to the flat on the second floor. He rang the bell, knocked, and then pounded on the door, before bouncing impatiently from foot to foot. "C'mon, c'mon..." He hoped that she was home. It was night, but other than that, he had no specific idea of when he was.

At last, he heard the sound of a chain rattling and a dead bolt sliding back.

Toshiko Sato peered at him from the gap. "It's three in the morning," she said.

The Doctor looked at his wrist strap. "Is it? So it is. Sorry. Feeling all healed up, I hope?"

"I—" Toshiko began.

"Brilliant! Get dressed. I've got to take you to—"

She had opened the door and pulled him in by the arm—which hurt, he suddenly remembered with a muffled cry—and closed the door behind him. The loft was spacious and tastefully furnished. "Sit down," she said. "I've got a bag ready."

"Eh?" He hesitated. "Did you know I was coming?" What day was it?

"You told me you would." She rubbed her eyes. "You didn't say it would be three in the morning."

"Sorry. But I'm actually in a bit of a rush, so..."

"Fine. Just be quiet. You'll wake Martha." She turned back to him after a couple of steps and said, "She says you knew."

"Knew?" he wondered, temporarily distracted by his realisation that she wasn't wearing anything under her silky red dressing gown. *Blimey.*

"About Martha and me. Sleeping together."

The Doctor shunted aside a series of interesting and impolite mental images that sprang to mind. If Donna had had a hand, she would have smacked him. *I could always use yours,* she muttered.

"Oh. Yes. I mean, I guessed."

Toshiko blushed. Oh good God, she didn't know what he'd been thinking about, did she? Had it shown on his face somehow? How did humans ever accomplish anything with such distracting (wonderful) things running around their heads?

*We manage. Focus!*

"Thank you for not telling anyone," Toshiko said shyly. "It's just... we knew it would be our jobs..."

"Would it?" He frowned. "Why?" What he'd read in the Archives and seen in newspapers had suggested that homosexual relationships, while not necessarily completely socially accepted, were at least protected under the law. Legal unions and all that. (It was 2013, after all. Wasn't it?)

"Torchwood employees aren't supposed to fraternise with each other..." she said, peering at him as if
he were confusing her. "You know that."

"Ah. Well. I didn't. I do now. So I will back when I did."

You're a Torchwood employee, Donna reminded him nervously.

Oh. Rose. Him and Rose.

But Owen had been sleeping with that woman... Faye Martin. (Why did he have such trouble remembering her name? He never forgot names!) Had that been sanctioned, somehow? Was this some kind of double-standard, or a matter of de facto versus de jure? What about him and Rose? He wasn't letting any rules get between them. No chance.

"It's a stupid rule!" he proclaimed.

"That's what you said."


He breathed a sigh of relief as Toshiko disappeared into her bedroom. Martha was in there. Good. So she was fine. Would be fine.

Unless...

He had left her and Lee in the midst of some rather aggressive Shadow Men. There hadn't been a way to lend them a hand at the time, as he his had been rather full. But there had to be a way to disable the Shadow Men without killing them all. Enough people were going to have been dying.

Toshiko came out of her room after only a couple of minutes. She was wearing blue jeans and a fluffy, cowl-necked jumper. It was sage green and loose enough that it clung to her in fascinating ways when she bent over to pick up her bag, or...

Oh, give it a rest, Spaceman! You're worse than a bleeding teenager.

He looked studiously at the TARDIS coral. She was twenty percent larger than she had been when he had gone to get Jack's friends and the Torchwood crew. He did some quick calculations and reached a new, slightly less depressing number than before.

Toshiko peered curiously at the coral. "Have you worked out how to—?" She clapped a hand over her mouth. "Oh! I shouldn't say. You've come from my past. I could create a paradox." Her eyes widened. "I shouldn't have said anything about Martha and me, either, should I?"

"I'm only here because I left myself a note," he admitted. "Not that I wouldn't have thought of it. You're the best person for the job, after all. I just might not have thought of it in time."

He checked the Brindisi effusion in its bag. Still glowing along with his own heart beat. Donna found that worrying for some reason.

The corridors on Genesis were more than just cold. They were also nearly airless. It was lucky that he'd brought them right to the engine room, so he was able to reactivate the environmental controls, though that was a bit of a trick in zero-gravity.

Toshiko got to work before he could even tell her what he wanted to do. She lay on her back
underneath the central emitter and pointed her pen torch at a gap in the machinery.

"Is that where it goes?"

He got on the floor and lay beside her so that he could look up into the emitter manifold. It was a wonder of machinery, it really was. They were about three hundred years ahead of where they should have been, but that was beside the point, really. Time Agency might well have snatched tech from all over history. (Didn't they realise that there were consequences for those sorts of actions? What a mess to have to clean up.) "Which bit?"

"That. It's the same size as the effusion device."

The gap she had found was in the middle of a nest of bio-metric wiring. There was a cradle made of the same alloy that encapsulated the top and bottom of the effusion device. "That'd be it, then."

"It's amazing," she breathed. He turned his head and looked at her. Her eyes were sparkling with excitement. "That little thing... So much life, so much death. More power than a hydrogen bomb in a glass jar the size of a wine bottle."

The Doctor's free hand found the black bag at his side. "Amazing," he agreed. After a moment (during which he was definitely not thinking about certain people's choice of shampoo) he rolled up and to his feet. "All right, so you get to work on the repairs. I've got to get us a bit more intel." He pulled out his sonic and looked at it a moment before deciding. He held it out to Toshiko.

She shook her head and opened up her laptop case. "No thanks. Got my own." His jaw dropped. Toshiko held up a small, thin silver thing, like a pen, with a red lens on the end.

"Where did you get that?" he cried. Oh, now that just wasn't fighting fair.

*Down, boy.*

"I probably shouldn't say," she replied. She held up the sonic pen and it made a cheerful whir. "Don't worry, though. I promised you I wouldn't patent it."

He laughed. "Toshiko Sato, you're brilliant!"

She smiled back at him. "So you're off to the Library then, right?"

He paused. "Library?"

"To research the Shadow Men?"

He scratched his head. "How much did I tell you, exactly?"

"You're just supposed to go," she said. "You're wasting time."

"Right!" He held up the TARDIS. "All right, sweetheart, how do you feel about a quick one?"

Tosh's eyes went wide. "What?"

He looked up and frowned. "What?"

She blushed. "Never mind. You should go."

He swallowed as he realised what he'd said. He was very grateful to the vortex for swallowing him up right then. A nice trick for ending awkward moments, that.
Donna held onto her terminal for dear life as the ship rocked to one side. You'd think that an impact in space wouldn't be so jarring, what with the fact that there was gravity in here, but not out there, and out there was where all the shooting was happening. Still, every time the Genesis was hit, Donna had to struggle to stay in her chair.

Captain Jack was shouting from the centre of the bridge. "Rose! Where are those shields?"

"Ten more seconds!" Rose cried. There was another impact and Rose nearly lost her seating as well. "Still re-calibrating!"

"Jack, three of them just broke off. The rest of them are still headed for the planet." Fish looked over his shoulder. "What do we do?"

An alarm sounded on Donna's terminal. She pressed the blinking light and relayed the message. "Message from Father Nicodemus." They'd save a lot of time, she thought, if they hadn't had such ridiculous names. "Shadow Men have breached their defences."

"What else?" demanded the captain.

Donna swallowed and shook her head. "That's all it says!" Captain Jack swore.

"Shields are back!" Rose said.

Jack let out a whoop. "I'm going to kiss that goofy bastard," he cried. "Peter, you're a wizard!"

Donna looked at the big display at the front of the room. Three of the ships were closing in on them. Three against one was better than ten against one.

There was another message on her terminal, this one was live audio. "Captain, Ianto's calling!"

"Put him on."

Donna winced as her earpiece squealed and Ianto's voice came over the loudspeaker. "We've got a fire down here!"

"Where?" Jack demanded.

"Engineering," Rose said, checking the computer. "Fire's in the lower level. The suppression systems aren't working."

"Io, get down there, see what you can do, get them out of there. Donna, get me Lola!"

Donna grimaced at her terminal. Jack had injected her with a translator chip—she had a welt on her neck to show for it. This meant that she could read the strange lettering on the display—it looked wrong, but at the same time it made sense, and it was giving her a headache. Everyone had their own earpiece, and she could access them all from her station. She pressed the control for Lola Enkidu's line.

"Lola, Jack calling."

Donna heard a grunt over the speaker. "Sort of busy!"

"Got her," Donna said.
"Lola, I need those cannons you guys promised me."

"Yeah, well—" There was a shudder on the line and Donna had to grab her terminal again as the ship shook.

"Shields are losing power," Rose informed them.

"There!" Lola cried. "Gregor, get me that—" There was another jolt, and Lola's line cut out altogether.

"We've got cannons!" Rose jumped from her seat and stood over Fish's shoulders. "Ready to fire!"

"Where's that medic?" Jack demanded. "Donna, get him down to deck 2."

Donna pressed Owen's comm. "Owen, deck 2. Check on—"

"Can't!" Owen grunted. "I'm in engineering." Donna winced at the cries and moans of pain in the background. Was it Ianto? "Keep the pressure on! We're gonna loose him!"

Donna swallowed. "Captain, Owen's—"

Something exploded. Donna covered her head and shrieked as hot air and sparks shot at her face. Her earpiece was dead. When she got to her feet again, she saw that her whole panel had blown.

"Communications is gone," she said, though she wasn't sure anyone heard her. Her hair was singed—she could smell it. Please God, let her still have eyebrows.

"Jack!" Rose was back in her chair now. "We've got a hull breach in engineering! We can't take another hit like that!"

"We still got cannons?"

"Yes, sir!" Lalit replied.

"Roast 'em!"

The display showed a shower of red light coming from them and hitting the leftmost ship. Donna found an empty terminal. She tried to bring up the communications array again, but the ship's system wasn't the most self-evident thing she'd ever worked with.

She had some small success, though. She could see which lines were active now: Ianto, Rose, Jack, Samsa, Fish, Lalit, Owen. Staker's signal was gone, so was Lola's. Could she see some sort of life-sign read out? This was the future, wasn't it? There had to be a way to see who was still alive.

When she found it, she ought to have been relieved. But no such luck. Deck 2 had two little golden symbols moving around inside it—Lola and Gregor—and the bridge showed her, Jack, Rose, Lalit, and Fish. Engineering (decks 5 and 6) only had two lights, not three, and one that was moving towards it. That was probably Io.

There was a hull breach in engineering. She could see it—the emergency systems had put up a shield, but the shields were losing power again, and soon those people down there were going to get sucked out into space.

Donna got out of her chair and she ran. No one called out after her, so she kept going. It was stupid, because what if they needed her up there, but someone was dead and she had to know who. The rest of them were going to die. Maybe it wasn't too late. Maybe she could help.
The lifts only took her as far as deck 3: the rest were all out of order. She was going to have to climb down a ladder to traverse the remaining decks. The life-signs in engineering were on deck 6. All she had to do was get to them. She’d figure out the rest when she got there.

Her hands were sweaty and spots on her palms were burned raw because her terminal had shot sparks at her, but she managed to hold onto the rungs. She tried not to think of how much she hated ladders, especially ones like this. It was straight up and down inside a metal tube, and there was hardly any air and the walls felt like they were going to close in on her. She wasn’t allowed to remember the screams and the stomping feet of the Cybermen, even if there was steam and gas wailing out of pipes as she ran down the corridor, even if the klaxon sounded like saw blades screeching.

The doors of engineering were closed. There was a panel on the wall, and she pressed it again and again, finally resorting to closed-fist pounding. "Open! Come on, you bloody useless thing!"

As if (finally) hearing her, the doors slowly moved apart. Donna found herself face to face with Ianto—alive, but red-faced and sooty, and still bruised from the fight. There was blood on his usually immaculate shirtsleeves.

"Shields," she said, unable to think well enough to form anything like a sentence. "Gonna go." Ianto turned and ran back in. Donna followed him. She could see scorched terminals and what looked like a discarded fire extinguisher.

"We've got to get out!" Ianto shouted.

Peter Staker was burnt and bloody and dead. His entire chest was metal. Not like armour, but his actual chest. Owen was bent over his knee, one arm over his face.

"He's a cyber?" Donna said, staring at Staker and feeling a dazed.

Io was holding the dead cyber's hand. She seemed to be in shock. "Ruffles," she said, blinking slowly behind her enormous glasses. "There were so many ruffles..."

"Owen!" Ianto grabbed the doctor by one arm. "We've got to go!"

There was a hole in the wall only a few metres away from them. Donna could see it—it was only size of a cricket ball. But once the shields went, it would grow, maybe even tear away the whole wall. Half the ship. The air in here would suddenly be out there and it would kill them all.

Ianto seemed to have given up on moving Owen and gone to pull Io to her feet. She looked at him as if she'd never used her eyes before. "I hated that dress." Ianto grimaced, lifted her to her feet and dragged her from the room.

Donna knelt by Owen, put one hand on his arm, another on the back of his neck, as if skin contact closer to his brain might bring him forth. "I'm sorry," she said. "But we have to run now."

Owen lifted his head and looked at her, eyes red-rimmed and cheeks soaked. "I keep losing."

She gripped his hand. "Come on, you lump," she said, looking him in the eye. "I haven't got time for your self-pity right now."

The lights in the room dimmed and Donna could hear the creaking sound of metal under stress. She yanked Owen to his feet. "C'mon!"

They ran. Ianto was already closing the doors, but there was just enough room to slip through. Once
on the other side, Donna tried to help push the doors closed. Io was standing uselessly to one side, but Owen seemed to have snapped out of it at least.

Suddenly, the shields or force fields, or whatever had been holding things together, were gone. Donna screamed as the air was sucked past them through the six centimetre gap between the doors. They kept pushing but they weren't going to be able to do it, and they were going to die here, three thousand years and God knew how many light years from home.

There was a metallic clank and an ear-splitting hiss as the edges of the doors met. Donna slid to the ground, gasping for breath. How much of the air had they lost? Her hair was all over the place, mostly in front of her face. She tried to move it, but she was cold, and her fingers were tingling and painful, and so was her chest.

Someone grasped her hand and pulled and they were running, but how were they still running when there wasn't enough air? She saw the black silk of the back of Ianto's waistcoat in front of her, saw Io's jacket and Owen's white lab coat. She was trailing behind. Her legs felt like jelly. Whoever it was that was holding her hand kept a firm grip.

A door opened in front of them and Donna felt a warm wind on her face. Breathing was a little easier, once they were on the other side of the door, but her legs were still half-useless.

"Now what?" Owen gasped as he collapsed onto a bench.

"Back to the bridge," Ianto said.

"What good'll that do?"

"That's where the captain is. We're no use in this..."

Donna pushed her fringe out of her eyes and looked around. "Mess hall?" she ventured. There were a few trays on the tables, some of them full of the desiccated remains of what might have once been beans on toast.

"I am starving," Owen said.

Ianto gave him a hostile look, so Donna didn't voice her agreement.

"Communications are down," she said. "Ianto's right. We go back to the bridge. Jack can tell us—"

The ship rocked and they stumbled. Donna fell into Owen. His grip was hard and claw-like on the softer bits of her upper arms, but he did keep her from falling on her face.

"There's not enough air in the corridor," Owen said. He stood and helped her upright. "How do we get back up there?"

"There's an emergency hatch," Io said. She went over to the wall. "There's always an emergency hatch."

Donna started to follow her, but Owen hadn't let her go yet. "Come on," she said. "We need to help."

He was giving her the strangest look. She stared back at him. His eyes were level with her eyebrows, which meant that she was looking at his soot and tear-smudged cheeks. He wasn't handsome, she thought, and wondered why such a thing was even entering her mind at a time like this, but then suddenly that thin, scowling mouth was on hers and she was being kissed by Owen Harper. But she
was most definitely *not* kissing him back.

"What are you doing?" she demanded when it ended. She was breathless because she was scared and because the air was too thin. That was the only reason.

Owen looked slightly startled. "We're going to die anyway."

Donna swallowed and hoped that she wasn't as flushed as she felt. "Your face is gonna be so red if we survive."
"There are about forty of them still in the camp," she said, checking the wrist strap's computer. "Kill them, but capture the C.O.; we're going to need someone to execute."

The Shadow Commander listened, but said nothing. They never spoke. Some people said that the Sanctuary scientists removed their vocal chords, or else engineered them away. It was more likely that they were mute by some code or vow. Shadow Men were disciplined, strong, able to withstand extremes in temperature and live without food or water for extended periods of time. She imagined that when they were decanted, "The Perfect Soldier" was probably imprinted on the side of the cloning chamber.

A grey face looked at her from a few metres in front of them. It tilted its head to one side, slowly, as its deeply sunken eyes stared into hers.

She stared back, turned away, and then she forgot.

Someone was coming. Her proximity alarm had gone off; she recognised the signal. It was her own strap—the one that had been tailor made for her when she had joined the Time Agency. She looked up and saw a tall man in a grey 21st century suit appear in a flash of gold light. It was the man who called himself 'The Doctor'.

She'd done her research after she and her partner had been rescued by the Shadow sent to answer their distress signal. There were very few to no records on any such man, and what was there was vague.

She'd seen that before, of course. It was obvious that he was a man in flux. Not like those other people in Torchwood—they had definite beginnings, slightly-less-definite endings. He didn't belong.

What was more troubling than that was the nagging voice in the back of her head that kept saying that he was familiar. And yet she knew that she had never seen him before in her life, not until he'd come charging towards her on that train platform and called her by that name.

"You look like you've been busy," she said, looking at the wounded left shoulder (her doing, she remembered that clearly), the black satchel slung across his chest, and the white sphere he held casually against his hip as he walked as if he were on his way to a football match. The strap on her wrist glittered with activity as it gathered data.

"Just a bit," he replied.

She nodded at the Shadow Commander. "You go on ahead."

The Commander led his troops into the blackness the trees created. The Doctor watched them go as if they were a curiosity.

"This has been a very interesting day," she said.

He turned back. "It certainly has."

"I hope you've been enjoying yourself, Doctor."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Here and there. You know that you could end all of this right now, don't you?"
That was an... interesting... thought. He over-estimated her power. "I've got orders," she said, smiling a little wider, amused by the intensity of his dark-eyed stare. "But I'd do it anyway," she said.

"I'm sorry that Jack killed your friend," he said. "I really am. But that doesn't mean that all these people deserve to die."

Her smile faded. "What makes them special?" she asked. "The O'an Paldra have been withering in space for twenty years. There are one-point-three billion of them. Do these people mean more because they're human?"

"No one should be forced to give up their life for another person," he snapped. "Not against their will."

"If some traitor in the Communications Corps hadn't warned them, they could have had a quick, painless death." She smirked. "Well, quick, anyway."

"River," he said, pleading. "Help me. Together, we can save all of these people. The humans, the O'an Paldra. Everyone."

Her anger rose up so quickly that she had no chance to contain it. "Stop calling me that!" she cried. "That is not my name." She couldn't remember why, but just hearing the name grated on her like nails on a blackboard.

The Doctor ignored her outburst. "We can do it; you and me. What d'you say?"

"How do you propose to do that?" she demanded. The Sanctum had run all the projections, they had looked at the timelines. There was no other planet in five galaxies potentially suitable to the O'an Paldra's needs.

"There's got to be somewhere else," the Doctor said, with more confidence than he deserved. "Just take your ships and your troops and leave these people alone."

She narrowed her eyes. "Why?"

Her new strap beeped. It had finished its analysis. She glanced down. It told her a couple of things. One—the white sphere he was holding was soaking in artron energy, and it was organic. More than that, the computer could not say, because it had never encountered such a thing before.

Two—the Doctor had the Brindisi effusion device in his bag. The fool had brought it right to her.

Her mission came to the foreground, and it pushed her curiosity about the sphere aside. She pulled her gun from its holster in one smooth motion and pointed it at the Doctor's heart.

"That was really stupid," she said.

He looked less afraid of her than he ought—it reminded her of Boeshane, that smug bastard. Years she'd been tailing him, trying to retrieve what he'd taken and bring him back to justice... The deserter, the traitor, the blasphemer and heretic... He was never scared enough, either. Always acted like there was something more that he knew, going on about how she had rules, lines she wouldn't cross. Well, one by one, she'd crossed them—but they'd never really been there.

"Which thing?" the Doctor asked. He wasn't even looking at her weapon—he dared to look her in the eyes.

She smiled. "Take off the bag, put it on the ground. The ball, too."
"No."

She aimed just to the right of his good shoulder and fired. His jacket smoked. He put up his hand. "All right! Just... put your gun down, and I'll put down the bag."

She considered this. The strap said that he was unarmed—another stupid move on his part. She held up her gun and slowly, they crouched, her setting the blaster on the forest floor as he took off the bag and gently laid it down at his feet.

"The ball, too," she said, holding the gun against the ground. One twitch of her wrist and she could kill him.

"No."

Another mistake. But he wasn't moving. It was organic—was it some kind of life form? Why was he protecting it?

Her goal lay at his feet—the thing that Tas had died for. Maybe she'd never catch Boeshane, but she could take the effusion device back to the *Genesis* and end this. They'd have nothing to fight for, no lost cause to rally to, if she just did the job that Boeshane had failed to do.

She left the gun on the ground when she stood. Let the Doctor have his lattice-work bauble.

He stood before her, determined and so damn sure of himself, her wrist strap on his arm, and again, she got that feeling of familiarity. Almost as if she'd stood here before, among these trees. But it wasn't quite right. The man in his wrinkled black clothes with his wrinkled grey skin came out of the trees and watched her, urging her forward. She looked at the Doctor.

*Kill him*, said the grey man's voice in her mind. *Kill him now.*

She attacked, crossing the few metres between them and striking him hard enough to send him to the ground. She stood over him and shot a switch blade from a strap on her other wrist and into her waiting hand.

Her arm came down, only to be blocked. The Doctor looked up at her with rage in his eyes. A fire lit in her belly. So there was some fight in him, after all.

He pushed her away with one foot and while she regained her balance, he rolled to his feet.

"I should have killed you in London," she said.

"You tried," he said. "You missed."

She took her knife off its strap. "Boeshane's friends aren't here to save you this time." She attacked, but he blocked once and again, using moves she'd never seen. He seemed as surprised as she was. One move and he had her by the wrist, and with one fast and painful twist of his hand, he made her drop her knife.

"What d'you know," he said, disgustingly pleased with himself. "Looks like I remember some of that Aikido after all!"

She curved her leg around his and laid him flat on his back. That wiped the smile off his face.

Somehow, despite his apparent disbelief, he was an almost competent opponent. His height, comparative strength, and long reach worked towards making up for the fact that she was the better
fighter. Her real problem was his movements were erratic, almost as if he were combining a dozen different fighting styles. Every time she adapted, tried another tactic, he would change again. But he was always on the defensive, never doing anything to hurt her outright. It was incredibly frustrating. He wouldn't even punch her. She even wondered if this was out-dated chivalry on his part, or worse, a twisted sort of pacifism.

And the worst part was that, during all of this, he somehow managed to never put down the ball.

Her blows added punctuation to his speech. "We. Don't! Have— Really! River!"

She broke away from him when he dodged a roundhouse kick. Both of them stood there, trying to catch their breath. She'd had sparring matches like this back in her training days. They'd moved from the centre of the clearing where the Brindisi effusion device was waiting. She ought to cut her losses and go.

Her strap beeped again—she checked it. Bad news. The Genesis was falling out of orbit. The Archangel ships had been disabled.

The Doctor's strap had given him an alert as well. From the look on his face, he had the same information she did.

"Happy?" she spat. "No more Former ship means no more terra-forming."

He swallowed. For the first time, he looked well and truly afraid. Then she realised why: there was a crew up there. There had to be, otherwise how could the Archangels have been stopped? It should have been laughable, a Former up against Angels. Formers barely had any weapons to speak of. All their power was geared towards the focusing and emitter arrays.

"Give it time, you'll just send another one," he said, still staring at the strap. Then he started punching in co-ordinates.

She ran for it. Before he realised what she was doing, she was already half-way back to the effusion device.

"River, no!"

She snatched it up and held the bag up by the straps.

The Doctor stopped a few paces away from her. "River, give it back to me."

"This device is the property of the Sanctuary Government of Earth and Her Colonies," she said.

"No," he said, like she was stupid or hard of hearing. "It's the property of the Nop Conglomerate. Your government stole it. Or, to be more specific, you did."

She stared at him. "What are you talking about? It was discovered by Abbot Brindisi."

"No," he said again. "It wasn't. It was stolen from a Nop science ship in the year 108,744. I double-checked. Brindisi just had an gigantic ego. Which I already knew."

"What do you mean 'you double-checked'?"

He held up his left hand. "I've got a vortex manipulator."

"My vortex manipulator," she snapped.
The Doctor's friendly veneer fell away. "You can't take that with you to the Nop ship—we'll probably end up with a predestination paradox, and things are complicated enough as it is. Give me the device."

Breathless with anger she said, "Never."

He punched something into the strap. "I'll be right back. I'll give you a few seconds to think it over."

"You're running away?" she cried. "You coward!"

He smiled ruefully. "Every time." Then he left.

She let out a groan. "I hate him!" she said to the trees.

"I know," said the Doctor.

She spun around and her mouth fell open. It was the Doctor again, but this time he was approaching on foot. He also had company.

"Okay," he said, with a wry smile. "So, where were we?"

§

The battle wasn't going so well. Rose was vaguely aware of explosions alongside the jarring movements of the ship and the siren screaming and the hiss of gasses bursting from pipes overhead and panels falling from the ceiling onto them. She heard someone cry out in pain—Lalit, she thought—but she was too caught up in trying to get the fire suppression systems to respond to any of her commands and checking the lower decks for life-signs. Donna had disappeared and she didn't know if any of the others were okay.

Jack was still shouting out orders, even when the smoke and the noise got to be too much. And then Rose was thrown from her chair and she hit her head and everything was really blurry after that.

She heard the Doctor's voice and thought she was going crazy. The last time she'd seen him, he'd been going down to engineering with Staker, but then he'd left them all to fight without him.

"Jack? Jack!"

She heard Jack groan. "Doctor?"

"Are you hurt? Where's Rose?"

She tried to talk, but her tongue was too thick. Then he was there—she could smell sweat and what was left of his aftershave. He'd used to smell faintly of honey. She missed that smell.

"Rose! C'mon, Rose, wake up!"

She squeezed her eyes shut and managed a groan. She could almost hear the sonic screwdriver, but he didn't bother with that for long. Had he even had a chance to program in any bioscan things yet? She'd seen him working on it once since that one night several days ago. His hand brushed her cheek and her forehead.

"Anything broken?" he asked.

She moved cautiously and raised her head from the floor. "No... I don't think so..." She opened her eyes properly. The Doctor looked terrified for a moment, but he relaxed as she spoke. "No, I'm all
right." She pushed her way painfully onto all fours and then he helped her to her feet.

"Doctor, those ships," Jack began. "We couldn't hold them."

"Is the emitter still online?" the Doctor asked. His arm went under hers and he held her up until she found her balance. He hesitated a moment, then dropped a kiss on the top of her head before going to check on Fish a few feet away.

One touch and Fish sat up like he'd been struck by lightning. "Wasn't me!"


"Where are Ianto and Donna?"

Rose tried to focus her eyes and for a moment it seemed to work. "Ianto was in engineering..." She trailed off. "Oh God. Engineering!" She stumbled to the nearest console. The ship's status screen was still up. "Fuck! The last of the shields went. Decks 4, 5, and 6..."

"What about Donna? Where's Lalit? The others?"

Rose wrestled the computer into showing the life signs again. "They're on deck 1—"

"This is deck 1," Jack said.

There was a scrape and groan of metal, and then, when the noise didn't seem to be doing anything useful, a familiar polite knock.

The Doctor went and soniced the door mechanisms and they slid open. Ianto emerged first, followed by Lola, Io, Owen, Donna, and, lastly, Samsa. All of them looked like hell. The Doctor hugged Donna quickly, then Ianto. He even hugged Owen.

"Hey, guys..." Fish's tone was heavy. "I hate to bring it up, but the ships... they're going to be in firing range of the planet in less than five seconds."

Rose looked at the holoscreen, but seeing everyone made another thought click its fingers for her attention.

"Lalit!"

Her limbs didn't want to co-operate, but she dragged herself over to the tactical station. Lalit was on his back, eyes open, a nasty gash along the side of his head. Rose gulped back a cry.

Owen came over first. He checked Lalit's neck for a pulse, but she already knew he wouldn't find one. She moved away.

The Doctor met her eyes. She shook her head. He set his jaw and soldiered forth, like he always did. "Jack, get me control of the emitter."

"What good will that do?" Jack snapped. "We've lost!" But he was already trying.

Donna tore her eyes away from where Owen was fighting a futile battle and edged closer to the coral thing that the Doctor had set on the chair. "It's getting huge!" she observed, picking it up and turning it in her hands. It was lit up and pulsing. "Lighter than it looks, though."

"Oi! Don't touch that!" the Doctor shouted over his shoulder. "She's delicate!"
"What is it?" Rose asked. Donna put the coral back down and the pulse changed rhythm.

The Doctor hit one last button and glanced up at her. "It's a temporally sensitive eleven dimensional organism that can travel through the time vortex. Just a little one."

Rose picked it up. It was lightweight, but warm, and the branches had grown out all around into an interlocking sphere. The throb of light felt like an excited heartbeat. Suddenly, she felt a wave of emotion and heat passing right through her chest and all the way down to her toenails. Her eyes filled with tears and she gasped.

"Ha hah!" the Doctor crowed. "Take that! I knew that would work."

She blinked furiously and looked at the holo-screen. Bright lightning-like energy was coming from the Genesis. They all watched as it engulfed the ships that were shooting at the planet.

"What was that?" Donna breathed.

"Freeze ray." The Doctor grinned. "Wellll... no. Super-fancy future version of an EMP. Disabled all their systems." He glanced at Rose. "Getting acquainted?"

Rose stared at him. Her mouth was dry. "It's a..."

He gave her one of those intense, raised-eyebrow expressions with just a hint of a smile. It was one of the looks that made her stomach do flips. Then it was gone again and he waved his hand in the air. "Okay, everybody: hands on!"

"Are we just leaving him?" Ianto asked. Rose didn't have to ask who he meant. Owen wasn't working anymore. God, how did he take it? He was trained, he was a doctor, but still...

The Doctor's smile faded. "We'll come back for him if we can," he promised. "C'mon, Ianto."

"Where's Peter?" Jack demanded.

"Couldn't save him," Owen said bitterly. He stopped arm's length from the coral in Rose's hands and they shared a glance.

Jack's face went slack for a moment. All his not-caring was an act. Just like the Proper Jack.

"I'm sorry, Jack," the Doctor said, sympathetic, but urgent. "But we haven't got much time. The ship's orbit is destabilising."

Everyone huddled around Rose and the Doctor and the football-sized coral and put a hand on it.

"Nobody move..." A look of concentration settled on the Doctor's face. Rose could feel her hands start to tingle.

"Can you really take all of us?" Io wondered. "Because—" Donna hushed her.

Rose swallowed as the heat filling her stomach spread all over again. It was like when she'd looked into the heart of the TARDIS (except she could breathe—well, she was panting). How had the Doctor done this? How could this little thing be a TARDIS? She'd known that the (original) TARDIS had been alive, certainly after that time, but she had also been a machine. This didn't have any metal in it at all.

A shell of golden energy enveloped all of them. Rose thought her heart was going to give out. She was sweating and every inch of her skin felt like it was coursing with electricity. It was almost erotic.
She could feel everyone's hearts beating, their breath, and she could was sure that she could see time around them. This was the Bad Wolf—or something very like it.

They left the ship together—Rose felt the vortex around them and it was vast and so different and yet so familiar—and arrived in the forest. It was night and there were a few campfires ringed by battered soldiers.

The moment that they finished re-materialising, Rose's legs turned to jelly and she found herself on her hands and knees.

"Rose!" The Doctor's voice was hoarse. He grabbed hold of her arm. Donna scrambled to keep the coral from falling and helped her into a sitting position, but Owen elbowed the Doctor back when he tried to kneel next to her. He shone a light in her eyes.

"What the hell happened to you?" Owen muttered, mostly to himself.

Rose shook her head. "'M all right..."

"And I'm a champion yodeller," he snarked. "Stay down, Tyler. I'm sick of losing patients."

"It's not that bad..."

Owen took her pulse. "Tachycardia, cold sweat... How many fingers am I holding up?"

Rose glared at his hand, and held up two. "How many's this?" she asked innocently.

"Sense of humour still works," Donna said with a snort.

"Didn't answer my question, though," Owen said wryly.

"Is she—?" the Doctor blurted. He was holding the little TARDIS to his chest with one arm; his other hand was on his head in a helpless gesture.

"I've got her," Owen said steadily. "You've still got a war to fight, haven't you?"

Rose could hear shouting coming from nearby. She raised her head as best she could—it felt like it was full of wet sand. Her whole body felt heavy and useless and so very small.

Donna stroked her hair. "Easy, Rose. Just hold still a minute."

Jack waved an arm over his head. "Over here!"

A tall bloke with black hair that she reckoned she ought to know was running full-tilt toward them, closely followed by Martha Jones and a few others in military jackets. The black-haired man practically ran into Jack and hugged him. Then he pulled away and, with what looked like loving exasperation, he punched Jack on the arm.

"Ow!" Jack complained as his other friends mobbed the tall one, hugging and clapping him on the back and fist-bumping him. Rose sniggered. What if the fist bump had replaced the handshake in the future? That would have been so mad.

Donna squeezed her shoulder. "Okay?"

"Help me up."

"I think you should stay right here for a couple of minutes," Owen said.
"I'm fine!" Rose complained. She pulled his hand from her neck impatiently. "Owen. Let me up."

Owen rolled his eyes. "Slowly. Noble, don't let her fall over."

"What, am I your nurse now?" Donna scoffed, but she kept an arm around Rose's shoulders while she got to her feet. Rose did her best not to lean on the taller woman, but Donna was a safe, solid fact in a universe of fuzzy, wobbly gelatine.

She looked over at Jack, who was receiving a salute from a young man in a camouflage jacket. He was wounded: he had a wide bandage wrapped around his head, covering his right eye, and he moved haltingly. "Father Alexander." How many different names did Jack have?

"Brother Nicodemus," Jack replied, returning the salute.

"Father Nicodemus, actually."

"You're joking."

Nicodemus jerked his head at the other men. "Field promotion."

Jack grinned before grabbing the Bishop and embracing him like a long-lost brother. Not an old boyfriend, then. The black-haired bloke might be. Jack always liked the pretty boys as much as he liked the pretty girls. And pretty everyone-elses.

Martha came over and gave Rose a relieved smile. "I wasn't sure if he'd found you," she said. "Donna, Owen... Ianto?" Her dark eyes went wide. "Did he bring all three of you?" She turned and gave the Doctor an exasperated look. "Are you daft?"

"And Lalit," Ianto said quietly.

Rose closed her eyes and tried not to think about it. Not yet. But two deaths in two weeks... That was bad, even for Torchwood...

Don't think about it.

"How many people do you have left?" the Doctor asked Nicodemus, leaving Martha to look shaken and dismayed as she gleaned Ianto's meaning from the expressions on Donna and Owen's faces. He still did that; pressing past people's feelings, trying to get the job done, never taking a second to mourn or grieve.

God, was that what she was doing? Lalit had been her colleague—not for long, only a little more than a month, really. But she'd liked him, and now he was gone. And they'd left him on that ship, alone, and he wouldn't have even been there if she hadn't let Jack grab her like that.

Arnold Fish slung his gun from his back. What was he doing, still carrying that monstrosity, anyway? "Did you leave any bad guys for us?"

Nicodemus shook his head. "The Shadow Men are good as gone. The Doctor's grenades took them out of commission. We just left them sleeping where they were. There's forty-three of us left." He rubbed his chin. "We got reports of more vortex activity nearby. We thought you would be them. How the hell did you do that thing with the globe, anyway?"

The Doctor shrugged. "Just a minor displacement. Martha, how long since you saw me last?"

Martha seemed puzzled by the question. "I dunno... eight, ten minutes?"
"Perfect. Any sign of River?"

"Who's River?" Nicodemus demanded.

"Time Agent. Curly blonde hair, tight black clothes, short temper, distracting..." The Doctor waved a vague hand over his chest, and cleared his throat. His cheeks were turning pink. Rose raised an eyebrow and sniggered again. Enthusiasm for flesh, indeed. She'd be jealous if it weren't so funny. God, why was it funny? Maybe Owen was right about concussion. She should be annoyed, not amused.

"She's one of the ones who's been chasing me for the last eight years," Jack added.

"Eight years?" Nicodemus looked impressed. "Remind me not to complain about a year of shitting in the woods."

"How do you know she's here, Doctor?" Donna asked.

"Already saw her." The Doctor held up the coral. "I've been rather busy."

Rose frowned. "But... Doctor..." He glanced at her. "What about timelines?"

He bobbed his head and made a face. "I know. Normally I'd say, 'don't cross the streams', but they did start it. Besides, I had to even the score somehow." He looked at his wrist strap. "She's half a kilometre west of here now."

"How can you be sure it's her?" Jack asked.

"This is her wrist strap; it's attuned to her DNA. Wellll, it _was_ hers. I'm thinking of keeping it."

"Now who's a thief?" Jack joked.

The Doctor waggled his eyebrows and grinned. "All right then! I'm going to finish a talk I was having with Miss Song. You lot stay here. I should be able to resolve this pretty quickly, now that I've got all her boys off the board."

"Oh no!" Jack cried. "You're not leaving me behind. That woman's been a pain in my ass for almost a decade! You just met her. If anyone gets to resolve her, it's me."

The Doctor glowered at him. "You're not killing her, Jack!"

"You're not my boss," Jack retorted.

"No, but I'm his," Martha said firmly. "And I say that we _try_ talking first, at least."

"Boss?" Rose wondered. The Doctor's eyes flicked over at her, then Martha. "What does she mean, 'boss'?"

"I'm coming with you," Ianto said. "You might need the backup."

"I think it's pretty reasonable to say that we're all going," Fish said.

Jack pointed at him. "No, you're not. I need you guys to stay with the men." He shook his head at the black-haired bloke when he opened his mouth. "You too, Lee. Don't argue with me." He flashed them one of his charming smiles. "Have I ever steered you wrong?"

"Singapore, 1932," Gregor Samsa said, in a voice deep and mysterious as a cave, complete with all
the stalagmites and stalactites. And maybe a few bats.

The captain gave him a wry look. "Other than that."


"You're not coming," Jack told the Bishop. "You're wounded."

"Well, then he's definitely not going." He nodded at Ianto. "You look like a morsap's chew toy. I'm in much better shape. I'm going with you."

Donna shifted on her feet. "What are we supposed to do while we wait? Play snooker?"

"Strip snooker?" Owen suggested.

Jack clicked his tongue. "See, now you're going to make me wish I was staying behind. Come on, Doctor." He held out a hand to Lee, who sighed and handed him a gun.

"I'm coming, too," Rose began.

"Oh no, you're not!" Donna cried. "You're worse than him! We're going to sit you down on a log by the campfire and get you a blanket. You look awful."

Fish and the rest of Jack's friends started walking with one of Nicodemus' men back to the fires. Lee looked back once, but he kept walking.

Martha nodded at Owen. "You and Donna take care of Rose. Nic, with me. I'll go with the Doctor. Ianto, stay here."

"No," Rose began. "No, I'm coming with you!"

The Doctor came and put a hand on her cheek. "Not this time, Rose. You stay with Donna; she'll look after you for me." He stroked her hair and gave her a worried smile before kissing her once, stepping away and joining the band of those heading off for the good part. Donna's brow furrowed determinedly.

"Not again," Rose murmured. "You're not doing that to me again." She pulled away from Donna and caught up with the Doctor in a few half-stumbling strides. She grabbed him by the elbow, spun him around, pulled him by the front of his burnt and rumpled jacket, and kissed him as hard as she could. This time he actually responded; none of that chaste-peck-to-the-top-of-her-head nonsense, like he was her dad or something. It was a proper I-might-not-get-another-chance snog and it left her breathless.

When they broke it off, Martha had her arms crossed. "All right now?" she asked pointedly.

"They keep doing that," Jack mused, shaking his head.

Nicodemus snorted and muttered, "Lucky them."

The Doctor tried to wipe the gob-smacked look off of his face as quickly as he could. "Yeah. Good. Off to... face... things." He started to go, then turned back and handed her the coral. He bent to whisper into her ear. "Take care of her."

Rose submitted to Donna's gentle direction then, but she kept looking over her shoulder, watching her friends and the man she loved disappear into the darkness.
In the back of his mind, he knew that the Doctor—the original—would have condemned what he was doing. Crossing his own timeline, leaving himself little messages on computers and with people, pausing in the battle to get information that he ought not to have. But he wasn't a Time Lord, not anymore. Those laws weren't his to uphold. Maybe they never had been. He'd been a bit of a rebel all his life, after all, and this human life: oh, it needed this wild impetuosity. His time sense was slipshod. (He blamed the human encumbrances.) The gravity of worlds simply felt like—nothing. Nothing compared to the blood in his veins, the need to win, to save Rose and these people. He wasn't a Time Lord anymore. The pull and the turn were faded facts in the back of his mind that he didn't have to think about.

What he needed to think about, what he needed to remember, was that he had people waiting for him, counting on him to save them. Rose and Donna and Ianto and Jack and Martha and Lee, and all those innocents in the valleys. They needed him to protect them, to help them, and he would be damned if he wouldn't do everything, anything, necessary to accomplish the task.

So when River Song was standing in front of him again, he reminded himself of all of this. She was on the wrong side. Maybe she could have been his friend, his companion, his... whatever. But that was in another world, and they weren't in that world. But this world, it was his now.

River Song was a Time Agent, and the Time Agents had started this. So she was going to either listen, or she was going to get out of his way.

"Hello, River," said Jack.

River's face contorted. "Boeshane," she said coldly.

"Yes, yes, we all know each other," the Doctor said. "Have you thought about what I said?"

Her expression gave away very little, except what she said, which was: "You're out of your mind."

Annoying. "You're hardly the first person to say so. Come on."

"What good will it do you if I steal this?" She pulled the effusion device from the bag.

Jack darted a glance at the Doctor and spoke through his teeth. "I thought Torchwood had it at their base?"

"I needed it. Not now, Jack."

"But you brought it back here?!

"The Genesis is gone," he said. "It'll be years before the Sanctum can build a new Former ship. Isn't that right?"

River shrugged and put the device back in the bag. "I have what I need."

"Why?" Martha asked. "Just tell us why you're doing all of this."

River looked her over. "You couldn't possibly understand."

"Try me."

That smug smile returned to River's face. She seemed much more confident facing five of them than she had against only him, back (what was for her) only seconds ago. He decided that it was a show,
"Because I had orders. It may not be how people do things where you come from, but in this society, we do our duty." She looked at Jack. "And there are consequences when we don't."

Martha shook her head. "But the orders are unethical. They don't make any sense. You talk about consequences for not following orders... What about consequences for mass murder? People will find out what happened here. And if trained, loyal soldiers of the Church won't stand for it, what makes you think that the people will?"

"Couldn't have said it better myself," the Doctor said, giving Martha a proud smile. Brilliant, in any universe.

River stared into space, thinking—hopefully reconsidering her position. He hoped that she wasn't too far gone. Then, like a switch had been flipped, she stood upright and pulled out her blaster.

Jack was a faster draw.

"Jack..." he warned.

"Stay out of this, Doctor." Jack stepped forward, getting in River's line of fire. She kept trying to aim at the Doctor; but why hadn't she just shot him? She kept looking out of the corner of her eye, almost as if...

*Something is wrong*, the Donna bits said.

He turned to look. There was a very tall, very thin alien standing amongst the trees. It wasn't a member of any race that he recognised, though its large, bulbous head and grey skin were reminiscent of humans' imaginings of Martians. It was looking right at him, silent and unmoving. Just staring.

He glanced at River, gauging her reaction to the alien, and then he forgot.

"It's you and me now," Jack said to her. "That's what you want, isn't it?" He disengaged the safety on his weapon. "Tell you what: you stop the attack, and I'll surrender."

"No!" Nicodemus stepped forward, but Martha's hand on his shoulder held him back. "Don't. She'll kill you."

"If that's what she wants," Jack said calmly. "What d'you say, Agent? You can arrest me. Then you'll have me, and the effusion device... You don't have to kill them. Just let them relocate the population. Let them all live."

"That's not what we've been fighting for," Nicodemus said. "These people's homes..."

"...Are less important than their lives!" Jack snarled. "Those are your orders, Brother Nicodemus! You get the colonists somewhere safe. Let the O'an Paldra have the planet. It's just rock."

River did not move. The Doctor tried to see the possibilities, to see which way this was going to go... but it was like a coin spinning in the air. Fifty-fifty chance. One way, River would relent. The other, she was shooting and Jack shot back and they all died.

*What does she keep looking at?* Donna wondered.

He followed River's gaze to the trees. There was a tall, thin man there—not a human. The face was
obscured in shadows.

"Who is that?" he wondered.

"Who's what?" Martha asked.

The Doctor blinked and looked at her. "Who's what?" he repeated.

"You asked, 'Who is that?'" she said, looking at him like he was mad. "Is there someone in the trees?" She touched the gun on her hip.

"Not that I've seen," he said, and gave her a pointed look.

Out of nowhere, River turned and let out a roar of anger and frustration. She fired into the trees to their right, letting loose into the darkness.

Martha drew her gun. "What the hell??"

"Enough!" River screamed. "I've had enough. Pushing, pushing, pushing! I won't do it anymore!"

Jack hesitated. He raised his chin and kept his weapon aimed firmly at the Time Agent. "What—" he began, when River pulled the effusion device's bag from her shoulder and dropped it unceremoniously to the ground. The Doctor winced. And then, to make matters worse, she aimed her blaster at it.

The proverbial coin wobbled in the air.

"Don't," the Doctor pleaded. He put up his hands and inched forward. "If you shoot it, the resulting explosion could take half the planet with it."

"Make it stop," she hissed. Her arm was shaking as she glared at the device. "Left, right, left, right! I can't."

"You don't have to," he said as calmly as he could manage with his heart pounding in his ears—adrenaline, noradrenaline, dopamine, and of course, testosterone again—too many chemicals! "Let me help you."

She looked at him, and it was like she was someone else. She had tears in her eyes. "Doctor?"

Nicodemus swore. "What, so we help her now?"

"Shut up," Jack hissed.

"No! My men have been here a year, defending this world from people like her." Jack grabbed the younger man by the collar and held him back.

"Doctor...?" Martha's voice was soft. "What's your recommendation?"

He looked back at River. She hadn't let go of the blaster, and she was still looking at him, frightened, like a child lost in the woods.

_We are in the woods_, Donna muttered.

Slowly, he reached out and took the weapon from River's hand. Thankfully, she let him. He handed it to Martha.
"Who are you?" River whispered. "Tell me, please."

The Doctor hesitated. He wasn't sure what to tell her, but he didn't want to lie.

Martha stuffed River's blaster into the back of her waistband. "Doctor, we should head back to camp."

"The camp." River blinked and looked at Martha, then back at the Doctor. "The Shadow Men. I sent them to the camp."

"What?"

"Half a dozen of them!" she cried. "You saw them yourself!"

His mouth fell open. "I what? When?" Then the fear struck him. "Rose..." He turned to Jack. "We've got to go. Now."

"I'll come with you," River said.

"No," Nicodemus said. "No fucking way!"

"They'll stop their attack if I order them to," she argued. "Otherwise they won't stop until every last person is dead."

The Doctor was already running back. How had he not known? They were probably already under attack. He had to get to them. River, Jack, Martha and Nicodemus were behind him. He didn't have any weapons, or a plan, or even any ideas, just one consuming thought, and it was to *run*. 
No one heard them coming, and suddenly, there they were. Half a dozen Shadow Men, shooting and killing. The band and Ianto joined the soldiers. Donna, Rose and Owen stayed in the tent. Donna clutched the weapon that she'd somehow kept in her coat all this time, afraid to put her finger around the trigger. She held it by the barrel and wondered what kind of battery life you could reasonably expect out of an energy weapon like this. Phasers had always seemed to have unlimited charge, unless the drama had demanded a sudden loss of power.

"Wha's going on?" Rose slurred, trying to sit up on her cot. The coral ball was tucked against her. She'd insisted on staying with it.

Donna sat on a crate and put her hand on the young woman's shoulder. "Lie back." She glanced at Owen. "What do we do?"

"Just stay behind me," he said.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "I thought you didn't know how to shoot?"

Exasperated, he said, "Look, I said I'd look after you, and I will."

"Owen." Rose had fallen back against her pillow. Her skin was too pale and clammy. "Don't do anything stupid."

"Yes, boss." He glanced up when they heard a scream from outside. This tent was the only real shelter they had. Donna wished that the soldiers had had something with solid walls instead.

She held the blaster awkwardly in her lap and waited for the noises outside to stop, or for some indication that the attackers had been defeated or driven off.

Even as frightened as she was, Donna wished she'd gone with the Doctor. He hadn't needed her, not with Martha with him. She knew that she was useless in a situation like this. But just the same... what if he couldn't trust Jack? He definitely couldn't trust River.

She was in no hurry to see the Time Agent again. With her luck, River might hold a grudge about that whole 'shooting her' thing. Maybe it would have been better for all of them if River had been killed. Not that killing someone was something that Donna had thought she'd be doing in her first week of work. Or ever.

But she hadn't thought that she'd participate in a rebellion three thousand years in the future, either. Or that Owen Harper, of all the people, would kiss her. He was standing by the tent flap, peering out, presumably so that he'd know if anyone came near. Donna watched him. She didn't go for his sort. She liked her men solid and tall. And handsome, if at all possible. Owen was her same height, shorter if she were to wear heels, and he was as skinny as the Doctor. He had no arse to speak of, and his mouth was too wide and he was too pale and too miserable. And he'd just lost his girlfriend, for Pete's sake.

So why couldn't she stop thinking about that kiss?

"Bugger," she said under her breath.
"It'll be okay," Rose said. "The Doctor'll sort it."

"Yeah," Donna agreed, once she processed what Rose had said. "That's what he does, isn't it?" Rose gave her a smile.

"He's going to get us all killed," Owen complained.

"You volunteered," Donna reminded him. "You could have stayed behind."

He glared at her over his shoulder. "I'm not a coward."

"No one would have thought you were," Rose said.

"Lots of good I've been." He looked out the gap in the tent flaps.

"There was nothing you could have done for Lalit," Rose said quietly. He didn't move. "You think I don't know?"

There was a rustling outside—someone's footsteps. "Did you hear that?" Donna asked.

"You can't blame yourself," Rose said.

"I don't," Owen snapped. "I blame him. One day he shows up, uninvited, and the next, everything starts going to shit!"

"Be quiet!" Donna hissed. She crept over to the flap. Owen wasn't paying attention anymore.

"And, can I say, ever since he got here, you've been—" Donna reached over and pressed her hand over his mouth.

"Somebody is coming," she whispered. Owen's eye twitched, but he nodded.

Donna lowered her hand and took proper hold of her gun.

"Might be one of ours," Rose said in a low voice. "Careful."

Owen slowly pushed Donna away from the tent flap with his arm.

"Owen..." she whispered, fear making her queasy.

"Stay here. Both of you."

"You're a doctor, not Rambo!" Donna cried. "Don't be stupid!"

The noises outside changed. She grasped at Owen's arm and willed him not to move. She could hear familiar voices shouting. One of them was the Doctor's.

"Sounds like the bloody cavalry's finally arrived," Owen said.

Rose knocked over a lantern in her attempts to get up off her cot. Donna cringed and looked back outside, and closed her eyes when she heard a man scream.

"Stay there, Tyler," Owen said. "Doctor's orders."
Donna pushed her way out of the tent. There was a gruesome tableau before her. She noticed the Doctor first; not unexpectedly, he was right in the centre of it, facing a single Shadow Man. The rest of the camp was a shambles. Bodies littered the ground—most of them soldiers. She could smell blood and burnt flesh and shit and God-knew-what-all else, and it was all she could do to swallow her bile and to not think of Cybermen.

The Shadow Man in front of the Doctor had been shot, she realised, right in the heart, but not by the Doctor. In fact, the Doctor was looking rather shocked, as if he’d expected to be dead himself.

River Song slowly lowered her gun. Had she just saved him? The Shadow Man fell to the ground and lay still.

"Doctor!" Donna said, relieved that he was alive. She gasped in dismay as River raised her weapon again, this time pointing it at someone else. Donna looked and saw Jack standing not far away, his white shirt stained with blood and dirt. Rose was wearing a very similar garment. They looked like nurse's scrubs.

Owen joined her outside of the tent and took stock of the situation. "Bloody brilliant," he said lowly.

"You need to go, now," River told the Doctor. "Take your people and get the hell out of here."

"Let me help them with the relocation," the Doctor said. "I'm sure that I can—"

"If you don't go now," River said through clenched teeth, "I can't save any of you. Don't you realise what will happen when they figure out what I've done?"

Donna caught sight of Martha coming out of the twenty or so people left alive. She was supporting Ianto, who looked even worse now than he had when they'd left Torchwood. Owen went to help them.

"Come with us," the Doctor said.

"Doctor?" Rose had come creeping out of the tent, holding the coral with a few fingers and leaning heavily on a make-shift crutch made out of a pole.

He looked over at her, but he had already started taking off his wrist strap and punching in commands. "Martha, Ianto, quickly." He looked up and waved Fish and Jack's other friends forward. "Come on!" he shouted. "Move it!"

Fish looked uncertainly at River. "Aren't you going to arrest us?"

Lola smacked him upside the head. "Why'd you bring that up?"

The Doctor looked at River. "I'm taking all of them," he said.

"Not him," she replied, looking at Jack.

"No!" Rose cried.

"It's okay, Rose," Jack said. "Time I stopped running. Isn't that right, River?"

River said nothing.

Nicodemus, the soldier with the bloody bandage over his eye, shook his head. "Please, son," he said. "Don't do this."
"I already said I'd go," Jack said. "Your orders are to see that every man, woman and child gets off this rock. I'm sure that our friend here can provide you with transport."

River raised a eyebrow and said in low deadpan, "Aren't we noble?"

Jack ignored her. "Doc, get these no-good bandits out of here, would you?"

The band needed no encouragement. They were already walking past River and the Doctor to where Rose was standing with the coral. Owen was practically holding her up, but her face was flushed and her eyes had an odd glow to them; probably a reflection from the regular white pulse of the coral.

There was a chorus of beeps. The Doctor, River, and Ianto all looked at their wrist straps.

"Reinforcements," River said.

The Doctor came and pressed his strap into Donna's hands.

"What are you doing?" she wondered. "You're not staying!"

"You all go on ahead," he said. "Get them home. I'm counting on you, Donna."

"Doctor—" Rose began.

"Trust me," he said.

"But—"

"Donna: the largest button. Keep one hand on the coral and she'll see you safely."

Rose looked terrified and furious. Donna joined everyone else around the glowing sphere in Rose's hands and put her palm on one of the few empty spots left on it.

"Go," the Doctor urged.

"No!" Rose cried, half-sobbing. She was struggling to pull away, but Owen and Ianto had flanked her and were keeping her hands on the coral.

Donna hesitated, thinking of what the Doctor had told her about the Void and how he and Rose had been separated all those years ago. And the other him, the alien leaving them in this universe—casting them aside like they were inconvenient. Forcing them to stay here.

The Doctor's voice broke through. "Donna!"

She swallowed and pressed the button. For half a moment, she thought that nothing would happen, but then the gold light that had covered them on the bridge of the Genesis returned, and the forest, River, Jack, and the Doctor faded away.

§

You're an absolute shit sometimes, Donna observed.

It's not as if I plan on staying here, he thought.

Maybe not, but you just sent Rose away. AGAIN.

I made a promise to Jackie.
What about your promise to Rose? Or do you not remember what you told her?

He did, of course. That night—God, how long ago had that been? Days, he was sure—after the nightmare where the other Doctor had taken Rose away, he had said a lot of things. He had said he loved her, and that he would never ever let her go again. At least, he’d meant to say it. Maybe he’d only thought it.

He looked away from the spot where his friends had stood. No one to worry about now. That would make things easier.

Well, it should have done, anyway. Except it seemed that Lee McCoy had taken it upon himself to stay behind. He was standing next to Jack, a determined look on his face.

"You should have gone," Jack said, furious. Lee was stoically silent.

The Doctor turned to River. She looked back at him, confusion wrinkling her forehead. "You've still got the effusion device," he said, nodding at the bag on her hip.

She stared down at herself, as if she were only just now noticing the wide black strap that crossed between her absolutely fantastic breasts. (In the back of his mind, Donna made disparaging remarks about his maturity.)

"Give it to me," he said, ignoring his feminine side for the moment. "I'll take it somewhere the Sanctum can never get their hands on it again."

"I don't..." River looked up at him. She was looking scared again. "Who are you? Why do I know you?"

He frowned as he wondered if she were suffering from sort of memory loss. But then he wondered about trans-dimensional psychic transfer and half a dozen other unlikely possibilities before he finally shook his head and said, "I'm the Doctor. You can trust me."

"I shouldn't believe you," she said, and her fingers worried the edges of the black strap, curling it.

"Give it to him," Jack urged. "That's the only way to prevent the Sanctum from doing this kind of thing to some other planet. If you knew the things I know... You'd know that the Sanctum can't be allowed to have that kind of power."

"Why not just take it from me?" she said.

The Doctor looked at the bag. She was right. He could. With Jack and Lee on his side, he could certainly overpower her and just take it. Keep it out of human hands—they weren't ready for it yet. Maybe in another fifty thousand years...

Then again... he could just keep it. With the effusion device, growing the TARDIS would take a few years, maybe even less time to grow to maturity. Then he and Rose could go. The Doctor and Rose in the TARDIS again.

He waited for the Donna bits to say something, but all he got was a sick, nagging doubt. What if Rose didn't want to travel anymore? What about Donna and Ianto and Martha and Toshiko...? Could he really just leave them?

What am I thinking? Am I really considering not travelling anymore?

That's not the question here, Donna said, gently but firmly. The question is whether you're willing to
risk people's lives just so that you can go swanning around the universe again. You know that they'd come for it. They may never stop coming for it.

"I'll return it to the Nop," he said. He stretched his fingers out towards her. "Please." He almost called her River. Had the other River Song lied, or did she simply have a different name here?

She pulled the strap over her head and handed him the bag. Then she turned to Jack and pulled what turned out to be a pair of very compact force-field handcuffs from her belt. "Sun yev Franklin of Boeshane, also known as Bishop Alexander of the Fifth Lutheran Battalion: you are under arrest, by the authority of the Time Agency and under the auspices of the Sanctuary Government of Earth and Her Colonies. You are charged with inciting mutiny and rebellion; theft of Sanctuary property; unauthorised time travel; fraud; and homicide. You are forthwith stripped of all rights and privileges. You will face court martial to determine your sentence."

Jack put out his hands and let her put the cuffs on him. The Doctor's stomach twisted.

"And me," Lee said; his voice was the firmest the Doctor (or Donna) had ever heard it. He held his wrists out to River. Father Nicodemus looked like he was grinding his teeth.

"Godric Leonard McCoy IV," River said with a sigh, taking out another pair of cuffs. "You are under arrest, by the authority of the Time Agency and under the auspices of the Sanctuary Government of Earth and Her Colonies. You are charged with unauthorised time travel; fraud; accessory to theft; and aiding and abetting a fugitive." She attached the cuff to his left hand. "I hereby place you in the custody of the Torchwood Institute of Earth, in the care of the agent known as the Doctor."

"What?!" The Doctor gaped at her. "What are you—"

She glared at him, grabbed him, and slapped the other cuff on his right arm. It made the hairs on the back of his hand stand up. "Now will you get the hell out of here?" she said.

"J-Jack—" Lee stammered.

"Don't worry about me," Jack said. "I've got Fortuna on my side. Take over the band, would you?" He smiled. "Maybe this'll be the kick you need to get you centre stage."

The Doctor met the Captain's eyes. Jack—Sun, Alexander, whatever his name was—nodded. "Take care of Rose, Doc. She's one of a kind."

"I'm sorry, Jack," he said. "I am so sorry."

River pulled a silver disc from her pocket and put it in the Doctor's free hand. "Home device. Takes you back to your origin point."

"I know what a home device is!" he said, irritated. "You remember what I said."

"Do you always waste this much time yammering?" she cried.

"Yes," Donna said with his mouth. He glanced at Jack one last time, and his brother. Rose would never forgive him for abandoning Jack to uncertain Sanctuary justice. He'd never forgive himself. Blasted alternate universe: it wasn't alternate enough. The rogue was a hero, again, and now the Doctor was leaving him behind. Again.

But there was Rose to think about.
Resisting the urge to take the man's hand, the Doctor tried to give Jack a smile as he activated the home device.

Wherever it was that they came out, it was bloody freezing. It was also night and he could smell the sea. The wind tore at his hair and his open jacket flapped against his sides. His footing was unsteady. Sand.

The first thing he heard, apart from the wind, was a voice calling his name.

He turned and saw a shadowy figure running towards him. There was just enough moonlight to see by, but he would have known her in the dark.

"Rose." Relieved, he threw his arm around her. She hugged him tightly, then backed away and thumped his chest with a fist before hugging him again. (Lee was still tethered to his arm, though, which made things rather awkward.)

"I'm sorry," the Doctor said into her hair.

"Where are we?" Donna wasn't far away, illuminated by the TARDIS. "It's bloody freezing!"

Ianto examined his wrist-strap. "We're in Norway," he said with a puzzled frown.

The Doctor and Rose exchanged glances.

"No..." the Doctor cried. "Can't be!"

Rose started to giggle. He didn't think it was very funny at first, but a chuckle bubbled up inside him.

"I recognise it now!" Rose gasped for breath. "It's—it's—"

"Where are we?" Owen demanded.

"Bad Wolf Bay!" Rose cried and then she was completely lost to half-sobbing, half-mirthful hysterics. That was when he lost it. (He wasn't entirely sure if he was laughing or crying, either.) They fell against each other and laughed until they couldn't breathe.

"Right," said Owen sourly. "Can we go home now, please?"

§

It was always raining at the Stormcage containment facility, though legends said that wasn't how the prison had got it's name. There were a few books on the subject. Jack had read all of them. He certainly had the time.

There was one thing he couldn't complain about, and that was the acoustics. The long corridor outside his cell made for great sound magnification.

"Oh, skylark... Have you seen a valley green with spring... where my heart can go a-journeying... over the shadows and the rain... to a blossom covered lane..."

"Always liked Mercer. And Carmichael," said a voice.

Jack sat up on his cot. There was a man outside his cell.
"Doctor?" He got to his feet.

"Hello, Jack," the Doctor said. He smiled and tapped one of the bars with a long finger. "Can't say I'm fond of the decor."

"My complaints all fall on deaf ears," Jack said. "What are you doing here?"

"Came for a visit." He looked better than the last time Jack had seen him. Rested and clean. He was wearing an expensive suit of deep blue with brown pinstripes.

"Conjugal?" Jack wondered hopefully. "The guards did say that if I behaved myself I'd get a present."

The Doctor raised an eyebrow, but there was a blush on his cheeks. "Not likely," he said.

Jack leaned against the bars. "I had to try," he said, just to see if the other man would blush any harder.

"I just wanted to make sure you were all right."

"Well, they didn't execute me. I'd consider that a victory." He took a step back and crossed his arms. "I don't know what it was you said to the Agent, but she kept up her side. I got a communication from Brother Nicodemus a month ago."

The Doctor nodded. "I know. I went back to check on them. The colonists of Gemini 4 have a new home on New Chesapeake. And it looks like Brother Nicodemus has decided to stay on with them."

Jack nodded. "That's what happens when you find a home." He nodded. "How's Rose?"

"She's fine," the Doctor said quickly.

"I never had a chance to apologise..."

"She told me what you told her." The Doctor hesitated. "You saved her life."

"She saved mine."

The Doctor nodded. "That's what she does."

They regarded each other in mutual silence for a few moments.

"How's that band of mine?" Jack asked at last.

"I managed to convince Mr. Tyler not to throw them in the cells, at any rate."

"Where are they?" he pressed.

"Well," the Doctor drawled. "Io wanted to go back to her own time. Samsa hitchhiked on a passing Ailin freighter. Lola and Fish stole one of the wrist-straps." He sniffed. "No idea where they went."

"Probably back to Vegas," Jack guessed.

"City or galaxy?"

"Galaxy, of course!"

"Ah, well. Good luck to them, then."
Jack chuckled. "They'll probably end up as my new cellmates."

"You don't seem surprised that they left."

He shrugged. "None of them really liked Earth that much. The twenty-first century's amazing, but stifling in the weirdest ways."

The Doctor nodded. Then, as if testing the waters, he said, "You haven't asked about Lee."

Jack looked at the bars. "I thought you'd get to him."

"He's decided to say in London," the Doctor said. "I got the impression that he's waiting for you."

He shrugged. "He might be."

"So, you and him."

Jack wasn't exactly surprised by the question, just by the uncomfortable look on the Doctor's face. "Why? Does it bother you?"

"No," the Doctor said quickly. "Certainly not for the reasons you're thinking."

"What's the reason, then?"

"Mind your business," he replied sharply. He took a deep breath and calmed himself. "Anyhow. Torchwood will be keeping an eye on him. They have procedures for handling people out of their time."

"He's not really," Jack said. "That man was born in the wrong century." He took a deep breath and let it out in a short sigh. "So. Thanks for the gazette. Anything I can get you? I have some tepid rainwater somewhere."

The Doctor looked thoughtful. "Do you believe in fate, Jack?"

That was an odd question. "Depends on your definition, I suppose. Time Agency thinks that there are fixed points in time, things that will always happen no matter what people do to try to change them. But everything else is in flux."

The Doctor nodded. "That's about right," he said. "Thing is, I usually think of people as things that are in flux. You'd think that a different Sun yev Franklin of Boeshane, given different circumstances would be a different man. But it looks like it's only the details that change."

Jack decided that this was supposed to be praise of a sort. Then he remembered what Rose had said about the Jack she'd known in her home universe.

"So... that other Jack...?"

"Absolutely the same man," the Doctor proclaimed with half a smile. "Though, I'd say you were a bit luckier."

If that was the case, Jack felt bad for his counterpart. "Fortuna's always been on my side."

"How long's the sentence?"

Jack's smile faded. "You mean you don't already know?"
"How much longer have you got?"

He shook his head. "Let's put it this way. By the time I get out, I might not be so pretty anymore."

The Doctor nodded. "Well, when they do let you out... You've got somewhere to go, if you like."

That was unexpected. "Why?" he asked suspiciously.

"I've made a lot of mistakes," the Doctor said. He sniffed thoughtfully and looked at the wall of the long, curved corridor behind him. "Time I started trying to correct them, where I can."

"Mistakes with your Jack, you mean."

The Doctor gave him a shrewd look. "Glad to see they're treating you okay. I'll come back to check on you, and the guards know it."

"Oh good. No more water-boarding, then," Jack joked. The Doctor didn't seem to find it funny. Jack pointed at a moist patch on his ceiling. The Doctor peered at it. "You could tell the warden. Maybe she'd listen to you."

"I haven't met her."

"Madame is usually unavailable," Jack said. He nodded at the Doctor's suit. "I like the new suit, by the way. Grey isn't your colour."

"Not this time," he agreed. "I think I'll keep the orange tie, though."

"Not with that suit, I hope." The tie the Doctor was wearing now was a brick-red toile.

He smiled at Jack, then took a small rectangular thing from his pocket and handed it over. Jack took it and looked back at the Doctor.

"A camera?" he asked incredulously. "That's subtle."

"There was something in the forest with us," the Doctor replied, ignoring the innuendo. "You were there. Do you remember?"

"Shadow Men."

The Doctor shook his head. "Something else. River shot something that was hiding in the trees. Did you see what it was?"

"No, none of us did. She just went nuts."

"That was what it looked like," the Doctor agreed. "But I reckon something else was going on on Gemini that we don't know about."

"Like what?"

The Doctor leaned his forehead on one of the bars. "You tell me."

"I'm not sure I know what you're talking about," Jack said.

"You said you knew things about the Sanctum. Reasons they shouldn't have power. What were they?"
He shook his head in disbelief. "I think what they tried to do to Gemini is one!"

"That's not what you meant, and we both know it." The Doctor's eyes narrowed. "What did you find out?"

"Nothing," Jack said truthfully. "Nothing concrete. Just..." The Doctor waited. "Stories. Rumours. There are legends about the origins of the Sanctum, you know. Names that have been passed down for over a thousand years. Ideas that don't die." He hesitated. "You probably wouldn't like what you hear."

"Tell me anyway," the Doctor said. He sounded so self-assured.

Jack shook his head. "Not now. Not here. Trust me, Doctor. These secrets will keep."

The Doctor stepped back, angry, but Jack didn't care. He wasn't stupid. Things weren't as bad for him as they could get. Not yet.

"Another time, then," the Doctor said, almost resentfully.

"I'm not going anywhere."

The Doctor didn't even crack a smile—couldn't blame him, it was a lame joke. He put his hands in his pockets and he turned to go.

"Hey, Doc."

The Doctor turned, annoyance passing over his face. "Doctor," he corrected him. "What is it?"

"You got a name?"

He seemed to think about this. "Doctor John Noble. On paper, anyway."

"Just 'The Doctor' to me, though."

"And everyone else. Why?"

"Just curious."

"Why 'Jack Harkness'?"

Jack shrugged. "Always liked the stories about him. And it sounded better than Archie Leach."

"I rather like 'Sun'."

Jack shrugged. "It's just a name. Names are just labels." He smiled. "I've never been fond of labels."

The Doctor grinned. "Neither have I. Though, you have to admit, there can be a lot of power in a name." He nodded and gave a little salute, which Jack returned, almost automatically. "Take care, Jack."

When the Doctor was gone, Jack laid back on his cot and looked up at the dripping crack in the ceiling. A drop of water fell and landed in a growing puddle on the smooth stone floor.

*John Noble*, he thought sadly. It was too bad, really. He sort of liked the Doctor, the way you liked a complete stranger who could have thrown you down into the pit and didn't. It really was too bad.
Lucky for him, Jack believed in life-debts.

Chapter End Notes

It took me a long time to write this story, partly because I wanted to watch all of Season 6 before I posted it. (You know, what with certain characters and their stories unfolding, etc.) Anyway, I'm hoping you enjoyed it. And I hope that any continuation of the story will take considerably less time to put together. Thank you all so much for reading and your comments. ♥♥

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