What is Essential is Invisible to the Eye
by prothrombintime

Summary

Jack and Ianto's epic journey, from the beginning to the end... and beyond. Spoilers for everything. Canon compliant, including selected books, audio books, and radio plays, through Children of Earth… with a twist.

Notes

This is how I imagine it happened. This is what I wish they had shown. I'm switching back and forth between Ianto and Jack's point of view in this story. The title is from The Little Prince by Antoine de St Exupéry. The full quote is, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye."

Torchwood is owned by the BBC. I don't own anything, just having fun.

My eternal gratitude to my talented and tenaciously pedantic beta and friend riftintime for taking on the monumental task of editing this story, for writing several chapters, and for co-authoring several more. Words are insufficient to express my appreciation for your endless patience, acumen, brilliance, ideas, dedication, and hard work. You have have made this story complete – it is not my story, it is ours. Thank you.
Ianto Jones was desperate to get into Torchwood Three, if he had any chance at all of saving Lisa. He had left his partially converted cyber girlfriend fighting for life in a rented storage unit in London, near the site of the now destroyed Torchwood One.

Ianto had researched the other Torchwood branches. He had accessed what was left of the mainframe computer of Torchwood One to research Torchwoods Two, Three and Four. Torchwood Two: Glasgow seemed, in a word, weird. The leader was somewhat of a recluse, with no real team to speak of. Torchwood Four had apparently disappeared – Ianto thought he would leave that one alone. Torchwood Three: Cardiff, however, had a team of four lead by one Captain Jack Harkness. Captain of what? Ianto wondered.

The other team members consisted of Susie Costello, weapons expert and second in command, Dr. Owen Harper, who joined after his fiancé died from an alien brain tumor, so very Torchwood, and Toshiko Sato, computer genius, who had been imprisoned indefinitely by UNIT for treason, until she was pulled by Harkness for Torchwood. Treason? Really? Just how crazy is this Captain Jack Harkness?

Ianto had never met the Captain, but he had heard rumors around the proverbial “water cooler” at T1. He was apparently somewhat of an enigmatic figure with wild stories running from the pornographic to the absurd. Ianto had heard that he had a voracious sexual appetite – female, male, alien? Someone had to be making that bit up! He had heard that he was transplanted through time from the 1940’s; some even said he had traveled with the Doctor. “You know they say Captain Jack Harkness is immortal. Been around for hundreds of years,” Sheila the gossip had said to Lisa and him at the pub one night.

“What, like a vampire?” Ianto had snorted.

“That’s one vampire I’d let bite me!” Sheila exclaimed. “He’s gorgeous!”

Sheila was dead now… Ianto didn’t want to let his mind drift to that. He had to focus. He had to save Lisa. He had to get into Torchwood Three to gain access to the equipment he needed. As desperate as Ianto was to get into Torchwood Three, he had to admit to a mild curiosity at the prospect of laying his eyes on this infamous Captain Jack Harkness. He had seen his file photo of course. He could admit that the Captain seemed like a handsome bloke, but what did Ianto know about that?

What he really wanted, no needed, was a job at Torchwood Cardiff. That would give him unlimited access to their kit. He wasn’t sure which of his talents to tempt Harkness with. He thought that he’d play it by ear, since apparently Harkness had unusual recruitment policies. He figured that once he was in, regardless of his job title, he could gain access to the T3 mainframe and find a way to help Lisa. Before he left London, he had carefully rewritten his file. Harkness didn’t have a great relationship with T1, and Ianto didn’t want him to know his real position. The less T3 knew about him, the better. He created a man that he thought would intrigue the enigmatic Captain Jack Harkness, but not make Ianto too conspicuous.

Ianto rented a car and drove from London to Cardiff. He knew the entrance to the T3 Hub was near the Millenium Center. He parked nearby and found a secluded location to set up surveillance. Within an hour he had spotted Harkness. Within two days he had discovered three of the Hub’s entrances. He watched Harkness and his team racing in and out of the Hub at all hours. He watched Harkness standing on rooftops. He watched Harkness during some of his sexual escapades. Sex, is
that my way in? Tempt him, but don’t make it too easy? He watched Harkness leave a pub with a
man in the small hours of the morning, and take him into a nearby alley. Ianto watched with a
sinking feeling in his stomach as they kissed roughly and wanked each other off. Can I really do
this? He had never even looked at a man in a sexual way before – never really thought about it. But
he could feel Lisa’s pain and resolved that he would do anything to get into Torchwood Three.

If Ianto was going to seduce the great Captain Jack Harkness, he needed to know what he was doing
and what he was getting himself into. Ianto researched. He was good at research. Knowing things
made him feel confident. He sat in his rented car near the bay, opened his computer and typed “gay
sex” into the search engine. He read about gay sex; how to guides, homoerotic literature, safe sex,
erogenous zones, prostate stimulation, anal sex, oral sex, and he watched gay pornography (which he
took with a grain of salt). A couple of hours was all he could stomach, besides, he felt like he got the
general gist of things. Sex is sex, after all, isn’t it?

After a week of watching Harkness, Ianto was ready for his approach. He had carefully chosen his
attire to match the style of the men he had seen Harkness with – fitted jeans, a studded belt, a blue
button down shirt with the top few buttons left open, a fitted black jacket, and a chunky silver
necklace around his neck. Almost within the hour of his arriving at the Hub, the black Torchwood
SUV roared out of the underground garage and down the street, heading towards Bute Park. He
followed in his rented car and parked several hundred meters away. He saw Harkness in his long
military coat jump out of the SUV and run into the park. Ianto followed behind and watched
Harkness tackle a Weevil with no backup in sight. This wasn’t really the meeting that Ianto had
planned, but he grabbed a large, thick tree branch lying near his feet, took a deep breath and stepped
into the fray.
Thanks as always to my amazing beta riftintime.

The first meeting, though it hadn’t gone as Ianto had planned, was by no means a failure. Ianto thought that he had definitely caught Harkness’ attention. Ianto had sensed Harkness’ attraction to him, followed closely by his wariness. *Not sure where the comment about loving his coat came from.* He had to admit though, it was kind of cool. Ianto went back to his rental car and drove to the nearest hotel. He needed electricity and a shower for phase two.

Showered, changed (though sporting a similar style to his earlier outfit), and carrying a thermos full of freshly brewed coffee, Ianto went to wait out Harkness by the entrance to the tourist information office that was a front for the Torchwood Three Hub. Ianto knew that he could make spectacular coffee. He was famous for it at T1. Ianto was covering his bases. He had shown the Captain bravery, he had flirted, and now he was going to appeal to his stomach – or at least his taste buds. “Morning,” he accosted the Captain as he came out of the tourist office. He proffered the steaming hot mug. “Coffee?”

Of course the Captain was in ecstasies over his coffee; however, the second meeting didn’t go as well as the first. Jack recited to him the bio he had created for himself in the T1 mainframe. *“Ianto Jones, born August 19, 1983. Able student but not exceptional.”* "I don’t want to seem too able! “One minor conviction for shoplifting in your teens.” *Yeah, I threw that in there just for you, Harkness. I know you have your strange recruiting policies. “Number of temporary jobs, mainly a drifter until two years ago, you joined the Torchwood Institute in London.” Right, they recruited me right out of Uni. “Junior researcher.”* Hardly. “Girlfriend: Lisa Hallett.”

It was the one truthful thing he had left in his file. He just couldn’t bring himself to delete her from his records. “Deceased,” he had replied.

Ianto sensed that he hadn’t played his cards right. Gone was the Captain’s earlier flirtiness, replaced now with irritation and contempt. He had researched Captain Jack Harkness. He had stalked him and studied him, but Ianto hadn’t taken into account his scorn for and mistrust of all things Torchwood One. *Not that I blame him.* Ianto had sounded almost desperate in his plea for a job, and that was definitely not something he wanted Harkness to pick up on. He had walked away from Ianto without a backwards glance. “I really like that coat,” Ianto threw at his retreating form. It was the best he could do under the circumstances.

Ianto was going to have to rethink his approach. He represented Torchwood One to Harkness and all things he disliked about it. There was nothing Ianto could do now except embody Torchwood One and hope that he could appeal to Harkness’ desire to prove how much better Torchwood Three was. He would appeal to the Captain’s feeling of superiority. It was a psychological ploy, but a good one, Ianto thought, considering Harkness’ ego. The Captain obviously wore a costume of sorts – a classic look from the 1940’s RAF uniforms. Ianto would also don a costume – his Torchwood One costume. They were all required to wear a suit to work. Ianto knew Harkness’ team was much more casual. He would stand out as the T1 employee that he was and get Harkness to pit Torchwood Three against Torchwood One… on a mission. That should appeal to the Captain’s overinflated ego.
How could he stand to be outdone by Torchwood One?

Ianto had scavenged many things from the ruins of T1, one of which was a rift activity locater. The next thing that came through the rift would be bait for Captain Jack Harkness. The pterodactyl wasn’t the ideal “evil alien” that Ianto had envisioned, but desperate times called for desperate measures. He needed to get Lisa into the Hub. He had left Lisa in London with Matthew, another one of the Canary Wharf survivors. Although Matthew had sworn to keep Lisa alive and a secret, he was starting to get antsy and showing signs of severe PTSD. Ianto had to get back to London. He had to get Lisa to Cardiff. He couldn’t stay away any longer. When he accosted Harkness for the third time, he was dressed in one of his Torchwood One suits, armed with the rift activity locater, and the knowledge of the whereabouts of a dinosaur misplaced in time.

An hour later found Ianto Jones and Captain Jack Harkness at the warehouse where the pterodactyl had fallen through the Rift. Their first attempt at entering the warehouse had been thwarted by the pterodactyl diving straight for them. As they leaned against the door of the warehouse catching their breath, the Captain commented on the excitability of the dinosaur. Ianto replied without thinking, “Must be your aftershave.”

This flirting with a man thing was easier than he thought it would be. He couldn’t deny it, the man’s scent was… erotic was the only word he could find for it. Odd, I’ve never thought of a man as erotic before…

“I never wear any,” replied Harkness.

“You smell like that naturally?” Ianto was stunned.

“51st century pheromones. You people have no idea.”

“Huh…” replied a confused Ianto.

He had no time to think on it further, as the Captain was ready for another go at catching the giant reptile. A few minutes later, the two men were rolling away from the sedated creature as it landed on the ground. A feeling of exhilaration ran through Ianto as he rolled with the Captain away from the creature’s crash path. He laughed his first true laugh since Canary Wharf. For a brief, wonderful moment he forgot Lisa and his desperation to save her. He forgot his pain and loneliness. He felt free, happy, elated even. He felt alive. He was having fun!

Ianto’s situation dawned on him suddenly. He was lying on top of Captain Jack Harkness, both of them breathing hard, mere centimeters away from each other’s faces. Their noses were almost touching. He could feel the Captain’s breath on his lips. He looked into the Captain’s eyes. It would be so easy to close the gap and kiss him. I want to kiss him… what am I thinking? Ianto could feel the Captain’s erection pressing into his thigh, and to his utter amazement, he felt his own body responding in kind. Shit! He knew he might have to seduce Harkness to get this job, but he didn’t expect to want to seduce him! I need to get out. He needed space. He needed to think. He needed to think about Lisa! He needed to regain control. Too much, too soon! “I should go,” he sputtered.

He leapt off of Harkness and walked away without looking back; even as the Captain called out, “Report for work first thing in the morning. Like the suit by the way.”

Ianto’s tears started to flow as he made his way out of the warehouse – tears of extreme relief, tears of confusion, and tears of guilt for what he had almost done, what he would probably have to do, and more confusing still, what he had wanted to do.
Ianto arrived outside the tourist information office at 7:00am the following morning in a well fitted but somber suit. Jack watched him from the CCTV in his office, as the young man stood patiently outside the door. “Well, you’ve hired him, Jack, now what are you going to do with him?” Jack mumbled to himself as he got up from his desk and took the lift up to the Plass.

He thought about what had made him hire this young man, as he walked from the Plass towards the tourist office. Jack was suspicious of all things Torchwood One. The boy was handsome, that was a given, but he also had a tenacity that Jack appreciated. Plus, he made damn good coffee and was good in a fight – at least in a fight with a pterodactyl. Damn it, the boy had balls, and Jack respected that. He could always retcon him if it didn’t work out. *This should be interesting*, Jack thought to himself, as he walked up to Ianto. “Well Jones, Ianto Jones of Torchwood One. What are we going to do with you?”

“Whatever you think is best, Sir,” came Ianto’s sly reply, and Jack grinned widely.

“Are you flirting with me Mr. Jones?”

Ianto rolled his eyes. “It’s a little early, Sir. I haven’t even had coffee yet!”

Jack threw back his head and laughed. He rolled his head and laughed. *He rolled his eyes at me! He actually rolled his eyes at me. Cheeky bastard!* “Well, we should definitely remedy that situation. Can you make us some of that fantastic coffee you gave me the other day? Then I’ll show you around the place and we’ll talk about your responsibilities.”

Jack grinned, and the boy smirked. *Damn, he’s sexy when he smirks. This is going to be more fun than I imagined*, Jack thought to himself and felt his day brighten up immensely. They stepped into the tourist office, and Ianto said nothing. He merely looked around with a slightly sour expression on his face. “What?” Jack asked, feeling a bit defensive.

“This is your cover story, Sir?” asked Ianto with a wry smile.

“We’re busy,” Jack shot back, and Ianto just looked at him.

Jack hit the button that opened the door to the Hub. “Come on, I’ll show you the rest.”

As they descended into the Hub, Jack eyed Ianto curiously. It was one of Jack’s favorite things to take someone down the lift for their first glance at the Hub. He loved to see their initial reactions. Jack couldn’t wait to see what this enigmatic young man would make of his base. As the doors opened, Jack watched him. Ianto said nothing as he strode forward a few paces and took a good look around. Jack waited for the reaction with a grin on his face. *I love this part*. Ianto turned to him, lifted an eyebrow and said, “I take it Torchwood Three doesn’t believe in rubbish bins, Sir.”

Jack’s smile dropped from his face, and he crossed his arms over his chest. “You know, Ianto, most people are impressed.”
Usually people were awed and overwhelmed by the Hub and intimidated by Jack himself. Ianto was none of these things. It made Jack nervous and a little bit annoyed.

“Oh, I’m impressed, Sir. I’m impressed by how messy you lot are. How you manage not to bury yourselves under the rubbish, lay your hands on everything you need, and find your way to the door when you need to is very impressive, Sir,” Ianto said with a smirk.

“We do just fine, thank you very much.”

Jack was starting to feel really defensive now. Ianto just looked at him with that same look he had given him the other night when Ianto had mentioned Weevils, and Jack said he had no idea what he was talking about. *This kid really is a piece of work!*

“Right, where is your coffee machine?” Ianto asked, breaking the silence.

Jack was bemused as he led Ianto to the coffee maker. This wasn’t going at all how he expected. When Ianto saw the state of the kitchen, he gave Jack a pained look. Jack just shrugged his shoulders. Ianto shook his head as he walked towards the large (and expensive) coffee maker. He started cleaning things up around the machine, as he mumbled to himself. Jack couldn’t make out everything, but he heard the words “pigs” and “squalor” and “don’t understand.”

When Ianto finally turned his attention to the coffee maker, Jack said, “I should have mentioned this before, but none of us can figure out how to work the damn thing – not even Toshiko and she’s a technological genius.”

“I’m sure I’ll manage, Sir,” Ianto replied as he busied himself with the machine.

Jack leaned against the door and watched Ianto as he worked. He saw Ianto reach into his jacket pocket and remove a small bag of coffee beans. Within five minutes, Jack was sipping on a steaming cup of some of the best coffee he’d ever had in his life – and that was saying something. As they stood drinking their coffee, Jack said, “You know, Ianto, we’re pretty casual around here. You don’t have to call me *Sir*.”

“I know, Sir,” came Ianto’s prompt reply, and Jack laughed.

This boy was really growing on him. “Come on. I’ll show you around,” Jack said, moving out of the kitchen.

Jack gave Ianto a full tour of the Hub and archives, after which they ended up back at the coffee machine. Ianto had remained expressionless and almost mute during tour, and Jack was starting to feel antsy under the young man’s scrutiny. “Why don’t you make us both another cup of that glorious coffee, and we’ll talk in my office,” Jack said, as he turned and headed in that direction.

Ten minutes later found them sitting at Jack’s desk, facing each other, and sipping on cups of coffee. “Well, Jones, Ianto Jones. What do you think?”

Ianto turned and looked hard at the Captain. “The tourist information office has leaflets from 1999 and needs a thorough dusting, the Hub is a mess, the archives are despicable, and the state of your wardrobe is, frankly, embarrassing, Sir. You need someone to man Torchwood Three’s cover, make the place look respectable, keep its leader looking presentable, clean up after you lot, and organize your archives so you can find things when you’re out saving the world. I can do all of that, Sir.”

Jack looked hard at the young, serious, and handsome man sitting before him. He had to admit, everything Ianto said was true. Things were pretty messy around the Hub. They could use some general support staff. Plus he liked the kid. He was unexpected, and Jack, who prided himself on
having seen it all, enjoyed the unexpected. He’d give Ianto a chance and see where it took them. 
Besides, the coffee was spectacular, and he did look great in a suit. “Alright, Ianto. As long as we 
can add coffee making to your list of responsibilities, you have yourself a deal.” 

“Right, Sir,” Ianto said, as he stood up. “I'll get to work then.”
Ianto quickly and efficiently took on his responsibilities at Torchwood Cardiff. He cleaned, updated, and manned the tourist office. He made coffee, ordered food for the team, and kept the Hub clean. He sorted out Jack’s wardrobe, taking in his dry cleaning, doing his laundry, repairing his clothing, and trashing any items that were beyond repair. He was a genius at paperwork, and so efficient was he, that within two weeks he had taken over doing the budget. Ianto was much better at dealing with bureaucratic red tape than Jack, who had no patience at all for the task.

Ianto proved to be diligent and dependable. He had an uncanny way of knowing what the rest of the team needed almost before they knew themselves. Jack was happy because the Hub was neater and more organized that it had ever been. His laundry and dry cleaning were done. He got regular meals and coffee, and Ianto always made sure the hideous paperwork was finished and submitted on time. Plus, Ianto was nice to look at. Jack began to wonder how he had ever survived without Ianto. The team accepted him quickly because of his exceptional coffee and professional demeanor, and as with any good servant, they just as quickly forgot about him. As long as their food and drinks were delivered with regularity and their paperwork got submitted on time, they paid little attention to the quiet young man who served them. It was just as well for Ianto, who wanted to remain in the background, considering what he was hiding.

It became Ianto’s habit to arrive at the Hub in the morning well before the rest of the team. He would bring Jack his first cup of coffee before starting his daily chores. When the rest of the team arrived, he would make them all coffee, then retire to the tourist office for the duration of the morning, unless Jack had other ideas (and Jack often had other ideas). At lunchtime, Ianto procured food for the team. In the afternoon he would disappear into the archives for several hours. If the team was still around near the dinner hour, Ianto would organise food for the evening meal as well. Ianto stayed in the Hub and provided backup for the team when they were out on missions. He kept the SUV stocked and ready to go. He kept Owen stocked with medical supplies, and provided the rest of the team with whatever they needed. Ianto would stay later than the rest of the team. He would always bring Jack a last cup of coffee and collect whatever clothing needed to be laundered before leaving for the night.

A few weeks into Ianto’s tenure at Torchwood Three, he stood in Jack’s office doorway with Jack’s last cup of coffee of the day. Jack looked him over appreciatively. “Really love the suits, Ianto,” Jack said with a leer.

He had kept his flirtation to a minimum for the last couple of weeks. He had wanted to see how the boy would do with his new responsibilities and how he would fit into the team. Jack was more impressed than he let on. Now that Ianto was safely ensconced in his role, Jack started flirting again. “Thank you, Sir,” was Ianto’s polite reply.

“Would really like to see you out of the suits!” Jack lifted his eyebrow and grinned lasciviously at him.

“That would be harassment, Sir!” Ianto quipped.
Jack threw back his head and laughed. “You’re doing a great job, Ianto. You play the whole butler persona to perfection. Welcome to the team.”

Ianto smiled a tight smile at Jack. “Thank you, Sir. Is there anything else you need before I go?”

“Oh, so many things…” Jack teased.

Ianto’s grin broadened into a smile. “I guess I opened myself up for that one, didn’t I? I’ll see you in the morning, Sir,” and with that parting remark, Ianto was gone, leaving Jack with a grin on his face.

Over the next week or so, the banter between Jack and Ianto increased a notch. Jack would thrust with sexual innuendo, and Ianto would parry with sarcastic wit or smooth evasions. Jack was really enjoying the whole thing, but he was feeling rather sexually frustrated as well. He was up late one night, thinking about the young man and prowling around the Hub basements, looking for something to do, when he literally ran smack into Ianto in the flesh. “Ianto, what the hell are you doing here?” he asked as they both recovered their balance.

“Couldn’t sleep, Sir. Thought I’d get some work done.”

“Ianto, it’s almost midnight. I thought you left hours ago!”

“I meant to, Sir, but I remembered that I had left something unfinished in the archives and came down to see to it. I guess I just lost track of time.”

“You really shouldn’t be here,” Jack said, and Ianto stepped into Jack’s personal space.

“Neither should you, Sir.”

And before Jack knew what was happening, Ianto had thrust him against the wall of the archives and was kissing him fiercely.

Jack quickly got over his initial shock and responded with enthusiasm. He pressed his tongue against Ianto’s lips and the young man opened his mouth to let him in. They both moaned as their tongues mashed against each other. *Damn this boy can kiss,* thought Jack as he kissed Ianto harder, pressing their bodies together. He could feel Ianto’s erection on his thigh and was sure Ianto could feel his. He felt as Ianto began to scrabble at his belt buckle. He was curious to see where this was going to go, so he did nothing. Ianto unfastened Jack’s trousers, stuck his hand into Jack’s briefs, and put his hand around Jack’s cock. Jack moaned at the touch. Ianto started to work his hand up and down Jack’s shaft. Jack pulled Ianto’s shirt out of his pants, sliding one hand onto the bare skin of Ianto’s back. With the other he unfastened Ianto’s trousers, pulled Ianto’s cock out, and started stroking him in return.

They clung to each other, each one jerking the other off, breathing hard into each other’s mouths until they both came within seconds of each other. Almost as soon as it was over, Ianto pulled away from Jack, quickly fixed his clothing, and was gone before Jack had recovered his wits. “Jones, Ianto Jones, you never cease to amaze me,” Jack said aloud to the empty archives.
The next morning, Jack was curious to see how Ianto would react to the events of the previous night. Ianto, however, delivered Jack’s morning coffee with an impassive face as usual. There was not a hint of what had happened between them the night before. Ianto was, as always, the perfect servant. “Curiouser and curiouser,” quipped Jack as Ianto departed his office to begin his morning duties.

Jack was determined to get Ianto alone again, but he didn’t get a chance for almost a week, as the Rift had kept them unusually busy. As the others left, Ianto moved towards the coffee machine to make Jack’s last cup for the evening. When Jack had watched the last of his team leave from the CCTV in his office, he made his way into the kitchen where Ianto was working his coffee magic. Ianto turned at Jack’s approach. “I was just about to bring you your last cup, Sir,” Ianto said as he proffered Jack’s mug.

Jack took the mug from him, put it on the counter behind Ianto, and dropped to his knees. He deftly unfastened Ianto’s trousers and took him in his mouth. He worked his tongue until Ianto got hard. It didn’t take long, and Jack smiled at his own talent. Jack knew that he gave fantastic blow jobs, and Ianto was cumming in his mouth within a few minutes. Jack smiled as he swallowed Ianto’s cum. He rose to his feet, taking in Ianto’s wanton appearance with a grin. He leaned in, his lips almost touching Ianto’s, and said, “Thanks, Ianto,” as he reached behind him and grabbed his coffee mug.

He turned and walked to his office. Two can play at this game Jones, Ianto Jones, Jack thought, as he made his way into his office. Within five minutes he heard the sound of the Hub door signaling Ianto’s departure. Let’s see what you make of that tomorrow morning.

Ianto, however, made nothing of it the next morning. He was as impassive as ever when he delivered Jack’s morning coffee. Jack was beginning to enjoy this as much as the flirting – which had never stopped between them. The team had come to expect it, and anything out of the ordinary would garner suspicion. Ianto, too, had continued to put Jack in his place every time he made a crude comment. Jack was really having fun with the boy and was feeling good about hiring him. He started to wonder what he could do to ruffle that cool exterior.

It was Jack who was ruffled next though, as Ianto came into his office one night after several more exhausting days of heavy rift activity. Jack was sitting on the sofa, his legs outstretched and his head leaning back against the wall. “I don’t think I can face the paperwork tonight, Ianto,” Jack said with a sigh, as Ianto placed the coffee mug on Jack’s desk.

“I’m sure I can help with that, Sir,” Ianto said as he removed his suit jacket and placed it over a chair.

“We can leave it ‘til the morning,” Jack said with a yawn.

He felt a weight on him suddenly. He opened his eyes to find Ianto straddling his lap, his face inches from his. Ianto leaned in and kissed him hard. Jack responded with enthusiasm. “Not what I meant, Sir,” Ianto said as he slid down to the floor in between Jack’s legs.
Ianto unfastened Jack’s trousers, and before Jack could think, Ianto had his already hardening cock in his mouth. Ianto sucked cock the way he did everything else – extremely well. Jack was almost embarrassed by how quickly the young man had him cumming in his mouth. Ianto swallowed, put Jack’s softening cock back in his pants and zipped him back up. “I’ll expect that paperwork done in the morning, then, Sir,” he said with a grin.

And with that, Ianto was gone, grabbing his suit jacket on the way out the door. Jack laughed, got to his feet, and settled at his desk to start on the paperwork. Yes, Jack was really enjoying this.

The next morning, when Ianto arrived with Jack’s first cup of coffee, Jack leaned back in his chair and grinned. “I’ve finished that paperwork, Ianto.”

Ianto cocked an eyebrow at him. “So you found the energy after all.”

Jack’s grin broadened as he handed over the files. Ianto took the proffered files with a smirk. “I’ll get these submitted then,” he said, as he turned and left Jack’s office.

The next few months passed in a similar manner between Jack and Ianto. One would corner the other for a quick wank or blow job. It never went farther than that, and both would walk away immediately afterwards. They never spoke about their arrangement and rarely made any comments to each other about it. It was like they had a silent understanding.

It was Ianto who escalated their fooling around to sex. Jack had gotten into an argument with his team. They had found a glove that seemed to be able to resurrect the dead for a few minutes. Susie was becoming obsessed with it. The team was, for the moment, supporting her. Jack felt uneasy about it and wanted the glove shelved. It turned into a shouting match between Susie, Owen and even Toshiko, who was all for science for science’s sake. It ended with Jack kicking everyone out of the Hub. Jack returned to his office and starting throwing things around in an effort to alleviate some of his ire. Ianto appeared in his office doorway. “Come to add your two cents, Ianto?” Jack said icily.

“Yes, Sir,” Ianto replied.

He shoved Jack roughly around and threw him over his desk. Jack was so surprised that his pants were around his thighs before a coherent thought could enter his head. He felt a slicked finger penetrating his entrance. The finger moved around as though searching for – “Uuuhhhh” – Ianto’s finger had brushed his prostate.

One finger quickly became two, and then three as Ianto stretched him out. Jack was so turned on he could hardly stand it. Here he was, Captain of Torchwood Three, bent over his desk with his office assistant’s fingers in his arse. It was delectable. Ianto withdrew his fingers, and Jack groaned. After a few moments and the sound of a condom wrapper being torn open coming from behind him, he felt Ianto’s cock pressing against his opening. Jack groaned as Ianto pushed slowly inside him. Ianto gave him a few seconds to adjust to his presence then pushed himself in all the way in until his balls were pressed up against Jack.

Jack made an inhuman noise, and Ianto stopped. Jack realized that Ianto thought he was hurting him, so to reassure the young man that it was a noise of pleasure, Jack pushed himself back into Ianto. Ianto started to move at a slow pace. Jack, eager for more, thrust back harder. Ianto kept shifting around until he heard Jack yell out. He had found his prostate. Ianto stayed at that angle managing to hit Jack’s prostate on almost every stroke. Jack was quickly coming undone. As Ianto began to speed up, he reached around and grabbed Jack’s cock in his hand. Jack placed his hand around Ianto’s, and together they set up a counter stroke to Ianto’s thrusts.

Within a few minutes Jack was shouting and cumming all over his desk. Ianto gave a few final
thrusts and moaned through his release. He leaned down on top of Jack’s back while they both caught their breath. It was the most affection Ianto had ever shown Jack. Jack thought he’d risk breaking their silent encounters by saying something. “How is it that you always know exactly what I need, Ianto?”

Ianto chuckled, and Jack felt the vibrations through his chest. It felt nice. Ianto stood up, withdrew from Jack, removed and discarded the condom, zipped himself back into his pants, and straightened out his suit. “I’m psychic, Sir,” he responded. And with that he was out the door.

Jack was left shamelessly draped over his desk, arse in the air, having been thoroughly fucked. Though feeling pretty spectacular, he actually wished he and Ianto were a bit more than just a shag. He would have liked some company that night.
The following morning, Ianto delivered Jack’s coffee with his usual impassivity. Jack wanted to say something, but didn’t know what to say. It seemed Ianto didn’t want to acknowledge what they got up to after hours. He finally came out with, “I just can’t look at my desk the same way.”

Ianto smiled at him, *a really sexy smile*, Jack thought, as he grinned in return. Then the Hub alarm sounded signaling the arrival of one of the team. Ianto gave Jack a small nod and left to start on another pot of coffee. Jack leaned back in his chair and thought about the previous night. He felt his cock start to stir and shifted in his seat. *Can’t go there, Jack. Work to be done.* He turned his attention to the night’s Rift readings.

A few hours later, Susie called to him from her workstation. He walked onto the catwalk and looked down into the Hub. “Another murder, Jack. Let’s go and see if we can get the glove to work.”

Susie was becoming obsessed with the glove they’d found in the river, and it was making Jack uncomfortable. She had them all chasing down recent murder victims in order to try out the glove. Jack was beginning to feel like it was a waste of time. He had tried the glove. In fact, they had all had a go at working the glove, except for Ianto, who flat out refused. Jack had looked at him curiously, when he’d vehemently declined to touch the artifact, but didn’t press the issue. He sighed and said, “Right, Susie, Owen, with me. Toshiko, Ianto, monitor from here.”

The murder was a wash. The victim had been dead too long, but the next few days saw a flurry of murder victims. Jack was feeling increasingly uneasy about Susie and the glove. He was going to talk to her, but then P.C. Gwen Cooper became involved, and Jack’s attention was diverted by her. The behavior of his second in command was momentarily forgotten.

The evening after Jack retrofitted Gwen, Ianto turned up in Jack’s office after the others had left. He found Jack sitting at his desk looking lost in thought. “Ianto, you shouldn’t be here.”

“Ianto, you shouldn’t be here.”

“Ianto, you shouldn’t be here.”

“Ianto, you shouldn’t be here.”

“Neither should you. Sir, do you have a moment?”

“Sit down, Ianto. What’s up?”

*I can’t wait to see what this is about,* thought Jack. *Is he finally going to say something about the fact that he fucked me over my desk the other night?* “It’s Susie, Sir. She’s… hiding something. I think it has to do with that glove. Something’s… not right.”

*Huh,* thought Jack, *not what I expected.* Aloud, he said, “You think so too, huh?”

Ianto leaned at him in surprise. Jack turned to his computer and pulled up the CCTV to see if he could catch Susie leaving the Hub. He was surprised to see her standing in front of the water tower by the invisible lift. “Uh oh, this can’t be good,” Jack said.

Ianto leaned over his shoulder to look at the computer screen. P.C. Cooper was walking towards the water tower. “Guess she’s resistant to retrofitted,” Ianto commented.
Jack was suddenly aware of how close Ianto was. Ianto’s face was right next to his, as they peered at the screen. Jack could smell him, feel his warmth. Jack felt a stirring between his legs. If I just lean in a few centimeters… "Captain!" There was alarm in Ianto’s voice as he pointed to the screen.

Jack looked at where Ianto was pointing. Susie was holding Gwen at gunpoint. “Shit!” Jack yelled.

He shot up from the desk, placing his comm in his ear, as simultaneously Ianto grabbed Jack’s greatcoat and held it out to him. Jack grabbed it as he ran out the door. “Ianto, comms on my desk.”

The next half hour was a blur. Susie shot him in the head point blank. He revived to find her holding Gwen at gunpoint. He tried to get Susie to give the gun up, but she chose to take the easy way out. She killed herself.

When it was all over, Jack tapped on his ear piece. “Ianto, I need a body bag.”

“I’m on my way up, Sir,” Ianto’s voice responded immediately in his ear.

“Thanks, Ianto.”

Minutes later, Jack was helping Ianto put Susie’s body in the bag and placing her on the lift. “I’ve got it from here, Sir. You should deal with P.C. Cooper.”

They both looked at her. She was still sitting on the ground where she had fallen to her knees after Susie shot herself. “You sure?” asked Jack.

Ianto nodded. “What did I ever do without you?” He smiled at Ianto, but there was pain behind his eyes.

Jack touched his wrist strap, and the lift began to lower Ianto and Susie’s body into the Hub.

A few hours later, Jack returned to the Hub after offering Gwen a job and getting her safely home. “Ianto!” he called. “Ianto?”

There was no answer. Jack listened to the background noise of the Hub for a few moments before his shoulders slumped and he slowly walked up to his office. He’s gone. He’s probably disgusted with me. I don’t blame him. I’m a terrible leader. I’m a failure. How did I not see this sooner? Jack walked into his office, sat on the sofa, took out his Webley, and shot himself in the head.

Jack jerked back to life with a loud inhalation of breath. He felt the usual panic he experienced when reviving, but he also heard movement beside him. He looked up to see Ianto in blue rubber gloves, washing the blood from the wall with a scrub brush.

“Ianto?” Jack asked weakly.

Ianto stopped his scrubbing and slowly turned to look at Jack. “Did you get it out of your system then, Sir?”

Jack was too disoriented to respond. Ianto sighed, put down the brush, took off his rubber gloves, and sat down next to Jack. “I really wish you wouldn’t do this, Sir,” Ianto said calmly. “Two gunshot wounds to the head in one night? You’re going to have a hell of a migraine.”

“I thought you left,” Jack managed to say.

“I had a quick shower.”

For a moment Jack just stared at Ianto, and Ianto held his gaze, blue on blue. “How long have you
known?” Jack finally asked.

“You’re rubbish at archiving, Sir.”

A look of fear shot through Jack, and Ianto caught it. “I’m not going to say anything, Jack.”

Jack started. It was the first time Ianto had used his name. He liked the sound if it, spoken in Ianto’s beautiful Welsh vowels. He dropped his head into his hands. “I’ve failed, Ianto.”

“No Jack. It was the glove. There’s something evil about it. Susie changed. She became… deranged. It wasn’t your fault.” He took Jack’s hand.

Jack tensed at the contact, and Ianto started to pull his hand away, but Jack held on tightly. Jack looked into Ianto’s eyes again and saw sympathy. He relaxed a little. “How much do you know?”

“A bit,” was Ianto’s response.

Jack figured that Ianto knew a great deal but decided to let it go for the time being. “Sometimes it’s just too much to bear,” he said quietly, looking down at Ianto’s hand that was still holding his.

Ianto surprised him with his next remark. “I imagine immortality would be rather a curse.”

Jack eyed him curiously. “It’s not many people who appreciate that, Ianto. Most people think that it’s the ultimate desire.”

Ianto just shook his head.

Jack’s eyes began to fill with tears, and Ianto put his other arm around him, not letting go of the hand he was holding. They sat there for a few moments in silence while Jack wiped at his eyes, until Ianto asked slightly ironically, “Coffee?”

Jack laughed. “I suppose your coffee is good enough to fix just about anything. I’d love a cup.”

Ianto smiled at him, and Jack thought his smile was beautiful. “I’ll just finish cleaning this up,” Ianto said, taking his arm from around Jack’s shoulders and releasing his hand.

“No, Ianto. That’s my responsibility. You shouldn’t have to do that.”

Ianto looked at him for a minute, then shrugged and walked out of the office to go and make the coffee.

While Ianto was away, Jack reflected over the last few minutes. He’d thought he was alone in the Hub. The fact that Ianto was there, that Ianto knew that he couldn’t die, that Ianto had actually started to clean up his blood in that neat Ianto way of his, that Ianto was kind, not overly hysterical, not even really freaked out, not demanding answers, just kind and understanding, it was… well, it was… nice.

Jack cleaned up, changed his shirt, and was sitting at his desk when Ianto returned bearing two mugs. He gratefully took the mug Ianto handed him, motioned for Ianto to sit across from him and took a sip. “Mmmm… what is that, Amaretto?”

“Yup, thought we both could use a drink,” Ianto smiled.

Jack smiled in return, and took another sip, savoring the flavors on his tongue. “You always seem to know exactly what I need, Ianto, and you’re always here when I need you. Don’t you ever go home?”
“I don’t sleep much these days, Sir. Might as well get some work done.”

Jack half smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “I don’t sleep much either,” he sighed. Then after a moment and with a true grin he said, “Ya know, there are other things to do late at night when you can’t sleep…”

Ianto chuckled. “I see we’re feeling better then, Sir. I’ll leave you to it.”

Ianto got up from his seat and had started to walk away, when he turned around, walked quickly back, and put a hand on Jack’s shoulder. He leaned down and kissed Jack softly on the lips. It was different from their other kisses, which were always about lust and need. “I’m sorry you’re in pain,” he whispered into Jack’s ear.

Ianto kissed him softly again, almost tenderly. Jack opened his mouth, and Ianto caressed his tongue with his own. It was…different. Ianto broke off the kiss suddenly. “I should go,” he said, and with that, he was gone.

_Damn_, thought Jack. _He keeps doing that._
The following morning when Ianto appeared in Jack’s office doorway with his usual cup of coffee, Jack said “Come in, Ianto. Sit down.”

“What can I do for you, Sir?”


Ianto nodded. They looked at each other until the silence was broken by the sound of the cogwheel door opening and voices coming from downstairs, as the rest of the team arrived for work. “I’d better get them their coffee,” Ianto said, rising from his chair. “Owen without his coffee in the morning is worse than the Weevils mating.”

“Ianto, wait. There’s something else.”

Ianto sat back down. “I want you to oversee the secure archives. I’ll give you the code, but no one else on the team is to know it. It’s where I keep the dangerous alien artifacts. As you said, I’m rubbish at archiving,” Jack smirked.

Ianto nodded, his expression neutral. Jack explained everything that Ianto needed to know. When he had finished, Jack gave him a hard look and asked, “Ianto, how much weapons training have you had?”

Ianto’s reply was a moment in coming, “I’ve had the standard Torchwood One training, Sir.” He added as an afterthought, “I’m not a field officer.”

“I don’t want you in the field, Ianto. Your coffee skills are too valuable to me,” Jack said with a grin. “I just want all of my team weapons trained. And since you are going to hold the codes to the secure archives, I want you weapons trained. Right, shooting range, you and me at 21:00 tonight.”

“Yes, Sir,” Ianto replied.

“By the way,” said Jack, changing the subject. “What did you think of Gwen Cooper?”

“Very genuine, Sir. What she feels on the inside is exactly what she shows on the outside. She definitely wears her heart on her sleeve.”

Jack nodded. “Good, because I hired her.”

“I’m glad, Sir.”

After a pause, Jack said, “She saw me die.”

“I know, Jack,” replied Ianto softly. “What did you tell her?”

“I told her that I couldn’t die, that something happened to me and since then I couldn’t die. And
that’s all I told her,” Jack looked hard at him.

“Yes, Sir,” was Ianto’s only reply.

“JACK?” Toshiko called from her workstation.

Jack got out of his chair and started walking out of his office. He paused in the doorway, turned around, and looked at Ianto. “21:00 hours, shooting range.”

“Yes, Sir,” Ianto said to his retreating form.

21:00 hours found Ianto and Jack in the shooting range. Jack kept handing Ianto different weapons, and Ianto would shoot at the target. He was a really good shot. After the fifth gun was handed to Ianto, and all rounds were duly expended, Jack walked up behind Ianto, pressed his body to Ianto’s back, lifted Ianto’s headset, and whispered in his ear, “Ianto Jones, you’ve been holding out on me.”

“We can’t have that, Sir,” Ianto said, as he threw off his headset and kissed Jack hard on the mouth. He and Jack kissed roughly and moved until Jack’s back was pressed up against the wall. Ianto bit Jack’s lower lip, and Jack groaned. Ianto kissed along his jaw and his neck. Jack’s neck was a particularly erogenous zone for him, and he started panting as Ianto licked the skin behind his ear. Ianto grabbed his shoulders and flipped Jack around so his face was to the wall. He bit and sucked on his neck from behind. Jack desperately wanted Ianto to fuck him again so he unfastened his trousers, slid them down and pushed his bare arse against Ianto’s erection. There was a pause, then he heard Ianto's zipper open and felt a slicked finger enter him, and begin to stretch him out. “Just fuck me already,” Jack grunted.

The finger withdrew. Jack heard Ianto open a condom wrapper and felt Ianto put his hands on his hips. Then Ianto entered him completely with one hard thrust – just the way Jack wanted it. Ianto set a relentless pace. Jack scrabbled for purchase on the wall, as Ianto ruthlessly pounded into him. Jack was practically screaming, as Ianto hit his prostate with every thrust. He reached down to stroke his own cock. Ianto’s hand joined his, and Jack was cumming on the wall in seconds. Ianto gave a final thrust and groaned. Jack felt the throbbing in his arse as Ianto came. He wished that Ianto wasn’t wearing a condom so he could feel Ianto cum inside him.

As usual, as soon as it was over, Ianto had withdrawn, cleaned himself up and straightened out his suit. Jack sighed. Now he’s going to run away again, Jack thought. To Jack’s surprise, Ianto leaned close to Jack’s ear and said with irony in his voice, “Thanks for the weapons training, Sir.” Then he was gone.

Jack really wished that Ianto would stick around for a while. He wanted to broach the subject of not using a condom with the young man. He knew they were both clean. Jack couldn’t get sick, nor could he be a carrier, and the rest of the team got regular checks per Owen’s orders. Of course, Jack didn’t know who else Ianto was sleeping with. The thought made him squirm uncomfortably. Is that jealousy, Harkness? No, can’t be. He was Captain Jack Harkness after all. He didn’t do jealous. But he would like to know who else Ianto was sleeping with. He was curious. Come to think of it, he didn’t really know anything about Ianto’s life outside of Torchwood. He didn’t really know Ianto at all.

They never got around to that conversation, as Gwen started work a few short days later. Jack was distracted by her. The team dynamic had changed with her arrival. She brought a lightness and wonder into the Hub – something they had been missing. We’ve all been doing this too long, Jack thought. He overheard the conversation the team had about him when they were eating Chinese food in the conference room after they captured Carys. He smiled when Ianto said he didn’t care about Jack’s sexuality. When they speculated about who Jack was, he tensed when he heard Ianto’s voice,
but Ianto said, “Used to be something big in the CIA, that’s what I reckon.”

Yes, he could trust Ianto to keep his secrets. He wondered again how much Ianto knew. He’d have to have a conversation with that boy about it some time. It seemed like there were a lot of conversations he needed to have with Ianto, but he just never got around to it. So much to do…

He gave weapons training to Gwen as well. He was so turned on by the memory of what Ianto had done to him there just a few days ago that he found himself seducing Gwen. That had to stop. One twisted Torchwood employee relationship was quite enough for him, thank you very much. Besides, Gwen had a boyfriend, and he wanted her to hold on to that life. It’s what made her different from the rest of them, and they needed that difference. They needed her fresh, unjaded perspective.

Gwen got off to a rocky start, but this was Torchwood after all. Expect the unexpected. So she let out some alien gas, and some people got killed. It was an accident, and Jack knew she felt terrible about it. It was a hell of a way to start a new job, but Jack knew she’d be okay. Gwen would find her way and her place at Torchwood.

And she did, after a week or so. Jack was happy with the team he had built, and he was starting to feel complacent. He forgot to expect the unexpected, for just as Gwen was starting to get settled into the team and Jack was feeling really good about his employees, all hell broke loose. Ianto Jones had been hiding a Cyberwoman in Jack’s basement for almost six months. Jack’s self-satisfied notions about his team came crashing down around him.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my brilliant beta riftintime.

Owen was the first to move after the carnage of Annie/Lisa/Cyberwoman. He went to Ianto and bent down. "Come on, Ianto. Get up. It's over. She's gone. There's nothing you can do. Get up, mate."

When Ianto didn't move, Owen wrapped his hands around Ianto's arms and pulled the still weeping young man to his feet. "Owen!" Jack's voice was threatening.

"Jack, he's in shock."

"Don't care right now, Owen!" Jack bellowed.

"Jack, you need to take a step back. Calm the fuck down. Go to your office and pace or go stand on a roof or something. Girls, deal with the bodies."

"Who died and made you the boss?" Jack scowled, but he turned on his heel and left the room.

"Come on, mate. Let's get you into the shower and into a change of clothes," Owen said pulling Ianto out of the room.

"Doesn't matter, Owen," replied Ianto softly. "Death or retcon. That's the choice."

"I highly doubt it, Ianto. We're all fuck ups, and Jack knows it. You weren't trying to get us killed. You were just a fool in love. Been there, mate. I'm willing to bet Jack has too, for all his bluster. Now come on, shower."

Owen walked Ianto to the shower room, grabbing a spare set of scrubs on the way. He handed the scrubs to Ianto and pushed him towards the shower. "I have a spare suit in the tourist office upstairs," Ianto whispered.

"Well, get started with that, then after you shower you can go upstairs and put on a fresh suit. I'm sure you won't want to face him without your armor," Owen said with a wry grin.

"Thanks Owen," Ianto muttered. "I don't deserve it."

"You're right, you git. Tomorrow I'm going back to being a bastard to you, so enjoy this while it lasts," Owen snarked.

A ghost of a grin passed over Ianto's face before his eyes filled with tears again. "Oh, god, not more tears. I'm outta here," said Owen, as he left the shower room.

Owen made his way to Jack's office. Jack was pacing his office, throwing the occasional object against the wall when Owen opened his office door. Jack opened his mouth to say something, but Owen cut him off. "Don't even start, Jack. Gwen's first day here, she let loose alien gas that killed several people. Toshiko was imprisoned for treason when you pulled her out of a UNIT prison to join Torchwood, and me with Katie… well let's just say we've all had our moments. Why is it that
you're so angry with him, when everyone else gets a pass? Is it because he pulled a fast one on you? Is it just pride, Jack? Whatever it is, get over it. We fucked up, you and me. You, because you probably know more about what happened at Torchwood One than I do, and me, because I'm a doctor, and I didn't notice that he was suffering from PTSD. We didn't even try to find out what happened to him at Canary Wharf. This is our fault as much as it is his. So pull yourself together, and take care of your team." With that, Owen turned and slammed Jack's office door on the way out, leaving Jack standing with his mouth slightly open.

Owen made his way back to the shower room. He was relieved to find Ianto sitting on the bench wearing the scrubs. His ruined suit was in the trash. Owen couldn't believe how young Ianto looked out of his suit. He thought back to Ianto's file. "Only twenty-three, Owen thought, Jesus. "Come on, Ianto. Let's go upstairs and get your spare suit. I just can't look at you in scrubs. It freaks me out."

Ianto rose without a word and followed Owen up to the tourist office. Once upstairs, Ianto changed into his spare suit and stood looking forlorn. "Okay, Ianto, you need to go back down there now and talk to Jack. I'm going to get out of here. Don't want to be around for you two screaming at each other."

"I really don't care what Jack does to me," Ianto mumbled.

"Yes, you do. Now go face the music."

Owen pushed the button that opened the door to the Hub. Ianto stood for a moment, then turned and walked through the doorway.

Gwen entered Jack's office. Jack was standing looking out of his window over the Hub. "Jack," Gwen hesitated.

"I need you to burn everything. Burn all of the bodies, dismantle that conversion unit and burn it."

"Tosh is already on it. I guess she helped with the aftermath of Canary Wharf so she knows what to do. I just came up to see how you were doing."

Just then the alarm sounded and the Hub door rolled open. Ianto emerged and looked up at Jack. They held eye contact for a moment, before Ianto gave a slight nod of the head, and Jack nodded back. Ianto turned and made his way into the Hub.

"You wouldn't have shot him, not really," Gwen stated.

"Wouldn't I?" Jack replied. He still wasn't sure that he wasn't going to shoot him.

"Would you have shot me if I had gone to stand by him?"

"But you didn't."

Jack wasn't in the mood for this. He watched as Ianto started picking up around the Hub, clearing up their shit, taking care of them. He was always taking care of them. They hadn't taken care of him at all, had they? They hadn't asked him any questions. Jack hadn't asked him any questions, and he had been sleeping with him.

"But if I had though," Gwen pushed. Gods, would she ever stop?

"But you didn't!" Just leave it, Gwen.

"All that deception because he couldn't bear to live without her."
Jack said nothing. Gwen kept pushing. "So have you ever loved anyone that much?"

Jack was so not going there. He didn't reply. They both watched Ianto for a few moments before Gwen asked, "Will he stay?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders. Did he even want him to stay?

Gwen said, "When she had a hold of you, I thought, just for a moment I thought that you could die after all."

This was something Jack could talk about. He grabbed onto the turn in the conversation. "Want to know a secret? So did I. And I felt so alive!"

After a few moments of silence Jack said, "Let's go help Tosh."

They made their way down to the wreckage of the cyber conversion unit and began to help Tosh dismantle it. After they had everything taken down and burned to Jack's satisfaction, he said, "You two get out of here. We're done for the day."

Gwen headed back upstairs, but Tosh remained behind. "Jack, I committed treason to save my mother. I can't imagine what I would do for a lover," Tosh said in her quiet voice, and then she turned to walk away.

"Toshiko?" she turned around. "Tell Ianto I want to see him in my office in half an hour."

Tosh nodded and headed back to the main floor of the Hub.
Jack made sure Gwen and Tosh had left. He sent a text to Owen telling him not to bother coming back in. He then made his way slowly to his office. He still wasn't sure what to say to Ianto. He wasn't sure how he felt about it, or what was acceptable anger and what was wounded pride. Each one of his team, in their own way, had fought for Ianto. Why was he the only one so enraged? He thought he might know the answer to that, and he didn't like the feeling.

As Jack walked through the Hub, he noticed how tidy everything was. All of the trash had been picked up, all the coffee cups had been washed and put away, and everything was in its place. Ianto had done this. While Jack was deciding whether or not to shoot the boy, he had continued to pick up after them. When Jack entered his office, Ianto was sitting stiffly at his desk across from Jack's chair. Jack noticed the absence of coffee. It was the first time that Jack had called Ianto to his office for a meeting, and Ianto hadn't brought Jack a cup of coffee. Jack's insides began to squirm. He slid into his seat, and looked into Ianto's eyes. Ianto's eyes were empty of emotion, as though he was dead inside. It sent a chill through Jack. He sighed and dropped his head into his hands. "You used me," Jack stated bluntly.

"Yes," Ianto replied tersely.

"You seduced me, so I wouldn't find out about her."

"Yes."

"You lied to me."

"Yes."

"You played me."

"Yes."

"You conned me."

"Yes."

With each sharp yes, Jack felt his recently abated anger roar back to life. "You hid yourself from us," he repeated his earlier statement.

Ianto remained silent. Jack's rage threatened to boil over. "What else are you keeping from us?" he yelled, re-asking the question that Ianto had never answered.

Ianto was silent for a minute, as Jack glared at him. He finally spoke in low voice, drawing the words out, "You… fucking… hypocrite."

"What did you say?" Jack recoiled slightly.
"I called you a fucking hypocrite, Sir." The honorific was used with such venom, Jack was momentarily taken aback.

This conversation wasn't going at all how Jack had planned. One thing was certain; Ianto Jones never ceased to astonish him. But it was like the dam had broken, and Ianto's perfect butler façade had crumbled. "Secrets? Captain Jack Harkness accusing someone of keeping secrets!"

Ianto stood up in a rage. Jack jumped to his feet. "What am I keeping from you? I hid myself from you? Oh, please! Spare me your self-righteous indignation! You want to talk about secrets? Let's talk about some of yours! Did you really think you could erase yourself from all of the files in the archives? You couldn't find your way around the archives with a torch and a road map! What are you keeping from us Captain?" Ianto spat out, shaking with rage.

"My secrets don't put the world in danger, Ianto! And you committed treason!"

"Who's Torchwood Enemy Number One?" Ianto roared.

Jack just stared at Ianto. "Who's Torchwood Enemy Number One, you bastard?" Ianto looked meaningfully at the hand in the jar that was sitting near Jack's desk.

Jack's hand instinctually moved towards his Webley. Ianto caught the movement and the expression on his faced changed. Jack started at the look in Ianto's eyes. The anger was gone and was replaced by relief. *He wants me to shoot him!* Jack took his hand off his gun and sat down in his chair. *Well he's not getting off that easily.* He looked Ianto in the eye. "You're on suspension. One month. Now get the hell out of here," he growled. "I don't want to look at you right now."

Ianto turned and left Jack's office and the Torchwood Hub without a backward glance.
Ianto didn't remember how he made it back to his flat. He didn't remember changing into jeans and a T-shirt. He just knew that he was done. He didn't want to be here anymore. He had nothing left. He looked around his flat – the one that he had never bothered to unpack or make into a home. He had chosen the first available flat he'd found and had movers pack up his and Lisa's flat in London and move their belongings into the flat in Cardiff. He had never bothered to unpack anything but essentials. He had spent most of his time at the Hub anyway, either working or keeping vigil by Lisa's life support unit. I have nothing left.

He began to pack up the few things he had taken out over the past months. All of his and Lisa's belongings would be Torchwood property now and end up in a storage unit. At least it won't be my job to do it, he thought wryly to himself. After several hours, he had finished putting the last of his suits into a box. He walked into the bedroom and retrieved the gun he had taken from Torchwood One from his bedside table. He checked it was loaded and walked with the gun into the kitchen. He grabbed a bottle of scotch and a glass and made his way into the living room. He sat on the floor and leaned back against a packing box. He poured himself a glass of scotch and took a sip. All that for nothing. Lisa's gone, my friends are gone. I killed two people. And Jack... He picked up the gun.

Out of nowhere, he felt a hand grab his and wrest the gun away from him. He jumped nearly out of his skin. Captain Jack Harkness stood there, holding his gun, an unreadable expression on his face. Ianto recoiled, "Jesus, where the hell did you come from?"

"Ianto, I've been in your flat for twenty minutes and you didn't even notice. What the hell are you doing with this gun?"

"It's not one of yours, Sir, if that's what you're worried about," Ianto said acidly.

"That's not what I meant, and you know it."

Jack turned and walked into Ianto's kitchen, retrieved a glass for himself, and sat down on the floor facing Ianto. He picked up the bottle of scotch, poured himself a generous glass, and downed it in one go. He then refilled both his and Ianto's glasses.

"I'm responsible for two innocent deaths, Jack. I'm responsible for Li..." He could barely get her name out. Tears formed in his eyes and threatened to fall down. He swallowed them back. There had been quite enough of that, thank you. "I endangered the team and the entire world. I deserve to pay the price. The price for treason in Torchwood is death or retcon. If you're not going to kill me, or let me kill myself, are you here to retcon me?"

"Is that what you want, Ianto?"


"That wasn't your Lisa we killed, Ianto. It was a Cyberman."
"I know. That's what makes all of this so awful, Jack. It's why I deserve to die. Part of me knew that she… that it wasn't Lisa anymore, but I couldn't let go. I couldn't lose her, too. I lost everything that day, everything. And now I have nothing left to lose."

"There's always something left to lose, Ianto," Jack repeated himself. "I have lived a long time, fought in many battles, two world wars… but I suspect you know that already."

Ianto didn't reply. Jack continued, "I have loved, Ianto, and I have lost, but I have no choice but to keep going. What's more, I've made terrible mistakes in my life, done things that I have tried desperately to forget, and I've had to live with it. It's horrible, gut wrenching, heart breaking, but it's what makes us human. It's what makes us brave. Dying is the easy way out. Facing your demons, accepting responsibility for your mistakes, becoming a better person because of it – it's what makes us truly remarkable. I forgot that for a while. I used to think it was Gwen who reminded me of that, but I was wrong, Ianto. It's you who has truly made me remember what we are fighting for, and why this planet, this race is worth saving. You were misguided, Ianto, but honorable. You did this out of love, not some malevolent plan to destroy the world, not for financial gain, or for power or vengeance. You did it for love, Ianto. That's more than I can say for some of the things I've done. I think that's what made me so angry. I've pulled cons like you did, for much less worthy motives. You are a better man than me."

They sat in silence for a while sipping their scotch. Ianto finally looked into Jack's eyes. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm sorry I called you a monster. I'm sorry I endangered everyone. I'm sorry I betrayed you. I was wracked with guilt if it makes any difference."

"It does, Ianto. You and I have much to discuss, but now is not the time. You need some time to heal and to process. I'll come back and see you in a few days. And, please, Ianto, no more guns. I need you on my team."

With that, Jack got up and swept out of Ianto's flat, taking the gun with him.

Ianto sat still, thinking about everything Jack had said. It almost hurt worse that Jack seemed to forgive him, but as Jack's words sunk in, he realized the intentions behind them. Death was the easy way out – the coward's way out. The true punishment would be to live with the pain of losing Lisa, the blood of two innocent people on his hands, the betrayal of the team, and the betrayal of Jack. This was his true punishment – to endure. Ianto curled into a ball on the floor. He would have to live with his pain, there would be no reprieve. The thought brought fresh tears to his eyes. He lay on the floor sobbing until exhaustion finally took him.
Jack thought about his encounter with Ianto. He had entered Ianto's flat without the boy even noticing, and had watched as Ianto boxed up the rest of his belongings and taken the gun out of his drawer. *Only Ianto would still be considerate of others before he kills himself;* thought Jack, *since we would have to take care of his belongings.* Jack was consumed with overwhelming affection for the young man. He could not let Ianto destroy himself. In fact, as soon as Ianto had explained who the Cyberman was, Jack knew deep down that he wouldn't kill Ianto. Jack had been filled with rage because of his own demons. His anger was misplaced. Ianto was right. He was a hypocrite. Jack had intervened.

He didn't think Ianto would attempt to take his life again, but he knew that when the young man realized he was going to have to live with the consequences of his actions, things were going to get a whole lot worse. Jack knew that feeling all too well. He battled with himself for twenty-four hours before finally giving up and driving the SUV back to Ianto's flat. Jack let himself in again. Ianto was curled up in a ball on the floor. At first Jack was terrified that he had misjudged, and Ianto had killed himself after all, but as he approached, he saw the rise and fall of Ianto's chest. Jack felt extreme relief wash over him. He knelt down by the boy and put his hand on his face. He doubted Ianto had moved since he had left the previous day. "Ianto," Jack whispered into his ear.

Ianto's eyes opened, and he turned his head to look at Jack. Jack felt his own tears well up at the sight of the pain in the boy's eyes. "I'm here, Ianto. I will help you through this."

"I can't do it, Jack." Ianto was barely audible.

"You can, Ianto. You will. Now get up and get into the shower. I'll find you something to eat."

Ianto didn't move. Jack sighed, wrapped his arms around Ianto, bent his knees and hefted Ianto to his feet. Ianto was almost Jack's height, but smaller in build than Jack. Jack all but carried him into the bathroom. He sat him on the toilet lid while he turned the shower on and waited for the temperature to adjust. He began to strip Ianto of his clothes in a business-like manner. Then he stripped himself. Ianto just sat there, mute. *You were wrong, Owen,* Jack thought to himself. *He wasn't in shock before. Now he's in shock.* Jack lifted Ianto into the shower where he made quick work of washing Ianto and shampooing his hair.

Jack tried not to think about the fact that this was the first time he and Ianto had been naked together. Sure, they'd had sex, but it had always been a quick hand job in the archives or a blow job in Jack's office. Ianto had fucked him over Jack's desk once and up against the wall in the shooting range once, but their clothes had never fully come off. It was always a quick release of sexual tension, never in a bed, and never anything afterwards except for a swift straightening out of rumpled clothes, and Ianto's hasty retreat. Neither of them had ever really acknowledged the sexual relationship between them.

Now that Ianto's body was in full view, Jack noticed for the first time just how thin and pale the boy was. He really hadn't been paying attention to him at all. Owen was right, this was partly their fault.
Jack swore to himself that he would do better, both with Ianto, and with the rest of his team.

He got Ianto out of the shower, wrapped a towel around him, and sat him on the bed. He quickly dressed himself in his trousers and white undershirt. He moved to one of Ianto's boxes marked, 'Ianto Jones, street clothes'. He dug around until he found pyjama bottoms and a T-shirt. He dressed Ianto like he was a child, Ianto unmoving and limp under Jack's hands. He then pushed Ianto down, so he was lying on his bed. Jack pulled the covers over him and ran his hand through Ianto's hair. "Sleep Ianto. I'll be here."

Jack sat down on the floor at the side of the bed to wait for the nightmares he knew would come. Ianto made it through two hours of sleep before he started writhing under the covers. Jack jumped up, put his arms around Ianto, and whispered, "Shhh, Ianto. It's just a dream. I've got you."

Ianto settled back to sleep, before the nightmare really started. Three more times Jack jumped up to comfort Ianto before his nightmares got out of hand, until Jack just gave up and joined Ianto in his bed. He wrapped his arms around Ianto and pulled him close, so that Ianto's back was pressed to his chest. Ianto remained quiet for what few hours were left of the night. Jack dozed off and on. When the sunlight began to stream into Ianto's bedroom window, Jack felt Ianto stir. Ianto must have realized where he was, because Jack felt him stiffen in his arms. Jack just held on tighter, until he felt Ianto relax again. "The first night is the hardest, Ianto."

Ianto turned in Jack's arms, so that he was facing him. Jack's heart felt heavy at the pain in Ianto's eyes. "Why?" Ianto whispered.

Jack knew that Ianto was asking him why he had stayed, not why the first night was the hardest. "Because, you were right. I didn't pay attention, and I screwed up. I will help you through this."

Ianto closed his eyes again, and Jack kissed the top of his head. "I have to get back to the Hub. I'm sorry I can't stay longer. I'll come back when I can."

He slowly extricated himself from Ianto's bed, dressed quickly, and then leaned over Ianto and whispered in his ear, "Please try to eat something today, Ianto."

Jack kissed his forehead and left Ianto's flat.
Ianto awoke with a start. He felt arms around him, a warm body pressed against his back, and Jack's familiar scent in his nose. Oh, God, Jack! He stiffened. Jack's here, in my house, in my bed! Jack had bathed him. Jack had dressed him and put him in bed. Jack had stayed. Jack's holding me! Ianto was mortified. He felt Jack hold him tighter. He's not going to let me move away. And then Ianto relaxed again. He had to admit, it felt good to be held like this. Then he remembered the events of the previous day, and bile rose in his throat. He heard Jack's voice say, "The first night is the hardest, Ianto."

How can Jack be so kind to me after what I've done? How can he stand to be near me? Why aren't I dead or retconned back to puberty? Why did Jack take care of me last night? He turned in Jack's arms to face him. "Why?" was all he managed to get out. His throat was raw.

"Because, you were right. I didn't pay attention, and I screwed up. I will help you through this."

I don't deserve it, Jack. He closed his eyes. He felt Jack kiss the top of his head. It was the first real sign of affection Jack had ever shown him. The tears rose up and threatened to fall again. No! He screamed in his head. I've been pathetic enough. Jack is right. I have to suffer this. I will not be this wretched anymore. No one should have to take care of me, least of all Captain Jack Harkness!

"I have to get back to the Hub. I'm sorry I can't stay longer. I'll come back when I can."

He felt Jack get up and heard him dressing. Ianto remained still with his eyes closed. He then felt Jack leaning close to his ear. "Please try to eat something today, Ianto."

He felt Jack kiss his forehead and heard him leave the flat.

Ianto lay still in bed, willing himself to move. He had to get up. He had to move. Jack was going to come back, and Ianto would be damned if he was going to let Jack see him in this pitiable state again. Ianto slowly drew back the covers and swung his legs around. He rose to his feet. His stomach lurched, and he raced to the toilet. He vomited bile, since there was nothing in his stomach. When was the last time he had eaten? He couldn't remember. When his stomach had finally settled, and the vomiting stopped, he slid down to the cool tile floor of the bathroom. He lay there for a minute before scolding himself. Get up, Ianto Jones. You have to endure. You cannot let Jack find you like this again. With one powerful heave, he lifted himself off the floor. He grabbed his toothbrush and began brushing his teeth, while he turned the shower on and adjusted the heat.

Ten minutes later, he was showered and searching through his boxes for clothing. He put on a pair of jeans and a black hoodie. I'm going to have to unpack all of this shit, he thought surveying the room. What am I going to do with Lisa's things? He felt his stomach give another heave. No No No! I won't do this! I have to endure. Jack's coming back. He stood for a moment, not knowing what to do. Then he remembered Jack's voice saying, 'please try to eat something today, Ianto'. He walked slowly to his kitchen. There was little food in his flat, but he managed to find some bread and jam and made some toast. It tasted like sandpaper, but he forced it down with a glass of water. He then...
surveyed his surroundings. There was a sofa, but it was still wrapped in plastic from the movers. The only furniture he had unpacked was the bed and a bedside table. He'd really only came here to sleep. "Well, I might as well unpack some stuff. Bad enough that Jack's seen the state of my flat," he said aloud.

He set to, and by the time Jack let himself into his flat that night, Ianto had unpacked the sofa, a television and DVD player, and a kitchen table and two chairs. He was unpacking dishes and silverwear, washing them and putting them away when Jack strode through the kitchen door. "Ianto Jones, this is a sight for sore eyes," Jack said, with a big smile on his face.

Ianto put down the dish he was washing. "Good evening, Sir. Would you like a cup of coffee?" Jack's smile faltered a little. "Well, I can't tell you how much I miss your coffee, so I'm not going to refuse, but…"

Ianto turned to the coffee machine and began preparations. "I brought dinner, Ianto." He brandished a bag. "Chinese. Did you eat anything today?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Ianto, don't do this to me."

"What, Sir?"

"Don't put on your butler mask and pretend that everything's okay. I'm glad you're up and finally unpacking your flat, but I can't have you hiding behind that disguise you wear."

"I don't know what you mean, Sir."

"Ianto…" Jack said menacingly.

Ianto's whole body went rigid. "Please, Jack," he whispered. "Please just let me get through today."

Jack looked hard at him, then nodded and put the food down on the table. "Have enough clean plates for two?"

"Yes, Sir. Do you want your coffee with dinner or after?" Ianto asked as he picked up two plates and silver wear and set them on the kitchen table.

"How about afterwards? Let's eat. I'm starved. I spent the whole day chasing Weevils around Splott. Why is it always Splott?"

Jack launched into a description of the day's events, as Ianto served the food. Ianto did his best to eat what he could, but ended up pushing a lot of his food around his plate as Jack talked. When Jack finally pushed his chair away from the table and threw down his napkin, Ianto stood and went to the coffee pot to prepare two mugs. "Let's take them in the living room, since you have a sofa to sit on now, Ianto."

Ianto nodded, and they settled themselves on the sofa. Jack took a sip of his coffee and moaned with pleasure. "I can't tell you how much I miss this coffee, Ianto! It's going to be a long month without you. I had to send Gwen down to the archives for files today. She got lost and it took us half an hour to find her again."

"You let Gwen into my archives," Ianto said, arching an eyebrow.

Jack laughed. Ianto really liked the sound of his laugh. "Thought that would get a rise out of you."
Now, let's see if we can't get this flat looking lived in."

"You really don't have to help me, Sir."

"I know, but I'm going to, Ianto, so you're just going to have to deal with my company."

"Yes, Sir."

Jack and Ianto worked at unpacking boxes of books, CDs, DVDs, and other various items. After a couple of hours, Jack said, "I should get back to the Hub, Ianto. Will you be okay?"

"I'll be fine, Sir."

"Do you want me to stay?"

Yes, Ianto screamed in his head. Please don't leave me! "No thanks, Sir. I'll be fine."

Jack looked at him a long time before he said, "Okay, Ianto, but promise you'll call if you need me."

Ianto nodded. He knew that he wouldn't call, no matter what happened. Jack moved towards him, but Ianto stiffened. If he touches me I'm going to break down and beg him to stay. I can't let that happen. Jack saw the movement and stopped in his tracks. "Please call if you need me, Ianto," Jack said as he grabbed his coat and walked out the door.

Several hours later, Ianto woke up screaming and drenched in sweat. He wished he had asked Jack to stay.
Over the next couple of weeks, Ianto got his flat unpacked, and everything put away. The only things left were Lisa's belongings. He had taken out a couple of pictures that he wanted to keep, but otherwise everything remained boxed up. He knew he would have to get them picked up for donation, but he kept putting it off. Jack came to visit almost every evening. He only missed an evening if the Rift was active, in which case, he would call Ianto to check in. He would usually bring dinner, and Jack would tell him what was going on at the Hub. He never stayed the night again, and they never talked about what happened.

Jack had not flirted with Ianto at all. He missed their banter, and Jack not flirting with him was disconcerting. *He'll probably never touch me again,* thought Ianto, and he didn't know if he was relieved or disappointed. He didn't know what he felt about Jack. He knew that the reprieve Jack had given him couldn't last much longer. He had a feeling that Jack was giving him some time before he confronted him with everything that had happened, and Ianto was dreading it.

Owen, Tosh, and Gwen had each come at different times to check on him as well. Owen insisted on giving him a thorough medical exam, Tosh had brought a movie, and Gwen had been overenthusiastic about how much they missed him. He was touched by their visits, though he rolled his eyes a good deal when both Owen and Gwen were there. Tosh had been Tosh, and he appreciated her quiet presence.

He woke one morning towards the end of his third week of suspension and decided it was time to get rid of Lisa's things. Seeing them in his flat every day only intensified the pain. Perhaps it would be more bearable if he didn't have to look at her things every day. He arranged for the local charity shop to pick up the boxes. When the last box was removed from his flat that evening, he sunk to the floor and cried. Then he remembered that Jack was probably coming by soon, so he picked himself up, showered and dressed himself in jeans and a tee shirt. He sat down on his sofa and waited for Jack.

Jack strode into Ianto's flat with his usual flurry. It always amazed Ianto how Jack's presence seemed to fill the whole room, while he skulked in the shadows. "Curry tonight, Ianto. Let's eat," Jack called from the kitchen.

After the meal was consumed, Jack went to Ianto's cabinet, took out the bottle of scotch and two glasses, went into the living room and sat down on the sofa. Ianto's stomach clenched. *This is it. This is what I've been dreading. Confrontation.* Ianto took a deep breath and walked into the living room, as though he were a condemned man walking to the gallows.

Jack poured them both a glass of scotch, as Ianto sat on the sofa on the opposite end from Jack. Ianto took the glass Jack offered and knocked back the scotch in one swallow. He then held out his glass for Jack to refill. Jack snorted and shook his head, but he refilled Ianto's glass. "I guess you know what's coming, Ianto. I need to know the truth about everything before you and I can work together again."

Ianto sighed heavily and closed his eyes. "I've been dreading this conversation, Sir."
"You're dreading telling me the truth?" Ianto felt Jack's heckles rising.

"Yes," Ianto whispered.

"Why? Is it that bad?" Jack sounded nervous.

Ianto was silent for a long moment. He then opened his eyes and looked at Jack. "I haven't spoken to anyone about what happened at Canary Wharf. I don't know if I can."

"You can, Ianto. You might find it helps."

"And you…" How am I going to talk about having sex with him so he wouldn't find Lisa? How am I going to explain how confusing it was…? "I'm afraid of what you're going to think of me, Jack."

Jack raised his eyebrows. "I didn't know you cared what I think of you, Ianto."

"I suppose I deserved that."

"It wasn't meant sarcastically. I really have no idea what you think, Ianto. You are a complete mystery to me. You played the perfect butler, but you outsmarted every one of us. You're obviously a lot smarter than you've let on, and you're obviously hiding much more about yourself than a Cyberman in my basement. I need to know the truth about you, Ianto. I let you put on your professional façade over the last few weeks, because you asked me to. I understood that it was what you needed to do to get through this, but I noticed that you finally had Lisa's things removed today. I've given you enough time. You need to tell me everything now. I have to know who you are, Ianto. I want you on my team, but before that can happen, you need to come clean."

Ianto just nodded and held his glass out again for Jack to refill. "Liquid courage?" Jack smirked. "Why don't I start by asking the questions I need the answers to, and we can go from there." Ianto was relieved, and Jack noticed. "Okay, let's start at the beginning. Were you really a Junior Researcher at Torchwood One?"

"No."

Jack felt bile rising in his throat.
"I was the Head Archivist, and a Research Team Leader. That was my official title."

"You were in charge of all of Torchwood One's archives? But you're only twenty-three!"

Ianto looked at Jack. "Actually I'm twenty-four," he said, only just realizing the fact. "It was my birthday last month," he said quietly. He smiled ironically and looked away. "I forgot…" he whispered.

When Jack didn't reply, Ianto looked at him, but Jack's expression was unreadable. Ianto sighed and continued his story. "I was recruited right out of university because I have an eidetic memory. I could quickly and easily lay my hands on anything in the archives. It came in handy when time was of the essence, and, as you know, it usually is in our line of business. It's also useful in research, because I remember everything I have ever read."

"So your official title was Head Archivist and Research Team Leader. What about unofficially?"

Ianto squirmed on the sofa. "Ianto…"

"All Torchwood One employees are given psychic testing and training. I… when they discovered I had certain… abilities, they had me sit in on some… interviews."

"What kind of psychic abilities?"

"I hated it, Jack. I hated what they made me do – always telling me it was my patriotic duty, for Queen and Country. I didn't want you to know, because I was afraid you would use me in the same way."

"What kind of psychic abilities, Ianto?"

There was a long pause. "I'm a bit empathic."

Jack leaned back on the sofa, and started to laugh.

"Why is that funny?"

"I was thinking about when I asked you how it was you always seemed to know exactly what I needed, and you answered that it was because you're psychic. You were telling the absolute truth, and I took it for cheek."

"Often when you tell the absolute truth, people don't believe you. I believe you employ that method as well, Sir. No one ever takes your wild stories seriously, but I'm willing to bet you're telling the truth every time."

They looked at each other in silence for a long moment. He's really quite brilliant, thought Jack. No
one had ever taken Jack for face value when he told outlandish stories. Only this quiet, inscrutable young man had ever realized that he wasn't making anything up. "Ianto Jones, you never cease to amaze me. Well, at least I know how you always seem to know what we need almost before we know it ourselves." He put a hand on Ianto's knee. "I would never force you to do something that you find so distasteful." He removed his hand. "But that explains a lot. Thank you for telling me. There's something else I really need to know. Did you have anything to do with the Ghost Machine Project?"

"No! Absolutely not! I knew it was a bad idea, not that anyone would listen to me. I hated Yvonne Hartman and all she stood for. She made my skin crawl. She wasn't a good person. She was full of ruthless ambition and malevolence. If I didn't believe that Torchwood, despite the reign of Hartman, actually did protect people from the threat of alien invasion, I wouldn't have stayed. As it was, we did keep the London streets safer."

Jack nodded as he thought about that. Then he asked, "How did you get out of Torchwood One during the battle?"

"I was down in the lower levels of the archives when it started. I was able to evade capture long enough to find Lisa. There were… there were bodies everywhere. I climbed over… the bodies of my friends to get to Lisa. The whole world was on fire. By the time I got to her, the battle was over. I pulled Lisa out of the conversion unit and got her to safety. I was able to scavenge enough parts from the wreckage to fashion a life support unit for her. I knew I had to get into your Torchwood if I had any hope of finding a cure…"

Tears welled up in Ianto's eyes. Jack took his hand and squeezed it. "Do you know how the battle ended, Ianto?"

Ianto nodded. "The Doctor."

They were both silent for a long time. Jack let go of Ianto's hand. "Tell me about getting into Torchwood Cardiff."

"I researched you. I was able to access the Torchwood One mainframe and find some information about you and the team. I changed my file to reflect someone I thought you might hire, but who would be inconspicuous. I left Lisa with another Canary Wharf survivor, Matthew, who swore to help me, and then I drove to Cardiff. I watched you for a week. You know the rest."

"How did you get Lisa into the Hub?"

"You living there made it difficult. I spent the first couple of days figuring out where to put her and how to get her in. I found old blueprints of the Hub in the archives that showed an entrance to the basement from outside through about a kilometer of tunnels. I would have spent longer researching, but Matthew was starting to come apart, so I really needed to get back to London. After my third day of work, I rented a moving truck and drove to London, got Lisa into the truck and drove her to the Hub. I got her in through the secret entrance and got the life support unit set up. It took me all night, but I finished just in time to get you your morning coffee. I was able to make vast improvements to the unit once I got it into the Hub. I also researched the Cybermen in the archives, but I didn't find anything useful except for Dr. Tanizaki's name. I did find lots of references to you, however."

Jack stiffened. This was the conversation he was most dreading, but he needed to know what Ianto knew about him. He refilled both his and Ianto's glasses, took a deep breath, braced himself and asked, "How much do you know, Ianto?"
Thanks as always to my wonderful beta riftintime.

Ianto took a long sip of his scotch. He felt the fear radiating off of the other man. "Why does this scare you so much, Jack?"

"Just tell me what you know, Ianto."

Jack crossed his arms over his chest. It was his defensive posture, and Ianto knew it well. Whenever he did it, Jack's emotions were closed to him. It was as though he had left the room. It was disconcerting. He might not shoot me for hiding Lisa in the basement, but he may very well shoot me for knowing too much about him. Well, that's what I want, isn't it? To die – to be released from my pain and my guilt. Ianto decided to tell the truth and to hell with the consequences.

"There were rumors about you at Torchwood One. I'd heard that you had a voracious and indiscriminate sexual appetite. I heard that you were from the 1940's, that you had traveled with the Doctor, and that you were immortal. At the time I dismissed the rumors, but I later realized that most of them were true. The night we captured Myfanwy, you made a reference to your 51st century pheromones. I took you at your word. You also said you had eaten dinosaur meat, as it was the only source of pre-killed food protein before the asteroid crashed. Again, I took you at your word. I presumed you were a time traveler from the 51st century."

"While I was organizing the archives and searching for anything I could find about the Cybermen, I came upon documents dating from the late 1800's with your signature on them. It's exactly the same as your signature now. There are, in fact, numerous Torchwood reports from the past hundred odd years mentioning you as the operative. There are several photographs of the various Torchwood teams dating back to the turn of the century. You're in some of them. You look exactly the same. I imagine you removed what you could find, but some things reside in unconventional locations. Your archives really are a mess, Sir."

Ianto stopped. "Is that it?" asked Jack. His tone was unreadable.

"No... It's just... This is the most I've spoken at one time together in over six months. I'm a bit out of practice."

"I appreciate your effort. Please continue." His tenor remained indecipherable.

Ianto took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He said, in little above a whisper, "Alice Guppy and Emily Holroyd kept diaries. I assume you destroyed their original reports, because I never came across them, but their diaries were explicit."

Jack jumped to his feet and started pacing around Ianto's living room. Ianto ignored the movement and continued talking. "They both described how they killed you over and over again in various ways. They also wrote that when they asked you why you weren't dead yet, you said that you'd been trying to figure that out yourself. Your exact words were: 'The Doctor, he'll be able to fix me. When the Doctor turns up, it'll all be put right. You wait 'til I see the Doctor. First I'm going to kiss him,
then I'm going to kill him.' When they told you that, the Torchwood Institute was created to combat the threat posed by the Doctor and other phantasmagoria. You said: 'He's not a threat. The Doctor's the one who'll save you from your phantasmahoojits.' They demanded to know his location. You said: 'I don't know! He left me behind. I came here to find him. He refuels from that Rift you have. Hoping if I stayed here long enough, we'd find each other.' Then they offered you a job at Torchwood."

Jack stopped pacing and stood stock-still. Ianto felt the tension in the air. He sensed danger. In for a penny, in for a pound, he thought. What does it matter anyway? He concluded his knowledge of the life of Captain Jack Harkness. "You've been here ever since, working for Torchwood on and off until you took over on New Year's Day, 2000. I'm assuming you're still waiting for the Doctor. The hand in the jar was the property of Torchwood One, cataloged as belonging to the Doctor until it was stolen several years ago. By the way you stare at that hand, and by the fact that you were willing to let Carys escape rather than let it be destroyed, I've deduced that the hand is your link to the Doctor. It will somehow let you know when he is here. Then you can find the answers you're looking for."

"Wow, word for word. Eidetic memory, huh?" Jack's tone was no longer unreadable. It was menacing.

Ianto shrugged.

"And you found all of this out when?" He asked through gritted teeth, fists clenched.

"Within the first week or so of you hiring me, Sir."

Jack looked murderous. He's really going to kill me, thought Ianto. Jack made a sudden movement, and Ianto closed his eyes. He waited for the blissful oblivion to come. It never did. Instead he heard his front door slam. Ianto opened his eyes in surprise to his empty flat. Jack was gone. He would have to endure another night.
As Ianto revealed more and more knowledge of Jack’s past, Jack felt his alarm turn to fury. Hearing Ianto talk about what Alice and Emily – those sadists – had done to him, in his precise, Welsh voice made Jack want to scream with rage. It had been easy for Ianto to discover Jack’s secrets. All of the things Jack had tried to hide were now laid bare. Jack couldn't breathe. He wanted to yell and storm, he wanted to hit something. He had to get out. As soon as Ianto finished speaking, he hurled himself out of the flat.

He started down the street on foot, sucking in the cool night air. Alice and Emily. Their faces flickered in his memory. They tortured me. They used me for their own purposes. I hated Torchwood then, hated them and everything they stood for. I changed it. I changed it and made it better. I changed it for the Doctor... the Doctor. Ianto knows so much about the Doctor. I should have realized that those two would have kept diaries. They would get off on re-reading their acts of cruelty. They probably read excerpts to each other in bed, those perverse cows! Jack increased his pace. He was almost running.

I don't want to think about them. They're in the past. Long dead. He tried to clear his mind, but he heard Ianto's voice repeating back to him his words of so long ago... He left me behind. I came here to find him. He refuels from that Rift you have. Hoping if I stayed here long enough, we'd find each other. It broke Jack's heart all over again. He was still waiting, almost 140 years later. Suddenly he was back on Satellite Five, in the year 200,100, in the wake of the battle with the Daleks. Everyone was dead. Everyone except me... alone. All alone. Bodies everywhere. He had crawled over bodies trying to find the Doctor. Jack stopped dead in his tracks. Ianto's words came back to him. 'There were bodies everywhere. I climbed over the bodies of my friends to get to Lisa.' Jack's breath caught in his throat. Is that how Ianto felt after the battle of Canary Wharf? The same way I felt after the battle on Satellite Five?

Jack stood motionless with his eyes closed, feeling the cool air around him, smelling the familiar scent of Cardiff, and tried to slow his racing heart. He was in the year 2007, head of Torchwood Three. Torchwood... Torchwood had tortured him, used him... More of Ianto's words came back to him. 'I hated it, Jack. I hated what they made me do – always telling me it was my patriotic duty, for Queen and Country.' Jack opened his eyes. Was it possible that he and Ianto Jones had some common ground? How could I have been so spectacularly ignorant of one of the team – my team. But Ianto wasn't only one of his team, he was also his occasional lover, yet Jack had seen nothing. Was he really no better than his predecessors? He had sworn to be different. Had he failed again? First Susie, now Ianto. Ianto...

He had stormed out of Ianto's flat without saying a word. Ianto... Ianto knew so much about him. No one had known this much about him in a long time. He didn't know how he felt about that. Of course, now he knew a lot more about Ianto as well. He thought about the hostility in Ianto's voice when he had called Jack a hypocrite. I suppose since I asked him to trust me with his secrets, I should trust him with some of mine. Ianto, who was insanely private, who didn't like to talk about himself – probably hates it as much as I do, had patiently answered all of Jack's questions. He had
told him everything Jack wanted to know. *Everything, except for one thing…*

Jack turned around and headed back to Ianto's flat. He let himself in again. Ianto was still sitting where Jack had left him on the sofa, staring into his empty glass. He looked up when he heard Jack approach. Jack sat back down on the sofa, picked up the bottle of scotch and refilled both their glasses. He drank his in one swallow and refilled it again. He looked at Ianto, but his face was as infuriatingly expressionless as usual. "You mentioned things that I don't like to talk about. I don't even like to think about them. Those are things I'd rather forget."

"Now you know how I've felt all night, Sir, but I would like to keep my job. Without it I have nothing."

Jack realized that Ianto, in his subtle way, was pointing out Jack's hypocrisy again. Jack could order Ianto to discuss unpleasant topics. Non-compliance would mean his job. Jack had the luxury of storming out of the house, dropping the subject, or evading it all together. *I am a hypocrite, damn him!* "Drop the Sir at least for tonight, Ianto. We're way beyond that right now. You can put your mask back on tomorrow," Jack said with irritation.

Ianto nodded and studied the glass in his hands. Jack took a calming breath. *I'm not mad at him, I'm mad at myself: I need to stop snapping at him.* "We're more alike than you think, Ianto Jones. We both have our fiercely guarded secrets, we both have been used by Torchwood, and we both have seen battles that would break some men."

"Except you hide your secrets with bravado and bluster, Jack, and I hide mine behind a mask of professionalism."

Jack sighed deeply. "I'm sorry I stormed out, Ianto. I just needed to…"

"You don't have to explain, Jack. I get it. I really do."

They looked at each other. A ghost of a grin shaped itself on Jack's face, and a ghost of a grin was returned to him by Ianto. *He really is sexy… No! Not the time. Get on with it, Jack. You need one more piece of the puzzle.* "I really wish we could be done with this conversation, Ianto, but there's one more thing we need to talk about before you come back to work."

"What's that, Jack?"

Jack finished off his glass of scotch, looked Ianto in the eyes, and said, "You and me."

Ianto's eyes widened momentarily, and he quickly downed his scotch in one swallow. He held out his glass to Jack for a refill.
Thanks as always to my wonderful beta rifitintime.

Ianto's stomach was tied in knots. "What do you want to know?"
"Everything."
"For example?"
"You're stalling, Ianto."
"Fine, what the hell." Ianto spoke so rapidly that his words ran together and his accent thickened. "I told you already that I watched you for a week. I saw you take a man into the alley and have a wank with him. I thought maybe sex was my way into the Hub. I researched gay sex on the internet while I…"

"Yes, Jack."
"You'd never been with a man before?"
"No."
"But surely when you were younger…"
"No, Jack. I’d never been with a man, never fooled around with a man, never given a blowjob or received one from a man, never even kissed a man before you. Happy now?" Ianto's embarrassment was manifesting itself as exasperation.

"It's not a matter of making me happy, Ianto. I'm just shocked. You're… well, let's just say you're talented. You got all of that from reading about gay sex on the internet? Gods, that makes me feel like some sort of science project."

"Jack, I…"

Jack held up his hand. "Never mind, Ianto. Just continue your story."

"Fine," Ianto began his hurried narrative again. "I flirted with you when we first met, hoping you would hire me. The first time I kissed you…"

"Wait, Ianto. What about the warehouse with Myfanwy?"

Ianto felt his cheeks flame with embarrassment. "What about it, Jack?"

"When you were lying on top of me, it seemed like you were going to kiss me. Was that part of your seduction plan?"
Ianto felt the color heighten in his face. Oh God! I can barely admit this to myself and now Jack is going to make me admit it to him. He's going to force me to own up to my final betrayal. The one I don't want to face. My betrayal of Lisa... "Ianto!"

Ianto started. He didn't realize he had been quiet for so long. He downed his scotch. He was rather tipsy at this point, and it loosened his tongue – and his temper. He stood and hurled the empty glass at the wall. It shattered as Jack jumped to his feet.

"God damn it, Jack. I wanted to kiss you that night, alright? I've never been attracted to a man before, and then suddenly I was on top of you with a raging hard-on, and I wanted you. Can you imagine how I felt, Jack? I was desperately trying to save the life of the only woman – the only person I've ever loved, and I was attracted to someone else! What kind of person does that make me when Lisa was barely hanging on to life? I thought I would have to seduce you to get the job, but I never expected to want to seduce you. That first time I kissed you, you'd caught me coming out of the room where Lisa was hidden, and I kissed you to distract you. But I wanted to kiss you! I'm sure you noticed my arousal. It's not like a bloke can pretend to be turned on when he's isn't. Don't you see that this is my final betrayal? I betrayed Torchwood, the team, you, and Lisa. I betrayed her with you. If it had been purely to distract you, I could have assuaged my guilt, but I can't. I can't because I am attracted to you. And that's what makes me sick inside."

"Ianto..." Jack whispered.

Ianto sat back down on the sofa and put his head in his hands, "Oh God, Jack..."

"Ianto," Jack said louder as he too sat back down on the sofa. "You told me that you knew it wasn't your Lisa that we shot. Lisa died in the battle of Canary Wharf. You didn't betray her."

"I did, Jack." Ianto's head was still buried in his hands.

"No, Ianto, you didn't. You knew it wasn't her. Part of you was trying to move on. You had suffered great losses at Canary Wharf, and you wanted to desperately try and hold onto something from your former life. But deep down you knew she was gone, and you'd been mourning her for a while. I understand, Ianto. Believe me, I understand. But you are too principled to use someone sexually for purely selfish motives. I should have realized that the day we discovered Lisa. Maybe I wouldn't have been so furious..."

"What do you mean?"

"What, you don't think I was hurt to think you had sex with me just to con me?"

Ianto took his head out of his hands and stared at Jack. "You were?"

"I may be a lot of things, Ianto, and I may be an unusual one, but I'm still a human being. Of course I was hurt! Why do you think I was so angry? Gwen killed more innocent people on her first day of work than you did, and I didn't even give her a stern talking to. I nearly shot you out of rage."

"Jack, I..." Ianto didn't know how to respond. He was stunned. He never thought he would be capable of hurting the feelings of the great Captain Jack Harkness. "I wanted to tell you about Lisa so many times," was all he could think of to say.

"Why did you always leave right after we fooled around. Why did you leave right after you fucked me?"

Ianto sighed. "Several reasons. I couldn't deal with the guilt, for one. And if I stayed, it would have meant more to me, and I couldn't let it. Also, I thought that's what you wanted."
"You thought that's what I wanted?"

"That seems to be your style."

"Sure, with strangers when I'm out on the pull, but Ianto, you're my employee. Occasionally, I even thought we were getting to be friends. I don't make it a habit of sleeping with my employees – not in this century anyway. Makes for a messy work environment."

"But I started it."

"You don't think I was perfectly capable of stopping it if I wanted to?"

"So why me? What makes me different?"

"So many things, Jones, Ianto Jones. So many things."

Ianto was taken aback. The words sounded like something Jack would say to flirt with him, but his tone was serious.

"Maybe someday you'll tell me some of them," Ianto said with a half smile.

Jack smirked. "You're a piece of work, you know that?"

"What do you mean?"

Jack just looked at him. Ianto tried to sense Jack, but he got nothing. "You're shielding yourself from me, aren't you? I can't get any sense of what you're feeling."

"Psychic abilities are more common where I'm from. We all learn to shield ourselves as a matter of course. I've let my guard down a lot lately because it's relatively uncommon in this century."

"But you've put them back up since you found out about me."

"Yes."

The statement made Ianto immeasurably sad, and he wasn't sure why. Jack seemed to notice because he said, "I'm still a little wary, Ianto, and I'm still a little hurt."

Ianto hung his head. "So where do we go from here?"

"You need to give me some time, and I need to give you some time. Then we'll have to play it by ear."

"I'm so sorry, Jack. I…” Ianto felt tears rising. No No No! I will not cry in front of Jack again! He clenched his teeth and balled his hands into fists. He tried to relax his expression into one of neutrality.

Jack noticed the movements, slid over to Ianto and pulled him into a hug. "Don't," he whispered. "Don't hide yourself from me again, please? You know so many of my secrets, and I could really use a friend – someone who I don't have to censor myself with for once. I was freaked out at first, but really, it's a relief."

Ianto's tears started to fall freely down his face. He put his arms around Jack and buried his face in his neck. He held on tight. Jack stroked his hair and kissed the top of his head, then his cheek. Ianto lifted his head and pressed his cheek to Jack's. He kissed Jack's cheek and Jack kissed his cheek again. Ianto turned his head slightly and before either of them knew what was happening, they were
kissing hungrily.
Without breaking the kiss, Ianto pushed Jack down so he was lying on the sofa with Ianto on top of him. He was kissing Jack with a desperate abandon, and Jack was letting him. This is a really bad idea, Jack thought to himself, but he didn't stop kissing him. They finally broke the kiss to catch their breath, and Ianto began sucking on Jack's neck. Jack moaned. I need to stop this before I don't have the willpower to stop it anymore, he thought as a shiver ran down his spine at something delicious Ianto was doing to his earlobe. "Ianto, I don't know if this is such a good idea. You're mourning, and a lot has happened between us."

"Jack?" Ianto raised his head up and looked him in the eye.

"Yes?"

"Shut up."

Ianto kissed him hard again, biting his lower lip and thrusting his hips forward, as he pushed his hard cock against Jack's.

Jack supposed they could both use the release after the painful conversation they'd just had. Besides, he was a man, after all. And I have needs, Jack reasoned to himself.

Jack put his hands under Ianto's T-shirt and ran his hands down the skin of Ianto's back. He pushed his fingers under the waistband of Ianto's jeans, letting the tips graze the swell that became Ianto's arse. Oh, the things he wanted to do to that arse. He'd been daydreaming about it for months. I wonder what I can get away with tonight. I bet he'll let me get away with just about anything, the state he's in. The bastard in Jack grinned wickedly at the thought, but Jack was a better man than he used to be. No, Jack. Let him lead. He'll resent you if you take advantage of him when he's so vulnerable. Besides, he was just chastising you for using your position as boss for emotional blackmail. Can't prove him right again. He's right often enough as it is, damn him.

As these thoughts were swirling around Jack's head, Ianto had made quick work of unbuttoning Jack's shirt and pushing up his undershirt. They were pressed bare chest to bare chest, and the feeling pulled Jack out of his musings and quickly focused his attention on the present. This was a new sensation with Ianto. Amazing how we've had sex, but skipped over these little intimacies. Ianto leaned sideways to open Jack's trousers. He pushed them and his briefs down so only his cock and balls were exposed. Ianto slid his hand up and down Jack's shaft until the tip began to weep with precum. He ran his index finger over the tip, and smeared the cum down Jack's shaft. Ianto unbuttoned his jeans and pulled out his cock. Then he pressed back down on Jack and kissed him open mouthed, his tongue caressing Jack's as their cocks pressed together. They both groaned as cock slid against cock, Jack's precum supplying just enough lubrication.

Jack would have liked Ianto in bed, completely naked, but being mostly dressed with only their chests and groins exposed was almost more of a turn on. It felt naughtier, and Jack loved feeling naughty. He grabbed Ianto's arse that was still mostly covered by his jeans, and pulled him harder
against him. They thrust against each other slowly at first, then quicker as perspiration broke out on both their foreheads. They broke off kissing as they both neared climax, but kept their lips touching, panting into each other’s mouths. Ianto’s movements became erratic and he started moaning in time with every thrust. It was the most noise Jack had ever heard him make during any of their encounters, and the sounds coming from the young man were such a turn on that it brought on his climax. With one more thrust, he was yelling and cumming all over their stomachs. Ianto came with a shout a second later, adding his cum to the sticky mess.

Ianto lay on top of Jack, catching his breath. Jack started to put his arms around Ianto, but Ianto pulled back, whipped off his TShirt, and started wiping the cum off their stomachs. Jack watched him silently, arms having fallen back to his sides. Every time he gives me a little more, but never very much more, Jack thought to himself. He studied the younger man, "Ianto, you're still too thin."

Ianto looked at him, then looked down at his bare chest. He started self-consciously buttoning up his jeans and looked like he wished his T-shirt wasn't covered in cum. He stared at it, as though considering putting it back on anyway. Jack reached out his hand and rubbed Ianto's arm. "Hey, don't get me wrong – you know I think you're gorgeous, but you really need to start eating more."

"Yeah, thanks Tad," Ianto said as he got off of Jack and headed into his bedroom.

"Oooh, dirty daddy sex games! I like it!" Jack called out with a grin, as he zipped himself back into his trousers.

"You're incorrigible, Jack," Ianto said, as he returned wearing a clean T-shirt.

"I've been called worse."

Jack, still stretched out on the sofa, clasped his hands together behind his head and winked at Ianto. Ianto frowned. "I don't think you're a monster, Jack."

"That's not what I meant. I wasn't even thinking about that. Come here." Jack held out his hand.

Ianto just stared at it. "Come on, Ianto, I don't bite. Well, actually that's a downright lie, I love to bite and nip and suck… but I digress. Come here." Jack's hand was still outstretched.

Ianto slowly walked forward and took Jack's hand. Jack pulled him down so he was lying on top of him again. Jack wrapped his arms around Ianto. Ianto was not exactly stiff, but he didn't entirely relax in Jack's arms. "Didn't take you for a cuddler, Jack."

"Are you questioning my machismo, Ianto?" Jack asked, feigning outrage.

"Wouldn't dream of it, Sir," Ianto said, deadpan.

"You really are a piece of work Jones, Ianto Jones."

They lay in silence for a few minutes, Jack stroking Ianto's hair. I wish he would just relax. Is it so awful for him to lie here in my arms? Jack signed, kissed the top of his head and said, "I suppose I should get back to the Hub."

Ianto immediately jumped off of Jack and sat on the end of the sofa. He was just waiting for me to give him permission to retreat. Well, I guess that's the last time I'll try that. He just wants slam, bam, thank you ma'am, and nothing more. Jack was actually feeling slightly hurt, which is why his next words came out sounding colder than he intended. "I'll see you in the Hub first thing next Monday."

He turned and walked out of Ianto's flat, buttoning his shirt as he went. He left so quickly that he
completely missed the look of surprise, confusion, and hurt on Ianto’s face.
Ianto was stunned. What had just happened? Why had Jack left so abruptly? Was he not going to come over again before Ianto went back to work? Maybe Jack was right and that had been a bad idea. Ianto began to replay the scene in his mind. The sex was good, really good. Ianto had read a lot more about male on male sex when he and Jack had actually began their... whatever it was. Ianto had a whole list in his mind of things he wanted to do with Jack. That was number five on his list. Was that safe, what they did? They hadn't used a condom, but could Jack even get sick? And was that considered sex or just fooling around? He wasn't sure of the semantics of the whole gay sex thing. *Maybe one day I'll ask Jack about it*... then he remembered Jack's abrupt departure... or maybe not.

Their conversation had been difficult. Talking about Canary Wharf was gut wrenching, even though he kept the details to a bare minimum. Jack was the first person he had talked to about what happened during that horrible day. Ianto closed his eyes, as he was momentarily back at Torchwood One, pulling Lisa out of the carnage, bodies everywhere. He shook his head and tried to clear his mind. He was too emotionally drained to go there right now. Jack had seemed to understand. 'We've both seen battles that would break some men.' Jack was right. It had, in the end, been cathartic to finally talk about it.

Admitting to Jack all that he knew about him had been difficult as well. But honestly, did he really think that Ianto couldn't piece together Jack's history from the Torchwood archives? He was surprised that the rest of the team hadn't known anything about Jack. It was all there in the Hub. It had taken him all of a few days to find the information on Captain Jack Harkness in various files. Perhaps no one had ever looked before. Considering the state of the archives, Ianto felt certain that was the case.

Jack had been furious that his deep dark secrets weren't all that deep and dark – at least not to Ianto. He thought Jack was going to put a bullet in his head – again. *What a twisted relationship we have,* Ianto smirked at the thought. Employer/employee, friend, confidant, lover, mortal enemy? They certainly ran the gamut. *I wonder how Jack would define it. I should have asked him when he made me tell him about us...*

That had been awkward. *I had quite the little temper tantrum, didn't I,* he thought as he eyed the stain on the wall and the broken glass on the floor. He'd had to admit that he wanted Jack – not just to Jack, but to himself as well. He felt his heart breaking all over again when he thought about Lisa lying in the cyber conversion unit in the basement while he fucked Jack over his desk upstairs. But Jack had made him feel immensely better about being with him while Lisa was still alive. No, that wasn't right. Lisa wasn't still alive. The Cyberman had accessed her memories and tricked him into thinking it was Lisa. Lisa would never have hurt anyone. She was too good for that. He had been deceived.

Talking about having sex with Jack had gotten him all worked up. He had thrown himself at Jack. He just wanted to feel something besides pain and guilt. He wanted to lose himself in Jack for a little
while. Jack had complied, with some reservations. *Should I have stopped?* Ianto took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. He just didn't know anymore.

Jack closing his mind to Ianto was disconcerting. He was used to having some indication of Jack's moods. He certainly didn't emote the way others did, but Ianto could usually get a sense of what he was feeling. He had been surprised when Jack had wanted to hold him after sex. It made him uncomfortable. He just wasn't sure why. He was admittedly attracted to Jack, but he wasn't sure how he felt about Jack as a person. Sometimes he admired him, sometimes he hated him. Sometimes he was in awe of him, sometimes he thought he acted like a spoiled child. To Ianto, he was not the hero that Gwen saw or the father figure that Owen and Toshiko saw. He was just a man who had his faults. Ianto's emotions were in such a jumble he could make neither heads nor tails of them. He decided he needed sleep. Hopefully Jack would come by the next night, or at least call, and things would make more sense then.

But Jack didn't come by the next night, or the night after. And he hadn't phoned to check in on Ianto. By 10:00pm Ianto had dialed Jack's number twice, just to hit end on his mobile phone before the call could connect. Finally, at 11:00pm he let it ring. It went to voice mail. He left a message, "It's Ianto. I'm just checking that everything's okay, since I haven't heard from you or seen you in a few days. I haven't seen anything on the telly about flying saucers taking over the planet, so I'm assuming all's well. Just wanted to make sure no one's injured, or Owen isn't in prison. I have bail money worked into the budget specifically for that eventuality, but I'm sure no one knows how to fill out the requisition form. I suppose if Owen's locked up he can stay there for a few days. Well, keep Gwen out of my archives, and don't let anyone touch my coffee machine. Make Tosh put down whatever piece of alien tech she's playing with and go get some sleep. And Jack, no shooting yourself in the head. I don't fancy scrubbing blood off the wall on my first day back. You're probably running low on clean shirts anyway, so try and keep the ones you have blood free. Torchwood's captain needs to look presentable. We don't want you to be mistaken for a Weevil. Call when you can."

Ianto closed his mobile phone and threw it down on the sofa. Why was he so nervous about leaving Jack a message? He had just blathered in a ridiculous fashion on Jack's voice mail. Ianto rubbed his eyes. He needed to work again. This had been the longest month of his life. *Five more days,* he thought to himself. *Let me just get through them, then I won't have to spend so much time thinking and tying myself in knots.*

Twenty minutes later, Jack burst through the door of his flat. Ianto, who had been lounging on his sofa watching the news, jumped up at the sound. Jack put his arms around Ianto and kissed him hard on the mouth. "Can't stay, Ianto. Busy night. I'll be back when I can."

And with that he was gone.

Ianto slowly sat back down on his sofa. He grinned and shook his head. "*I'm* a piece of work?" he said aloud to the empty room.
Jack left Ianto's flat quickly after his failed attempt at "cuddling" as Ianto had put it. He was more hurt than he wanted to admit. No one in this time knew more about him than Ianto, and after their painful conversation, he had felt close to the young man. He had thought, perhaps naively, that he and Ianto… well, what did you think, Jack? He's still in love with Lisa and mourning her death. Maybe it was a bad idea for us to fool around. Maybe I should have stopped it. This just complicates things. We should just go back to being employer and employee. He doesn't need me to come visit him anymore. He's doing fine. I'll just see him when he comes back to work next week.

Jack was determined to stay away. The next evening, at the time he usually went to see Ianto, he prowled around the Hub instead. Twice he started to dial Ianto's number, just to flip his phone shut again with a growl. Finally he put on his coat and went to stand on the roof of the Millennium Center. He let the cool night air chill his body, as he tried to clear his mind. This was the century when a version of the Doctor – his Doctor – would be refueling at the Rift (if Faith, the prophet child was correct, and he knew she was.) I can't get involved with anyone because the Doctor is coming back, then all of my problems will be solved. He spent the next hour thinking about what he would say to the Doctor when he saw him again and speculating on where their adventures might take them. He hadn't been to the Vegas Galaxies in a while… He finally retreated back to the room underneath his office, had a wank, and tried to think about anyone except Ianto Jones.

The next night, Jack had almost given in and phoned Ianto when, to his enormous relief, the Rift alarm sounded. Jack called in Gwen and they went to investigate. The location of the Rift spike was right outside the Hub. It seemed the Loch Ness Monster had reappeared, this time in Cardiff Bay. "The Loch Ness Monster was actually an individual from the planet Cetacea," he told Gwen, as they watched the creature crashing into docked boats from the pier by the Hub. "Looks like another one fell through. The planet is almost entirely water. Nice species if you can get the language right. All that whistling and hooting. I could never get my tongue around it, which is saying something because I have a very talented tongue."

While Gwen was talking to the coast guard, Jack's mobile phone rang. He looked at his phone and saw the name Ianto Jones appear on the screen. He felt his stomach do a flip and grimaced. Not the time, he thought to himself, pocketing his phone and letting the call go to voice mail.

However, the conversation with the Coast Guard was really boring (the man was an idiot), and Jack's phone was burning a hole in his pocket. He finally relented, took out his phone and pressed the button to call his voice mail. Jack listened to Ianto's message with a growing smile on his face. It was so Ianto. He felt a wave of affection for the young man. He eyed Gwen appraisingly, and it seemed like she would be at this conversation for a while. He interrupted, "Right, Gwen. I'm going to call in the rest of the team and see if I can commission a boat. We can go out there, and I'll try to explain to her that she needs to swim farther out to sea. I'll be back in a little while."

He practically ran to the SUV. He hopped in and drove to Ianto's flat while phoning Owen and Tosh. He just wanted to lay his eyes on the young man. He burst through the door, grabbed Ianto
and kissed him hard on the lips. "Can't stay, Ianto. Busy night. I'll be back when I can." He ran out the door again and went to see about commissioning a boat.

The clean up job from the Cetacean took three days. Jack had spent hours trying to explain to her that she needed to swim farther out to sea. He must have mispronounced a few things because at one point the Cetacean (whose name sounded something like singing ooooh down an octave) pulled Jack off the boat and started licking him. Considering the fact that her tongue was as big as he was, the team might have been justified in their overreaction. Jack tried to reassure his team, who were about to open fire, while receiving a tongue bath from a very enthusiastic Cetacean. It was just another day at Torchwood.

Jack managed to send a text to Ianto explaining that the Rift was keeping him busy.

Message to Ianto Jones: Tied up with the Rift right now. Talk soon.

Message to Jack Harkness: The Loch Ness Monster?

Message to Ianto Jones: She's got a great tongue. Haven't been this turned on since the Cerberus from Olympus.

Message to Jack Harkness: I'm going to leave that one alone, Sir.

Message to Ianto Jones: What, no witty retort?

Message to Jack Harkness: So many choices… such tiny buttons on my phone.

Message to Ianto Jones: :-)

Things finally got sorted out two days before Ianto was due to return to work. Jack had sent him a few more texts to let him know he was working, but they hadn't actually spoken since Jack ran into his flat for a quick kiss a few days ago. It was Saturday evening, and Jack was finally going to get a chance to stop by Ianto's. He wanted to see him alone one more time before Ianto came back to the Hub. Jack was in the SUV heading to Ianto's when he received an alert on his wrist strap – an alert that only he received. The Rift had returned another human victim. Jack pulled the SUV into a screeching U-turn.

It took several hours for Jack to track down the Rift victim. As he searched, he slowly came to a decision. He needed someone to know about Flat Holm. He needed someone to look after the people there when the Doctor came back. He also needed Ianto to know that he was still a member of the team and that Jack trusted him. He was going to let Ianto in on the secret. He looked at the time. It was 11:00pm. Jack took out his phone and made the call. Ianto answered on the second ring.

"Jack?"

"Were you sleeping?"

"Nope, watching people speculate on the sightings of the Loch Ness Monster in Cardiff Bay. You should hear the things they've come up with."

"Tosh is never as good at cover stories as you are. Can't wait to have you back. Listen, I need your help with something Torchwood related."

Ianto's tone changed. "Of course, Sir. What do you need?"

"Can you meet me? Wear warm clothes, and Ianto, it might be an all nighter."
"I'll bring some coffee."

"Bless you."

Jack gave him the address and flipped his phone closed. He knew he had made the right decision.
Ianto met up with Jack twenty minutes later carrying a thermos of hot coffee. He was ecstatic to be doing something for Jack and Torchwood again. He had wanted to wear one of his suits; however, heeding Jack's warning about dressing warmly, he had put on jeans, a long sleeve T-shirt, a black jumper, and a wool coat instead.

Ianto pulled up in a taxi next to the SUV, paid the driver and climbed in beside Jack. He had bought a car during his suspension, but had decided to leave it at home. "Thanks for coming, Ianto. Can I have a cup?" Jack asked, indicating the thermos in Ianto's hands.

Ianto smiled, poured coffee into the thermos lid that doubled as a mug, and handed it to Jack. Jack took an appreciative sip. "Mmmmm." He downed the cup in a couple of swallows and handed it back to Ianto. "When are you coming back to the Hub, again?"

"Two days, Sir."

"Finally!"

Jack grinned at him, and Ianto smiled back. Jack's expression turned serious. "There's something I have to tell you. The rest of the team doesn't know about this, and I need it to stay that way."

"I'm good at secrets, Sir."

"Yes… yes you are. That's part of the reason why I chose you. Also, I thought your personality would be best suited to deal with this. Owen would go crazy trying to fix all of them, Tosh isn't really a people person, neither was Susie for that matter, and Gwen… I don't even want to think about how Gwen would react."

"React to what, Sir?"

Jack sighed. "The Rift not only delivers things to Cardiff, it also takes things away."

"The negative Rift spikes," Ianto said, nodding.

Jack looked at him in surprise. "Whenever a first body exerts a force F on a second body, the second body exerts a force −F on the first body. F and −F are equal in magnitude and opposite in direction," Ianto quoted.

Jack just looked at him blankly. "Newton's Third Law. Commonly paraphrased as: To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction," Ianto continued.

"I dated Newton for a while. Smart guy. He did this amazing thing with his tongue…"

Ianto rolled his eyes. "My point is, Sir, it makes sense that the Rift would go both ways. Once I conceded that, I took a closer look at the Rift readings and noticed the negative spikes. I figured that..."
was a signal of the Rift going the opposite direction."

"You really are brilliant, Ianto. You know that? Some other time we'll have to have a conversation about going both ways," Jack said lasciviously.

Ianto rolled his eyes again. Jack will always be Jack, he thought.

"Yes, Ianto. The Rift giveth, and the Rift taketh away," Jack quipped. "Only sometimes the Rift returns the things, or the people it has taken," Jack said in a much more serious voice.

"Oh God," Ianto said, fully realizing the point of their conversation. "Where does it take them to, Jack?" Ianto asked in a whisper.

"All sorts of places and times. Many of them… most of them come back… damaged."

Ianto understood at once. The Rift could take people anywhere in space and time. Who knows where they went or for how long. Who knows what had happened to them there. "I understand, Sir," was all Ianto said.

"When I took over Torchwood Three, I found two Rift survivors in the vaults."

Jack took in Ianto's horrified expression. He continued, "When I took over command, I swore to change Torchwood for the better, at least my Torchwood. I couldn't stand to see them locked up like dangerous aliens, but I knew that they were too damaged to assimilate back into society. I built a facility for them on Flat Holm Island in the Bristol Channel. I used my own money, because I didn't want the Torchwood Institute involved. I was afraid of what they would do to these people if they found out. I hired a few kind souls to take care of them. The caretakers think they're the victims of failed government science experiments."

Ianto looked hard at Jack. He suddenly saw the side of Jack that Gwen always saw – the hero. He put his hand around Jack's neck and pulled him forward, kissing him passionately. Jack responded and they kissed for a minute before Ianto pulled away and looked Jack in the eyes. "What was that for?" Jack asked, a bemused expression on his face.

"For being you," Ianto said and touched Jack's cheek with his hand. Okay, Ianto Jones, work to be done. He didn't call you out here to snog in the car like teenagers, though Ianto thought as he sat up straight again. "I take it that there has been another Rift victim, Sir."

Jack looked at Ianto with an unreadable expression on his face. Then he said, "I have the Rift monitor set to alert my wrist strap with that particular reading. I'm the only one who is notified. I got a signal a couple of hours ago. It took me a while to track him down. I hate to do this, but I think we're going to have to sedate him."

"Is the med kit stocked? You know how lax Owen can be."

"Luckily, I made him do it after the Cetacean incident."

"The what?"

"The Loch Ness Monster. I'll have to fill you in on that later. Ianto, I want you to be prepared for what you're going to see both with this man we're picking up and on Flat Holm. Some of these people are in really bad shape, both physically and emotionally."

"I understand, Sir." Ianto had already been mentally preparing himself for this.
"You're going to have to close your mind. I don't want you to be overwhelmed."

"Yes, Sir." He had already done so.

"Okay. Let's go get him," Jack said as he put the SUV into gear.
Ianto immediately understood why Jack had suggested that they might have to sedate the Rift victim. He could hear the blood-curdling scream even before the man came into view. They got out of the SUV, and Jack moved to the back to take out the med kit. Ianto stared at the shrieking man. It was a terrible, almost inhuman sound. He was covered in burns, some were scarred over and some looked like they were new. He was sitting on a suspension bridge, his legs dangling over the side. *I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry for what you have endured, but it's all over now. It's over. You're back on Earth, and we're here to help you. I'm so, so sorry.* These thoughts raced over and over in Ianto's mind as he started to approach the man.

The man suddenly stopped his spine-chilling cry and turned to face Ianto.

"My name is Ianto Jones. This is Captain Jack Harkness. We're here to help you. Can you speak?" Ianto knelt down by him.

"I… yes." The man croaked. His voice was raspy.

"What's your name?"

"J… Jonah Be… Bevin."

"Nice to meet you Jonah Bevin. Do you know where you are?"

"I… am I home?"

"You sound like a Welshman," Ianto said smiling. "You're in Cardiff."

Tears filled the man's eyes. "Home," he said in confirmation.

"We have somewhere safe you can stay, to get your bearings again. Will you come with us?"

"My mother… I want to see my mother."

Jack stepped over and knelt down next to Ianto. "We need to give you a physical and take care of your injuries, Jonah. Can you walk?"

Jonah Bevin nodded. He got slowly and unsteadily to his feet. "I'm going to take your arm, Jonah, to give you some support. Jack's going to take the other one. Is that okay?" asked Ianto.

Jonah nodded again, and with Ianto supporting one side and Jack the other, they made their way slowly to the SUV. They got Jonah safely buckled into the back of the SUV, being mindful of his injuries. They drove to the docks and got Jonah onto a boat. Jack steered the boat, and Ianto sat with Jonah. During the journey, Jonah told Ianto that he had been stuck on a burning planet for forty years and that he was taken into a building where he witnessed the burning of a solar system. Ianto ran a search for Jonah Bevin on his PDA while Jonah talked. Jonah had gone missing three days ago from...
Cardiff. He had been fifteen years old. Ianto looked at the middle aged, scarred man next to him and wanted to cry.

Ianto excused himself from Jonah and walked up to Jack. He showed Jack the PDA screen with Jonah's missing person report. Jack's eyes filled with tears, and he looked out toward the island that was fast approaching. "Sometimes I hate this job," he whispered, brushing tears from his eyes.

Ianto put a hand on his arm and squeezed it. Then he turned and walked back to Jonah. At Flat Holm, they were met by a capable looking woman whom Ianto liked immediately. "Helen, this is Jonah Bevin. We're going to take care of him here. And this is Ianto Jones. He works for me, and he's going to be helping me run this place."

Helen gave Ianto a quick nod before turning to her new charge. "Hello, Jonah. Let's see if we can't make you comfortable here and get your injuries seen to. Captain, Mr. Jones, give me some time to get him settled, then I'll be with you." She led Jonah into the facility.

Ianto started to follow them into the building, but Jack put his hand on Ianto's arm, holding him back. They watched the two figures retreat. Once they entered the building and the doors had closed behind them, Jack turned to Ianto. "I thought you didn't want to use your abilities for Torchwood."

Ianto turned to him confused. "What do you mean, Sir?"

"You calmed him. When we first approached him, and he was making that terrible sound, you calmed him."

Ianto had no idea what Jack was taking about. Jack must have seen the confusion on Ianto's face because he asked, "What were you thinking as you approached him?"

Ianto thought back. "I was thinking that I was sorry for what had happened to him and that we were there to help."

Jack looked at him for a long time. Then he said, "Huh."

"What is it, Jack?" Ianto asked, frowning.

"Did Torchwood One ever train you to project your feelings onto others?"

Ianto was starting to feel very uncomfortable. "No, why?"

Jack put a hand on Ianto's shoulder. "Don't worry about it, Ianto. It doesn't matter. I told you that I would never use you for your abilities."

"I know. This isn't Torchwood One, and you're not Yvonne Hartman."

"No, I look better in a dress," Jack said with his usual cheek.

Ianto shook his head in exasperation. "I don't even want to know," he mumbled.

Jack patted him on the back. "Come on. I'll show you around and introduce you to whoever's awake."
Thanks as always to my brilliant beta rifftintime.

Jack led Ianto into the building that housed the Rift survivors. Most of them were awake, even though it was the small hours of the morning. Ianto was good with the residents, and most of them took an immediate fancy to him. For once Jack stood in the shadows, while Ianto was the center of attention. The irony of the situation wasn't lost on Jack. He was in awe of the young man. *Ianto always takes care of everyone. Me, the team, the Rift survivors. I'm lucky to have him on my team.*

Helen found them after she had Jonah settled and begun to discuss provisions needed for the facility. Ianto whipped out his PDA and started taking notes. He had several suggestions for Helen, and they began an animated conversation on how they could better the services for the patients. Jack gave Ianto free reign. He knew that Ianto would do a much better job than he could. In truth, he hated coming to Flat Holm. Jack was a man of action. He needed to do something to make himself feel useful. He could set up the facility and get the victims here, but once they were here, he was at a loss. This was where Ianto shined. He was detail oriented and a natural caretaker. Jack felt his admiration for the young man growing.

Once they had bid farewell to the residents and Ianto had spoken to Jonah for several minutes, Helen led them back to the boat. "I'm so glad you're going to be helping Captain Harkness with the facility. He really takes it hard, you know."

"Standing right here," said Jack with mild irritation in his voice.

"You couldn't have picked a better man for the job, Captain. Ianto, you have my number."

"Yes, Helen. I'll be in touch this week," Ianto assured her.

Helen kissed Ianto on the cheek and gave Jack a motherly pat on his. "You boys be safe."

"Yes, Mum," they chorused.

The sun started to rise over the Bristol Channel, as Jack and Ianto motored back towards Cardiff. They were silent on their boat journey from Flat Holm, both lost in their own thoughts. When they made their way back to the SUV, Jack moved to open the door, but instead he leaned his forehead on the car.

"Are you okay, Sir?" Ianto said from the other side of the vehicle.

Jack sighed. "I wish I could do more."

Ianto walked around to Jack's side of the SUV. "You do plenty, Jack."

"Do you really think so?" He asked, lifting his head up and looking at Ianto.

Jack realized that he really wanted to know what Ianto thought. He wished Ianto would touch him. He wanted someone to tell him that he was doing a good job. He hadn't shared the secret of Flat
Holm with anyone, and now that he had, he wanted reassurance that he was doing the right thing. *I hate feeling helpless.*

"I do," Ianto replied calmly. "Why don't you let me take over the minutiae of running the facility."

"Ianto, that would be really helpful," Jack said, crestfallen.

Ianto gave him a sad smile. *Please put your arms around me, Ianto. Please tell me that I'm doing the right thing*, Jack silently pleaded. Ianto just looked at him, his face impassive as ever. Jack knew that he could put his barriers down, and Ianto would sense what he was feeling, but Jack was petulant. *He should know what I need without cheating!*

Jack sighed. He knew he was being childish. He was tired. He should be alone tonight. He said, "I need to get you home so you can get your beauty sleep. Can't have you with bags under your eyes for your first day back at work. I expect you to look your best. I can't tell you how much I've missed those suits," Jack said, trying to return to his usual flirty tone, but it fell flat, even to his ears.

They got into the SUV and headed towards Ianto's flat. Jack was silent during the drive. He felt despondent. He wanted to chase a Weevil. He wanted to shoot aliens. He wanted to stand on a rooftop with a bottle of scotch. He needed to run. He wished the Doctor would come and take him away from all of this. He was so deep in thought when they arrived at Ianto's flat that he barely managed a 'See you tomorrow morning,' before Ianto got out of the SUV, and he drove off down the road.

He wanted to get back to the Doctor's hand in the jar. Maybe tonight would be the night.
Ianto stood staring at the SUV, as it raced away from him. Jack had hardly spoken a word to him after their journey to Flat Holm. He knew Jack was distressed, and he had wanted to offer comfort. He kept opening his mouth to say something during the ride back to his flat, but he always thought the better of it and shut his mouth again. He, too, was troubled over the survivors of the Rift, but he was better at schooling his emotions than Jack. More Torchwood victims, he thought. Will it never end? He thought about what Jack had asked of him by telling him about Flat Holm. He wondered what was in Jack's mind. Had Jack forgotten that he had cared for a Torchwood victim for almost six months? He was a little chagrined at the thought. Didn't Jack think that knowing about the victims might remind him of Lisa and torment him? Was that why Jack had brought him in on the secret? He started to feel angry.

Ianto remained standing outside for a while and tried to relax. Eventually the cold air caused him to start shivering. He knew that he was being unfair to Jack. He was overwrought and exhausted. He needed sleep. He would reconsider the night's events when he was more rational. He made his way into his flat, kicked off his shoes and dropped onto the sofa. He slept for four hours.

Ianto woke at 10:30am and looked around the flat. He was going back to work tomorrow, and he had things he needed to do. He spent the day running errands, paying bills, doing laundry, ironing and cleaning. He let his mind analyze his feelings on Flat Holm while he did his housework. He had been honest when he had told Jack that he thought Jack was doing everything he could for the Rift victims. He just wasn't sure if Jack had really wanted his help with Flat Holm, if Jack was trying to teach him a lesson of some sort, or if this was some kind of punishment. He finally decided to let it go for the time being. He would do all he could to help the people there, regardless of the intentions of Captain Jack Harkness. He just wished that Jack had talked to him afterwards. He wished that Jack hadn't been so distant. You need to get back to work. You have too much time to think, he chastised himself. He sat down on his sofa and put his head in his hands. "I really miss you, Lisa," he whispered to the empty room, as tears filled his eyes.

Ianto was at the Hub early the next morning, in a well fitted black suit, before the rest of the team arrived. He made straight for the coffee machine, trying not to look too hard at the rest of the Hub, as he knew it would be a disaster area. He started a pot of coffee. The kitchen was cleaner than he had expected, although nowhere near his high standards. He set to work cleaning as the coffee brewed. When it was done, he poured himself and Jack a cup each and headed towards Jack's office.

Jack was sitting at his desk, going over the Rift readings from the previous night. "Morning, Sir. Coffee?" Ianto said from the doorway.

Jack looked up. "Ianto. Good to have you back. Take a seat."

Ianto placed Jack's coffee near his hand and sat in the chair across from him. "Make yourself comfortable, Ianto. We've got a lot to cover."

Jack spent the next hour getting Ianto up to date on all things Torchwood. He finally finished with, "I
made the team clean up yesterday, so hopefully it won't be too much of a mess. I've also told everyone that they're responsible for clearing up their own shit. I don't know how long it will last, but hopefully they won't take you for granted anymore. They're all really happy to have you back, Ianto. I think your absence made them realize just how much you do around here. Oh, I should warn you, Owen's been making noises about giving you a full physical."

"Well then, it's a good thing I wore clean underwear, Sir."

Jack half smiled, then returned his attention to his paperwork. *Well, that's me dismissed,* Ianto thought as he rose to his feet. He headed for the door.

"And Ianto, love the suit."

"Harassment, Sir," Ianto called over his shoulder, as he left Jack's office. He smiled to himself.

He was back.
The team welcomed Ianto back with enthusiasm. Gwen hugged him, Tosh kissed him on the cheek, and even Owen muttered something about finally getting a decent cup of coffee, followed quickly by, "Ianto, medical bay, one hour."

He endured Owen's full physical exam with an impassive expression. After Owen finished poking and prodding, he sat down and started making notes in Ianto's file. "You're looking healthier than last time I saw you, but you're still underweight. I'll give you one month and then I'm going to get really snarky if you haven't filled out to my satisfaction."

"Heaven forbid. We wouldn't want you snarky," Ianto said smoothly.

Owen looked at Ianto. "How are you, mate?"

"I'm fine, thank you, Owen. How are you?"

"Don't give me that shit, Ianto. How are you holding up? Are you sleeping? Do you have nightmares? Are you eating? What about exercise?"

Ianto knew that Owen was honestly concerned about his well-being. In acknowledgement, he tried to answer truthfully. He said softly, "I'm doing my best, Owen."

They looked at each other. "Okay, Ianto, I'm just going to say this one time. I may be a real son-of-a-bitch, but I'm a good doctor. I didn't pay enough attention to your health. I should have noticed that something was wrong. I didn't do my job well and that makes me really irritable. It is my job to keep us all healthy and sane – or at least sane enough to do our jobs. Don't make me look bad again, hear me Tea Boy?"

Ianto rolled his eyes, but nodded. He knew that was the closest thing to forgiveness he was ever going to get from Dr. Owen Harper.

Ianto threw himself into his work with abandon. He spent the next few days furiously cleaning the Hub and the tourist office, reorganizing all of the files that were disarranged in his absence, and reading all of the reports for the last month. He arrived early and stayed late. He hadn't really spoken to Jack since their trip to Flat Holm. He knew Jack was around, but Jack didn't seek him out. Ianto wasn't sure what to make of it. Was he avoiding him? It had Ianto rattled.

On Ianto's fourth day back at Torchwood, he had noticed some unusual weather anomalies around Cardiff. He had begun to monitor them in the afternoon, and by the evening, he had assimilated some odd data. The rest of the team had left for the night, but he continued working. He didn't want to be at home anyway. He was going through the readings, trying to make sense out of what he was seeing, when Jack's voice startled him. "You shouldn't be here."

Ianto looked up to see Jack in his undershirt, suspenders hanging down and hair rumpled from sleep.
"Neither should you."

They looked at each other. It was what they always said to each other when they were the last ones left at the Hub, but that was before Jack knew about Lisa. Ianto felt uncomfortable. Jack was still unreadable to him, and after everything that had happened, and Jack's distance over the last few days, he didn't know where they stood. He turned and walked to his computer.

He felt Jack's hand on his shoulder and was surprised. He looked questioningly at Jack, but Jack just said, "What've you got?"

Ianto let out the breath he didn't know he was holding, and Jack gave him another pat on the back before he removed his hand. "Funny sort of weather patterns," Ianto replied.

They both looked at the computer screen for a few minutes. Then Jack said, "Ianto, I…" at the same time that Ianto said, "What…"

They both smiled, and the tension between them lifted slightly. Ianto indicated to Jack that he should speak first. "Ianto, I… I don't know what to say. What were you going to say?"

Ianto sighed. "What's going on, Jack? Are you angry with me for some reason?"

"No, Ianto, I… maybe a little."

"Why?"

"Because I… the other night when… you just… I wanted… URRGH!"

"You have got to be kidding me. You're what, about a hundred and seventy years old, and you can't just tell me what's on your mind?" Ianto was incredulous.

"I'm not good at this," Jack said through clenched teeth.

"Then let me in, Jack," Ianto whispered.

Jack looked at Ianto for a long time, and then he closed his eyes. Ianto felt a wave of emotions from Jack – pain, loneliness, insecurity, fear, and the desire for… reassurance. Suddenly Jack's behavior over the past few days made sense to him. The other night, after Flat Holm, Jack had wanted Ianto to reassure him that he was doing the right thing. Jack wanted confirmation that he was doing all he could for the Rift victims, and he had barely said a word. Ianto looked at Jack, trying to figure out how to mollify him, when he remembered that Jack was a tactile creature. Jack craved physical contact.

He put his arms around Jack and held him tight. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I was distracted by my own feelings about everything I'd seen." He felt Jack put his arms around him and bury his face in his neck. Ianto continued, "You've been dealing with this for so much longer, and you've had to endure it alone. I know how hard that is… to carry a burden like that. I should have realized. I'm sorry, Jack."

Ianto felt his neck become damp from Jack's tears. He whispered soothing words to him in Welsh and ran his fingers through Jack's hair. They stood like that until Jack had cried himself out. Ianto took a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to Jack. Jack wiped his eyes and smiled almost shyly at Ianto. "I've been a selfish bastard, Ianto. It must have been terrible for you too."

"Doesn't matter, Jack. I'm glad you told me about Flat Holm. I'll do everything I can to help." Ianto thought for a moment. "Remember when I kissed you in the car before we went to pick up Jonah?"
Jack smiled at the memory. "You said it was for being me."

Ianto nodded. "At that moment, I saw you as a hero."

Jack’s smile lit up the room. "Really?"

He sounded so much like a little boy seeking approval from a parent, that Ianto laughed and put his arms around Jack's neck. He leaned in to Jack so that their lips were almost touching. "Don't worry. The thought was fleeting." Then he pressed his lips to Jack’s.

Jack broke the kiss long enough to say, "Cheeky bastard," before kissing Ianto again.

They kissed passionately, but with more compassion than they’d ever shown each other. Jack slid Ianto's suit jacket off and tossed it on a nearby desk. He ran his hands down Ianto's back and kissed along Ianto's jaw until he reached his neck. Ianto was just starting to get aroused, when the alert on the weather monitoring program he was running started to beep. Jack growled and gave Ianto's neck a final kiss before turning to the screen. They studied the readings. "Do you know what's happening, Jack?"

"I think I might, and it scares the hell out of me."

"What is it?"

Jack told him about his troops in 1909 dying on the train in Lahore and about finding a rose petal on his desk. "What are they, Jack?" asked Ianto, when Jack had stopped talking.

"Creatures from the dawn of time. I think we should monitor this. Why don't you go get some sleep, and I'll keep watch."

"I'll just lay down on the sofa for a bit. Wake me in a couple of hours?"

Jack nodded, "Thanks, Ianto," he said, and turned his attention back to the computer screen.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to the brilliant riftintime.

Jack had been right about the creatures, or fairies, as Estelle called them. He thought they were Mara, but it was an old argument between them. He needed to see Estelle, who was giving a talk on the fairies that day. He considered taking Ianto with him, but Ianto would know right away what Estelle had been to him. That might cause complications. It could lead to all kinds of conversations that neither of them were ready to have.

Jack had felt a bit uncomfortable around Ianto since their trip to Flat Holm. He had revealed some of his vulnerability. He had been needy, and now he was embarrassed. *I don't do needy!* Besides, *it's not like we're anything to each other except employer/employee with the occasional impersonal shag between us. He's still mourning Lisa. I see the sadness in his eyes when he thinks no one's looking.*

He didn't know what he and Ianto were, but whatever it was, it was tenuous at best. He decided to take Gwen instead. Gwen was in awe of him. She saw him as a hero, and he could use the ego boost right now. Ianto saw him as a man, and a fallible one at that. Jack wanted to feel as invincible emotionally as he was in body. Little did he know it wasn't to be.

It was a terrible few days. He lost Estelle, and he'd had to sacrifice Jasmine. His team gave him the silent treatment on the ride back to the Hub after he'd let Jasmine go with the fairies. Tosh and Owen went home soon after they got to the Hub. Gwen slammed around the boardroom for about an hour, then she, too, left in a huff. Ianto was… Jack had no idea where Ianto was. He hadn't really seen him during the investigation.

Jack sat in his office drinking scotch, tears fall down his face. Estelle was dead. Jasmine was gone. His team was disillusioned and disappointed in him. Gwen's hero worship had faded. Jack unholstered his Webley and put it on the desk. He took another swig of scotch, picked up the gun and put it to his head. He felt a hand on his and a familiar voice said, "No, Jack."

"Where did you come from, Ianto? I thought you'd left hours ago."

"Been standing in your doorway. You didn't notice."

"When you hear what happened today, you might save me the trouble and shoot me yourself."

"I know what happened, Jack. Tosh, Owen and Gwen each cornered me and told me their version of the events."

"So you hate me too, then."

"I don't hate you, Jack and neither do they. Give them some time. They'll realize you took the only option available to you."

"Yeah, right."
"You're our Captain because you are capable of making the difficult choices that we cannot and will not make."

"Great, and that makes me the arsehole."

"Sometimes. But it's easy for us to be on our high horses and make moral judgments when it isn't our job to make the difficult decisions. None of us could do what you do, Captain. It's what makes you a great leader and us your team. I hated you for killing Lisa. I said terrible things to you. I called you names and insulted you, but you were right, and I was wrong."

Jack looked at Ianto. He was overwhelmed by his words. "Does that mean you forgive me?"

Ianto nodded and put his hand on Jack's shoulder. "For Jasmine and for Lisa. I forgave you a long time ago for Lisa. As far as Jasmine goes, I wasn't emotionally invested, so I can see it with a clear head. The team will too, once they have some distance."

Jack's head dropped into his hands. The tears started flowing again, and he couldn't stop them. "You know what Peter Parker says – with great power comes great responsibility," said Ianto with humor in his voice.

"Who's Peter Parker? An ex of yours?" Jack said into his hands.

Ianto tutted. "Didn't you ever read comic books? Peter Parker was Spiderman's alter ego."

Jack looked up at the young man. "You're quoting Spiderman to me?" he asked scornfully.

Ianto just grinned at him. Jack couldn't help but smile back. Ianto squeezed his shoulder and said, "I heard about Estelle. I'm sorry for your loss, Jack. I've made some funeral arrangements that are awaiting your approval." The after a moment he said, "You loved her." It was a statement more than it was a question.

Jack nodded. He saw in his mind the beautiful girl that Estelle had been, so long ago... "In a different lifetime," he whispered.

Ianto held his hand out to Jack, and Jack took it. Ianto pulled him out of his chair and embraced him. Jack put his arms around Ianto. Once again, Ianto was taking care of him, comforting him, holding him. Jack closed his eyes. What was it about Ianto Jones?

He wanted Ianto to stay with him. I don't want to be alone. Could he ask? Would he stay? He pulled Ianto tighter. He heard Ianto whisper, "I'm not going anywhere."

He always knows, damn him, thought Jack, as Ianto released him. He took Jack's hand and led him to the ladder leading to Jack's bedroom underneath his office. Jack's heart started beating faster, as he watched Ianto descend through the hatch. Jack had no idea what was waiting for him at the bottom of that ladder. He had no idea what Ianto would do next. The night could go any number of directions. Ianto had always kept him at arm's length, but he also always surprised him. It thrilled and terrified him at the same time. He took a deep breath, tried to calm his thudding heart, and put his foot on the ladder.
Ianto had taken off his suit jacket and hung it over a chair. He stood waiting as Jack descended the last step into his bedroom. Jack’s attempts to slow his heart rate had been in vain. It was thumping so loudly in his chest that he was sure that Ianto could hear it. Ianto said nothing. He walked towards Jack, placed his hands on Jack’s suspenders, and gently slid them off his shoulders. He started deftly working on the buttons on Jack’s shirt. He slid the shirt off and threw it over the chair where he had hung his suit jacket. Jack stood stock still, staring at Ianto. He was afraid to move.

He watched Ianto loosen his tie and slide it out from around his neck, then toss it aside. Ianto pulled Jack’s white undershirt out of his pants and slid his hands up the bare skin of Jack’s back, pulling the undershirt up as he went. Jack’s breathing hitched. He lifted his arms, as Ianto pulled the shirt over his head. Ianto threw the shirt on the growing pile of clothing on the chair, as he stared at Jack’s bare torso. He put his hands on Jack’s shoulders and ran them down his chest, brushing his fingers over Jack’s nipples. Jack inhaled sharply. His cock started to respond to Ianto’s touch.

Ianto removed his hands. He looked into Jack’s eyes, as he started slowly unbuttoning his own shirt. Jack cock grew harder with each button Ianto opened, but he was rooted to the spot. When Ianto reached the last button, he slid his shirt smoothly down his arms and threw it on the pile of clothing. He pressed his bare chest against Jack’s, and Jack moaned softly. He ran his hands softly up Jack’s back, as he placed feather-light kisses on Jack’s neck, under his ear and along his jaw line. He looked Jack in the eyes, then kissed his mouth, darting his tongue along Jack’s upper lip. Jack opened his lips, and Ianto’s tongue danced inside his mouth.

Ianto kissed down Jack’s neck again, over his shoulder, down his pectoral and landed on his nipple. Ianto licked around the areola and teased the tip of his nipple with his tongue. Ianto then moved to the other nipple and repeated the motions. Jack was panting now, his cock straining against his trousers. Ianto ran his tongue down Jack’s abdomen and dipped inside his belly button, while sliding his hands down Jack’s sides.

Ianto dropped to the floor and unlaced Jack’s boots. He lifted Jack’s feet out of one and then the other, simultaneously peeling off Jack’s socks. He slipped his own shoes and socks off, then stood and looked into Jack’s eyes again. He slowly unfastened Jack’s belt buckle and trousers, never breaking eye contact. He slipped his fingers over the skin of Jack’s hips and slid Jack’s trousers and briefs slowly down his legs, letting his fingers brush Jack’s skin as he went. He lifted Jack’s feet up one at a time and removed his trousers. He tossed them onto the pile of discarded clothing. He stood and gazed slowly up Jack’s naked body starting at his feet and ending with Jack’s eyes.

Jack was coming undone. It was so erotic that Jack was certain one touch to his cock, which was already weeping with precum, would send him over the edge. Ianto held his gaze, as his hands moved to his own trousers. Jack was panting with anticipation. Ianto slowly unbuttoned and unzipped his trousers, hooked his fingers under the waist band and slid them and his briefs down slowly. He stood naked, looking at Jack. Jack couldn’t stand it any longer. ”You’re beautiful, Ianto,” he said in a husky voice.
Ianto took one step forward and pressed their bodies together. Then they were kissing hungrily, hands everywhere at once, stroking, touching, pinching, caressing. Ianto walked Jack backward until his calves hit the bed. They fell onto Jack's mattress in a tangle of limbs. Their mouths and hands fervently explored each other's bodies. Jack rolled them over so he was on top of Ianto. He kissed and sucked on Ianto's nipple, ran his tongue down his torso, over his hip bone and down his thigh. He took each of Ianto's balls into his mouth, sucking gently, and then moved back to Ianto's other nipple. Ianto flipped him over and kissed down his chest, bit on his nipples, licked his belly button, nibbled on the insides of his thighs, and lapped the precum off the head of his cock. Then he slid up along Jack's body, pressing his body along Jack's as he moved.

Jack thrust his hips involuntarily, as the friction of Ianto's body on his cock made him desperate for more contact. Ianto kissed him hard on the mouth. They thrust against each other. Both of them were so turned on that it didn't take long before first Jack and then Ianto coated their stomachs with cum. Ianto lay panting on top of Jack. Jack put his arms around Ianto. I wonder how long before he bolts, he thought. But Ianto didn't move. He lay on top of Jack, running his hand up and down Jack's arm.

"Can I ask you something, Jack?"

_Oh this is going to be good_, thought Jack. "Sure Ianto."

"What do you call that?"

Jack was confused. "What do I call what?"

"What we just did."

"I call that one of the most erotic sexual encounters of my very long and very experienced life. Why, what do you call it?"

"I mean, is that considered sex or just fooling around?"

"Ah, I see." Light dawned on Jack, and he was amused. "Well, what do you think?"

"I believe the technical term is frottage."

Jack laughed. "Well, I do enjoy throwing around some technical jargon. I suppose, technically, there was no penetration, so it wasn't sex. But it was definitely more intimate than times when there has been penetration between us, so go figure."

"Was that safe?"

Jack was confused again. Really, this young man was an enigma. "What do you mean?"

"Should we have used a condom?"

"Ah." Light dawned again. He begun to tease, "I thought you did all of this research."

"Well, let's face it, Jack, you're not exactly the average man. I can't very well type 'risk of getting Chlamydia from frottage with an immortal' into Google."

Jack laughed, "And yet, you didn't use a condom."

Ianto was silent for a minute, and then he said softly, "I took a leap of faith. Was that a foolish thing to do?"

Jack answered him honestly, "With anyone else, yes. With me, no. I can't get sick, nor can I be a
carrier. My body rejects it. I don't mean to belittle your questions, Ianto. You should be concerned about safe sex with other people. You're being careful, aren't you?"

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"With other people." Jack felt his insides squirm. He didn't like to think of Ianto with other people.

"Oh," was Ianto's only reply.

"Ianto?" Jack was getting nervous. He didn't know if he wanted to have this conversation.

"What are you asking me, Jack?"

"I just want to make sure that you're taking care of yourself." And are you sleeping with anyone else? He added silently. Stop it Harkness. He doesn't belong to you.

"I am," Ianto replied brusquely.

Jack was silent for a long time. He was having a silent war with himself. He wanted to know, but he didn't want to know. We're not together. It's none of my business if he's seeing other people. He can sleep with whomever he wants. I can sleep with whomever I want. What if he asks me? Do I lie or tell the truth? Do I want to have this conversation? Damn it!

"If you want to know the answer, Jack, you're going to have to ask the question."

Damn him. How does he always seem to know what I'm thinking? I thought I'd closed my mind. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said defensively.

"Okay," was all Ianto said.

Urrgh, he's insanely frustrating. He has me acting like a jealous teenage girl. How does he do that to me? "Ianto…" he hesitated.

"Jack…" Ianto replied, mocking Jack's tone. He was unreadable as always.

"God damn it Ianto, are you sleeping with other people?" Jack practically roared.

"No," Ianto said matter-of-factly.

"Oh."

Jack was taken aback. Now what do I say? Is he going to ask me? What should I tell him? But the next words out of Ianto's mouth surprised Jack as usual. "Shower?"

Jack grinned. "Really?" he asked hopefully.

"Really." Ianto smiled that sexy smile at him.
Thanks as always to my amazing beta riftintime.

Jack hopped out of bed and had the water temperature adjusted before Ianto had even risen to his feet. They got into the shower and started to wash each other. It quickly turned into kissing and groping, and hard cocks brushing together. Ianto dropped to his knees and took Jack in his mouth. He worked his tongue around the underside and up and down Jack's shaft. "Ianto," Jack panted, "I really want you to fuck me."

Ianto stopped sucking Jack's cock and looked up at him. "I don't have anything."

Jack jumped out of the shower, rushed to his bedside table, fumbled in the drawer, and returned carrying a bottle of lube. He handed it to Ianto with a look of triumph on his face. Ianto chuckled. "You're like a little kid sometimes, Jack, you know that?" He looked down at the bottle Jack handed him, then looked up at Jack and raised an eyebrow. "No condom?"

Jack's face fell a little bit. "We don't have to use one, but if you want to…"

Ianto smiled at him. "I'd rather not, if it's okay with you."

"Oh, thank the gods!" Jack almost whooped, as he kissed Ianto hard on the mouth. He turned around and put his hands against the tiles, pressing his bare arse into Ianto. Ianto smacked his arse hard and said, "Patience, Jack."

Jack was enthralled. "Ianto Jones, you're a little bit dirty aren't you?"

Ianto leaned close to his ear and whispered, "You have no idea, Sir."

Jack groaned, "Ianto, the things you do to me…"

He heard Ianto chuckling, and decided he loved the sound. Ianto inserted a slick finger inside him and slowly worked the muscle. When it relaxed, he slid a second finger in. Jack was moaning and thrusting his hips. Ianto leaned into Jack and whispered coyly into his ear, "Have I been doing this right, Sir?"

"Are you kidding me?" Jack panted. "Why do you think I was so surprised when you said I was the only man you'd had sex with?"

"I'm good at following directions," Ianto teased.

"You drive me crazy, Ianto, you know that?" Jack said huskily, and then whimpered as he felt Ianto's fingers withdraw.

He cried out with pleasure when he felt Ianto start to push his cock inside him. Ianto shouted, "Oh God."

Jack snickered. "Different without the latex in the way isn't it?" he asked slyly.
Ianto pushed himself all the way in, moaning as his balls pressed against Jack.

Jack thrust back into Ianto, desperate for him to move. Ianto adjusted his angle until he hit Jack's prostate. Jack was making inhuman noises, as Ianto thrust, hitting him in just the right place with every stroke. Ianto was gasping. "Not... going... to... last... Jack," he panted.

Ianto reached around and wrapped his hand around Jack's cock. Jack held his hand opposite Ianto's and together they stroked Jack's cock as Ianto pounded into him. Ianto's thrusting was becoming erratic. "Sorry... Jack... can't... uuuuhhh!" and Ianto was cumming hard.

The feeling of Ianto cumming inside of him pushed Jack over the edge. With a shout, he sprayed the shower tiles with his cum. Ianto was breathing hard as he leaned his forehead against Jack's back. His softening cock slipped out of Jack's arse, and Jack felt Ianto's cum sliding down his leg. It was fantastic. He turned around and wrapped Ianto in his arms. "I've wanted to feel you cum inside me for so long."

Ianto didn't reply. He just hugged Jack for a minute, and then said, "Let's get cleaned up."

They washed for real this time and quickly dried off. Ianto stood uncertainly for a minute, towel wrapped around his waist and then he said, "I suppose I should head home."

Jack's face fell.
Ianto caught the look of disappointment on Jack's face. He sighed inwardly. He had already been more intimate with Jack than he had planned, but feeling Jack's pain after the events with the fairies had weakened his resolve. He wanted to comfort the older man. He wanted to take his pain away. He just didn't know if he was ready for this. He reached out and took Jack's hand. "You want me to stay." It wasn't a question, just an acknowledgement of fact.

Jack looked for a moment like a shy little boy. "Not if you don't want to," he said, looking at his feet.

_Seriously_, Ianto thought to himself. _Is this man really over one hundred and seventy years old?_ He shook his head inwardly. He dropped his towel and climbed into Jack's bed.

Jack looked at him uncertainly. "Are you sure, Ianto?"

Ianto didn't respond, he just held out his hand to Jack. Jack's face lit up, and he climbed into bed with Ianto. He wrapped himself around Ianto and pulled him close. Ianto laughed. "You're like an octopus, Jack."

"There's this race called the Octopoda. Very interesting sexual practices," mused Jack.

"Oh lord, here we go," mumbled Ianto.

"Really, the things they can do with eight arms…"

"And yet I'm one of the most erotic sexual encounters you've had in your very long and very experienced life?" Ianto teased.

"Yes," Jack answered simply.

Ianto was taken aback. "I'm a twenty-four year old bloke from the 21st century with only two arms."

Jack just shrugged his shoulders. Ianto decided to leave it alone. He wasn't sure he wanted to go there. Jack buried his face in Ianto's neck, and Ianto stroked his hair. Ianto was bemused. _This is the great Captain Jack Harkness, former companion of the Doctor, immortal, sexual deviant… and very, very human_, Ianto concluded. He closed his eyes and started to drift into unconsciousness.

_He was surrounded by fire. He could hear Lisa calling his name, her metal-clad arms reaching through the flames. He reached out to her, crying, trying to grasp her hand. "Lisa," he shouted, the fire singeing his sleeves. "Lisa!" He grasped her hand, but it wasn't Lisa's hand, it was Jack's. Jack, half converted into a Cyberman, laughing as he burned, dragging Ianto into the fire to burn with him…_

Ianto woke with a start, his body covered in sweat. He was lying naked in bed with a sleeping Jack Harkness. _Oh God_, he thought. _I have to get out of here. What am I doing? Why did I agree to stay here? I can't do this._
He extricated himself from Jack as silently as he could. He heard Jack's breathing change and knew he was awake. He didn't look at him, praying Jack wouldn't say anything. He dressed hurriedly and left the Hub without a backward glance.

He drove home, tears streaming down his face. Why had he given himself to Jack Harkness last night? It had been too… emotional. If it was just sex, that was one thing, but that had been… well more than just sex. He wasn't ready for this. *Lisa*…

He got himself into his flat, stripped of his clothes and got into the shower. He let the hot water cascade down his body as he cried. His legs gave way underneath him, and he sunk to the floor. He curled his legs, wrapped his arms around his knees and rocked back and forth, body shaking with sobs, as the water pelted over his head and shoulders.

When the water temperature dropped enough to make him shiver, he pulled himself out of the tub, dressed in a pair of old sweat pants and a hoodie, grabbed the blanket off his bed and curled himself up on his living room sofa. He needed to think. He mentally reviewed the history of his sexual relationship with Jack Harkness.

He hadn't expected to be attracted to Jack. He had never been attracted to a man before, but lying on top of Jack after that pterodactyl hunt… Jack had turned him on. He could freely admit it now. He had been lying on top of Jack with a raging hard-on, and he had wanted to snog him senseless. It had been confusing and upsetting. When he had reported for work the following morning, he had steeled himself. He didn't know what the day would bring, but he had been resolved to do anything to save Lisa, including having sex with the boss.

He hadn't been sure what kind of role he could fulfill at Torchwood Three, but once he observed the disorganized mess that was the Hub, he immediately saw how he could fit in. The team needed some organization in their lives. He had fitted in nicely.

He had been somewhat relieved that Jack had kept his flirting to a minimum for his first few weeks on the job, but Ianto had known it wouldn't last. That first week had been dreadful. He had spent most of the time getting Lisa settled into the Hub and trying not to get caught by Jack. He had gotten her out of London just in time too. Matthew had shot himself a week after Ianto had taken Lisa off his hands. Ianto didn't want to think about that. The number of Canary Wharf survivors was decreasing at an alarming rate.

When Jack had resumed flirting, Ianto had been relieved because he'd known that it meant he was in. He'd also been nervous because he didn't know how long he could put Jack off. They'd bantered back and forth, flirting and making sexual innuendo, but he'd known that one day Jack would want more. He had decided that if he was going to sleep with the boss, he wanted to be the one in control.

Things had finally come to a head when Jack had caught him coming out of Lisa's room. He had been sitting with her, reading aloud from one of her favorite Agatha Christie novels. She had drifted off to sleep, and Ianto was going to make his way home to restock his supply of clean clothes and get a few hours of uninterrupted sleep. He was startled when he literally crashed into Jack as he was making his way through the archives. He had been terrified. He thought Jack was finally going to discover Lisa. He had to protect her at all costs, so he'd done the first thing that came into his mind. He'd kissed Jack Harkness.
Thanks as always to my brilliant beta riftintime.

He had kissed Jack and it had been... intense. Ianto closed his eyes as he remembered the scene. He had shoved Jack hard up against the archives, relishing the fact that he didn't have to be gentle with a man. He could take out some of his aggression and sexual frustration. He hadn't had any sexual encounters since Lisa had been converted. Jack was a good kisser, a great kisser. Ianto had been really turned on, but he had also been nervous. He hadn't wanted things to go too far. He'd known that the best defense was a good offense, so he'd steeled his nerves and unbuttoned Jack's pants.

How different could it be? He had thought. I have one too. He had put his hand on Jack's cock. It was slightly different from his. Jack's cock was thicker, but about the same length as his. He'd started moving his hand, doing the things he, himself, liked. It hadn't been that difficult. He must have been doing something right, judging from the sounds Jack had been making. He'd felt Jack undo his trousers, and he'd let him, desperate for contact by then. Jack had started stroking his cock. He was bloody good at it. Ianto had forgotten everything except the sensations he had felt, until they had both cum. Then he'd realized what he'd just done and needed to escape.

Ianto had cried all the way home. He had betrayed Lisa. He'd been with a man. The worst part was that he'd enjoyed it. He hadn't understood what was happening to him. He'd slept fitfully and returned to work early the next morning. He'd wanted to see Lisa. He'd wanted to apologize to her. He'd wanted her forgiveness, but she had been in so much pain that morning, he couldn't bring himself to tell her.

The next evening, he'd been totally shocked when Jack had dropped to his knees and started sucking his cock. Jack was exceptionally talented, and Ianto had cum before he could regain his wits. He'd left the Hub quickly, knowing that he would have to reciprocate and not knowing if he could do it. When the time came, he had found that he could. He had boldly unbuttoned Jack's trousers and taken him into his mouth. He had done everything he knew that he liked himself, and some things that he'd read about. He had been surprised to find that he liked the taste of Jack. It turned him on. He'd gotten hard sucking Jack off, and that had confused him even more. He'd been most afraid of Jack cumming in his mouth, but when he did, Ianto had felt... excited. I wanted him, he confessed to himself.

And then he had buggered Jack over his desk. Ianto remembered the scene vividly. Jack had been upset about an argument with the team, and Ianto had sensed his pent up frustration. He'd known that he could take Jack. He'd steeled his nerves and forced Jack over his desk. Ianto had been simultaneously thrilled and terrified. He had read over and over again about anal sex, and he had been ready with lube and condoms. He'd known about having to stretch the muscle, and that otherwise it could be painful. He knew that once he had entered Jack, he had to give him a minute to adjust to his presence. He knew that he had to angle correctly to find the prostate. He had been totally turned on by Jack and had to concentrate so he didn't cum before Jack did. I liked it. I more than liked it. But he'd been mortified afterwards. He had spent another night sitting on the floor of his shower, crying inconsolably. It didn't stop me from buggering Jack against the wall in the shooting range not that long afterwards... I can't deny the sexual connection. He not only found Jack extremely attractive, but he liked the man too, despite his faults. He had liked the team as well. He respected all of them and what they did. It had made his betrayal so much harder to bear. The guilt
Ianto put his head in his hands and sighed. Light was coming through his windows and it was almost time to return to the Hub. How had his life come to this? Before Torchwood had recruited him, he was just a normal bloke with a great memory who was really good at reading people. Torchwood had taken him in, told him his memory was eidetic and called him an empath. Ianto had thought it was ridiculous, but they had spent months teaching him to hone his abilities. Then they had used him for their own purposes.

The one good thing in his life had been Lisa. He had wanted to marry her, have a couple of kids and put Torchwood behind him. Then the Cybermen came, and it all fell apart. He'd shagged his boss and betrayed his team to hide her, and now he was shagging his boss because… why the hell was he shagging his boss? "What am I doing?" he asked the empty flat.

He decided that he and Jack needed to cool off. He needed to maintain a professional relationship with Jack and that was all. He just couldn't handle anything else right now. *I'm still in love with Lisa.* He would commit himself to Torchwood, and to saving the human race from the threat of alien invasion, but that was all he could offer. He got off the sofa and got dressed for work.

Just as Ianto was about to walk out the door his mobile phone rang. He looked at the screen. It read 'Torchwood'. Jack was calling from the Hub.

Ianto answered the call, "Yes, Sir?"

"Ianto, I hope I caught you before you left," Jack's voice said on the other end of the phone.

"I was just about to walk out the door."

"Good, go back in and change into clothes for hiking and camping. We're taking a trip to the countryside. Can you get a hold of the rest of the team and let them know?"

"Certainly, Sir. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Good. When you get in, pack the SUV with camping gear. I've just been alerted to a rash of disappearances we need to investigate. Tell the team we'll be leaving in two hours. And, Ianto…"

"Yes, Sir?"

"Nothing. I'll see you when you get in."

Jack disconnected the call.
They drove to the countryside with Owen griping the entire trip. Ianto was lost in thought. Why am I here? I'm not a field agent. And what are we going to do about sleeping arrangements? Will Jack have me sharing his tent? Ianto grimaced at the thought. He had a feeling this trip was going to be a disaster.

He was in a foul mood. He missed Lisa, he missed his old life, and he didn't want to be there. He didn't want to deal with Jack or the team. He wished they had left him at the Hub. The sentiment increased a hundred-fold when Gwen started her stupid "who was the last person you snogged" game. This is going to end badly, he thought to himself.

He inwardly cringed when Tosh admitted that Owen had been the last person she had snogged. Poor Tosh, pining after Owen, and him not giving her the time of day. He inwardly rolled his eyes when Owen admitted that Gwen was the last person he had snogged. Predictable, he thought. He felt ill when Owen turned to Jack, but Jack easily evaded the question. That just left… "It's my turn, is it?" he asked, finishing his thought aloud. "It was Lisa."

God, he wished that was true. He knew his statement would make everyone uncomfortable, but at least it would turn the attention away from Gwen and Owen and be a kindness to Tosh.

"Ianto, I'm sorry," said Gwen.

"Sorry she's dead or sorry you mentioned it?" He was being spiteful, and he knew it. He just didn't care right now.

"I just didn't think," explained Gwen.

"You forgot," he said with irony. I forgot. I let her be dead. How could I do that to her?

Owen and Gwen beat a hasty retreat, leaving just him, Jack and Tosh. Ianto knew Jack was furious, so it was with dread that he chanced a look at him. The look on Jack's face was murderous. Ianto quickly looked away. Suddenly he was slightly afraid of Jack Harkness. Tosh sensed the tension in the air and she too, made her departure. As soon as she was out of earshot, Jack said, "Lisa?" through clenched teeth.

"Non-human lifeform?" Ianto retorted.

"That was pure evasion, Ianto. You know that," Jack growled.

"What did you want me to say?" Ianto’s foul temper threatened to break loose.

"How about nothing. No one had even asked you!" Jack snarled as he got off the bench and stalked away.

"Fuck you, Harkness," Ianto said under his breath.
Several hours later, Jack saved his life.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my wonderful beta riftintime.

The team made the journey back to the Hub in silence after the cannibals had been dealt with. Owen had taped up Ianto's cracked ribs, cleaned the small laceration on his neck, and diagnosed a mild concussion. "You need someone to stay with you tonight, Ianto, and wake you every few hours. Do you have someone who can do that?" Owen had asked.

"Yes," Ianto had lied.

Owen had looked at him skeptically, but said nothing.

Ianto felt numb. He knew he should be in pain, but he felt nothing. It was possibly due to the industrial strength pain killers Owen had given him. He leaned his head against the back window of the SUV and watched the blackness of the Welsh countryside speed past. He wondered if he would ever be able to look at that countryside the same way again.

Jack dropped Gwen, Owen and Tosh off at their respective flats, then headed toward Ianto's. Jack parked outside Ianto's flat, and Ianto slowly extricated himself from the SUV with a muttered, "Thank you, Sir."

Jack got out of the vehicle and moved to help Ianto to his flat. "I'm fine, Sir. You don't need to help me."

"Nice try, Ianto. Owen told me about the concussion. You need someone to wake you every few hours. If you don't want me in your flat, we'll go back to the Hub, but either way, you're stuck with me tonight. I just thought you'd be more comfortable at home."

"Really, Sir, I…"

"Ianto," Jack's voice was stern. "That's an order."

"Yes, Sir." Ianto knew he didn't have a choice.

Ianto allowed Jack to help him into his flat. Jack made his way into Ianto's bathroom and started the shower. Ianto followed him silently. Jack looked at him for a long moment, then left the bathroom and closed the door. Ianto kicked off his shoes and sat gingerly on the toilet lid. He slid his jacket off with difficulty, unbuttoned his shirt with one hand and slid that off as well, cringing with pain. When he tried to remove his T-shirt, he got stuck. He couldn't lift his arm high enough to get it off. He struggled for a minute, but gave it up as a bad job. He sat, staring at the bathroom wall, his side throbbing. "Ianto," Jack called from the other side of the bathroom door.

Ianto didn't reply. He knew he should call out, but couldn't make his lips move. The bathroom door cracked open. When Jack saw him sitting there, his T-shirt half off, he opened the door fully and stood in front of Ianto. Ianto just continued to stare at the bathroom wall. Jack moved forward and begun to remove Ianto's T-shirt. Ianto shrank back from Jack's touch. "Well, clearly you're having problems doing it yourself," Jack said with irritation.
Ianto gave a slight nod of his head, never removing his gaze from the bathroom wall. He felt Jack undressing him. When Jack went to remove his jeans and briefs, Ianto flinched. "For God's sake, Ianto. You fucked me the other night. Now you're modest?" Jack's irritation was growing.

He looked into Jack's eyes. The emotions that he had been so successfully repressing threatened to break free. Jack must have seen something in his eyes because he knelt down to Ianto's level, put his hand on his cheek and said in a kinder voice. "Let me help you, Ianto."

Ianto gave another small nod, and Jack removed the rest of his clothing. Jack quickly stripped himself, got them both into the shower, and just like the night after Lisa, started washing him in a business-like manner. When Jack reached around him to soap his back, Ianto put his head on Jack's shoulder and started to cry. His dam had broken.

Jack stopped washing and wrapped his arms around Ianto. "They were human, Jack," Ianto said through his tears. "Not aliens following their instinctual nature, but human beings. And not just one psychopath, but an entire village full."

"I know," was all Jack said.

"Is the human race really worth saving? Are we worth the risks you all take every time you go into the field?"

"Yes," Jack answered simply. Then he said, "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Ianto looked at him. "There's always a balance to everything, Ianto. You told me that. For all of the goodness in the world, there has to be a measure of evil."

As Jack's words sunk in, Jack put his hands on Ianto's face and kissed him on the forehead. "Now let's get your hair washed and get you into bed."

Jack finished bathing Ianto and got him into a pair of pyjama pants. He handed him painkillers and a glass of water. Ianto swallowed the pills and handed the glass back. Jack helped him into bed, and then went back into the bathroom. Ianto missed his presence immediately. "Jack?" he called out. "Don't leave."

Ianto hated the neediness in his voice, but he didn't want to be alone. He wanted to feel the comfort of another body next to his. Jack stuck his head out of the bathroom. "I'm not going anywhere, Ianto. I have to wake you every few hours."

Ianto lifted the covers up with difficulty, indicating that he wanted Jack in bed with him. Jack came out of the bathroom. He was still wearing a towel wrapped around his waist. He looked at Ianto, and then said, "Can I borrow a pair of pants?"

Ianto nodded and indicated his closet with his head. Jack rummaged around, found some, put them on, and threw the wet towel into the bathroom. He got into Ianto's bed on the opposite side and curled up behind Ianto. He carefully placed his arm around Ianto's body. Ianto pressed back into the Jack's warmth. He finally felt safe. He closed his eyes and started to drift off to sleep.
Thanks as always to my beta incredible riftintime.

Jack lay in Ianto's bed with his arms around him, listening to Ianto breathe. He had nearly lost his team that day, and not to aliens, but to a bunch of cannibals. He had wanted to rip their throats out, though he had not been as horrified as the rest of the team. He had lived a long time and witnessed too many horrible things. Hell, he'd done horrible things. He had tortured one of the cannibals just a few hours ago to find Tosh and Ianto. The old Jack had resurfaced. He was capable of horror too.

He remembered with fury the sight of Ianto bruised and beaten on the floor of that foul cottage and he felt bile rising in his throat. *Prison is too good for them!* He considered getting them transferred to a UNIT prison. He'd ask Ianto to look into it. *Ianto*… He considered the young man sleeping in his arms. He had been angry when Ianto had said that Lisa was the last person he'd been with. He didn't know what he had wanted Ianto to say, but he could have hinted that there was someone. It wasn't about Gwen's childish game, it was that Ianto had denied everything that had happened between them. Jack didn't know what he wanted from Ianto, but he definitely did not want Ianto's indifference. He knew that Ianto was struggling with guilt over sleeping with him. He wasn't over Lisa yet. The whole thing with Ianto was getting out of hand.

But so much had happened since that stupid game. He had arrived just in the nick of time. Ianto had been about to be slaughtered. He felt sick at the thought. Then he felt angry at himself. *This thing with Ianto needs to stop. You're becoming distracted.* He had felt close to Ianto because Ianto knew some of his secrets. But there was still so much Ianto didn't know about him. He didn't know about the Time Agency or what he'd been like before the Doctor and Rose, or even his real name. Ianto had no idea what he was capable of and maybe wouldn't want to know him if he did. Yes, it was foolish of him to think that they could be anything to each other. He was his employer and a casual shag. That was all. He needed to go out on the pull. He'd been distracted by Ianto for too long, and he'd become too emotionally attached.

Ianto started writhing in his sleep and shouting in Welsh. Jack decided it was time to wake Ianto up. "Ianto, Ianto, it's only a dream. Ianto wake up. You're safe. I'm here."

Ianto opened his eyes. "Jack," he said.

"Ianto, do you know where you are?"

"I'm at home and you're in my bed."

Jack couldn't help but chuckle. "Okay, I guess that means your brain is functioning. Go back to sleep Ianto."

Ianto took Jack's hand and pulled it tighter around his body as he drifted back to sleep. Jack felt his affection growing for Ianto and steeled himself. He'd made a resolution. He wasn't going to back down now. *No, Jack. You can't go there,* he told himself.

Jack started drifting off to sleep but woke with a start when Ianto began struggling again. He woke
him, made sure that Ianto was cognizant, and then let him go to back to sleep.

Twice more during the night Jack woke Ianto. The last time he had given Ianto another dose of pain medication. As Jack watched the sunlight stream into Ianto's room, Ianto's mobile phone rang. Ianto was still in a drug-induced slumber. Jack got out of bed and fished Ianto's phone from his jacket that was still lying on the bathroom floor. The screen read 'Toshiko Sato.'
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my wonderful beta riftintime.

"Good morning, Tosh."
"Jack? I thought I was calling Ianto. Did I dial you by mistake?"
"No, Tosh. He's dosed up on pain meds. I'm on concussion watch. What's up?"
"I was calling to thank him and see how he was feeling."
"Thank him for what?"
"He sacrificed himself so I could escape. He didn't tell you? No, of course he didn't. He's far too modest."
"What are you talking about, Toshiko?"

Tosh told Jack how Ianto had warned her to get ready to run and distracted the cannibals with a well timed head butt, allowing her to make her escape. Jack's eyes moved towards the sleeping young man as Tosh told her story. "The thing is, Jack, when we were first captured, they had us in this cell. There were… remains there. He was scared, Jack. He was really scared. But when it really counted, he was so brave. You always know who a person truly is when they face adversity. He was willing to endure a horrendous death so I could escape. I know you saved us all, Jack, but yesterday, Ianto was the hero."

Jack couldn't think of anything to say, so he didn't say anything. "Jack, are you still there?"
"I'm here, Tosh. Thanks for telling me. No need to come in today. We could all use a day off. Are you okay?"
"I'm fine, Jack. Ianto got the worst of it. Take good care of him."
"I will, Tosh. See you tomorrow."
"Bye, Jack." Tosh disconnected.

By that time, Ianto was awake and looking at Jack. Jack came over and knelt down. He kissed Ianto softly on the lips. "Thank you for saving my Toshiko."

"Didn't… do much good. Everyone… got captured anyway." Ianto was panting slightly.
"It made all the difference in the world. I'm really proud of you, Ianto. How are you feeling?"
"I'm not sure I can move, Sir."
"Is it your head?"
"Hurts to breathe."

Jack knew that there was something he could do to repay Ianto for trying to sacrifice himself for Tosh. It would take some explaining, but... "Ianto, I can make you feel better, but I have to kiss you."

"Really, Sir. Don't... think I'll... be much fun," Ianto gasped out.

Jack laughed. He couldn't help it. Even in pain, Ianto was a cheeky bastard. "Not what I meant, Ianto."

He leaned over and kissed Ianto. He focused on the energy that flowed through his body and visualized it moving from his mouth into Ianto. He felt Ianto grow warm. He broke off the kiss. Ianto looked dazed. Jack said, "Now do you think you can get up? I'm going to call Owen. We need to get your head examined."

"I'm sure there's a witty retort to be had there, I'm just too groggy to think of it," remarked Ianto.

"Now you have me really worried." Jack chuckled. "Come on, I'll help you get dressed."

Jack got Ianto up and into the SUV. He called Owen on the way and they met at the Hub. While Owen was running tests, Jack went to get them all some breakfast and coffee. He knew it wouldn't be up to Ianto's standards, but it would be better than nothing. When Jack returned, Owen was just finishing up with Ianto. He took the coffee and pastry that Jack offered and ate hungrily. "What's the diagnosis, Doctor?" asked Jack.

"Well, he'll live to clean another day. No serious damage. I thought he'd cracked some ribs, but the x-rays are clean. There are three healed rib fractures there that I don't remember from his medical records. Probably those idiots at Torchwood One. Anyway, I don't see any brain injury, but keep an eye on him for one more day just to be safe. Let me know if his behavior becomes erratic in any way."

"Sitting right here, Owen," said Ianto.

"Yeah, whatever. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to get the hell out of here. I've got better places to be, unlike you two," Owen said as he put his coat on.

"Sure, Owen. See you tomorrow, and thanks for checking him out."

"I would have groused a lot more, but I talked to Tosh this morning, and she told me that Tea Boy here is a big hero, so you got me grouse free."

"Alert the presses," quipped Ianto.

"Don't you start, you prat. I might decide that you need an invasive medical procedure."

Ianto rolled his eyes and Owen smiled. "I think he'll be fine, but keep your eye on him one more night, yeah? God forbid he gets amnesia and forgets how to make coffee." And with that parting remark, Owen left the Hub.

"I've got some things to do around here, Ianto. Do you mind hanging out for a while?"

"Sir, I don't need-"

"Don't even start, Ianto. I don't want to hear it. There are some books in my room. Why don't you
choose one and lay down on my bed."
"I should do some-
"Do I need to make it an order?"

"No, Sir," Ianto said as he took his coffee and made his way down to Jack's bunker.

Jack did some paperwork, checked on the Rift readings, made some calls, and then went down to check on Ianto. Ianto was lying on his bed reading Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. "Are you trying to believe six impossible things before breakfast?" asked Jack.

"With this job? I've been down the rabbit hole for years," Ianto jibed.

Jack smiled. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine, Sir. Can I get up now?"

Jack sighed. "I've got a few more hours of work to do. If you promise me that you won't do any cleaning, you can get up."

"Can I make us some decent coffee?"

"Oh gods. Please?"

Ianto smiled, but then he frowned slightly. "There's something I've been meaning to ask you for a while."

Jack felt his stomach knot. "What is it, Ianto?"
"That day, when you… when you discovered Lisa. She threw me, and I was… I woke up and you… what happened, Jack?"

Jack sighed. He had been wondering when Ianto would bring this up. "There's a life force that runs through me. I don't really know how to explain it, because I don't really understand it myself, but sometimes I can transfer some of that life force into other people. You were injured and unconscious, I needed you awake, so I gave you some of my energy." It was the best explanation he had.

"I thought you wanted me dead."

"Obviously I didn't." No, he had never wanted Ianto dead. He had just been angry and impulsive and hurt.

"So you healed me?"

"I suppose so, yes."

"And you did it again this morning? The healed rib fractures that Owen was talking about?"

Jack just shrugged. Ianto reached up, grabbed Jack behind his neck and kissed him. Jack kissed him back. _He's going to reward me for healing him with sex._ Part of Jack didn't care, but a bigger part of Jack did. _No, I can't do this. I'm not that shallow anymore._ He broke off the kiss. "Ianto, I don't know if this is such a good idea."

"Why, because I didn't tell Gwen that you were the last person I snogged?" Ianto's tone oozed with sarcasm.

Jack was irritated by Ianto's assumption. "Oh come on, Ianto. What am I, fifteen years old? It's because every time we have sex, you're wracked with guilt. You're clearly not over Lisa, and I don't want to deal with the drama." _Okay, that came out a little harsher than I meant it to._

Ianto bolted out of Jack's bed. "You don't want to deal with the drama?"

"Look, that came out wrong. I just mean, I think you need to come to terms with Lisa's death."

"I'll do my best, Sir." Ianto emphasized the Sir. "I'll get started on that coffee."

He started climbing up the ladder out of Jack's bunker. Jack watched him go. _Smooth, Harkness. The boy's been through hell and you just belittled everything he's been through._ Jack picked up Alice's Adventures in Wonderland to see where Ianto had been reading. _The rule is jam tomorrow and jam yesterday but never jam today._ Jack laughed ironically. "That's the truth," he said to the empty room.

Ianto returned with Jack's coffee, wearing his butler demeanor (which was particularly impressive since he was in jeans and a hoodie). "If you need me, Sir, I'll be in the archives." Then he spun on
his heel and left.

After about an hour of work, Jack went down to the archives to find Ianto. He walked through calling Ianto's name, but he didn't get a reply. *Where the hell did he go? Oh gods, he's not...* Jack suddenly had an idea where Ianto might be, and the thought made his stomach clench. He made his way down to the basement room where Ianto had hidden Lisa. He found Ianto sitting on the floor, tears streaming down his face.

He sat down next to Ianto. "Ianto, I didn't mean to belittle your pain. I'm sorry. It's just that one minute you want me, and the next, you're devastated over your dead girlfriend. It's not so fun from where I'm sitting."

Ianto didn't respond. He just wiped his eyes. "Look, you're emotionally drained after the Brecon Beacons. Understandably so. Not many people can say they survived a near death by cannibal experience."

Ianto cringed but said nothing. Jack continued, "We both know that you don't have a head injury now, so you don't need me to watch you. Why don't you take a couple of days off? Take a break from all of this."

"I just got off a month's suspension."

"That was suspension. This is being rewarded with a vacation after a difficult but successful mission. Besides, I have a little assignment for you to do over the next couple of days."

"What's that, Sir?"

"I think prison and a fair trial is too good for those sick bastards. Besides, some hot-shot lawyer might get them off on an insanity plea. See if you can get the cannibals transferred to a UNIT prison."

Ianto half grinned at him. "That's playing dirty, Sir."

"I'm a dirty guy. Can you do it? I assume it will just take some phone calls. You can do it from home."

Ianto nodded. "Yes, Sir. I can do it from home."

"Good. Come back to work when you're ready."

Ianto nodded, stood up, and left Jack sitting on the floor. Jack closed his eyes. *What a mess*, he thought.
Ianto spent the next couple of days gleefully getting the cannibals transferred into a UNIT prison. It was cathartic. When he had put the final details on the arrangements, he sent a text message to Jack telling him that the prisoners had been transferred. Jack sent a message back saying that nothing was happening and if he wanted another day off, he could have it. Ianto showed up for work the following morning anyway.

When he brought Jack his morning coffee, Jack glanced up at him but said nothing. Ianto retreated, feeling slightly chagrinned. He had to admit that maybe Jack was right. He wasn't over Lisa, and he was running hot and cold with Jack. He had been going to thank Jack for healing him with sex the other day. Jack had known it and stopped him.

Ianto spent most of the day in the archives, avoiding everyone. The next few days were more of the same. Ianto was growing more and more despondent. He knew he had to let Lisa go, he had to let her be dead, but it was almost more painful than when she had first died. He'd stopped eating again. He'd said nothing but the bare minimum to the team. Jack had hardly spoken a word to him in days. He was sitting on the floor of the archives, staring into space when Jack's voice came on his comm.

"Ianto, we've got a new piece of alien tech to play with. Can you come up?"

"Yes, Sir."

Ianto made his way into the main area of the Hub. He began the cataloging of the piece of alien tech that everyone kept referring to as a "giant stapler." No idea what that's about. Must be an inside joke that I'm, once again, not privy to. Within ten minutes he wanted to leave again. Tosh was angry, Owen and Gwen were flirting (obviously they were shagging) and Jack was absent. The emotions running through the Hub were too much for him. He finished his work and retreated back to the archives.

He managed to get through the rest of the day. He didn't even bother going home. He slept on the cot that he had used when he'd hidden Lisa. He had a couple of spare suits in the Hub. The next day he went about his daily chores in a daze. He had to let Lisa go. He felt ill. His body ached. Can't imagine a time when this isn't everything. Pain so constant, like my stomach's full of rats. Feels like this is all I am now. There isn't an inch of me that doesn't hurt. He noticed Tosh, looking at him strangely. He put on his mask. "I'm about to brew some of Jack's industrial strength coffee. Would you like a cup?"

"I'm fine, thanks, Ianto."

Ianto went to the coffee machine and started on Jack's coffee. He felt like he had missed something. It was like there was something he'd glimpsed out of the corner of his eye but couldn't quite discern. He looked at Tosh. Something was wrong. She was conflicted. She was worried about him, upset by him. Had she heard his thoughts? What was going on? It was almost enough to pull Ianto out of his despair.
He watched Tosh over the next couple of days. Something wasn't right. With Susie, he had known that something was going on, but he hadn't discussed it with Jack for a while because he had been afraid of discovery himself. Then Susie had murdered three people and shot herself. He still felt guilty about how long he'd waited before mentioning it. He knew he had to talk to Jack about Tosh.

They had barely spoken a word to each other outside of the necessary work communications, but Ianto cared too much for Tosh to let his pettiness get in the way. After the rest of the team left for the night, he steeled himself and went to Jack's office with his last cup of coffee for the day. Jack wasn't there. He found him in the boardroom, studying the alien tech they had brought in a few days ago. He put Jack's coffee down on the table. "Do you have a minute, Sir?"

"What's on your mind, Ianto?" Jack didn't take his eyes off the contraption.

"It's Toshiko, Sir."

"You've noticed. I was wondering what it would take to get you out of the funk you've been in. Yes, something is definitely going on."

"I think she heard my thoughts the other day."

"Yup, I felt her scrabbling around in my brain, too."

"I also think she's met someone. She's looked…"

"Like she's had a good shag?"

"Yes, something like that," Ianto smiled. "It's nice for her, though. I think she was really upset about Owen and Gwen."

"Oh, you mean that they're shagging?"

"They think no one knows."

Jack just snorted. Ianto asked, "What's going on with Tosh?"

Jack explained what Owen had discovered about the injury patterns of victims throughout the years. He finished with, "I'm not sure what it is yet, but I think it has to do with this device. I'm trying to figure it out."

"Anything I can do?"

Jack sighed. "How are you, Ianto?"

Ianto was about to answer with his usual "I'm fine," but that just seemed ridiculous. He sat down in a chair. "I've been better."

Jack looked at him, sat down in a chair across from him, and picked up the coffee Ianto had brought him. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really."

"Will you talk to me when you're ready?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Okay, let's see if we can figure this thing out."
They worked together for hours on the device. Ianto was having fun again. He'd forgotten that he really enjoyed Jack's company. Jack was ridiculous, larger than life, crass, and just Jack. By the time they figured out what the alien device did, Ianto was actually laughing, as Jack recounted the incident with the Loch Ness Monster giving him a tongue bath and the team's horrified reactions. "How did Owen ever let you live that one down?" Ianto said, laughing at Jack's interpretive reenactment of the events.

"Oh, you wouldn't believe the dirt I have on Dr. Owen Harper. Did you ever hear about the Banshees?"

"No…"

"Well, we'll just have to save that one for when Owen really pisses you off. Now what are we going to do about our precious Toshiko?"

They came up with a plan.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my lovely beta riftintime.

After Jack had sent Mary into the sun, he called Ianto to his office. "Ianto, I want you to do the
debriefing with Tosh on this incident. I think you'll be more sympathetic than I will."

"Are you sure, Sir?"

"I'm sure, Ianto. I'm going to call her in, then I'll leave you two alone."

Ianto listened with a sympathetic ear to Tosh's explanation of everything that had happened with
Mary. He patted her on the back and gave her a handkerchief. He told her that if there was anything
he could do for her to let him know. Tosh said, "Ianto, I heard what you were thinking when you
were in so much pain, like your stomach was full of rats. I'm worried about you."

Ianto had been expecting this. "Tosh, I've been having a bad week. I think after the cannibals, I was
a bit vulnerable. It takes time to get over the loss of someone you love. You have good days and bad
days. You happened to catch me on a really bad day at a really bad moment. I don't feel like that all
of the time, and neither will you."

"It's not the same, Ianto. I would never presume to feel Mary's loss as keenly as you feel Lisa's. We
never had what you had."

"Pain is relative, Tosh. You've suffered a loss, and you feel you betrayed us. That's how I feel. But it
gets better, and life goes on. It's the hardest part, you know, to keep on living. You never forget
them, Tosh. They're always a part of you, but we all have to go on living."

Ianto realized suddenly why Jack had wanted him to do this debriefing.

Tosh thanked him and made her way out. He saw Gwen and Owen waiting outside like vultures
circling over a corpse, waiting to confront Toshiko about what she'd overheard. Really, who do they
think they're fooling? He waited to see if Tosh needed him to defuse the situation, but he saw Gwen
retreating after a few minutes.

Jack came back into his office. "How did it go?" he asked.

Ianto gave him a brief account of what Tosh had told him about Mary. "I think you should talk to
her, Sir. She still has the necklace. You should let her decide what to do with it. I'll wait for you
here."

Jack nodded and went after Tosh.

Ianto watched from the CCTV as Jack talked to Tosh outside the Millennium Center. He smiled to
himself when he saw Tosh smash the necklace under her foot. He made coffee and waited for Jack
to come back to the Hub.

"She destroyed it, then." Ianto said when Jack entered his office where Ianto was waiting with two
mugs of coffee.

Jack nodded, looking lost in thought. "It was too dangerous to keep, even in the archives," Jack said distractedly.

"Yet, what I can do isn't dangerous?"

"It isn't the same thing, Ianto. Most people can tell when someone's upset or angry or sad. Some people are better at it than others, and some people are really good at it. Torchwood One had the know-how and the tech to amplify your natural abilities. You can sense people's emotions much better than the average man, and maybe project some of your own, but you can't read people's minds."

"No, I can't. I suppose what you're saying is I'm not so special after all." Ianto was teasing, but Jack didn't bite. He continued, "But you still close yourself off from me."

"It's a reflex where I'm from." Jack was preoccupied.

"Are you okay, Jack?"

Jack looked up at the sound of his name. He sighed heavily and sat down. "I was just thinking that three of you have betrayed me now."
Ianto felt a tightening in his chest. "We didn't set out to betray you. It wasn't even about you, Jack. You can't take it personally. I can't speak for Susie, but as far as Tosh and I are concerned, we are loyal to Torchwood and to you, but we're human and we're fallible. People do stupid things for love."

"I suppose."

"Come on, I'm sure you have some outrageous story about how you nuked a small planet for love of an alien with four hands and six orifices," Ianto teased. He wanted Jack out of his bad temper. He wanted Jack.

Jack threw back his head and laughed, and the gloom faded. Ianto's stomach flipped at the sound. He really liked making Jack laugh. "Ahhh, that takes me back. Her name was Foramina…"

It was Ianto's turn to laugh. It felt good to laugh with Jack.

Jack eyed him then said, "You've seemed to have lightened up quite a bit."

Ianto thought over the past week. He had almost fallen apart again, but counseling Tosh had given him a different perspective. "It hurt to let her go," he said softly.

"I know, Ianto."

"When I was being held by those cannibals, I realized that I didn't want to die, and that made me feel guilty. Like I was finally abandoning her."

Jack said nothing. He studied his hands that were clasped around the mug of coffee that Ianto had brought him.

"But I'm alive, and I'd like to stay that way for a while."

"That's good to hear, Ianto." Jack didn't remove his eyes from the mug.

Ianto was tired of all of the angst. He'd been really depressed for a while, but the spell was finally breaking. He wanted to lighten up the mood, and he really wanted Jack. He had an idea of how he could turn things around. "Now, I suggest we switch from coffee to scotch, and you and I play a little game," he said in a voice he hoped would tempt Jack.

"What kind of game?" Jack sounded mildly interested.

"Strip poker."

Jack looked up. He narrowed his eyes. "Ianto Jones, are you coming on to me?"

Ianto walked over to Jack and sat on his lap, straddling his thighs. He put his arms around Jack's
neck, leaned his face close to Jack's, and said, "Have you got a problem with that, Sir?"

"Let's see," Jack said thoughtfully, "Beautiful Welshman sitting on my lap, hitting on me, and calling me Sir… Nope, no problem that I can see."

Ianto kissed him, hard. Then he got off Jack's lap and said with a grin, "If you want me out of my clothes, you're going to have to beat me at poker."

Jack jumped up. "I'll get the cards, you get the booze." He ran to the ladder and climbed down into his bunker.

"I have to warn you, Sir, I've got a great poker face," Ianto called out as he retrieved the bottle of scotch from Jack's desk and two glasses.

"Ha!" Jack called from below. "You've never been to the Vegas Galaxies. I went on a three week bender there, once." Jack's head appeared as he climbed back up. "They have these waitresses with unusually long forefingers…"

Ianto rolled his eyes. "No, really. They use them to try and distract the players," continued Jack.

"Well, I can't claim really long forefingers, but I've always been told that I'm well endowed," Ianto deadpanned.

Jack's eyes widened and his pupils dilated. He hurriedly pushed everything on his desk aside and jumped into his chair. "Let's play!"

Ianto smirked.
It was a close game. They were a match for each other in poker. Ianto was surprised by how good Jack was at maintaining a bland expression. He'd thought he could easily beat Jack, but he had been wrong. When Jack realized how good Ianto was, he started to play dirty. They were both down to their undershirts and briefs. Ianto had a really good hand and was deciding how much to raise his bet when Jack made a huge show of stretching. He lifted his arms over his head so his white T-shirt rose up over his stomach. He lifted his hips off the chair and made a sound like he was having an orgasm. Ianto was completely distracted. He was starting to get hard. He wanted to throw down his cards and lick Jack's abdomen.

"Are you going to bet, Ianto?" Jack asked from his stretched position.

"I fold," he said, still staring at the skin Jack was revealing.

Jack sat up straight, grinned triumphantly, and threw down his hand. He had nothing, "Shirt off!" Jack commanded.

Ianto realized he'd been had. "You bastard. That was cheating."

"How is having a stretch cheating?" Jack asked innocently.

Ianto glared at him, eyes narrowed. Oh, I'm so going to get you back, Harkness. Two can play at that game. During the next round, Ianto leaned back and made a show of studying his cards. He let one hand casually slide up his stomach. When he reached his nipple he brushed his thumb over it making it hard while pretending to be preoccupied with his cards. He heard Jack's breathing hitch and heard him say in a small voice, "Fold."

Ianto smirked and said, "Shirt off, Sir."

Jack took his shirt off and threw it on the floor. He looked at Ianto slyly. "What do you say we up the ante?"

"What did you have in mind, Sir?" Ianto emphasized the 'Sir'.

"Whoever wins this next round gets to do anything they want to the other person." Ianto felt a moment of fear, but he didn't move a muscle of his face. 'Anything' with Jack Harkness could mean… well, literally anything. He hoped it wouldn't run to strange alien devices. What the hell, he thought as he leaned forward in his chair and said coyly, "Anything?"

Jack leaned forward with his trademark grin plastered on his face and repeated, "Anything."

Ianto said, "Deal the cards."

Ianto knew that Jack was going to play dirty, but he had an idea. The cards were dealt and they both studied their hands. Jack said, "Raise."

Thanks as always to my marvelous beta riftintime.
Jack put his hand down his briefs and started fondling his cock. Not going to work, Harkness. Way too predictable. Ianto pretended to be distracted by Jack touching himself. Although it wasn't a pretense, he was distracted. Focus, Ianto, he thought. He made a show of being so distracted that he dropped one of his cards on the floor. "Damn," he muttered. He stood and bent down to pick up his card, thrusting his arse out so that it was practically under Jack's nose. He sat back down and looked at Jack's face. Jack was in a daze, mouth hanging slightly open, cock hard under his briefs. His cards had fallen to the floor. "See and raise," Ianto said calmly.

Then he eyed Jack's cards on the floor. "I take it you fold?"

Jack made a noise that sounded something like, "Mmmph."

Ianto laughed gleefully. "Briefs off, Jack."

"That was really, really cheating," Jack said distractedly.

"You started it, now strip."

Jack stood and dropped his briefs to the floor. "What are you going to do with me?" asked Jack, his voice husky.

Ianto leaned back and tapped his finger against his lips, studying the naked Jack Harkness standing in front of him. His cock became harder with every idea that flashed through his mind. "It's difficult to decide. I have such a long list."

"You have a list?"

"Of things I want to do with you? Oh yeah."

"Ianto Jones, you kinky bastard." Jack looked like he wanted to devour him.

Ianto stood, "Well, might as well cross number one off the list," he said as he walked over to Jack.

He kissed him open mouthed, his tongue pursuing Jack's. Jack kissed him back, pressing their bodies together. They kissed hungrily until they both had to stop for air. "What's number one on your list?"

Jack panted into Ianto's mouth.

"I want you to fuck me, Jack."
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my phenomenal beta riftintime.

Jack stared at Ianto. He blinked. Was he hearing this right? Then he grinned like a kid on Christmas morning. "Really?" he asked.

"Really," Ianto replied.

"Well, what do you know? That's number one on my list, too!"

"Is it now?" asked Ianto as he headed toward the ladder leading to Jack's bedroom.

"You have no idea," Jack muttered to himself, as he started to follow Ianto down into his bunker. He had wanted to fuck Ianto Jones since the day he'd met him.

Ianto was standing naked at the bottom of the ladder as he descended. He felt Ianto's hands run over his arse as he climbed down the ladder. "Whatcha doing?" he asked Ianto as he hit the floor and Ianto's body pressed against his back, hands still on his arse.

"Admiring the view and adding a few things to my list," whispered Ianto into his ear.

Ianto ran his hands up Jack's body, starting at the tops of his thighs and landing on his nipples. Jack leaned his head back on Ianto's shoulder as Ianto sucked on his neck and teased his nipples. "I like the way you think Mr. Jones."

"Do you, Captain?" Ianto brought one hand down and lightly stroked Jack's cock.

"I really, really do," Jack said to the rhythm of Ianto's strokes.

"Jack," Ianto whispered into his ear. "Be gentle with me, yeah? I've never done this before."

Ianto's words and all of their implications hit Jack at once. He's so young, so inexperienced. It's easy to forget, because it's not how he comes across. Maybe we shouldn't be doing this. The situation is complicated enough as it is. I had resolved to stop this anyway... How does he do that to me? He has me turning on my head every time he opens his mouth. He's so unexpected. As these thoughts were running through his head, Ianto had pulled him toward his bed. If I'm going to stop this, I'd better stop it now. "Ianto..."

"Jack..."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh yeah. I'm sure." Ianto smiled the sexiest smile Jack had ever seen, and Jack's last ounce of resolve crumbled.

Ianto lay down on the bed on his stomach. Jack took several moments to admire the naked young man sprawled invitingly on his bed. Ianto turned his head and looked at Jack. "Are you waiting for
"an engraved invitation, Sir?"

"Just admiring the view and adding some things to my own list," Jack smiled.

"Do you have a list too, then?" Ianto smirked.

"Oh yeah," said Jack as he kissed down Ianto's spine. "I think I'll start with number two."

He kissed and bit at Ianto's arse, then pulled Ianto's hips up so his arse was in the air. He sucked Ianto's balls one at a time, then licked deliberately between Ianto's arse cheeks. He put his hands on Ianto's arse and slowly spread him apart exposing the ring of muscle at his entrance. Jack tongued the muscle gently. He heard Ianto suck in his breath. He pushed his tongue into the opening, savoring the musky flavor that was Ianto Jones. He worked his tongue in and out of his opening until Ianto relaxed and started moaning.

Jack turned Ianto on his back, enjoying the dazed look in the young man's eyes. He reached into his bedside table and took out a bottle of lube. Then he took Ianto's cock into his mouth letting it slide as far down his throat as he could. He sucked hard as his mouth came back up Ianto's shaft, and he swirled his tongue around the head of Ianto's cock. He lubed up his fingers and deep throated Ianto again, gently pressing a finger inside Ianto as he did. Ianto inhaled sharply then groaned. Jack worked his finger slowly inside Ianto, sucking his cock until he felt the muscle relax. Then he slowly inserted another finger inside Ianto. He moved his fingers until he found the bundle of nerves deep inside. "Oh God," Ianto cried out.

Jack smiled around Ianto's cock and brushed Ianto's prostate again, thoroughly enjoying the wanton noises coming from Ianto. Ianto was coming undone at his ministrations, and Jack was humming with approval, the vibrations of his voice around Ianto's cock heightening the young man's pleasure. He carefully inserted a third finger as he licked up Ianto's shaft. After a minute, Ianto started thrusting against his hand, and Jack thought he was ready. Jack grabbed a pillow and, without removing his fingers, lifted Ianto slightly and slid the pillow underneath his hips. He kissed and licked his way up Ianto's stomach and chest, circling Ianto's nipples with his tongue, while continuing to massage Ianto's prostate. Ianto was thrusting against him and panting. Jack kissed his mouth, and Ianto kissed back with fervor. "Are you ready?" Jack asked into Ianto's mouth.


He heard the lid flip open then felt Ianto's slicked hand running up and down his shaft. He lifted Ianto's knees up and pushed his legs apart. "Ianto, look at me."

Ianto looked into Jack's eyes and grasped Jack's biceps. Jack maintained eye contact as he removed his fingers slowly and pressed his cock against Ianto's entrance. "I've wanted to do this since the moment I met you," he said. Then he slowly breached Ianto.

It took all of Jack's experience and self-control not to slam into Ianto. He pushed a little way inside and stopped. Ianto's eyes widened slightly and he clenched Jack's arms, but he didn't make a sound. Jack raised his eyebrows and Ianto gave a slight nod. Jack pushed in further and stopped again. Ianto closed his eyes. "Stay with me, Ianto," Jack said, and he leaned down and kissed him. "Am I hurting you?"

Ianto opened his eyes and said, "No."

Jack pushed further in. He was almost completely inside Ianto now. He stopped again. Ianto was so tight that Jack was forcing himself to think about mucking out the Weevil cells so that he wouldn't
lose control. He shifted his angle until he heard Ianto moan and felt him thrust slightly. Jack smiled. "That's what I was looking for."

He started to move slowly, angling to hit Ianto's prostate. Ianto started moving against Jack's thrusts and making the most delicious sounds Jack had heard in a long time. Ianto wrapped his legs around Jack's waist, pulling Jack deeper inside of him. Jack was quickly losing control. He was practically screaming as he grasped Ianto's cock with his hand. Ianto put his hand on top of Jack's and together they stroked Ianto as Jack thrust into him. Jack was desperately trying not to thrust too hard, but it became more difficult as he neared his climax. He was holding on as hard as he could because he wanted to make sure Ianto came first. A minute later Ianto was moaning as he spurted cum over their stomachs. It was all Jack needed, and with a final yell he came hard inside Ianto. He collapsed on top of Ianto, trying to keep most of his body weight on his arms. He kissed Ianto softly on the lips and then slowly withdrew. He got up and grabbed a towel from the bathroom. He gingerly cleaned Ianto off then wiped himself down. He threw the towel on the floor, got back into bed and gathered Ianto in his arms. He kissed him. "Are you okay?" he asked between kisses.

"Yes. I may never walk again though."

Jack frowned and Ianto caught it. "I meant in a good way, Jack. I think my legs have turned into gelatin." He ran his fingers through Jack's hair. "Next time you won't have to hold back quite so much."

"There's going to be a next time?" Jack grinned like the Cheshire Cat.

Ianto laughed. "When you deserve it."

"What do I have to do to deserve it?" Jack asked demurely.

"I'm sure I'll come up with something," Ianto said as he kissed Jack again.

Jack kissed him back then pulled Ianto closer to his body. "Are you going to bolt now?" he asked into Ianto's hair.

"No. Not unless you're kicking me out of bed."

"No one in their right mind would kick you out of bed Jones, Ianto Jones."

Ianto snorted and shook his head. Jack grinned and wrapped his legs around Ianto's.

"Really, like an octopus," Ianto muttered.

Jack drifted off to sleep with a huge smile on his face.
Ianto woke the next morning to find Jack still wrapped around him in his octopus embrace. Ianto half grinned to himself. Jack was, for all his posturing, much more sentimental than Ianto had expected. Ianto sighed. Part of him wanted to run away, but he had told Jack he would stay, and he was done with feeling guilty. Jack buggered me last night, he thought. Shit! Jack hadn't hurt him once. It had been strange at first, but when Jack had started hitting his prostate, Ianto had suddenly understood what all of the fuss was about. It was fantastic. Ianto glanced at the clock on Jack's table. It said 6:30am. He kissed Jack on the lips until he felt Jack stirring. "Jack, we need to shower and get ready for work."

"I just woke up to a gorgeous, naked Welshman kissing me in my bed, and he's trying to get me out of it?" Jack mumbled.

Ianto rolled his eyes. "He's trying to get you out of it and into the shower with him."

"Sold!" Jack said as he released Ianto and sat up. "Wow, I haven't slept that long in a while."

Ianto got up and used Jack's toilet. Then he turned Jack's shower on, adjusted the water and stepped in. Jack followed a couple of minutes later, stepping in behind Ianto and caressing his arse. "How are you this morning?"

"Really, Jack, I'm not made of glass. I'm fine… I think."

"You think? Will this help?" Jack started fondling Ianto's cock which became rock hard in his hand.

"Maybe…" Ianto moaned.

Jack spun Ianto around and pressed his open mouth to Ianto's, seeking his tongue. Ianto kissed him back and shoved him against the shower wall, running his hands down Jack's chest. Jack thrust his now hard cock against Ianto's. He put his hand around both of their cocks and stroked them together. With his other hand, he took Ianto's hand and placed it around their cocks, opposite his, clasping their fingers together. They thrust into their entwined hands, kissing, and biting each other until they both came.

"Well, that's a delightful way to start the day," Jack said as they both caught their breath.

Ianto smacked him on the arse, "Come on, Tosh will be in soon, and I don't want her to catch me down here." He grabbed the soap and started lathering his body.

"Ashamed of me?" Jack asked teasing, but Ianto heard a hint of truth in his question.

"I'm not ashamed of you, but this is strictly after hours. It's nobody's business, and it would be unprofessional. I don't want to be like Gwen and Owen." And I don't want the team to know. I don't want anyone to know, he added to himself.
Jack looked lost in thought for a moment, but then he nodded. They finished showering and Jack dressed while Ianto ran to his locker to get a clean suit, his razor and the other toiletries he kept at the Hub. He finished his morning ritual in the communal shower room and had the coffee brewing by the time the Hub alarm announced Tosh's arrival.

In the week that followed, Ianto maintained a completely professional demeanor around Jack, and he was happy to see that Jack followed suit. They still flirted. It was expected of them, but to the casual observer they were just employer and employee. The only real difference was that Ianto began to take care of Jack a little bit more. He'd always played the role of Jack's butler, but he started doing a few more little things to make Jack's life easier. He begun to intercept the phone calls he knew would annoy Jack. He started doing more of Jack's paperwork. He read reports that he knew Jack would yawn through so he could give him a brief summary of anything important.

The week was a busy one, and except for a quick blow job in the archives one afternoon (Jack giving and Ianto receiving) and another in Jack's office an hour later when the team was out doing some recon (Jack sitting in his office chair and Ianto on his knees in front of him), they didn't have time for anything more. Ianto had gone home for a few hours sleep when he had the chance. Otherwise the team took turns dozing on the sofa in the Hub.

Things finally began to quiet down, and then Susie Costello came back to life.
Thanks as always to my spectacular beta riftintime.

When Susie died for the final time, Ianto brought her corpse to the morgue and started doing the paperwork. He knew Jack was distressed about the whole incident, and he was doing what he could to take on some of the burden. When Jack came down to the morgue, he could see the sadness in the older man's eyes.

"Thanks for doing this," Jack muttered.

"Part of my job, Sir."

"No. I should be doing it, but…" Jack leaned against the wall. He looked exhausted.

"One day we're going to run out of space." Jack hung his head.

He looks completely beaten, Ianto thought. He needs a distraction. Ianto remembered how quickly he had pulled Jack out of his funk after the Tosh/Mary incident and smiled to himself. Without dropping his professional demeanor he said, "If you're interested, I've still got that stopwatch."

Jack looked confused. "So?"

"Well, think about it." Ianto allowed himself a small smirk. "Lots of things you can do with a stopwatch."

Realization dawned on Jack. "Oh yeah." He half laughed. "I can think of a few."

Jack was looking more like Jack now, and Ianto was pleased with himself. "There's quite a list."

"I'll send the others home early. See you in my office in ten."

Ianto took out the stopwatch. "That's ten minutes and counting." He pushed the button on the top.

He almost ruined the mood when he made the parting comment about gloves coming in pairs, but he knew Jack's sex drive was made of stronger stuff. He pushed the button on the top again when, nine minutes and fifty-six seconds later, Jack stepped into his office. "Four seconds to spare," Ianto said and grinned.

Ianto was standing by his desk. His suit jacket was draped over the chair opposite Jack's. Jack shoved his hands in his pockets. "So, Mr. Jones. What do you have in mind?"

"Take a seat, Captain."

Jack sat in his chair and noticed there were two sheets of paper and two pens on his desk. Ianto sat opposite him and took one of the sheets and one pen. "I've shut off the CCTV for some internal systems analysis."

"I am. Now to business. We have two minutes to make our… wish lists."

"Wish lists?"

"I have a list of things I want to do with you… you have a list… whoever has the longest list at the end of the two minutes gets to chose one option from either list… for later."

"Later?" queried Jack.

"Later," confirmed Ianto. "I think we've got a few hours to spare. Point of order; it has to be a list of things we've never done together."

Jack grinned. "No problem," he said as he pulled his sheet of paper towards him.

Ianto placed the stopwatch on Jack's desk. "Begin." He started the timer.

Ianto began his list.

He glanced at the stopwatch when he reached number twenty on his list. He was getting distracted, and hard. He watched the stopwatch count the final five seconds. "Time," he said as he reached over and clicked the button.

Jack threw down his pen and grinned. "Switch," Ianto said as he passed his list to Jack.

He watched with a bemused expression as Jack greedily read his list. He knew Jack would win this round, but he didn't care. He glanced briefly at Jack's list and saw the number thirty-two. He would read it carefully, but right now he wanted to watch Jack's expression. Jack's eyes grew wider and wider as he scanned and re-scanned Ianto's list. Ianto grinned and then turned his attention to Jack's list. Ianto's eyebrow rose higher the further he read.

When he was finished, he looked up at Jack. The older man was gazing at him with something like awe and respect. "Ianto Jones. Always full of surprises," was all he said.

"I see we have the same thing written for number one," Ianto mused.

"We do indeed," said Jack. Then after a pause, "What's Naked Hide and Seek?"

"Ah." Ianto smiled. "A little game I dreamt up."

"Well, I won and that's my choice!" said Jack emphatically.

"Naked Hide and Seek it is," replied Ianto with a smile. He passed Jack's list back to him. "Hang on to those lists. You'll need them."

Jack's mouth opened slightly but no sound came out. Ianto smiled inwardly but he maintained a cool exterior. He continued, "Since you won this round, you get to choose the next game." He passed the stopwatch to Jack.

Jack leered and grabbed the stopwatch. "Okay, who can make the other one hard the fastest? No touching, no removing clothing. I'm going first."

Ianto raised an eyebrow but said nothing. Jack pressed the button on the stopwatch. He felt a wave of Jack's lust crash over him. It was like the room had come alive with desire. Jack's pheromones hung in the air like a dense fog. Ianto gripped the arms of the chair to keep from throwing himself at Jack. Dead puppies. Dead puppies. Dead puppies. He thought to himself, trying to control his body.
"Ianto…" Jack's voice oozed with sex. Ianto felt like it was permeating his skin. "When this little game is over, I'm going to throw you over my desk and fuck you blind."

*Dead puppies. Dead pup… "Damn."*

Jack clicked the stopwatch with a huge grin on his face. "What the hell was that, Jack?"

Jack shrugged. "Told you. Psychic powers are a little more common where I'm from."

Jack handed the stopwatch to Ianto. The dial read forty-seven seconds. "Beat that," Jack said as he leaned back in his chair with a smug expression on his face.

Ianto pushed the button to start the timer. He had no idea what he was going to do. He looked into Jack's eyes, wracking his brain for inspiration. *Damn, it's hot in here,* he thought distractedly. Jack's pheromones still hung in the air. He slowly loosened his tie and unbuttoned the top button of his shirt, eyes still on Jack's, as he thought frantically. He began to roll up his sleeves. *Damn it!* shouted Jack.

Ianto was so surprised, he almost forgot to stop the timer – almost. He couldn't believe it. He hadn't even started trying yet. Despite his surprise, he kept his expression neutral. *I'll have to file away that little fact for later. I guess sometimes less is more,* he thought to himself. The stopwatch read twenty-six seconds. He showed the stopwatch to Jack.


They took turns seeing who could withstand fondling the longest without cumming or pulling away, who could withstand a blow job longest without cumming or pulling away, who could undress the fastest, and who could re-dress the fastest. By the time they got to the last one they were both trying to cheat by snatching each other's clothing away.

They ended up tangled together on the sofa in Jack's office, both half undressed and laughing uproariously. Then they were kissing. Ianto broke away before things became too heated. "Naked Hide and Seek?" he asked.

"Naked Hide and Seek!" Jack nodded excitedly.

"Okay," Ianto said as he extricated his entangled limbs. "These are the rules. The Seeker gives the Hider five minutes. The Hider hides articles of his clothing and himself around the main floor of the Hub. Then the Seeker has ten minutes to find the Hider's clothing or the Hider himself. Each article of clothing the Seeker finds, he keeps. Each article of clothing the Hider retrieves without being caught, he gets to put back on. If, after ten minutes, the Hider has all of his clothing, he wins and he becomes Seeker. If, after ten minutes, the Seeker has all of the Hider's clothing or the Hider himself, the Seeker wins and gets to top."

Jack blinked. "I'm sorry. Did you say he gets to top?"

Ianto just smirked at him. "I'm seeker," Jack said and jumped off the sofa.

Ianto rolled his eyes and handed the stopwatch to Jack. "Five minutes, then you come looking for me."

"Five minutes," repeated Jack deviously.

"No cheating, Jack."
"Would I cheat?" asked Jack, the picture of virtue.

"Absolutely."

Jack cheated. Then he fucked Ianto over his desk the same way Ianto had fucked him over that same desk all those months ago, the same way he had told Ianto that he would fuck him at the beginning of their game.

It had been number one on both of their lists anyway.
Ianto and Jack found a common ground in their games. It suited them much better than the somewhat tempestuous initial stages of their sexual relationship. Jack would find a note on his desk, lying on top of the tie Ianto was wearing that day with 'Tonight. Your list. Number 2.' written in Ianto's neat script (Number two on Jack's list happened to be 'Tie Ianto up with one of his ties'). Ianto would receive an instant message from Jack saying, 'I've got a phone conference with the PM at 22:30 tonight. Number 18 from your list?' (Number eighteen on Ianto's list happened to be 'Suck Jack off when he's on the phone to the PM').

Over the next several weeks, they got through quite a few items on both of their lists. Sometimes Ianto would stay the night with Jack after their extracurricular activities, and sometimes he went home. Jack never came to Ianto's flat. Ianto enjoyed being with Jack. He loved having sex with Jack, but he was still gun shy when it came to intimacies. He would accept Jack's octopus embrace when he spent the night – he even rather enjoyed it, but he always had to fight the instinct to bolt. If Jack noticed, he didn't mention it. Ianto never stayed the night if they hadn't had sex.

It wasn't that Ianto felt guilty about Lisa. He had accepted her death, though he still missed her and loved her. He just wasn't sure what this thing was with Jack, or where it was going. *It's just a bit of fun,* he told himself. *It's not like we're in a relationship.* The very idea made him grimace. He liked Jack. He admired him as a leader and as a person. He found him incredibly attractive, but he couldn't possibly feel more than that for him, could he? Jack was a man, after all, and Ianto was straight… wasn't he? Besides, this was Jack Harkness. Ianto couldn't imagine Jack in any kind of serious relationship. He especially couldn't imagine Jack in any kind of serious relationship with *him,* any more than he could imagine himself in a serious relationship with *a man.*

The idea was laughable. Jack had a wandering eye and the attention span of a goldfish. Ianto was sure that Jack still went out on the pull even though they had fairly regular sex. Ianto wasn't sure how he felt about that. He wasn't jealous… was he? Jack had asked him if he was sleeping with anyone else, but Ianto hadn't asked Jack. At the time, he just assumed he was. At the time, he didn't really care. He still didn't really care… did he? Moreover, Ianto had noticed the way Jack sometimes looked at Gwen… No, this was just a bit of fun and they would soon grow bored with each other. *Maybe once we get through our lists, that will be an end to it.* Ianto just wished that he spent less time thinking about Jack Harkness. Jack seemed to be occupying more and more of his thoughts.

Ianto continued to take on more responsibilities at the Hub. He may not have known where their relationship stood outside of work, but during working hours, he was absolutely loyal to Jack and to Torchwood. He felt honor bound to make himself as useful as possible. Without Torchwood, he had nothing. He was now reading every report and summarizing them for Jack every morning. He did almost all of Jack's paperwork. Jack had him do more of the liaising with UNIT and Downing Street. He was more diplomatic and polite than Jack, and the priggish government officials much preferred Ianto's professional demeanor to Jack's petulance.

He continued to keep the Hub and its team members cleaned, fed and watered. He dealt with the
bodies – both alien and human. He fabricated the cover stories. He took care of the resident Weevils and Myfanwy. He ran the archives like a well oiled machine. He knew the location and contents of almost everything in the vast Torchwood collection. Jack relied heavily on him for his factual knowledge, his innate intellect, his diplomatic skills, and his loyalty.

Ianto fell back into a routine of sorts. This routine just happened to include occasional sex games with the boss after hours, or infrequently, stolen moments during the day. Torchwood had the usual Weevils, the odd flotsam and jetsam that came through the Rift, the occasional lost alien space craft, and a kid with a Dogon sixth eye. In other words, life was par for the course at Torchwood.

Then the Sky Gypsy came through the Rift, and like a kaleidoscope, things shifted.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my extraordinary beta riftintime.

Jack had sent Ianto to London to represent Torchwood at a UNIT conference, so Ianto was away when the Sky Gypsy first landed. Ianto didn't know if Jack had sent him because he had faith in him or because Jack hated these things and was looking for any excuse to blow it off. Knowing Jack as Ianto did, it could have been either one.

Ianto used some of the time in London to shop. Before Torchwood, he never wore suits. Professional attire was required at Torchwood One, and he had worn a suit every day, but he never took much interest in them. Now at Torchwood Three, the suits had become an integral part of his persona, and all because Jack had continuously complemented his appearance when he wore one. He decided that if he was going to wear suits all of the time, he could at least spice things up a bit and show some of his personality. Jack had a couple of waistcoats, and Ianto thought he looked very sexy in them. When he'd mentioned to Jack that he liked his waistcoat, Jack had said, "I bet you would look really hot in one."

So he spent a good portion of his paycheck on some lovely and extremely well fitting three piece suits (waistcoats included). He also bought shirts and ties to go with them. Jack was always trying to get him to wear more color so he made a few bolder choices. Why was he thinking so much about what Jack would like? It was extremely disconcerting.

Jack called him every night to get an update on the conference. One night they talked for hours. It was difficult for him, being back in London, and that day he had visited the wreckage of Torchwood One and walked by his and Lisa's old flat. When Jack called him for his nightly update, he thought he had managed to sound like his usual self, but Jack must have heard something in his voice. Jack asked him what was wrong, and to Ianto's astonishment, he told him. Jack had listened sympathetically, and Ianto had felt better after their conversation.

One night they had phone sex. Ianto had never had phone sex before. It started because he mentioned to Jack that he'd bought some new suits. Jack had asked him to describe them. Ianto did so in detail. Then Jack started describing how he was going to take them off of him and one thing led to another. Everything with Captain Jack Harkness is a new experience, thought Ianto after they had ended the call.

Ianto was eager to return to Cardiff. He didn't want to be in London anymore, and he missed Jack, though he was loathe to admit it. When he returned to the Hub, Jack seemed happy to see him, but Ianto had work to do helping to assimilate the three passengers from the Sky Gypsy into 21st century society. There was no time for a private welcome home.

Jack was deeply affected by the plight of John Ellis. He seemed to identify with the man who was having difficulties with adjusting to his situation. After a rocky few days however, it seemed like John would manage, and Jack had sent him off to live his life. Ianto hadn't been alone with Jack since his return from London, so when John left the Hub, Ianto was looking forward to having Jack and the Hub all to himself. Unfortunately, Ianto found that John had stolen his car keys, and Jack ran off after him.
Ianto sat down in Jack's chair to wait for his return. The tracker on his car didn't move for two hours. *When had Jack put a tracker in his car?* He realized that he must have dozed off, because he awoke with a start when the Hub door alarm sounded. A few moments later Jack stood before him with tears in his eyes. He looked terrible, and the smell of carbon monoxide hung strongly in the air. There were black rings around his eyes and his skin was gray. Ianto felt his stomach drop. *Jack died tonight*, he thought. Jack said, his voice hoarse and raspy, "John's dead. He's in your car in the garage. I'm sorry."

Jack was in so much pain that Ianto could feel it filling the room. He jumped out of the chair and wrapped his arms around Jack, holding him tightly. Jack stood like a statue, arms hanging listlessly at his sides. He looked utterly defeated. Wordlessly Ianto took Jack's coat off of him and led him down to his bedroom. He ran a bath for Jack, adding liquid soap to the water. He got Jack undressed and into the bathtub. Tears were still streaming down Jack's face. Ianto wiped a tear from his cheek as he said, "I'm going to take care of things. I'll be back in a bit."

He left to deal with John's body, taking Jack's clothes with him and tossing them into the laundry pile. Once he had gotten John's body into the morgue, he went back to Jack's bathroom. Jack was still sitting in the tub, a frozen look on his face. The water had gone cold. Ianto let the water out of the tub and started the shower. He quickly took off his clothes, pulled Jack to his feet and got into the shower with him. He bathed Jack and washed his hair twice. It was the best he could do to get the smell out. He got Jack out of the shower and dried them both off. Then he put Jack into his bed and lay down next to him, wrapping his arms around him. "I'm sorry about your car, Ianto. I'll buy you another one," Jack said, and then he started to sob.

"I don't care about the car, Jack."

He kissed the top of Jack's head and held him while he cried. He couldn't stand to see Jack in so much pain. He felt like it was his pain. Ianto started to sing a Welsh lullaby to Jack that his mother used to sing to him, and Jack's sobs quieted down. "I had to let him go. He didn't want to be here. He was so alone. He was lost, his family gone. He said that if I stopped him he would just try again, so I held his hand while he died. I had to let him go, and he went where I can't go. I'm lost in time, too, but I can't leave. He gets to go where I can never follow."

Ianto was silent, trying to piece together what had happened. He couldn't imagine what it was like to be Jack Harkness. He was from three thousand years in the future. He would probably never see his family again. He had watched friends and lovers die for over a century, and he never changed. He couldn't die. Ianto shuddered. "Jack, I can't begin to understand your pain, but I'm here now, and I'll take care of you for as long as I can."

He felt Jack pull him closer. He began singing the lullaby again until he heard Jack's breathing change as he fell asleep. Ianto drifted off after him.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my outstanding beta riftintime.

Jack was standing in the middle of what had been a busy intersection in Cardiff. There wasn't a single sign of life anywhere – no car engines, no people, no dogs barking, no birds chirping, no insects buzzing... nothing but the sound of the wind and the beat of his own heart. Everyone, everything was dead. He was the last man on Earth. He was alone. He fell to his knees and screamed with despair. Then he heard a voice, and the voice was calling his name. It was the most beautiful voice Jack had ever heard. He reached out to the voice...

"Jack! Jack, wake up!"

Jack woke with a start. He was covered with sweat and shaking. He heard the voice from his dream say, "Jack, look at me."

Jack looked into Ianto's eyes, blue into blue. "I'm here, Jack." He felt Ianto kiss him softly on the lips. "I'm here."

Ianto. He was in his bed in the Hub and Ianto Jones was here. He felt immeasurable relief. He hugged the young man to him. Ianto was always there when he needed him with his quiet strength and loyalty. He had really grown fond of Ianto. Ianto said, "No point in going back to sleep. Do you want me to make you some coffee?"

No, I just want to stay here with you. Jack said out loud, "In a bit. Can we just stay here for a little while longer?"

Jack felt the slightest stiffening of Ianto's muscles before he relaxed again. "Sure," Ianto said.

It had been subtle, but Jack felt it. He always felt it. "You want to run away again, don't you?" he asked.

"What makes you say that?"

Jack sighed. "Because you always do."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Ianto, I know you're fighting the instinct to bolt right now. I know you fight it every time you stay here with me."

Ianto was silent. Jack continued in a soft voice, "I need you, Ianto. You make things easier to bear."

"I'm here, Jack. Whatever you need."

Jack took Ianto's hand and entwined their fingers. They lay together in Jack's bed. They didn't speak, and they didn't have sex, they just lay in each other's arms, their fingers entwined. Jack wanted to stay there all day, but Ianto glanced at the clock. "Jack, we should really get up. We need a shower,
and Tosh will be in soon."

Jack was exasperated. What was the big deal? So what if they were sleeping together? "I know," he said. "You don't want her to catch you down here."

"Jack, I…"

But Jack didn't want to have this conversation. He cut him off, mustering the usual Jack Harkness bravado. "Can I at least talk you into shower sex?"

Ianto quirked an eyebrow at him, and Jack gave him a trademark Harkness grin. Ianto laughed. "Well, you can pretty much always talk me into having sex with you," Ianto said as he got out of bed.

Ianto headed into the bathroom, and Jack closed his eyes. Ianto was loyal to him because he was Torchwood, and that was all Ianto could offer. Jack had seen the passion and ferocity of Ianto's love for Lisa, and a selfish part of him had wanted that passion directed towards himself. But he wasn't Lisa, and he could never offer Ianto what she could have offered him – marriage, a family, a normal life outside Torchwood, someone to grow old with…

Ianto was devoted to Torchwood, so Ianto would take care of Jack to the best of his ability. Ianto would be there for him. Ianto would make his life easier. Ianto would offer his body to him, but Ianto would never love him. Besides, Jack wouldn't be here much longer. The Doctor was coming any day now. No, it was best that they kept to their arrangement. Ianto was his right-hand man, his faithful sidekick, his confidante, his sexual relief, and that was all. He could count on Ianto to carry on when he left with the Doctor. I should start bringing Ianto out into the field more often, he thought distractedly. Then he remembered that Ianto was waiting for him in the shower. Can't let that go to waste, he told himself as he grabbed the bottle of lube and headed into the shower after Ianto.

He pulled Ianto towards him and kissed him hungrily. He wanted Ianto to take him. He handed Ianto the bottle of lube, turned around and put his hands on the shower wall. "And just what do you want me to do with this?" Ianto teased as he ran his hand down Jack's arse, dipping his fingers in between the cheeks.

"Whatever comes to mind, Ianto," Jack said as he closed his eyes.

Jack felt Ianto kneel, spread his arse and lick his entrance. Jack moaned with pleasure as Ianto breached him with his tongue. I guess it's number ten from his list, Jack thought as his cock hardened at the feeling of Ianto's tongue working in and out of him. Then all coherent thought fled his mind as Ianto opened and entered him.

After Ianto had cum inside of him, and he had cum all over the shower wall, he felt Ianto put his arms around him and pull him close. Ianto leaned his head on his shoulder, kissed his neck, and whispered into his ear, "I missed you, Jack."

Jack felt his heart skip a beat. Then he reasoned with himself. The Doctor is coming soon, Jack. You'll be leaving him soon. He just missed the sex. Well, that works for me. I missed the sex too. Jack smiled. "We'll just have to make up for lost time."

"Is that an order, Sir?" Ianto asked coyly.

"Definitely an order," said Jack, grinning.
They spent the next couple of nights making up for lost time. There wasn't much Rift activity so they had some time to themselves. They shagged in the boardroom, they shagged on the autopsy table, they shagged on various desks around the Hub, and Ianto stayed with Jack both nights.

The couple of nights turned into weeks as their sex marathon continued. They spent both Christmas and New Years together, though neither one of them mentioned the holidays. Jack had felt the significance of those days, but he had remained silent. And other than wishing Jack a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, Ianto didn't acknowledge the days either. As though by silent consent, they treated those days like any other work day. *I suppose we've both lost so much... better that we ignore the holidays,* Jack reasoned to himself. *Besides, I like things the way they are...*

Jack and Ianto couldn't get enough of each other. They were often finding excuses to sneak away to hidden corners of the Hub during working hours, and Ianto spent more and more nights with Jack.

One night Ianto promised to play naked hide and seek. Jack was so antsy for everyone to leave him alone with Ianto that he sent the team home early and gave them the night off. It had been unusually quiet anyway, and Jack figured they should enjoy it while it lasted.

Just as Ianto was about to find Jack who was hiding in a freezer in the medical bay, the Rift alarm sounded. "Weevil sighting in the Plass. Do you want backup, Sir?" Ianto asked caressing Jack's naked backside as they leaned over the computer screen. "No, I can handle one Weevil. Just be waiting for me in my bed when I return."

"Yes, Sir," Ianto said as he left to retrieve Jack's clothing which he'd hidden around the Hub.

Jack followed him and threw on the items as Ianto removed them from their hiding places. Ianto retrieved Jack's button down shirt first, and Jack quickly put it on. "No undershirt?" Ianto asked as he removed his pants from behind the coffee machine. "No time, Ianto. Gotta run."

Ianto nodded and handed Jack his boots before running to Jack's office to retrieve his coat and Webley. He handed the Webley to Jack and helped him on with his coat. "I shouldn't be too long. Keep the bed warm!" Jack said over his shoulder as he left the Hub.

The Weevil put up more of a fight that he had expected. He needed backup. He thought of Ianto, but decided that Ianto would be a nice treat for him waiting naked back at the Hub. He tracked the other team's mobile phones with his Vortex Manipulator. Gwen was nearby and he ran in the direction of the signal. He accidentally started a domestic quarrel between Gwen and her boyfriend Rhys. He reminded her of her promise to him to hold onto her life.

Jack's fine plans for a night in bed with Ianto fell apart when a group of men wearing ski masks caught the Weevil he and Gwen had been chasing and transported it away in a van. "We're going to have to call in the team. You get hold of Tosh and Owen, I'll call Ianto."
He dialed Ianto's mobile. "Yes, Sir..." Ianto's voice oozed sex.

Damn, damn, damn, Jack thought. "Ianto! Sorry to ruin your night off," he kept up the pretense for Ianto's sake. "I've picked up Gwen. We've run into a little problem with the Weevil. We should be there in about twenty minutes. We're calling in the rest of the team. Can you meet us there?"

"Jack, I'm out of clean shirts. Can I borrow one of yours?"

"Of course. See you in a few."

When Jack saw Ianto wearing one of his dark blue shirts under his suit, he was tempted to send the team home again so he could rip it off of the young man, but there was work to be done. They had to figure out who was kidnapping Weevils.

Jack took Ianto with him when they went to interrogate the man with the suspicious injuries at the hospital. Jack was impressed by Ianto's good cop routine, but Ianto teased him that his bad cop routine needed work and offered to practice with him next time they got a chance. Jack almost ran off the road.

They closed the case on the Weevil kidnappings after Owen had gotten into a cage with one. Ianto had done well in the field, and Jack was proud of him. He was becoming more and more secure in the knowledge that Ianto could take care of Torchwood when he left with the Doctor. Not only did Ianto know everything about Torchwood and the Hub, he always knew everything that was going on with the team. It had been Ianto who told him that Owen had fallen in love with Diane before she left and that this was the reason he was behaving the way he was. It was Ianto who told him that he thought Gwen and Rhys were having problems, and that she had stolen a dose of retcon; probably with the intention of drugging Rhys and coming clean about her affair with Owen.

In the weeks that followed, Ianto spent more nights in the Hub with Jack. They had a lot of sex, but they also talked more. Jack really enjoyed Ianto's company. He was witty, intelligent and always had a surprising point of view. If Jack hadn't known that he was leaving soon, he could see himself falling hard for this beautiful young Welshman. As it was, he would leave Ianto in charge of Torchwood when he left. He knew that Ianto was the best choice out of all of the team, and he wanted to show Ianto his gratitude for everything he had done for him. Jack had begun to hint to Ianto that, should he leave, he knew Ianto could run Torchwood better than he had done. Ianto never replied when Jack made reference to that topic. He would just look hard at Jack and say nothing.

Sometimes Jack forgot that the Doctor was coming soon, and he found himself getting a bit too sentimental around Ianto. It was on one such night, when they were lying tangled in Jack's bed, exhausted after their third round of sex, that Jack was feeling very affectionate towards Ianto. "Ianto, remember when I asked you if there was anyone else?"

"Hmmm?" Ianto asked in a sleepy voice.

"I asked you if you were having sex with anyone else and you said no."

Ianto nodded but said nothing. "Is that still true?" Jack asked.

Ianto laughed. "When would I have time to sleep with anyone else, Jack? I practically live here. Besides, it's not my style. One person at a time is more than enough for me, and frankly your ego is so big that it's practically its own person."

"Hey!" Jack feigned offense, then smiled and kissed Ianto on the lips. "How come you never asked me?"
"Oh please. You flirt with anything with a heartbeat, and possibly things without a heartbeat."

"I've met some lovely robots in my time," joked Jack.

"And, I rest my case." Then after a pause, Ianto continued, "I just assumed there was, and I really didn't need to know about it." Ianto shrugged a shoulder.

Jack's voice turned serious. "There isn't anyone else, Ianto. Hasn't been for a while."

"Oh," was Ianto's only reply.

He thought Ianto had drifted off to sleep, so he whispered, "I only want you."

However, he felt Ianto tighten his embrace. Ianto had heard him. Jack lay there thinking what a pity it was that he wasn't sticking around for much longer. As it was, Jack needed to remember to leave instructions for the team placing Ianto in charge when he left.

He never had the chance. The next day he and Tosh got trapped in 1941.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my excellent beta riftintime.

Ianto Jones had fallen hard for Jack Harkness. He had resisted for as long as he could, telling himself that they were just having fun. But as soon as Jack had told him that he needed him, Ianto felt his resolve crumble. When Jack told him that he wanted only him, Ianto knew that there was no turning back. His feelings for Jack ran deeper than boss/friend/sometimes lover. It was the reason he fought so hard against Owen when he'd been determined to open the Rift. He knew Jack would never allow it, and he was trying to carry out Jack's orders in his absence. He was confirming his devotion to Captain Jack Harkness.

Ianto understood that Jack wanted him to take over Torchwood should the need arise. Of course, it would have helped if Jack had let the rest of the team know his wishes. He tried to order Gwen out of the dance hall, but Owen questioned his authority. He should have known that Owen would never take orders from him. It had finally come to arms. Ianto was holding a gun to Owen, threatening to shoot if he persisted in opening the Rift. He understood that Owen was hurting, so he tried to reason with him.

"You have to let Diane go, like I did with Lisa."

"Don't compare yourself to me. You're just a tea boy." Owen was seething with contempt.

Ianto heard Jack's voice in his head. *I need you, Ianto. *I'm much more than that. Jack needs me."

"In your dreams, Ianto. In your sad wet dreams when you're his part-time shag maybe."

Ianto felt anger run through him as he cocked the gun and eventually pulled the trigger. *I'm not his part-time shag, Owen. I mean more to him that that.*

Jack didn't speak to him when he and Tosh returned from 1941. He just retreated to his office with a slight nod in Ianto's direction, not making eye contact. Ianto knew immediately that something had happened. Tosh went into Jack's office after him. Ianto watched as they poured out scotch and toasted something or someone. When Tosh came out of Jack's office, Ianto motioned her over. "Do you have time for a chat?"

"Of course, Ianto, but I'd really like to get out of here. Let's go to the pub and have a drink."

They left the Hub and walked to a nearby pub. "What happened, Tosh?" Ianto asked when they had settled into a booth with their drinks.

"I think Jack fell in love," Tosh said dreamily.

Ianto choked on his beer. "What?"

"I know! Can you believe it? Our Jack actually caring about someone? He's never cared about anyone he shags! I should know. I've watched him in action for years. But we met the real Captain Jack Harkness, and he was gorgeous. It was like love at first sight between our Jack and him."
It took every ounce of strength he had to maintain his neutral expression as Tosh talked. She told him everything Jack had told her about his past. Then she said, "I overheard him talking to Captain Harkness. He asked Jack if I was his woman and Jack said, 'No, there's no one.' And Ianto, he sounded so sad... so lonely."

Ianto gripped his glass of beer so hard that his knuckles turned white. Tosh continued, "Jack knew that Captain Harkness was going to die the next day, and he was devastated by it. I was sitting with Jack and we were watching Captain Harkness, and tears were pouring down Jack's face. Then the most wonderful thing happened. Captain Harkness walked over, took Jack's hand, and pulled him to the dance floor. It was the bravest and most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Can you imagine, daring to dance with another man in the 1940's? Risking everything you have, just to have one dance with the man you love! It was so romantic!"

Tosh paused to take a sip of her drink. She was so enthralled with her tale that she was completely oblivious to Ianto, who had turned slightly grey. She went on, "They danced together, and everyone in the room stopped to watch them. It was so beautiful and so tragic. Then they stopped and looked into each other's eyes. It was like the room was filled with electricity. They were just about to kiss when the Rift burst open, and we had to leave. I had to convince Jack to go with me, beg him even. I told him that we needed him, but I think he wanted to stay there with Captain Harkness. Jack started to walk towards me reluctantly, but then he turned back, grabbed Captain Harkness and they kissed. And Ianto, it was the most beautiful and most passionate kiss I have ever seen. I had tears in my eyes. Jack had to tear himself away from Captain Harkness. It was heartbreaking."

She paused for another sip. "He's so sad now, Ianto. He missed his chance at love."

Tosh finally looked up at Ianto. Ianto was trying so hard to keep his face impassive that he was shaking. "Ianto, are you alright?" Tosh asked worriedly.

"Not feeling so great, Tosh. I think I need to go."

"Ianto, you look ill."

"Need to go Tosh, sorry."

Ianto ran out of the pub and made it to an alley before he collapsed to his knees and vomited. He felt like something had torn a hole through his chest. He couldn't breathe. He had fought so hard against giving way to his feelings for Jack, but then Jack had told him that he needed him. Jack had told him that there wasn't anyone else, so he had let himself fall for Jack... and it was all a lie. He vomited again. He felt someone at his side and he looked up to see Tosh peering anxiously down at him.

"Ianto?"

"Sorry Tosh, must be something I ate," he managed to get out, hoping she would think the tears streaming down his face were from vomiting.

"Should I give you a lift home?"

"I'm just going to grab a taxi," Ianto said as he stepped out of an alley and hailed a taxi.

"Ianto, are you sure?" he heard Tosh calling after him.

"I'm fine, Tosh, really," he said as he stepped into the taxi.

Ianto fell asleep on his sofa with tears streaming down his face. When he woke early the next morning, he decided that he was going to leave Torchwood. Let Jack retcon him. He'd had enough
heartbreak. He turned on his TV to distract himself with the news. When he saw that chaos had broken out around the world, he knew he couldn't stay away. How could he be so petty? There was work to be done, and he was Torchwood.

He went to work as usual, determined to keep his appearance dispassionate and his focus on his job. He’d be damned if Jack Harkness saw him shed one tear over him.
Ianto's stomach was in knots as the cogwheel door of the Hub rolled open, however he kept his facade in place as he walked to the coffee machine to start the morning brew. He was just sipping his first cup, thinking that Jack Fucking Harkness could get his own God damn coffee today when he heard Jack's voice calling him, "Ianto! My office."

Ianto closed his eyes and braced himself. He thought about not taking Jack any coffee, but realized that it would just encourage comment from Jack, so he poured him a cup and walked slowly up the stairs.

He entered Jack's office, his expression as impassive as ever, and put Jack's coffee on his desk. Jack was standing with his arms crossed and looking out the window over the Hub.

"Ianto, something bad is happening – bad, like apocalypse bad. The Rift should have never been opened. Do some research. See what you can find out."

"Yes, Sir," Ianto said, and he turned to leave.

"I reviewed the CCTV footage of the shooting incident between you and Owen."

Ianto turned back around, his expression blank. "You handled the situation well, but you still didn't stop him from opening the Rift."

Ianto balled his hands into fists and clenched his teeth together, but still remained expressionless. *Fuck you Harkness,* he thought. When Jack didn't continue, he turned once again to leave and made it to the door when he heard Jack say, "I'm sorry for the things Owen said to you."

He should have walked out. He meant to walk out, but the words were out of his mouth before he could stop them. He turned and looked Jack in the eye. With an eerily calm voice he said, "Why? They were true."

Then he turned, walked out of Jack's office, and headed for the safety of the archives. He returned to the main area of the Hub an hour later with the results of his research. The team was gathered, and tensions were running high. Ianto read them excerpts from literature he had found describing the apocalypse, which were startlingly proverbial. When he got to Abaddon, Jack cut him off with something snide about superstitious nonsense. He wanted to say, *'Fuck you, Jack',* but what came out was, "Thanks. That makes me feel a lot better." Ianto Jones. Always the professional.

Jack blamed Owen for the cracks in time, but Ianto knew, from Jack's sideways glances in his direction, that Jack also blamed him for not stopping Owen. When Gwen asked Jack if he would rather be trapped back in 1941, Ianto caught the look on Jack's face. *Of course he would.*

Ianto was so irascible that he kept snapping at Jack, and at the rest of the team, for that matter. No one noticed because everyone's nerves were frayed, and they were all short tempered. The world was going to shit. Gwen and Jack left to cope with a Roman soldier, Owen and Tosh were dealing
with the level one priority at the hospital, so that left him to round up the Weevils.

He had just gotten one safely into the vaults when he saw her; his Lisa. Not the cyber-converted Lisa, but the real Lisa, whole and beautiful. It couldn't be her, could it? She was dead… She was telling him that he had to open the Rift. Would that stop everything? Would that bring her back to him? If only he could have Lisa back, then none of this would matter anymore. He could leave Torchwood and Jack Harkness behind. He could chalk up their entire misguided relationship to the aftereffects of intense grief. He closed his eyes. When he opened them, Lisa was gone.

It was the beginning of the end when Jack and Owen got into it. Jack was really handling things badly. Just when they needed all hands on deck, Jack threw Owen out. *Bloody brilliant leadership, Captain,* Ianto thought scornfully. He was tempted to walk out with Owen, but he knew that, despite Jack, he was needed here. He would do what he could to help fight this thing.

By the time Rhys was killed and Owen had come back claiming he could fix everything by opening the Rift, Ianto had reached his limit with Jack Harkness and with Torchwood. He'd had enough of pain, grief, suffering, heartache, and loss. He had believed in Jack. He had trusted him, and he had been wrong. He was going to help Owen. He turned to follow him. Jack called after him, "Make sure you stop him."

*The nerve of the man! To just assume, after everything, that I'm still faithful to him. He thinks he can treat me like a convenience, and I'll just lie down and take it. That I'll just follow blindly like a wide eyed school girl with a crush. Good old dependable Ianto. The faithful lap dog of Captain Jack Harkness, always there at his beck and call. Not anymore, you bastard!* He turned around, looked Jack straight in the eye and said, "No."

It was as close to *'Fuck you, Harkness'* that Ianto's inherent social etiquette would allow.

Torchwood had declared mutiny.

Jack was pointing his gun at them, trying to unbalance them, trying to make them turn against each other, trying to hit them where it hurt. Ianto thought it was clumsily done – mentioning Mary to Tosh and Owen's Weevil fighting. When Jack turned to him, Ianto thought Jack would make a snide comment about fooling him into thinking he was more than Jack's part-time shag. He was wrong. Jack used Lisa against him instead.

Jack went too far with Gwen. Before Ianto knew what was happening, Owen had put three bullets into Jack. Ianto was so horrified at what they had come to that he momentarily forgot that Jack was immortal. From the look on Gwen's face, it seemed that she had forgotten too. For an instant, the world stood still. Then he ran to Jack's side. What had Owen done? What had they all done? Had they gone too far?

It was too late to turn back now. They opened the Rift.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my invaluable beta riftintime.

Jack was dead. Jack was dead for real this time. Captain Jack Harkness, from the 51st century, over one hundred and seventy years old, former companion of the Doctor, was dead. Jack who was larger than life, whose personality took up an entire room, who inspired awe and respect from all those around him, was dead. Jack had believed that he couldn't die. Jack was wrong. Ianto was stunned. It was like a light had gone out.

Ianto had hated him that day. He had been short tempered and rude to him. He had defied and betrayed him. And now he was gone. No chance for apologies or reconciliations. He was gone.

Gwen was sitting with Jack. Part of Ianto hated her for it, because he thought it should be him. Then he would remind himself that he was nothing to Jack. He was an employee whom Jack had occasionally liked to shag. *His part-time shag.* Tosh had told him that Jack never cared about anyone he shagged. Jack had chosen Gwen, after all, to go with him to face Abaddon. No, it was better that Gwen be the martyr.

Ianto wanted to grieve for Jack, but he was so conflicted. He didn't know how to grieve for him. Should he grieve like an employee, a friend, a lover? What had they been? He wanted to grieve for Jack, but he couldn't around the rest of the team. They wouldn't understand why he felt Jack's loss so deeply, and Ianto couldn't explain it to them. He spent half a day wandering aimlessly around the Hub. Then he went into Jack's office under the pretext of straightening up. When he saw Jack's greatcoat hanging on the coat stand, he couldn't resist picking it up. The familiar scent of Jack washed over him and his composure disintegrated. The tears came as he buried his face in Jack's coat.

The next few days passed in a daze. Ianto was forlorn. He tried to busy himself with work. He always threw himself into work when distressed. It was how he coped. But this time it wasn't helping and he kept losing focus. Gwen was still sitting with Jack. At that point he was glad she was, because he knew that if she wasn't, he would be. Then he'd have to explain. And he couldn't explain. Not even to himself.

He and Tosh were working on the Rift manipulator when Tosh suddenly jumped up and ran across the Hub. He looked up, and his stomach knotted. There was Jack, standing there large as life. Alive. *Jack's alive!* Ianto was on his feet and walking toward him before he was aware of what he was doing. But as he neared Jack, he became uncertain. So much had happened between them. What did he do? What did he say? The whole team was watching. He tentatively stretched out his hand to shake Jack's, but Jack was having none of it. Jack pulled Ianto into his arms. Ianto let himself hold onto Jack for a moment, breathing in his scent. *Jack's alive.* *He's alive and his arms are wrapped around me.* Then Jack kissed him. Just like that, he kissed him, and in that moment the world stopped turning. Jack was kissing him. Jack was kissing him in front of the whole team, and Ianto was kissing him back.

But Jack still had one person to acknowledge. Owen had come downstairs.
After Jack had forgiven Owen and he'd regained enough composure to speak, he explained what
he'd seen. "I saw Diane. She told me she was lost in the Rift. She told me I had to open it to save
her."

"I saw my mother," Tosh added. "She told me that something was coming out of the darkness and
that I had to do it."

"I saw Lisa," Ianto confessed. "She was whole again, not a Cyberwoman. She told me people would
die unless I opened the Rift."

Gwen said, "And I saw Rhys die."

"It was a trap," Jack said quietly. "Bilis tricked you, manipulated you into opening the Rift to suit his
purposes. Guess I shouldn't have dismissed your research on Abaddon, Ianto. Remind me to always
listen to superstitious nonsense."

Jack smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. Then he shivered. Ianto saw it and went to retrieve his coat.
He brought Jack's coat to him and helped him into it, relishing the feel of Jack beneath the wool. Jack
smiled at him gratefully, and Ianto's insides squirmed. Ianto said quickly, "I would offer coffee, but
the coffee machine fell victim to the Rift. I could go out and get some."

"I'll come with you," said Tosh.

"Me too," added Owen. "I could use some fresh air."

As he turned to leave, Jack grasped Ianto's arm and whispered to him, "We need to talk."

Ianto nodded his acknowledgement and then made his way out of the Hub with Owen and Tosh. He
braced himself for a deluge of questions from Tosh or snide comments from Owen, and was
surprised when neither were forthcoming. They were all silent as they walked to the coffee shop, lost
in their own thoughts. He did catch both Tosh and Owen surreptitiously glancing in his direction
once or twice, but neither of them said anything. He pretended not to notice.

When they returned, the Hub was in disorder again, and Jack was gone. At first they thought
something or someone had taken him, but then Ianto saw that the hand in the jar was gone. He pulled
up the CCTV footage and watched Jack running across the Plass towards the blue police box. He
called the team over and played the footage for them. He said quietly, "He wasn't taken. He left. And
he took that hand in the jar with him."

"Where the bloody hell did he go? And what the hell did he want with the bloody hand?" asked
Owen.

Ianto shrugged his shoulders. He had given them all of the clues, but he wouldn't offer them any
explanations. He would keep Jack's secrets. He knew that Jack had finally found the Doctor. Jack
had left them. Jack had left him.
Ianto left the Hub after the team had viewed the footage of Jack running towards the police box. He walked around Cardiff for hours feeling desolate. His thoughts were so muddled that he couldn't make sense of what he was feeling. So much had happened so quickly.

He was roused from his ruminations when he noticed he was outside his favorite bookstore. He walked in and found himself in the aisle containing journals. He picked up a nicely bound leather diary and caressed the cover. He had the idea in his head that if he wrote everything down, he might be able to make sense of it all. He purchased the diary and made his way back to the Hub. He walked into a fight between Gwen and Owen over who was going to take charge of Torchwood.

For the next couple of days the team was in chaos. Everyone was arguing over what they should do, who should lead, and whether or not Jack was coming back. Ianto was quiet through all of it, going about the daily business of running Torchwood. Jack had wanted him to carry on, and he would. He owed Jack that much. He owed the world that much. Luckily, the Rift was blissfully quiet. The calm before the storm, Ianto thought to himself. Gwen had told them that Jack said the Rift would be more volatile than ever. Ianto knew that they had to get it together… and soon.

On the evening of the second day after Jack's disappearance, the team was sitting at their workstations, going through the motions of working, when another argument broke out about who should run Torchwood. Everyone was shouting at each other – even Toshiko's voice was raised in anger. Ianto decided he'd had enough. He finally broke his silence. He wasn't going to take control like Jack had wanted him to. He was going to take control in his own way. "Enough!" Ianto roared over the voices of the others.

Everyone immediately stopped talking and looked at him in shock. No one moved and the din of the Hub grew louder. Ianto let the silence hang for a minute and then began to lay out his plan. "We need to get organized, and get organized quickly. We need to play to our strengths. Gwen, you lead all investigations, liaise with the police, and decide which cases we take. Owen, you take charge of field operations. Decide who goes with you and take point on all missions. Tosh you are in charge of all the tech and alien artifacts. I know you're an extremely competent field agent, but we need you to focus on your particular genius. I will keep Torchwood running, do all the admin, and communicate with the government and UNIT." And take care of Flat Holm, he added to himself. Aloud he said, "Agreed?"

Everyone nodded, surprised that Ianto's solution made so much sense.

"One more thing," Ianto continued, "I suggest we keep Jack's… disappearance quiet for now. I know Jack wouldn't want Torchwood infiltrated by UNIT. I can handle that end. I do most of the liaising anyway."

They all nodded in agreement. Ianto continued, "Someone will have to monitor the Rift. I'll stay here most nights, but I'd like to go home once in a while. Tosh can set up Rift alerts to come through your mobile phones, and you three can take turns being on call when I go home. Is that agreeable to
"Ianto, you don't have to stay here so often. We can take turns," Gwen said.

"Let's just see how the first week or so goes and take it from there, yeah?"

"You don't think he's coming back then?" asked Tosh.

Ianto was silent.

Gwen said, "Right, let's get to work. I have a feeling we're going to be busy. Tosh, what have you got on the Rift readings?"

And so they began to cope without Jack.

Each member of the team, in their own way, confronted Ianto about his kiss with Jack. Tosh was first, staying later than Gwen and Owen after they had agreed on Ianto's scheme for the continued running of Torchwood. She went to the refrigerator, took out two bottles of beer, handed one to Ianto, and pulled a chair up to his computer where he sat working. "You handled that really well, Ianto. Jack would be proud."

Ianto allowed himself a small snort as he took a long swallow of his beer. Tosh looked down at the bottle in her hands, playing with the label nervously before saying, "Ianto… you and Jack were…"

"Yes." Ianto interrupted. He and Jack were… something.

"You were lovers." Tosh stated it for him.

He grimaced slightly at the term. He sighed, took another swig of his beer, and then said, "We were shagging. Lovers might be too strong of a word for it, Tosh."

There. He'd said it out loud. He had acknowledged it to Toshiko, and to himself. Tosh looked him in the eyes. "Ianto, I saw the way you reacted to my telling you about the real Captain Jack Harkness. I think lovers is exactly the right word for it."

Ianto shut his eyes momentarily, and then opened them again. "Then it was entirely one-sided, Tosh," he said in a quiet voice. They do say confession's good for the soul, he thought to himself.

"I doubt it, Ianto. You're way too perceptive to be fooled like that."

Ianto snorted louder this time and took another sip of his beer. He began to wish it was something stronger.

"I'm sorry, Ianto. I'm sorry I told you the story the way I did. I didn't know about you and Jack."

Ianto shrugged. "You were being honest, Tosh."

"I was being overdramatic and fanciful."

Ianto half grinned at her. "I highly doubt it."

Tosh was silent for a moment before she said, "Did you ever stop to think that the real Captain Jack Harkness was Bilis' way of manipulating our Jack?"

Ianto looked up sharply. He hadn't even considered it. "Think about it, Ianto," continued Tosh. "Bilis knew so much about us, enough to manipulate us all, enough to get at us where we were weakest."
We all saw visions of people we loved telling us to open the Rift. Gwen told us that Jack said he didn't see anything. But that's not true. This all started when Bilis displaced us into 1941. Why then? Why there? Could it have been to seduce Jack with the real Captain Jack Harkness and to drive a wedge between you two? You and Jack had the strongest connection. Perhaps he knew that a vision of Lisa wouldn't be enough to make you turn on Jack. Would you have gone against him if it weren't for the real Captain Jack Harkness?"

Ianto was silent. He didn't know the answer. He hadn't even considered the question.

"I'm sure Jack cared about you, Ianto. The way he held you… the way he kissed you… the way he touched you. It was obvious from where I was standing." With that parting remark, Tosh kissed Ianto on the cheek and left the Hub.

Ianto sat still as he listened to the sounds of the Hub and considered Tosh's words.
Ianto went to sleep that night in Jack's quarters. He wasn't sure how he felt about what Tosh had said, and for the moment, he was exhausted. He would reconsider her theory after he'd slept. He climbed into Jack's bed and drifted into a deep sleep.

Ianto opened his eyes with a start, sensing a presence. Jack was standing at the foot of the bed. He looked older and haggard. Tears were pouring down his face. "Ianto. My Ianto," he said, his voice choked with sobs.

"Jack?" Ianto asked tentatively.

Jack flung himself into Ianto's arms, sobbing and holding him tight. "My Ianto."

Ianto put his arms around Jack, but something was nagging at him. Jack seemed different, felt different. This wasn't his Jack. "Jack?" he asked again.

Jack pulled back and held Ianto's face in his hands, looking at him. Ianto could see him struggle to pull himself together. "This is a dream, Ianto. You're dreaming." Jack's voice had a calming, almost hypnotic quality to it.

"Am I?" Ianto replied in confusion.

"Ianto, I need to take some blood from you. I can't explain. Will you let me?"

Ianto felt himself nodding, feeling dazed.

Through a fog, Ianto watched Jack remove a syringe from his greatcoat pocket and draw blood from Ianto's arm. He pocketed the vial and wrapped Ianto in his arms again. "I can't stay, Ianto. I want to, but I can't. You won't remember this in the morning. This is a dream."

Jack kissed Ianto softly and tenderly on the lips. Ianto watched in a haze as Jack stood and manipulated his wrist strap. With a flash of light, Jack was gone. Ianto's eyes closed again.

Ianto woke with a start. He had dreamt about Jack, but he couldn't remember the details. He lay in Jack's bed for a while, staring up at the hatch opening. There was something nagging at the back of his mind. It was like he had forgotten something important. He sighed. He often dreamt about Jack. Why should last night be any different? Besides, he was in Jack's bedroom and surrounded by his scent. He was just going to have to get used to dreaming of Jack.

He got up and into the shower. As he washed, he noticed a bruise in the crook of his arm. When had he done that? A memory stirred but he couldn't quite grasp it. He examined it closely. He could make out a small puncture mark in the middle of the bruise. He shook his head and continued bathing. This was Torchwood. One was always covered in bruises and cuts. Must have been one of the Weevils, he thought to himself as he stepped out of the shower and readied himself for work.
Owen confronted Ianto about Jack under the guise of giving him a physical. When Ianto brought him his morning coffee, Owen eyed him appraisingly. "Ianto, I haven't given you a physical in a while. Right, med bay, one hour."

Ianto rolled his eyes, but presented himself to Owen at the specified time. Owen did his usual poking and prodding. He rolled up Ianto's sleeve to draw blood and noticed the small contusion on Ianto's arm. "Did you have a blood draw, mate?" he asked, fingering the bruise.

Ianto looked down at his arm. "I think it's from wrestling with the Weevils." Ianto said, studying the mark.

Owen shrugged and moved to the other side of Ianto. As he was drawing the blood he said, "I'm going to run a full STI panel on you."

Ianto raised his eyebrows. Not looking at Ianto, Owen asked, "Have you been safe?"

Ianto sighed. He should have known this was coming. "Is there something you want to ask me, Owen?"

Owen sat down across from Ianto. He showed his rarely seen bedside manner. "Ianto, Jack Harkness is…"


Owen smirked, "Yeah, something like that."

Ianto opened his mouth to say that Jack couldn't get sick, but did he really know that for sure? Should he confide that to Owen or just let him run the tests? He shook his head. "Do what you need to do, Owen."

"Look, mate, as your doctor, I'm concerned for your well-being. I saw what a wreck you were after Lisa. Jack's a right arse, and we all know it."

"Water under the bridge, Owen."

"But if he comes back…"

"Then I'll sit here patiently while you lecture me on how Jack's bad for my health."

Owen grinned at him then thumped him on the head almost affectionately. "Jack Harkness? Really?"

Ianto rolled his eyes, got up and straightened out his clothes. "We done here?"

"I'll let you know when the test results are in."

Ianto nodded and walked away. Two down, one to go, he thought as he got back to work.

Gwen accosted him that evening. "You and me are going to the pub, Ianto," she said as they started to pack up for the day.

"Yes, Mum," he said ironically. And Gwen makes three.

They sat in a booth facing each other. Ianto had opted for scotch. He'd decided that this conversation was going to call for something stronger. Gwen sat sipping on her beer, a contemplative look on her face. She looked up at him. He braced himself. She said, "What's going on between you and Jack?"
"Your guess is as good as mine, Gwen," Ianto replied noncommittally.

"He snogged you!" Gwen said it almost like an accusation.

"Yes," Ianto returned coolly.

"I take it that wasn't the first time."

Ianto just looked at her. "Right," she said. "How long has this been going on then?"

Ianto sighed. "A while," he said, swirling the scotch in his glass.

Gwen said nothing as she sipped on her beer. Ianto took a large swallow of his scotch. He certainly wasn't going to fill the silence. After a time, Gwen asked, "Does he talk about himself?"

"A bit." Jealously. I can sense her jealousy. Rein it in, Ianto. That's all we need is a pissing contest between you and Gwen over Jack Fucking Harkness. Aloud he said, "He tells outrageous stories like he always does. He doesn't talk about anything personal. He probably tells you more about himself than he tells me."

Ianto immediately sensed her relief. That was easy, he thought. He liked Gwen, but sometimes she could be petty.

"He told me that the only thing that would have tempted him to open the Rift was the right kind of doctor. What did he mean? What kind of doctor?"

Ianto just raised an eyebrow. "What is it, Ianto? Tell me," Gwen said in her commanding voice.

Ianto supposed he could give her that much. If any of the team had read anything about Torchwood, they would already have known. As employees of Torchwood, they should have known how the institute was founded. "Not a doctor, Gwen, the Doctor," Ianto explained.

"What do you mean, Ianto?"

"Haven't you ever read how the Torchwood Institute was founded? The information is available to every Torchwood employee."

"Hand me your PDA." Gwen stretched out her hand.

Ianto pulled out the device and connected with the Torchwood mainframe. He pulled up the file on the history of the Torchwood Institute and handed it to Gwen. "The Doctor is dangerous and an enemy of the Crown?" she asked after reading the file.

"He defeated the Cybermen and the Daleks at the Battle of Canary Wharf. Seems like a hero to me."

Ianto shrugged. "Torchwood London was… well, let's just say that their motives weren't always honorable. They were more about the power and glory of the British Empire and less about saving the world."

Gwen looked thoughtful as she handed Ianto's PDA back to him. Just then Owen and Tosh appeared at their table, carrying drinks. Owen slid himself into the booth beside Gwen, and Tosh asked politely, "Mind if we join you?"

"Of course," said Ianto. "I think Gwen's done giving me the third degree." He smiled tightly at her.

Tosh sat down beside Ianto. "Right, what did you get out of him?" asked Owen before he took a long pull of his beer.
Ianto laughed. He couldn't help it. Had they discussed how to approach him with each other before making their moves? Soon they were all laughing. Then they were laughing uproariously. The tension between them all had finally broken. They ordered more drinks and set about getting very drunk.

"Ianto was telling me about the Doctor," Gwen said after they had settled into their next round of drinks.

Tosh nodded. "Torchwood Enemy Number One," she said knowledgeably.

Owen said nothing, he just sipped at his beer. "Did you all know about him then?" Gwen asked, sounding annoyed.

"History of Torchwood, Gwen. Don't you ever read?" Owen retorted snidely.

"What's Jack's interest in the Doctor?" continued Gwen, ignoring Owen's jibe.

"Maybe Jack thinks the Doctor can fix him," said Owen, thoughtfully. "I ran some tests on Jack's blood sample today. I was curious..." he glanced quickly at Ianto, then continued hastily, "Since we discovered that he can't die. I tried mixing his blood sample with various common viruses and bacteria. They have no effect on his blood. Fascinating. Not clinically relevant for curing disease in anyone else... for various reasons that are too complicated to explain to you lot, but from Jack's perspective, I'd say he was immune to many illnesses."

So Jack told me the truth about that, thought Ianto. Does that mean other things he told me were true as well?

The conversation hovered round the subject of Jack's immortality and the Doctor for the next couple of rounds. Ianto didn't add to the conversation. He had given them a little nudge and they drew their own conclusions. By the fifth round, they were all desperately clinging to sobriety. Tosh surprised everyone by turning to Ianto and asking conspiratorially, "So, what's Jack Harkness like in bed?"

Ianto, who had just taken a sip of his scotch, spit it out across the table, spraying both Gwen and Owen. Luckily, everyone was too drunk to care and another giggling fit overtook them. Ianto said the first thing that popped into his head. In retrospect, he had no idea where it came from. "His manners in bed, like his manners in general, are atrocious."

The laughter became hysterical as the bartender came over and suggested that they'd had enough to drink. They made their way out of the pub with as much dignity as they could muster, clinging to each other for balance. When they got outside, Ianto said, "Right, taxis for everyone. No driving."

He saw the team safely into their taxis and stumbled back to the Hub. He passed out on the Hub's sofa and slept a dreamless sleep.
The next several days were a blur of activity at Torchwood. Weevil sightings were at an all time high, and it was all the four of them could do to keep things under control. The team, after a bit of a rocky start, was settling into their new roles. Ianto felt that Torchwood was running in a reasonably efficient manner. Of course, there was always room for improvement, but Ianto knew he was a perfectionist at heart, so he made allowances. The team was more companionable after their drunken night out and, as though by unspoken consent, no one discussed Jack again. They had all accepted that they had to carry on, regardless of whether or not Jack returned. The Rift would continue to spit out aliens, and Torchwood would continue to pick up after it. Gwen proved to be a good investigative director, and Owen was a natural field leader. Toshiko was, as always, a genius. Ianto was certain that, barring catastrophe, he could manage Torchwood operations. Ianto was bemused to find that Owen often chose him for field work. After all, he thought to himself, I do have some experience chasing Weevils.

Ianto had begun writing everything in his diary from his thoughts on Jack, to interesting artifacts in the Hub, to the daily running of Torchwood. He enjoyed writing in the diary. It was a chance for him to exercise his wit with uncensored rumination. He had thought a lot about Tosh's theory on Jack and the real Captain Jack Harkness. He figured that she was probably correct in her assumptions, but he didn't know if that changed anything. He wasn't even sure if it still mattered. Jack was with the Doctor now. It was where he had wanted to be for over a hundred years. Whether or not Jack cares about me is probably a moot point.

Ianto missed Jack. He missed him more that he was willing to admit to himself. He saw him everywhere in the Hub, and he slept surrounded by his scent every night. Often he would find himself turning to ask Jack's opinion or to make a witty comment to him, only to remember he was gone and feel a stabbing pain in his gut. It was getting harder to bear, and he was becoming more and more disconsolate. He needed to spend a night at home, away from Torchwood, away from the Hub, and away from memories of Jack. A little over a week after Jack's disappearance, he told Tosh that, Rift permitting, he was going home for the evening.

He felt a sense of relief as he walked into his flat. Here, at least, there were fewer and more faded memories of Jack Harkness. Jack hadn't been to his flat since their trip to the Beacons, and that time period had been so horrible that he'd succeeded in locking those memories away in a rarely visited part of his mind. He spent the evening cleaning and packing some things to take to the Hub. Then he got into his own bed for the first time in over a week and stretched out. He fell asleep almost instantly.

Ianto heard Jack calling his name from somewhere far away. He stirred. "Jack?" he called. He smelled the familiar scent of the man and felt Jack's lips on his. He opened his eyes. Jack was kneeling by his bed, stroking his hair, saying his name. Jack looked old and broken. Ianto had a sudden sense of déjà vu. "You're not my Jack," he whispered.

"You're dreaming Ianto," Jack's voice was hypnotic. "You're dreaming of a future Jack who's older
"and wiser."

"Oh." Ianto accepted Jack's explanation without question.

"There are so many things I want to say to you, Ianto, but I can't right now." Jack went on. "I'm going to inject something into your arm. It's important, Ianto." Jack's hypnotic tone continued.

"Okay." Ianto immediately trusted Jack implicitly.

Jack stood and removed a case from his pocket. He took out a syringe and injected the contents into Ianto's arm. He massaged the muscle and replaced the syringe. He knelt back down by Ianto and kissed him again. "I'll need to come back to take more blood from you. You won't be surprised when I come to you in your dreams, Ianto. You'll just accept it. You trust me. You're going to dream about me a lot while I'm away. You'll never remember the details in the morning. You'll just know that you dreamt of me." Jack's voice was melodious and peaceful.

"Okay," Ianto agreed without question.

Jack kissed him again and caressed his face. "I am your Jack, Ianto. I'll always be your Jack," he said, looking into Ianto's eyes, his fingers brushing Ianto's cheek bone. "Sine qua non."

Jack kissed him one last time and then stood. Ianto watched through half-closed eye lids as Jack pressed a button on his wrist strap and disappeared with a flash of light. Ianto closed his eyes again.

Ianto woke the next morning feeling more rested. He had dreamt of Jack again, but it seemed like he was always dreaming of Jack. Usually the dreams were sexual and Ianto woke up sweating, with a throbbing erection. This dream had been different, but he couldn't remember the details. He just had a vague sense of dreaming of Jack in his bedroom. He shook his head slightly as he got out of bed. He showered, dressed, and headed for the Hub. There was work to be done.
Ianto went back to monitoring the Rift at night. He would have rather been at his flat, but his sense of duty was so strong that he was willing to put aside his personal feelings. It had been five nights since he'd been home. He had dreamt of Jack every night. He sat on Jack's bed, looking around Jack's room. He was tempted to look through Jack's things, but he had too much respect for Jack's privacy. He was even more tempted to sleep in one of Jack's shirts so he could be surrounded by his scent, but he wouldn't let himself. He was staying there because he had a job to do, and he'd be damned if he would give in to his despair. He was tired. They had been working hard. And he really missed Jack. He sighed and lay back on the pillows. *Damn you, Jack Harkness.* He closed his eyes. His mind started to drift.

*Ianto awoke to Jack holding him in his arms. "Jack?"

"You're dreaming, Ianto." Jack's voice was melodic and smooth.

"I'm dreaming," Ianto murmured, feeling befuddled.

"Yes, you're dreaming. I'm going to take some blood from you. You need to trust me."

"Yes, I trust you," Ianto murmured.

*Ianto watched with the vague sense of having been there before as Jack drew blood from his arm. When Jack was finished, he kissed him softly. Then he kissed him passionately. Ianto responded and then felt startled as though awoken from a dream. He was kissing Jack? Jack had returned? Ianto broke off the kiss and looked at Jack. Jack looked different, older, broken. "Jack? What's happened to you?"

"So much, Ianto. So much."

*Ianto stretched out his hand and touched Jack's face. There were several more lines around his eyes. "Jack? Where have you been?"

"Ianto, can you give me this night and not ask me any questions? If you can do that, I can stay."

*Ianto was on the verge of saying something about the way things were left between them, but then he looked at Jack's face. There was so much pain in his eyes – like he had seen horrors that he couldn't bear to remember. For some unknown reason, he trusted Jack completely. Ianto couldn't refuse him. "Yes," he agreed quietly.

Jack took off his greatcoat and kicked his boots off. He then quickly took off his clothes. He lay down naked beside Ianto and gathered him into his arms. Then Jack kissed him like he had never kissed him before. There was so much emotion in his kiss that Ianto was astonished. He broke off the kiss with a question forming on his lips, but he had promised Jack no questions, so he bit his tongue to keep his silence. Jack stroked Ianto's cheek tenderly. "I'm so sorry, Ianto. I'm so sorry I didn't say it back. But you knew, didn't you? You knew."
Tears were sliding down Jack's face. Ianto wanted to ask, 'Say what back? I knew what?' But he kept his promise and remained silent. He wiped the tears from Jack's face and then kissed Jack, more to keep himself from asking questions than anything else. When Jack kissed him back fervently, his questions faded into the background. Jack slowly began to remove the T-shirt and briefs Ianto was sleeping in. He kissed and caressed every inch of the skin he exposed as he removed the garments. Ianto shuddered. This wasn't like Jack. Jack had always been about lust and desire. But Jack was touching him with great tenderness, almost worshipping him, as though he wanted to savor every part of him. He was touching him like he… like he… I'm dreaming, Ianto thought to himself, cutting off his last thought. This is a dream.

Jack turned them over so he lay on his back with Ianto on top of him. Ianto moved slowly against Jack. Jack caressed his back, kissing him ardently. He felt Jack reach out and heard the bedside table drawer open. Then he felt Jack press a bottle of lube into his hands. Ianto took the bottle from Jack silently and poured some lube on his fingers. He kissed Jack's neck as he pressed a finger inside of him. Jack sighed and pulled Ianto close to his chest. Jack stroked his hair and softly kissed every inch of his face as he gently opened Jack. When Ianto felt Jack was ready, he removed his fingers. He spread lube over himself and looked down at Jack. Jack stroked his cheek with his thumb. Ianto repositioned himself, and Jack wrapped his legs around Ianto's waist. Jack ran his fingers over Ianto's lips. Then he took Ianto's face in his hands and looked deeply into his eyes as Ianto entered him.

Jack pulled Ianto down into another passionate kiss as Ianto slowly began to move inside Jack. Jack kept Ianto's body pulled down close to his, wrapping his arms around Ianto as they found their rhythm. Jack kissed him tenderly as they moved together. Tears were falling from Jack's eyes. As they both neared climax, their breathing grew louder, but there wasn't the usual thrashing and moaning of their previous encounters. The friction of their bodies was enough to bring Jack to climax and he whispered Ianto's name as he came. Hearing Jack saying his name took Ianto over the edge. He came inside Jack and then rested on top of Jack's chest. Jack held him close, stroking his hair, his back, his shoulders, kissing every part of Ianto he could reach. Then he rolled them so they were both laid on their sides, looking into each other's eyes.

"That was… different," said Ianto after a few minutes had passed.

"I was a fool, Ianto. I was such a fool, but I can't let you remember this."

"What do you mean?" In his surprise, Ianto had forgotten his promise not to ask questions.

"You won't remember this night." Jack's voice changed to a soothing tone, and Ianto felt his mind slip sideways.

"You dreamt that we had sex. That's all you'll remember." Jack's voice was hypnotic.

"That's all I'll remember," Ianto repeated.


Jack kissed him softly. Ianto felt like he was far away.

"Sleep now, Ianto. You're just dreaming."

Ianto woke with a start. He was sweaty and naked in Jack's bed. This is getting out of hand, he thought as he extricated himself from the tangled sheets. Erotic dreams of Jack as usual. Wish his scent would fade from this room. I've really got to get him out of my system. Maybe I should go out on the pull like Owen does and just get laid. He grimaced at the thought. It was comforting to think
that he could, and it made him feel superior and slightly triumphant with vengeance, but deep down he knew that he wouldn't do it. He wasn't ready for that yet. Besides, Torchwood was busy – really busy. Ianto needed to get back to work.

A week later, Prime Minister Harold Saxon ordered the Torchwood team on a mission to the Himalayas.
Thanks as always to my superb beta riftintime.

Jack Harkness hung from shackles aboard the Valiant. The Master had tortured him over and over again, delighting in finding new and innovative ways to kill him. Sometimes the Master would forget about Jack for a while, and Jack would be lulled into a false sense of security. Then the Master would return to amuse himself with a vengeance. Those were events Jack tried desperately to forget. Days turned into weeks, which turned into months.

Jack had endless amounts of time to think. It was often the only thing he had to do. He thought about everything that had happened with the Doctor and with Torchwood. He thought about his reunion with the Doctor. Jack had been ecstatic at first to be reunited with the Doctor. He had waited so long… even though the Doctor hadn't been thrilled to see him. He hadn't denied that he had abandoned Jack on the Satellite Five, but it was soon forgotten when he'd heard that Rose, Jackie and Mickey were alive and well, even if they were living in an alternate universe.

Then they had been running for their lives, excitement growing, adrenaline pumping, and it had been exhilarating. Jack was finally exactly where he'd wanted to be for so long; on another adventure with the Doctor. Jack had missed it enormously. He'd missed the Doctor, and he'd missed their escapades. But most of all, he'd missed the sense of purpose he had in his unutterable awe and devotion to the Time Lord. He loved the Doctor. He was half in love with him, in an unrequited way. For a few blissful hours he felt like he had come home. He had been in such a good mood, flirting with everyone and everything around him. He hadn't felt that light-hearted in well over a hundred years.

Then they'd had that conversation. The one that Jack knew he would never forget in all the eternities he was destined to live. It had hurt. It had more than hurt, it had been devastating. He played the conversation over and over again in his head. The Doctor had admitted that he ran away from Jack. He had left him behind, just like Jack had feared. Jack would never forget the next words the Doctor had said.

"It's not easy just looking at you, Jack, 'cause you're wrong."

Jack felt the bile rising in his throat again as he remembered. He had uttered a sarcastic, "Thanks," but the Doctor couldn't just leave it at that.

"You are. I can't help it. I'm a Time Lord. It's instinct. It's in my guts. You're a fixed point in time and space. You're a fact. That's never meant to happen. Even the TARDIS reacted against you, tried to shake you off. Flew all the way to the end of the universe just to get rid of you."

All the way to the end of the universe, just to get rid of him… The one person he had wanted to be with more than anything, the person he had longed for, yearned for, the person for whom he had waited for over a hundred years couldn't stand to look at him. Jack was heartbroken.

As he hung from his shackles, trying to find a way to live with himself, trying to come to terms with everything the Doctor had told him, trying to find solace in some part of his past, he would remember his Torchwood team, especially Ianto Jones. Ianto had accepted him. Ianto wasn't afraid of him.
Ianto saw past the smoke and mirrors of Jack's boisterous personality. Ianto saw him, and he could stand to look at him. He knew Ianto had cared about him, and Jack had screwed it up.

Jack remembered another part of his conversation with the Doctor, after he had explained that Jack was forever. They were in the year one hundred trillion and the Doctor had suggested that Jack might be out there somewhere. Jack had said, jokingly, that he could go and meet himself. And the Doctor had replied, "Well, it's the only man you're ever going to be happy with."

Jack had smiled and called him cheeky, but on reflection, it stung deeply. Did the Doctor have a point? He had messed things up with Ianto because he had met the real Captain Jack Harkness, and he was everything Jack, himself, wanted to be. That was just it, wasn't it? He had met the exemplary version of himself, and he had fallen for him. Had that been the purpose of sending him back to 1941? Was that Bilis' plan all along?

It dawned on Jack suddenly. He had been played. He had scorned his team because they had let themselves be manipulated by Bilis Manger, but he had been Bilis' greatest success. It was because of the real Captain Jack Harkness that Jack had drifted away from his team, enraged because they had torn him away from Captain Harkness, disguising it as anger at them for opening the Rift. He had blamed Owen for taking him away from Captain Harkness and Ianto for not stopping Owen, when Ianto had acted bravely and wisely.

Ianto… He had treated him appallingly. He had chastised Ianto for running hot and cold with him, but he had done the same thing with Ianto. He was such a hypocrite. He had cajoled Ianto into getting over Lisa and being with him. He had led Ianto on, and when Ianto had fallen for him, he had discarded him for Captain Harkness like Ianto had meant nothing to him. He had even told Captain Harkness that there was no one in his life. It had been a bold-faced lie. Did Ianto know that he had said that? Had Tosh overheard and told Ianto? Ianto probably knew everything that had happened in 1941. Ianto always knew everything. Considering the coldness with which Ianto had treated him after his return, he would lay odds on Tosh having told Ianto everything.

He had no one but himself to blame for what happened with Abaddon. He had pushed his team away, pushed Ianto away. He had denied everything that he and Ianto had been, and it had been a trap all along. All a part of the malevolent plan of Bilis Manger, and Jack had played right into his hands. No wonder his team had turned on him. No wonder Ianto betrayed him. How could he have been so stupid?

Ianto Jones had experienced so much devastation and grief in his short life, and yet he wasn't embittered. He was still kindhearted, considerate, and selfless – always putting the needs of the team and Jack before his own. Jack knew that Ianto had kept him at arm's length, not wanting to become too emotionally attached, and Jack had sweet-talked Ianto into falling for him. He had wanted Ianto's passion directed towards him, regardless of whether or not he could or would return it. He had unashamedly manipulated Ianto's emotions with no thought at all of Ianto's expense. Jack had used Ianto for his own selfish amusement. Ianto had been open and accepting of Jack, and Jack had treated him as an entertaining pastime while he waited for the Doctor to return.

It was no wonder the Doctor couldn't stand to look at him. How could he ever make it up to Ianto? Would Ianto ever forgive him? Would he ever see him again?
Jack hung from his shackles aboard the Valiant for a year, enduring pain, torture, heartbreak, and death. The entire world had fallen apart. Planet Earth was no longer recognizable. Millions of people were dead. Cities were destroyed. Governments had fallen. Torchwood was gone, his team was dead. The Master had found and killed them all. Jack would have gone insane with despair if it weren't for the Doctor's voice whispering in his head. The Doctor kept telling him to have hope, to hold on, to trust him, to trust Martha Jones. If his plan succeeded, time would reverse. None of this will have happened. All would be right again. So Jack held onto that voice and held onto his hope.

He found comfort in his memories during the long hours of his imprisonment. He was in constant pain, and he would delve into his mind to escape the physical torment. He mostly found comfort in his memories of Ianto Jones. He played through his entire relationship with Ianto. After he had thoroughly chastised himself for his treatment of Ianto, he began to remember all of the moments when he had found himself falling for the remarkable and enigmatic young man. And there were quite a few. Ianto had fascinated him, intrigued him, and turned him on in ways no one else had in a long, long time. Ianto was beautiful and brilliant. Ianto was exciting and clever. Ianto was passionate and caring. Ianto was witty and sexy as hell. Memories of Ianto got him through the worst of times. He swore to himself that if they ever got out of this mess, he would make things right with would become someone who deserved the devotion of Ianto Jones.

Horrible things happened. So many horrible things happened in the year that never was. But the Doctor made good on his word and saved them all. Time was reversed.

He had the Doctor take him straight back to Cardiff. Even when the Doctor finally said the words that Jack Harkness had been longing to hear for over a century, "I really don't mind though, come with me," Jack just wanted to get back to his team, to Torchwood, to Ianto.

He didn't even have to consider the Doctor's offer for a moment. "Had plenty of time to think this past year, the year that never was, and I kept thinking about that team of mine. Like you said, Doctor – responsibility."

So Jack said his goodbyes to the Doctor. He loved him. He would always love him, but Jack now knew where he belonged. He was going home.

Jack ran across the Plass towards the Hub. He could hardly contain his excitement.

He entered the Hub, but was crestfallen to find everyone gone. He spent a couple of hours going through reports while waiting for his team to return. He discovered that he had been away almost four months in this timeline. *Damn, I have some explaining to do.* He had hoped that the Doctor had returned him closer to the time he had left, but it was not to be. It was going to make things more difficult to put right. But at least he had the chance to put them right, and he wouldn't give that up for anything in the universe.

It was growing dark outside, and the team still hadn't returned to the Hub. He couldn't wait any
longer. He decided to go and find his team. He ran the tracker on the SUV and then took off after them.

He found them in the middle of a stand-off with a blowfish. Jack watched his team, his heart swelling with pride at their professionalism, but he wanted to intercede. He waited at the back door for the perfect time to intervene. He loved to make an entrance. At just the right psychological moment, he made his move and entered with a bang. "Hey kids, d'ya miss me?"

Then he laughed. He was back.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my fantastic beta riftintime.

The team stared openmouthed at Jack for a good minute. Then they sprang into action, as though he wasn't there. They swiftly and professionally took control of the situation. They got the body of the blowfish into the SUV, cleaned the house, and retconned the family. Jack stood back and watched them work, amazed at how much of a cohesive team they had become in his absence. No one looked at him or spoke to him, not even Ianto, who addressed all of his comments to Gwen, Owen, or Tosh.

Jack grinned at Ianto's ensemble. He was wearing a pink shirt and blue tie with a pinstriped suit, and he looked delicious. Gods, he'd missed those suits. He couldn't wait to get Ianto alone. There was no chance for that, however, as Ianto opted to drive the stolen car back to the Hub and was off before Jack could say a word to him. The rest of the team climbed into the SUV, and Jack followed, sitting in the back, as Owen was driving and Gwen was riding shotgun. None of them spoke to him on the way back to the Hub. They continued to work, discussing the case on the short drive back. Jack watched as they entered the Hub and efficiently continued working the case. Jack, again, stood back and watched. It was so good to see them and to hear the sounds of his team working among the constant thrum of the Hub. He was home.

After a while, Jack got tired of being ignored. He had fought long and hard to get back here. He wasn't going to stay in the background for long. "Got pretty organized without me." It was the first words he had spoken since his dramatic entrance into the scene.

"Yeah, well we had to." At least Gwen acknowledged his presence, but she didn't look at him.

He looked around the Hub trying to come up with more conversation, "Hey, did you decorate in here?"

Suddenly Gwen was shoving him against the wall. "You left us, Jack!"

At last, some sort of reaction to his presence. The team stopped what they were doing and looked at him. This was it – the confrontation. He sighed. "I know. I'm sorry."

"We knew nothing, Jack," Gwen added, still furious.

Tosh asked in her quiet, polite voice, "Where were you?"

Jack smiled. "I found my Doctor."

"Did he fix you?" This came from Owen.

Did they know more about why he left then he had given them credit for? Did Ianto tell them? It didn't matter. He couldn't go there. He couldn't explain to them that the Doctor had told him that he was wrong. He evaded the question with cheek. "What's to fix? You don't mess with this level of perfection."

At least that got a half smile from Gwen. Then he heard Ianto's voice. Finally Ianto acknowledged
him, and in his few words, asked so many questions and said so much. "Are you going back to him?"

He looked straight into Ianto's eyes, hoping he would understand. "I came back for you." Ianto's expression didn't change. Damn his stoicism. He looked around at the rest of his team. "All of you."

Then the Rift alarm sounded, and the team turned their attention away from him.

*Of all the things that could come out of the Rift, it had to be Captain John Hart, Jack thought grimly. Of course, that wasn't really his name, but that's what he was going by now, so that was the name that Jack would use. This was going to make things more difficult. Just when he needed to try and get back on everyone's good side, especially Ianto's, his psychotic ex had to come waltzing through the Rift to cause chaos. Perfect. He had hoped he could get rid of him without the team becoming involved, but clearly that had been asking for too much.*

There was one good thing that came out of the initial meeting between Hart and his team. When Hart had said that he and Jack had been 'partners,' Ianto had immediately asked, "In what way?"

Jack saw a glimmer of hope. *Was that jealousy? Maybe Ianto still cares…* Jack felt his spirits climb, but he had to get rid of Hart first. *The man's hot, Jack thought, remembering the kiss that quickly turned into a brawl, but he's trouble. I wonder if Ianto would be angry if he knew…* Jack smiled at the notion. *Then I would know he still cared.*

Gwen confronted Jack on their way to the boardroom to strategize with Hart and the team. She asked him about the Time Agency, about where he had been, and about what had happened to him. He tried to put her off, but she was insistent. She was always so insistent. He was desperate to talk to someone about what had happened to him, and Gwen was the first real opportunity he'd had. Besides, he knew that Ianto wouldn't ask. Ianto never asked him questions. Ianto had barely spoken a word to him since he'd returned. He started to talk. "I have died so many times, been dragged back into life, like being hauled over broken glass. I saw the end of the world…” his voice started to crack at the memory of the devastation.

"How?" Gwen asked in awe.

*No! What am I doing? He couldn't talk to her about this. He needed to unburden himself, but not to Gwen. She wasn't the right person. He evaded. "Doesn't matter now," he said quickly. Then he continued, "But after it was all over, I knew I belong here. What kept me fighting was the thought of coming home to you."*

He grabbed her hand. He was so happy to see her and to see the team. She was beautiful. They were all so beautiful, and he was thrilled to be home. Then he felt her ring… she was engaged. A flood of emotions rushed through him. He suddenly knew that one day he would lose her. She would leave Torchwood to go and lead a normal life. A normal life… He would never have a normal life. He envied Gwen her chance at normalcy. Part of him wanted to beg her to stay with them, and part of him wanted to tell her to go. To snatch this opportunity she had for a real life and run far away from here. Instead, he said neither. He just congratulated her, kissed her on the cheek and said that they needed to get back to work. What would Torchwood be without Gwen? He couldn't think about it right now. He just couldn't. He'd just come home. He didn't want to think about losing anyone.

Gwen paired him with Ianto to go and find the canisters Hart was after. He was desperate to be alone with Ianto, but not until this whole thing was done. He wanted to keep an eye on Hart. He knew all too well what Hart was capable of, and he didn't want his team anywhere near him. Gwen finally convinced him to do things her way, but he was extremely skeptical.
Ianto didn’t speak in the car, other than to comment on the coordinates received from the readings on the radiation surges. He kept glancing over at Ianto, but Ianto kept his eyes on his Rift scanner, his expression unreadable. Jack didn’t know if Ianto was happy to see him or furious that he had come back. Jack was starting to get nervous. When they walked into the office, he started to babble. He was trying to joke and flirt with Ianto, be his usual self, but Ianto was having none of it. Ianto cut him off unceremoniously, trying to keep the focus on work. Well, the indirect approach isn’t working. Maybe I should go for direct... "How are you, Ianto?"

"All the better for having you back, Sir."

Great, we're back to Sir. Ianto's making his attitude towards me perfectly clear. Well, I'm not letting him get away with it. He said, "Can we maybe drop the 'Sir' now? I mean, while I was away… I was thinking… maybe we could… you know… when this is all done…” I'm babbling again. Gods, I sound like an idiot. Get on with it, Jack. "Dinner? A movie?"

Ianto stopped and looked at him in confusion. "Are you asking me out on a date?"

Why does it sound so simple when Ianto says it, and a mess of gibberish coming out of my mouth? Jack felt like an arse, so he tried to cover it with nonchalance. "Interested?"

"Well as long as it's not in an office. Some fetishes should be kept to yourself."

What does that mean? Was that a yes? It wasn't a no. It wasn't a "Go to hell, Jack." Okay, that's something. Jack started to ramble again. "Looks like we're going to have to go through every drawer, bin and plant pot." He laughed nervously. Gods, I sound like a fumbling teenager.

"Right, okay. I'll do this floor. Don't want you getting overexcited," Ianto paused to smirk at him, "And you take the roof. You're good on roofs."

Was Ianto teasing him? Jack started to feel more hopeful, but he didn't want to blow it. Maybe he should make a quick escape before he said something else really stupid, and Ianto decided to tell him to go to hell after all. He headed towards the door. "Jack?"

Jack's stomach flipped when he heard Ianto say his name. He had heard it so often in his mind over the past year. He stopped. Ianto asked, "Why are we helping him?"

He looked at Ianto. He wanted to say, there's nothing between me and John Hart. It's ancient history. I only want you. Instead he said, "He's a reminder of my past. I want him gone." He hoped Ianto got the message.

Then he paused with his hand on the door. Do I dare push my luck? "By the way, was that a yes?"

"Yes, yes."

Jack wanted to whoop with joy, but he just smiled and left the room. He'd asked Ianto out on a date, and Ianto had said yes! He wanted Captain John Hart gone as quickly as possible.

They finally got rid of Hart after Jack had died, Owen had been shot, and Gwen had been poisoned and held hostage. It was just another day at Torchwood. Jack decided that, since they had to avoid themselves for a day, he would splurge on a night at a five-star hotel for all of them. His team deserved it after having done such a good job while he'd been away. Besides, maybe he could finally get some time alone with Ianto. They really needed to talk.
A nice Welsh family was being held hostage by a blowfish, and the team was in a stand-off with it. In other words, it had started out as a normal night for the Torchwood team. Ianto had his gun pointed at the creature's head, but it kept moving, shielding itself behind a teenage girl. Should he shoot? He didn't want to hit the girl. And would the thing shut up already? He was taunting Ianto, daring him to shoot. Ianto was just considering pulling the trigger when, with a bang, the blowfish's brains splattered across the window. Ianto was momentarily confused. Had his gun gone off? He looked at it, but then realized that the shot had come from behind him. He whipped around, and there stood Jack Harkness, looking the same as ever, with a big cheesy grin on his face. "Hey kids, d'ya miss me?"

Ianto stared, his heart beating hard against his chest. They all stared. Then they all turned their attention back to the matter at hand. There was work to do. Ianto went about his job with an impassive expression on his face, but underneath he was reeling. Jack was back. Jack was back. The words raced through his mind over and over again. What does this mean? Is he going to stay? What am I going to do? Let's face it, Ianto. Jack treated you like dirt. You meant nothing to him. You were a convenience, a part-time shag. Owen's harsh words came back to him. Why was he even wasting his energy on Jack Fucking Harkness? Ianto felt a surge of anger rise up in him, and it made him feel strong. Jack was nothing to him. He was glad he was back as his boss and that was it. Otherwise, he didn't care one way or another. He put the car into gear and drove back to the Hub. For five minutes he almost believed his assertions.

The team was ignoring Jack and that worked fine for him. He would go about his business as though Jack wasn't there. Then Gwen had to go and confront Jack, so they all stopped what they were doing, waiting for an explanation. Jack admitted that he had been with the Doctor. The words were out of Ianto's mouth before he could stop himself, but he had to know. "Are you going back to him?"

"I came back for you."

Ianto's heart leapt into his throat. Did he mean... Then Jack looked at the rest of the team and said, "All of you."

Oh, he meant he came back for the team. For a brief moment, Ianto had thought... well, that's just...
ridiculous, fanciful thinking Ianto Jones. Of course he didn't come back just for you. Pull yourself together. Part-time shag, remember? Luckily, the Rift alert sounded and they had to get back to work.

He had sworn that he was going to maintain a professional demeanor around Jack and not make a single reference to the fact that they had been sleeping together. When Jack's wrist strap beeped, however, Ianto couldn't help but comment, "Whoa, that never beeps."

He was admitting to an intimacy that he didn't want to concede, but there it was. When Jack drove away from them, ordering them not to follow him, Ianto wasn't standing for it. Sod that! He ran down the street and whistled for a taxi while the team was still shouting after the SUV.

Ianto's cool exterior slowly fell away as events progressed. "It is more fun when he's around," Ianto admitted to the team when they were complaining about the enigma that was Jack Harkness.

Then he asked John Hart what kind of partners he and Jack had been. So much for my indifference, he thought resignedly. It was not how Ianto had wanted to play it. He was going for indifference, but instead, he was doing the whole jealousy bit. Bloody brilliant, Jones! Keeping a cool exterior around the man was near impossible. Jack Harkness certainly didn't do things by halves. He had not only made a dramatic reappearance into their lives, but he had come back with an outrageous ex-boyfriend in tow. Perfect. It is more fun when he's around, damn him!

Captain John Hart was a piece of work. Ianto couldn't remember ever rolling his eyes so many times in the space of five minutes. Owen was right. He was worse than Jack. He knew that Gwen paired him with Jack so they would have a chance to talk, but Ianto didn't want to talk to Jack right now. He tried to keep his mind focused on the task at hand, and maintain some semblance of dignity.

Jack tried flirting with him in the office, but Ianto wasn't having it. He cut him off, indicating that he wanted to remain focused on work. Then Jack started blathering something about when this was all done… Ianto was only half paying attention. Then he heard, "Dinner? A movie?"

Wait, was Jack… did he mean… "Are you asking me out on a date?" Ianto asked skeptically.

"Interested?"

Okay, what they hell does that mean? He wants to go out on a date with me? Ianto evaded, "Well, as long as it's not in an office. Some fetishes should be kept to yourself."

He tried to return to what he was doing, but he was completely distracted. Jack Harkness just asked me out on a date. Jack Harkness went out on dates? Ianto was so flabbergasted and flustered that he found himself looking for the canister in ridiculous places. A canister hiding under a pile of papers, Jones? Pull yourself together! Jack was chattering again about looking everywhere. Ianto wanted to get rid of Jack. He needed space to breathe. "Right, okay. I'll do this floor. Don't want you getting overexcited," he smirked at Jack. He couldn't help but tease him a little. "And you take the roof, you're good on roofs."

Jack started to walk away, but Ianto wanted to know… he wanted to know about John Hart. Were he and Jack… "Jack," he called. "Why are we helping him?"

"He's a reminder of my past. I want him gone."

Well, Ianto supposed it was better than Jack wanting him to stay. He began to look around again. Jack added, "By the way, was that a yes?"

"Yes, yes."
I agreed way too quickly. Don't look at him. Act normal. Jack left the room. Ianto took a deep breath and sat down on one of the desks. Okay, Jack Harkness just asked me out on a date, and I said yes. So much for a semblance of dignity… Damn him! Ianto got off the desk and continued his search. There was still work to do. They really needed to get rid of Hart.

Gwen got herself taken hostage again. Why was it always Gwen? An orgy, really? Hart is worse than Jack. Would they ever get rid of this bastard? Ianto couldn't help but feel gleeful when the bomb attached itself to Hart with ten minutes until detonation. He took out his stopwatch and pressed the button on the top. "Actually, nine minutes fifty, forty-nine, forty-eight. Always at the ready."

He was positively gloating. I'm not jealous, just annoyed, he told himself with what almost passed as confidence. When Hart kissed Jack goodbye, Ianto flinched. Jack looked right at him afterwards. He tried to keep his expression neutral. Doesn't matter to me, he told himself.

Jack drove them to one of the nicest hotels in Cardiff and ushered them inside. The team stood around looking questioningly at each other as Jack went to the front desk. He returned several minutes later. "We have to avoid ourselves for the next day, so I thought I'd treat you guys to a little luxury." He turned to Gwen. "When was the last time you spoke to Rhys?"

"I haven't spoken to him since yesterday evening, or is it this evening? I'm a little confused."

"Can you be more specific?"

"I called him right before we got into the car chase with the blowfish."

"That was around 6:00pm," Ianto interjected.

Jack looked at the clock on the hotel wall. It was 8:15pm. "Okay, it should be safe. Give him a call and have him meet you here. I got you guys a room." He handed Gwen a room key.

"Really?" Gwen's eyes lit up.

"Really. Call it an engagement present from me."

Gwen squealed, threw her arms around Jack and kissed him on the cheek. Then she pulled her phone out and hurried away to call Rhys. Jack turned to Owen and Tosh. He handed them both room keys and said, "I've booked massages for both of you in half an hour."

"Are you trying to bribe your way back into our hearts, Jack?" Owen asked as he took the key from Jack.

Jack grinned. "Is it working?"

"It's a start," replied Owen with a touch of scorn.

Tosh grabbed Owen's arm and hauled him away. "Haven't you ever heard the one about looking a gift horse in the mouth, Owen?" she asked as she led him to the lifts.

Jack turned to Ianto, and Ianto's heart started pounding. Jack looked at him for a long moment. "Ianto, can we talk?"

"What, I don't get a hotel room and a massage?" Ianto couldn't help the sarcasm. He was nervous.

"I got you a room…" he handed Ianto a room key. "I… I was hoping you would invite me in. Just to talk," Jack added hurriedly.
"I should return the sports car to its owner," Ianto hesitated.

"Do it tomorrow… Please Ianto," he pleaded softly.

Ianto nodded and turned towards the lifts. His stomach was tied in knots, and he was trying desperately not to break out into a sweat. On the lift ride up, Ianto said, "I need a drink."

"I had a bottle of scotch sent up to your room."

"Oh, it's going to be one of those kinds of talks," Ianto murmured.

Jack raised his eyebrows. "We always seem to have a bottle of scotch on hand during difficult conversations," Ianto explained.

Jack grinned at him and Ianto's stomach clenched. *He's so beautiful… No, Ianto! Don't go there. Pull it together.* Ianto steeled himself. They got off the lift and entered Ianto's hotel room. It was a big room with a king size bed, a sofa, a coffee table, two chairs, and a desk. Ianto removed his suit jacket and tie, hanging them on the back of the desk chair. Then he slipped off his shoes and sat down on the sofa. There was a knock on the door and Jack answered it, returning with a bottle of scotch and two glasses. Jack took off his greatcoat, kicked off his boots, and sat in the chair opposite Ianto. He poured out two glasses of scotch and handed one to Ianto. Ianto knocked it back and held out his glass for another.

Jack grinned and filled his glass again. Jack took a sip from his glass and then looked at Ianto. Ianto sat still, trying hard not to move a muscle on his face. The alcohol had done wonders, and his heart rate had slowed. He leaned back against the sofa and sighed. Jack chuckled and Ianto looked at him questioningly. "Since I've returned, I've been desperate to get you alone so we could talk. Now that I finally have you here, I don't know what to say or where to begin."

Ianto just raised an eyebrow at him. He didn't know where to begin either, so he said nothing. Jack swirled the scotch in his glass, staring at it. Then Jack slowly put the glass down on the coffee table and looked up at Ianto. Jack's expression had changed. The carefree Jack Harkness mask had disappeared, replaced by the face of someone who had seen terrible atrocities. Ianto stared at him. *My God, what happened to him?* Suddenly, the whole dance they had been doing around each other seemed ludicrous. Jack was in pain, and no matter what had happened between them, he couldn't stand to see Jack suffer.

He drank the rest of his scotch, put the glass down and stood up. Jack looked up at him, startled. There was fear in Jack's eyes, as though he was afraid Ianto was going to leave. Ianto pulled Jack out of the chair and into his arms. They held each other close.

Then to Ianto's utter astonishment, Jack started to cry.
Jack clung to Ianto and sobbed. Ianto held him tightly, whispering soothing Welsh words into his ear. Jack cried like Ianto had never seen him cry before. He cried as if the world was ending. Without breaking his hold on Jack, he moved them onto the bed. Ianto held Jack in his arms while fear gripped his heart. What had happened to Jack? He had seemed exactly the same when he had first returned – the same old flirtatious, larger than life, boisterous Jack. The man crying in his arms was utterly broken.

Ianto didn't know what to do, so he held Jack close and began to sing the same Welsh lullaby he had sung to him all those months ago. Jack sobs began to abate, and he finally spoke. "He can't fix me."

Ianto knew exactly what Jack was talking about. He stroked Jack's hair. "There's nothing wrong with you, Jack. Well, you can be a right arse, but aside from that…"

He felt Jack give a faint chuckle, and Ianto smiled. "I'm sorry, Ianto. I'm so sorry for everything," Jack said clutching at Ianto. "Do you hate me?"

"Of course I don't hate you. Okay, maybe that's a bit of a stretch. I spent a good deal of time hating you."

Jack looked up sharply and Ianto grinned at him. Jack half smiled. "I didn't mean to leave without saying goodbye. But the Doctor came and it was my chance…"

Ianto cut him off, "I know, Jack. You'd been waiting for him for over a century. The timing could have been better, but… I don't hold that against you. I know you had to go. I just didn't think you were ever coming back, Ianto added in his head. I didn't think you cared enough about us… about me.

As though Jack had heard his thoughts he said, "Ianto, the real Captain Jack Harkness…"

Ianto stiffened. He didn't want to hear about the real Captain Jack Harkness. That was still a painful subject. "It was a ploy, Ianto. Bilis manipulated me, made me see the man that I wanted to be, but never was. He showed me a real hero. A hero I could never be."

Ianto dropped his arms from around Jack. He sighed. Old wounds were being reopened. He closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. His head hurt. Jack sat up on an elbow. "I was a fool, Ianto. I was a fool for letting myself be manipulated by Bilis. I was a fool for not seeing what was right in front of me."

Jack touched Ianto's face, stroking his cheek bone with his fingertips. Jack's voice changed. He suddenly sounded much older. "I saw terrible things while I was away, Ianto. I saw things that…" Tears filled Jack's eyes again. His voice broke. "I saw things I can't begin to describe. I saw the world end. I was imprisoned, tortured for a year…"

A year? Ianto's head was reeling. How could Jack have gone for a year… Oh, right. Time
travel. He was with the Doctor. Of course. Then Jack's words sunk in. Imprisoned and tortured for a year? Ianto was horrified. Jack couldn't die. He could be tortured over and over again, only to die and come back to life to endure more torture. It would be endless… He looked into Jack's eyes. What had those eyes witnessed? What horrors had they seen? What agony had they endured? He reached out a hand and touched Jack's face, wiping a tear from his cheek. Jack looked at Ianto, gazing into his eyes. He whispered, "It was my memories of you that kept me sane, Ianto. I swore that if I ever made it back, I would make things right with you."

Ianto had heard enough. Suddenly everything that had happened between them seemed petty and small. He put his hand around Jack's neck, pulled him down and kissed him softly. "I'm here," he whispered.

Then he kissed him passionately.

Jack kissed him back then gently pulled away. "This isn't the way I wanted to do things. I want to do right by you. I was going to take you out on a date. Wine and dine you. You know? The old fashioned way? Try and get back into your good graces. Maybe grovel a bit?"

"Jack, I get it. It's enough that you asked me out on a date."

He kissed Jack again. They kissed, open mouthed, tongues brushing against each other until they had to stop for air. "I really do want to take you out on that date," Jack smiled.

"Oh, you will. And the groveling bit, too. You're going to do that. A lot. I'll hold you to it."

Ianto kissed Jack again. Jack pulled away to say, "You always were a cheeky bastard, Jones, Ianto Jones."

Ianto just smirked and kissed him again. When they paused to catch their breath, Jack said, "There's so much more we need to talk about."

"Later, Jack. We've got time. Unless you're planning on leaving again." Ianto's stomach knotted at the thought.

"I'm exactly where I want to be, Ianto." Jack caressed Ianto's face. "I'm home."

Ianto smiled his first true smile in a long, long time. "Then we've got time. You're going to have to take me out on several dates to make up for everything, and we wouldn't want to run out of conversation, now, would we?"

Jack laughed. Ianto loved the sound of his laugh. He took Jack's face in both of his hands and said, "Now shut up and kiss me."

"Whatever you say, Eye Candy."

Ianto punched him on the arm. "Don't call me that!"

"What? It's the only true thing Hart said during his entire time here. You look good enough to eat in this pink shirt." Jack started fingerling the buttons. "No wonder John was hot for you."

Ianto rolled his eyes. "Nice psychotic ex, by the way, Jack."

Jack laughed. "Don't even get me started. It was lifetimes ago. My taste is much improved."

Ianto snorted. "I would take that as a complement, but Janet would be a step up from Hart."

__________
"Ianto Jones, I do believe you're jealous."

"I am not!" He was so not jealous!

Jack kissed his neck. "I really think you are. I heard you asking him what kind of partners we were."
Jack kissed his neck again. "Come on, admit it. You were jealous."

Alright, maybe I was a bit… Not saying that out loud. "Were'n't you supposed to shut up and kiss me?"

"You are jealous!" Jack positively gloated.

Ianto flipped them around so he was on top of Jack, straddling his waist. "What," he kissed him, "Do I have to do," he kissed him again, "To get you," he kissed him again, "To stop talking?" He kissed him hard pressing his tongue into Jack's mouth.

Jack groaned as Ianto pressed his hips against Jack's. "I can think of much better uses for your mouth," Ianto said as he slid Jack's suspenders off and unbuttoned Jack's shirt.

"I almost forgot how dirty you are."

"No you didn't," Ianto said as he pulled Jack's T-shirt off.

Jack smiled. "No, I didn't."
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to the brilliant riftintime.

Jack reached up and unbuttoned Ianto's shirt. He slid the shirt off of Ianto's shoulders and ran his hands down Ianto's chest. "Wow, have you been working out?"

"Seriously, Jack? Notice, I'm already in bed with you. You don't have to use your cheesy lines on me."

Jack laughed. "I was just admiring the fact that you've filled out. Wait, did you just call me cheesy?"

"If the shoe fits…"

Jack flipped them around again so he was on top of Ianto. He kissed up Ianto's stomach to his chest. "My lines are always original," Jack said, licking Ianto's nipple.

Ianto snorted. "Hardly. Have you been working out? That's the best you can come up with?"

"I thought we were going to stop talking," Jack said, as he licked Ianto's other nipple.

"You started it. I was offering your mouth alternate forms of entertainment."

"Oh yeah, what did you have in mind?"

Ianto flipped them over again and kissed Jack while undoing his belt buckle and unzipping his pants. Ianto sucked on Jack's neck as he slid his hand into Jack's pants, grazing the head of his cock with his fingertips. Jack groaned. Ianto sat up and pulled Jack's pant's and briefs down. Jack kicked them off. Ianto licked up Jack's shaft, and then circled the head with his tongue. "I thought you wanted me to do something with my mouth?" Jack asked breathlessly.

"Yes," said Ianto. He sucked on one of Jack's balls. "I want you to moan," he sucked on the other one, "And groan," he swept his tongue along Jack's cock, "And make all sorts of obscene noises."

He took Jack into his mouth as far as he could, relaxing his throat as Jack slid into him. He hollowed his cheeks and sucked as he dragged his mouth along Jack's shaft. He swirled his tongue around the head of Jack's cock, and then slid his mouth back down as far as he could. Jack was writhing underneath him, making all the noises Ianto wanted to hear. He moved his mouth up and down Jack's cock until he felt Jack's balls constrict and Jack was cumming in his mouth. He continued sucking until Jack was spent, then swallowed and crawled up Jack's body, kissing along his stomach and chest as he went. He kissed Jack on the lips and ran his tongue over Jack's, letting Jack taste himself. Ianto murmured, "That was fast."

"Hey, it's been a year for me!"

Ianto grinned at him. "You know, you could have used that opportunity to complement me on my skill, but no, you had to blow it by telling me you were desperate."
Jack flipped them over again and quickly divested Ianto of his pants and briefs. "Looks like it's my turn to get you to stop talking."

Jack got off the bed and grabbed his own pants off the floor. He reached into the pocket and removed a bottle of lube. "Well, well, well," said Ianto, "Aren't we presumptuous? You were so sure you were going to get me into bed?"

"Always be prepared. That's my motto." Jack grinned

Ianto snorted. "What would you have done if I… bloody hell!"

Jack had leaned over the sofa so his arse was facing Ianto. He inserted his own finger into his opening, stretching himself out. He looked over his shoulder at Ianto with his trademark Harkness grin. "Thought I could get you to shut up."

Ianto watched, spellbound as Jack worked first one finger, then two and then three, opening himself up for Ianto. He was right. Ianto was speechless.

Then he walked over to the bed and ran a lubed hand up and down Ianto's shaft. He straddled Ianto then lowered himself onto Ianto's cock. "Fuck!" Ianto shouted as Jack impaled himself on him.

Jack chuckled. "Something like that," he said as he began to move up and down. Jack rode on top of Ianto, caressing his chest and teasing his nipples with his fingertips. Ianto stroked Jack's cock which had become hard again. Jack leaned forward, kissing Ianto, running his tongue over his lips. Ianto grabbed Jack's arms and dug his nails into his biceps. He was moaning and writhing underneath Jack. He looked up at Jack who was smiling down at him. "Can't hold on much… longer…" Ianto gasped.

Jack leaned down again, using the friction of their bodies on his cock. He sucked on Ianto's neck and then kissed his mouth hungrily. They panted into each other's mouths, as their movements became more erratic. Ianto groaned and came hard into Jack. A few moments later Jack followed, spurting his cum between them. He collapsed on top of Ianto then rolled them until they were on their sides, facing each other.

Jack kissed him softly on the lips. Then he kissed his eyebrows, his nose, his cheeks, his chin and the corners of each eye. Ianto stroked his fingers through Jack's hair. "Jack…"

"Ianto…" Jack kissed down his jaw line.

Jack stopped kissing him and looked him in the eyes. "What's going on in that enigmatic brain of yours?"

Ianto quirked an eyebrow at him. "You're calling me an enigma?"

"You always surprise me, Ianto. It's one of the things that makes you so special. I don't surprise easily."

"Seen it all, eh?"

"I thought I had… What did you want to say?"

Ianto sighed. "Please don't lie to me."

Jack raised his eyebrows. "What are you talking about?"
"I never asked you for anything, and I wouldn't. It's not who you are, and I get that. But please don't tell me that you only want me, if it isn't true."

"Ianto, I told you that the real Captain…"

Ianto cut him off, "That's not the point, Jack. The point is that you told me, unprompted by me, I might add, that there was no one else, and the next day you go and fall in love with another man. Don't tell me that I'm something more that I am, and then we won't have that problem."

"I fell in love with another man? Is that what Tosh told you?"

"She was very descriptive of the events in 1941. She didn't know about you and me so she was rather uncensored."

Jack was silent for several minutes. "Ianto, I know I behaved badly towards you. I knew the Doctor was coming and…"

"Jack," Ianto cut him off again. "You misunderstand me. I'm just asking you not to tell me that I mean more to you than I do. If I'm just a part-time shag…"

"Is that what you think, Ianto? That's what Owen said to you, right? Before you shot him? He called you my part-time shag. That really got to you, didn't it?"

"Jack, perhaps I'm not making myself clear. I would have been okay being your part-time shag if you hadn't convinced me otherwise. I would have just let things remain casual, and I wouldn't have let myself fall for you."

"You fell for me?"

"Urrgh!" Ianto smacked Jack on the head.

"Ow!"

"You're insanely frustrating."

"It's all part of my charm!"

Ianto smacked Jack on the head again.

"Ow! That really hurts!"

"Good!"

Jack grabbed Ianto's hand to keep him from smacking him again. He entwined their fingers and kissed Ianto's fingertips. "You were never a part-time shag, okay? Even if I was a bastard."

Ianto was silent. Jack pulled Ianto close to him and put his arms around him. "I had a lot of time to think while I was away, and most of the time I spent thinking about you. I know I have to make it up to you. I know that it will be a while before you trust me again, and I'm okay with that. I understand what you're asking of me. You don't want me to say things to you that I don't mean. You'd rather I just not say anything at all."

"Exactly."

"Ianto, I've never said anything to you that I didn't mean. I remember what you said to me the day after 1941. I apologized for the things Owen said to you and you said, 'Why? They were true.' You
were wrong, Ianto. They weren't true. You're not just a tea boy and you're not my part-time shag. And I do need you. I wanted to leave you in charge of Torchwood when I left with the Doctor. I just never had a chance to write instructions for the team. You already practically run the place. And you're not my part-time shag. You're my employee, my friend and my lover, and not necessarily in that order."

"Your lover?" Ianto frowned.

"Why, what do you call it?"

"Don't know. I just thought we were shagging."

Jack smacked Ianto on the head. "Ow! That hurt!" Ianto exclaimed.

"Told you it hurts!"

"What was that for?" Ianto asked rubbing his head.

"You're going on about being my part-time shag, yet you squirm at the word lover? Sounds like I'm your part-time shag!"

Ianto picked a pillow up and smacked Jack over the head with it. Jack picked up another pillow and smacked Ianto over the head with it. "What are we, teenage girls?" Jack said with sarcasm.

Ianto glared at him, eyes narrowed. "For good measure," said Ianto as he gave Jack one last really good smack over his head.

The pillow burst. "Now look what you did!" Jack shook his head, mocking disapproval. "I get you a nice hotel room, and that's my thanks? I can't take you anywhere."

"Guess you'll just have to punish me," Ianto said with a mischievous grin on his face.
Thanks as always to my remarkable beta riftintime.

Ianto's words about punishment had a bizarre effect on Jack. He felt a rapid surge of adrenaline. It was as though a switch had been flipped inside of him. All of the rage he'd been holding on to came flooding to the forefront. The tight rein he had on his anger at what had happened to him broke free, and his restraint faltered. Jack grabbed Ianto and roughly flipped him around so he was on his stomach. He put his hands around Ianto's waist and hauled his arse into the air. Then he shoved a knee in between Ianto's thighs and forced his legs apart. He grabbed the bottle of lube and opened Ianto quickly. He entered Ianto hard and fast. Ianto inhaled sharply. Jack paused for barely a second before setting a ruthless pace, pounding into Ianto with total abandon. Ianto pushed back against Jack, digging his hands into the bed sheets. Jack relentlessly thrust into Ianto, his eyes glazed over. He poured all of the anguish he had felt over the past year into the young man on his knees before him. He grabbed the back of Ianto's neck and shoved him down on the bed, pinning Ianto underneath him. The rational part of his brain was telling him to slow down, to stop, but he was acting on baser instincts. He thrust as hard as he could, once, twice, and on the third, he came with a shout. He slipped out of Ianto and collapsed on the bed next to him. As Jack laid there reeling and gasping for breath, reality fell on him like a boulder. He suddenly remembered where he was. Oh Gods! He covered his face with his hands… what did I just do?

Silence descended on the room. Jack had sworn to himself that he wouldn't take Ianto for granted again, but he had just used him mercilessly. And Ianto had let him. He couldn't bear to look Ianto in the eyes. He felt a hand pulling his own hand off of his face. "Jack." Ianto's voice was soft. Jack didn't respond. His heart was pounding and there was bile rising in his throat. "Jack, look at me."

"I hurt you, didn't I?" Jack asked in a horrified whisper.

"Jack, if you had been truly hurting me, I would have told you to stop."

"What if I didn't?" Jack asked, feeling nauseous.

"You would have," Ianto said with certainty.

Jack wasn't so sure. He heard Ianto get up and go into the bathroom. Then he heard the sound of the bath running. He felt Ianto's hand on his, trying again to pull his hands away from his face. "Jack, the bathtub is big enough for both of us. Come on."

Ianto heaved Jack to his feet. "Jack, I'm fine. It was kind of… thrilling."

Jack finally looked Ianto in the eyes. Ianto was smirking at him. "Remember the second time I buggered you, in the shooting range? I pretty much did the same thing – took all of my aggression out on you. I understand," said Ianto, kissing Jack on the lips. "Not so great for a one off, but it's not always like that between us. I've discovered that it's one of the nice things about having sex with
another man. You don't always have to be so careful."

Ianto wasn't the least bit angry, and Jack was astonished. He stroked Ianto's cheek. "You're always full of surprises, Ianto." Then he confessed to what had scared him the most. "I was out of control."

"It's okay to be out of control sometimes," Ianto shrugged. "Now come on. Stop berating yourself and get into the bath with me. When will we again have a chance for both of us to fit comfortably into one tub?"

He took Jack's hand and pulled him into the bathroom. He turned off the water, grabbed Jack's hand again and stepped into the tub, pulling Jack in behind him. Jack sunk to his knees in the tub and then stretched out. The hot water was soothing. He grabbed Ianto and pulled him close, so Ianto's back was resting on his chest. He wrapped his arms around Ianto and nuzzled his neck. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

"Don't be," Ianto said, reaching a hand back and stroking Jack's neck. "I'm certainly not opposed to rough sex if you aren't."

"I didn't do that right. We should have safe words."

"Okay, what's yours?"

Jack thought for a moment. Then he decided, "Desiir."

"What's it mean?"

"It's Galactic Standard for stop."


"Llonýddu – Welsh for calm the fuck down."

Jack laughed and pulled Ianto tighter. Ianto was astounding and brilliant. He hoped the rest of the team recognized how brilliant Ianto was while he had been away. He was struck by a memory of the last time the whole team had been together before he'd left with the Doctor. He said, "I take it the rest of the team knows about us."

"Well, considering the fact that you snogged me in front of them, I'd say they have a pretty good idea."

"Yeah, sorry about that. Do you mind?"

"I'm over it. They all accosted me individually after you left. Gave me the third degree."

"What did they say?"

"Tosh apologized for telling me about the real Captain Jack Harkness then tried to convince me that I wasn't your part-time shag, Owen called you promiscuous and tested me for every STI under the sun, and Gwen worried that you might tell me more of your secrets than you tell her, so I told her that I didn't know a thing about you."

Jack laughed. "Sounds just like them. Gods, I missed them while I was away." Jack paused for a moment and then admitted, "I missed you."

"I missed you too, Jack," Ianto said as he leaned his head against Jack's shoulder and yawned.
They lay in companionable silence for a few minutes. Jack stroked Ianto's hair as he considered the young man lying in his arms. So young, but so wise beyond his years, Jack thought. What is he, twenty-three… no… twenty-four now? I must have missed a birthday at some point… Only twenty-four years old, yet he has the perception of someone who has lived a lifetime. He often wondered what went on in Ianto's head. There were two people on whom he would have been tempted to use the necklace that Mary had given to Tosh; the Doctor and Ianto. Although, getting inside the Doctor's head would probably drive a human mind insane. Getting inside Ianto's head, however, would be fascinating. For a moment, he almost wished Tosh hadn't destroyed it.

He appreciated the fact that he and Ianto could be silent together. They could talk or not talk as the mood struck them, and not feel uncomfortable. He leaned over to share his thoughts with Ianto, only to realize that Ianto had fallen asleep. Jack chuckled. Then he impishly decided to mess with Ianto a bit. He nudged Ianto hard, while saying in a loud voice, "I feel so much better having finally gotten that off my chest, Ianto. You don't know what a relief it is to be able to confess that to someone at last."

He felt Ianto start, but didn't stop talking. "I don't know if I'll ever be able to say that out loud again."

He leaned his head around so he could see Ianto's face. Ianto's eyes were wide, his mouth was slightly open, and he had a distinctly guilty look on his face.

Jack gave Ianto his trademark Harkness grin.
Thanks as always to my lovely beta riftintime.

Ianto began to sputter. "I… um… Jack, I… erm…"

Jack started to laugh. He couldn't help it. Ianto looked so devastated. Then Ianto frowned. "You knew I was asleep, didn't you?"

"Yup. Don't worry. You didn't miss any deep, dark secrets. I'll save them for Gwen."

Ianto continued to frown. Jack kissed his lips but Ianto didn't respond. "What is it, Ianto?"

"I've seen the way you look at her, Jack."

Jack sighed and leaned back. Gwen. How do I explain my feelings for Gwen? "Gwen's beautiful and sexy and full of life, but I admire her from afar. She needs Rhys to keep her grounded. I would never do anything to take that away from her. Besides, Gwen sees me as a hero. I would quickly shatter that image if we were together and then she would despise me."

Jack turned Ianto's face with his hand so Ianto was looking at him, "You see me as just a man and you accept me for who I am." Jack kissed Ianto softly on the lips. "You have no idea how rare that is."

Jack kissed him again. This time Ianto responded, but without much enthusiasm. Jack knew he was keeping Ianto awake. "Now let's get you into bed. You're exhausted."

Jack grabbed a washcloth and began to tenderly wash Ianto's body. He had used Ianto's body brutally, and he still wanted to make up for his harsh treatment. Ianto's eyes kept drifting closed as Jack bathed him. Jack smiled as Ianto fell asleep while he was washing Ianto's hair. Jack finished washing Ianto, then got him dried and into bed. He lay down beside Ianto and wrapped his body around him.

"Octopus," murmured Ianto as he drifted off to sleep.

Jack fell asleep with a smile on his face.

Jack was hanging from shackles aboard the Valiant, blood pooling around his feet. There were long slashes in his arms, legs and chest from which the blood was flowing. The Master had Owen, Tosh, Gwen and Ianto in a line on their knees facing Jack. The Master raised a gun to Owen's head. "NO!" Jack screamed, struggling against the restraints.

The Master fired. Owen fell to the ground, dead. Jack screamed again and again as the Master turned his gun on Tosh and then Gwen, killing them both. He struggled in the restraints, but he couldn't break free. He was weak from blood loss. The Master turned the gun on Ianto and grinned malevolently at Jack. Jack struggled so hard that his shoulder dislocated. Ianto looked into Jack's eyes. "Jack," he said as the Master pulled the trigger. Jack howled in agony.
"Jack!"

He woke with a start. He was drenched in sweat. Ianto was looking down at him, a worried frown on his face. "Jack, you were dreaming."

Jack sat bolt-upright. He grabbed Ianto and held him close, his tears falling silently into Ianto's hair. Ianto wrapped his arms around Jack. "Maybe one day you'll tell me what happened to you, Jack," Ianto said quietly into Jack's chest.

Jack eased down onto his back, pulling Ianto on top of him. He kissed him hard, pressing his tongue into Ianto's mouth, running it over his teeth, relishing in the sensation of Ianto's tongue pressing back against his. He ran his hands over Ianto's arse and slid them up his spine. Ianto moaned, his cock starting to respond to Jack's touches. They shifted slightly so their cocks were aligned, sliding against each other.

They moved slowly, kissing and touching each other, the friction from their bodies adding just the right amount of pressure. Jack grabbed Ianto's arse and pressed him closer to his body. They didn't stop kissing as they both neared their climax, their movements becoming more frantic as the moment drew closer. They kissed through their orgasms and continued kissing softly as they both recovered.

Jack finally drew back from Ianto to look at his face. Ianto's lips were swollen and red. His hair was sticking out at all sorts of odd angles. His eyes were glazed over. Jack smiled. Ianto had never looked more beautiful to him.

Ianto leaned his forehead against Jack's and murmured, "I suppose we should get back to work. World to save and all that." He sighed.

Jack leaned over and grabbed his watch which he had discarded on the nightstand. It read 9:00am. "Yeah, we're just about done avoiding ourselves. As much as I'd like to stay here with you and see if we can break world records in sex, I'd like to go back to work. I missed the Hub. Besides, I'd really like a cup of your coffee."

"You didn't miss me at all," Ianto teased, biting Jack's shoulder, "You just missed my coffee."

"True," Jack deadpanned.

Ianto bit his shoulder harder and Jack stroked his hair. "Do you need to go to your flat to get some fresh clothes?" Jack asked.

"Most of my clothes are at the Hub," Ianto replied as he extricated himself from Jack and got out of bed. "I've been on Rift monitoring duty."

Jack smiled. "So you've been living in my bedroom while I was away," he said as he stretched out on the bed.

Ianto went into the bathroom, grabbed a towel and returned. He wiped Jack and then himself down, cleaning up their mess. "Someone had to monitor the Rift, Jack."

Jack's smile turned into a grin. He liked the thought of Ianto sleeping in his bed every night. He considered pulling Ianto back into bed, but he knew they needed to get back to work. Time had just about caught up, and they needed to check the Rift to see if there were any after-effects of John's visit. He reluctantly got up and dressed himself.

They drove to the Hub in companionable silence. When they arrived, Ianto went down into Jack's bunker to ready himself for the day's work, and Jack sat down at his desk. He had a lot to catch up
on. He was scanning the Rift readings when he felt a hand on his shoulder and Ianto's lips on his cheek. "Go shower, Jack. You smell like sex. I'll make you some coffee."

Jack looked up at Ianto. He was wearing an extremely well fitted three piece, black pinstriped suit with a red shirt and a coordinating black tie with a red diagonal stripe. He looked mouth-watering. "Ianto Jones, you look good enough to eat. Is that a new suit? It's delicious." He fingered the waistcoat buttons. "I'd really like to take it off of you."

He pulled Ianto down onto his lap and kissed him, sliding his hands up Ianto's chest and fingerling his tie. The Hub alarm sounded, and Ianto leapt off Jack's lap, straightening out his suit. Jack raised an eyebrow at him. Then he reluctantly got up off his chair with a sigh. "I'll go shower."

"I'll get your coffee, Sir," Ianto said as he left Jack's office.

Jack heard Ianto call out, "Good morning, Tosh. Coffee?"

Jack shook his head and descended the ladder to his bedroom. *Sir again?* Clearly Ianto was opposed to public displays of affection. *Either that or he doesn't want the team to know that he's forgiven me already.* Jack wondered which one was true.
Ianto was in a good mood – a really good mood. He couldn't help it. He had just spent the night with Jack in a luxurious hotel room having marathon sex. After the whirlwind of emotions from Jack's sudden arrival, the entrance of Captain John Hart, the psychotic ex, and Gwen almost dying – again, Ianto hadn't expected anything but sleep after the day's events. But Jack had wanted to talk. Well, that didn't last very long, Ianto thought, smiling to himself.

He had sat down to have a conversation with Jack with the intention of keeping things platonic, but Jack's pain had overwhelmed him and broke through the barriers he had created. Something had happened to Jack. Something terrible. He was suffering, and Ianto couldn't stand to see anyone suffer – especially Jack. He had held him and kissed him, and that was the end of platonic.

Perhaps I shouldn't have jumped back into bed with Jack so soon, he considered, but I am a man, after all. I have needs. And Jack was good. Jack was really good. Besides, Jack had told him that he came back for him, had asked him out on a date, had said he wanted to make things right with him, and had apologized for his treatment of him. It was enough for now. Ianto still wasn't quite sure where he stood with Jack or what exactly they were, but he now knew that he meant more to Jack than he'd realized. Yes, they were shagging again, but Ianto knew that it was a far cry from trusting Jack again, or giving way to his feelings for the man. That would take time.

Down in Jack's bedroom, Ianto had showered and carefully chosen his attire. His pinstriped, three piece suit was very well fitted. The trousers were tighter than his other suits, and they emphasized his crotch and his arse. He'd chosen a red shirt, since red was his color. He thought he looked pretty good. Ianto smiled as he remembered Jack's face when he'd first seen him. Jack had practically been drooling. Ianto eagerly anticipated another sex filled evening with Jack after the day's work.

He supposed he would have to pack up his stuff and move back into his flat. It would be a rather uncomfortable moment, but Ianto didn't want to spend too much time staying with Jack. He was still wary of their tenuous relationship. Besides, he wanted to reclaim his own space. He had come into his own while Jack was away. He had found his place at Torchwood, and the team had grown to respect him. He felt more comfortable in his own skin. He wasn't going to risk losing himself in Jack Harkness.

One by one, the team accosted him about Jack's return throughout the day, just like they had done when Jack left. Tosh was first in that morning, so she was the first to confront him. He and Jack had been kissing when the cogwheel door rolled open, announcing Tosh's arrival. He had jumped off of Jack's lap. He wasn't ready for such open displays of their relationship – or whatever it is.

He called out to Tosh on his way to the coffee machine. She followed him into the kitchen as he began to make coffee. She leaned against the counter, watching him. Ianto raised an eyebrow at her. She smiled a bit shyly and said, "I came to see how you're doing with Jack being back, but I can see that things are made up between you. You're positively glowing. You look very handsome."

"I just want you to be careful, Ianto. We all know what Jack's like."

"I know," Ianto said as he turned his attention back to the coffee machine.

"Don't let him take you for granted, Ianto. You're too good for that."

Ianto turned and looked at Tosh. Then he leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. "And you're too good for Owen."

"Let's not even go there," Tosh said, affecting a very Ianto-like eye roll.

They smiled at each other. Ianto poured out their coffees and handed Tosh her mug. They sipped appreciatively. Ianto always felt comfortable around Tosh. They were alike in some ways, and they understood each other. "Jack's ex was cute," Tosh smiled over her coffee mug.

Ianto smirked. "And psychotic."

Tosh giggled. "And psychotic," she agreed.

"Always like the bad boys and girls, don't you?" Ianto teased.

"Not always..." Tosh replied thoughtfully.

"Ah, yes," said Ianto, remembering. "It's almost that time, isn't it? Time to get a certain soldier out of cold storage?"

"Makes him sound like frozen meat you take out for dinner," Tosh said musingly.

They looked at each other and started to laugh. Just then Jack appeared, freshly showered, his hair wet and tousled. "Hey, is there more of that coffee? And what's so funny?"

"Nothing," Ianto and Tosh chorused as Ianto handed Jack his mug of coffee.

"Talking about me again, are we?" He inhaled the coffee deeply and took a sip. "Oh Gods, this is almost better than sex!"

Ianto quirked an eyebrow at him, but he said nothing. He just took another sip of his coffee. "Well, not better than sex with you, Ianto," Jack added, looking at him.

Ianto choked on his coffee and Tosh giggled. Ianto rallied. He wasn't going to let Jack get one up on him. "I'll have you know, Sir, that Tosh and I were not talking about you. We were discussing another man entirely."

"Oh, were you?" Jack asked skeptically

Ianto turned and left the kitchen, saying as he went, "Yes, we were. We were discussing how we like our meat served."

To his great satisfaction, he heard Jack spit his coffee out and Tosh laugh out loud. He walked away, grinning to himself.

Later in the day, Owen called Ianto down to the medical bay with all of his usual ceremony. "Oy, Tea Boy. Get your arse down here. I want to talk to you."

Ianto rolled his eyes, but walked down to Owen's workstation all the same. "Yes, Owen?"
"Sit down, Ianto. You and I are going to have a little chat."

"I'm aflutter with anticipation," Ianto said, as he complied.

"Don't start, you prat. What the hell are you doing letting Harkness into your pants again?"

"What makes you think…"

"Oh please," Owen cut him off. "You might as well have a post-it on your forehead that says got shagged last night."

Ianto felt himself begin to blush, but he wasn't going to let Owen see that he'd affected him. Instead he schooled his features and said, "And this morning."

Owen threw up his hands. "Bloody hell! What are you thinking?"

Ianto's expression didn't change. "I was thinking that Jack gives really good head."

"Ugh!" Owen covered his ears with his hands. "Spare me the gory details. You know what? There's nothing I can do for you. Get out of my sight. And don't come crying to me when it all goes to shit!"

"Is that the extent of the Jack Harkness is bad for my health lecture you promised me?" Ianto asked, smirking.

"You're too far gone to lecture, mate. I'm just going to sit back and watch this train crash."

Ianto was extremely tempted to stick his tongue out at Owen. But that would be childish, wouldn't it?

The last person to accost him was Gwen. He was down in the archives reading a file when Gwen approached him, bringing with her a storm of emotions. Ianto braced himself. Gwen said, "So, Jack's back."

Without looking up from his file he said, "Yes, Jack's back."

"Does that mean you and he…"

Ianto was silent. He would let her struggle and not offer her any help. He continued reading the file. "Are you and Jack back together?"

He still didn't look up from the file. "I don't know that we were ever really together…"

"Ianto!"

Ianto looked up at Gwen. "What is it, Gwen?"

"Are you shagging again?"

"Does it matter?"

Gwen shrugged. "Well, I don't know, Ianto. Do you think that's a good idea after everything that's happened?"

Ianto shrugged in return. "Did he tell you anything about where he's been?" Gwen asked.

"No."

"So that's it? He comes back with no explanations and you just start shagging again. No questions
asked."

Ianto just looked at her impassively. "Don't you care, Ianto? Don't you care that Jack hides everything from us? Don't you care that we know nothing about him? Don't you care that Jack flirts with everything and everyone under the sun?"

"Not really."

"How come?"

"Because I know that he only shags me."

"Do you? Really though? This is Jack Harkness we're talking about."

Ianto started to feel uncomfortable, but he'd be damned if he would let it show. "Doesn't really matter. We're just shagging. It's not a big deal."

He knew that it was more than just shagging – at least to him, but he wasn't ready to fully admit that to himself yet. Right now, it was just shagging, because maybe Gwen was right. Maybe Jack was lying to him. Maybe he did shag other people and Ianto was a fool to believe Jack when he said that he only wanted him. Gwen's voice interrupted his musings. "I don't want him to hurt you, Ianto."

Ianto looked at Gwen, surprised. Her feelings were genuine. She was concerned for him. There was an undertone of jealousy, but it was insignificant. He said honestly, "I have fun with him, Gwen. After everything that happened with Canary Wharf and Lisa... it's a nice change."

Gwen hugged him warmly. Ianto was taken aback, but he returned Gwen's embrace. "Don't let him take advantage of you, Ianto."

"I think I can hold my own."

"I'm sure you can, sweetheart," she said as she released him. "But Jack can be... overwhelming."

She sounded far-away as she pondered her statement. Ianto thought it was time to bring her back to reality. "How are the wedding plans coming?" he asked, taking her arm and leading her out of the archives.

Gwen launched into a litany of wedding drama as they walked back to the main floor of the Hub arm in arm. Ianto listened with half an ear as he considered their conversation. He knew Gwen had feelings for Jack, but maybe she was mature enough to realize that they were more about hero worship than real affection for the man. Maybe now that she was going to be married, she would focus her attention on Rhys. He hoped so.
Ianto had put an enormous pile of reports from the past four months on Jack's desk that morning, and Jack had spent most of the day catching up on all the cases he'd missed. He had talked to each of the team individually, at some point throughout the day. Jack had called Ianto in last. Ianto stood across from Jack, who was seated at his desk. Jack said, "I've already talked to Owen, Tosh and Gwen. I let them yell at me for leaving and tried to reassure them all that I was here to stay. I think we've already had that conversation, but I didn't want you to feel left out. Is there anything else you want to talk about?"

"Nothing that I can think of, Sir."

"Still with the 'Sir'?"

Ianto walked over and sat on the edge of the desk. "Well, maybe just for special occasions," he said, looking Jack up and down.

Jack leaned back in his chair, smiling. "What would constitute a special occasion?" he asked, leering at Ianto.

Ianto grinned at him. "We'll have to see… later. Everything okay with the rest of the team?"

Jack sighed. "They're angry that I won't tell them anything about where I was. They're angry that I left for so long, and they're not sure if they trust me."

"They'll come around. Maybe we should order some food tonight. All have dinner together in the boardroom."

"Team bonding, huh?"

Ianto shrugged and got up off the desk. "Just a suggestion."

"It's a good one. Chinese?"

"I'll take care of it, Jack," Ianto said as he left the office.

Ianto was on the phone to the Chinese restaurant when Jack came out of his office and addressed the team. "Okay everyone. Dinner meeting in the boardroom in an hour."

The team sat around eating Chinese food and telling stories. Jack added very little to the conversation, but he listened appreciatively to everyone and laughed in appropriate places. After several stories had been told, Jack said, "I've read all of the reports from the last four months. I'm impressed by the way you all handled yourselves."

"It was Ianto's doing," said Tosh, "The first two days, all we did was fight over who was going to run Torchwood. Ianto barely said a word for forty-eight hours. Then he yelled at us and started..."
bossing us around." Tosh smiled.

Ianto felt himself start to blush. "I just made a suggestion."

"Yeah, well it was a good one," said Gwen. "Ianto told us that we needed to play to our strengths. He put me in charge of the cases, and Owen in charge of fieldwork. Tosh took care of the tech, and Ianto did everything else."

"Yup, we'd all probably still be arguing if it weren't for Tea Boy here," added Owen with just a small amount of snark.

Ianto was embarrassed by the attention, so he tried to shift the conversation. He praised Gwen's leadership, Owen's fieldwork and Tosh's genius. The girls smiled at him and even Owen looked mildly pleased. Suddenly, Ianto sensed a new emotion in the room. To his great surprise, it was coming from Jack. He had gotten so used to sensing nothing from Jack, but Jack was positively radiating one feeling. Pride. Ianto looked at Jack sharply. Jack caught his eye and winked at him, a grin on his face. "Sounds like Ianto pretty much ran things while I was gone."

"No, Jack. We worked as a team," said Ianto, glancing at his teammates.

"Well, I know that Ianto pretty much runs Torchwood when I'm here, so I would expect nothing less from him." Then he added with a smirk, "He definitely wears the pants."

There was a moment of silence as Ianto looked daggers at Jack, who smiled back innocently. Then Owen started to snicker. "So, Gwen," said Ianto quickly, trying to cut off the sound coming from Owen. "How was your night with Rhys?"

"Oh, right," said Gwen, momentarily confused. "It was brilliant. Jack, thanks so much for that!"

"And how were your massages, Tosh, Owen?" asked Jack, looking at the two of them.

"Fantastic, Jack. Thank you," said Tosh.

"Yeah, all right. As a bribe, it wasn't half bad," said Owen as he crossed his arms.

Jack smiled. "You're welcome, Owen. And Ianto, how was your hotel room?"

Ianto glanced quickly at Jack, who was grinning. Then he looked at the team. Owen was rolling his eyes, and Tosh and Gwen were trying desperately not to laugh. Ianto finally gave up trying to maintain any semblance of dignity. Everyone knew about him and Jack, and it was ridiculous for him to pretend otherwise. He put on his best bland expression and deadpanned, "Don't know, Jack. I was too busy shagging you to notice."

Jack threw back his head and laughed, Owen made retching noises, Tosh beamed at him and even Gwen smiled. The proverbial cat was out of the bag. He might as well make the best of it.

Around 10:00pm Jack's mobile phone rang. He had a brief conversation with the person on the other end of the line, and then he hung up. "Okay, kids. Work to do. Unusual robbery gone wrong. Some kind of strange stab wounds. We're needed at the scene. Owen, Tosh, Gwen, with me. Ianto, see what you can find out from here."

They all stood up and returned to work as a team.
Several hours later, Ianto stood with Owen watching Jack and Gwen interrogate Beth. He remembered, with amusement, remarking several months ago that Jack's bad cop routine needed some work. *Perhaps I should renew my offer to practice with him*, Ianto thought with a smile.

When Jack left the interrogation room and stood beside Ianto looking down on Gwen and Beth, Ianto couldn't help but tease him just a bit. "Just us, in this room, for as long as it takes. Terrifying."

"Really?" Jack seemed almost pleased.

"Absolutely," Ianto said in mock seriousness. "Shivers down my spine."

"You don't look scared."

"Oh, it… passed."

Jack growled and made as if to throw a punch as he walked away. Ianto watched him, amused by his effect on Jack. For almost a year, Jack had teased him mercilessly, making sexual innuendo at the most inopportune moments. Since the team now knew about their sexual relationship, it was finally Ianto's turn for some payback. At last he had some room to stretch his wit.

He continued to rib Jack throughout the investigation. Jack wanted to use the mind probe on Beth, and Ianto teased him about the last time they had used it. Surprisingly, it was Gwen who gave him the best opportunity for some ragging. Beth was rigged up to the mind probe, and Jack had just told her that it was going to hurt. Beth said, "Your bedside manner is rubbish."

Gwen replied, "You should see his manners in bed. They're atrocious. Apparently. So I've heard."

Ianto jumped in with, "Oh they are. I remember this one time…"

Jack cleared his throat loudly. It was all Ianto could do to keep a straight face. *Touché, Jack*, he thought gleefully.

When, after Torchwood saved the world once again, Gwen entered the Hub with Beth in tow, Ianto stood by the door, expecting Jack to follow them in. When Jack didn't make an appearance, he asked, "Where's Jack?"

"He's still in the SUV," Gwen replied. "He said to give him a minute. He was stabbed."

Ianto walked quickly from the Hub and into the garage. His heart was pounding as he approached the SUV. Jack was lying dead in the passenger seat. Ianto stood next to him and waited, feeling an anxiety he couldn't quite place. When Jack came back to life with a gasp, Ianto let out the breath he didn't realize he was holding. "Looks like I'm going to have to repair your coat again, Jack. Do you do this just to irritate me?"
"Yes, Ianto. I got stabbed in the chest by an alien just to annoy you."

Ianto smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "I knew it."

"What did I miss?" Jack asked.

"Well, when we thought the world was ending... again, Owen wanted to have an orgy."

"Without me? How could he? What did you say?"

"I said yes, of course," Ianto replied, expressionlessly. "It was fun."

"You know, you've been quite the smart arse today," said Jack with an amused expression on his face. "What was that bit about my manners in bed?"

Ianto just looked at him. He was bantering with Jack to hide his anxiety. What he wanted to do was wrap his arms around the older man, to feel Jack's heart beating against his, to reassure himself that Jack was alive. When Ianto didn't respond, Jack flashed his best Harkness grin, asking, "So, you think I'm dashing, do you?"

Ianto rolled his eyes. Jack got out of the SUV and touched Ianto's cheek. "Worried about me?" Jack asked with a moment of perception.

Ianto snorted, suddenly feeling self-conscious. "Worried about the blood I'm going to have to clean out of the SUV."

"Ah," Jack said. "That I did do to annoy you. I'm going to go get cleaned up."

Jack turned and walked towards the Hub. Ianto watched him go, feeling his heart rate slowly return to normal. Why had it bothered him so much that Jack had died again? Jack died a lot. Ianto took a cloth and began to clean the car seat, trying to stop his racing thoughts. As Ianto scrubbed at the blood stain, he remembered those terrible days after Abaddon, when he'd thought that Jack was truly dead. Then Jack had left, and Ianto remembered the moment he'd realized that Jack was with the Doctor, and he had thought Jack would never return. Ianto scrubbed harder at the stain, his anger building. Then he noticed the CB radio antenna taped to the wing mirror of the SUV. "Bloody hell!" he said out loud as he removed it.

When he saw the sticky residue left by the duct tape, his rage boiled over. He grabbed the antenna and headed back into the Hub, completely irate and searching for an outlet for his anger. Jack took one look at his face and retreated into his office. Ianto followed, fuming. He slammed the antenna down on Jack's desk. Jack looked at him, surprised by the anger he saw on Ianto's face. Ianto almost shouted at Jack, "You had to duct tape it to the wing mirror?"

Jack just stared open mouthed at Ianto.

"It's left the wing mirror disconcertingly sticky," Ianto growled. "And I'm going to have to clean it."

Ianto knew he was being ridiculous, but he couldn't help it. He was furious with Jack. Some part of him knew that it had nothing to do with the stickiness of the mirror, but that was the tangible thing his mind had latched onto, and he wasn't about to let it go now.

Jack raised his eyebrows. "Um... sorry? You know, world ending and all that. I didn't really think about the consequences to the wing mirror."

Ianto slammed his fist down on Jack's desk and Jack started in surprise. "God damn it, Jack! Don't
you ever consider anyone else?"

Jack just stared at him, shock in his eyes. Then they heard Beth call out. "I won't let you freeze me! I'll kill you all!"

They both ran out of the office, drawing their guns. Gwen had been taken hostage again. Beth left them no choice. They opened fire.

Once Ianto had dealt with the body, he retreated into the archives. He was angry with himself for losing control and yelling at Jack. He finally understood that he was upset because Jack had died again, and he had been afraid that Jack wouldn't come back this time.

He took a deep breath and sat down on the floor. What was happening to him? He had joked openly with the team about sleeping with Jack. He had made several references to the fact that he and Jack were… something. Then he had actually raged at Jack. Ianto shook his head. His barriers were starting to crumble, and he wasn't sure how he felt about it. *We're just shagging*, he told himself. *You can't fall for him again. Pull yourself together and get up off this floor. You need to apologize for acting like a total wanker.*

He stood up, wiping the dust off his trousers, and started walking slowly towards Jack's office. He needed to pack up his belongings and take them back to his flat, but not tonight. He was exhausted and emotionally drained.

He put on his best butler demeanor as he knocked on Jack's office door. Jack was sitting at his desk holding Beth's alien weapon and studying it. "Anything else I can do for you before I leave, Sir?"

Jack put down the weapon and stared at Ianto. "What's gotten into you?"

"I apologize for my outburst earlier. It was unprofessional. We'll just chalk it up to adrenaline, shall we? If you don't need anything further…"

"What are you doing tonight, Ianto?" asked Jack, interrupting him.

"I'm planning on going home to shower and sleep."

"Have dinner with me first?"

Ianto stared at Jack. Just when he was trying to beat a hasty retreat, Jack had to ask him out to dinner. Ianto opened his mouth to decline but instead found himself saying, "Alright." *Damn and blast! Why hadn't 'no' come out of his mouth!*

As though sensing his hesitancy, Jack jumped out of the chair and grabbed his coat before Ianto could change his mind. They took the invisible lift out of the Hub. As they neared the surface, Jack asked "How's Italian sound?"

"Fine," Ianto replied.

They walked silently together across the Plass.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my ingenious beta riftintime.

Jack was bewildered by Ianto's behavior. He had been so compassionate towards Jack in the hotel room. He had finally admitted to the team that they were sleeping together and had teased Jack openly about it. Then he had yelled at him for something completely inane. Jack had finally glimpsed the fire that he knew was raging just under the surface of Ianto's cool exterior, and this time it had been directed towards him. Jack craved that passion. He wasn't fooled by the paltry excuse Ianto gave about the duct tape on the wing mirror. He knew something else was on Ianto's mind. He wanted to get him out of the Hub and into neutral territory so that maybe Ianto would tell him what was going on.

He glanced over at the man walking beside him. He saw Ianto stifle a yawn and realized that Ianto was probably exhausted. Besides, Jack had wanted to take Ianto out on a proper date, and grabbing a meal after a long and trying investigation didn't seem like the best time. "I've changed my mind, Ianto. How 'bout we just grab some fish and chips and have a seat by the water."

"Fine," Ianto replied.

They stopped by a stand and ordered their food. They found a bench and sat, eating for a few minutes in silence. "Are you going to tell me what that was all about?" asked Jack.

"What are you talking about?"

"The stickiness of the wing mirror? I haven't seen you show that much emotion since…"

Jack sensed Ianto stiffen next to him. He took Ianto's hand and held it in his. Ianto looked around quickly. Jack realized that Ianto was concerned that someone would see them holding hands in public. He sighed and let go of Ianto's hand. Sometimes he hated the 21st century. The people of this planet had come a long way in their feelings towards seeing two men together, but they were centuries away from full acceptance. In the 51st century, there was no such thing as homosexuality. Hell, half of the population was interbreeding with non-human life forms. Being with your own species was considered mundane.

"I don't like it when you die," Ianto whispered, not looking at him.

It was said so quietly that Jack almost missed it. "But Ianto, you've seen me die plenty of times. I always come back. Why was this time different?"

Ianto looked down at the rest of the food in his hand. He made a face at it, as though he suddenly found it distasteful. He stood and tossed the remainder into a nearby rubbish bin. Jack watched him as he slowly sat back down on the bench next to him. He looked into Jack's eyes and then quickly looked away again. "I… It's the first time I've seen you die since Abaddon."

Jack was silent as he pondered Ianto's statement. He finally said, "I'm not sure I understand."

"Perhaps it's better that you don't. Thanks for dinner, Jack, but I really need to get some sleep."
Jack wanted to press the matter, but he knew it wasn't the time. He got up, and they made their way back towards the Hub. Jack was starting to feel nervous. It sounded like Ianto intended to go home alone, and he didn't want to be alone. He hadn't really been alone since his time on the Valiant, and he was afraid of the nightmares. He finally asked almost shyly, "Do you want to stay at the Hub?"

"I just said that I need some sleep, Jack," Ianto said, looking sideways at him.

Jack almost laughed. "We can sleep, Ianto. I promise I'll let you sleep."

Ianto was silent as they neared the water tower. Then he stopped and looked at Jack. Jack's heart started pounding. "I'd like to sleep in my own bed, Jack, but you're welcome to come back to mine."

Jack hesitated. Did Ianto not want him there? He didn't want to impose. He began, "The Rift…"

"We can send the alerts to my PDA or to your Time Agency wrist strap thingy."

Jack chuckled in relief. "I guess John kind of gave that one away, didn't he? It's called a Vortex Manipulator."

"Whatever," Ianto murmured.

Jack smiled and said, "Okay, I'll come to your flat. Why don't you take your car and go ahead. I'll shut down the Hub for the night and follow in the SUV."

Ianto nodded and turned towards his car. Jack took the invisible lift back into the Hub. As he descended, he thought that maybe he should call Ianto and tell him that he was going to stay at the Hub after all. It was silly of him to not want to be alone. He was acting like a coward. Besides, it didn't really seem like Ianto wanted his company. However, alone in the empty Hub, he began to get jittery. He quickly shut down the Hub for the evening and climbed into the SUV.

He arrived at Ianto's flat and was about to use his key to open Ianto's door as he had done in the past, but he hesitated. He had keys to all of the team's flats, and he had used them all freely at some point or another, but this was different. He had generally used them in his role as boss. He was entering Ianto's flat as his lover. They were lovers, weren't they? He never really quite knew where he stood with Ianto. Of course, that's your own damn fault, Jack, he told himself. He was starting to feel uncomfortable. He wondered if maybe he should go back to the Hub. He thought again of being alone in the Hub with a shudder. He reached out his hand and rang the doorbell.

Ianto answered, rubbing his wet hair with a towel. He was wearing a T-shirt and sweat pants. He looked so young. Jack felt almost shy as he smiled at him. This is absurd, he thought to himself. Ianto stepped back to allow Jack inside, saying, "I think this is the first time you've ever rung the doorbell, Jack. Don't you usually just let yourself in?"

"I'm trying to be respectful," said Jack, shrugging.

"Okay, who are you and what have you done with Jack Harkness?" Ianto asked as he turned and headed for his bedroom.

"Ha ha ha," Jack said, following behind Ianto.

Ianto threw the towel into the bathroom and climbed into bed. Jack stood for a moment at the foot of the bed feeling slightly unsure of himself. What did he do now? Ianto shook his head, smirking at him. "I do love that coat, Jack, but I can't imagine it will be comfortable to sleep in. Come on, take off your clothes and get into bed."
Jack quickly stripped down to his T-shirt and briefs and climbed into bed next to Ianto. He stayed on the opposite side of the bed so he wouldn't crowd him. "What's wrong, Jack?"

"I promised I would let you sleep."

Ianto chuckled and laid his head on Jack's shoulder, putting his arm over his chest. "I'm exhausted, Jack. I need sleep, but that doesn't mean you can't touch me."

Jack wrapped his arms loosely around Ianto, not wanting to impose too much. Ianto was always chastising him about being like an octopus. He said, "Thanks for letting me stay here. I get... I... have nightmares."


Jack tightened his arms around Ianto and kissed the top of his head. He listened to Ianto's breathing as it became slower and more regulated. He sighed. There was still so much uncertainty between them. He really needed to be able to get through a night on his own.

Jack hung from shackles aboard the Valiant. Both of his shoulders were dislocated. The pain was excruciating. The Master had killed Martha Jones and her family. He had killed his team. He had destroyed the Earth. He had killed the Doctor. There was no one left. Everyone was dead except for Jack, hanging, forgotten, from shackles aboard the Valiant. He had dislocated both of his shoulders trying to free himself. He couldn't escape. He was destined to hang from those shackles to die and be reborn over and over again for all of eternity.

Alone. He was alone.

He screamed in agony and despair. He screamed in terror. He was alone and suffering, forever. His body started shaking uncontrollably. He was in hell.

"Jack," Ianto was shaking him.

Jack opened his eyes. He was sweating and tears were streaming down his cheeks. The covers were in a heap on the floor. "Jack, you're just dreaming." Ianto kissed his lips softly. "Jack, I'm here. It's just a dream. You're home."

Ianto got up and pulled the covers off the floor. He got back into bed and lay down on top of Jack, pulling the covers over them both. He wiped the tears from Jack's face and kissed him again. Jack wrapped his arms around Ianto, savoring the weight of Ianto's body on top of his, reminding him that he wasn't alone. Ianto was here. Ianto was alive. He wasn't alone. He stroked Ianto's hair. Ianto nuzzled his face into the crook of Jack's neck. "Sorry I woke you, Ianto."

"Don't be absurd, Jack."

"I'm not being absurd. I feel terrible for imposing on you like this."

Ianto picked his head up and propped it on his hands on Jack's chest. "Jack, you stayed with me after Lisa, keeping my nightmares at bay. You stayed with me again after the cannibals, chasing my nightmares away. Let me be here for you."

"I don't want you to feel obligated to me, Ianto. Don't let me stay out of some sense of duty."

"That's not why I'm here."

"You're here because this is your flat," Jack retorted.

"Ianto, I know things between us are…"

Ianto stopped his words with a kiss. "Stop fussing. I'm here. If you need me, I'm here. Can we sleep for a couple more hours? We'll talk tomorrow, okay?" He kissed Jack again.

Jack nodded. Ianto slid off of Jack and turned over on his side, pulling Jack with him. He pulled Jack’s arm around his body and scooted back into Jack's chest. Jack held him close and breathed in his scent. Ianto moved closer against Jack. Jack felt his body start to respond to Ianto. "Stop wiggling, Ianto, or you're not getting any more sleep tonight."

Ianto chuckled. "Give me another hour or two, and I'm all yours."

Jack smiled. "I'll hold you to it."
Ianto awoke early the next morning to an empty bed. He looked around and saw a sheet of paper folded on the pillow Jack had been sleeping on. He opened it and read:

Ianto,

I would like to take you up on that date you promised me. I want to make it formal and official and all that, so here goes:

Mr. Jones,

Would you do me the honor of dining with me this evening? (Rift permitting). I will pick you up at 20:00 hours.

Captain Jack Harkness

p.s. Take the day off and rest up for our date. :-)

Ianto laughed out loud. Jack was really inane sometimes. However, he couldn't deny the warm feeling in the pit of his stomach. He lay back down in bed and closed his eyes again. He might as well get some more sleep while he could.

Ianto spent most of the day lounging around his flat, grateful for the time off. He needed a little time for reflection. He had wanted to be alone last night because he was embarrassed by his emotional outburst. He didn't want Jack to know how much he cared for him. He didn't really want to admit it to himself. But he realized that Jack was still suffering from whatever had happened to him while he was away, and he knew he had to be there for Jack. He couldn't stand to see him suffer. He had intended to guard himself against falling for Jack again, but it seemed that he was fighting a losing battle.

He couldn't deny that he was excited about his date with Jack. He was having problems deciding what to wear. He knew Jack liked him in suits, but he wore suits every day. He wanted to mark this night as something different, something outside of Torchwood. He finally settled on black trousers and dress shoes with a burgundy, well fitted cashmere jumper and a black leather jacket. He looked discerningly at his reflection in the mirror. Frowning slightly, he arranged his hair with a little more casual disarray that he usually wore it at work. I'm always so formal at Torchwood. He sighed and begun pacing around his flat.

At 8:00pm sharp, his doorbell rang. He opened the door with his heart beating in his throat. Jack stood on Ianto's doorstep with his hands in his trouser pockets. He had on his greatcoat as usual, and he was wearing what was secretly Ianto's favorite outfit. He was attired in black trousers, a dark blue shirt and a black waistcoat with a fob watch chain visible in the pocket. Ianto felt his stomach turn over. Jack looked very sexy. Jack eyed him up and down appreciatively. "Ianto Jones, you look gorgeous."
Ianto felt himself start to blush. "Thanks, Jack. So do you."

Ianto was suddenly struck by how odd his life had become. Never in a million years would he have thought that he would be telling a man that he looked gorgeous. Never in a million years would he have thought that he would be going out on a date with a man and be so excited about it. Never in a million years would he have thought he would be sleeping with a man. Life was really strange. He chuckled to himself.

"What's funny?" asked Jack, taking him by the arm and leading him towards the SUV.

"No one expects the Spanish Inquisition," Ianto quipped.

"Yeah, you really don't want to mess with those guys. Nasty bunch. But what does the Spanish Inquisition have to do with it?" asked Jack, holding the door of the SUV open for Ianto.

"Pop culture reference, Jack. Monty Python? How long have you been living in this country?"

Jack shrugged. He got into the SUV and started the engine. "I don't get out much. World to save and all that. Still don't get it."

"I was momentarily amused by the strange turn my life has taken. I'd always considered myself straight."

"You people and your quaint little labels," Jack said, shaking his head.

"I've heard you say that before. What does it mean?"

"Where I'm from, there's no such thing as straight or gay or bisexual or any of that rubbish," Jack said impatiently.

Ianto shrugged. "Must be nice."

"Yeah, it is. Imagine you got sucked through time and landed in the Late Prehistoric Era, right around the Iron Age. How would the people there seem to you?"

Ianto was silent as he pondered this. What must it be like for Jack? What was three thousand years in the future like? How primitive did they seem to him? Was Jack homesick? Did he want to go back to his own time? All Ianto could say was, "Wow."

"Yeah," Jack agreed.

Jack parked the SUV outside a restaurant with big windows looking out over the bay. "We didn't get a chance for Italian last night. Hope you don't mind. I love this place."

Jack jumped out of the car and had Ianto's door open before Ianto had unfastened his seatbelt. They walked into the restaurant. It definitely had a romantic feel – the lights were dim and there were few patrons. Ianto glanced at Jack nervously, but Jack was grinning as he looked around the room. They were seated in a secluded nook with a window that overlooked the bay. The waiter came by, and Jack ordered a bottle of wine.

Ianto was starting to feel anxious. What if they couldn't think of anything to say to each other? What if there was only silence for the entire meal? He had numerous questions he wanted to ask Jack, but he didn't like to pry into Jack's past. He always felt that if Jack wanted to tell him something about himself, he would do so in his own time. The waiter returned and went through the usual pomp and circumstance of pouring out the wine. When he withdrew, Ianto took a sip. It was delicious. Jack
looked at him and asked, "Do you have any family, Ianto? There's no family listed in your file and no one listed as next of kin."

Ianto was taken aback. Of all the things he had anticipated Jack asking him, that wasn't one of them. "Both my parents are dead. I have an older sister here in Cardiff. She's married to a complete wanker and they have two kids, a boy and a girl."

Jack looked surprised. "I never knew. How come it wasn't in your file?"

Ianto sighed. "Lisa. At the time, I thought that if everything went to shit, I didn't want any connections made to my family. I wanted them well out of it. I have a solicitor who knows to turn everything I own over to my sister if he doesn't hear from me every month."

Jack stared at him with such a dumbfounded look on his face that Ianto almost laughed. "You are always full of surprises," Jack said with what sounded like admiration.

Ianto just shrugged his shoulders. "How come you never updated your next of kin records after Lisa?" Jack asked.

"Never really thought about it. Like I said, I have the solicitor who will take care of my estate should anything happen to me. I suppose I could put him as my next of kin…” Ianto shrugged again.

"What's your sister's name?"

"Why the sudden interest in my family, Jack?"

"I just realized that there's still so much I don't know about you."

"The feeling's mutual," Ianto said under his breath.

Jack looked hard at him. "Is that what's bothering you?"

Ianto sighed and rubbed his forehead. This was already getting difficult. "What do you mean, Jack?"

Jack just looked at him. Then he said, "Okay, how 'bout this? I'll answer a question of yours for every question of mine that you answer. There are some things that I can't tell you because of timelines, but I'll answer what I can."

Ianto considered. There were things that he wanted to know about Jack, but there were also things that he didn't want Jack to know about him. "What?" asked Jack, noticing his hesitation. "More Cybermen in the basement? Should I be worried?"

Ianto half smiled. "No, it's not that, Jack. I'm a private person. I figured that you of all people would understand that."

"I do understand that, Ianto. That's why I offered to answer your questions in exchange. Quid Pro Quo. I won't force you to confide in me unless I give you something in return. Fair enough?"

Ianto looked at Jack and then nodded. What the hell, he thought.

"You never ask me anything about myself. How come? Everyone else never stops asking me questions. You're different."

"Is that your first question?" Ianto asked with a suppressed grin.

"If you like."
"I just figure you'll tell me what you want to tell me. Other things, I find out on my own. I'm good at research."

"That you are. Is there anything you're not good at Mr. Jones?"

"That's two questions," Ianto admonished.

Jack smiled at him. The waiter came by to take their order. As they hadn't even looked at the menus yet, they sent him away. They perused the menu and placed their order when the waiter returned, both of them ordering pasta and salads. After the waiter retreated again, Jack said, "Okay. Your turn. Ask away."

"Where were you born?" asked Ianto as he took a sip of his wine.

"On the Boeshane Peninsula. It's a... well, it will be a human colony in another solar system. Technically it doesn't exist yet. And before you can ask, it was colonized by Americans – hence the accent." Jack looked thoughtful, "At least, they were once Americans. I mean, they're Americans now, but they won't be when they colonize..." He shook his head as if to clear it. "You see! Timelines. It gets very confusing," he said shrugging a shoulder.

Ianto nodded thoughtfully, his brain processing and storing this latest piece of information he had on Jack Harkness. After a beat, Jack asked, "Are you close to your sister?"

"Not really. We're very different," Ianto answered and then moved quickly onto his next question. "Did you have family on the Boeshane Peninsula?"

"Yes. A mother, father and brother," said Jack. Then he asked, "What happened to your parents?"

"My mother died with I was twelve and my father when I was seventeen. How old were you when you became immortal?" asked Ianto, slightly amused. This is like a tennis match.

"Thirty-five," answered Jack. "How did your parents die?"

Ianto paused. "My father had a heart attack and my mother..." he drifted off, thinking of his mother.

"Your mother?" Jack pressed.

Ianto looked at Jack. "Pass."

"Pass?" asked Jack, looking bemused.

"Pass," Ianto confirmed.

Ianto took another sip of his wine. He definitely wasn't going there tonight. They were both silent for a few minutes. Jack picked up his wine, looking contemplatively at the contents in the glass. He took a sip. Then he said, "So do I get another since you passed?"

Ianto waved his hand slightly, indicating to Jack that he could ask another question. "What's your sister's name?"

"Rhiannon. Her husband is Johnny and the kids are called Mica and David."

Jack nodded. Then Ianto asked, without first thinking it through, "Who's Grey?"

Jack put his glass of wine down and closed his eyes. Ianto could see an internal struggle going on inside Jack. Ianto started to feel slightly ill. Great, another one of Jack's exes. Ianto didn't think he
could take any more of them dropping in. Ianto took another sip of wine and expected Jack to pass, so he was surprised when Jack answered him in an almost a whisper. "My brother."

Ianto was stunned. Obviously there was some story there, but Jack would tell him about it when and if he felt like it. He wouldn't push. Ianto was all too familiar with family skeletons lurking in the closet. The waiter appeared with their salads. They ate in silence for a few minutes. Jack asked, "Do you keep in touch with any friends from university?"

"Not really. I sort of had to sever all contact when Torchwood recruited me. I had a lot of friends at Torchwood One…” Ianto faltered.

Jack nodded and stretched out his hand, brushing Ianto's fingertips. Ianto looked at him and gave him a small smile. They entwined their fingers across the table. Jack caressed Ianto's thumb with his. "Can you tell me about the Time Agency?" Ianto asked.

"Not a lot, sorry. I can tell you that I used to work for them. My Vortex Manipulator is a time traveling device, but it doesn't work anymore. It burned out after I landed here in 1869."

The waiter came to remove their salad plates, and Ianto jumped at the sight of him, quickly withdrawing his hand from Jack's. Jack raised his eyebrows at Ianto. After the waiter withdrew, Jack asked, "Are you ashamed to be seen with me, Ianto?"

"I… no, Jack… I… I'm sorry." He took Jack's hand again. "I'm sorry. What can I say? I'm your equivalent of a Neanderthal."

Jack laughed. "Hmmm, caveman role playing. I like it. Will you wear an animal skin thong and drag me through the Hub by my hair?"

Ianto burst out laughing at the image. He couldn't help it. "Jack, you're incorrigible you are," he choked out, still laughing.

"But I look good!" Jack grinned.

Ianto wanted to roll his eyes, but he was still chuckling over the thought of dragging Jack through the Hub by his hair and possibly beating on his own chest for good measure. The thought sent him into another fit of laughter. His laughing fit finally died down as the waiter returned with their main courses. Ianto purposefully squeezed Jack's hand tighter as the waiter placed their dinner in front of them. He grinned at Jack, and Jack smiled in return. They started on their meals. The food was fantastic. Jack moaned as he ate. Ianto was completely aroused by the sounds coming from Jack's mouth. "Jack, tone it down, or I'll have to fuck you right here," Ianto said in a low voice.

Jack positively leered at him. "Promise?"

This time Ianto got out his eye roll. They he looked appreciatively at Jack. "If you're really, really good all through dinner, I promise I'll make it worth your while."

Jack's face lit up. "Really?"

"Really. Now behave yourself."

Jack saluted him and began to eat in a very prim and proper fashion. Ianto laughed and shook his head. Jack winked at him. "It's my turn, is it?" asked Ianto. "When did you first realize you couldn't die?"

"1892, Ellis Island. A man shot me through the heart. Were you planning on marrying Lisa?"
Ianto was silent. He felt a mild ache in his stomach, but it was nowhere near the raging pain he used to feel. "Yes," he answered simply. Then he asked quickly, "Were you ever married?"

"Yes," answered Jack. "Do you ever wish that you could get away from Torchwood, have a normal life, maybe marry and have kids?"

Ianto looked him in the eyes, and said with certainty, "No."

"Are you sure, Ianto?"

"I'm positive, Jack. And that's two questions."

Jack didn't smile, and he didn't look convinced. *I'm yours, Jack.* Ianto thought to himself. And all at once, he knew it was true. He wasn't ready to admit that to Jack, though. He could scarcely admit it to himself. Instead he said, "Torchwood is my life, Jack. I wouldn't have it any other way."

Jack smiled and took his hand again. "You're so young, Ianto."

"I know. You're quite the cradle robber, aren't you?" He smiled at Jack.

Jack frowned. "Sometimes I forget that. Sometimes, you seem so much older…"

Ianto didn't want Jack to turn maudlin. He said teasingly, "Well, it does take a certain amount of maturity to put up with your antics."

"It's all part of my charm," Jack replied, leaning back and picking up his fork again.

Ianto snorted and turned back to the food in front of him. When they finished dinner, they sat sipping their wine and smiling at each other. "Do you want dessert?" Jack asked.

Ianto looked Jack up and down, "Oh yeah, I definitely want dessert."

Jack feigned outrage, "It's not appropriate to proposition someone on a first date! I'm trying to be a proper gentleman."

"Ah," said Ianto, playing along. "A proper gentleman. Right. I take it Naked Hide and Seek is out of the question then?"

Jack signaled the waiter. "Check please!"

Ianto grinned.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my gifted beta riftintime.

Jack paid the bill, waving aside Ianto's attempts to pay his share, saying, "When you take me out on a date, you can pay."

"Oh, you're assuming I'm going to take you out on a date, then?" Ianto teased.


Ianto looked surprised. Jack smiled at him. He had wanted to tell Ianto that... he didn't know what he wanted to tell Ianto. He had hoped to re-earn Ianto's confidence by letting Ianto ask him questions about himself – questions that he usually avoided answering. Instead they had asked and answered each other's questions in a rapid-fire succession, both uncomfortable with discussing personal matters. He wanted Ianto to trust him again. Jack had already told him that he came back for him. Had he not made it clear that Ianto meant something to him? Why was he so bad at this? How did he make it clear to Ianto that they were... that he was... Damn, why is this so hard?

They walked back to the SUV in silence and drove towards the Hub. Jack wanted to tell Ianto that he was serious about them. Ianto was more to him that a part-time shag, and he never wanted to take Ianto for granted again. Even if he tried to, he'd never get away with it. Owen, Tosh, and Gwen had all confronted him individually, telling him, in their own unique way, that if he messed with Ianto again, he would have to answer to them. Though Jack had no intention of leading Ianto on, he had been touched by the team's concern for Ianto and their desire to protect him. Jack wondered if Ianto knew just how much he was loved and respected by the team. Jack wondered if Ianto knew how much he, himself, cared for him. How do I tell him?

Jack knew that he could put down some of his mental barriers, and Ianto would sense how he felt. But Jack wasn't quite ready for that. He wasn't sure if his feelings were returned by Ianto. He knew that Ianto took care of him, was loyal to Torchwood, and believed in his leadership, but what was he to Ianto as a man, as a lover? Jack had behaved badly toward him. Has he forgiven me? He parked the SUV in the garage and they got out. Jack was lost in his thoughts. He felt like they still needed to talk, but he wasn't sure what they needed to say to each other. "We're waking Tommy the day after tomorrow," said Ianto as they descended into the Hub.

"Oh yeah, that's right." Jack had forgotten all about it. Luckily he had Ianto to remember these things for him.

"Tosh will be happy," added Ianto.

"Should we worry about her, having a thing for a frozen soldier from 1918?"

Ianto frowned slightly. "I don't think so. Tosh is smart enough to know what she's getting into. Besides," Ianto smiled at him. "Nobody's perfect."

Jack was distracted by thoughts of Tosh as the cogwheel door rolled open. They walked into the
Hub. Jack continued his thoughts aloud, "But Tosh falls so easily. Look at Mary…"

Ianto shrugged, "Still… 'tis better to have loved and lost, and all that," Ianto mused.

Jack looked at Ianto, remembering how he had lost Lisa and how utterly devastated Ianto had been. He wondered if Ianto meant what he said. "Do you believe that, Ianto?"

"Do you?" Ianto shot quickly back at him.

Jack thought about all of the lovers he had outlived. He thought of the pain of watching them grow old, or seeing them die before their time. He knew that one day, Ianto would… He didn't want to think about it. He looked away from Ianto. "It's different for me."

Jack felt Ianto's eyes on him. "Is it?"

Jack was saved from answering by the Rift alarm sounding. They went to the nearest computer. "Weevil sighting in Splot," said Ianto, toggling the computer screen.

Jack groaned. "Splot again? What is it with Splot?"

Ianto chuckled. "Come on, Jack. We could do with a good Weevil hunt to pull us out of this somber mood we've been in all night."

Jack grinned. Ianto, Weevils, adrenaline, perhaps a post-hunt shag… didn't sound half bad. "Weevil hunting it is."

Jack and Ianto ran back down to the SUV and drove to Splot. They parked the SUV in a wooded area and stocked up on Weevil spray and tranquilizers. Then they took off after the Weevil. Jack realized that they worked really well together. Jack was a little less guarded around Ianto when they were on a hunt, and he found that Ianto could sense his next move and act accordingly. They easily got the Weevil cornered, and Jack distracted it while Ianto got it sedated. They hauled it back to the SUV and shoved it unceremoniously into the boot.

They were both sweating and hopped up on adrenaline as they climbed back into the SUV. They took one look at each other and then they were snogging like teenagers, pulling at each other's clothes, desperate to reach bare skin. Jack pulled Ianto's jumper off and started on the buttons of his shirt while Ianto simultaneously worked on his.

When Jack got to Ianto's last button, Ianto broke away and climbed into the back seat, pulling Jack with him. Ianto reached into Jack's pocket and pulled out a bottle of lube. He pressed it into Jack's hand and make quick work of unzipping Jack's trousers and pulling out his cock. Then he kicked off his shoes, and took off his own trousers and briefs. He straddled Jack, hovering over him, kissing his neck and then sucking on his ear. Jack, working with his arms around Ianto, got the bottle of lube opened and spread some on his fingers. He inserted a finger inside Ianto, who groaned appreciatively and pushed back against his hand. Jack inserted a second finger, and Ianto kissed him hungrily, his tongue doing enticing things to Jack's. Jack inserted a third finger, and Ianto leaned back, moaning and riding Jack's hand. Jack was so hard that his cock ached. Ianto looked him in the eyes and said, "Fuck me, Jack."

Jack quickly removed his hand and lubed up his cock. Ianto arranged himself over Jack and then pushed himself down onto Jack in one hard thrust, yelling out as he did so. Ianto paused for a moment and kissed Jack, running his hands through his hair. Jack kissed him back and resisted the urge to thrust into Ianto, letting him take the lead. Ianto started to move slowly on top of Jack, shifting his angle until he called out, "Oh God!"
Jack grinned and kissed him again. Ianto started to writhe on top of him, making the most delicious noises Jack had ever heard. Ianto leaned back and grabbed his own cock, stroking himself. Jack was enthralled with the vision before him. Ianto's head was thrown back, his shirt was hanging open revealing his bare chest and he was riding Jack with his own cock in his hand. Ianto looked so beautiful and so wanton, that Jack felt his climax coming all too soon. He tried to hold back, but the sight before him was so erotic that he was unable to control himself. Ianto began to move faster, thrusting himself harder onto Jack, his hand working faster on his cock. Jack knew Ianto was close. He tried to hold on for a few more seconds. Ianto started to moan loudly, and Jack lost control. With one good thrust he was cumming deep inside Ianto as he simultaneously felt Ianto's cum hit his stomach.

Ianto collapsed on top of Jack and Jack put his arms around him. Ianto started to laugh. Jack grinned. He loved the sound of Ianto's laughter. He wished he could make Ianto laugh all of the time. "What's so funny," he asked, holding Ianto tighter.

"We just shagged in a car parked in the woods like a couple of teenagers. Except we have an unconscious Weevil in the boot."

Jack laughed. "Gotta love Torchwood."

Jack kissed Ianto's neck, sucking gently on it. Then he kissed along Ianto's jaw and landed on his lips. He kissed him softly. Then he leaned back and shrugged out of his shirt. He pulled off his T-shirt and used it to clean first Ianto and then himself. They started to dress themselves and laughed again when they noticed how foggy the windows had become. Jack looked at Ianto with affection, "I like Weevil hunting with you."

Ianto grinned, "I bet you do."

Jack reached out a hand and stroked Ianto's cheek. "Stay with me tonight?" he asked softly.

Ianto leaned in and kissed him. "Yes, Jack."
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my perspicacious beta riftintime.

Jack and Ianto drove back to the Hub and got the Weevil into the vaults. Jack went into his office while Ianto wrote up the report. When Ianto brought Jack the paperwork to sign, Jack pulled out a bottle of scotch and two glasses. He indicated the chair across from him, and Ianto sat. He handed Ianto a glass of scotch. Ianto took a sip, then looked at Jack and said, "Thanks for the date."

"It didn't go exactly how I planned, but as Torchwood dates go, not bad," Jack smiled at Ianto.

"How exactly did you plan it?" asked Ianto, raising an eyebrow at Jack.

Jack grinned. "Well, first I was going to make some small talk. Then I was going to charm you with my scintillating conversational skills. Then I was going to astonish you with tales of my courageousness. Then I was going to take you to a movie and grope you in the back row. You know, be a proper gentleman."

Ianto laughed. "And that's what proper gentlemen do, is it? Grope their dates in the back row of the cinema?"

Jack gave his best Harkness grin. "It's always worked for me."

Ianto snorted. "I bet it has."

Jack considered the young man sitting across from him. He asked, "How come you don't like to talk about yourself, Ianto?"

"How come you don't?" Ianto shot back.

Jack answered him honestly. Maybe if he was candid with Ianto, Ianto would open up to him a bit more. "There's a lot I can't tell people, and even if I can, it just gets complicated. Too much explaining. You should try to draw out my timeline some day. Get's pretty messy."

Ianto looked serious. "Oh, I've tried. You should see my diary."

Jack was surprised. "You keep a diary? Since when?"

Ianto shrugged. "Since you left."

Jack's eyes opened wide. "Can I read it?"

"No," he said with an unreadable expression.

Ianto stood and headed towards the ladder to Jack's bedroom saying, "I need a shower."

Jack was still thinking about Ianto's diary, wondering how he could possibly lay his hands on it, when he heard Ianto call out. "Coming?"
Jack looked up to see Ianto's head disappearing into the hatch. "Oh yeah!" Jack said as he threw back the rest of his scotch and jumped up from his desk. *Operation: Read Ianto's Diary* would have to wait.

They got into the shower, kissing and fondling each other until they both came again. Then they washed and got into Jack's bed. Jack wrapped himself around Ianto and kissed his neck. "Jack, tell me about the Doctor. What's he like?"

Jack paused, considering. "You don't have to talk about him if you don't want to," Ianto said, nuzzling his face into Jack's neck.

Jack pulled him closer and kissed the top of his head. "No, it's not that. I was just trying to figure out how to explain him to someone who's never met him. The Doctor is astounding, brilliant, funny, unfathomable, full of awe and wonder at the universe, and always getting himself and his companions into trouble. Everything with him is a fantastic adventure, and he always tries to find a diplomatic way to resolve any conflict – no matter how dire the circumstances or how vicious the alien race. He hates violence and refuses to carry a weapon. His only words to anyone or anything that commits an act of brutality are, 'I forgive you.'"

"What you said to Owen," Ianto mused.

Jack remembered forgiving Owen after Abaddon. He said honestly, "It's what I learned from the Doctor. He always sees the good in everyone. He won't allow anyone to use weapons around him if he can help it. He orders me to stand down every time I take a gun out, even if our lives are threatened."

"You take orders from him then?" asked Ianto, slightly amused.

"Everyone takes orders from him. He's a Time Lord. The last of the Time Lords…"

Jack stiffened as he remembered the Master. He thought about telling Ianto about the Master, but he wasn't ready to talk about it yet. It was still too vivid in Jack's mind. He continued, "He only has his TARDIS, a sonic screwdriver, and his brain. His magnificent brain…"

Jack kissed Ianto's head again and ran his fingers through Ianto's hair. "Being with him… you discover the best version of yourself. I was… I was not a good person when I met him. I'd left the Time Agency, and I was angry and bitter and only out for myself. I was a conman. He changed me – him and Rose. He made me want to be a better man. I *did* become a better man because of him."

"You love him." It was a statement from Ianto, not a question.

"I do," Jack replied honestly.

"So why didn't you stay with him? Why come back here?"

"You, the team, Torchwood, and the Rift. In that order. This is where I belong."

Jack kissed Ianto's forehead and stroked his hair. "Tell me about one of your adventures with the Doctor," said Ianto, yawning slightly.

"Sounds like you're going to fall asleep."

"They you can finish the story another night," Ianto said groggily.

Jack smiled. He began to tell Ianto about his first meeting with the Doctor and Rose. He told Ianto
about the first time he ever saw Rose Tyler, hanging from a barrage balloon in the middle of the London Blitz wearing a Union Jack T-shirt. He got up to the part about dancing with Rose on the deck of his Chula spacecraft docked outside Big Ben when Jack realized that Ianto was asleep. He stroked Ianto's hair and watched him sleep for a few minutes, thinking about how much he cared for this young man. And then he felt afraid.

He remembered Ianto quoting Tennyson earlier in the evening. *Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. Do I believe that?* He would inevitably lose Ianto one day. He couldn't imagine the pain that he would suffer. As it was, he had to send Ianto out into the field almost every day, knowing that Ianto might not come back. He looked at Ianto lying in his arms. Would he give up these moments, knowing that he would inevitably suffer his loss? He caressed Ianto's face. It was the same struggle he'd had with himself over and over again for the past century. *Do I let myself fall for him?* Just then Ianto murmured something which sounded like Welsh and then said clearly, "Jack."

Jack smiled. He stroked Ianto's face again. *It's too late, Jack. You're already there. Ianto Jones has been under your skin since the day you met him.* He leaned down and kissed Ianto's lips softly. Then he carefully extricated himself from Ianto and got out of bed. He knew that sleep would elude him tonight. He dressed and climbed up the ladder. He needed a rooftop. He needed to think.

Jack drove to the highest building in Cardiff and climbed to the roof. He stood, looking out over the city and thought about his words to John Hart. *These people, this planet, all the beauty you could never see. That's what I come back for.* He thought about the people he had loved and lost over his unnaturally long life. Could he do it again? Could he suffer through Ianto's inevitable death?

He felt his stomach clench tightly at the thought, and bile rose in his throat. It was so painful that he almost decided that he couldn't bear to lose another lover. Then, with a shudder, he remembered his time aboard the Valiant. It was his memories of Ianto that got him through the worst kind of agony, and he knew, all at once, that he wouldn't give those up for anything. Ianto was worth the pain he would inevitably cause him. He had to let Ianto know, somehow, what he meant to him. He didn't want Ianto to doubt him anymore. Ianto's life was too short for that.

He headed back to the Hub and to Ianto, asleep in his bed.
The next day was a rather slow one, and the team sat around talking and laughing with each other for most of the morning. Tosh was full of nervous anticipation, and Ianto spent a large part of his day entertaining her and trying to keep her mind off Tommy. He even brought her down to the archives to show her some of the more interesting items he'd discovered. She was only half paying attention to him, glancing surreptitiously at her wristwatch every few minutes. Finally, Ianto turned and looked at her. "You know that's not going to make the time go any faster, right?"

Tosh frowned. "I'm sorry, Ianto. I'm completely distracted aren't I? Let's talk about you. What's going on with you and Jack?"

Ianto shrugged. He did love Tosh and wanted to distract her, but he wasn't sure how much he wanted to talk about him and Jack. "We went on a date last night," he said after some consideration.

Tosh's eyes opened wide. She dusted off a low filing cabinet and sat down. "Jack Harkness out on a date with Ianto Jones? Sit down here, and tell me everything." She patted the cabinet next to her.

Ianto couldn't help but smile at Tosh. She was really adorable. He hoped she would have a good time with Tommy tomorrow. She deserved it. He dusted off the filing cabinet next to hers and sat down. "Well… we went for Italian."

"Is that all?" Tosh asked skeptically.

Ianto shrugged. "He asked me a lot of questions about myself."

"Really?" Tosh looked surprised. "There's things he doesn't know about you?"

Ianto thought for a minute. "A lot of things, I imagine."

Tosh said with admiration. "Ianto Jones, you man of mystery! Did you tell him anything?"

"Only when he offered to tell me things about himself in exchange."

"Ooh, find out anything juicy?" asked Tosh, looking excited.

Ianto laughed. "No Tosh, nothing of interest. Just mundane stuff. I wasn't in the mood for a heart to heart."

"Jack Harkness offered to tell you some of his secrets and you didn't take advantage? What's the matter with you?" she practically hollered at him.

"Dunno, Tosh. I knew that if I got too personal, he would ask me personal questions, and I'm not sure I want to go there with him."

Tosh looked confused. "How come?"
Ianto looked away from Tosh. "I'm not really sure where I stand with him."

Tosh looked dubious. "Ianto, he told us all that he came back for you."

"He said all of you," Ianto said, still not looking at Tosh.

"I was standing right there, Ianto. He looked right into your eyes and said, I came back for you. Then he looked at the rest of us and said all of you. It was very romantic."

Ianto snorted. Tosh bumped his shoulder with hers and said, "Don't you snort at me Ianto Jones. I know what I saw. I know what I see every day. Jack is completely smitten with you. He's always watching you. Even before he left with the Doctor. I just didn't know, before, that you had any interest in him."

"I didn't mean to…"

"Yeah, well, we don't always get to choose, do we?" asked Tosh.

"No," Ianto said seriously. "We don't."

They were quiet for a few minutes, both lost in their own thoughts. Then Tosh said, "So what happened after dinner?"

"Weevil hunt."

"Oh, Ianto, I'm sorry," Tosh said with disappointment.

"No, it was quite fun, really," Ianto grinned impishly. "Especially the shagging in the SUV afterwards."

Tosh squealed. "With the Weevil in the back?"

"With the Weevil in the back," Ianto confirmed, grinning at her.

"You are so naughty!" Tosh said, laughing.

Ianto sighed in mock exasperation. "So Jack keeps telling me."

"No wonder he's totally enamored by you. You're gorgeous, brilliant, brave, mysterious and kinky. Everything that Jack admires."

Ianto bumped her shoulder. "Stop it, Tosh. You're making me blush."

"What are friends for?" She bumped his shoulder back.

They smiled at each other. "So, what are you and Tommy going to do tomorrow, Miss Sato? I expect you to be on your best behavior. Do I need to chaperone you two?"

It was Tosh's turn to blush. "He's too young for me."

Ianto laughed outright. "You're talking to the bloke who just had a date with an immortal who's over 170 years old."

"Wow, Ianto. I never thought about it like that. You're right. Jack's far too old for you. I'm going to have to put my foot down." She grinned at him.
They both looked up as they heard Jack's voice calling, "Ianto? Ian-tooo?"

"He just can't keep away from you, can he?" She bumped his shoulder one last time. Then she called out, "We're here, Jack!"

Jack appeared around the corner of the archives. "What are you two doing down here?"

"Planning world domination," Ianto deadpanned.

Tosh nodded her agreement with a serious look on her face.

Jack looked at the two of them, both gazing innocently back at him. "I wouldn't put it past either of you. It's always the quiet ones."

Ianto said, "What do you need, Jack?"

"Nothing, I just wondered where you two had gotten to."

"Here we are," said Tosh, waving her hand dramatically around the archives.

Jack dusted off the cabinet next to Ianto and sat down. "So Jack," said Tosh, casually. "Weevil hunt last night?"

Ianto glared at her, and she smiled devilishly at him. "Oh, yeah," said Jack, grinning. "You should have seen Ianto in action. It was hot!"

Ianto elbowed Jack in the ribs, and Jack laughed, putting his hand on Ianto's back and caressing him softly. "Never had a Weevil hunt like it." He winked at her.

"I'm sure the Weevil didn't either," murmured Tosh.

"It was unconscious!" Ianto exclaimed.

Both Tosh and Jack laughed. Tosh hopped down off the cabinet. "I'll leave you two to reminisce. I'm going to see what Owen's up to."

Tosh walked away, giving them a parting grin as she rounded a corner and was out of sight. Jack put his hand on Ianto's knee. "Ianto Jones, did you kiss and tell?"

"I learned from the best," Ianto said snidely.

Jack looked up, contemplating. "That's true. I am the best."

Ianto rolled his eyes, and Jack grinned at him. "What are you doing tonight, Ianto?"

"Why, is there another apocalypse to avert?"

"Shut your mouth! No, I was just wondering if you wanted to order in Chinese, maybe play a little Naked Hide and Seek. We never got a chance last night."

"Well, I'll have to check my schedule…" Ianto whipped out his PDA and started scrolling through the menu.

Jack raised his eyebrows. "Oh, right. I have a date with… well…” Ianto shrugged. "I guess I can always reschedule. You are my boss after all."
"You have a date?" Jack asked with some anger.

Ianto just smiled mildly at him. "Who do you have a date with?" Jack asked, his voice rising. Ianto's smile turned into a grin. Jack frowned. "You're taking the piss aren't you?"

"Yes, Jack. I'm taking the piss. You know, British colloquialisms sound strange in your American accent."

Jack looked uncomfortable. He started to babble, "Ianto, I never asked… I suppose that it was wrong of me to assume… I mean… I was gone almost four months in your time… If there's… If you've met someone."

The Rift alarm sounded, and they heard Tosh call out, "Jack!"

Jack glanced quickly at Ianto, and then they hopped off the filing cabinets and dashed up to the main area of the Hub. They spent the rest of the evening, and into the early hours of the morning, trying to convince a friendly but dense alien species that their spacecraft was in a no fly zone and that they were in direct violation of the Shadow Proclamation. It took the team hours to deal with them, and by time everyone went home, it was past 2:00am. As the cogwheel door rolled shut after Gwen, Tosh and Owen had departed, Jack wrapped his arms around Ianto and said, "Alone at last."

Jack's mobile rang and he looked at the screen. He flipped it open and said, "Martha Jones, voice of a nightingale."

Ianto retreated to let him take his call in private. He sat down on the sofa, and the next thing he knew, Jack was shaking him awake and half carrying him down into his bunker. Ianto started to undress, still half asleep. Jack finally took over and got him out of his clothes and into bed. A moment later Ianto felt Jack wrap himself around him. "Architeuthis," Ianto said as his eyes closed again.

"What did you call me?" asked Jack, laughing.

Ianto yawned. "I've decided that you're bigger and clingier than an octopus. You're a giant squid."

"Does that make you Captain Nemo?"

Ianto opened one eye and glanced around Jack's bedroom. "Well, it is a bit like a submarine down here."

Ianto climbed on top of Jack and kissed him, delving his tongue into Jack's mouth. He broke away and whispered, "Now that I'm up."

Jack put his hand around Ianto's cock. "Yes, yes you are," Jack said, stroking vigorously.

Jack rolled them onto their sides and kissed Ianto again. Then he spun himself around and took Ianto into his mouth. Ianto groaned as Jack slid him deep into his throat. Jack's cock was right by his head, and he took Jack into his mouth, thinking that he loved the way Jack tasted. And then he considered how odd that thought was. But as Jack worked his mouth around Ianto, all coherent thoughts fled. They sucked each other off, the vibrations from their moaning around each other's cocks adding to the pleasure.

Ianto came into Jack's mouth with Jack's still hard cock in his mouth, and Ianto thought that it was the most erotic thing that had ever happened to him. He turned his full attention onto Jack, and Jack came in his mouth moments later. They lay there, panting for a few minutes then Jack spun back around and wrapped himself around Ianto once again. "I think that was one of the things on your list
that we never got to," Jack grinned at him.

"Number nine," Ianto agreed.

"Eidetic memory, huh?"

Ianto smiled. "Something like that. What are we going to do once we get through both our lists?" Ianto asked with some trepidation. There was a part of him that was afraid that once they finished everything on those wish lists, it would be over between them.

"Make new lists, of course," Jack said and kissed him.

Ianto fell asleep wrapped in Jack's arms with a smile on his face.
Ianto woke to an empty bed. He showered and dressed, then climbed the ladder out of Jack's bedroom. Jack was sitting at his desk, reading the file on Thomas Reginald Brockless. He walked over, put a hand on Jack's shoulder and asked, "Did you sleep?"

Jack reached back and covered Ianto's hand with his. "A bit. I wanted to read Tommy's file again."

He stroked the back of Jack's head and said, "I'll get the coffee on."

Ianto went into the kitchen to make coffee and check what provisions there were for breakfast. He knew that Tommy would be hungry when he woke. Finding the cupboards empty, he decided to order the team take-away breakfast, and made a quick shopping list for a trip to Tesco. He finished brewing the coffee and filled both of their mugs. He took Jack his coffee and set it down in front of him. "I'm going to order breakfast for Tommy and the team. Any requests?"

"No," Jack smiled at him. "I trust you."

Ianto smiled back and turned to leave. "Ianto?"

Ianto turned around. "Jack?"

Jack got up from his chair and walked over to Ianto. He put his arms around him and kissed him. "That's all," Jack said, as he sat back down behind his desk. Ianto smiled as he walked out of Jack's office to make arrangements for the day.

Once Tommy was defrosted, and the team had eaten breakfast, Tosh and Tommy left to spend the day together. Gwen walked up to Ianto's desk in the Hub and sat down next to him. "Okay, Ianto, explain this to me, seriously. Jack's too evasive."

Ianto smiled at her, remembering him and Jack teasing her about Tommy that morning. He said, "Tommy was frozen by the Torchwood team in 1918 because there's something important he has to do in the future. We're just not sure when in the future."

Gwen sat for a moment, mulling it over. "Torchwood in 1918. I wonder what they were like."

"There are photos in the archives," Ianto said helpfully.

"Really? Can I see them?" Gwen sounded excited, and Ianto smiled at her.

"Sure. Follow me," he replied, getting up from his desk.

Ianto got the Torchwood photos out of the archives and set up the light box. He sat Gwen down and put up the transparency of Gerald and Harriet. He leaned over her shoulder, studying the photograph. "He's a bit of alright," Gwen said, indicating Gerald Carter.
Ianto smirked. "He's the boss."

Gwen looked at him, smiling. "Nothing changes."

Ianto smiled at her, thinking about Jack, and Gwen chuckled. He wanted to change the subject, so he said, "She's alright too. Harriet Derbyshire."

"I wonder what happened to her," Gwen mused.

Ianto looked at Gwen. "She died, a year after that was taken. Twenty-six years old."

"So young," Gwen said, shaking her head sympathetically.

No one survives very long at Torchwood, he thought to himself. Aloud he said, "They all were."

He picked up a photo of the 1918 Torchwood team and looked at it. They had all died young. Lisa was twenty-six years old when she died. He felt his heart sinking. Lisa... "Nothing changes," he whispered, sadly.

Gwen got up suddenly and walked out of the room. Ianto looked at her in surprise. "Where are you going?"

"Saint Teilos hospital. And bloody cheer up will you?"

Ianto didn't respond. "She's right, he thought. I'm getting maudlin. I need to stop brooding. Maybe I'll go and see what Jack's up to."

He made some fresh coffee and found Jack, who was sitting in his office, going over reports. He put Jack's mug down in front of him and sat down opposite, sipping his own coffee. Jack looked up, smiled briefly at him and then went back to his reports. Ianto sat for a few minutes in silence, thinking about the photos of the old Torchwood team and about how everyone who worked for Torchwood died young. I'll probably die young.

He glanced at Jack who was studying the paperwork in front of him. Jack had been at Torchwood in 1918. He had known Harriet Derbyshire and Gerald Carter. He had been there when they died. How many people has Jack watched die? How many friends and lovers has he lost? He remembered the excruciating pain he felt at Lisa's death. How many times has Jack suffered that pain? Oh God, how can he stand it? He stared at Jack, and then he understood. Jack's behavior suddenly made sense to him. He doesn't let himself fall in love, that's how he stands it.

Ianto's thoughts became muddled and disordered. He felt himself begin to panic. He'll never love me. He couldn't breathe. I can't do this anymore. He needed space. He got up quickly and practically ran out of Jack's office. He made his way into the archives amidst a torrent of emotions. I need to end this because... because I... He froze in place as realization dawned on him like a pail of ice water had been thrown in his face. He finally grasped what he'd been denying to himself for so long. I'm falling in love with him.

He stood dazed and motionless as comprehension emerged. Oh my God, I'm falling in love with him, and I can't let that happen. Panic rose up inside him and threatened to break free. He'll never love me back. I'm going to die doing this job, loving someone who will never love me back. I can't do this. He turned to his work in an attempt to settle his racing thoughts. He busied himself in one of the darkest corners of the archives, trying to clear his mind. He had just regained control when he heard Jack calling out, "Ian-toooo?"

He shut his eyes briefly, steeling his nerves, and then opened them again. "I'm here, Jack," he called
out.

He felt warm arms around his waist and soft lips on his neck. "Why did you run off?" asked Jack, pulling Ianto close to his body.

Ianto closed his eyes again. He needed to end this thing with Jack, but now was not the time. "Figured you were busy," he murmured.

Jack spun him around and kissed him softly on the lips. Ianto's heart started pounding. I can't do this, he thought, pulling away. Jack grinned at him and said, "I'm free now."

Jack kissed him again with more vigor. Ianto stiffened, wanting to break free, but as Jack opened his mouth, seeking his tongue, Ianto felt himself relent. Jack slid his hands down Ianto's back and grasped his arse, pulling Ianto's hips against his. What am I doing, he thought as his body started to respond to Jack.

Ianto was almost relieved when Jack's mobile phone rang. Jack made a growling noise, but pulled it out of his pocket and looked at the screen. He flipped it open. "What's up Gwen?"

He caressed Ianto's back as he listened to Gwen on the other end of the phone. Ianto tried to regain his composure. "I'll be right there," Jack said into the phone.

He flipped the phone shut. "Gwen's at Saint Teilos. She says there's something strange going on there."

Jack took Ianto's face in his hands and kissed him one last time. "Later?" he asked, smiling at Ianto.

Ianto nodded distractedly as Jack turned and left him alone in the archives. He slumped against the wall, feeling totally conflicted. He didn't want to end things with Jack, but he knew that he couldn't do it anymore. He couldn't do unrequited love – not if he wasn't going to live much longer. Even if he did survive Torchwood, it would just end in heartache for him, and he'd had enough of that in his short life.

Then he rallied. He straightened himself up. There was work to do, and he was Torchwood. It was not the time to hide in the archives pondering the state of his relationship with Jack Harkness. If something was going on at the hospital, they needed to get to the bottom of it.

It turned out that the slice of the future that Tommy Brockless was needed for was occurring presently. Time was splintering, and they needed Tommy to travel back to 1918 and close down the time-shift. Tosh took Tommy home with her, and the rest of the team left for the evening with a 6:30am call time for the next morning.

Ianto made his way into Jack's office trying to figure out how to end their relationship – if it even was a relationship. Well, that's part of the problem isn't it, he said to himself as he neared his destination.

He walked slowly into Jack's office, still trying to decide what to say to Jack. I can't do this anymore. I know that you'll never love me so it's not worth it. I can't just be a convenient shag for you anymore. None of the things he rehearsed in his head sounded right. Jack must have sensed his presence because, without looking up, he said, "This time tomorrow he'll be back in 1918."

"In his own time," Ianto said, looking at Jack. He was momentarily diverted from his thoughts about ending their relationship. Jack was out of his time too, and Ianto knew how hard it was on Jack. He wondered again if Jack was homesick. He asked, "Would you go back to yours if you could?"
"Why, would you miss me?" Jack teased him.

"Yep," Ianto answered nonchalantly. It was the truth, after all. He walked slowly towards Jack.

"I left home a long time ago. I don't really know where I really belong." Jack looked up, contemplatively. "Maybe that doesn't matter anymore."

"I… uh…" Ianto didn't know how to respond.

He remembered what Jack had said about living in the 21st century. Imagine you got sucked through time and landed in the Late Prehistoric Era, right around the Iron Age. How would the people there seem to you? Ianto frowned to himself. He must feel so alone. Aloud he said, "I know you get lonely," sitting on the edge of Jack's desk.

Jack closed the file on Tommy and looked up at Ianto. "Going home wouldn't fix that."

Jack looked down at his hands and shook his head. "Being here, I've seen things I never dreamt I'd see, loved people I never would have known if I just stayed where I was."

Ianto nodded sadly, thinking, but you'll never love me, and that's why I have to end this. Then he was hit by a wave of intense emotion coming from the older man. Jack had lowered his mental barriers. Ianto looked at him in surprise. Jack was staring intently into his eyes as he said, "And I wouldn't change that for the world."

All at once, Ianto knew that Jack cared for him deeply – Ianto could feel it radiating off of him. All thoughts of ending things with Jack fled his mind. He grabbed Jack behind the neck and kissed him fervently, holding his face between his hands. Ianto kissed him with all of the passion he had been holding back for so long, and Jack kissed him back with equal fervor. In that one moment, both of them completely let down their guard.

Finally Ianto broke away to catch his breath. He rested his forehead against Jack's, looking deeply into his eyes, his stomach tied in knots. "Take me to bed, Jack," he whispered.
Thanks as always to my spectacular beta riftintime.

Chapter Notes

Jack was having trouble sleeping. He knew that they were going to wake Tommy in a few hours, and the case of Thomas Reginald Brockless had always intrigued him and also made him sad. He felt for the young soldier, frozen in their vaults. He knew what it was like to be displaced in time. He looked down at Ianto, sleeping in his arms. But there's a reason I'm here, in this time. He kissed Ianto softly and got carefully out of bed. He decided he might as well get some work done. He showered and dressed, then climbed up to his office.

Ianto came up an hour later, asking him if he'd slept. Jack felt Ianto's hand on his shoulder, and he placed his hand on top of Ianto's. "A bit. I wanted to read Tommy's file again."

Jack liked when Ianto was there in the morning, even if Jack was too restless to wake up next to him. Ianto still had most of his clothes in the Hub from when Jack was away with the Doctor. Jack wondered if he could convince Ianto to leave them there instead of taking them back to his flat. He was roused from his thoughts when he heard Ianto say something about getting the coffee started. Ianto was gone before he could respond. Jack turned back to the file in front of him, still distracted.

Ianto returned with his coffee several minutes later. "I'm going to order breakfast for Tommy and the team. Any requests?" Ianto asked.

Ianto was always taking care of everyone, including him. It was one of the things Jack found so amazing about Ianto. He smiled at the young man standing at his desk, a warm feeling in the pit of his stomach. "No," Jack responded. "I trust you."

Ianto turned to leave, but Jack wanted a few more moments to themselves before the rest of the team arrived. "Ianto?" he called out.

Ianto turned around, "Jack?"

Jack got up from his chair and walked over to Ianto. He put his arms around him and kissed him. "That's all," Jack said, as he sat back down behind his desk. Jack smiled as he saw the look on Ianto's face when he walked out of his office. Still smiling, he turned back to his file.

Jack took great pleasure in teasing Gwen about Tommy's origins. He and Ianto were being totally enigmatic and it amused him immensely. He loved how he and Ianto played off of each other, like they were totally in sync. Jack even paid homage to Ianto when Gwen, commenting on Tosh's crush, said, "He's a frozen soldier from 1918."

Jack repeated Ianto's words to him earlier. "Nobody's perfect."

Jack sat in his office and watched the CCTV feed as Ianto and Gwen looked at the pictures of Gerald and Harriet. He snickered at the comments about the boss still being a bit of alright. Then he frowned as he watched Ianto telling Gwen about Harriet's death. He zoomed in on Ianto's face. Jack watched Ianto's expression change to one of pain as he held up the photo and said, "Nothing
changes."

Jack leaned back in his chair, turning off the CCTV feed. *Am I still competing for Ianto's affections with a dead woman? I thought we were past that. Why is everything so difficult?* He picked up a report and started reading. He heard Ianto enter several minutes later with a cup of coffee for him. Ianto sat across from him. Jack looked up and smiled at him, then returned his attention to the file in front of him. If Ianto wanted to talk, he would talk. Jack wasn't going to push. A few minutes passed in silence and then Ianto jumped up from his chair and practically ran out of his office. He quickly turned on the CCTV again and followed Ianto's progress through the Hub. He switched cameras until he found Ianto in the archives. Ianto was standing stock still with a stricken look on his face. He looked like he was in shock – like someone had doused him with cold water. "What is going on with you, Ianto?" Jack asked aloud, completely bewildered.

He felt like he could live a thousand years and still never understand Ianto Jones. He watched with growing amazement as Ianto pulled himself together, resumed his butler persona, and threw himself into his work. "You are a complete mystery, Jones, Ianto Jones," Jack said aloud.

He watched for a few more minutes, and then turned the CCTV off. He stood up and headed for the archives. He wanted to see the man in the flesh. As he walked through the archives, he realized that he was giving himself away. Ianto would know that Jack was watching him if he found him without difficulty. He called out, "Ian-tooooo?"

He heard Ianto call out, "I'm here, Jack."

Jack walked up behind Ianto and put his arms around his waist, kissing his neck. He pulled Ianto close to his body, whispering, "Why did you run off?"

"Figured you were busy," Ianto replied.

"Liar," Jack thought as he spun Ianto around and kissed him. He felt Ianto pull away, and Jack smiled at him. Maybe he could charm Ianto into telling him what was on his mind. "I'm free now," he said and then kissed him hard.

Jack felt Ianto stiffen momentarily, but Jack was persistent, and Ianto started to respond. Just when things were getting exciting, his damned phone rang. Jack growled as he pulled it out of his pocket and looked at the screen. It was Gwen calling him. *Business hours, Jack*, he reminded himself. *You have to answer that.* He flipped open the phone and said, "What's up Gwen?" trying to keep the annoyance out of his voice.

Jack stroked Ianto's back as he listened to Gwen. "Jack, I'm at Saint Teilos Hospital, and something weird is going on here. I'm seeing ghosts."

"I'll be right there," Jack told her.

He flipped the phone shut. "Gwen's at Saint Teilos. She says there's something strange going on there."

He took Ianto's face in his hands and kissed him again. He wasn't done with Ianto yet. "Later?" he asked, smiling at Ianto.

Ianto nodded with a distracted look on his face as Jack walked away. Whatever was going on with Ianto, he'd get to the bottom of it. But right now there was work to do.

Of course it turned out that the slice of the future that Tommy Brockless was needed for was occurring presently. Jack was slightly hesitant about letting Tommy go home with Tosh, but they
were both adults. If that's what they both wanted, who was he to interfere? He told the team to be back at 6:30am sharp. Time was splintering, and they needed Tommy to go back to 1918 and close the time-shift. He just hoped Tosh would have the strength to let Tommy go.

After the team made their departure, Jack sat down at his desk to go over the instructions left by Torchwood in 1918 one last time. He knew Ianto was lurking about, probably mustering his courage to talk to Jack about whatever was bothering him. But he would let Ianto come to him. He had a feeling that it was time for him to be honest with Ianto. *He needs to know how I feel about him, before he decides he's just a part-time shag after all and tells me to go to hell.*

Jack stared blindly at the papers in front of him. *What do I say? How do I tell him?* Jack was afraid of words. Words were misleading, unreliable. Words could trick. *I should know. I was a conman.* For years Jack had used his quick tongue, his charm and his good looks to manipulate and obfuscate. He didn't want to do that with Ianto. Ianto meant more to him that that. Besides, Ianto knew too many of his secrets – knew him too well. As he sat trying and rejecting various declarations of affection, he suddenly realized that with Ianto, he didn't need words. All he had to do was put his barriers down, and Ianto would sense what he was feeling. He just had to be brave enough to do it. *Time for a leap of faith, Jack.*

He made his decision and turned back to the file on his desk. He felt, more than heard, Ianto's approach. *I'll test the waters… see what kind of mood he's in before I do anything.* Jack was stalling, and he knew it. He said, "This time tomorrow he'll be back in 1918."

"In his own time," he heard Ianto say from behind him. "Would you go back to yours if you could?"

*Maybe it's best that we keep things lighthearted, Jack* thought to himself. *Perhaps now isn't a good time for this.* Aloud, he said, "Why, would you miss me?"

"Yep."

Jack was taken aback by Ianto's answer. He had expected a smart retort. Instead he got brutal honesty. It sobered him at once. He said, seriously, "I left home a long time ago. I don't really know where I really belong." He thought about Ianto, his team, and Torchwood. "Maybe that doesn't matter anymore."

"I… uh… I know you get lonely," Ianto said, sitting on the edge of Jack's desk.

Jack closed the file on Tommy and looked up at Ianto. "Going home wouldn't fix that."

Jack looked down at his hands. *If I had never come here, I would never have known all of the people I've loved over the years. I would have never met Ianto.* Jack shook his head. "Being here, I've seen things I never dreamt I'd see, loved people I never would have known if I just stayed where I was."

Jack looked at Ianto. Ianto wasn't looking at him. *Leap of faith, Jack.* He lowered his barriers. Ianto looked at him. Jack waited until Ianto made eye contact, and holding his gaze said, "And I wouldn't change that for the world."

Ianto grabbed Jack behind the neck and kissed him with more passion that he'd ever shown Jack before. Jack was momentarily surprised, but recovered quickly and responded with equal fervor. Ianto paused for breath and rested his forehead against Jack's. Ianto looked into his eyes and whispered, "Take me to bed, Jack."

Jack felt his stomach lurch. He kissed Ianto softly, then stood up from his desk and held out his hand. Ianto took it, and they walked towards the ladder to Jack's bedroom, fingers entwined.
Jack descended the ladder first and waited at the bottom while Ianto climbed down. Ianto turned to face him, and they stared at each other. Then, moving simultaneously, they embraced and held each other close. Jack leaned back and took Ianto's face in his hands. He looked into Ianto's eyes, stroking his cheek bones with his thumbs. Jack kissed his forehead softly and then kissed him tenderly on the lips. Jack wrapped his arms around Ianto and held him again. Ianto laid his head on Jack's shoulder, and they stood there, holding each other, swaying slightly.

Jack tipped Ianto's chin up and kissed his mouth gently, then more persistently, opening his mouth to seek Ianto's tongue. Ianto ran his fingers through Jack's hair, and Jack slid his hands up Ianto's back, under his suit jacket. Ianto, without breaking the kiss, shrugged off the jacket and threw it over a chair. He broke off the kiss and looked into Jack's eyes. Without breaking eye contact, he slid Jack's suspenders off his shoulders and started unbuttoning Jack's shirt. Jack loosened Ianto's tie and slid it out from around his neck. Then he started to work on Ianto's shirt, still looking into Ianto's eyes.

Jack slipped his shirt off of his shoulders and threw it on the floor, then tugged off his T-shirt. Ianto ran his hands over Jack's bare shoulders and down his arms. Jack finished unbuttoning Ianto's shirt and slid his hands down Ianto's chest. Ianto slipped off his shirt and threw it down on top of his jacket.

They looked at each other again. Jack divested himself of his shoes, trousers and briefs while Ianto stared at him. He stood up, completely naked, and Ianto's eyes raked over his body. "You're beautiful, Jack," he whispered.

Ianto took off the rest of his clothes as Jack watched. They stood naked, staring at each other. Then they both took one step forward, and their lips met. They pressed their bodies together and kissed until they ran out of air. They leaned their foreheads together as they caught their breath, their arms wrapped tightly around each other.

Ianto started walking them towards Jack's bed. He lay down and pulled Jack on top of him. Jack kissed his lips and then pulled back. They gazed into each other's eyes, and then kissed again. Jack worked his way down Ianto's chest and stomach, kissing and touching every inch of Ianto's skin as he went. Ianto reached over and opened the drawer in the bedside table. He removed a bottle of lube and pressed it into Jack's hand. Jack brought himself back up to Ianto's face and kissed him tenderly. Then he sat back on his knees, straddling Ianto. He flipped open the bottle and coated his fingers. He leaned down, breathing into Ianto's mouth, as he gently inserted a finger into Ianto. They kissed passionately, as Jack opened Ianto.

When Ianto was ready, Jack wordlessly poured lube into Ianto's hand, and Ianto stroked it over Jack's cock. Then Ianto wrapped his legs around Jack's waist. He held Jack's head in his hands and looked into his eyes as Jack entered him. Ianto wrapped his legs tighter around Jack, pulling Jack deep into his body. Jack leaned down and kissed Ianto, gathering him into his arms. They began to move together, finding their rhythm. Jack lifted himself up enough to see Ianto's face. They stared at each other as Jack thrust into Ianto.
Jack could feel Ianto's cock starting to throb between their bodies. As Ianto neared his climax, he pulled Jack down and kissed him hard. Then he broke off the kiss and panted into Jack's mouth. "Jack," Ianto cried out, as he coated their stomachs with his cum.

Hearing Ianto say his name drove Jack to his climax. He thrust deep into Ianto and came hard inside of him. He lay on top of Ianto, letting his breathing return to normal, as Ianto ran his fingers through Jack's hair. Jack leaned over and grabbed a towel from the drawer in the bedside table. He cleaned them both up, and then wrapped himself around Ianto and kissed his forehead.

They lay in silence, as Jack thought about everything that had happened during the day. He still wanted to get to the bottom of Ianto's strange behavior. "Ianto, what was going on with you earlier today?"

"What do you mean, Jack?"

Jack knew that the only way he was going to get a straight answer out of Ianto was if he was completely honest with him. He said, "Okay, I have a confession to make. I watched you and Gwen through the CCTV feed when you were looking at the pictures of Harriet and Gerald. I saw the look of pain on your face. Then, after you ran out of my office, I watched you on the CCTV as you went into the archives. You stood frozen, with a stricken look on your face."

Ianto murmured, "The mirror cracked from side to side. The curse has come upon me cried the Lady of Shalott."

_Ianto Jones, thought Jack. Always an enigma. Jack couldn't help teasing, "Uh… you're a lady?"

Ianto punched him on the arm. Jack chuckled. "What is it with you and Tennyson lately? Am I going to have to supervise your extracurricular reading? And let me tell you something about Tennyson. I could not get the guy to shut up, no matter what I did to him."

When Ianto didn't respond to Jack's cheek, Jack started to feel nervous. _That serious, huh? Jack asked with some trepidation, "Is it Lisa?"

"No, Jack," Ianto paused. "I mean, yes, I was thinking about how Lisa died young when Gwen and I were looking at the old Torchwood photos…"

"But it wasn't about Lisa in the archives," Jack said, finishing Ianto's thought.

"No," Ianto confirmed.

"What was it then?" Jack asked. He didn't know, at that point, if he was curious or afraid.


Jack was taken aback, so he covered with impudence. "I'm a curse? Well, I suppose I've been called worse."

Ianto didn't respond. Jack was starting to get nervous. Ianto always had some kind of witty retort to his cheek. All of his silences were making Jack edgy. Finally he asked, "Are you going to tell me what's going on, Ianto?"

Ianto sighed. "In that moment – the one you're referring to, I realized something, and I was afraid."

Jack was silent. He had no idea where this conversation was going. With Ianto, it could be anywhere. But that was one of the many reasons why he felt so deeply for this young man. What
Ianto was one of the bravest men he knew. Jack ran his fingers up Ianto's back, asking, "Are you still afraid?"

Ianto shrugged. "A bit."

Okay, that line of questioning is getting me nowhere fast. Let's try another. "You pulled away from me, when I came down to find you. Why?"

"I didn't know if I could do it anymore, Jack."

Jack felt his stomach clench. He asked, with some anxiety, "Do what?"

"This," Ianto said, indicating the two of them. Then he mumbled, "Whatever this is."

Jack suddenly felt annoyed. He let go of Ianto and sat up on one elbow. He asked, "What do you mean whatever this is, and what do you mean you couldn't do it anymore?"

Ianto was silent again. Jack temper started to flare. He said, "Damn it, Ianto, you can sense what I'm feeling. I don't have that gift."

"I'm sorry, Jack. I'm not much of a talker."

Jack relented slightly, but he was still feeling frustrated. "I know, Ianto, but I let you in. That was terrifying for me. I don't let anyone in."

Ianto reached out and stroked Jack's cheek. He said, "I know, Jack." He kissed him softly. "I'm just trying to figure out how to explain it to you. In that moment, I realized that I..." Ianto frowned. He tried again, "I realized how much you..." Ianto shook his head. He closed his eyes and said, "I suddenly realized what I felt for you, and I thought that you would never return the sentiment."

Suddenly Jack understood. He grasped Ianto's chin and waited until Ianto opened his eyes and looked at him. Then he said, "But I do."

Ianto kissed him and, this time, wrapped himself around Jack the way that Jack usually wrapped himself around Ianto. "I know that now. Then, I didn't."

Jack relaxed into Ianto's arms, letting himself be held, burying his face into the crook of Ianto's neck. He said, "So are we done with the doubting?"

Ianto pulled him closer. "Yes, Jack. We're done."

"Ianto, I... I won't block you out anymore. I trust you. I... I like that you know what I'm feeling. I..." He couldn't say the words.

Ianto kissed the top of his head and whispered, "I'm yours, Jack."

Jack looked up at Ianto, and Ianto pressed his face close to Jack's, stroking his cheek. He whispered again, "I'm yours."
Ianto held Jack close and stroked his hair, thinking about their conversation. Jack trusted him. Jack had let him in. Jack cared about him. Ianto sighed. The damage was done. He was in love with Jack. No more denials, no more inhibitions, no more evasions. He was truly in love with the man. *I'm in love with a man? How strange my life has become!* Ianto laughed out loud at the thought.

"What's funny?" Jack asked in a sleepy voice.

Ianto kissed his head again. "No one expects the Spanish Inquisition."

"You really like that phrase, don't you?"

Ianto smiled and stroked Jack's back. He said matter-of-factly, "They really come at the most inconvenient of times."

Jack yawned. "You're telling me! This one time they burst in while I was in the middle of a really hot threesome with two priests. That was a night!"

Ianto rolled his eyes. "Here we go," he muttered.

"No really! I got tangled in one of their cassocks trying to escape and knocked over the Holy Water. Priests… I tell you. Those guys should really get out more."

"Jack?"

"Mmmm?"

"You're ridiculous."

Jack chuckled. He sat up and stretched. Then he took a look around his room. "Ianto Jones, it seems you've moved in. Your stuff is everywhere."

Ianto grimaced. "Yeah, I've been meaning to do something about that. I haven't had the chance to take my things back to my flat since you returned. It's just been one thing after another."

Jack grinned down at him. "Don't."

Ianto gave him a confused look and sat up on one elbow. "Don't what?"

"Don't do anything about it. Leave your stuff here," Jack said with sincerity, looking at him.

Ianto almost laughed, but Jack had such a serious look on his face, so he suppressed the urge. He shook his head slightly. "Jack, this room is hardly big enough for one grown man."

"We've done just fine," Jack gave his come-fuck-me grin. If Ianto wasn't so spent, he might have taken him up on it.
"I do pay rent on a flat," Ianto said, running his hand down Jack's chest.

Jack shrugged. Ianto grinned at him. Then he schooled his features and, with a desperate attempt to keep a straight face, inquired, "Jack Harkness. Are you asking me to move into your manhole?"

Jack burst out laughing. "When you put it like that… you can take up permanent residence in my manhole," Jack leered at him.

Ianto put on a mock contemplative face and said, "It will make it awfully hard to work. Chasing Weevils would be a bitch."

Jack's laughter died down, and he looked seriously at Ianto. "I just meant that you can stay here whenever you want. You don't have to crash on the sofa in the Hub."

"Thanks, Jack. And you're welcome to my flat anytime you want to get out of here."

Jack looked around his room again. "Yeah, I guess this isn't much of a home." He leaned back against the wall, drawing his knees up. "So, did you go through all of my things while I was gone?" he asked with a smile.

Ianto frowned at him. "No, Jack."

"How come?" Jack asked with incredulity.

"I have respect for your privacy, that's how come," Ianto said, shaking his head with reproach.

"You're a better man than I. I would have gone through everything of yours." Jack looked pensive. "I'm still plotting ways to get my hands on your diary."

"It will never happen," Ianto said seriously.

Jack grinned malevolently. "I can be very devious."

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "I can be very clever."

"That you can." He looked at Ianto calculatingly. "I can threaten to withhold sex," Jack said with an attempt at a threatening tone of voice.

Ianto snorted. "You'd never last."

"Damn," Jack sighed. "You're right."

"And I can withhold coffee," Ianto said with malice.

Jack looked horrified. "Ianto Jones, you wouldn't!"

Ianto looked fiercely at him, and then, smiling sweetly, said, "Wouldn't I?"

Jack threw up his hands. "Okay, okay, I give in! I won't try to read your diary."

Ianto snorted again. "Liar!"

Jack grinned. "Yep! You know, you can be really scary sometimes," Jack said, running his foot down Ianto's leg.

Ianto chuckled. "Should I be worried about Tosh?" Jack asked, changing the subject. "She was
really upset when I told her Tommy's fate back in 1918."

Ianto sighed. "It's going to be difficult for her, but she'll do the right thing. Have faith in her Jack," Ianto said, stroking Jack's arm.

"And afterwards? What kind of heartache will she suffer?" Jack asked with a momentary look of pain.

Ianto squeezed his arm briefly, then let go. "Owen will take care of her," he said with confidence.

"Owen?" Jack asked, surprised.

"Yes, Jack. Owen. You know, he really does love her, even if he doesn't know it yet."

Jack looked lost in thought. "So you think some day…" Jack's sentence faded, as he looked curiously at Ianto.

"Yes. I think some day," Ianto confirmed. He knew that beneath all of Owen's bluster and feigned obtuseness, he really did care deeply for Tosh.

"Hmm. Torchwood's turning into a regular fuck-fest," Jack said thoughtfully.

"Well, with you as its Captain, how could it possibly be otherwise?" Ianto said ironically.

Jack smiled his best Jack Harkness grin. "True. I get everyone all worked up. It's part of my charm."

Ianto gave him his best Ianto Jones eye roll. Then they smiled at each other.

Ianto took Jack's hand and entwined their fingers. "Are you going to sleep, Jack?"

"Don't know, Ianto. Maybe."

Ianto pulled Jack down and wrapped himself around him. "Try," he said, kissing Jack on the lips.

"Now who's the octopus?" asked Jack, as he settled himself in Ianto's embrace.

Ianto smiled and stroked Jack's hair. He fell asleep holding Jack in his arms.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my wonderful beta riftintime.

The next day, they sent Tommy back to 1918 with the Rift key and instructions on how to use it, but when they returned to the Hub, something was wrong – the past was still erupting into the present. Tommy hadn't used the key. Ianto felt a surge of panic when Jack said that someone would have to go back to the hospital. Jack will be trapped in 1918! Ianto felt sick to his stomach. Luckily, Owen came up with an alternative plan. They sent a psychic projection of Tosh into Tommy's mind. She convinced him to turn the key, and time fell back into place.

After it was over, Ianto began to pack up Tommy's clothes to return to the archives. Tosh walked over and put a hand on his arm, stopping him. "Let me do it," she said, taking the clothes out of Ianto's hands and sitting on the sofa.

Ianto put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed it gently. "He was very brave," he said softly. "And so were you."

Tosh's eyes filled with tears. She looked up at him and smiled. "I know."

Ianto squeezed her shoulder again. Then, leaving her to her thoughts, he headed for the medical bay. Owen was there, doing whatever Owen did that resembled work. Ianto looked over the railing at him. "Owen."

Owen glanced up at him and then turned back to his work. "What do you want, Ianto?"

"Go and take care of Tosh," Ianto said, staring hard at the medic.

Owen looked up at him for a moment, and then nodded his head. Ianto, satisfied that Owen got the message, retreated into Jack's office. Jack was sitting at his desk, looking at the photo of Tommy. He put his hand on Jack's shoulder. Jack sighed. "He told me I was no better than the generals, sitting safely behind the lines while I sent my men into battle."

Ianto squeezed his shoulder and said, "When you look into an abyss…"

"The abyss also looks into you," Jack finished softly.

Ianto sat down on the corner of Jack's desk. "You did the right thing, Jack. You always do the right thing."

"Did I?" asked Jack, sounding unconvinced.

"Yes, Jack," Ianto affirmed.

Jack shook his head. "I sent a soldier to his death."

"And saved millions of lives," Ianto reminded him.
Jack frowned and looked at Tommy's picture again. Ianto continued, "That's the curse of being the leader, Jack. You have to make the difficult choices."

"And live with the consequences," Jack mumbled.

"And live with the consequences," Ianto confirmed. "But you can't lose sight of why we do this."

"And Tosh..." Jack faltered.

Ianto was silent for a moment. Then he said, "You should thank her."

Jack looked at him. "You're right, I should."

He got up from his chair and walked to his office door, touching the back of Ianto's neck as he passed. Ianto heard him say, "Tosh... thank you."

Ianto didn't hear Tosh reply. He sighed. Jack came back into his office and sat down. They heard the cogwheel door roll open and close. A minute later Owen stuck his head inside Jack's office. "I'm taking off, Jack. I'm going to check up on Tosh, make sure she's okay."

Jack glanced briefly at Ianto and then at Owen. "Thanks, Owen. Take care of her, will you?"

Owen nodded as he walked away. Jack looked at Ianto. "How do you always know everything?"

Ianto shrugged, but he didn't reply. Jack shook his head, looking at Ianto appraisingly. Ianto returned Jack's look. "So, no stories about how Nietzsche's a great shag?" Ianto asked with a smirk.

"Huh?" Jack looked confused.

"Usually when I quote someone, you come in with a story about how the two of you used to shag." Ianto tsked. "You missed your cue, Jack. Are you off your game?"

Jack, whose brow had cleared with understanding, smiled affectionately at Ianto. "Well, now that you mention it, Freddy was quite the..." Gwen walked into Jack's office interrupting his sentence.

Ianto and Jack smiled at each other. Gwen sat down in the chair opposite Jack's, and heaved a heavy sigh. "Poor Tosh," she said, shaking her head sadly. "She seems to be really unlucky in love, doesn't she?" She fingered her engagement ring.

Ianto and Jack looked at each other. Ianto raised his eyebrows slightly, and Jack frowned. Then he said, "Go home to Rhys, Gwen. Everyone else is gone for the day."

"What about you, Jack?" Gwen asked, completely ignoring Ianto.

Jack looked at Ianto and smiled. "I'll be fine, Gwen," he said.

"I could stay. Keep you company," Gwen suggested with eagerness.

Ianto stifled a smirk, and Jack looked annoyed. "We're fine, Gwen. Really."

Ianto said, "Rhys will be ecstatic that you're home early, Gwen. You should have dinner together. Talk about your wedding plans."

"He will love it that I'm home early..." Gwen looked momentarily torn. Then she looked hard at Jack and hedged, "Okay, if you're sure..."
Jack nodded and Gwen, looking slightly disappointed, got up. "Well, I'm off then. Have a good evening, boys," she said as she made her way out of Jack's office.

"Bye, Gwen," they chorused.

When they heard the cogwheel door a few minutes later, they looked at each other. Ianto was feeling a bit possessive after Gwen's blatant overtones. A less evolved part of him wanted to stake his claim on Jack. *I want to take him... hard...* He smiled inwardly. "So..." Ianto said, thinking about exactly what he wanted to do to Jack. "Evening off..."

"Yup," Jack said, leaning back in his chair. "What would you like to do, Mr. Jones?"

*You,* thought Ianto. *Over your desk with my cock up your arse.* He suppressed a grin and said, looking around Jack's office, "Well, your office could use a thorough cleaning."

"You want to clean?" Jack asked incredulously.

*Hardly. How about I slam you into the wall and fuck you?* Ianto grinned and said instead, "How about a film?"

Jack put his hands behind his head. "Will you let me grope you in the back row?"

"No," Ianto replied, *but you can grope me right now,* he thought as his eyes drifted down Jack's body.

"Please?" Jack put his hands together in supplication.

*Yes, down on your knees and begging for it.* Aloud he said, "I'll think about it."

Jack beamed at him and turned to his computer. He pulled up a movie website. "What should we see?"

*Porn?* Ianto thought, smirking. "Science fiction?" he asked instead.

"What, you don't get enough of that at work?" Jack asked sarcastically.

Ianto smiled. "It'll be educational."

"It'll be laughable," Jack said scornfully.

*Ianto replied seriously, "All the more reason. I could use a good laugh. You?"

Jack looked momentarily distracted. "Yes, yes I could use a good laugh..."

"Jack," Ianto chided. "You're not going to go all brooding on me, are you?" *Don't you dare! I'm going to wipe that morose look off your face.*

"Do I brood?" Jack asked defensively.

"Just a bit," Ianto confirmed. *But not when I get done with you...* Ianto was starting to get worked up.

Jack crossed his arms over his chest. "I do not," he said, petulantly.

"Now you're pouting," Ianto said, thinking; *and now I'm going to have to discipline you...*
"So?" Jack glared at him, "What are you going to do about it?"

Ianto was on his feet and pulling Jack out of his chair, before the thought had even finished forming in his mind. He slammed Jack down on his desk, scattering papers and toppling items to the floor. He pushed Jack's head down on the desk and leaned close to Jack's ear. "You've got a smart mouth, Captain, you know that?" he hissed.

Jack struggled underneath him. "Ianto!" Jack called out.

"Did I say you could speak?" Ianto growled.

Jack bucked into Ianto, thrashing underneath his grip. Ianto felt his cock harden. He yanked down Jack's suspenders, grabbed one of Jack's arms and pinned it behind Jack's back. He reached into Jack's pocket and took out the small bottle of lube he knew would be there. Still holding his arm, he wrenched open Jack's trousers and forced them down roughly. Jack writhed underneath him. Ianto could feel Jack's alarm and excitement, and he grinned to himself.

Ianto quickly unfastened his trousers and pulled out his cock. Keeping one hand firmly holding Jack's arm, he used the other to open the bottle of lube and squeeze some onto his cock. He threw the bottle down and spread the lube over himself. Then, without ceremony, he shoved two fingers inside Jack. Jack inhaled sharply. Ianto worked his fingers roughly inside Jack, and then withdrew them suddenly. He lined himself up behind Jack and thrust hard into him, burying himself to his balls.

Jack yelled out and then whimpered. Ianto grabbed Jack's other arm and wrenched it back. Then, holding both of Jack's arms pinned behind his back, he drove himself into Jack, repeatedly slamming into his body. As Ianto felt himself get closer, he reached down with one hand and grasped Jack's cock. It was rock hard and leaking cum. He grinned as he started pumping Jack ruthlessly in counter movement to his thrusts.

Jack thrashed underneath him, and his movements brought Ianto to the edge of his orgasm, but he held on until he felt Jack's cock throb in his hand. Then he let himself go, driving as deep as he could, and exploding into Jack. Almost simultaneously, Jack shouted Ianto's name and came all over his desk.

Ianto collapsed on top of Jack, panting for a moment. Then he lifted himself up and let go of Jack's arms. He sat down in Jack's chair, still breathing hard. When Jack didn't move for several moments, Ianto felt a momentary alarm. *Did I go too far?* He got up, pulled Jack up off the desk, and turned him around. Jack had a huge grin on his face, and Ianto gave a sigh of relief. "You scared me there for a minute, Jack. I thought maybe you forgot our conversation about safe words."

Jack laughed. "Do you really think I would forget a conversation like that?"

Ianto smirked at him. Jack touched his face, "Ianto Jones. You are always full of surprises. I love it!"

Ianto blushed slightly, and looked down. "Are you blushing?" Jack asked incredulously. "After that?" he asked, waving his hand in the direction of the desk.

Ianto shrugged his shoulders, and Jack shook his head at him. Ianto put his hand around the back of Jack's neck and kissed him roughly. He drew back and grinning, asked, "So, what time does that film start?"
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my amazing beta rifftintime.

Jack laughed at Ianto and kissed him. "You are amazing, you know that?"

"You're not so bad yourself, Jack," said Ianto, still blushing.

They both cleaned themselves up and straightened out their clothes. Jack grabbed his coat and took Ianto by the arm. "Let's go make fun of the latest science fiction flick."

They walked out of Jack's office, arm in arm, and stood on the lift. Jack used his Vortex Manipulator to raise the lift platform. "Show off," Ianto quipped.

"Am not," Jack responded.

"Are too," Ianto replied.

Jack stuck his tongue out at Ianto, and Ianto rolled his eyes. Then they smiled affectionately at each other.

They settled themselves into the back row of the cinema to watch the newest science fiction blockbuster. They chuckled through most of it and snogged like teenagers through the rest of it. Ianto fought off Jack's wandering hands for a good deal of the film, but finally gave up. Jack wanked him off in the back row, just as he'd threatened to do earlier. Ianto was eternally grateful that the theatre was mostly empty and extremely dark.

Ianto convinced Jack to spend the night at his flat. They picked up Indian food on the way home, which was dropped unceremoniously on the floor, as soon as they entered Ianto's flat. Jack had already started taking off Ianto's jacket and waistcoat before Ianto even had the key in the lock. The rest of their clothing was shed as soon as the door was closed, and Jack fucked Ianto on the floor of the hallway, with Ianto's legs wrapped around Jack's neck.

Afterwards, they picked up the food and sat naked on Ianto's floor, eating out of the containers, swapping them back and forth. They got into the shower, kissing and stroking each other until they both came again. Then they washed and crawled into Ianto's bed. Jack wrapped himself around Ianto and continued the story of his first meeting with the Doctor and Rose, as Ianto fell asleep in his arms.

For the next several weeks, Jack and Ianto spent most of their free time together. Ianto almost always stayed at the Hub. Occasionally they would spend the night at Ianto's flat, but they didn't spend a single night apart – even after Jack's nightmares began to subside. They went out to dinner several times, as Ianto reminded Jack that he still owed him a number of dates.

It was after one of their dinner dates that fate raged in like a sandstorm, obscuring Ianto's reality. They had just eaten sushi and were at the pub having a drink before returning to the Hub for the night. Ianto was slightly tipsy and, feeling amorous, leaned suggestively against Jack and whispered into his ear, "When we get back to the Hub, I'm going to rip your clothes off and fuck you as hard as I can over the…"
Ianto was interrupted by a tap on his shoulder. He looked up to see the face of a handsome, dark haired man. "Ianto Jones. Is that you?"

Ianto was momentarily bewildered until the identity of the man dawned on him. "Alun?" he asked hesitantly.

Alun looked from Ianto to Jack, and back to Ianto again. Ianto felt himself blush to the roots of his hair. For a good few seconds, he couldn't make his mouth form words. Jack stepped forward with his best trademark grin and stuck out a hand. "Captain Jack Harkness."

Ianto, trying to hide his embarrassment, and suddenly remembering his manners, said, "Jack, this is Alun Davies. We were roommates at university."

Alun looked Jack up and down with a mildly disapproving expression as he shook hands. Jack put his hand on Ianto's back and said, grinning, "I've always wanted to meet Ianto's friends from his university days."

Ianto, trying to be subtle, shrugged Jack's hand off his back saying, "Buy you a drink, Alun?"

"Cheers, Ianto."

Ianto signaled the bartender and, trying to regain control of the situation, asked, "What have you been up to? Haven't seen you since graduation."

"Well, I got married," Alun said, waving to a pretty brunette who walked over and joined them. "Ianto, meet Efa, my wife."

Efa turned to Ianto and shook hands saying, "Ianto Jones from uni? I've heard stories about you!"

Jack butted in, "Stories about Ianto from university? Oh, this is going to be good! Captain Jack Harkness," Jack stuck out his hand and gave her his best grin.

She shook his hand and looked from Ianto to Jack, then questioningly at Alun. Alun shrugged his shoulders vaguely, but Ianto caught the exchange. "Jack is my boss," Ianto blurted out, apropos of nothing.

Jack's grin faltered, and he looked at Ianto. Alun looked again from Jack to Ianto. An uncomfortable silence fell. Jack shifted his weight and, smiling again, said, "Gotta pee. I'll be back. Don't tell any Ianto stories without me." He turned dramatically and strode towards the toilets, coat billowing.

"He sure knows how to make an exit, that one," Alun remarked with disdain.

Ianto snorted. Alun looked at Ianto with a question forming on his lips. Ianto cut him off. "So, when were you two married?"

"A year ago," Alun said smiling and taking Efa's hand.

"Congratulations. What are you doing now, Alun?" Ianto hoped that he could keep Alun talking and keep him from asking.

"I work for Abbey National Bank," Alun replied with a shrug.

"You were always good with numbers," Ianto said, smiling at him.

"What are you doing now Ianto? We always expected great things from you." He turned to Efa. "This bloke always had the most amazing memory."
Ianto answered, with some hesitancy, "I work for the Welsh Tourist Board."

"I'm sorry, did you say the Welsh Tourist Board?" Alun asked with surprise.

Ianto nodded, not meeting Alun's eyes. Alun indicated Ianto's attire. "All togged up like that?"

Ianto looked down at his immaculate three piece suit, then back up at Alun who was dressed in jeans and a Wales rugby jersey. He shrugged noncommittally.

"And your boss is American," continued Alun, dubiously.

"International relations," Ianto quickly rejoined.

"Is that what you're calling it?" Alun mumbled, looking skeptical.

"I'm sorry?" asked Ianto, his color rising again.

"He's quite peculiar, your boss… Who does he think he is then? And what's with the coat? Is that an American thing?"

A delightful sounding, tinkling laugh came from Efa, and Alun smiled lovingly at her. "Alun," she scolded him with a smile. She turned to Ianto. "He's very handsome, Ianto," she said, smiling kindly at him. "Alun is just threatened by anyone he thinks might be better looking than he is," she said, touching Alun's cheek with adoration in her eyes.

Ianto was mortified. He suddenly saw Captain Jack Harkness through the eyes of this nice, normal Welsh couple. Gone was the image of the indomitable immortal who had traveled through time and space, seeing the wonders of the universe. Gone was the image of the man who saved Planet Earth from the threat of alien invasion day after day. Suddenly, Jack was just a flashy, ostentatious, and somewhat ridiculous man. Ianto's world abruptly shifted into sharp focus, like he had been farsighted all his life and had just put on his first pair of glasses.

"Is he really your boss?" Alun asked with disbelief.

"Yep," Ianto replied, lost in his own thoughts.

"It seemed like you and he… sod it, Ianto. Are you gay?"

Ianto whipped his head around and faced Alun. "No!" he said with more vehemence than was necessary.

"It just seemed like you and that Captain Whatever were…"

"Talking business," Ianto finished quickly, his face flaming red.

"It looked like a lot more than business, Ianto," Alun said sardonically, "Either that or the Welsh Tourist Board is getting a whole lot friendlier."

"It's just business," Ianto said emphatically.

"Come on, Ianto. We've been mates for years. If you're gay, that's fine. But be honest with me."

"I'm not gay! I had girlfriends in uni, Alun."

"I know, mate. I know. That's why I was so surprised. I would never have guessed that you, of all people, would have gone bender."
Ianto felt someone behind him and turned to see Jack with an inscrutable look on his face. Ianto wondered how long he had been standing there and how much he had overheard. Jack said, "I'm sorry to have to do this, but I have to drag Ianto away. We have a work related emergency."

"An emergency at the Tourism Board?" asked Efa, raising her eyebrows.

"International relations can be tricky affairs," said Jack with a smile. "Ianto, we really have to go."

"Right, well Alun, it was great to see you again. Efa, lovely to have met you. And congratulations again on your marriage."

"Ianto, we should get together for a beer. Give me a call. I'm listed," Alun said, as he shook Ianto's hand and clasped him on the shoulder.

"Right, I'll look you up." Ianto shook hands with Efa and left the pub as quickly as civility would allow.

Once they were outside and walking towards the Hub, Ianto turned to Jack. "What is it, Jack, Weevils?"

"No, Ianto. There's no work emergency. You just looked so pathetic standing there stammering and blushing that I took pity on you," Jack said disdainfully.

"Thanks," Ianto said flatly. Then he stopped walking and shoved his hands in his pockets. "Look, Jack," he hesitated, "I could really use a good night's sleep. I... think I'm going to head home."

Jack nodded and, without a word, walked away. Ianto looked after him, about to call out Jack's name. The word was on the tip of his tongue, but he couldn't get his lips to form it. He sighed, shook his head, and made his way to his car. "I'm not gay, he told himself. I just happen to be in love with a man. Doesn't make me gay. I love women! Ianto got to his car and started fishing in his pockets for his keys. He suddenly felt overwhelmed. He leaned his head against the car and closed his eyes. "What am I doing?" he asked aloud.

He thought about Alun, married now with a normal job and a wife. They'd probably have kids in a few years. He thought about Torchwood and about how he would probably die young. He thought about Lisa and everything he had lost. He thought about Jack and their unconventional and undefined relationship. He groaned and got into his car. He started the engine and then folded his arms on the steering wheel. "What am I doing," he asked again, as he dropped his head onto his arms.

He felt tears burning at the back of his eyes, but he refused to succumb. He straightened up, put the car into gear, and headed home, blinking rapidly.

Jack sat in his office staring at the CCTV feed. He watched Ianto fumble for his keys, and then lean his head against the car. He watched Ianto get into his car. He watched Ianto drop his head onto his arms, folded over the steering wheel. Then he watched Ianto drive away. He switched off the CCTV feed and rubbed his face with his hands. "Sometimes I hate the 21st century," he muttered aloud to the empty Hub.
For the next few days, Ianto avoided Jack as much possible. He kept up his professional demeanor around the others, but he circumvented any situation that would leave him alone with Jack. He knew he was being childish, but couldn't help it. He needed to sort out his feelings. Seeing Alun had thrown him for a loop. It was different, somehow, in the safety of the Hub, where the team saw outrageous things every day. The fact that he and Jack were sleeping together seemed pedestrian in contrast to Weevils, vicious alien species trying to take over the planet, and the apocalypse. But out in the real world, it was different. Ianto had forgotten that. Running into Alun had shifted his perspective, and he couldn't seem to get it to fall back into place again.

The day after running into Alun, Jack spent most of the time sulking in his office, but after that, he reverted to his usual antics – with one exception. Jack made no attempts to talk to Ianto or get him alone. He didn't flirt with him or make any sexual innuendos, and he made no reference to their relationship. Ianto was partly relieved and partly disappointed.

Jack started spending more and more time with Gwen. She lapped up Jack's sudden attention. Ianto had always known that Gwen had a thing for Jack, but he thought she had put it behind her when she'd become engaged to Rhys. However, ever since the incident with Tommy, Ianto had noticed Gwen's growing interest in Jack. More and more she hung around the Hub, instead of racing home to Rhys at any given opportunity. It was with slight uneasiness that he watched the sexual tension between Gwen and Jack growing. Ianto figured that it must be cold feet on Gwen's part. It seemed she had noticed that he and Jack had cooled off, and she was taking the opportunity to make a last-ditch effort at shagging Jack before her marriage.

As for Jack's part in the scenario, Ianto had no idea what that was about. He'd seen the way Jack had sometimes looked at Gwen, but Jack had assured him that he would never act on it, and Ianto had believed him at the time. Now he wasn't so sure. All he did know was that Jack had closed his emotions to him again. Ianto could sense nothing from the older man.

Ianto knew it was his own damn fault. He wished he could be more open minded, but he was a 21st century bloke, with all of the prejudices that went along with it. I'm not gay, he told himself over and over again. He even took to wearing his more somber suits, shirts and ties, as though the more colorful ones were somehow a reflection of his sexual preference. He also took to hiding in the archives again. About a week after the Alun incident, Ianto was sitting at his desk in the archives, trying to find something to do, when Tosh approached him carrying two mugs. "I brought you tea, Ianto."

He smiled at her. "Thanks, Tosh."

She handed him a mug and sat down on his desk. "How are you?" she asked, running her fingers around the rim of her mug.

"I'm fine, Tosh. How are you?" Ianto asked before taking a sip of the tea. It was excellent.
Tosh held her tea up to her lips and blew gently on it. "I'm fine," she said, looking at him over the rim of her mug. "What are you doing down here?"

"Trying to sort through this mess." Ianto waved a hand at his immaculate desk.

Tosh cast her eye appraisingly over Ianto's desk. The files were neatly stacked, the pens in their holder, and the paperclips lined up in a tray. "I see," said Tosh, nodding. "Yeah, you'd better get right on that. It's a disaster area here."

Ianto sighed and rubbed his temples with his fingers. Tosh looked hard at him and set her mug of tea down. "Okay, Ianto. You've been creeping around the Hub for days now, lurking in the shadows like you used to do before Lisa. You and Jack have barely spoken two words to each other, and Jack and Gwen have been making googly eyes at each other. Did you two have a fight?"

Ianto shrugged his shoulders. Tosh crossed her arms over her chest and looked angry. "Okay, Ianto. You've been creeping around the Hub for days now, lurking in the shadows like you used to do before Lisa. You and Jack have barely spoken two words to each other, and Jack and Gwen have been making googly eyes at each other. Did you two have a fight?"

Ianto shrugged his shoulders. Tosh crossed her arms over her chest and looked angry. "What did Jack do?"

Ianto half laughed. He was touched by little Toshiko, looking ferocious, like she was ready to kick Jack's arse in his honor. He shook his head. "It's not Jack, Tosh. It's me."

Tosh smiled at him and relaxed her arms. "Okay, what did you do?"

Ianto wanted to laugh, but it wasn't funny. He stared at the wall for a minute before he turned to her and asked, "Tosh, when you were with Mary, did you feel... were you..." he hesitated.

"Spit it out, Ianto," Tosh said, looking at him expectantly.

"Did you have problems with the fact that she was a woman?" Ianto asked, quickly, his words running together, and his accent thickening slightly.

"Ah, it's the gay thing. I was wondering when that would come up." She smiled at him. "I'm Japanese, Ianto. Of course it was an issue. When Mary showed me her true form, the first words out of my mouth were, 'so, I'm shagging a woman and an alien.' Mary asked which one was worse, and I responded, 'well, I know what my parents would say.'"

Ianto laughed aloud and Tosh joined in. Then, unexpectedly, Ianto felt his heart ache, and his laughter died on his lips. Tosh put her hand on his arm. "What happened, Ianto?" she asked in a quiet voice.

"We ran into my roommate from uni and his wife," Ianto muttered.

Tosh thought about that for a moment. "I see... what are you going to do?"

Ianto smiled at her sadly. "I don't know if I can do it, Tosh. I guess I didn't realize all that it would entail."

She patted his arm affectionately. Ianto shook his head in dismay, saying, "For two people working for a secret organization that hunts aliens, we're not very open minded are we?"

Tosh frowned. "We're open minded, Ianto. It's just the rest of the world that isn't. It's easy to forget that when we're surrounded by this all day." She waved her hand around the archives.

Ianto nodded, but looked unconvinced. Tosh took his hand and squeezed it. "Is it over, then? You and Jack?"
Ianto shrugged, not making eye contact. Tosh squeezed his hand again. "I'm sorry, Ianto."

Ianto sighed. "So am I," he said, looking at their hands.

Tosh withdrew her hand. "How about you come over to my flat tonight? We'll eat ice cream, watch a soppy chick flick, and cry about our failed relationships."

Ianto chuckled, feeling touched again by Tosh's concern. "Sounds great, Tosh. I'd love to, thanks."

She took him by the arm and led him out of the archives. Tosh grabbed her bag and stuck her head into Jack's office. Ianto could see Jack and Gwen, sitting at the desk, talking and laughing. Gwen was leaning forward, looking into Jack's eyes. Tosh said, "Ianto and I are leaving for the day, Jack. Call if you need us."

Jack barely glanced up. "Sure Tosh. See you tomorrow."

Ianto beat a hasty retreat out of the Hub with Tosh following close on his heels.
Jack was furious. He was annoyed and frustrated and fed up and hurt. *Angst and more angst*, Jack thought to himself. *And over some stupid label!* Jack had been down this road one too many times to not know the internal battle that was raging inside Ianto's mind, but he had expected more from his Torchwood team and especially from Ianto. *The man fights aliens on a daily basis, for crying out loud, and he cringes at being called gay? After everything, Ianto is ashamed to be seen with me.* It cut deeper than Jack cared to admit. He was tired of this century and its narrow minded culture. For once, he felt genuinely homesick.

It was the first night he spent alone since the Valiant, and he was terrified of the nightmares. He hadn't had one in weeks, but Ianto wasn't there to calm him if they returned. He spent a long night prowling around the Hub, afraid to go to bed. *You need to get over this Jack*, he told himself. *You can't be this co-dependent. It's pathetic. They're just nightmares.* He finally got into his bed and slept in fits and starts, afraid to completely succumb to sleep. He gave up at 5:00am and climbed up to his office to work.

He sat in his office the day after the incident with Alun, watching Ianto put on his best butler persona and pretend there was nothing between them. *That's it then. Without a word, he's done with me. That's how much I mean to him.* Jack was tempted to call Ianto into his office and have it out with him, but in the end, he decided to leave Ianto alone. *He should come and talk to me about it. I shouldn't have to drag it out of him.* Jack was devastated, but he refused to admit it to himself. After all, this was Ianto's problem, not his. *What could I possibly say to him*, he thought to himself. *Get over it? People suck? There's no such thing as gay where I'm from? Hey, at least we won't get thrown in prison anymore? Not very reassuring – and not true if you're living in some of the more backward places in the world. Well, at least it will no longer get you killed?… No, that's not true either.* Jack had been killed for sleeping with men quite a few times in his long life. Of course he had been killed for sleeping with women too. The world had changed a lot since he was first stranded here in 1869. But it hadn't changed enough. *No, he decided, this is Ianto's battle. There's nothing I can say.* All he could do was withdraw gracefully – or, in his case, a little spitefully. *To hell with him. I don't need him.* He put his mental barriers back in place. He could suffer his nightmares alone. He would be completely professional towards Ianto, but that was it. Instead, he would distract himself with Gwen.

Jack had noticed her growing interest in him since the Tommy incident when she had blatantly ignored Ianto with her offer to comfort Jack. He'd overlooked it at first, but since Ianto was avoiding him, he figured what the hell. It was fun, and Jack found himself getting caught up in Gwen's drama. At least it took his mind off Ianto. With Ianto, he was a dirty secret, but with Gwen, he was the ideal man. He wanted to bask in that glory for a while. As the week passed with no communication (and no sex) with Ianto, Jack found himself caught up in Gwen's hero worship. It was the ego boost he needed.

Jack knew that Gwen loved the attention, and somewhere in the back of his mind, he knew that he
was letting things go a little too far. He really didn't want to get between Gwen and Rhys. It would change Gwen, make her harder, and he needed Gwen just the way she was. But it was easy to forget all of that when you're caught up in the moment, and Jack was definitely caught up in the moment.

He also knew somewhere in the back of his mind that he was being spiteful towards Ianto, but he wasn't willing to admit that just yet. It was two weeks since he and Ianto had spoken, and he was still furious with him. He'd noticed that Ianto spent a lot of time with Tosh and Owen, and he wondered what that was about. But he was trying to forget... or make Ianto jealous... or both...

Things came to a head when Torchwood was called in to investigate a strange find in a trucking accident, and it seemed that Rhys was somehow involved. Gwen jumped to Rhys' defense, and Jack knew for certain that Gwen truly loved Rhys. Jack was just a symbol to her. He was the charming and mysterious champion of the Earth. She fell for his illusion. She didn't really know him, not the way Ianto did. But Ianto was still avoiding him.

Tosh had Rhys on speaker phone in the Hub, and Jack saw a glimmer of hope when Ianto handed him a note. He half expected it to be something dirty, or at least something good. However, Jack should have known that Ianto was always the consummate professional. The note simply said, *Find out what time the driver left the base. I can track him on CCTV.* Disappointed, Jack handed the note to Tosh.

There was a moment during the investigation when Jack nearly let things get completely out of control. He almost kissed Gwen, and he knew that if he did, he would open a door that he wouldn't be able to close again. They were at the warehouse tracking the alien meat and had been surprised to find Rhys there. Gwen wanted to go after him, half cocked and hot headed as usual. Gods, he loved her passion. "You can't just go in there. You have to do as I say," he said, physically restraining her.

She looked into his eyes, and he looked into hers. All he had to do was lean forward a few inches. He knew she would respond. Time seemed to stand still, as if waiting for him to make a decision, as if the whole of his life hinged on this one choice. He knew this was the pivotal moment. *Which road are you going to take, Jack?*

Something held him back. Something in his head screamed, *NO! This is wrong, and if you do this, there's no turning back.* He couldn't do it. He let her go. "We wait until he comes out," he said, turning away from her.

Jack was looking at Gwen out of the corner of his eye, thinking about what he had almost done, when he realized that Ianto and Owen were walking towards them. He felt his heart thud against his chest. *How much of that did Ianto see?* His pulse raced even faster, and he wondered how much of the scene he had wanted Ianto to witness. "Meet us back at the Hub," Jack said, barely looking at them, giving nothing away. "We're going to wait for Rhys to come out."

"Bloody hell! Rhys is in on it?" asked Owen, looking disgusted.

"Meet us back at the Hub. That's an order!" Jack practically shouted at him.

Ianto and Owen turned and walked away. He heard Owen mutter, "Alright, alright. Keep your trousers on."

When Rhys exited the warehouse and got back into his car, Gwen said, "Jack, drop me off at home. I'm going to find out what's going on."

They drove to Gwen's flat in silence, and Gwen got out of the SUV without looking at him. Jack returned to the Hub and went into his office. Ianto came in a few minutes later with a cup of coffee
for him. He set it down on Jack's desk and stared at Jack for a few moments. Then he said, "Jack, what's going on with Gwen?"

Jack sighed, "It seems Rhys is in it up to his eyeballs."

Ianto looked at the floor. "I meant between you and Gwen," he said in a quiet voice.

Jack felt his hackles rising. He snapped at Ianto, "This is the first time you speak to me in two weeks and that's all you have to say to me?"

Before Ianto could reply, Jack's mobile phone rang. He looked at the screen, saw it was Gwen, and flipped the phone open. "What's up, Gwen?"

"Jack, Rhys saw something at the factory. You need to hear what he has to say," she replied.

"… okay," Jack hesitated.

"And I've told him everything," she continued.

Jack sighed. He had wondered when this was going to happen. "Bring him in," he said resignedly.

"We'll be there in about an hour," Gwen said before she disconnected.

Jack flipped the phone shut and dropped his head into his hands. "Seems that Rhys saw something at the factory. Gwen's told him about Torchwood. They're on their way in," he said with what sounded like defeat.

He sat there, thinking about what a mess everything was, when he heard Ianto ask angrily, "What the hell is going on with you and Gwen, Jack?"

Jack's temper flared. He wanted to say, Oh, so now you give a shit? But there was a petty part of him that wanted to hurt Ianto as much as Ianto had hurt him, so instead he snarled, "What do you want me to say? It's not like you and I ever made any promises to each other."

Ianto's eyes narrowed. "Fuck you, Jack," Ianto growled under his breath. Then he spun on his heel and left Jack's office.

Damn it! What the hell am I doing, Jack asked himself, as he rubbed his head in his hands. Why did I just say that to Ianto? He slammed his fist on his desk. Because I'm mad as hell at him, that's why. He sat thinking for a few minutes. You didn't kiss Gwen because of Ianto, you idiot, he told himself honestly. This has gone on long enough. With a sigh, he got up to go and apologize to Ianto. He walked out of his office to find the team sitting around having a drink. He said, "Gwen's bringing Rhys in. He saw something at the factory. She's told him everything about us." Then he walked upstairs, as though that was his intention in coming out of his office all along.

He made his way onto the catwalk and looked down at Ianto. He lowered his mental barriers and thought as hard as he could, I'm sorry, hoping Ianto would sense his apology. Ianto looked up at him and then quickly looked away. "Well, this is unprecedented, a fiancé finding out," Ianto said to Tosh and Owen.

"Mainly because we're all sad and single," Tosh said ironically.

Jack saw Ianto smile at that, and he felt like a knife had been plunged into his chest. So he's told Tosh that we're through. Please contradict her, he thought, staring at Ianto.
"Speak for yourself. I'm better off without that kind of hassle," said Owen with his usual cynicism.

Jack walked along the catwalk towards the greenhouse, still looking at Ianto, hoping he would say something. Tosh said, "Maybe the answer is to go out with someone who knows what you do."

"Look around you, Tosh – only we know what we do," Owen said as he pushed his chair away from them and turned his attention back to the computer screens.

Tosh glanced briefly up at Jack, then picked up her wine glass and said nothing. *Maybe it's really over then. Just like that.* Jackfelt his fury rising again, so when Ianto turned and looked at him, his chin shot up in a defiant gesture. Ianto looked away and took a sip of his drink. As quickly as it had flamed, his anger died. *This is getting ridiculous, and it's enough already. If we're done, I want him to tell me to my face,* he thought. He walked downstairs towards his office, and passing the team, said, "Ianto. Can I see you in my office?"

Jack walked into his office and leaned on his desk with his arms crossed. He didn't want to sit behind his desk, because this wasn't a boss talking to an employee. This was Jack, talking to Ianto. Ianto walked in a moment later and stood by Jack's desk with his hands shoved in his pockets. Jack looked into Ianto's eyes. "I'm sorry," he said, leaving his mental barriers down.

Ianto just looked at him, but he didn't respond. Suddenly Jack ached to touch Ianto again. Jack pulled Ianto to him and wrapped his arms around him. "I'm sorry," he whispered, stroking Ianto's hair.

He couldn't deny that it felt so good to hold Ianto again. Ianto was stiff in his arms, but Jack never gave anything up easily. He held Ianto close, breathing in his scent. Ianto tentatively put his arms around Jack, and Jack closed his eyes. He didn't want to let Ianto go. He felt Ianto tighten his embrace, pulling Jack closer. Jack felt tears burning at the back of his eyes, but he blinked them away. They stood there, holding each other until they heard the alert indicating that someone was standing on the invisible lift. Jack released Ianto reluctantly and used his Vortex Manipulator to lower Gwen and Rhys into the Hub. He touched Ianto's face. "Later?" he asked hopefully.

Ianto nodded, and Jack kissed him quickly on the forehead. Then he walked out of his office to greet Gwen and Rhys.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my extraordinary beta riftintime.

Jack’s emotions were running rampant following his showdown with Gwen and Rhys. First, he and Rhys got into a testosterone-fueled pissing contest. Then, Gwen and Rhys were shouting at each other in the boardroom. And finally, when Jack told the team that they were going to try to save the alien, despite their grumblings, Gwen looked at him and said, "So you do have a heart."

It cut Jack to the bone. He looked at Rhys and said by way of an explanation, "We see enough death."

_Gwen thinks I'm just a cold-blooded bastard_, Jack thought as he walked desolately out of the boardroom. He felt an uneasiness growing in the pit of his stomach and, suddenly, he wanted desperately to see Ianto. He caught sight of Ianto as he made his way past the armoury. He entered just in time to catch Ianto doing a Dirty Harry impersonation. He bit his tongue so as not to laugh when Ianto pointed the gun at an invisible enemy and growled, "Make my day!"

Jack frantically schooled his features and cleared his throat loudly. "Achem." 

Ianto, his body language screaming with embarrassment, quickly put the gun down and turned to face Jack. With his best attempt at casual, Ianto asked, "Rhys, should we arm him?"

Jack replied, "Hell no, he's hot headed enough!"

"Like stags butting antlers," Ianto teased, "I half expected you to get out the measuring tape."

Jack laughed and moved towards Ianto. They hadn't really made it up yet, _but perhaps I can speed things along a bit_, he thought slyly, as he grabbed Ianto's hands and pressed his body up to Ianto's. "Who do you reckon would win?" Jack asked, pushing Ianto's hand against his hardening cock.

Ianto opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. Instead, he spun out of Jack's grip and returned his attention back to the guns. _Success_, Jack thought, smiling. He loved seeing Ianto flustered. _I'll just leave him hanging with that thought_, Jack mused, as he turned and jogged out of the room.

Gwen cheerfully took Rhys on a tour of the Hub, and Jack went into his office. He was anxious for the team to leave so he could be alone with Ianto. He spent some time on his computer, looking over the Rift readings. When that wasn't enough of a distraction, he got up and went to his bookshelf, looking for something to read. He picked up one of his trashy science fiction novels and turned to his favorite scene. He lifted his head to see Gwen and Rhys kissing. She looked right at Jack, still kissing Rhys, as though she wanted a reaction from him. _I've definitely let things go too far_, Jack thought, quickly turning away and moving out of their line of sight. He saw Ianto standing in the doorway of his office, watching him. _Damn_, Jack thought, as Ianto turned and left his office. _Damn, damn, damn!_ He sat down in his chair.

He didn't get a chance to talk to Ianto that night. Gwen and Rhys stayed until the small hours of the
morning, and Tosh never left the Hub. She and Ianto worked together through most of the night. Then they fell asleep on the Hub sofa, Ianto, with his head leaning against the wall and his long legs stretched out in front of him, and Tosh with her head on Ianto's shoulder. Jack was tempted to wake Ianto, but they looked so endearing that he couldn't bring himself to do it. Instead, he took out his mobile phone and snapped a picture of the two of them. He knew that Ianto would love it.

The team assembled a couple of hours later, and they dropped Rhys and Jack off at Rhys' office. Jack got a huge kick out of flirting with Rhys' secretary, Ruth, while they waited for the phone call from Dale. When it came, he and Rhys took the Harwood's van while the team followed in the SUV. Rhys gave him hell about hiring Gwen, but Jack held firm. They needed Gwen. He told Rhys, remembering fondly, "On her first day of work, she told me off for being too clinical."

"She doesn't hold back, mate," Rhys replied.

"Mmm, stubborn as hell," Jack agreed.

"Tell me about it. Yeah, she's an amazing girl. I'm a lucky man, Jack."

"Yeah, you said it," Jack said, turning away, thinking about Rhys and Gwen… thinking about himself and Ianto.

_They are lucky_, Jack thought to himself. _I wish Ianto and I…_ Rhys interrupted his thought, "I just wish you would've been uglier."

Jack looked at Rhys, and Rhys started laughing. Jack chuckled. Rhys said, matter-of-factly, "You're not gay, by any chance, are you?"

Jack, still chuckling said without thinking, "If it makes you feel any better, Ianto and I are…” he hesitated. _What are Ianto and I doing?_

Rhys looked sideways at him. "You and Ianto?"

Jack quickly changed the subject. "We're almost there. You sure you're ready for this?"

"I'm ready," Rhys replied, looking determined.

At the warehouse, things rapidly fell apart. Dale and his associates captured Ianto and Rhys, and Gwen, seeing Rhys in danger, gave herself up. Then one of the other men spotted Jack and Tosh, and they were forced out of their positions. Dale shot at Gwen, and Rhys threw himself in front of her, taking the bullet instead. Ianto broke free and struggled with Dale for his gun, and the creature started thrashing as it tried to escape from its bonds. Jack felt panic rising in his gut. "NO!" he shouted, running for his discarded gun, terrified that Ianto would be hurt.

Jack tried to get a clear shot, but Ianto was in the way. He couldn't reach Ianto because he and Tosh were trapped behind the creature. All he could do was watch in helpless agony as Dale pointed his gun at Ianto and shouted, "Die!" firing point blank – but his clip was empty.

_Thank the gods!_ Jack's heart was pounding. He shouted, "Ianto. Go! After them," his voice cracking with lingering anxiety.

Owen came in moments later and put the creature out of its misery. All in all, it wasn't the best work Torchwood had ever done. Jack stood, touching the creature, feeling terrible that this was one life they couldn't save. He turned to see Ianto walking towards them. "I've got everything under control," Ianto said calmly. "They're all knocked out and tied up."
Jack didn't care that the entire team was watching. He didn't care that he and Ianto hadn't really made up yet. He ran up to Ianto and crushed him to his chest. "Don't ever do that again," he said, tears threatening to fall.

"What," Ianto asked with his best trademark sarcasm, "Disarm and subdue the bad guys and regain control of the situation?"

Jack wanted to laugh, but he was too shaken. "Almost get killed. Ianto… I…"

He heard Owen call, "Jack, we need to get Rhys back to the Hub."

He grabbed Ianto behind the neck and kissed him hard on the lips. Then he turned and went back to work.
Ianto and Jack had barely spoken for almost two weeks. Ianto knew that it was all his fault – he had behaved badly. After he had childishly avoided Jack for a week, he'd wanted to talk to the older man, but by then, it seemed that Jack was no longer interested. Jack was spending all of his time with Gwen, and Ianto was somewhat revolted… and more than a little hurt. It appeared Jack had moved on pretty quickly, and Ianto was starting to feel that he hadn't meant much to Jack after all.

Ianto had been spending a lot of time with Tosh and Owen. He enjoyed their company, despite Owen's constant griping and Tosh's obvious infatuation with the medic. They were entertaining, and Ianto had needed a distraction. He had also hoped that maybe he could do his part to push the two of them together, but he'd decided, after careful observation, that Owen wasn't quite ready for that yet. Instead he let things be and enjoyed their antics. He was depressed about Jack, but he would be damned if he let it show.

Torchwood was called in to investigate alien meat found in a trucking accident. Just to make things more interesting, the vehicle in question turned out to be from Harwoods Haulage, Rhys' trucking firm. Ianto, along with Jack, Gwen, and Owen, were at the warehouse to take the operation down. Ianto and Owen were at a side door of the warehouse, about to make their way in, when Jack's voice came over their comms and told them to stand down. Obeying orders, they aborted their entrance and walked around the warehouse looking for Jack and Gwen.

As they turned a corner, they caught side of Jack holding Gwen in his arms and looking deep into her eyes. It looked like they were about to snog. The sexual tension was unmistakable, and Ianto stopped dead in his tracks. Owen stopped too, his eyes darting quickly from Ianto to Jack and Gwen and then back to Ianto. Jack released Gwen, and, after a moment, Owen and Ianto started towards them again. Jack, noticing their approach, said, "Meet us back at the Hub."

Jack barely looked at them, and his emotions were closed off. Ianto kept his features trained in an impassive mask. "We're going to wait for Rhys to come out," Jack continued.

"Bloody hell! Rhys is in on it?" asked Owen, looking disgusted.

"Meet us back at the Hub. That's an order!" Jack growled.

Ianto and Owen turned and walked away. Owen muttered, "Alright, alright. Keep your trousers on."

Ianto was silent, his thoughts reeling. "What's eating him?" Owen asked as he opened Ianto's car door and got in.

Ianto didn't respond. His mind was flooded with emotion, and he didn't trust himself to speak. He just got into his car and started the engine, turning it in the direction of the Hub. Owen glanced at Ianto out of the corner of his eye and said, "So, Jack's already tired of shagging you? Already moved onto Gwen, has he? That was fast."
"Leave it, Owen," Ianto said, trying to keep his feelings in check.

Owen eyed him. "I warned you what he was like, Ianto. I told you it would go to shit."

"Shut up, Owen," Ianto growled, tightly gripping the steering wheel.

"Guess Gwen wants one last hurrah before she gets married, huh?" Owen added thoughtfully.

Ianto didn’t say anything; he just gripped the steering wheel tighter and drove in silence. He decided that enough was enough. He was going to have it out with Jack once and for all. When he got back to the Hub, he headed straight for the coffee machine. He wanted something to do with his hands and needed some time to pull himself together.

Fifteen minutes later, Ianto heard Jack enter the Hub and head into his office. He poured a cup of coffee for Jack and took it to him. He set it down on Jack’s desk and stared at the older man, wondering what to say. He finally settled for being straightforward. He asked calmly, "Jack, what’s going on with Gwen?"

Jack sighed, "It seems Rhys is in it up to his eyeballs."

Ianto looked at the floor. "Spit it out, Jones, he told himself. "I meant between you and Gwen," he said quietly.

"This is the first time you speak to me in two weeks and that’s all you have to say to me?"

The anger in Jack's voice was unmistakable. Ianto was taken aback, but before he could compose his reply, Jack's phone rang. Jack looked at it and flipped it open. "What's up, Gwen?"

Ianto stiffened. "Speak of the devil, he thought as he heard Jack say, "Okay," and then "Bring him in."

Jack flipped his phone shut and dropped his head into his hands, saying, "Seems Rhys saw something at the factory. Gwen’s told him about Torchwood. They're on their way in."

Jack sounded miserable. Ianto felt his anger rising. Not only is he totally over me, he's already heartbroken over Gwen. The fire that always burned inside him threatened to break free. He was seething with rage. "What the hell is going on with you and Gwen, Jack?"

"What do you want me to say?" Jack growled. "It's not like you and I ever made any promises to each other."

Ianto felt like he had been slapped in the face. Owen was right. Jack Harkness is about as constant as a ping-pong ball. Fury rose inside him and broke like a storm. He couldn't believe he had wasted so much time struggling over his feelings for Jack Fucking Harkness. He wasn't worth it. Ianto's eyes narrowed, bile rising in his throat. "Fuck you, Jack," he spat venomously, before turning and leaving the office.

Ianto wanted to storm out of the Hub, but there was work to be done and Torchwood always came first. Instead, he headed for the refrigerator and took out a beer. He desperately needed a drink. Then, looking at Tosh and Owen, he decided that he didn't want to drink alone. If they were all stuck there, they might as well make the most of it. He grabbed another beer for Owen and poured Tosh a glass of white wine.

He wordlessly handed out the drinks. Tosh and Owen stopped what they were doing, as if by silent consent, and gathered around the sofa. Ianto leaned against a support beam. He wished he could convince Tosh and Owen to go to the pub with him and get thoroughly pissed, but we have to wait
for Gwen and Rhys. He rolled his eyes at the thought. He supposed he should tell Owen and Tosh about Rhys finding out about Torchwood, but before he had a chance, Jack came out of his office. Ianto almost flinched, but he managed to maintain a neutral expression. Jack looked at them and said, "Gwen's bringing Rhys in. He saw something at the factory. She's told him everything about us."

Jack headed up the stairs. Ianto was startled when he suddenly sensed something coming from Jack. Jack's emotions had been closed to him for two weeks. Ianto turned his head to find Jack staring down at him from the catwalk. The emotion Jack was broadcasting was unmistakable – remorse. Ianto looked away quickly and, wanting to start a conversation in order to ignore Jack, said, "Well, this is unprecedented, a fiancé finding out."

"Mainly because we're all sad and single," Tosh said ironically.

Ianto half laughed. Yeah, I guess I am single, he thought sardonically.

"Speak for yourself. I'm better off without that kind of hassle," said Owen with his usual cynicism.

Tosh said, looking hopefully at Owen, "Maybe the answer is to go out with someone who knows what you do."

Owen was as oblivious as usual. He said, "Look around you, Tosh – only we know what we do." He pushed his chair away from them and turned his attention back to the computer screens.

Tosh glanced briefly up at Jack, then picked up her wine glass and said nothing. Oh, Tosh. What are we going to do with you? Ianto thought to himself. Ianto felt Jack's emotions abruptly close off, and he turned to look at Jack. Jack's chin shot up defiantly. Ianto looked away and took a sip of his drink, his stomach churning. Jack came down the stairs. As he passed the team he said, "Ianto. Can I see you in my office?"

Tosh and Owen looked at Ianto, but they didn't say anything. Their emotions spoke loud enough. Ianto swallowed the remainder of his beer, set it down, and walked into Jack's office, feeling slightly ill. Jack was sitting on the edge of his desk with his arms crossed. Ianto shoved his hands in his pockets, not knowing what to expect and doing his level best to maintain his composure. Jack put his mental barriers down once more, and Ianto, again, felt Jack's remorse. Jack looked into his eyes and said, "I'm sorry."

Ianto looked at him. He knew Jack was sincere, but he was still reeling. Jack pulled Ianto into his arms and stroked his head. "I'm sorry," he said again.

Ianto was stiff in Jack's arms, trying to maintain his anger. But Jack didn't let him go, and Ianto felt himself starting to relent. Jack's scent was intoxicating, and Ianto instinctually wrapped his arms around the older man. He had missed Jack – a lot. More than he had been willing to admit. He relaxed into Jack's embrace, his anger dissipating. He pulled Jack closer to him. They held each other silently until Gwen and Rhys arrived. Jack released Ianto and used his Vortex Manipulator to lower the invisible lift. Jack touched Ianto's face asking, "Later?"

Ianto nodded, and his gut clenched when Jack kissed him on the forehead. But Gwen and Rhys were coming down in the lift, and there was work to be done. Ianto and Jack turned their attention back to the job at hand.
Ianto marveled at the way his disposition could shift so drastically with the attention of one man. His snark, which had deserted him for the past couple of weeks, reappeared suddenly, with two words and one embrace from Jack Harkness. One minute he was miserable and churlish, and the next, he was making quips about Torchwood releasing a single. *Which, by the way, was hilarious, and I can't believe no one even cracked a smile. No one appreciates my humor,* Ianto thought, dejectedly.

Ianto was gratified to see that Jack was already turning to him again for his opinion, as though the past two weeks hadn't happened. Of course, it was only for an opinion about whether or not Jack was a show-off – *which he is* – but it pleased Ianto nonetheless, and added to his good humor.

So much had his mood improved, that even the emotional display during the team meeting didn't faze him. He quipped and snarked his way through the meeting, then went to the armoury to sort out the stun guns. Feeling frivolous, he picked up one of the guns and pointed it at an imaginary target. Growling Dirty Harry style, he said, "Make my day!"

He heard Jack's unmistakable "Achem," coming from behind him. Feeling completely mortified, he dropped the gun, and turned to face Jack. With his best attempt at casual, he asked, "Rhys, should we arm him?"

"Hell no, he's hot headed enough!" Jack replied.

Ianto couldn't help but tease Jack, "Like stags butting antlers. I half expected you to get out the measuring tape."

Jack laughed and moved towards him. Ianto felt momentary alarm. They hadn't really sorted out things between them yet, and Ianto wasn't quite sure how to respond. Jack grabbed his hands and pressed his body against Ianto's, asking, "Who do you reckon would win?"

Jack put Ianto's hand on his cock, and raised his eyebrows suggestively. Ianto opened his mouth to make a witty retort, but he was so distracted that nothing came to mind. Instead, he spun out of Jack's grip and pretended to return his attention to the guns. He heard Jack leave the room, and he let out the breath he didn't know he was holding.

*We need to make things up between us, and fast! Dead puppies... dead puppies... dead puppies...* he thought, trying to regain control of his body.

Ianto finished organising the weapons and went to find Jack. He hoped that he would be able to lure Jack into one of the hidden corners of the archives for some much needed make-up sex. He went into his office and stood in the doorway. Jack was standing by his desk, reading some trashy science fiction novel. Ianto was about to tease him about it when Jack looked up suddenly. He was staring at something, with a pained expression on his face. Ianto turned to see what Jack was looking at. He saw Gwen kissing Rhys with her eyes open, looking directly at Jack.

Ianto started to feel ill again. As quickly as his mood had elevated, it crashed. Jack turned from Gwen and Rhys, and he caught sight of Ianto. For a minute their eyes met. Then Ianto turned around
and walked out of Jack's office. He just didn't want to deal with Jack anymore.

Ianto busied himself for the rest of the night, trying his hardest not to think about Jack. He and Tosh worked together until the small hours of the morning. Then they sat down on the Hub sofa for a rest, and the next thing Ianto knew, it was morning. He got ready for work in the communal shower room. Then the team left for the warehouse holding the giant alien space whale, where things rapidly fell apart.

Dale and his associates captured Ianto and Rhys. Ianto worked at the rope binding his hands while Gwen, and then Jack and Tosh were forced out into the open. He was still working at the rope when Dale shot at Gwen and Rhys took the bullet for her. Ianto finally broke free and struggled with Dale for the gun. He had the upper hand for a minute, but Dale flipped him over and kicked him in the chest, winding him. Ianto tried desperately to catch his breath as Dale pointed the gun at him. "Die!" Dale shouted, firing point blank.

Dale's clip was empty, and Ianto was so stunned at his near escape from death that he lay motionless. It had happened so quickly that he didn't even have time to react. He heard Jack's voice calling him back to the present, "Ianto. Go! After them!"

Ianto got to his feet, finally registering the chaos around him. The creature was thrashing its way out of its restraints, Rhys was bleeding to death, and Tosh and Jack were trapped. His body finally reacted. He felt a surge of adrenaline and fury at the wankers who had put his friends in danger. He picked up his stun gun and headed after the men with calm resolve. Jack was counting on him.

He went to find Owen who was holding one of the men up against the wall. Ianto held his stun gun up to the man and fired. He was still catching his breath from the kick to his chest. "We've got to help them," he panted. "It's out of control."

He turned to go and find Dale. As he made his way down the hall, he heard voices coming from behind a door. He had finally regained control of his breathing. He waited until one of the men went to open the door, and then kicked it in, knocking the man backwards. Ianto calmly strode up to him and fired the stun gun. Then he strode towards Dale with determination. He saw Dale reaching for his gun. Not again, you bastard, he thought as he gave a well aimed roundhouse kick, knocking the gun from Dale's hands. He held the gun to Dale's forehead. "Pray they survive," he said menacingly. Then he fired.

He calmly turned and went to make sure he had dealt with all of them. Then he made quick work of securing the prisoners and went back to the team. He found the creature dying, and Jack, Owen and Tosh standing with their hands on it, offering what comfort they could. He could feel their sorrow. He walked towards them. Jack turned and saw Ianto. "I've got everything under control," Ianto said calmly. "They're all knocked out and tied up."

Jack ran up to Ianto and wrapped his arms around him. Ianto was surprised, but he didn't show it. "Don't ever do that again," Jack said, his voice breaking.

"What," Ianto asked, feeling rather proud of himself, "Disarm and subdue the bad guys and regain control of the situation?"

Jack shook his head and pressed Ianto tighter to him. "Almost get killed," Jack whispered into his ear. "Ianto… I…"

"Jack, we need to get Rhys back to the Hub," Owen interrupted Jack's words.

Jack grabbed Ianto behind the neck and kissed him hard on the lips, taking Ianto completely by
surprise. Before Ianto could even think to respond, Jack had already turned his attention back to work. Ianto stood still, stunned for a moment, and then he too joined in the clean-up effort.

After everything was sorted out, and Gwen and Rhys had left, Jack called Ianto into his office. Ianto entered and went straight for Jack's scotch, pouring himself a glass. "It's going to be one of those conversations, is it?" Jack asked with a half grin.

"Not during business hours," Ianto responded with a smirk.

"Then I'll stick to water," Jack said, lifting the water bottle sitting on his desk and taking a sip.

They heard the cogwheel door roll open and Gwen came in with all of the fury of a hurricane, announcing that she wouldn't retcon Rhys. She was deaf to their protestations, threatening to quit Torchwood and let them retcon her, and insulting all of them in the process. Ianto was disgusted.

Jack tossed his water bottle to Ianto and walked up to Gwen, "You really think you could go back to your old life before Torchwood?"

"I wouldn't know anything different," she responded defiantly.

"I would," Jack said, his voice breaking.

Ianto started to feel ill for the third time that day. You've got to be fucking kidding me, he thought.

He watched as Jack and Gwen stared into each other's eyes. Then Jack said, through gritted teeth, "Give Rhys my love, and I will see you tomorrow."

Jack turned from her and walked back into his office. Ianto handed him the water bottle as he passed and leaned on the door frame in despair. He watched disconsolately as Jack sat down in his chair and pulled up the CCTV feed outside the Hub. Jack watched Gwen and Rhys kissing with a resigned look on his face. Ianto finished the rest of his scotch in one go, put the glass down, and left Jack's office, heading for the safety of the archives. That's it. I'm done, he thought with hopeless determination.
Jack watched the CCTV feed of Gwen and Rhys with mixed feelings. He always let Gwen get away with murder. *Hell, I let the entire team get away with murder; Ianto and a Cyberman, Tosh and treason, Owen and… well, being Owen. And now Gwen's fiancé knows about us.* He didn't know if it would mean Gwen would be better off, or if it meant they would lose her. Rhys might decide that her job was too dangerous and convince her to quit. *And we need her. I need her. I need every one of them. But I especially need Ianto.*

He looked up to say something to Ianto, and realized that Ianto was gone. His suit jacket was hanging on a chair in Jack's office, so he knew that Ianto was still in the Hub. "Where's he run off to now," Jack asked aloud as he pulled up the internal CCTV feed.

He flipped through the cameras until he found Ianto in the archives. Tosh popped her head in the door and said, "Owen and I are going to get pissed. Do you and Ianto want to join us?"

"Maybe later, Tosh," Jack said as he watched Ianto on the CCTV.

"Let Ianto know that we'll be at the pub," Tosh continued. "I sent him a text, but he didn't respond."

"Uh-huh," Jack murmured with raised eyebrows, as he had just watched Ianto violently hurl a book at the wall.

He kept his eyes glued to the screen, watching Ianto, as he heard Tosh and Owen leave for the evening. Then he turned off the screen and headed for the archives. *What's eating him,* Jack wondered as he made his way through the maze of hallways in Torchwood's sub-basement. He saw Ianto leaning against the wall, his back to him. Jack walked up behind Ianto and put his arms around his waist. Ianto shrugged him off, and without turning around said, "I'm not your consolation prize, Jack."

Jack was taken aback. "What the hell does that mean?" he asked, confused.

Ianto turned to face him, and Jack was stunned at the ferocity of Ianto's expression. "Do you think I'm stupid?" Ianto shouted, "Or maybe you think I'm blind?"

"Ianto, I don't…" Jack started to say, but Ianto cut him off.

"Oh come off it, Jack! You and Gwen have been making eyes at each other for weeks now. Everyone has noticed and everyone has commented on it! How can you even pretend that nothing's going on after that display?" Ianto pointed in the general direction of the main area of the Hub. Jack blinked. He was totally astounded by Ianto's outburst – and a little turned on. He opened his mouth, but Ianto continued his tirade before a word had formed on Jack's lips. "I don't understand how you can fall for Gwen's rubbish! It was deplorable! And you're pathetic for being taken in by it," Ianto sneered at him. "It's so cold and lonely out there for the rest of you," Ianto said, mimicking Gwen's voice. "Please!" Ianto returned to his own, most acerbic tone, "Spare me! Who the hell does..."
she think she is?"

Jack raised his eyebrows. *When he puts it like that*… he found himself thinking. Again he opened his mouth to speak, but Ianto continued, still seething, "Why are you even down here, Jack? You finally realized that she loves Rhys after all, so you come crawling back to me?"

"Ianto, that's not…" Jack tried to interject, but Ianto cut him off again.

"I'm tired of you pissing me about, Jack!" Ianto roared at him.

Jack felt his hackles rising, "I'm pissing you about?" he asked, taking a step towards Ianto. "I'm pissing you about?" he repeated, getting up in Ianto's face. "You haven't spoken to me in weeks!"
The anger and hurt Jack had felt over the situation came raging to the surface.

"Well it certainly didn't take you long to move on," Ianto spat at him, pushing Jack out of his personal space.

"What am I supposed to do?" Jack growled, "Sit around and wait for you to decide whether or not you're going to throw everything away because some idiot called you gay?"

"That isn't what this is about, Jack!" Ianto snarled. "This is about you and Gwen."

"No, Ianto!" Jack thundered, stepping closer to Ianto again. "This is about you and me! You just dropped me because you're having some 21st century existential crisis." Jack crossed his arms and leaned into Ianto's personal space again. "That's all I'm worth to you?" he asked bitterly. "At least Gwen wouldn't be ashamed to be seen with me!" Jack threw out spitefully.

"I know we all seem like unsophisticated caveman to you, Jack," Ianto snarled, "But it's different for me."

Jack looked hard at Ianto. Then his eyes narrowed, and he said with disdain, "Ianto Jones, I would have never taken you for a coward."

Jack felt the pain on his jaw before he had even realized that Ianto had hit him. He put his hand to his mouth and felt blood on his fingers. Then he felt his body being hurled against the wall. Ianto was holding him by the shirt, twisting the fabric in his hands. His beautiful features were contorted into a mask of rage. Jack's heart started pounding with fear and excitement, and his cock started to respond. Jack couldn't deny that he was completely turned on by open displays of passion. It was what Jack found so attractive in Gwen, but Jack had forgotten that Ianto had that fire too, in spades. Ianto just didn't show it as often as Gwen did. It was those hidden depths that had attracted Jack to Ianto in the first place, and what had made him fall so hard for the remarkable young man.

Ianto pushed Jack harder against the wall and snarled, "I... am... not... a... coward," emphasizing every word.

Then Ianto was kissing him brutally, biting Jack's tongue and drawing more blood from his already bleeding lip. The pain was exquisite, and Jack was rock hard in seconds. Ianto pulled back suddenly and turned away from Jack. Jack grabbed at Ianto's arm, and Ianto turned and punched Jack again, shouting, "Fuck you!"

Because Jack was holding Ianto's other arm, his second punch wasn't as effective as his first. Jack caught Ianto's fist and spun them around, so Ianto was up against the wall. Jack pinned Ianto's body with his own and forced his hands over his head. He crushed his lips against Ianto's, and Ianto responded ruthlessly. Jack let go of Ianto's hands and pulled open Ianto's shirt, scattering buttons everywhere. He put his hands on Ianto's bare chest, and Ianto pushed Jack away from him. Jack tried
to pin Ianto again, and they struggled, knocking things off of shelves in the process.

After several seconds of struggling, biting, clawing, and kissing each other, Jack succeeded in pinning Ianto against the wall again. He yanked open his own waistcoat and pulled both of his shirts over his head. Ianto used the opportunity to try to shove Jack away, but Jack had anticipated the move and had his weight centered accordingly. He pressed his bare chest against Ianto's and kissed him viciously, pulling at Ianto's belt buckle. Ianto curled his fingers in Jack's hair and pulled it hard, crushing Jack's lips to his. Jack had just gotten Ianto's pants unzipped when Ianto, with one good shove, managed to upset Jack's balance. He spun Jack around and shoved his face into the wall with one hand, while unfastening Jack's trousers with the other. Jack waited until Ianto had finished with his zipper and had moved his hand to work on his own trousers, before he spun out of Ianto's grip. He shoved Ianto's back against the wall, pushing his hips against Ianto's. They both groaned as their cocks pressed against each other.

Jack realized that they both wanted to top, and neither of them was going to give in, so he decided that this was the best alternative. He kissed Ianto passionately, kicking off his boots and stepping out of his trousers. Ianto kicked off his own shoes, and Jack yanked Ianto's trousers down. Ianto stepped out of his trousers and tried to move away from the wall, but Jack grabbed his hands and entwining their fingers, held Ianto's hands against the wall above his head.

Jack pressed their now naked bodies together again, grinding his cock against Ianto's, kissing him hard on the mouth. Ianto bit at Jack's lip and pulled his hands from Jack's grasp. He clawed at Jack's back, digging his nails into Jack's skin and pulling Jack's body closer. Jack groaned at the pain and pleasure that were simultaneously coursing through his body. They thrust against each other violently, almost painfully. Both of them were so worked up that they were cumming hard against each other within minutes.

They stayed clutched in each other's embrace for a few moments. Then their bodies started to relax, and they stood, their forehead pressed together, panting into each other's mouths. Jack felt the blood dripping from his lip and saw that Ianto had a long, bleeding scratch down his chest. Jack looked down at their softening cocks, he and couldn't help the grin that spread across his face. "You know," Jack remarked impassively, "We could have just gotten out the measuring tape."

And as if the spell had broken, Ianto burst into uproarious laughter. Jack laughed with him, feeling immense affection for Ianto rising in his chest. Oh gods, Jack thought, I think I might be in love with him.
Ianto was still laughing at Jack's comment about the measuring tape. How could he possibly stay mad at Jack with quips like that? Still chuckling, he said, "I don't think it would have helped, as we're about the same size."

"I'm definitely bigger!" Jack retorted.

Ianto raised an eyebrow at Jack. "We are NOT having this conversation," he remarked dryly.

Jack crossed his arms over his chest. "What, you don't want to admit that I'm bigger?" he asked, eyeing Ianto.

Ianto bridled. "Thicker, maybe, but not big…" Ianto cut himself off, saying, "I can't believe we're having this conversation."

"Thicker AND bigger," said Jack with confidence.

"You are not!" Ianto retorted, before he could stop himself. He raised his hands to his face, rubbing his eyes. He said, with amused exasperation, "We're actually having this conversation."

"I'm going to get a measuring tape," Jack announced, turning from Ianto and striding naked down the hallway.

"He's gone to get a measuring tape," Ianto said, as though to an invisible audience.

Ianto shook his head and laughed again. Then he slid down to the floor and sat with his arms around his knees, thinking about everything that had happened. Not an hour earlier, he had sworn that he was done with Jack Harkness. Now, he was sitting naked on the floor of the archives, covered in sweat, blood and cum. Jack would say that it's the perfect combination, he thought, smiling to himself. It's not half bad… he mused.

Then everything that had happened that day flashed before his eyes, and he suddenly felt exhausted. He put his head down on his arms and sighed. How did I get here? He sighed again. Do I just forgive him after everything with Gwen? He felt himself growing angry once more. Then he reasoned with himself. Of course, I was a complete wanker as well…

He was startled out of his reverie by the heat of Jack's body next to his, and Jack's hand on his back. He looked up. Jack was sitting next to him, looking into his face, his expression unreadable. Jack withdrew his hand and leaned his head back against the wall. He sighed. "I can't pretend to completely understand, Ianto, but it hurt."

Ianto knew that Jack was referring to his behavior after the incident with Alun. Ianto closed his eyes. Then he opened them again, wishing he had something to drink. "I know I behaved like a complete wanker, Jack. I have no excuse for it, only an explanation of a sort. But I'm sure you don't want to hear it."
"I do, actually," Jack said, stretching his legs out and crossing them at the ankles.

Ianto sighed. *How the hell do I explain this?* He hesitated, "I'm not sure I even have it sorted in my head yet."

"I'll bear that in mind," Jack said, looking at him expectantly.

Ianto rested his cheek on his arm, looking at Jack. "I know that to you there is no such thing as sexual orientation. But this century isn't there yet, Jack, so to us, there is. I have friends who are gay, and I've heard their stories about coming to terms with it. They knew, for a good portion of their lives, that they were attracted to people of the same sex. It was always an element of their struggle, part of their psyche, knowing that one day they were going to have to face it; to tell the world they were gay."

Ianto paused for a moment, collecting his thoughts. He was not one for big speeches, and this was difficult for him. He continued, "I've never had feelings towards anyone of the same sex. I always had girlfriends, and I never felt like I was missing anything. And then you..."

He stopped and lifted his head up, looking into Jack's eyes. "You're the only man I've ever been attracted to. When we started... shagging, I figured that's all it was. But when I realized that it wasn't..." Ianto stopped abruptly and exhaled. Then he went on, "I guess I never considered all that it would entail. I wasn't ready for it."

Jack raised his eyebrows and looked like he was about to speak, so Ianto continued hurriedly, "I know it sounds naive, Jack, but working for Torchwood tends to skew your perspective. I forgot how people who haven't seen the things we've seen view the world. I balked. I needed some time to think, to sort my feelings. When I'm around you, it's just too confusing," Ianto stopped again, shaking his head.

Jack said nothing. He just continued looking at Ianto. Ianto explained, "By the time I'd licked my wounds and pulled myself together, you and Gwen were all over each other. I was furious with you, and it just didn't seem worth it anymore."

Jack looked away from Ianto, saying, "I'm not going to say that I had no idea what was going on, Ianto. It was pretty obvious from your reaction to us running into your friend. I just wish you'd said something instead of avoiding me."

"That's the problem, Jack," Ianto retorted with frustration. "You don't understand. You're not from this time. You're always making comments about our *quaint little labels*. How was I supposed to explain my *21st century existential crisis* to you," he said, repeating Jack's words from earlier.

Jack sighed with exasperation. "Ianto, I've been around since 1869. You don't think I've figured it out by now?"

Ianto was momentarily startled. He hadn't even considered it. Jack Harkness, in 1869, flirting with and shagging everything that moved… terrifying thought. Ianto smirked. *I wonder how many times it got him killed.*

"What's funny?" Jack asked, sounding apprehensive.

"I was just trying to imagine how many times you got yourself killed by hitting on and shagging men in our very conservative past," Ianto said, with a full on smile.

Jack gave his trademark grin. "You have no idea!"
They smiled at each other. *I've really missed him*, Ianto thought, feeling suddenly overwhelmed with emotion. He opened his mouth to tell Jack, when he remembered Gwen, and closed it again. *Sodding Gwen*, he thought bitterly.
The smile fell from Ianto's face at the thought of Jack and Gwen. Jack must have caught the look because he, too, stopped smiling. "What is it, Ianto?"

Ianto pursed his lips together and shook his head. He didn't even know how to begin. He looked at Jack, and he felt angry again. "You and Gwen…"

"There's nothing going on between me and Gwen, except for some harmless flirting," Jack interrupted him.

"Harmless flirting?" Ianto asked incredulously. "Don't insult my intelligence, Jack," Ianto chastised. "Considering the emotions coming from Gwen, I'd say it had gone a lot further than harmless flirting."

"Then it was entirely one sided," Jack said defensively.

Ianto clenched his fists. "No it wasn't, Jack."

"How would you know? First of all, I closed myself off to you. Second, you haven't spoken to me, so how could you possibly know what was going on in my mind. And thirdly, it's nice to know that you give a damn," Jack said, angrily.

Ianto took several deep breaths, trying to still his temper. "One," Ianto counted on his fingers, "I thought you weren't going to do that anymore. Two, why don't you tell me what's going on in your head? Three, how could you think I wouldn't give a damn?" Ianto said, with overemphasized calm.

Jack jutted his chin out in the defensive posture that Ianto knew all too well. *Yeah, go ahead and try to explain it all away, Jack,* Ianto thought with scorn. Jack held up one finger, saying, "You weren't speaking to me, so you lost privileges." He held up a second finger, "I thought Gwen would cheer me up." He held up a third finger. "Um, you weren't speaking to me."

"And how, exactly, would you get Gwen to cheer you up?" Ianto asked with icy calm.

"Ianto…" Jack hesitated, "Okay, look, Gwen's attention is flattering, and I just needed that after you…"

"After I what?" Ianto asked, truly wanting to know.

"After I thought you were done with me," Jack said, shrugging slightly.

Ianto raised his eyebrows. "Is that really what you thought?"

"What was I supposed to think?" Jack asked defensively.

"That I was having an existential crisis, and I would get over it if you just gave me some time?" Ianto
tried hopefully, knowing it sounded weak – even to his ears. He didn't wait for Jack's reply. "I know, I know. It sounds a feeble excuse, even to me. You're right; I was an arse, okay? Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa," Ianto exaggerated. "I prostrate myself before you."

Jack half smiled at him, but he didn't laugh, and Ianto was disappointed. Jack looked down, saying, "Knowing that you would ditch me like that, when I didn't even do anything wrong… what's going to happen when I really fuck up? Cause I'm sure I'll really fuck up some day," Jack half smiled again.

The words were out of Ianto's mouth before he could turn on his filter. "Are you in love with Gwen?" he asked bluntly, closing his eyes and bracing himself for the answer.

He felt Jack's hand on his arm, and he opened his eyes, looking at Jack. Jack's forehead was wrinkled in consternation. "No, Ianto. I'm not in love with Gwen," he said, looking into Ianto's eyes. "Not even close."

Ianto could sense the truth in Jack's statement, and he felt his body relaxing, but he was still unconvinced. "But if Gwen left Rhys…" Ianto began.

"Then she wouldn't be Gwen, and I still wouldn't want her." Jack sighed and looked uncomfortable. "Ianto, a big part of my flirtation with Gwen was just good old-fashioned spite."

Ianto was silent as he considered Jack's words. *He was trying to get back at me? What are we, twelve?* Jack continued, "I knew it had gone too far when Gwen…" he cut himself off.

Ianto looked at him sharply. "When Gwen what?" Ianto asked, feeling a knot forming in his stomach.

"When I could see that Gwen was getting carried away. Nothing happened between us," Jack finished quickly.

"So you flirted with Gwen just to get back at me?" Ianto asked with half amusement and half disdain. He couldn't deny the relief he felt at Jack's words.

"Well, when you put it like that… yeah, I guess I did," Jack said sheepishly. "Well, that and the ego boost," he added.

"Oh please, Jack. If your ego gets any bigger, you're going to have to pay it a salary!" Ianto quipped.

"Hey!" Jack pointed a finger at him. "Who signs your paychecks?"

"I do," Ianto deadpanned.

"Okay, well, who's name do you forge on your paychecks then?" Jack asked, trying to repress a grin.

Ianto laughed. He felt like a weight had been lifted off of his shoulders, and he felt ashamed of the pair of them. He knew that Jack had been an arse, but so had he. *We both behaved like teenagers,* he thought with irritation. He looked at Jack, sitting naked next to him on the floor of the archives, and suddenly felt like they were two of the most ridiculously vulnerable people he had ever met. He bumped Jack's shoulder with his. "Can we agree that we both behaved like complete wankers and move on?"

"I always act with the utmost dignity," Jack said, sitting up very straight.
Ianto snorted, and Jack grinned at him. Then he leaned his head on Ianto’s shoulder and put his hand on Ianto’s arm, caressing it gently. "I missed you," Jack whispered.

Ianto kissed the top of Jack’s head, and laid his cheek where his lips had been. "I missed you too, Jack," he said with sincerity.

"And I’m starving." Jack said. His stomach rumbled, as though it wanted to emphasize the point.

Ianto smiled and ran his fingers though Jack's hair. "What do you fancy?" he asked kissing his head again.

"Besides you? Nothing," Jack replied promptly, squeezing Ianto's arm.

"I asked what you fancy, Jack, not who you fancy. I don't want to sit here all night," Ianto said sardonically.

"Let's not exaggerate, Ianto. My list isn't that long. It would only take an hour or two," Jack said eagerly, as though he was already compiling the list in his head.

Ianto rolled his eyes and was chagrinned when he realized that Jack couldn't see it with his head on Ianto's shoulder. As though reading his thoughts, Jack asked, "You're rolling your eyes, aren't you?"

Ianto smiled in spite of himself. "How ever did you guess?" he asked sarcastically.

He was startled when he felt a wave of emotion coming from Jack. It was… affection? fondness?… was it?… no, Ianto wouldn't even allow himself to think it. "Ianto, there's only been you… pretty much since the day we met," Jack said, rubbing his arm again.

"Oh, please," Ianto said. "I've forgiven you, Jack. No need to go telling lies now."

Jack stopped caressing his arm and went very still next to him. Ianto looked down at Jack. He could sense his… fear? "There's only been you since the day we met," Jack said in a small voice.

"What about the real Captain Jack Harkness?" Ianto couldn't help asking.

"That was an elaborate plan by Bilis Manger to drive a wedge between me, you and the team. One that I was foolish enough to fall for. He was a fantasy, Ianto. He wasn't real. Besides," Jack shrugged a shoulder. "We only danced and snogged once."

Ianto frowned. "Jack, I've seen you snog at least half a dozen people since we met. And I've heard about a few more."

"What's a snog?" Jack asked, shrugging his shoulders again.

"What's a shag?" Ianto retorted.

"Completely different, and you know it. Sure, I've snogged lots of people since we met, but I haven't shagged any of them. Does snogging count?" Jack asked, curiously.

Ianto thought about it. "No," he said honestly. "I guess it doesn't. Considering most of them were in front of me, I can't say that I really minded. It's kind of who you are. It's like the Jack Harkness way of saying hello… or goodbye… or I'm bored, or how's the weather, or…"


Jack lifted up his head and put a hand on Ianto's cheek. He turned Ianto's face towards him and
leaned slowly forward, looking into Ianto's eyes. Ianto felt his heart start beating faster as Jack's face moved closer to his. Their lips touched gently, and Ianto felt like a bolt of electricity had shot through his body. Then he and Jack were kissing with all of the pent up emotion that they had both held on to for so many days.

Jack pressed Ianto down onto the floor and lay on top of him. They were both rock hard again. Jack pressed his hips into Ianto's and they both groaned as their cocks rubbed together. Ianto wound his arms tightly around Jack and pulled him closer, kissing him passionately.

Jack sat up suddenly and reached for something on the floor. Ianto was momentarily confused, until he saw the object in Jack's hand. Jack had unwound the measuring tape and was holding it to Ianto's cock. "You have got to be kidding me," Ianto said, laughing.
Jack held the measuring tape up against Ianto's cock, grinning impishly. Then he held it to his own cock, fudging the reading. "Yep, one inch bigger," Jack said with satisfaction.

Ianto sat up. "No way," he said, grabbing at the measuring tape.

Jack lifted his hand out of Ianto's reach. "I've just proven it. One inch bigger," Jack said with confidence.

He repeated his action of holding the tape to Ianto and then himself, using sleight of hand to falsify the results again. "You're cheating," Ianto chastised, making another grab for the measuring tape.

"Am not!" Jack retorted, throwing the measuring tape aside and straddling Ianto, who was still sitting upright.

Jack kissed him, letting his tongue explore Ianto's mouth. Ianto pulled away. "And now you're cheating by trying to distract me," Ianto said as Jack sucked on his neck, pushing his pelvis closer to Ianto's, and wrapping his legs behind Ianto's arse.

Jack kissed Ianto again, succeeding in getting Ianto to stop talking. They sat facing each other on the floor, Jack in between Ianto's legs, with his legs wrapped around Ianto's waist. They kissed and touched each other, until they were both panting and leaking pre-cum. Jack leaned over and scrabbled for his trousers. He caught hold of them and reached into the pocket, pulling out a bottle of lube. He pulled away slightly from Ianto, sitting with his legs spread, and flipped open the lid of the bottle. He poured some lube into his hands and spread it over his fingers. He grabbed hold of his cock with one hand, stroking himself slowly, and looking into Ianto's eyes, he inserted the finger of this other hand into his entrance, stretching himself.

Ianto watched with his mouth slightly opened, and Jack had to suppress a grin – Ianto was practically drooling. Ianto watched, spellbound, as Jack simultaneously opened himself and stroked himself, putting on a show for Ianto. When his muscles had relaxed enough, he inched closer to Ianto and covered Ianto's cock with lube. Then he lifted himself slightly and slowly impaled himself on Ianto's cock, wrapping his legs around Ianto again, and holding Ianto's shoulders for support. Ianto moaned deliciously as Jack gave himself a moment to adjust. He pulled Ianto close to him and kissed him as he started moving up and down.

His own cock was trapped between their bodies, receiving plenty of friction from their sweat dampened stomachs. He thrust himself down harder on Ianto, relaxing his muscles to take in as much of Ianto's impressively ample cock as he could. It is about the same size as mine, after all, he thought with amusement. He kissed Ianto until he had to stop to catch his breath. Then he leaned his head back, panting, letting Ianto hold his shoulders to keep his body close. Their pace quickened, and Jack was reduced to making inhuman noises as his prostate was hit over and over again. As he felt himself near climax, he pulled Ianto as close to his body as he could, and whispered, "My Ianto," into Ianto's ear. Then he let his body go and came with a shout onto their stomachs.
A moment later, he felt Ianto cum inside of him with a cry that sounded like something in Welsh, but could have been anything. They sat, holding each other and breathing heavily until Jack's stomach rumbled again, and they both laughed. Jack relaxed his grip on Ianto and ran his fingers down Ianto's face. "Food?" he asked with a smile.

Ianto kissed the tip of his nose and leaned his head against Jack's forehead. "Food and a shower, I think," Ianto replied.

They untangled their limbs and began to grab their scattered clothing. Usually, they would have redressed themselves before walking through the Hub, but they were both so filthy, that they just bundled their clothes under their arms and headed to Jack's bedroom. "We'll have to do a number on the CCTV footage," Ianto commented as they made their way through the main area of the Hub.

"Mmm-hmmm," Jack replied distractedly, thinking about what gems the past two encounters would add to his private CCTV collection.

Ianto caught something in his voice and looked at him. "Jack," Ianto said with a warning tone, "What is it that you do with all of the CCTV footage?"

Jack smiled to himself. "I may have a private stash of some of our more interesting scenarios," he said, looking at Ianto and wondering how the young man would react.

Ianto was silent for a minute. Then he said, "I amend my previous statement. A shower, food, and then some home movie viewing."

Jack threw back his head and laughed. He should have known that Ianto would find it as much of a turn on as he did. He turned and looked at Ianto. Damn, he thought. I think I might really be in love with him.

They got into the shower and washed quickly, both of them were too spent from their previous activities to do anything more than clean themselves up. They got out of the shower and began to dress. Jack, who was still in his briefs and undershirt, watched Ianto put on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt that he had left behind from his time monitoring the Rift while Jack was away. Jack looked at him, feeling his lust rising again. Ianto caught his look. "What?" he asked, looking momentarily insecure.

"You look really hot," Jack murmured, putting his arms around Ianto and kissing him.


"I'm thinking something vegetarian tonight. Don't really fancy meat," Jack said, frowning slightly as he remembered the creature they had incinerated earlier that day. "Besides," he added, pointing his finger at Ianto in mock chastisement, "You need to eat more vegetables."

Ianto rolled his eyes, and Jack beamed at him. Ianto turned to Jack's closet and pulled out a pair of trousers, handing them to Jack. Jack shook his head mildly, thinking about how Ianto was always taking care of him. Ianto flipped open his phone and placed a delivery order for Middle Eastern food – all vegetarian. Then he turned to Jack and asked casually, "So, where do you keep those CCTV recordings?"

Jack grinned and sat at the desk in his bedroom, pulling his laptop computer out of a drawer and placing it on the desk. He opened the screen and the computer whirred to life, asking for a password. He eyed Ianto for a moment, considering just how many of his secrets he wanted to share with him.
Then having made his decision, he said, "Lex underscore parsimoniae," telling Ianto the password.

Ianto furrowed his brow. "Ockham's Razor?" Ianto asked. Then, in his typical Ianto way, he quoted, "Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitate. Commonly paraphrased as all things being equal, the simplest explanation is usually the best one."

Jack smiled affectionately at Ianto. "Kind of my own private joke."

"Very amusing, Sir," Ianto deadpanned, and Jack chuckled.

Ianto put his hands on Jack's shoulders and began to massage them as Jack moved his fingers over the keyboard. Jack paused and groaned with pleasure. "Ianto Jones, have you been holding out on me?" he asked as Ianto worked at an extremely tight knot under his left shoulder blade. "I didn't know you were a talented masseuse."

Ianto leaned close to Jack's ear and said, "You should never doubt the dexterity of my hands, Sir."

Jack felt his cock stirring again. He'd always had an immense sexual appetite, but he was still amazed at how quickly and how often Ianto turned him on. Sometimes he wondered how he ever got any work done with Ianto around. Before he could comment on Ianto's highly evocative statement, an alert sounded from the Hub signaling the arrival of someone at the tourist office entrance. Ianto leaned down and kissed Jack quickly on the cheek, then agilely ascended the ladder to receive the food delivery.

Jack touched his cheek where Ianto's lips had been, not a moment before. Then, smiling, he stood up to go and have dinner with Ianto.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my ingenious beta riftintime.

Jack stood on a rooftop, looking out over the night lights of Cardiff, and thinking. He had been alone for a long, long time. It had been well over a hundred years since he’d had someone with whom to share his secrets. He’d had to hide things for so long, always evading questions, censoring answers, concealing so much. Finally he had someone who really knew him, and with whom he could be himself. Someone who was there for him, and someone who helped him. Someone he could talk to, and someone he could confide in. It felt good, really good. He didn’t know how he’d coped before Adam.

Sure, he had Ianto for sex, and Ianto was a good man. He was stalwart and loyal, and sexy as hell, but Ianto didn’t know the real him. Not like Adam did. Ianto had wanted to go with him to hunt the Weevil. Ianto had said that it had been a while since they went hunting together. Was that something they did? Hunt Weevils together? It seemed that Jack spent most of his time with Adam… Jack couldn’t remember Weevil hunting with Ianto. It must not be important.

Ianto… He felt like there was something scratching at the back of his mind… but, no, it was gone. Anyway, he had brushed Ianto off. Ianto hadn’t seen Gray, when Gray had been standing right there. Ianto didn’t understand him. Jack wanted to be alone. He needed to think. Why did he keep seeing visions of Gray, of his past? He’d buried those memories. He wanted them to stay buried. He closed his mind to the memories, and thought instead of Gwen, and how she had forgotten Rhys’ existence.

Gwen… Rhys had accused him of doing something to Gwen's memory. Rhys had said that they played sick games. Jack had been startled by Rhys’ words, Are you phasing me out so you can have her all to yourself? Jack was confused. Is that what I want? he asked himself. He didn't think so. Sure, he loved Gwen. He loved all of his team, but… there was something… someone else? It must be Adam, he thought. Adam was the one Jack always confided in, wasn't he? Gwen didn't know him like Adam did. But Adam had Toshiko… Jack shook his head. Shouldn't he feel jealous about that? Strangely, he didn't. Still, there was always Ianto to play with. Again, something clawed at the back of his mind, like it was trying to get out… but, again, it faded into the background.

All at once Jack was back on the Boeshane Peninsula, on that horrible, horrible day. As he had told Adam, it was the worst day of his life. It was the last thing he wanted to remember. Once more he relived that day in his mind, flashing back, as though he were there again. "Why now?" he asked as he fought his way back to the present. "Why now?" he repeated to the cold night air.

He turned from his scenic vista and made his way back to the SUV. He would go to the Hub. He would go home. He had a sense that there would be someone waiting there for him. He felt like there should be someone at the Hub to greet him when he got back… but that couldn’t be right. Who would be there? He couldn't remember, but the feeling persisted. He couldn't shake the idea that he was going home to someone. But who was it? Was it Adam? No, Adam would be with Toshiko. Shouldn't there be someone waiting for him?

Jack drove towards the Hub with purpose. He felt like he needed to talk to someone. To… was it Adam? But that didn't seem right. He parked the SUV in the Hub's garage and sat in contemplation.
There was someone he wanted to talk to, someone who he confided in. Adam, right? *It has to be Adam. Should I call him?* He flipped open his phone and stared at it, but something held him back. He put the phone away again and got out of the SUV. He headed into the Hub, still feeling distracted by sensations he couldn't quite place. He entered, and as he turned towards his office he heard a voice call out, "Jack."

*Oh gods, not Gray again,* he thought with dread. He turned and was immensely relieved and also, strangely, not surprised to see Ianto sitting by the staircase. "Ianto," he said with a smile. Jack walked towards the young man. "Hey," he said.


"You'll have to put me in the vaults. Lock me up. I killed three girls. Strangled them," Ianto said with abhorrence in his voice.

*What the hell is Ianto on about?* Aloud, Jack said, "Stop kidding around," not at all amused.

"I'm serious," Ianto looked at him, and Jack could see the certainty in his face, and the fear. Jack felt sick to his stomach. Ianto continued, "I murdered them in cold blood. I took their bodies, and…"

Ianto jumped up and looked around wildly. Jack felt fear grip his heart. "You have to lock me away… before I turn on you. None of you are safe," Ianto ranted, moving violently past Jack.


Ianto finally went still. "What's happened to you?" Jack asked, looking into Ianto's eyes.

Jack pulled Ianto into an embrace, his hand caressing the back of Ianto's head. As soon as Ianto was in his arms, something inside him clicked. This was right. Ianto felt… right. *My Ianto. He's my Ianto, and I love him,* Jack thought, surprised at the notion. *I'm in love with him. How could I have forgotten that? Did I just realize it?… no, this feeling isn't new.* Ianto interrupted his thoughts. "I'm a monster," Ianto whispered into Jack's ear.

Jack was starting to get that feeling in the back of his mind again. It was inching closer, as though the thought was breaking through the walls of his consciousness. Jack suddenly realized that it was Ianto's company he had craved on the rooftop. It was Ianto that he had wanted to talk to. It was Ianto who would be waiting at the Hub for him. *It's Ianto I come home to.* Something had happened to Ianto. *This is wrong.* "Ianto," Jack pulled back and looked into Ianto's eyes. "I know you. You're not a monster."

"Jack," Ianto said, with agony in his voice.

"No, Ianto. I love you. We love each other, don't we?" Jack asked, suddenly feeling uncertain. Did Ianto love him too? Was this something they said to each other?

Ianto nodded, "Yes, Jack, we love each other," he whispered, still looking stricken. Feeling relieved, Jack said, "Then I would know if you were a murderer, Ianto. Something strange is going on here. I forgot… I forgot that I love you. It wasn't until I held you in my arms that I remembered. How could I forget that?"

Ianto just stared at him. Jack continued, "I've been remembering things… things from my past. Things I haven't remembered for over 150 years. Things I thought I had buried," Jack's voice broke, and he looked away, momentarily unable to continue.
Jack looked back up at Ianto. Tears were streaming down Ianto's face. Jack felt overwhelmed by Ianto's pain. He cupped Ianto's face in his hands, wiping the tears with his thumbs. "I need you, Ianto," Jack said, softly. "I need your help to figure out what's going on here. But first we're going to prove that you're no murderer."

"But Jack, I remember it. I remember it clear as day," Ianto cried.

"Then something's not right," Jack said with certainty.

He kissed Ianto tenderly on the lips. "My Ianto," Jack whispered against Ianto's mouth. "I love you." Jack kissed him again. "I know that you're no murderer, and I'm going to prove it to you."

Jack kissed him once more, convinced that he was right. He took Ianto's hand and pulled him into his office, sitting him in a chair. He kissed Ianto's forehead and said, "We're going to figure this out together, okay? Wait here."

Jack went to the secure archives to retrieve the alien lie detector.
Ianto woke in a good mood, a really good mood. He had spent the night with Jack, and that always made him happy. Even though he awoke to an empty bed – Jack was often too restless to stay in bed for long – he felt contented. He got up, showered, dressed, and went to make coffee. As he ascended the ladder out of Jack's quarters, he heard two male voices. Who the hell is that? Ianto thought in confusion. It's not Owen's voice. He listened for a moment, feeling apprehensive, and wondered if he should go for his gun. When he heard Jack laugh, his body relaxed. He straightened his suit and walked out of Jack's office. Jack was talking to a red haired young man whose hand was on Jack's shoulder. Ianto inwardly rolled his eyes. Oh lord, this isn't another one of Jack's psychotic exes, is it, he thought. I don't think I can take another Captain John Hart.

Ianto made his way over to the pair, bracing himself for impact. "Ianto," Jack called out in his usual chipper voice. "You're just in time to get the coffee on. You know how Adam gets without his first cup!" Jack put his hand on Ianto's shoulder and squeezed softly.

Ianto wrinkled his forehead in confusion. Jack was talking to him like he knew this bloke. He started to open his mouth to inquire about the identity of the man, when Adam cut in, "Yeah, Ianto. I'm a right bastard when I don't get my coffee, remember?" he asked, placing a hand on Ianto's shoulder.

Ianto remembered his first day at Torchwood, making coffee for the team and Adam moaning about how good it was for at least a quarter of an hour. Adam took his coffee black, and Ianto respected him for it. No cream and sugar to hide the rich, bitter flavor. He remembered Adam taking him down to the archives and showing him around. He remembered Adam guiding him through the Torchwood mainframe computer. He remembered Adam, always there – part of the team. Ianto smiled at Adam. "I'd better get that coffee started then," he said as he turned from them and headed into the kitchen.

He went to the coffee machine and started brewing a pot. He looked down at the suit he was wearing. When had he picked out this suit? He didn't remember putting it on that morning. Was it a late one again last night? Had he slept on the Hub sofa? Ianto shook his head and went to pour out the coffee. That's odd, he thought, staring at the draining board next to the sink. There's only five coffee mugs. He shrugged and took down another mug from the cabinet. He poured out the coffee, placing the three mugs on a tray, and carried it over to Jack and Adam.

Adam was sitting at his desk, and Jack was sitting on the edge of it, laughing at something Adam had said. Ianto felt a sensation in his gut, but he couldn't place the feeling. As he approached, Jack turned his trademark grin in his direction. "You're looking edible today, Ianto." Jack fingered Ianto's waistcoat. "Love the suit!"

Jack grinned lasciviously at him and took his mug of coffee from the tray. Ianto was flustered by Jack's flirting, and he blushed, trying desperately to keep the tray balanced. Ianto pulled himself together, and, reclaiming his indifferent, butler demeanor, he turned the tray to Adam. Adam looked from Ianto to Jack and then back to Ianto again, an unreadable expression on his face. He took his mug of coffee and asked, "So, you two are shagging then?"
Ianto flushed an even deeper shade of scarlet. *That's right, I spent the night with Jack,* Ianto remembered. *How could I have forgotten that?* Jack laughed, and with a wink at Ianto asked, "Why? Would you like to join us? Always room for one more."

Adam smiled slowly, but didn't respond. He sipped at his coffee. "Mmm, Ianto. This is divine."

Ianto smiled, placated by Adam's praise. He looked at Jack. Jack smiled and winked at him again, sipping on his own coffee. Adam put down the empty mug and clapped his hands together. "Right, Jack. Why don't you show me what the Rift brought through last night."

Jack stood up, and he and Adam headed into Jack's office. Ianto watched them go, feeling like he was missing something. He leaned against Adam's desk, drinking his coffee and trying to sort through the chaos in his mind. After several minutes of contemplation, he sat down at his desk to begin the day's work.

Tosh arrived about an hour later and Ianto got up to fix her a cup of coffee. Ianto heard Jack call her into his office. He couldn't hear what was said, but he saw Adam put his hand on Tosh's shoulder, and Tosh smiled at him. Ianto smiled in return. He liked to see her happy. He took in her coffee and refilled Jack's and Adam's mugs.

When Owen arrived, hung over and foul as ever, there was a bit of an argument. He stormed in grumbling, "Oy, Tea Boy. Where's my coffee?"

Ianto rolled his eyes and was headed towards the kitchen, when he heard Owen call out, "Who the bloody hell are you?"

Ianto stopped in his tracks and turned towards the medic. Owen was standing with a scalpel in his hand, pointing it at Adam. Jack and Tosh were standing nearby. "Owen," Jack's voice rang out in his commanding tone. "Put the scalpel down. That's an order."

Owen tossed the scalpel down violently. It skidded off the autopsy table, and Jack moved quickly as it nearly hit his leg. Ianto watched Jack's face turn livid with rage. Instead, Adam put a restraining hand on Jack's shoulder. "Let me handle this, Jack. I know how to deal with Owen, remember?"

To Ianto's relief, he saw the anger drain from Jack's features. Jack relaxed and smiled. "Okay, yeah, Adam. Thanks."

Adam walked up to Owen. Owen was standing with his arms crossed, grimacing at Adam. Adam reached out a hand and touched Owen's arm. "Owen, you know I hate to see you in a temper. I'm always the one to cheer you up, remember?"

Ianto watched Owen's body relax. The grimace slid off his face and was replaced with a sheepish grin. "Yeah, you're right, mate. I'm sorry I was such a wanker."

Owen looked at Jack, "Sorry about that thing with the scalpel, Jack. That was unprofessional of me."

Ianto's mouth fell open slightly with surprise. *That's really unlike him,* Ianto thought. If Owen ever apologized, it was usually with antipathy. Jack shrugged and grinned at Owen. "No worries, Owen. Let's just chalk it up to the morning grumps. You'll feel better after a cup of Ianto's coffee."

Knowing that was his cue, Ianto turned back towards the kitchen. He was already filling Owen's mug when he heard Jack call out, "Ianto, emergency coffee needed in the med bay."

Ianto smiled to himself, feeling something he couldn't quite place at Jack's words. It felt like…
affection? Ianto frowned in confusion as he finished fixing Owen's coffee. By the time he returned to the medical bay, Jack, Owen, Tosh and Adam were laughing at something Adam had said. He only caught the tail end of it, so he didn't hear the punch line. Again he felt like he was missing something. *Am I usually left out of things?* The feeling felt familiar, but faded, as though it was a memory of the past – something he had felt a long time ago and had forgotten about. He schooled his features as he handed Owen his coffee. Owen turned to him. "Cheers, Ianto. That's really nice of you, mate."

Ianto was so surprised that his mouth fell open. He could see Adam looking at him out of the corner of his eye. Adam said with an exaggerated exuberance, "Come on, group hug."

Adam pulled Owen, Tosh, Jack and Ianto into a circle around him. Ianto remembered them all sitting around the Hub, drinking together, laughing, talking, and telling stories. They were all so close – like family. He smiled at the memories. "Well, let's actually get some work done here," Adam said, breaking away from the group. "What's on the menu today, Jack?"

"I wanted you to take a look at this artifact I found," Jack said, turning towards his office. Adam followed close behind.

"You know how I love strange artifacts, Jack," Adam said, turning to the rest of them and winking before he entered Jack's office.

Ianto watched them go, still smiling at the memories of the team's antics. He turned and made his way into the archives.

Towards lunchtime, Ianto surfaced from the bowels of the Hub to see what everyone wanted for lunch. He thought it odd that he'd heard nothing from the team all morning, but figured that nothing interesting had happened. When he walked into the main area of the Hub, he found it empty. Everyone was gone. He stood, lost for a moment, wondering why Jack hadn't told him that they were leaving.

"Do they usually tell me they're going out?" he asked himself, feeling confused again. "Am I usually left out of things?" Again, he felt that familiar, but faded sensation.

He stood looking around the empty Hub for a while, and then sat at his computer to check if there had been any Rift alerts. Finding nothing, he pulled up the CCTV footage and watched Adam convincing Jack to take them all out to lunch. *Everyone except me,* he thought bitterly. Why was this feeling so recognizable to him, and at the same time, wrong somehow? Ianto did what he always did when feeling distressed. He cleaned. But instead of soothing his irritation, it only served to intensify it. He was furiously scrubbing the windows of Jack's office when the team came back, joking and laughing. It was nearing 7:00pm, and Ianto felt a surge of anger at having been neglected for so long. *This is wrong. Something is wrong.* He wasn't usually ignored like this, was he? *At least not by Jack... especially, as it seems we're lovers.* As soon as the thought crossed his mind, he remembered. *Jack and I are lovers. I think we're quite close... Something is definitely off. Did we have a fight?* He pulled off his rubber gloves and tossed them into the bucket by his feet, deciding that he was going to talk to Jack.

He walked to the doorway of Jack's office and stopped in his tracks. Tosh and Owen both looked different. Tosh had unbuttoned the top few buttons of her blouse in a daring display of cleavage. Ianto raised his eyebrows. She looked quite sexy. Owen, on the other hand, had replaced the T-shirt he had been wearing with a long sleeved shirt. Ianto's eyebrows raised even higher, as he noticed that Owen had tucked the shirt into his trousers, and... *has he done something with his hair?*

Ianto watched the team for a few minutes as they talked. He realized with surprise that he could sense emotions from Owen and Tosh. He abruptly remembered Torchwood One and his psychic
training. He studied Owen and Tosh. The sensations coming from them grated somehow, like Owen and Tosh were wearing the wrong skin. Owen seemed shyer, less brusque, and more refined. He was deferential towards Tosh, who, for a change, was ignoring him. Tosh, for her part, seemed like she had found her confidence at last. Ianto turned his attention to Jack. There was an impression of walking into a wall when he tried to sense Jack, which didn't seem unusual. But Jack seemed content to let Adam be the center of attention. That, in itself, was odd, and Ianto felt his uneasiness growing. Then Jack turned and caught sight of him. "Ianto! Think you can get us some coffee?"

Ianto nodded silently and turned towards the kitchen. Something is definitely off, he thought again, and his disquietude grew stronger. As he put the coffee on, his stomach rumbled. He realized that he'd skipped lunch, having not been invited along with the team. He stuck his head out of the kitchen. "Anyone for pizza?"

"Sounds great, Ianto. I'm starved," Jack said, smiling at him.

Ianto stepped out of the kitchen and pulled out his phone, mentally placing the order in his head. As he stared at the phone, he realized with a start that he didn't know what kind of pizza Adam liked. That's not like me. I always know what everyone wants. He looked at Adam, opening his mind as he had been taught at Torchwood One, but he could sense nothing from Adam. It wasn't like with Jack, where he could sense a presence, but not his emotions. With Adam, it was like he was looking at someone who didn't exist. Adam was like an absence… a void. Ianto felt a chill run down his body. He was startled when he heard Jack's voice. "What's up, Ianto? You looked like you've seen a ghost."

Ianto looked up to find that they were all watching him. He noticed that he was holding his phone out in front of him, staring at it. He looked directly into Jack's eyes, trying desperately to silently communicate his anxiety. "I can't remember what kind of pizza Adam likes," he said, his voice devoid of emotion.

"That's not like you, Ianto." Tosh said with a smile. "Are you losing your touch?"

Ianto frowned. Adam walked up to him and put a hand on his shoulder. "I always have the cheese, Ianto. Remember?"

Ianto remembered teasing Adam about his fussy food choices. He remembered the team making fun of Adam for always wanting a vegetarian option when they all had the meat feast. Again he saw visions of the team, sitting around, eating pizza, talking and laughing. He smiled. "Sorry, yeah," Ianto said humbly, shaking his head. "Must be having an off day," he added, turning back to the kitchen. The kitchen is where I belong, he remembered.

Their dinner was interrupted by the Rift alarm going off. Ianto rose and went to the computers. "Weevil sighting in Lisvane," he called out.

Ianto automatically turned to Jack, who had risen to his feet. Ianto smiled at Jack, knowing instinctually that he and Jack would go together, so he was surprised when Adam said, "Jack and I will go. You all stay here and finish your pizza."

Jack looked momentarily confused. He was still looking at Ianto, as though about to speak. Adam stood and put a hand on Jack's shoulder. "Come on, Jack. We always hunt Weevils together, remember?"

Ianto watched the expression on Jack's face change from confusion to acceptance. Jack smiled at Adam, and they made their way out of the Hub. Ianto stared after them, feeling like something was wrong, but not being able to place it.
Tosh and Owen left for the evening soon after Jack and Adam had departed. Ianto stayed behind to clean the Hub. When he finished, he looked around, lost for a moment, and uncertain of what to do next. Should he wait for them to return? Was that something he did? He couldn't remember. He couldn't shake the feeling that it was supposed to be him hunting Weevils with Jack, not Adam. He moved restlessly around the Hub, straightening things that were already neatly arranged, and dusting things that were already dust-free. He finally gave up after about an hour and headed home. He didn't know what else to do.

When Ianto arrived home, it was with confusion that he surveyed his flat. It seemed to be in a state of neglect, like it hadn't been lived in for a long time. There was a thin layer of dust on everything. The refrigerator was empty, and the cupboards were bare. He looked in his closets, surprised to find that most of his clothes were gone. I must be spending more time at the Hub than I remember. All at once, he was flooded with memories of him and Jack spending nights in Jack's small bedroom underneath his office. Feeling perplexed but resigned, he took off his suit, put on jeans and a T-shirt, and settled himself in for a good long clean.
Ianto finally gave up on sleep early the next morning. He’d tossed and turned most of the night with vivid dreams that fled his mind as soon as he returned to consciousness. He felt hazy and discombobulated. He had the impression that he was seeing the world through cellophane. Nothing seemed like it was quite in focus, but there was one clear thought in his mind. Jack. I need to see Jack.

He dressed quickly and drove his car to the Hub. The sun had not risen yet, and his was the only car on the road. He didn’t know what was going on, but he was certain that Jack would put it right. When the cogwheel door rolled opened, he expected the Hub to be dark and quiet. Instead, the lights were on and there was music playing. He looked around in confusion. The music was coming from Jack’s office, and he heard voices – male voices. He walked towards Jack’s office with fearful anticipation, not sure what he would find there.

The scene that greeted him wasn’t quite the one he had braced himself for, however it did nothing to assuage his fear. Jack was leaning against his desk and Adam was sitting in Jack’s chair. They were drinking scotch and laughing. Ianto felt a sensation in the pit of his stomach, and this time he could place it. It was resentment. Jack looked up and saw him. Chuckling, Jack turned to Adam and said, "Uh oh! Ianto’s here. That must mean it’s time to quit the scotch and move to coffee."

Adam laughed, but the laugh was hollow. He eyed Ianto with wariness. Ianto ignored him and turned to Jack. "Jack, can I speak to you?"

The smile slid off of Jack’s face and was replaced with a look of concern. "What's up, Ianto?" he asked, matching Ianto’s serious tone.

Ianto turned to Adam. "Do you mind if I have a minute alone with Jack?" he asked with his best attempt at politeness.

Adam got up and moved towards Ianto. "Sure, Ianto," Adam said, placing a hand on Ianto’s shoulder and leaning in to whisper in his ear, "But you’re just the Tea Boy, and Jack’s bit on the side. You don’t really mean anything to him, remember?"

Images flashed through Ianto's mind, and he remembered his place at Torchwood. He was a loyal servant and dedicated to Captain Jack Harkness. He was Jack's occasional shag, and although he wanted more, he knew that Jack would never give it to him. He had to be content with the role of Jack's faithful assistant, and his sexual release. It was all in the line of duty. Ianto blinked when he realized that he was standing in the doorway of Jack's office, and not doing anything constructive. This won't do. There's work to be done. "I'll go get the coffee on," he said, assuming his professional demeanor.

"Wait, what did you want to talk to me about, Ianto?" Jack asked, looking confused.

"No idea, Sir. I'll get started on that coffee," Ianto said, turning to leave Jack's office and heading for
Ianto heard Adam's voice as he walked towards the kitchen. "What's with him?"

Ianto didn't hear Jack's reply, as he was already busying himself at the coffee machine.

Ianto moved through the day in fits and starts, feeling disjointed. He was starting to get the impression that he was looking at a mosaic pattern whose true form he couldn't discern. The kaleidoscope kept shifting. It was confusion and non-sequiturs. Gwen returned to work after her trip with Rhys. Gwen doesn't know who Adam is. Adam is part of the team. He's been here for years. Oh, Gwen was only teasing Adam. Yes, that's right. Adam's been with us for three years. Of course Adam and Tosh had been together for a year. They're in love. Owen's idolized Tosh for years, but she has no interest in him. Gwen doesn't remember Rhys – has no memory of him. They've just been to Paris together! They're getting married! "Temporary amnesia?"

What's going on? Adam and Jack are close… No! Jack and I are close, not Adam… This is wrong… Jack's seeing things that aren't there. Jack needs me. "It's been a while since we went hunting together."

Jack doesn't want my company. Didn't he use to confide in me?

And then Ianto remembered his diary. My diary. I have a diary, don't I? "I like to log the interesting stuff."

Where do I keep it? I've hidden it from… someone. From… Jack. I've hidden it from Jack, because he's always trying to get his hands on it. I've hidden it in the archives. Ianto found the diary, sat on the Hub sofa, and began to read. Lisa. How could I forget Lisa? Jack and I are… shagging… Jack left us to go off with the Doctor. I dreamt about him every night. Jack came back. Jack said he came back for me. I'm in love with Jack. Jack and I are… together. Measuring tapes? How could I forget the measuring tape? I have an eidetic memory. How can I have forgotten all of this? Tosh is in love with Owen, and he pretends not to notice. Gwen's obsessed with Jack – makes blatant plays for his attention. This is all… different… No mention of Adam. Adam's not here. Adam's not in it. Adam doesn't exist! Who the hell is Adam?

Ianto closed his diary and put it down on the coffee table. He leaned back against the sofa. Who or what the hell is Adam? "What's wrong?"

At the sound of Adam's voice, Ianto nearly jumped out of his skin. He scrambled off the sofa and away from Adam. He watched, feeling alarmed, as Adam picked up his diary. "My diary," Ianto said, "You're not in it. Everyone else is."

Ianto watched with trepidation as Adam flipped through the pages of his diary. He asked, "Why would I leave you out when you've been here so long? Like I'm remembering a man who doesn't exist."

Adam threw his diary on the floor, and Ianto watched in horror as Adam's arm flickered in and out of existence. "What's real? I don't know what's real anymore. Jack has to know. Jack… Oh God, that poor girl. I didn't do that! I didn't do that… I did do that. I killed her. Oh my God, I killed her. What have I done? She wasn't the only one. There have been others. I killed three girls. I didn't feel anything. I didn't care. I'm a murderer. I'm a monster. Oh God, I'm a monster."
Ianto found himself sitting on the floor of the Hub, sobbing uncontrollably. "I'm a murderer," he whispered into the empty Hub. "They have to lock me up. I can't remain free. I'm not safe. Jack. I have to wait for Jack. He'll put me in the vaults."

Ianto climbed shakily to his feet and dragged himself into a chair. The visions of himself strangling those girls played over and over in his head. He kept looking at his hands. *My hands did that. My hands took their lives. What have I done? Oh God, what have I done?*

Ianto didn't know how much time had passed, but he finally heard the cogwheel door roll open and heard Jack's footsteps in the Hub. "Jack," he called out, barely able to make his vocal chords function.

"Ianto," Jack said, as he turned and walked towards him. "Hey. What's wrong?"

Ianto forced the words from his mouth. "You'll have to put me in the vaults. Lock me up. I killed three girls. Strangled them."

"Stop kidding around," Jack said sternly.

Ianto managed to look Jack in the eyes. He had to make him understand. "I'm serious. I murdered them in cold blood. I took their bodies, and..." but Ianto couldn't continue. He jumped up, panic stricken. What was it that he was feeling? *Is this the urge to kill creeping up on me again? Am I going to hurt someone else? Oh God, not again. I'm a murderer. Jack can't let that happen. I've got to get to the vaults before someone else gets hurt. "You have to lock me away... before I turn on you. None of you are safe," Ianto managed to say as he ran past Jack, heading towards the vaults."

"Hey, hey, come here," Jack grabbed his arm and tried to hold him back, but Ianto struggled against him. He was determined to get to the vaults.

*Doesn't he understand? I need to be locked up. If he's not going to do it then I'll do it myself. "Come here," Jack repeated with more force, spinning Ianto around and forcing him to look Jack in the eyes. "What's happened to you?"

And then Jack's arms were around him, and Ianto remembered that he loved Jack. But it didn't matter anymore. He was a murderer. "I'm a monster," Ianto whispered.

"Ianto," Jack pulled back and looked into Ianto's eyes. "I know you. You're not a monster."

"Jack," Ianto started to protest. *I am a monster. I killed those girls.*

"No, Ianto. I love you. We love each other, don't we?" Jack asked him earnestly.

Ianto nodded, knowing instinctually that Jack's words were true. "Yes, Jack, we love each other," he whispered. *But it doesn't matter anymore. None of it matters.*

"Then I would know if you were a murderer, Ianto. Something strange is going on here. I forgot... I forgot that I love you. It wasn't until I held you in my arms that I remembered. How could I forget that?"

Ianto looked at Jack. *I forgot that I love him too,* he realized slowly. *How could I forget that? But it doesn't matter, because we can never be together.* Jack continued, "I've been remembering things... things from my past. Things I haven't remembered for over 150 years. Things I thought I had buried," Jack stopped abruptly and looked away.

Ianto couldn't keep the tears from flowing down his cheeks. Jack looked at him. Then he cupped
Ianto's face in his hands and wiped away his tears. "I need you, Ianto," Jack said softly. "I need your help to figure out what's going on here. But first we're going to prove that you're no murderer."

"But Jack," Ianto protested. "I remember it. I remember it clear as day." How can I make him understand?

"Then something's not right," Jack said, kissing him tenderly and holding him close. "My Ianto. I love you," Jack whispered before he kissed him again. "I know that you're no murderer, and I'm going to prove it to you."

Jack kissed him once more, and, grasping Ianto's hand, pulled him into his office. Jack sat him in a chair and kissed his forehead. "We're going to figure this out together, okay? Wait here," Jack said before turning and unlocking the secure archives.
Thanks as always to my brilliant beta riftintime.

Jack unlocked the secure archives, his heart thumping hard against his chest. *What's happened to Ianto? Who's done this to him? If anyone's hurt Ianto, I'll kill them,* he thought, as he ground his teeth. He glanced over at his lover, sitting slumped in the chair, and looking utterly defeated. His heart ached at the sight. *I'll kill them slowly.*

He took out the alien lie detector and relocked the safe. He set the machine down on the desk and put a hand on the back of Ianto's head, stroking his hair lightly. "Take your jacket off and roll up your sleeves."

Ianto looked up at him, his eyes full of fear. "Trust me," Jack said, cupping the back of Ianto's neck and squeezing gently.

Ianto nodded silently and removed his suit jacket. He rolled up his sleeves and Jack attached the sensors to Ianto's arms. Once he was settled, Jack kissed him softly and went to his side of the desk. Jack began to set up the machine. "Just tell me what happened," Jack said, looking at Ianto. "Tell me what you remember."

"What is this?" Ianto asked, looking at the attachments on his arms.

Jack put the scanner in place and looked up at Ianto. "Best lie detector on the planet. If something's untrue, the light turns red." Jack flipped the machine on and said, "Go."

Ianto started talking. "My… hands on her throat. And it felt so good. Squeezing the life out of her."

Jack was staring at Ianto. The more Ianto talked, the more certain he became that this wasn't his Ianto. *Screw the machine! *"No! This is not you!" Jack unhooked the scanner, stood up and walked around the desk. "Something's changed you. You're not a murderer," he said, as he put a hand on Ianto's shoulder. "I'm certain of it."

Jack walked over to the computers and pulled up the CCTV footage from the past day. He watched various scenes of Adam. "Remember?… Remember?… Remember?" He watched Adam force memories into Ianto's head. *I knew it!* Jack turned to Ianto who was sitting on the stairs. He grabbed
Ianto's arm and pulled him up.

"No," Ianto said, trying to resist him, but Jack wasn't having any of it.

"Come here. Come here," he said, putting his arm around Ianto and turning him toward the computer. "Just look," he said, pointing at the screen. "Look."

They both watched the image of Adam touching Ianto's head, forcing the memories into him. "Remember it... Remember it... Remember it."

Jack squeezed Ianto's shoulders in reassurance. He sat down to let Ianto watch the recordings again. After several minutes had passed, he intervened. He pulled Ianto away from the screen and into his arms. "I knew you weren't a murderer," he said, holding Ianto close to him.


Jack kept whispering words of reassurance as Ianto slowly pulled himself together. He looked back and looked at Jack. "You believed in me, even when the best lie detector on the planet told you that I was a monster. You never doubted me. Not even for a moment."

Jack just looked into his eyes. "No," he confirmed, wiping the tears from Ianto's face. "I never believed it."

"Thank you, Jack," Ianto whispered, before he kissed him with so much passion that it made Jack's toes curl.

**Damn, I wish there wasn't an alien to kill right about now,** Jack thought as he let himself kiss Ianto for just a moment longer. **Okay, I need to stop this before I can't stop it,** Jack thought, mustering the strength to pull away. But Ianto pulled away first and leaned his forehead against Jack's. "I love you, Jack," Ianto whispered, gazing into Jack's eyes.

Jack touched Ianto's face, caressing his cheek. "I love you too, Ianto. More than you'll ever know."

They stood for a moment, foreheads touching, bodies pressed together, staring into each other's eyes. **Have I ever loved anyone this much? How will I ever live without him?** The thought hit Jack suddenly, before he could do anything to push it away. **He's going to die, and I'll have to go on living. Oh gods, I can't do it. I can't let myself love him! I can't! I won't be able to bear losing him.** He was overcome with an unutterable fear, and his whole body stiffened in response. Ianto must have sensed the movement, because he asked, "What is it, Jack?"

Jack laughed nervously, and trying to cover, he said, "I was just remembering that we have an alien to kill... at least, I think it's an alien."

"Right," Ianto said, attempting a smile. "Work to do."

Jack was filled with nervous energy. His emotions were oscillating wildly, and to expel some of his anxiety, he started pacing around the Hub. "Right, so we're dealing with someone or something that can alter our memories and insert himself in. How long has he been here? How much has he changed us? How much has he taken from us? Where do we start?"

Ianto sat down on the stairs leading to the autopsy room and leaned his head against the wall, watching Jack pace around the Hub. He looked exhausted, and Jack wanted to go to him, but they had to focus. "What kind of creature are we dealing with?" Ianto asked.
Ianto’s comment gave Jack an idea. Blood samples, he thought. All Torchwood employees have blood samples on file. If Adam’s been here for any length of time, we’ll have his blood on file. ”Let’s see if we can find out,” Jack said, walking to the refrigerator where the phials were stored. He found everyone’s there, except Adam’s. ”Where’s Adam’s blood sample?” Jack asked, looking at Ianto.

Ianto jumped up and went to a workstation, pulling up Adam’s personnel file. Jack followed him, looking over his shoulder. ”Everything’s in order here,” Ianto said, reading the file.

”When was it last updated?” Jack asked.

”Um… twenty-four hours ago,” Ianto replied.

So that means… the Hub lights came on suddenly, interrupting Jack’s train of thought, and they both jumped up. Jack picked up a book, pretending to read nonchalantly. Ianto glanced at him, and then shoved his hands in his pockets, also trying to look casual. However, it wasn’t Adam who came into the Hub. It was just Owen, carrying a bouquet of flowers. Owen’s carrying flowers? Jack thought to himself, perplexed. There’s something you don’t see every day. Ianto turned to look at him, and Jack could read the same question in Ianto’s expression. It would have been funny, if the situation hadn’t been so dire. Just another example of Adam’s mind manipulation.

Ianto turned from Jack and headed up the stairs. He’s probably going to go clean himself up. No matter what the circumstances, he always has to look professional, Jack though with affection. Then he heard the cogwheel door roll open and voices entering the Hub, so he turned his attention back to the situation at hand.

Jack’s mind rapidly gathered together what facts he could as the rest of the team entered. Adam probably created his file when he learned enough about Torchwood to know about the personnel files. That means he’s probably been with us for about two days at most. Ianto would have noticed if there wasn’t a file for any longer than that… That bastard. He’s trying to mess with Ianto again. I’ll kill him. But I need to find out what he is to know how to kill him… I have no emotions towards him. I feel no remorse at the thought of killing him. I need to get him into the vaults. He needs to get out of Ianto’s head. I need him to get out of my head… That horrible day. He made me remember it, and I wanted to forget. ”All I know is that when I think of my team, I see you there, but I don’t feel anything for you. No pride, no warmth… You, the one who I can confide in. The one who unburied the dead.”

Tosh is going to put up a fight… Good, Ianto’s handling it. My Ianto… I can’t let myself love him so much… what will I do when… I can’t love him… Adam’s finally safely in the vaults. He tried to convince me that he made us better. Is he kidding? I love them all the way they are. Our memories make us who we are. Without them, we’re different people, and each one of them is so uniquely brilliant. I wouldn’t change them for anything… I have to find a way to get them back. And the dead need to stay buried. I have that alien hypnosis device. ”Our memories define us. Adam changed those memories… changed who we are. Now I have to help you all go back, find a memory that defines you. Rediscover who you are.”

Owen and memories of his mother… not happy memories, but defining ones. Tosh and memories of being alone… alone but brilliant, special… Gwen and memories of Rhys… Rhys truly does make her who she is – grounded. Ianto and memories of Lisa… I’m still competing with a dead woman… Gwen loves Rhys, but not like she loves me? Oh gods, that’s a problem. ”Take this,” Jack said, handing Gwen a pill.

I saw that you were special Tosh. I always knew you were special. I’ll save you, Owen, even if it’s only from yourself. And that just leaves… ”Coming here, gave me meaning again…”
Jack's heart started pounding as Ianto paused and looked into his eyes. "You."

Jack felt his love for Ianto momentarily overwhelm him. He leaned down and kissed Ianto tenderly on the forehead. Then he placed a pill on the table in front of him. "You all have a short term amnesia pill. It'll make you forget Adam. We have to wipe out the last forty-eight hours from our memories, go back to who we were."

And now it's my turn. I have to do the clean-up first. I need to call Rhys – explain about Gwen's memory lapses. Tell him that she will have forgotten the last forty-eight hours. At least he'll be happy that she'll remember him… Wiped the CCTV footage, deleted Adam's personnel file. Cleaned up all traces of Adam. Just one last look around the Hub to make sure that there's nothing of Adam left behind… What's this? Oh my gods, this is Ianto's diary! I remember… I'm always trying to get my hands on this. Would it be wrong of me to exploit this moment for a little personal gain? Of course not! Jack flipped to the last few pages. Nope, Adam's not in here, so it's safe. I'll put it in my desk drawer. At least one good thing will come out of this – I'll finally be able to read Ianto's diary.

Ianto… I can't let myself love him. I just can't… But that's for another day… I hope we don't become tenacious about trying to recover the lost days. I'll send an email to myself that only I'll be able to read, even if Ianto can break into my account – which he probably can… Now for Adam. Time to get rid of him… But he had to entice me with my family. "What about the last good memory of you and your dad… I can help you find it."

I let him in, tempted by recovering the last happy memory of my family, and he destroyed it. He changed that memory, inserting himself, so he would always exist… as long as I remember it. I have to forget. He can't be allowed in. Hehhh hhHe's malicious, and I need him gone. He needs to be wiped out like any other dangerous alien threat. "Goodbye, Adam."

Jack woke, finding himself slumped on the floor of the vaults. What the hell? He made his way back into the main area of the Hub and to his team. We've lost two days? Jack went to his office, sat down at his desk, and accessed his secure files. There was a note from his email account, written in Galactic Standard, "Don't recover lost days. All's well. Alien threat. Left you a present – desk drawer. Enjoy." It was signed with his true name.

Well, I guess that's me told… by myself, he thought ironically as he pulled open his drawer. Lying partially buried under some loose papers was a leather bound book. It looked remarkably like a diary. "No way!" he exclaimed aloud, grinning like a schoolboy.

But first, the team. Jack walked into the main area to find his team talking animatedly about how they could recover the lost days. Tosh had already started running a recovery program on the missing CCTV footage. Jack reached out to Ianto with his emotions. Trust me. Back me up. I need you. Ianto looked at Jack and nodded. Jack smiled briefly at him. My Ianto. Turning to the team he said, "Hey kids. Don't worry about the last two days. It needs to stay forgotten."

There was a chorus of protestations from everyone except Ianto. "I understand you're concern, but I'm going to have to ask you to leave it, okay? Trust me," Jack said, looking sternly at all of them.

"Right, fine. But if you made me forget a really good shag, I'm going to get ratty," Owen said with his usual charm.

"Well, that'll be something different," Ianto quipped, as he typed at the computer.

"Don't start Tea Boy," Owen said, shaking a finger at him.

Ianto smiled benignly as he hit a final key on the keyboard. "Ianto, you stopped running the
program! It had already recovered 28% of the files!" Tosh cried mournfully.

Ianto nodded his head in Jack's direction. "He's the boss."

"Well, restart it, Tosh," Gwen said defiantly. She turned to Jack, her eyes blazing. "I don't care what you say, Jack. I want to know what happened. We could have been doing anything."

Jack took a deep breath, trying to calm his irritation. "Gwen, I know how you get, but I really need you to leave this one alone. It's for our safety. Please," he pleaded.

"But Jack," Gwen started.

*Really, her defiance is getting out of control. Ianto was right.* Jack's temper flared. "Gwen, I said no," Jack snapped.

Gwen crossed her arms over her chest, looking rebellious. Jack looked at Ianto. *Make sure she doesn't defy me,* Jack thought. Ianto nodded slightly, understanding, and Jack nodded back at him. He returned to his office and closed the door. *Ianto will make sure the team follows my orders.*

*Ianto*… Jack sat down, leaned back in his chair and, put his feet on his desk. He picked up Ianto's diary, and smiling to himself, he began to read.
Thanks as always to my excellent beta riftintime.

It only took a few pages of Ianto's diary for Jack to realize that rather than shedding light on what made Ianto tick, it would only serve to make the young man even more mysterious. Ianto's diary was unlike any diary Jack had ever read, and Jack had read a few in his long life. It was less of a diary and more of a collection of impressions. There were dates at the top of each page, but that was about the only ordinary thing about it. It was written in several different languages – mostly Welsh with some English, Japanese, German and French scattered throughout. There were drawings and mathematical equations interspersed within memories and thoughts. Some sentences would start in one language and end in another. Sometimes there were only words or parts of sentences. Jack decided, after turning several more pages, that it was going to take him quite a while to decipher it. He didn't want to hold on to it for too long because he knew Ianto would be looking for it, but he had an idea.

He got up from his desk and unlocked the secure archives. He removed the alien scanner that he had confiscated from Tosh after the Susie incident, and that Owen had used to uncover the underground Weevil fighting ring. Glad I made them all bring their stolen items back to the Hub, or Tosh might still have this little baby, he thought, caressing the scanner. He remembered how each one of the team members had borrowed something from the Hub. All but Ianto... and he was hiding the biggest secret of all. Jack thought back on the Cyberwoman incident with something almost like pride. It was far enough in the past that he'd gotten over feeling betrayed, but he was still impressed by the fact that Ianto had fooled them all for so long. Ianto Jones is a force to be reckoned with, he thought with affection. Ianto Jones... he looked at the diary in his hands. I'll figure you out yet.

He held the scanner up to the diary and watched it transfer into his computer. Then he returned the scanner to the secure archives, and sat back down at his desk. He was fairly certain that Ianto could access his files, and he didn't want Ianto to know that he'd copied the diary. Plus, his Welsh, French and German weren't all that hot, and he didn't speak Japanese at all. He had a translation program on his computer that he'd downloaded from his Vortex Manipulator, and he used it to begin a translation of Ianto's diary into Galactic Standard. He watched for a few minutes, making sure the program was running smoothly. Then he picked up the diary and started looking though it again. He turned the pages, focusing only when he found English and caught sight of his own name. The diary began when he had left with the Doctor.

Jack's finally found his Doctor. Now we're left to pick up the pieces.

It continued in Welsh, so Jack turned the page, thinking that he'd read the rest when it had all been translated.

The team's falling apart. Fighting all the time. Jack wouldn't want this. Time to step in.

Jack turned another page.

Jack came to me in my dreams. He was older. Does he get older?
Jack reread the passage. There was something odd about the sentence. *Jack came to me in my dreams*, rather than, *I dreamt of Jack.* Jack read it through one more time. *He looked older.* Jack stared at the page. *Do I visit him from the future?* Jack thought, frowning. *What does that mean?* Jack decided to leave it for the time being. He turned to the next page.

*I miss Jack. Wish that I didn't.*

Jack felt guilt welling up inside him. It was such a simple phrase, but it said so much. He thought about how he had abandoned his team, left Ianto, without a word or a backward glance. He remembered how much he had missed Ianto during the year that never was, and how his memories of the young man had kept him sane throughout a year of torture. He shuddered at the recollection of that year. *I never did tell Ianto what happened to me. Maybe it's time to talk about it. If I could tell anyone, it would be Ianto.*

*Ianto…* He pulled up the CCTV feed on his computer. He caught sight of Ianto in the main area of the Hub, lifting up papers and peering into drawers. *Damn, he's looking for his diary already.* Jack switched off the feed and pulled up the translation program. It had finished, and Ianto's diary was safely saved on his computer in Galactic Standard. He smiled to himself as he closed the program and turned back to the actual diary. He flipped to the last few pages, catching sight of a phrase in English.

*Note to self: find measuring tape and test for alien technology. What would aliens want with a measuring tape that lies?*

Jack laughed aloud. There was a knock on his door and Jack quickly closed the diary and threw it down on his desk. "Come in," he said, hoping he looked the picture of innocence.

It wasn't Ianto, however. Owen entered, carrying a box in one of their official Torchwood evidence bags. "Found this in the boardroom," he said, handing the item to Jack. "And I'm off for the day," he added.

Jack took it. "Thanks, Owen. Can you send Ianto in before you go?"

"So, it's all made up between you, then, is it?" Owen asked, his voice oozing scorn.

"What are you talking about, Owen?" Jack asked in confusion.

"Oh, bollocks, Jack. Think we don't notice what goes on around here?" Owen said with derision. "Ianto's not much of a talker, and he's got that whole butler thing down to perfection, but we're not that thick. You and Ianto were barely civil to each other, and Ianto was creeping around the Hub again, like he used to do before Lisa."

Jack winced at Owen's words, but it only seemed to encourage the medic. He continued, "Then you and Gwen go making that scene over Rhys knowing about us. I don't know who's the bigger drama queen, Jack, you or Gwen."

Owen paused as if waiting for a reaction from Jack. Jack didn't know what to say, so he said nothing. He put the artifact that Owen had handed him down on his desk, trying to buy time to compose a response. Owen took a step closer to Jack and said in a low voice, "I saw the look on Ianto's face, Jack, after you'd stormed off to brood over Gwen." Owen paused, looking hard at Jack. "Tosh and I sat at the pub for hours waiting for Ianto. Tosh refused to leave, checking her phone every five minutes. We never heard from him, and I finally convinced Tosh to give up her crusade at midnight."
Owen paused again, and Jack still said nothing. He didn't know what to say. He shoved his hands into his pockets. Owen eyed him suspiciously and went on, "We walk into the Hub the next morning, and what do you know? Ianto's all smiles and wry humor again, and you announce that you've sent Gwen home to spend time with Rhys."

Jack contemplated Owen silently. He had to admit that it didn't sound good when Owen put it like that. "Why are you bringing this up now, Owen? That was weeks ago."

Owen snorted. "Well, you two have been joined at the hip ever since. Never had the opportunity. But seeing the way he followed your orders blindly back there…" Owen paused, a disgusted look on his face.

Jack bridled. "I'm the Captain."

"Don't give me that bollocks, Jack." Owen took a step closer, getting up in his face. "I thought you weren't going to mess with Tea Boy again. I don't want to have to pick up the pieces when this all goes to shit."

Jack was simultaneously touched at Owen's concern for Ianto and offended by his implications. He crossed his arms over his chest and, instead of being defensive, went for cheek. "Didn't know you cared, Owen," he said with a fake grin.

Owen frowned at him. "He's my teammate and my friend, Jack. Not to mention the fact that I'm his doctor, and it's my job to be concerned about his well-being. I know how he gets…" Owen looked momentarily lost in thought. Then he looked Jack in the eyes, "I'm warning you, Jack. Don't fuck with Ianto or you'll have to answer to me. Even more bloody terrifying, you'll have to answer to Tosh. And trust me, you do not want to get on her bad side."

"Jack," Owen started with a warning tone.

Jack interrupted him. He said seriously, "I get it, Owen. Don't worry about it, okay? Just send Ianto in."

"Fine. I'm out of here," Owen said, turning and sauntering out of Jack's office.

Jack watched him walk away. Why didn't I just tell him what Ianto means to me? he thought distractedly, as he picked up the box that Owen had brought in. Probably because I'm ashamed of how I behaved with Gwen. I thought things were okay now between me and Ianto, but maybe I'm wrong. He was examining a piece of the box when Ianto walked in. "Did you, uh, call?"

"Found your diary," Jack said, holding the book up.

"Yep, been looking for that," Ianto said, walking forward and holding out his hand.

Jack smiled wryly. Ianto was obviously embarrassed, and Jack couldn't help but revel in the situation. We'll talk later, after I've had some more time to read through it, he thought, handing the diary to Ianto. "And for the record," he said, grinning as Ianto paused in the doorway. "Measuring tapes never lie."

Ianto hurried out of his office, but Jack had noticed the writing on the bag. "Hey," he called out.

"Yep?"
"Who's Adam?"

"Don't know," Ianto said before scurrying away again.

_Oh, I'm definitely going to spend some more time with that diary_, Jack thought to himself.
Two days gone, Ianto thought, as he closed the computer program after Jack had retreated into his office. And Gwen's on a rampage again. As soon as Jack's office door was closed, Gwen said, "Sod that. Tosh, start that program again. We're going to figure out what we were doing over the past forty-eight hours."

Tosh and Owen both started talking at once. Ianto raised his voice over both of them. "No, Gwen, we're not," Ianto practically roared at her.

Everyone stopped talking and looked at Ianto. Silence fell heavily around the team. Ianto composed himself. "Jack said it's for our own safety. That means he's the one who made us all forget, including himself. There's no way he would have made that decision lightly, so let's trust him, yeah?"

"But Ianto," Gwen started.

Ianto cut her off. "Did you ever stop to think that it's not only our safety Jack's protecting, Gwen, but the rest of the world's too? What about Rhys? You wouldn't want to put him in danger, would you?"

"I agree with Ianto," Tosh said quietly. "And I trust Jack."

Gwen looked at Owen. "Come on, Owen. You're not buying this are you?"

Owen sighed. "Gwen, do you remember what happened last time we defied Jack? Remember Abaddon? I'm with Tosh and Ianto."

"We're Torchwood, Gwen. That's the price of working here. Why don't you phone Rhys? Check he's okay," Ianto threw in quickly before Gwen could protest again.

She looked at the three of them. "Right, fine. I'll call Rhys," she said, taking her phone out of her pocket and walking away from them.

Tosh and Owen both turned to look at Ianto, who rolled his eyes. Tosh giggled and Owen snorted. "Where are you off to, Owen?" Ianto asked, noticing that Owen had his coat on.

"I just need some air, mate," Owen said. "I may not remember being stuck in the Hub for two days, but I feel like I was."

"Maybe I'll come with you, Owen," Tosh said, grabbing her coat and handbag. "I could use some air, too."

Ianto smiled at them, as Gwen came back into the main area. "I spoke with Rhys. He said he talked to Jack and that everything's okay. We can't recover the days. Some kind of alien threat."

They all looked at Gwen. She trusts Rhys, but not Jack, Ianto thought to himself. Maybe there's hope for them yet. "Right," Owen said, breaking the silence. "Tosh, shall we?"
They turned and left the Hub together. "Where are you going then?" Gwen asked after them.

"Just for some air, Gwen," Owen called over his shoulder.

"Well, why don't you pick us up some food? I'm starved," Gwen called to them as the Hub door rolled closed. She turned to look at Ianto. "What's that all about?"

Ianto shrugged his shoulders. He watched as Gwen turned to her computer and started reading through the police reports from the past few days. "You're going to leave it, Gwen, aren't you?" Ianto asked, looking over her shoulder.

"Yes, Ianto. I'll leave it. I trust Rhys. I'm just seeing if there are any Torchwood-related crimes that need our attention," she said, scrolling through the reports.

Ianto nodded in satisfaction and headed for the archives. He had one last thing to check on – his diary. He needed to make sure that he hadn't written anything over the past few days. If he had, he needed to destroy it. *Gwen may trust Rhys, but I trust Jack… at least where Torchwood is concerned*, he thought with a frown. *Do I trust him otherwise?* Ianto didn't have an answer to that question. He wasn't sure what he felt about his relationship with Jack. It had been intense over the past month or so. *That whole thing with Alun, and everything with Gwen. That scene with her… then me and Jack in the archives… the fight… the sex… the night we spent watching the CCTV footage and reenacting some of the scenes…* he smiled at the memory. *The feelings I sensed coming from Jack… they were… powerful.*

Ianto made his way into the section of the archives where he hid his diary, but it wasn't in its usual place. *Hmm… maybe I was writing in it at my desk down here.* He sat down at his desk and began a thorough search. It wasn't in his desk. He started looking in a few other places he had stashed his diary on previous occasions when Jack had surprised him. It was nowhere to be found. *Is it possible that my diary had something to do with the missing days?* he asked himself, looking hopelessly around the archives, his hands on his hips. "Ianto?" he heard Tosh's voice call out.

"I'm here, Tosh," he answered as he continued his search, thinking hard about where else he could have put his dairy.

Tosh appeared around the corner. "How was your walk with Owen," he teased mildly, when he caught sight of her.

Tosh blushed prettily. "It was fine, Ianto. We brought some food back. Hungry?"

"Not just now, Tosh. I've got to find my diary."

"You keep a diary?" Tosh asked, sounding amused.

"I like to log the interesting stuff." He winked at her.

"Speaking of interesting stuff, I take it you and Jack made up then?" she asked, watching him carefully.

Ianto shrugged. "You're always together," she continued. "I think this is the first time I've spoken to you alone in weeks."

"Yeah, I guess so," Ianto admitted, blushing slightly. Tosh looked at him contemplatively. Ianto started to feel uncomfortable under her scrutiny. "What?" he asked her.

"Nothing, just after that whole scene with Gwen…" Tosh's voice faded, and she looked away from
"I was kind of a prat as well, Tosh," Ianto confessed.

Tosh looked at him. "Yeah, you kind of were, Ianto," she said bluntly.

Then she smiled at him, as if to soften the blow, and he smiled back at her. "I was worried about you, Ianto. Owen and I waited at the pub for you for hours that night after the scene with Gwen."

"Oh, Tosh, I'm sorry," Ianto said sincerely. "Jack and I were… talking."

"Talking, huh?" Tosh grinned at him.

"Well… making up?" Ianto tried, completely unable to suppress the grin that spread over his features.

"Right… making up," Tosh giggled. "He was rather sweet about your birthday too," she added.

Ianto felt himself begin to blush. That was a favorite memory of his, and one that he knew he'd play over again in his mind in future. "I'm glad you've made up, Ianto," Tosh continued, saving Ianto from having to respond. "You're good for each other. You make Jack more human, and he makes you more confident."

"You think?" Ianto asked thoughtfully.

"Yeah, I think," she replied, patting his arm. "What about the whole gay thing?"

Ianto shrugged his shoulders. "It shouldn't matter what other people think. I'm trying to let it go. I want to be with Jack. Does it matter what that means about me?"

"No, Ianto. It doesn't matter. With this job, we could get killed any day. We should all take love where we can get it."

"I don't know about love, Tosh," Ianto hesitated.

"I do," Tosh said with certainty. "I know both of you, and I'm sure you'll never admit it to each other. You may not even admit it to yourselves, but I see the way you look at each other, the way you communicate without speaking…"

Tosh's voice broke off, and she looked lost in thought. Ianto knew what she was feeling. "And I know how Owen feels about you, Tosh. Give him time. He'll come around," Ianto said with a smile.

"Really?" Tosh asked, looking hopeful.

"Really," Ianto squeezed her shoulder. "Now, I really need to find my diary," he said, putting his hands on his hips and looking aimlessly around the archives.

"Maybe you left it upstairs. I'll help you look," she said, taking Ianto's arm.

They walked arm in arm back to the main area of the Hub. They spent several minutes searching, but they had no luck. Tosh, Owen and Gwen sat down to eat the sandwiches they'd brought back, but Ianto wasn't hungry. He wanted to find his diary. Where the bloody hell did I put it? he asked himself, feeling anxiety welling up inside him. Oh God, Jack didn't finally get his hands on it, did he? He wasn't sure if Jack would even understand most of it, but Jack's pretty intelligent… He cringed at the idea of Jack reading some of the things he'd written. He heard Owen say, "Right, nothing doing today. I'm out of here."

Ianto finished his search of the desks, and sighing with frustration, he walked into Jack's office. "Did you, uh, call?" he asked Jack.

To Ianto's horror, Jack held up his diary. "Found your diary," Jack said, grinning at him.

Ianto hurried forward to take it from him. "Yep, been looking for that," he said, glancing quickly at Jack to see if he could tell whether or not Jack had read any of it.

He could sense Jack's amusement. *Damn, he's read it. Maybe he didn't understand it,* he thought hopefully, as he tried to make a quick exit. "And for the record," Jack started.

Ianto froze, feeling his heart sinking. "Measuring tapes never lie."

"Fuck!" Ianto said silently. Then he hurried out of Jack's office.

"Hey!" Jack's voice called him back.

*Bugger it!* Why couldn't Jack let him make his escape? He stuck his head back in the door. "Yep?" he asked.

"Who's Adam?" Jack asked, holding up a Torchwood evidence bag.

"Don't know," Ianto said, retreating quickly again. He needed to sit down and reread his diary from the beginning. What had he written about Jack?
Jack spent several minutes looking at the box that Owen had brought him. He had no idea what it was, so he put it aside for Ianto to file away in the archives. *Ianto*… He sat down at his desk and pulled up the translation of Ianto's diary.

**Day 1 of Jack's disappearance.**

Jack's finally found his Doctor. Now we're left to pick up the pieces. I don't even know what we were, really. I just knew that when I was with him, things were better. I laughed a lot. After everything that happened with Lisa and Canary Wharf, it was nice. But Tosh was right. Jack never cares about anyone he shags…

I didn't want to care. I tried to keep it casual. I was fine being his part-time shag. Why did he have to tell me that he needed me? Why did he have to tell me there was no one else? Why did he have to try to convince me that I meant more to him than I did? Why couldn't he just let me be? Then it wouldn't have mattered. The real Captain Jack Harkness wouldn't have mattered. When we thought he was really dead, the world wouldn't have seemed so empty. The fact that he left without even saying goodbye wouldn't have mattered. The fact that he's not coming back wouldn't matter. It shouldn't matter. Jack told the real Captain Jack that there was no one in his life. That's what I am to him – no one…

I'll keep his secrets. I owe him that much. I'll keep Torchwood running the way Jack would have wanted it to run, even though I know he won't come back. Even if I die doing it.

Jack paused and looked away, wiping a tear from his eye. *How could I have treated Ianto like that? How could I let Ianto think he was no one? And in spite of it all, he was still loyal to Torchwood – to me? He still followed whatever orders he thought I would have given. He still kept my secrets from the team. No bitterness, no malice – though they were well deserved – just loyalty and self deprecation… my Ianto. I'll make it up to you, I promise.* Jack closed the file. He would read more of the diary later. Right now he wanted to see Ianto. He pulled up the CCTV feed, but he couldn't find Ianto anywhere in the Hub. He tried the comms, but Ianto didn't respond. Finally, he took his mobile phone out of his pocket and dialed Ianto's number. Ianto answered after the first ring. "Yes, Sir?"

Jack smiled. "Ianto Jones, how is it that you can make those two words sound so sexy?"

"It's a gift, Sir. What's up? Weevils? Alien sex monsters? Giant space whales? Another one of your psychotic exes?"

Jack laughed, flooded with a warm feeling that he couldn't quite describe. "No, nothing like that, Ianto. I just…" "I just wanted to see you. "Where are you?"

"I'm at home, Jack."

"You didn't tell me you were leaving," Jack said, almost sounding offended.
"Sorry. You've seemed a bit distracted today, so I thought I'd leave you to it," Ianto said nonchalantly.

_I have been distracted today… distracted by his diary… "I'd rather be distracted by you,"_ Jack smiled into the phone.

There was a pause on the other end of the line before Ianto replied, "You know where I live… Sir." He emphasized the 'Sir'.

"Is that an invitation, Mr. Jones?" Jack asked, his cock already starting to respond to thoughts of Ianto.

"I suppose you could put it like that." Ianto's tone was teasing, and Jack was already lost in his fantasies.

"I'll be there in twenty," he said, before flipping his phone closed. He wanted to see Ianto, now.

Jack jumped into the SUV and drove to Ianto's flat. He considered whether he should use his key or ring the doorbell. Ianto had told him that he could use the flat whenever he wanted to, but that was before the Alun incident. _Things have been… messy. Maybe I should play it safe and ring the bell._ He parked the SUV and walked up to Ianto's doorstep. His heart was pounding, and he didn't understand why. He rang the doorbell. When Ianto answered the door, Jack's breath caught in his throat. Ianto looked incredible. He was wearing tight black jeans with a fitted black T-shirt and the silver necklace he'd been wearing the first day they met. He looked young and dangerous and gorgeous. "Wow," Jack said. "You look really… wow."

Ianto blushed slightly, and Jack felt affection for him welling up in his chest. _Still my Ianto._ "Come here," he said, pulling Ianto close.

They stood holding each other on Ianto's doorstep for several minutes. Finally Ianto pulled away, leading Jack inside and closing the door. He helped Jack off with his coat and hung it neatly in the coat closet. Jack watched Ianto fondly, as he lovingly took care of his greatcoat. When Ianto had finished, Jack grabbed him again and held him tight, stroking his hair. "Jack, is everything alright?" Ianto asked, sounding worried.

"Yeah, everything's fine. I just… are we good, Ianto, you and me?" he asked into Ianto's hair.

Ianto squeezed him tighter for a moment. "Yeah, Jack. We're good."

"Good," Jack whispered.

Jack felt something cold on his arm and looked down. There was a handcuff around his left wrist. He looked up into Ianto's slyly grinning face. "And now we're even better," Ianto said triumphantly.

"Getting you just where I want you," Ianto said, taking the other end of the handcuff and pulling Jack through his flat.

Ianto led him into the wide opening between the kitchen and living room. He pulled Jack's left arm
up and cuffed it to an eyehook in the wall. Jack looked up. "I don't remember that being here before," Jack said, momentarily distracted.

Ianto grinned impishly at him. "What can I say, Sir? I'm handy around the house," he said before he kissed Jack roughly and started unbuttoning his shirt.

Jack smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. He tried to shift his mood into one of frivolity. "Ianto Jones. I like the way you think," he said, trying to get into the swing of things. Like I would ever refuse sex games.

Ianto's grin broadened, as he finished unbuttoning Jack's shirt, lifted up his T-shirt and slowly ran his hands down Jack's bare chest. Then he kissed Jack again, hard, pushing his tongue into Jack's mouth. Jack felt something cold on his right wrist – Ianto had a second pair of handcuffs. Ianto pulled Jack's right arm up and cuffed it to another eye hook on the opposite side of the doorframe. Jack was hanging with his arms outstretched, one cuffed to each side of the door frame. Instantly he was back on the Valiant, hanging from shackles. He started to hyperventilate, and he tried desperately to slow his breathing. You're okay, he told himself. You're with Ianto. You trust Ianto. You... oh gods, the Master is coming. He's coming to torture me again. I can't stand anymore. It took me a week to die last time... and the pain...

Jack struggled violently against the shackles. "NO!" he yelled. Not again. I can't take any more. Not again. Please, gods, not again. He screamed in terror, and then he shut down. It was the only way he could survive the Master's torture. Ianto, think of Ianto. Remember the time after Susie died for the last time? The stopwatch... the lists... Naked Hide and Seek... the sound of Ianto's voice saying my name in that beautiful Welsh accent. Jack... Jack... "Jack!"

Jack came to with a start. He was lying on Ianto's floor, and Ianto's arms were around him. There was a look of sheer panic on Ianto's face. "Jack!" Ianto kissed him. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't... what did I do? Did I hurt you? What happened? Are you alright?"

"Ianto?" Jack asked weakly, looking around.

He was safe. He was in Cardiff. He was with Ianto. He touched Ianto's face, feeling slightly queasy. He took several deep breaths. "Jack, I don't understand. Are you ill? I thought you didn't get sick," Ianto asked, looking like he was going to be ill himself.

Jack reached out and pulled Ianto close to him, wrapping his arms around the frightened young man. Jack held him tightly, breathing in his scent, letting the feel of Ianto in his arms soothe him. I'm in Cardiff, in Ianto's flat. I'm with the person that I... that I love. "Ianto," Jack began, but he couldn't continue.

Memories of his time aboard the Valiant still burned clearly in his eyes. He thought he had let it go. He thought he was over it. He knew Ianto was just playing a game with him. It was meant to be fun and sexy. He pulled away and looked at Ianto. Ianto's eyes were filled with anxiety. Poor Ianto probably just got the shock of his life. Pull yourself together Harkness, he thought, getting up off the floor and walking into the kitchen.

He poured himself a glass of water and swallowed it down. He refilled the glass and drank that one down as well. He saw Ianto out of the corner of his eye, standing in the doorway, looking alarmed. He knew that he would have to explain. Closing his eyes, he stood still for a minute and pulled himself together. Then he located a bottle of scotch and two glasses. It was time to tell someone what had happened to him. It was time to tell Ianto.

He walked into the adjoining room and sat down on Ianto's sofa. Ianto sat down next to him, looking
wary. Jack poured out two glasses of scotch. He handed one to Ianto and the other he swallowed in one go. Ianto looked at the glass Jack had handed him, and then back up at Jack. Jack reached out his hand and Ianto gripped it tentatively. "I need to tell you about the year that never was," Jack said in a hushed tone.

"The year that never was?" Ianto asked, looking confused.

Jack looked into Ianto's eyes. "I need to tell you what happened to me when I was with the Doctor."
"After Abaddon," Jack began, "I was in the Hub, talking to Gwen. You, Tosh and Owen had left to get coffee."

Jack described how the Doctor's hand had glowed, and he had known that the Doctor was nearby. He described grabbing the jar with the hand and running faster than he'd ever run before. He explained how he'd hurtled himself at the TARDIS, calling for the Doctor, and clinging to the outside as it took off, dragging him to who knows where or when in time and space. "Ianto, I'm sorry I didn't say goodbye or leave a message, but I didn't expect to leave with him. I just knew that I only had minutes to catch him, and I ran like hell. I was desperate for answers. The last time I saw him, I died – for the first time – in the year 200,100. We were fighting a battle with the Daleks, and they killed me. Then I woke up, and he was gone. Everyone was dead, and I was alone. I didn't understand what had happened to me. I had to find him. I knew he used the Rift energy to refuel the TARDIS, so I used my Vortex Manipulator to take me to Cardiff before the turn of the 21st century. Only I got it wrong, and I ended up before the turn of the 20th century, 1869 to be precise, and my Vortex Manipulator burned out. I was stranded. I waited for over a hundred years for a version of the Doctor that would coincide with my Doctor. I had to know if he could fix me." Jack paused for breath, and Ianto squeezed his hand.

Jack refilled his glass and took a long sip of the scotch. Then he said in a quiet voice, "Turns out he saw me running after him. He tried to get away from me…" Jack's voice broke, and he suppressed a sob. "The TARDIS flew all the way to the end of the universe to try to get rid of me," he said, and then he broke down.

Ianto wrapped his arms around Jack and held him. Jack laid his head on Ianto's shoulder and forced himself to go on. "I'll never forget his words. He said, 'It's not easy just looking at you, Jack, 'cause you're wrong'." There. He'd said it aloud. He'd told someone. The words that had been haunting him for over a year were finally out in the open. He was stunned when he heard Ianto laugh. "That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard," Ianto said with contempt.

Jack sat up and looked at Ianto. "This is what you've been torturing yourself with since you returned? The Doctor told you that you're wrong?" Ianto asked with some amusement.

Jack stared at Ianto, his mouth hanging slightly open. Then he said, "He's a Time Lord, Ianto. The last of the Time Lords. You don't understand what that means. You don't know the wisdom and the power the Time Lords have over the universe – or had," Jack tried to explain. "The Doctor can see all of time; the past, the present, and the future," Jack continued. "He told me that I was never meant to happen."

"I don't care if he's the king of the universe. It's bollocks," Ianto said nonchalantly, taking a drink from his glass of scotch.
"Well, he kind of is the king of the universe," Jack said, smiling in spite of himself.

"I don't care, Jack. He's one... um... do you say person? I know he's an alien and everything... But Jack, there's nothing you could do to get me or Gwen or Tosh or even Owen to think that your existence is wrong. You mean everything to us... and to Torchwood," Ianto said seriously.

Jack looked at Ianto, who was looking back at him earnestly. He knew that Ianto didn't understand about the Time Lords, but he appreciated Ianto's loyalty. "Besides," Ianto went on. "Did I hear you say that the Time Lords had all this wisdom and power, as in past tense?"

Jack nodded his head. "So what happened?" Ianto asked curiously.

"Long story," Jack said.

"Give me the summary," Ianto said.

Jack sighed, "Basically, there were some that believed the Time Lords had too much power, and there was a war with the Daleks. The Time Lords were wiped out."

Ianto looked thoughtful for a moment. Then he quoted, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Jack nodded. "Yeah, something like that."

"So you're telling me that these Time Lords, who are supposed to be full of the wisdom of the universe, suffer from the same weaknesses that we mere mortals do?"

Jack was taken aback. He hadn't quite thought of it like that. But then he remembered. "The Doctor fought against them having absolute power. He tried to stop them," Jack argued.

"Still don't care, Jack. Doesn't make him right about you. No one or no thing can be right all of the time," Ianto replied, taking another sip of his scotch.

"He is right, Ianto. I am wrong."

Ianto grabbed Jack's arm and shook him, almost violently. "No, Jack, you're not! Even if you're talking about the wisest, most powerful creature in the universe, it's still only one person's opinion. I grant you that it's someone you highly respect and admire and even love, but that still doesn't make him right." Ianto shook him hard again. "There is nothing wrong about you."

Jack looked at Ianto. He was staring intently at Jack, a ferociousness about his features, as if daring Jack to contradict him. My Ianto. Jack smiled and touched Ianto's face. "Don't our opinions count for anything, Jack? Me and Tosh and Gwen and Owen? We're not Time Lords, but we're..." Ianto hesitated.

"Special," Jack finished, kissing Ianto's forehead. "Yeah, your opinions count, Ianto. It's just... there's nothing like me in the entire universe."

Ianto laughed. "You can say that again!"

Jack chuckled. He was feeling immensely better. Ianto always has a surprising point of view. "So, you think the Doctor's wrong and you're right?" Jack teased.

"About this? Absolutely," Ianto smiled at Jack.

Jack leaned his forehead against Ianto's. He took a deep breath, knowing that now he was going to have to talk about the year of torture. "That's not all," said Ianto, as if reading his mind.

"No, that's not all," Jack confirmed.

He started to tell Ianto what he safely could of the year that never was, hesitantly, at first, then gathering momentum like an avalanche. He told him about the end of the universe. He told him about Martha Jones and her family. He told him about the Master, masquerading as Harold Saxon, twisted and evil. He told him about the Doctor being aged beyond reason and powerless to help, held prisoner by the Master. He told Ianto about the Toclafane and the Master's plan to destroy the world. He told Ianto about the death and destruction of the human race. Then he told Ianto about his time aboard the Valiant and the torture he'd endured there.

Ianto sat with his hand gripping Jack's arm tightly, becoming paler and paler, tears rolling down his face, as Jack described what the Master had done to him.

And then Jack told Ianto about the memories that kept him sane through the long year. He told him how he had replayed in his mind every one of his memories of them together in order to withstand the pain and suffering. He told him how Martha Jones had saved the world and how time had reversed itself. He told him that, when it was all over, he had asked the Doctor to bring him back to Cardiff. "He asked me to come with him, you know, the Doctor," Jack said, remembering the scene.

Ianto's head shot up. His face was wet with the tears. "But that's everything you ever wanted, Jack," Ianto said with surprise.


Ianto looked deep into Jack's eyes and opened his mouth slightly, looking like he was about to say something profound. Jack's heart started pounding and his stomach clenched. Is he going to tell me that he… but then Ianto shook his head slightly and smiled. "You wanker," Ianto teased. "The Doctor can't really think you're wrong if he asked you to travel with him again."

Jack didn't know if he was disappointed or relieved about what Ianto might have said. I don't think I can do declarations right now. "Yeah, I suppose you're right," Jack said distractedly.

Ianto was silent for a long time. He drank the rest of the scotch in his glass, then set it down on the table and looked at Jack. "Do you trust me?" he asked Jack seriously.

"Yes, Ianto. I trust you."

Ianto stood and held out his hand. Jack took it and let Ianto pull him to his feet. Ianto led him back to the doorway where the handcuffs still hung from the wall. "Do you remember our conversation about safe words?"

"Of course I remember," Jack said, trying to grin, but he had an idea of what Ianto had in mind, and he was terrified.

"What's your word, Jack?"

"Desiir," Jack replied immediately.

Ianto kissed him softly and murmured against his lips, "All you need to do is say that word and I'll stop, Jack. You're in control."
Jack took a few deep breaths and nodded. He knew what Ianto was going to do. Psychiatrists called it desensitization. And he knew that Ianto was doing the right thing, the only thing that would help him move past the terror. He had to replace the horrible memories with good ones. Ianto gently slid Jack's shirt off of his shoulders. He kissed his neck, sucking on the skin beneath his ear. Jack sighed, letting himself focus on the feeling of Ianto's mouth on his skin.

Ianto raised one of Jack's hands and kissed his fingertips before he lifted it up and locked it into the handcuffs. Ianto gently took Jack's other hand and kissed the palm. Then he looked Jack in the eyes, waiting for Jack to give him permission. Jack took one last deep breath and nodded slightly. Ianto slowly raised Jack's other hand up to the free pair of handcuffs hanging from the wall. Jack closed his eyes when he felt the metal lock around his wrist and his breathing quickened. He felt Ianto's lips on his. "Stay with me, Jack," Ianto said, holding his face in his hands.

"Look at me. It's just you and me here, and you're in control," Ianto continued, leaning his forehead against Jack's.

Jack opened his eyes and looked into Ianto's. He saw nothing but affection in Ianto's eyes. He smiled. "I'm here, Ianto. I'm with you."
Ianto had been horrified when what started out as a game, ended with Jack screaming in terror and frantically thrashing in the handcuffs. Ianto had scrambled to get Jack down, dropping the keys twice in his haste. But even more alarming than Jack's shouting and struggling was what followed. Jack went completely catatonic, like his soul had left his body. It was one of the most frightening things Ianto had ever seen – and he'd seen quite a lot.

When Ianto finally managed to get the cuffs unlocked, Jack fell to the floor, insensible. Ianto kept calling his name and shaking him, but Jack was unresponsive. Ianto was completely frantic, he was about to call Owen when Jack finally looked at him and said his name. His heart still pounding in his throat, Ianto watched anxiously as Jack stood up and walked into the kitchen. He followed and hovered in the doorway, not knowing what to do. When Jack retrieved the bottle of scotch and two glasses, Ianto's felt his stomach churn. Oh God, now what? It was with dread that he sat down on the sofa and took the glass of scotch that Jack handed him. He'd had no idea what was in store.

Ianto had been outraged when he heard that the Doctor had told Jack he was wrong, and he knew Jack had been torturing himself with the notion ever since his return. How dare he make Jack question his very existence! Jack had waited for an explanation from the Doctor for so long. More that that, Jack had waited for consolation, for reassurance, for compassion. He had got nothing from the Doctor except for rejection and heartbreak, and it made Ianto furious. He wasn't sure if he liked this Doctor of Jack's.

He had scoffed at the idea that Jack was wrong. Really, though, it's bollocks. He knew that Jack worshiped the Doctor, and that to Jack, his word was law. Ianto also knew that his own words couldn't assuage Jack's pain or his conviction that he was wrong, but Ianto tried to convince Jack that he was loved – by all of them.

Ianto had been appalled by Jack's description of the year that never was. He had tried his best not to break down for Jack's sake. He knew that Jack needed to talk, and if Ianto broke down, Jack's attention would shift to him instead of remaining focused on himself. This needs to be about Jack. It's not about me. He had gripped Jack's arm tightly and let his tears roll unheeded down his face so that Jack could continue without interruption. He hoped it would be the catharsis that Jack needed.

When Jack had finished the story, Ianto sat silent for a while, drinking his scotch and mulling over everything that Jack had told him. Finally Ianto understood what Jack had been carrying around with him for so long. He understood Jack's nightmares and his fear of being alone. He understood the mood swings and the false bravado. He thought that he finally had an understanding of Captain Jack Harkness and the curse he bore.

He wanted to comfort Jack. He wanted to wrap his arms around Jack and reassure him. He wanted to tell Jack that he was in love with him. He had even started to say it, but before the words had formed on his lips, he'd known instinctually that it would be the wrong thing to do. Jack was filled with too much self-loathing to hear it. Rather than reassure him, it would only serve to lower Ianto in Jack's esteem. Ianto knew that at this moment, Jack would think less of Ianto for loving him. It was
an indication of how little Jack thought of himself. *The great Captain Jack Harkness believes he isn't worthy of love.*

Ianto knew that Jack needed to recover some semblance of control in order to regain his confidence. Jack put on a good show, but Ianto knew how much of Jack's boisterous façade was a cover for his desperate insecurity. *Thanks for that, Doctor. Now I have to pick up the pieces,* he thought sarcastically. First and foremost, Jack needed to conquer the residual trauma from his year of torture. They were Torchwood, and Jack was going to get chained up at some point in time. It was inevitable. *It just won't do for our Captain to go to pieces the next time he's captured and bound by some alien or other.*

Ianto put his glass down with decision. "Do you trust me?" he asked Jack.

Ianto waited for Jack's permission to handcuff him to the wall again. When Jack started to hyperventilate, Ianto kissed him softly, and cupped his face in his hands. "Stay with me, Jack. Look at me. It's just you and me here, and you're in control," Ianto said, leaning his forehead against Jack's.

Jack opened his eyes and looked into Ianto's. He smiled. "I'm here, Ianto. I'm with you."

Ianto held Jack's face in his hands and tenderly kissed his cheeks, his forehead, his eyes, his nose, his chin, his throat and then his mouth, his tongue caressing Jack's. Then he gently removed the remainder of Jack's clothing. Ianto knew Jack's body well, and he knew what Jack liked. He kissed and caressed every inch of Jack's skin, paying special attention to Jack's erogenous zones. Jack's palpable fear became pleasure and then excitement under Ianto's skillful mouth and hands. "Ianto," Jack moaned, and Ianto smiled.

Ianto stepped back from Jack to remove his T-shirt. Jack looked at him hungrily, panting slightly, and Ianto knew that the memories of the Valiant were fading into the background. Ianto looked Jack in the eyes as he unbuttoned his jeans, freeing his hard cock. He wasn't wearing any underwear, and Jack noticed. "Ianto Jones, you naughty boy," Jack said with a grin.

*Ianto. That's my Jack,* Ianto thought, as a huge smile spread across his face. He kissed Jack and pressed their bodies together. They both groaned. Jack strained at the cuffs, but this time in a good way – the way that Ianto had intended. With one last kiss, Ianto dropped to his knees and took Jack into his mouth. He reached up and cupped Jack's arse, pressing Jack deep into him as he relaxed his throat. He was giving Jack permission to thrust with abandon, letting Jack have control. Jack moved gently at first, then with more force as he began to lose control of his body.

Ianto had Jack just where he wanted him. He felt immensely pleased with himself as Jack drove his cock in and out of his mouth, moaning and writhing in the cuffs. Ianto kept his eyes on Jack, watching pleasure take over his body, watching him come undone. With one final thrust, Jack came hard down his throat. Ianto swallowed, sucking Jack gently, milking every last drop from his weeping cock.

Then he stood up, grabbed the keys, and released Jack from the handcuffs. Jack immediately dropped to his knees and took Ianto's cock in his mouth. Ianto was about to tell him that it wasn't necessary, that this was all for him, but Jack's talented tongue prevented the words from taking form. Jack made quick work of Ianto, and he was cumming in Jack's mouth moments later.

Jack stood and held out his hand. Ianto took it, and Jack led them silently into Ianto's bedroom. They didn't speak. They didn't need to. They climbed into Ianto's bed and wrapped themselves around each other, both clinging tightly to the other. Suddenly Jack laughed. "What's funny?" Ianto asked, bemused.
"What's the plural of octopus? Octopuses? Octopi?"

Ianto laughed too. "I believe both are considered correct," Ianto answered knowledgably.

"Now we're both like octopuses," Jack said, amused.

"Yeah, I guess we are," Ianto replied distractedly, wondering just what that meant. *You think too much Jones.*

Ianto was exhausted, and he felt himself drifting. Just as he was on the edge of slumber, he heard Jack whisper, "Thank you, Ianto."

*Anything for you, Jack,* was his last conscious thought.
Thanks as always to my phenomenal beta riftintime.

Jack slept soundly until he was awakened by sunlight streaming in through the bedroom windows. He and Ianto were still wrapped around each other, and Jack considered the young man asleep in his arms. Ianto had laughed at what the Doctor had told him. He had actually laughed. The words that had plagued Jack for so long, making him yearn for the release of death, cursing his very existence, Ianto had thought absurd. *He's convinced the Doctor is wrong about me… Is it possible that this twenty-five year old man from Cardiff is right and the Doctor is wrong? But you know that Ianto's more than just that, Jack,* he told himself. *Ianto is extraordinary. He never stops surprising you.*

As was common when sharing confidences, Jack felt slightly embarrassed after his emotional outpouring from the night before. He wondered how Ianto would act towards him when he woke. Would he be embarrassed as well? Would he fuss over him? Would he pretend nothing had happened? Would he want to talk about it some more? Jack had no idea what Ianto's reaction would be, but knowing Ianto, it was bound to be completely unexpected.

Jack ran his fingers through Ianto's hair. Ianto now knew more about him than anyone in the universe, including the Doctor, but there was still so much Ianto didn't know. Jack had done so many things in his long life. So many things that he was ashamed of. Would Ianto still think it was bollocks if he knew what Jack was truly capable of? Would he still respect him if he knew all of Jack's sordid history? Would he forgive him? *Would he still want me?*

Part of Jack wanted to make a clean breast of it. He wanted to sit Ianto down and tell him everything, every single one of his dirty little secrets. He wanted to tell Ianto about the people he'd tortured and killed. He wanted to tell Ianto about the children he'd sacrificed all those years ago. He wanted to tell Ianto about everyone he'd conned, the lives he'd destroyed, the lives he couldn't save, his own children that he'd abandoned, the lovers he'd left. Would Ianto still think so highly of him then? Would he still not believe that Jack was wrong? *No, I can't risk it. It might make him hate me, and I couldn't stand that. I need him. He makes everything better. He makes it bearable.*

Regardless of whether or not the Doctor was right about him, what Jack couldn't get his head around was why he, of all people, had been given immortality. *I don't deserve it. I'm not a good person – far from it.* Why wasn't this gifted to someone who could do some real good in the world? *Why wasn't it given to the Doctor? The Doctor is the real champion of the universe. I'm just a poor substitute. I'm shallow and egotistical and selfish. What role can I possibly have to play in the universe?*

Jack knew *that* was the heart of the matter. *I wanted the Doctor to fix me, but if he couldn't, I wanted him to tell me that I had a purpose… that my immortality wasn't an accident of fate or a mistake.* He had wanted the Doctor to tell him that there was a reason this had happened to him. *I wanted him to tell me that I was important to the universe. I wanted him to tell me that I mattered. That he could live with.* *That* he could understand. He would have been reassured that, for all his suffering and loneliness, he had an important role to play.

Instead he had received nothing but rejection and revulsion from the Doctor. *But Ianto told me that I'm important.* Jack looked down at Ianto and ran his fingers through Ianto's hair again, remembering
his words. You mean everything to us – and to Torchwood. If only Jack could believe him. If only I felt that I was worthy of Ianto's love. Jack paused, his hand in midair, as his heart beat faster. Does Ianto love me? The thought both thrilled and terrified him.

I didn't used to be so afraid of love. People were a lot freer with their emotions in the 51st century. It was a time without the inhibitions or the social constrains that marked the century in which Jack was currently living. Jack could remember being completely open about his love for people... but that was a long, long time ago. His recoiling from love was a learned behavior, a conditioned response, a byproduct of his curse. He had suffered so much heartache over the years. He had watched lovers and friends age and die. He had watched his own children outgrow him. Those who didn't know his secret, he'd abandoned before they became suspicious. Those that did know ended up hating him for his perpetual youth. What would happen with Ianto? Jack's heart started pounding and he began to feel sick. I can't think about it. I already depend on him for so much.

Jack had to admit that Ianto had made himself indispensible to Jack as an employee, as a lover, and as a friend. Ianto's reaction to the story of the Valiant had been astonishing. He had obviously been moved by Jack's plight – Jack had seen the tears streaming down Ianto's face. But he had let Jack talk. He had allowed Jack to tell his story in his own way without asking questions or interrupting him. He hadn't coddled Jack or offered empty words of regret. No, Ianto had put him right back in those handcuffs, and it had been... hot. Jack smiled at the memory. My clever, practical, beautiful Ianto. And to think I had wanted to kill you when I found the Cyberman in my basement...

Jack shifted uncomfortably. He remembered watching Ianto's love for Lisa with something akin to envy. Ianto loved with such fierce abandonment, and Jack yearned for that passion to be directed towards him. Would Ianto ever love him like that? Did he want Ianto to love him like that? He both desperately craved it and apprehensively dreaded it. Jack, you're thinking so hard I can hear you from here," muttered Ianto's sleepy voice, startling Jack out of his ruminations. "It's far too early in the morning for that much thinking. We haven't even had coffee yet," Ianto continued with a yawn.

Jack didn't respond. He was still too distracted by his musings. Ianto lifted his head up off of Jack's chest and looked at him. He looked so young, still half asleep with his hair sticking out at odd angles. What am I doing? thought Jack. He's so young. He has so much to offer the world, and I've dragged him into my mess. I've burdened him with my curse. He deserves better than me. He deserves someone who can give him a real life. "That's enough Jack," Ianto said sternly.

Jack looked at Ianto in surprise. "That's enough what?" he asked in confusion.

"No more beating yourself up." Ianto glared at him.

Jack felt slightly alarmed. "Are you sure you can't read my mind, Ianto?" he asked with trepidation.

"Please, Jack. Your self deprecation is so loud it's deafening," Ianto responded blithely. "Now are you going to fuck me, or am I going to have to take care of myself?"

A grin spread slowly across Jack's features. How does he do that? He has an uncanny ability to make things better. He always has me turning on my head... He's always unexpected. Jack felt his cock stirring, and his internal struggles faded into the background. He clasped his hands behind his head. "I do love a good show," he said, grinning broadly.

Ianto raised an eyebrow, and then threw back the covers. He leaned over to the bedside table and
took out a bottle of lube. He pulled Jack's knees up, then straddled Jack's chest and leaned back against Jack's legs. "You're the boss," he said demurely.

Ianto opened the bottle of lube and coated his hand. Then he started stroking his already hard cock. He stopped and put more lube into his hand. He reached down and inserted a finger inside himself feeling around for the bundle of nerves and groaning when he found it. He inserted a second finger. "Is this what you wanted, Sir?" he asked breathlessly.

"Oh yeah," Jack replied, watching with fascination as Ianto stretched himself out.

Ianto inserted a third finger and grabbed his cock with this free hand. Jack watched with growing excitement as Ianto simultaneously stroked and fucked himself. Ianto had his eyes closed and his head thrown back, and Jack thought it was insanely erotic. "I want to watch you make yourself cum," Jack said in a rough voice.

Ianto worked his hands faster, writhing and moaning on Jack's chest. Jack thought he might cum just from watching Ianto. Ianto opened his eyes, looked right into Jack's, and with a yell, he came all over Jack's chest. Jack couldn't contain himself any longer. He sat up and threw Ianto down on his back. He pushed Ianto's legs up and over so he was practically folded in half with his knees by his ears and his arse high in the air. Jack stood over him and entered him with one swift thrust. He fucked Ianto with shameless unrestraint until, shouting his release, he came deep inside him.

Jack released Ianto and dropped down on the bed next to him, panting. "I didn't know that my body could bend like that," Ianto said in awe, catching his breath. "That was innovative," he added.

"Stick with me Mr. Jones. I'll get you into all kinds of positions," Jack said with a grin.

Ianto eyed him. "I bet you will, Sir."

Jack chuckled and pulled Ianto over to him. "Ianto Jones. The things you do to me," Jack kissed his forehead. "So, going to chain me up more often now?" he asked coyly.

"Only if you promise not to go catatonic again," Ianto said dryly. "I had no idea how I was going to explain that one to Owen."

Jack laughed. It felt so good to laugh about it. Only Ianto could get him to laugh about the side effects of a year of torture. Jack looked at the young man lying next to him, still catching his breath, and he felt overwhelming affection for him. Ianto caught his look and smiled at him. "I suppose we should think about getting to work. My boss is a real tyrant," Ianto teased.

"Is that so?" Jack asked, running his hand down Ianto's chest.

"You wouldn't believe the things he makes me do in the line of duty," Ianto continued.

"Oh, so this is all in the line of duty, is it?" Jack asked, fondling Ianto's balls.

"For Queen and Country, Sir," Ianto saluted.

Jack kissed him. "You always were a cheeky bastard, Jones, Ianto Jones. What do you say we play hooky today. Spend the day in bed," Jack added, stroking Ianto's cock which had already started to recover.

Ianto grinned at him. "You're the boss."
Ianto lay on top of Jack catching his breath. He had just fucked Jack really hard, and he was sore – in a good way. He slid sideways off Jack leaving an arm and a leg thrown over him, thinking about the events of the last twenty-four hours. It all started with the missing days… and my missing diary. He had spent a good portion of the previous day rereading his diary. He'd cringed every time it said something about his feelings for Jack. Although it never said the actual words anywhere, it was still a record of his falling in love with Jack.

How much of my diary did he read? What did he think? Ianto squirmed uncomfortably with embarrassment. He hadn't really left the Hub the night before because Jack had been preoccupied. He'd left because he'd been slightly mortified at the prospect of Jack knowing how much he cared. He was afraid that if Jack knew, he would end things between them.

I should be angry at him for violating my privacy like that, but who am I kidding? That's just Jack. Besides, he was completely upfront about the fact that he was going to do his utmost to read it.

When Jack had phoned him, wanting to come over, Ianto had been worried that Jack would want to discuss something he'd read in the diary. Ianto had frantically wracked his brain for a way to distract Jack from the pending conversation. That had inspired the idea of chaining Jack up. Ianto had quickly gotten out his tool box and mounted the two eyehooks into the wall. Then he'd changed his clothes and dug out the two sets of handcuffs from his Torchwood kit. This will definitely distract him, he'd thought with glee. What a disastrous idea that had been! He'd had no idea that his plan to divert a serious discussion would lead to an even more serious had chained Jack up as a distraction because he was worried that Jack would want to talk to him about the diary, and he had no desire to confront Jack about it.

And then the story Jack had told him… Ianto shuddered at the memory. Horrible. Ianto looked at Jack who was lying, spent, on his bed. Jack's eyes were closed, and he had a sated look on his face. Well, whatever he read in my diary must not have bothered him too much if he trusted me enough to tell me what happened to him. Ianto knew Jack was still reeling from the conversation. But I'm here for you, Jack. You're not alone anymore. Ianto stroked Jack's face. Jack smiled, grasped Ianto's hand, and kissed his fingertips. Anything you need, Jack.

Ianto had questions about the year that never was, but he wouldn't ask them. Jack will tell me more if he wants to. I would never force confessions out of him… Jack's phone rang from the other room, recalling Ianto to the present. They looked at each other. Ianto raised an eyebrow, and Jack rolled his eyes in a very Ianto-like manner. We must be spending a lot of time together, Ianto thought with amusement.

Grumbling, Jack got out of bed and went into the living room to retrieve his phone which he'd left in his trouser pocket. Jack walked back into the bedroom holding it out in front of him. Ianto watched Jack, standing naked at the foot of his bed, looking intently at his mobile. Jack was so gorgeous that he took Ianto's breath away. I would never have believed that I would think a man to be so beautiful. I must really be in love.
Jack's phone rang again, and his face lit up when he read the screen. Ianto smiled at Jack's look of sheer joy. Jack flipped the phone opened. "Suddenly, on a gloomy day in Cardiff, I hear the voice of a nightingale."

Ianto got up to let Jack take his call in private. He kissed Jack's shoulder on his way out of the room, closing the bedroom door behind him. Jack might not respect his privacy, but he at least, respected Jack's. He went into the kitchen to make them coffee, feeling mildly superior and somewhat smug. After about ten minutes, he heard Jack calling him. He prepared their coffees and took them back to his bedroom.

Jack was sitting naked on the bed with his back against the wall and his feet crossed at the ankles. Ianto handed him a cup of coffee. "You didn't have to leave, Ianto. Thanks," Jack added, as he took the coffee from him. "That was Martha Jones," Jack said, taking a long sip of coffee. "Mmm. So good."

Ianto sat down on the side of the bed near Jack's hip. "Speak of the devil..." he took a sip of his coffee.

"And the devil shall appear," Jack finished. "She's working for UNIT now."

"Really?" Ianto asked, surprised.

"She should have called me. I would have given her a job," Jack said, sounding dejected.

Ianto stroked his forehead. "At least now you may get to see her more often. Perhaps she'll be our UNIT liaison, and we'll get to work with her."

Jack grinned broadly at the idea, and Ianto could tell that he was thrilled at the idea of seeing Ms. Jones. "You're excited at the prospect of seeing her again," Ianto stated, sipping his coffee and running his hand over Jack's chest.

"Yeah, Ianto. I really am," Jack said, grinning even wider.

Jack's phone rang again and he groaned as he looked at the screen. He flipped open the phone. "What's up Tosh?"

As Jack listened to her response, Ianto felt Jack's muscles contract. Back to work, he thought with amusement. I had a feeling us spending the day in bed would never happen.

"I'll be there soon," Jack said into the phone before snapping it closed.

Ianto smiled. "Back to the Hub it is then," he said with affection.

Jack frowned slightly. "Are you disappointed?"

"Of course not, Jack. Torchwood always comes first," Ianto replied with a reassuring squeeze of his shoulder.

Jack frowned deeper. "I'm not sure if I should be offended by that or not," Jack said, lifting his chin slightly.

Ianto laughed at him. "You're inane, Jack, you know that? And I always know when you're feeling defensive because you lift your chin up like that," Ianto added, stroking Jack's jaw line. "Of course I would much rather spend the day in bed with you, but there's work to do... Better?" Ianto couldn't keep the amusement out of his voice. If people only knew how deep Jack's insecurities run, and how
much he hides behind that demonstrative exterior, Ianto mused.

Jack chuckled, looking slightly embarrassed. "Yeah, yeah, okay."

Ianto downed the rest of his coffee and stood, holding his hand out to Jack. "Shower?" he asked.

Jack finished his coffee and took Ianto's hand. Together they showered and got dressed for work.

Ianto's prediction of Torchwood working with Martha Jones was not long in coming. It was only a few weeks later that she called Jack for help on a case. Jack's excitement at the prospect of seeing Martha Jones again was palpable, and it amused Ianto to see him with such boyishly eager anticipation.

Ianto liked Martha Jones. He liked her a lot. He could see why Jack admired her. She was brilliant, gorgeous, and entertaining. He watched with affection as Jack showed her off to the team. But what made him smile the most was Jack's obvious delight at seeing her again. Jack was radiant, and it thrilled Ianto to see him like that. He was filled with an insouciance Ianto hadn't seen in him in a long time. Maybe telling me about his year of torture finally gave him some peace, Ianto dared to think. Or maybe it's just seeing Martha again.

Ianto was getting Martha ready to infiltrate the Pharm when she remarked, "So, Jack asked me if I could get you a UNIT cap to wear."

Ianto had to stifle a laugh. "Did he?" He started to walk away, but he couldn't help adding, "Well, red is my color."

"So am I right in thinking you and he…"

Ianto paused on the stairway and looked at Martha. She was smiling at him. His instinct was to evade the question, but he knew that it would get back to Jack and hurt his feelings. "We…" Ianto tried desperately to come up with an adjective to describe him and Jack. "…dabble," Ianto finished, hard pressed to find a better definition.

"Yeah?" Martha asked, looking interested.

"Yeah," Ianto confirmed.

"So what's his dabbling like?" Martha asked with a fascinated look on her face.

*Jack in bed is… "Innovative," Ianto said aloud.*

"Really?" Martha asked, sounding impressed.

"Bordering on the avant-garde," Ianto added.

"Wow," Martha said, looking awed.

"Oh yeah…" Ianto thought of a particularly impressive position Jack had him in the morning after he told him about the Valiant… *almost folded in half… it really must have looked avant-garde…*

"Huh…" Ianto felt a stirring between his legs. *Work to do, Jones. "So should we get your cover story sorted?"*

"Absolutely."

Ianto knew that the entire conversation would get back to Jack – if Jack wasn't already watching via the CCTV cameras. He hoped he'd handled it alright. Jack could be touchy about them – especially
after everything with Alun, and Ianto didn't want to spoil Jack's good spirits.

After Martha had infiltrated the Pharm, they had a few hours to kill before she would risk gaining access to their computer system. Ianto was feeding the Weevils when Jack's voice came over his comm. "Ianto, my office."

Ianto touched his earpiece. "I'll be there in five minutes, Jack."

When Ianto appeared in Jack's office doorway, Jack held out his hand. "Come here. And close the door behind you."


Jack opened the CCTV footage. He pulled Ianto onto his lap. Ianto felt uncomfortable being demonstrative with Jack at work, but he knew that it would hurt Jack if he showed it, so he tried to ignore his discomfort. Besides, they were alone in Jack's office and the door was closed. The CCTV footage showed Owen and Tosh having a conversation. Owen said, "Plus, if I tried anything with her, I think Jack would have my kneecaps."


Ianto chuckled, and Jack put his arms around Ianto and held him close. "Watch," he said, kissing Ianto on the neck.

Owen asked, "So what happened to that, um, pool tournament you were organizing?"

"That… it was never a tournament," Tosh said.

"What was that all about then?" Owen asked.

"It was supposed to be a date," Tosh explained with embarrassment.

"Sorry?"

"I was asking you out on a date," Tosh said, looking at Owen.

Ianto watched with a growing smile as Owen agreed to go out on a date with Tosh. Jack kissed Ianto's neck again. Owen said, "And I'm going to keep flirting with people, okay? Just 'cause of this, doesn't mean I'm going to stop flirting."

"You can be the king of flirts," Tosh said, smiling.

Jack hit a key on his computer to stop the footage, saying, "I believe that's my title, Tosh."

Ianto laughed. "I believe you're right, Jack. You are definitely the king of flirts."

"Does it bother you?" Jack asked, looking hard at Ianto.

"What, your flirting?" Ianto asked with an eyebrow raised.

"Yeah," Jack said running his hands up Ianto's chest and fingering the buttons on his waistcoat.

"No, Jack. It doesn't bother me. It's who you are, and I wouldn't change that."

Jack smiled at him and touched his cheek. "You knew that would happen, didn't you? Tosh and
Owen? How is it that you always know?” Jack asked, stroking Ianto's face gently.

"Because I know what they feel for each other," Ianto said, looking at Jack.

"Do you know what I'm feeling right now?” Jack asked coyly.

"Yes, Jack. I can feel it against my arse," Ianto said, wiggling slightly in Jack's lap.

Jack laughed. "I like Martha,” Ianto said, changing the subject.

"She's brilliant, isn't she? We think the Doctor got her the job at UNIT, but they're damn lucky to have her. I would have given her a job in a second.”

"How come she's not still with the Doctor?” Ianto asked hesitantly, hoping he wasn't bringing up a sore subject.

"She wanted to take care of her family after the year that never was. We were all in the eye of the storm so we all remember what happened. They were having a hard time coping.”

"So everyone had someone to help them cope except you?” Ianto asked, looking at Jack.

"I have you,” Jack said, winking at him. "Besides," Jack went on, "Martha was in love with the Doctor and he…" Jack broke off.

"Didn't feel the same way?” Ianto asked.

Jack shook his head distractedly. "For the Doctor, there's only Rose… but she's living in an alternate universe, and I don't think they'll ever see each other again."

"Huh,” Ianto said. "Very theatrical and romantic."

"Well," Jack continued, "It's not like it would have worked anyway. He's a nine-hundred year old Time Lord, and she's a mortal woman…” something caught in Jack's voice, and Jack looked away.

Ianto caught the look of pain on Jack's face. He's thinking of us.

"Yeah, I suppose you're right," Jack said thoughtfully. Then changing the subject, he said, "So… we dabble, huh?"

Ianto shrugged his shoulders and suppressed a grin. "I knew he would hear that conversation. "That's it? We're just dabbling?” Jack teased.

"Yes, Jack," Ianto kissed him. "We dabble."

"And my dabbling borders on the avant-garde?” Jack asked, putting a hand on Ianto's cock.

"Jack,” Ianto scolded. "Office hours."

But Jack wasn't at all deterred. He fondled Ianto's cock through his trousers. "I'll show you avant-garde… you know, I dated Marcel Duchamp for a while. Weird guy. Always wanted to play chess after sex…”

Ianto rolled his eyes. "Here we go again,” he muttered.

Jack chuckled and pulled Ianto against his chest, wrapping his arms around him. "Do you really
think Tosh and Owen…?" Jack asked with a note of hopefulness in his voice.

Ianto leaned his head back against Jack. "It would be nice, wouldn't it?" he asked, allowing himself a moment to enjoy being in Jack's arms. He kissed Jack's neck.

"Yeah," Jack agreed, stroking Ianto's hair. "It would be nice." Then he added, "Think we could find a way to film their first date?" Jack asked with a grin.

Ianto smiled back. "I'm quite clever, Sir. I'm sure I can figure something out."

Jack laughed and looked questioningly at Ianto. "I thought you would be offended by my wanting to spy on them."

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "Sod that! I want to see what happens!"

Jack, still laughing, hugged Ianto even tighter to him. Ianto sat in Jack's lap with Jack's arms around him. Ianto's head was nuzzled against Jack's neck, and Jack was stroking his hair and kissing his forehead at regular intervals. They stayed like that for a few minutes, just enjoying each other's company. Then Jack whispered into Ianto's ear, "Will you let me fuck you just like this?"


Ianto could both sense the excitement coming from Jack and feel his excitement pressing against his backside. "Promise?" Jack asked hopefully.


However, the promise was not to be fulfilled that night because a few hours later, Owen was dead.
Ianto was furious with Jack. He was furious that Jack went after the second glove. He was furious that Jack used it on Owen. He was furious, but he didn't let it show. In front of the team, he was loyal to Jack. Everyone had tried to talk Jack out of using the glove on Owen except him. He'd kept quiet; silently backing Jack up, even though he knew it was a really bad idea. When Owen had risen up off the autopsy table and everyone was fussing around him, Jack picked up the glove and held it out to Ianto. "See what you can make of this," he said, proffering the thing.

Ianto instinctually stepped back from it. "I know you have an issue with it, Ianto. I remember that you refused to touch the last one, but I need you to look into this. Do you feel anything when you touch it? Is it the same as the last glove?"


Ianto sighed and took the glove. It made his skin crawl to touch it. "Do you sense anything?" Jack asked, looking at him intently.

"Death," Ianto said, trying to hand it back to Jack.

"Great, more superstitious nonsense," Jack said irritably. "See what you can find out about it."

"Jack, no, I…" Ianto started to object.

Jack cut him off, "We all have to do things we don't want to do in this job, so get over it," Jack threw out icily as he walked away from him.

Ianto stared after him, his mouth slightly open. Wanker, he thought with irritation. Jack knew that he'd been repulsed by the original glove, but he shoved it into my hands anyway. Ianto dropped the glove onto the table with exasperation and started to run tests on it, comparing it to the data they had from the first glove. He tried to calm his rising fury. He knew that Jack was upset about Owen, but he's being a right arse. Ianto sighed heavily as he tried to talk himself down. Jack always acts impulsively, and sometimes he lives to regret it. That's just Jack. He knew that Jack hadn't wanted to let Owen go. And now Owen was… Ianto didn't even know what Owen was now. The living dead? Ianto shuddered. How was Owen, who enjoyed all the visceral things in life, going to handle this? That is, if he's stuck like this… how can I help him? Ianto didn't have another chance to think about it. They had to stop Death.

It wasn't until after Owen had faced and defeated Death, and everyone had left the Hub to get whatever hours of sleep they had left of the night, that Ianto confronted Jack. Ianto had held his anger at bay in front of the team, keeping his mask of professionalism in place, and dealing with the situation at hand. Jack had done something beyond stupid by using the glove on Owen, especially after Susie. Jack had completely disregarded Ianto's abhorrence of the glove, ordering him to examine it. Jack had sneered, once again, at his 'superstitious nonsense', and people had died. People had died because Jack had been selfish and impulsive. And now Owen was trapped, maybe forever,
in a dead body. Ianto was appalled.

He waited until the rest of the team had gone home. He waited until he and Jack were alone, because Ianto respected the separation between him and Jack during working hours, and him and Jack after hours. Ianto found Jack in his office, sitting at his desk, reading through a file. Ianto stood in the doorway with his arms crossed and said, "What the hell were you thinking?"

Jack, without looking up said, "I did what I thought was right, Ianto, and I'm the boss."

"No you bloody well didn't," Ianto said furiously, moving towards Jack and standing in front of him. "You did what you thought was best for you. And don't give me that I'm the boss rubbish. There's no one here but you and me."

Ianto was fuming. The anger he'd kept in check all day was boiling to the surface. "There were things I needed to know from Owen. He was the only one who knew the code to the alien morgue," Jack said defensively, crossing his arms and jutting his chin out.

"Bollocks, Jack. You didn't want Owen to be dead, so you did the first thing that came into your mind without even pausing to consider the consequences. Now Owen may be like that permanently. Owen, who loves all the primal things in life; shagging, drinking, sleeping. You took all that away from him. You cursed him to a life of abstinence. You, who knows what a curse immortality is. You, who lives to shag. How would you feel, living forever and not being able to shag? You'd go mad. How could you, Jack?" Ianto shouted.

Jack jumped out of his chair. "I'm the boss, Ianto. What I say goes. I did what I thought was right. You have no right to question my judgment," Jack roared.

"Fine," Ianto said, trying to push his rage back beneath his cool exterior. "You're the boss. I'm going home," he stated, turning and walking out of Jack's office.

"We're not finished here," Jack said menacingly, following Ianto out of his office.

Ianto put his coat on. "Oh yes we are," he said coolly.

"Don't you dare walk away from me," Jack growled.

Ianto walked up to Jack, his anger rising up again. "All along, I thought that what you were doing with the glove was a really bad idea, Jack, but I never challenged you in front of the team. Everyone else did, but I backed you up, and I did my job. I waited until this was all over and everyone had left for the night before I even showed a hint of my disapproval. I'm talking to you now as my… lover," Ianto hesitated over the word. "Not as my employer," he continued. "But if you can't separate the two, then I can't do this."

Suddenly Jack's mask fell and he was clinging to him, as if holding on for dear life. "Oh gods, Ianto, what have I done?" Jack wailed. "What have I done?"

Ianto's anger quickly dissipated. He could deal with Jack being honest with him. It was when Jack hid behind his façade when they were alone that infuriated him. He sighed and stroked Jack's head. What have you done? Ianto agreed silently. He knew that he wouldn't leave Jack alone now. As long as Jack was honest with him, he would support him in any way that he could. I'm here for you, Jack... I'll be here for you for as long as I can. Aloud he said, "Come on, Jack. Let's go to bed."

Jack turned from him and walked back towards his office, his whole body sagging, as though he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders. Ianto took his coat off and hung it back up. He shut the computers down and switched the Hub into night mode. Then he followed Jack down into his
bunker. He found Jack sitting naked in bed, his arms wrapped around his knees and his head on his forearms.

Ianto quickly shed his clothing and sat down on the bed, his hand on the back of Jack's neck. "I'm sorry," Jack whispered, not lifting his head.

"Doesn't matter," Ianto said. *I know you were just lashing out at me because you're angry at yourself,* he thought silently.

"What are we going to do?" Jack asked, lifting up his head and looking at Ianto.

"You're going to do what's best for the team and for Torchwood. The rest of us will help Owen adjust."

"I need to relieve him of his duties until we've made sure he's safe."

"Yeah," Ianto said, running his fingers through Jack's hair. "You do."

"I need you there, Ianto. I don't know how he'll react."

"I'll be there," Ianto said.

Jack looked at him, a sheepish expression on his face. "You still mad at me?"

"No," Ianto replied honestly.

Jack took his hand, entwining their fingers, and lay back on the bed, pulling Ianto with him. He curled up around Ianto, his head on Ianto's chest. Ianto wrapped his arms around him, rubbing his back. "I'll ask Martha to take over as Torchwood medic for the time being and get her to run some tests on him," Jack said. "Then… I don't know what to do."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," Ianto assured him, kissing his head.

Jack looked up at Ianto, and Ianto kissed his lips. Then Jack buried his face in Ianto's neck. "It was stupid and impulsive of me. I just wasn't ready to give up on him," Jack said, his face still nuzzled into Ianto's neck.

"I know, Jack," Ianto said, kissing his head again. "I know."

They didn't speak again, and they didn't have sex that night. Neither of them was in the mood, knowing what Owen had lost.
Ianto woke when he felt Jack sitting up in bed. He opened an eye and looked at Jack. Jack was sitting up with his hands around his knees. "What is it, Jack?" Ianto asked sleepily.

"Can't sleep," Jack said, not looking at him.

"What's up?" Ianto asked, rubbing his eyes.

"Why didn't you say anything, Ianto? Why didn't you argue with me like everyone else did?"

"Because you're the boss, Jack," Ianto said blithely.

"I thought you were just yelling at me about that," Jack said, looking at him.

Ianto sighed heavily, knowing Jack understood exactly why he hadn't said anything in front of the team. "Why don't you tell me what this is really about, Jack."

"I respect your opinion, Ianto. You could have said something."

"You were hell bent on using that glove. I knew that nothing we said would have stopped you, so I did my job."

"I might have stopped if you had said something," Jack argued.

"No you wouldn't, Jack," Ianto said with exasperation.

Jack rubbed his hands over his face. "I know that I act impulsively. That's why I need you. You're my sounding board."

When Ianto didn't respond, Jack looked at him. "You were angry all day, and you said nothing. I didn't even notice. You're so good at hiding how you feel, it's scary."

"Is that what's bothering you?" Ianto asked putting his hand on Jack's arm.

"Well, that and I turned my medic into a zombie."

"Well, yeah, there is that." Ianto couldn't help but smile.

Jack flashed him a brief smile then turned serious again. "I appreciate you respecting me as your boss in front of the team, but I'd rather know what you're thinking, Ianto. It makes me nervous when I find out hours later that you're angry. It reminds me of the... of what happened with Lisa."

Ianto looked up sharply. "I'm not hiding anything from you, Jack."

"I know, I just think I'd rather know if you think I'm doing something stupid... Not that we should have a domestic in front of the team..."
"Okay," Ianto said, kissing him on the cheek. "I get it. You want me to give my opinion as a member of the team. Anything further, we'll discuss in private."

Jack looked at him for a long time. "Sometimes I forget how young you are. You seem so much older, so wise beyond your years. Why is that, Ianto?"

"I suppose we're shaped by our experiences," Ianto said, thinking not only of Torchwood, but of his childhood.

"Will you tell me about them sometime?" Jack asked, touching Ianto's face. "I have a feeling that there's more about you that I don't know. When I asked you about your family, you declined to answer. Will you tell me about it sometime?"

Ianto looked away, shrugging his shoulders. This was not a conversation he wanted to have. Jack looked away from him. "Did you tell Lisa?" he asked, his voice devoid of expression.


Jack took his hand and kissed his fingers. "Will you tell me sometime?" Jack asked again.

"Okay," Ianto said, agreeing before he'd realized what he was really agreeing to. Then he quickly added, "Not today though. Today needs to be about Owen."

Jack flinched slightly, but nodded his head in agreement. I wonder how long I can hold off on that conversation, Ianto thought. Time to change the subject. "Should I make coffee?" Ianto asked, stretching and stifling a yawn. "You have to fire Owen today."

"Yeah, thanks for that, Ianto," Jack said, getting out of bed and walking into his bathroom.

"Just keeping it real, Jack," Ianto said, adopting an American colloquialism.

Jack popped his head out of the bathroom door. "Keeping it real?" Jack asked, his eyebrows raised.

Ianto shrugged. Jack snickered and said, "Get in here."

Ianto joined Jack in the shower where they kissed and touched each other, both becoming quickly aroused. They entwined their fingers and pressed their cocks together, stroking as one until they both came. Then they soaped each other's bodies and washed each other's hair, stopping frequently to kiss. Finally Ianto said, "We really need to get moving, Jack. Can't stay here all day."

"Can't we?" Jack asked, caressing Ianto's arse.

"You're stalling, aren't you? You're going to have to face him some time or other," Ianto said, getting out of the shower and pulling Jack out after him.


"Isn't it my job to get you everywhere on time?" Ianto asked, throwing Jack a towel before grabbing one to dry himself off.

Jack grumbled something in reply which Ianto ignored. He dressed quickly and went to make coffee. When he brought their coffee back to Jack's office, Jack wasn't sitting at his desk. "Jack," Ianto called out.
"Still down here," came Jack's voice from his bedroom.

Ianto set the coffee down on the desk and climbed down the ladder to Jack's bedroom. Jack was sitting on his bed wearing only his underwear and white T-shirt, his head in his hands. Ianto went to Jack's closet and started rummaging around. "Come on, Jack."

"I can't face him, Ianto," Jack said, his face still in his hands.

"Yes you can, Jack," Ianto said, pulling out a pair of dark blue trousers and a light blue shirt.

"I can't, Ianto. I did this to him. This is all my fault," Jack said, finally raising his head and looking at Ianto.

"There's nothing we can do about it now except to make the best of it," Ianto said holding the shirt out to Jack. "You need to be the Captain and let the rest of us help him cope."

"How do you think he'll react?" Jack asked, taking the shirt from Ianto and putting it on.

"It's still Owen, Jack," Ianto said, holding out Jack's trousers. "He'll react exactly how you think he'll react. He'll grumble and sneer and growl, but he'll do what you tell him to do."

"We don't know that it's still Owen," Jack said, pulling on his trousers.

"I know it," Ianto said, holding out Owen's beige suspenders. "And he won't disobey you again. Not after Abaddon."

Jack caught the suspenders and looked at Ianto. Ianto leaned down and kissed him. "It's going to be okay. Now come on, Captain, coffee's upstairs."

He headed up the ladder, and after a minute Jack followed.

Ianto stood by Jack, trying to diffuse the situation as Jack relieved Owen of his duties. All things considered, it didn't go as badly as Ianto had expected. But Ianto cringed when Jack suggested that Owen could make the coffee until they had cleared him for duty. That wasn't part of the bargain, Ianto thought irritably as he tried to teach Owen how to brew the perfect cup of was easily frustrated and shook the machine in irritation, breaking the cups that were neatly stacked on top. "You okay?" Ianto asked seriously.

"What do you think?" Owen returned snidely. "I bet you're loving this, aren't you? It's like you've finally won."

"I didn't realize we were in a competition," Ianto said quietly.

"Oh come on! Even Tosh had more of a life that you used to. And now you're always out on missions, you're shagging Jack, and I'm stuck here making the coffee."

Ianto was immediately defensive. "It's not like that… me and Jack," he said, starting to clean up the mess Owen had made.

"Yeah, yeah… You and Jack. Gwen's getting married. Martha's got her bloke. God, even Tosh had Tommy. This is really shit," Owen said, throwing down the tea towel he was holding.

"We've all gone through shit," Ianto said, folding a towel neatly and trying to figure out what to say to help Owen. "I've seen you dissect alien corpses. I've seen you save so many lives. Are you really going to let this beat you?"
Owen was silent for a long time. Then he looked at Ianto. "So what is it like then, you and Jack?"

Ianto looked at Owen, suddenly uncertain of what to say.
"It's not just shagging," Ianto said, feeling uncomfortable because he didn't know how to explain it to Owen. "It's more that that."

Owen snorted. "Maybe to you," he said snidely.

Ianto's first instinct was a defensive one and he was about to argue, but then he looked at Owen, realizing that the man standing before him was in pain. Instead he said calmly, "And to Jack."

"You sure about that?" Owen asked, eyeing him.

"Yeah, Owen. I'm sure," Ianto said moving back to the coffee machine to take over where Owen had left off.

To Ianto's astonishment, Owen put a hand on his shoulder, "Good for you, mate. We all see the way he looks at you. I just didn't know if you knew it."

Ianto turned to look at Owen. Owen was grinning at him. Ianto's mouth opened, but no words came to mind. Owen chuckled. "Doesn't mean I'm not going to give you shit about it. Who would have thought it? Jack Harkness and the Tea Boy… boyfriends," he said as he clapped Ianto on the shoulder again.

Ianto cringed at the word. Boyfriends? What the hell… Owen must have seen something in his face because he said, "Now don't go getting all prudish on me, Ianto. Come on, show me how to work this bloody thing again. Someone's got to make the coffee while you're busy entertaining the boss."

Ianto wanted to strongly object to the term boyfriends, but Owen's spirits seemed to have lifted, and Ianto didn't want to rock the boat. He kept his discomfort to himself. Besides, Owen had paid him a complement – in his gruff Owen way. And a backhanded one at that, but there's that thing about the gift horse and its mouth, Ianto reminded himself with amusement. I knew it was still Owen…He did his best to teach Owen how to brew a decent cup of coffee.

From that point forward, Ianto made an effort to treat Owen exactly the way he'd always treated him. He engaged in their usual banter when they were in the boardroom discussing Henry Parker, teasing him about his horror of Tintin. He wanted to make Owen feel normal again. He hoped that in time, the rest of the team would follow suit.

He made a special trip out just to buy Owen a Tintin T-shirt. He was coming out of the shop when he caught sight of Owen running down the street. He followed and watched Owen jump into the bay. When Owen didn't surface after five minutes, Ianto took out his phone and called Jack.

"Where are you?" Jack asked by way of a greeting.

"I'm by the piers. Did you send Owen out for something?"
"He went home," Jack said tersely.

"And you just let him go?" Ianto asked, still looking at the water.

"What?" Jack said, sounding defensive. "He's fine."

"You think so, huh? I just watched him run through the street, down a pier and jump into the bay," Ianto looked at his watch, "Seven minutes ago, and he hasn't come up yet," Ianto said, looking around. "There's a CCTV camera about twenty meters away."

After a minute, Jack's voice said, "Okay, I see you."

Ianto turned and gave the camera a brief wave. "I'll be right there," Jack said before he disconnected. When Jack arrived several minutes later, he asked, "How long has he been under?"

Ianto looked at his watch. "Twenty-two minutes."

Jack indicated the bag Ianto was holding. "What have you got?"

Ianto pulled the Tintin T-shirt out of the bag and held it up for Jack to see. "For Owen," Ianto said with a half smile.

Jack flashed a brief grin, "Very funny," he said, but then he turned serious again. "How long now?"

Jack asked, opening his Vortex Manipulator.

Ianto put the T-shirt back in its bag and looked at his watch. "Twenty-four minutes," Ianto said.

Jack sighed and pushed some buttons on his wrist strap. "Okay, let me talk to him."

Ianto nodded and started to walk away. "Ianto," Jack called.

Ianto turned around. "Thanks," Jack said, shoving his hands into his pockets.

Ianto nodded again and walked back to the Hub. He pulled up the CCTV feed to watch the exchange between Jack and Owen. When he saw Jack walk away from Owen, he went to brew some fresh coffee. He heard the Hub door roll open as he poured out two cups. He took them up to Jack's office, setting them down on Jack's desk so he could help Jack off with his coat. He hung the coat on the stand while Jack sat down at his desk and sipped his coffee.

"I watched the CCTV footage," Ianto said, letting Jack know that he had witnessed the exchange.

Jack sighed. "I'm not sure I said the right thing."

"You did," Ianto said, laying his hand briefly on Jack's shoulder before picking up his cup of coffee and sitting down on the corner of Jack's desk.

"I watched your conversation with Owen when you were teaching him to make coffee," Jack said, taking another sip of coffee.

"Of course you did," Ianto muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" Jack asked, putting his coffee down on the desk, a hint of a smile on his face.

"You always seem to know when someone's talking about you," Ianto said mildly. "And you always manage to get a hold of the CCTV footage."
"I have a program on my computer. It was given to me by this really hot MI-5 agent I used to know. He had this incredible…"

"Right, anyway, Owen…” Ianto interrupted, not wanting to hear the end of that sentence.

Jack chuckled. "Yeah, Owen. I just wanted to tell you that I think you handled it well. And to say that I'm glad you don't think we're just shagging."

Ianto felt his face turn red, thinking of Owen's next comment about them being boyfriends. He still shuddered at the term. Jack laughed at him and put his hand on Ianto's arm, pulling him closer. "Come here."

Ianto put his coffee down on Jack's desk and leaned toward Jack. Jack put his hands around Ianto's neck and pulled him down into a deep kiss, pushing his tongue into Ianto's mouth. Ianto was so lost in the kiss that he momentarily forgot where they were until he heard, "Jack, I… Oh, sorry!"

Startled, Ianto pulled away from Jack to see Martha standing in Jack's office doorway, grinning at them. He looked at Jack who was also grinning. He hopped off the desk and self-consciously straightened his suit. He picked up his coffee. "Right… well… I should… really… I've got a… back to work," he stammered, walking quickly past Martha out of Jack's office, his face an impressive shade of crimson.

He heard Martha call out, "Just dabling, huh?" but he pretended not to have heard.

Twenty minutes later, Jack's voice came over his comm., "Ianto, stop hiding in the archives. Team meeting in ten."

I'm not hiding, I'm looking for something, Ianto reasoned to himself, walking up from the archives, his professional mask in place as he entered the boardroom.

Ianto was pleased when Jack let Owen take part in the investigation. He knew that it was the only way Owen would feel like himself again, and more importantly, feel useful. Owen handled the investigation well, and Martha cleared him for duty. Things were finally returning back to normal… well, normal from a Torchwood perspective. Which really isn't that normal, considering we now have a zombie for a medic, in addition to our immortal boss from the 51st century. Really, we're better than a traveling circus, Ianto thought with amusement.

Since Owen was once again the official Torchwood medic, Martha was heading back to London and to UNIT. Ianto was sad to see her go. He really liked her. He was determined to keep in touch with her via email. Ianto watched with a bemused expression as Martha snogged Jack, seeing the confusion in Jack's expression. He smirked when she said, "Well, everyone else has had a go."

They watched Martha walk away. Eventually Gwen, Tosh and Owen all bade them goodnight and headed home. When he and Jack were finally alone, Ianto hugged Jack tightly to him. "It's going to be okay," Jack said into his ear.

"Yeah, Jack. It's going to be okay. And you know what?" Ianto asked, running his fingers through Jack's hair.

"What?" Jack asked softly.

"We have the Hub to ourselves," Ianto whispered into Jack's ear before sucking on his earlobe.

"Why, yes, yes we do, Mr. Jones," Jack replied, moaning as Ianto kissed his neck.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my clever beta riftintime.

Still kissing him, Ianto walked Jack backwards into his office and pushed him down into his chair. "I believe that I promised you something earlier," Ianto said, loosening his tie.

It took Jack a moment to remember… Ah yes, he was sitting in my lap in this chair, and I asked him if I could fuck him just like this… A grin spread across Jack's face, and he began to unbutton his shirt. He watched as Ianto slid the tie out from around his neck, rolled it up and put it in his pocket. He watched Ianto take off his suit jacket and hang it neatly over a chair. He watched Ianto unbutton his waistcoat, feeling his cock starting to respond. Jack quickly removed his shirt and T-shirt. He stood and unfastened his belt. Ianto smirked at him as he reached into a pocket and pulled out a small bottle of lube, placing it on the desk. "Did you plan this Ianto Jones?" Jack asked him with amusement.

"Always be prepared. That's my motto," Ianto replied slyly.

"Hey, you got that from me," Jack said, removing his trousers and briefs.

Jack stood naked in front of Ianto, his hands on his hips, his cock hard. Ianto took a step forward and said against his mouth, "I learned from the best," before he kissed him, then shoved him down into his chair.

Jack chuckled, watching as Ianto removed the rest of his clothing. Ianto stood for a moment looking thoughtful. Jack's eyes raked hungrily over Ianto's naked body and hard cock. "Now where were we?" Ianto tapped his finger against his lips. "Oh yeah…" He sat in Jack's lap, his arm around Jack's shoulder, and his lips against Jack's neck. "Right about here," he murmured against Jack's skin.

Jack put his arms around Ianto, caressing his chest and fingering his nipples. Ianto moaned, and Jack slid his hands down to Ianto's cock. He cupped Ianto's balls with one hand and stroked his shaft with the other. Ianto moaned louder and squirmed on Jack's lap, brushing against Jack's erection. Ianto turned his head, and Jack covered Ianto's mouth with his, parting his lips and sliding his tongue in. Ianto leaned back against Jack's chest, sighing into Jack's mouth. "What did you want to do to me again?" Ianto asked, momentarily breaking off their kiss.

Jack leaned them forward and grabbed the bottle of lube Ianto had placed on his desk. He opened it with his arms still around Ianto and poured some into his hand. Ianto shifted and spread his legs, giving Jack access to his entrance. Jack kissed Ianto's neck and inserted a finger inside him. Jack gently stretched Ianto's muscle as he kissed up Ianto's neck to his earlobe. He sucked gently as he inserted a second finger. Ianto started to thrust against Jack's hand. Jack inserted a third finger, and Ianto leaned back and kissed him deeply. Jack massaged Ianto's prostate with one hand and stroked Ianto's cock with the other while he and Ianto kissed. Jack suddenly felt overcome with tenderness for the young man in his arms. I love him, he confessed to himself. He ached to be inside Ianto, to be as close to him as he could get. "Okay?" Jack whispered when they stopped for air.

Ianto touched Jack's face with his hand. "Okay," he whispered back.
Ianto raised his hips off of Jack's lap. Jack quickly coated himself with lube and positioned his cock at Ianto's entrance. He put his hands on Ianto's hips and slowly pulled him back down onto his lap, his cock sliding smoothly into Ianto's opening. Jack moaned with pleasure, running his hands up and down Ianto's back. He was exactly where he wanted to be and with exactly who he wanted to be with. I love him, he thought again, surprising himself. His arms encircled Ianto, and he caressed Ianto's chest and kissed his shoulder while Ianto adjusted to his presence. Ianto shuddered. "Am I hurting you," Jack asked, suddenly alarmed.

"No, not at all," Ianto said quickly.

"You're shaking," Jack said, pulling Ianto against his chest and holding him tightly.

"In a good way," Ianto said, putting a hand behind Jack's neck and pulling him into a fervent kiss.

As they kissed, Ianto started moving on top of Jack. Jack kept Ianto's body pulled close to his with one hand while stroking his cock with the other. Their lips only parted to catch their breath, and then they would kiss again. Jack was filled with a passion that he hadn't felt in a long, long time, if ever. I love him, he found himself repeating in his mind.

Ianto started moving erratically on top of him, and Jack knew that he was getting close. He thrust harder into Ianto, wanting them to cum at the same time. Their kisses quickened, as they were both panting and moaning. Jack felt the familiar tingling below his navel, signaling the beginning of his orgasm, as Ianto's moaning became faster and louder. Jack pulled Ianto down hard onto his cock and came deep inside him, while Ianto simultaneously came in Jack's hand, both of them shouting their release.

Ianto leaned back against Jack's chest, catching his breath, and Jack held him close, his arms wrapped around Ianto's stomach. Ianto buried his head in the crook of Jack's neck, and Jack kissed his head, grazing his fingers over Ianto's chest. They sat there for a few minutes until their breathing returned to normal. Jack's softening cock slipped out of Ianto, and he shifted underneath him. Ianto started to get up. "Am I too heavy for you?"

"No," Jack said, pulling Ianto back down on his lap and holding him against his body. "You're fine. Stay here a minute longer."

Jack tried to pull Ianto's face towards him to kiss him, but Ianto resisted, keeping his face turned away from Jack. "What is it?" Jack asked in confusion.

"Nothing," Ianto said, rubbing his face against his own shoulder.

"Ianto, look at me," Jack said, trying again to turn Ianto's face towards him.

Ianto turned his face, but didn't meet his eyes. Jack was totally perplexed until he noticed that Ianto's eyelashes were wet. "Are you crying?" Jack asked, mystified.

Ianto snorted. "No, why would I be crying?" his casual tone was almost enough to convince Jack of his sincerity – almost.

Jack touched Ianto's eyes with his fingertips, wiping the moisture away. "What is it, Ianto?" Jack asked softly.

When Ianto didn't reply, Jack said, "I don't understand."

"Don't you?" Ianto whispered.
Jack wrinkled his brow in confusion. Then he realized that his mental barriers were completely down. Ianto had probably sensed everything Jack had been feeling towards him. Jack's emotions whirled. He felt wary, then he felt embarrassed, and then he felt afraid. *I didn't want him to know… I didn't want to know myself…* Jack instinct was to shield his mind, *but I can't do that now. It's too obvious.* As Jack's thoughts raced, he realized that Ianto was probably sensing his oscillations. *Damn it.* Jack was already reticent about emotional attachments, and somewhat terrified of his feelings towards Ianto. *You're making it worse, Jack. Just act casual.*

He shifted uncomfortably underneath Ianto again, and Ianto got off of his lap. He walked towards the ladder leading down to Jack's bedroom without looking back. Jack watched him climb down the ladder, trying to decide how to handle the situation. *Just let it go,* he told himself. He stood and followed Ianto down into his bedroom.

Jack heard the shower running as he descended the ladder, so he walked to the bathroom and stepped into the shower with Ianto. Ianto had his head tilted back and his eyes closed, letting the water cascade down his face. *He's beautiful,* Jack thought, staring at Ianto. He put his hands on Ianto's face and kissed his mouth. "So, you gonna dance with me at Gwen's wedding?" he asked glibly, trying desperately to forget their previous conversation. "It's only a few weeks away, as Gwen constantly reminds us."

Ianto opened one eye and looked at Jack, "Dance with you?" he asked incredulously, before closing his eye again and running his hands through his hair.

Jack grinned to himself. *Operation: subject change, successful.* "Yeah, you know… dance," he said, grabbing the soap and lathering his body.

"How does that work then?" Ianto asked, taking the soap from Jack's hands and lathering his own body.

"What do you mean how does that work? They play music, then two people embrace and move to it. It's a fairly simple concept. I thought you were an intelligent man," Jack said sarcastically.

Ianto rolled his eyes. "I meant, who leads when two blokes dance together?" he asked, handing the soap back to Jack and rinsing his body under the water.

"Well, I lead, of course," Jack said with a grin.

"Of course you do," Ianto muttered under his breath, putting his hands on Jack's shoulders and turning them so Jack could have his turn under the water. "I don't know how to dance without leading," Ianto said, stepping out of the shower and grabbing a towel.

"Oh, come on, Ianto," Jack said, rinsing the soap off his body and stepping out after Ianto. "I'm sure you can figure it out."

"Why can't I lead?" Ianto asked, handing Jack the towel.

"Because I'm the Captain," Jack said with bravado, running the towel over his body and hanging it back on its hook.

Ianto responded with his very best eye roll, and Jack laughed. "Come on, it's easy. I'll show you," he said, pulling Ianto out of the bathroom and into his bedroom.

He placed Ianto's left hand on his back and put his right hand on Ianto's left shoulder. Then he took Ianto's right hand in his left and held it to his chest. He started humming and moving them in time. Ianto kept trying to lead and stepped on his toes a couple of times, but Jack was nothing if not
stubborn, and finally Ianto let him lead. Jack smiled to himself when he felt Ianto finally relent. "Weird," Ianto said after they'd danced successfully for a minute. "I feel all backwards."

"You'll get used to it," Jack said, enjoying the moment.

"Oh, I will, will I?" Ianto asked acerbically.

"Yeah, you will," Jack confirmed.

Ianto harrumphed, and Jack laughed again. "So, does this mean you'll dance with me at the wedding?"

"No," Ianto said irritably.


"It might. Your ego will become so over-inflated that I'll suffocate underneath the weight," Ianto retorted.

"Ha ha ha," Jack said sarcastically.

Then they looked at each other and grinned. Ianto kissed his lips. "So will you dance with me?" Jack asked when their lips parted.

"I'll think about it," Ianto said, yawning widely. "Right now the mortal among us needs sleep."

Ianto kissed Jack once more, then gently pulled away and climbed into Jack's bed. Jack pulled the covers over him and knelt down next to the bed, stroking Ianto's hair. He kissed his cheek. "Do you mind if I go upstairs and do some work?" Jack asked.

Ianto turned and looked at him. "Of course not, Jack. Do you want me to make you some coffee?"

"No, that's alright. I'm going to stay here until you fall asleep anyway," Jack replied, touching Ianto's face.

"That's not necessary," Ianto said, yawning again.

"I know," Jack said, kissing his forehead. But I will anyway. He knew that as soon as Ianto was asleep, he was going to sit down at his desk and read the rest of Ianto's diary.
Ianto lay in Jack's bed with Jack kneeling beside him, running his fingers through his hair. He wanted Jack to go upstairs and work like he said he was going to. He wanted to be alone. He needed to think. He concentrated on slowing his breathing and relaxing his body, trying to feign sleep. After several minutes, he felt Jack kiss his forehead and heard him rise to his feet. He heard Jack ascend the ladder and move about overhead. Ianto opened his eyes, staring into the darkness of Jack's bedroom.

He had been overwhelmed by Jack's emotions when they were shagging in his chair earlier that evening. He closed his eyes, putting a hand to his forehead. It wasn't shagging, he told himself. You were making love to each other. Admit it, Jones. That's what was happening. He remembered feeling overwhelmed by Jack's emotions once before. It was when they were playing the game with the stopwatch after the Susie incident. Jack had wanted to see how quickly he could make Ianto hard without touching him. Ianto remembered how the room had felt alive with Jack's desire. Jack had somehow projected his feelings so strongly that they permeated the air. That's what it had felt like when Jack had entered him earlier. Except this time the room had been filled with passion. The intensity of Jack's feelings for him had surrounded him like water. It had been so powerful that Ianto couldn't help the tears that had filled his eyes as they made love. No wonder people from the 51st century learn to close their minds, he thought, raising an eyebrow. That was intense.

He had known that Jack had been extremely uncomfortable when he'd realized that his barriers were down. He had felt Jack's emotions oscillate wildly from alarm to embarrassment to fear. He knew Jack had his own issues with their relationship. Relationship… weird… Ianto half guessed at what some of Jack's issues might be, but he wasn't sure he knew the whole story. It seemed that Jack had had hundreds of lovers in his long life – maybe even thousands, knowing Jack. Who knew what kind of damage that had caused in the long-run. Ianto already felt damaged by his very few relationships – especially Lisa. What must it be like to carry baggage from hundreds of relationships? The thought made Ianto feel slightly ill. Hundreds of relationships… How could one person even stand out? What makes me any different? Could he possibly feel that strongly about me? How could he? But Ianto remembered again being surrounded by Jack's emotions. Jack felt intensely for him. Ianto may not have a word for how Jack felt about him, but he knew it was strong. He couldn't deny it.

He looked at the spot where not half an hour before, he and Jack had danced naked in each other's arms to an unrecognizable tune that Jack had been humming. He tried to see them there in his mind's eye, holding each other and moving slowly in a circle. What do we look like together? How do we appear to other people? Could I really dance with him like that in public, and at Gwen's wedding no less? Will he be hurt if I don't? His eyes shifted, looking at the ceiling where he knew, overhead, Jack was sitting at his desk, ostensibly working. He wasn't sure if he was ready to be that open about his relationship with Jack. There it is again; our relationship… He guessed that's what it was. It was so hard to tell with Jack. Everything was so different from what he was used to. He hadn't had many girlfriends, but he'd had enough to know that what he and Jack had was unconventional at best. Well,
Ianto cast his mind back over his life, trying hard to remember if there had been any other man who he’d been attracted to. He thought carefully and honestly, shaking his head slightly. He could recognize if a man was attractive or not, but that wasn’t the same thing. He'd never felt attracted to or turned on by another man. He'd never felt aroused by the sight of a man's naked body, nor had he ever felt any interest in looking at another man's naked body. He remembered researching gay sex on the internet before he had first approached Jack. He'd watched a couple of hours of gay porn and had felt slightly ill, knowing that he might have to do that in order to save Lisa. He remembered wondering how the hell he was going to do that with another man. At the time he'd been desperate to save Lisa and would have done anything, no matter how distasteful. He definitely hadn't found the sight of two men shagging erotic.

No, he decided after several minute's contemplation. There was no one else. I've never had sexual feelings towards another man in my entire life – not until Jack… But I'm certainly aroused by the sight of his naked body, and I've never found anything I've done with him distasteful. How did that happen? He remembered their first encounter in the park with the Weevil.

Did I feel something for him the first time I saw him? I did make that comment about loving his coat… He remembered being struck by Jack's appearance. He is very handsome, Ianto conceded.

But it was when he'd been lying on top of Jack in that warehouse after catching Myfanwy, the adrenaline still coursing through his body from the thrill of the hunt, that he'd first had feelings for Jack. I wanted him from that moment on, he admitted to himself. He remembered the first time he and Jack had kissed. He had been terrified that Jack would find Lisa and had kissed him without thinking. From the moment Ianto's lips had touched Jack's, a part of him had known that something monumental had happened in his life.

Everything that had happened sexually between them from that point on had been unfamiliar and slightly terrifying to Ianto, but it had never felt wrong or repugnant to him. He'd never been repulsed by any part of Jack's body. On the contrary, he'd been intensely excited – nervous, but excited. He found Jack's body erotic and beautiful. He loved touching Jack's body. He had loved becoming familiar with it, learning what he liked, what his kinks were, what made him moan with pleasure, how to make him cum. He loved the way Jack smelled, the way Jack tasted – all the parts of him, even the ones I'd have thought I would find disgusting. He smiled to himself. I love when he cums in my mouth. I love having my tongue in his arse. Ianto felt his cock starting to respond. He shook his head with incredulity.

I still can't believe those things turn me on.

He thought back over his many sexual encounters with Jack Harkness – too many to count at this point. Too many to count! I've had sex with a man so many times that I've lost count! But it isn't just sex with a man, Ianto. It's sex with Jack… It's only Jack. He knew that he was completely in love with Jack. He hadn't fallen in love with a man or a woman. He had fallen in love with a person – the gender was irrelevant. He was just Jack, and Ianto loved him absolutely. He loved Jack more intensely and with more passion than he'd ever loved Lisa… and he'd loved her. But it wasn't the same kind of love. He would always love Lisa, and he would always miss her, but he knew that if she walked through the door right now, alive and whole again, he would never go back to her. There was no turning back for him now. He would be desperately in love with Captain Jack Harkness until the day he died. Jack had saved him. Jack had made him see that life was worth living again after Lisa's death. Jack had taught him to love again. Jack had made him feel more alive than he'd ever felt. With Jack, he was whole.

Jack… Ianto thought about Jack's voice, Jack's laugh, Jack's eyes, Jack's smell, Jack's body, Jack's mouth on his body. Ianto realized that his hand had been stroking his cock while his thoughts had been wandering. He was rock hard, and he wanted Jack again. Well, Jones, he's just upstairs. You
can have him, he thought with a smile. He reached into the drawer in the bedside table and grabbed a bottle of lube. He got out of Jack's bed and climbed up the ladder with some difficulty – not so easy with a raging hard-on. At the top of the ladder, he saw Jack sitting at his desk reading something on his computer. Jack was clad only in his black briefs and Ianto licked his lips with the anticipation of tearing them off of him.

He strode intentionally towards Jack. Jack looked up with alarm when he heard Ianto approach, but when he saw Ianto striding purposefully towards him, naked with a rock hard cock and a bottle of lube in his hand, a grin spread across Jack's features. With one sweep of his arm, Ianto unceremoniously knocked everything off Jack's desk. Jack jumped out of his chair, a look of eagerness on his face, the bulge in his underwear marking his excitement. Ianto practically tore Jack's briefs off his body and pushed Jack down on his desk. He ran his hands down Jack's entire body, starting with his chest and ending with his toes. Then he put his hands in between Jack's thighs and spread his legs, bending them at the knees. He spread Jack's arse cheeks, exposing the ring of muscle at his entrance.

He pressed his tongue into Jack, tasting him, savoring the flavor that was uniquely Jack Harkness. Jack moaned loudly, and Ianto smiled to himself. He worked his mouth over Jack, kissing and sucking on him, moving his tongue in and out of his opening. Without taking his mouth away from Jack, he opened the bottle of lube and poured some into his hand. He replaced his tongue with his fingers and moved his mouth up to Jack's cock. He wanted to taste every part of Jack. He swirled his tongue around the head of Jack's cock, lapping the precum that was leaking from the tip. Then he slid Jack deep into his throat and sucked hard, pushing his fingers against Jack's prostate. Jack was writhing underneath him, moaning and bucking his hips. Ianto didn't want to wait any longer. He ran a slicked hand down his shaft. He removed his fingers, lined himself up, and pushed his cock inside Jack, groaning with pleasure. He pulled Jack up into a sitting position and their mouths found each other. Ianto bit at Jack's lip, sucking hard on it as he began to thrust inside Jack, changing his angle until Jack yelled out. Jack wrapped his legs around Ianto's waist, and Ianto pounded into Jack, unable to contain his desire.

Jack leaned back on one hand and grabbed his cock with the other. Ianto put his hand around Jack's, and together they stroked him as Ianto continued to thrust. Ianto completely let himself go. He was loud – louder than he'd ever been before. He was almost a match for Jack. He was practically screaming with pleasure. He felt Jack cum, and with a few final thrusts, he buried himself deep inside Jack and came hard, yelling Jack's name.

He collapsed with exhaustion on top of Jack. He felt Jack's body shaking under his. He raised his head up and looked at Jack's face. Jack was laughing. Ianto felt the smile spread across his own face. He loved to hear Jack laugh. "What?" he asked.

"Where did that come from?" Jack asked. "I thought I left you asleep in my bed."

Ianto shrugged a shoulder. "Just woke up and wanted you," he said, not wanting to admit that he'd feigned sleep.

Jack touched Ianto's face. "I don't think I've ever heard you be so loud." Jack grinned. "That was hot. Can you be that loud all the time?"

Ianto felt himself start to blush. Jack saw it and pulled him down into a quick kiss. "Don't be embarrassed. Why do you think I came so fast? You were driving me crazy with the noises you were making."

"Really?" Ianto asked.
"Yeah, really," Jack said. "Whatever it was you were dreaming about, I hope you have that dream more often."

"I was dreaming about you," Ianto said. It was partly true. He had been thinking about Jack.

"And what was I doing in the dream?" Jack asked, looking interested.

Ianto looked around him, trying to come up with something. He took in his surroundings. *We've made a mess.* As his eyes moved over the destruction of Jack's desk, he caught sight of Jack's computer screen. The characters on the screen were ones that Ianto didn't recognize, and Ianto knew a lot of languages. He leaned in closer for a better look. When Jack noticed what he was doing, he wriggled out from underneath Ianto and quickly turned the screen off with a distinctly guilty look on his face.

"What is that, Jack?"

"Nothing," Jack said quickly, looking uncomfortable.

Ianto could feel the guilt radiating in waves off of Jack. *Now what,* he thought warily.
Jack knelt by his bed stroking Ianto's hair and watching him as he drifted off to sleep. He was still reeling from the knowledge that Ianto had sensed his emotions and was so overcome by them that he'd been moved to tears. *I was projecting*, Jack realized. *That's why he was crying. I've let my guard down so much with him that I was unintentionally projecting. It must have been intense for someone from this century… If the Time Agency could see me now, they'd have a field day*, he thought with a smirk. The Time Agency had strict policies about guarding your mental barriers, and he'd been through rigorous training courses with the Zenerians, a race famous for their ability to break into the minds of others. Jack's psychic abilities had never been that great – not by 51st century standards anyway.

Jack wasn't sure how he felt about Ianto having sensed his passion for him. He had a hard enough time admitting to himself how he felt about Ianto. He'd watched too many lovers die to not be wary of falling in love again. His instinct was to hold back, to reel himself in. He wanted to deny the feelings. He wanted to force them into the back of his mind and pretend that they didn't exist. He didn't want to love Ianto. He would lose him all too soon, and then he would be alone again.

*It's not just that you'll be alone, Jack*, he told himself. *There will always be more lovers. It's that Ianto Jones is exceptional*. He winced at the thought. He knew that as an immortal, finding someone who was irreplaceable was both a blessing and a curse. *And more of a curse than a blessing*, he told himself bitterly. *I don't even really know how he feels about me. He's such an enigma. I know he's loyal to me as Torchwood's leader, but more than that… I really have no idea. With Ianto, anything's possible…* He studied the young man sleeping in his bed. *But that's why you feel the way you do, isn't it? You were so sure that after over a century, no one could surprise you anymore… I really want to finish reading that diary*. In fact, as soon as he'd realized that Ianto had sensed his emotions that evening, he'd been determined to finish reading Ianto's diary. *Fair is fair*, he told himself.

He heard Ianto's breathing slow and become steady. He kissed him on the forehead and stood up. Quietly, he put on a pair of briefs and climbed the ladder to his office. He sat down at his desk and pulled up Ianto's diary on his computer. He skimmed over the first entry until he found where he'd left off.

*I'll keep his secrets. I owe him that much. I'll keep Torchwood running the way Jack would have wanted it to run, even though I know he won't come back. Even if I die doing it.*

**Day 2 of Jack's disappearance.**

*The team's falling apart. Fighting all the time. Jack wouldn't want this. Time to step in.*

"Ah, I remember this. The only part in English on the page," Jack said aloud.

He continued reading.

*Right, got everyone to stop fighting and get back to work. Jack said the Rift would be even more*
volatile now, so we need to focus. Gwen's in charge of all cases, Owen is field operations, Tosh is tech, and I'm general admin… and of course Flat Holm. We've decided to keep Jack's disappearance secret from UNIT for as long as possible. Hope this works…

Tosh accosted me today about Jack snogging me. She asked me if we'd been lovers. I told her that it was only shagging, but she didn't believe me. She apologized for the way she told me about the real Captain Jack Harkness. Her words about Jack and the real Captain Jack… I'll never forget them:

"I think Jack fell in love. Can you believe it? Our Jack actually caring about someone? He's never cared about anyone he shags! I should know. I've watched him in action for years. But we met the real Captain Jack Harkness, and he was gorgeous. It was like love at first sight between our Jack and him. I overheard him talking to Captain Harkness. He asked Jack if I was his woman, and Jack said, 'No, there's no one.' And Ianto, he sounded so sad… so lonely. Jack knew that Captain Harkness was going to die the next day, and he was devastated by it. I was sitting with Jack and we were watching Captain Harkness, and tears were pouring down Jack's face. Then the most wonderful thing happened. Captain Harkness walked over, took Jack's hand, and pulled him to the dance floor. It was the bravest and most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Can you imagine, daring to dance with another man in the 1940's? Risking everything you have, just to have one dance with the man you love! It was so romantic! They danced together, and everyone in the room stopped to watch them. It was so beautiful and so tragic. Then they stopped and looked into each other's eyes. It was like the room was filled with electricity. They were just about to kiss when the Rift burst open, and we had to leave. I had to convince Jack to go with me, beg him even. I told him that we needed him, but I think he wanted to stay there with Captain Harkness. Jack started to walk towards me reluctantly, but then he turned back, grabbed Captain Harkness and they kissed. And Ianto, it was the most beautiful and most passionate kiss I have ever seen. I had tears in my eyes. Jack had to tear himself away from Captain Harkness. It was heartbreaking. He's so sad now, Ianto. He missed his chance at love."

Jack cringed as he read the passage. When he got to the end, he dropped his head into his hands and groaned aloud. "Was that how she described it to you?"

He massaged his temples with his fingers, letting out a heavy sigh. "I'm sorry, Ianto. You're right. I act impulsively, and I don't consider the consequences. That's why I need you so much. You keep me grounded. You deserve an explanation for why I said there was no one…" Jack sighed again and turned back to his computer.

"I made some excuse to leave and made it all the way into the alley before I vomited. Tosh caught me vomiting the second time. Told her I had food poisoning and took a taxi home. I was going to leave Torchwood, let Jack retool and to hell with it all, but then I saw the news that morning. I couldn't leave Torchwood – not when the world was falling apart.

Jack stopped again. "Oh gods, Ianto. I'm so sorry."

Jack was consumed with guilt at the way he'd treated Ianto before he left with the Doctor. Despite Jack, Ianto had done his job and done it well. He kept Torchwood going after I left, regardless of the way I'd treated him. Ianto… always the professional, putting everyone and everything else first.

Jack shut his eyes for a moment. Then he opened them and continued reading the diary.

Anyway, I told her that she was just being honest when she described the meeting of the two Jacks. She said that she was being romantic and fanciful, but I suspect she was just trying to spare my feelings. However, she did suggest something that I'd never thought of. She said, "Did you ever stop to think that the real Captain Jack Harkness was Bilis' way of manipulating Jack? Think about it, Ianto. Bilis knew so much about us, enough to manipulate us all, enough to get at us where we were
weakest. We all saw visions of people we loved telling us to open the Rift. Gwen told us that Jack said he didn't see anything. But that's not true. This all started when Bilis displaced us into 1941. Why then? Why there? Could it have been to seduce Jack with the real Captain Jack Harkness and to drive a wedge between you two? You and Jack had the strongest connection. Perhaps he knew that a vision of Lisa wouldn't be enough to make you turn on Jack. Would you have gone against him if it weren't for the real Captain Jack Harkness?"

"Toshiko Sato, I always knew you were a genius! Oh, you're good, baby, you're good," Jack said, shaking his head in amazement. "Ianto and his eidetic memory. It's almost as good as CCTV… Tosh realized the truth about the real Captain Jack Harkness way before I did. Hell, she realized it even before Ianto did, and that's saying something. Ianto always knows everything." Jack shook his head again. He continued reading.

I don't know if that's true or not, but it doesn't really matter. Jack's not coming back. He's with the Doctor now. He's where he's always wanted to be.

Before Tosh left me this evening she said, "I'm sure Jack cared about you, Ianto. The way he held you… the way he kissed you… the way he touched you. It was obvious from where I was standing."

"Of course I cared," Jack said aloud. "You should listen to Tosh. That's one smart woman." He continued reading.

She may be sure, but I think she's being romantic and fanciful again. Let's face it, she also told me that Jack never cares about anyone he shags…

"That's not true! Okay, I take it back. Don't listen to Tosh… Why do they all think I'm completely heartless? What was it Gwen said? 'So you do have a heart.' Is that really how they see me?" Jack shook his head and turned back to his computer.

But I'm too tired to try and figure it all out now. I'll think about it again when I've had more sleep. Now I have to go to bed surrounded by his scent… Thank God for intense exhaustion.

**Day 3 of Jack's disappearance.**

Jack came to me in my dreams. He was older. Does he get older?

Jack paused when he read these words. Again, these had been the only words in English on the entire page. He hoped the translation would give him some more insight. He was desperate to know if he'd visited Ianto from the future. And if so, why? He kept reading.

I don't remember much of the details, but it was unlike my other dreams about Jack – which generally involve sex. I don't think there was any sex in this dream. It was different… He was sad. And I keep feeling like I've forgotten something important…

Found a strange mark on my arm this morning. Must have been one of the Weevils. Owen noticed it too – asked me if I'd had a blood draw recently. Weird. Oh, did I not mention that this was when, under the guise of giving me a physical, he gave me a lecture on how Jack's bad for my health? He also tested me for every STI under the sun – and probably some alien ones as well. I thought about telling him that Jack said he couldn't get sick, but then I decided against it. Who knows if he was telling me the truth about that. He obviously lied to me when he said that he needed me. He obviously lied when he said that there was no one else. He obviously tried to make me believe that I was important to him when I wasn't. Why wouldn't he lie to me about that as well? I suppose I'm a fool.
"I didn't lie to you about anything," Jack said, feeling awful. "I was just a complete wanker." He resumed reading.

**Owen thinks I'm a fool. He warned me that Jack's promiscuous, licentious, and wanton. Actually, those were my words – Owen couldn't come up with any good ones. So, for those of us keeping score on 'confrontations on the snog' – that's two of them down, only one to go. Wonder how Gwen's going to do it. That's the one I'm least looking forward to…**

Jack couldn't help but chuckle over that. He read the rest of the day's entry, however he was disappointed to find that it only described Torchwood events. Though Ianto's point of view was always interesting, intelligent, and witty, Jack had already read all of Ianto's reports, and they closely resembled the diary entry. There was nothing else about Ianto's dream. Jack reread the first passage about the dream. Then he sat thinking. **Different… different, how? Sad? I don't think I want to know… Maybe I shouldn't know.** Jack shuddered and continued on to the next day.

**Day 4 of Jack's disappearance.**

I miss Jack. Wish that I didn't.

"I remember this part too… Again the only words in English," Jack muttered.

Then I remember the real Captain Jack, and how Jack told him that there was no one.

"I really owe you an explanation for that," Jack said, shaking his head at the screen. "That really got to you, didn't it?" He continued reading.

I pulled up the photo of the real Captain Jack Harkness with Jack, Tosh and Bilis. I shouldn't have, but I was curious. Captain Jack is handsome, I suppose… I never really look at men like that… except for Jack – my Jack, that is. No, no, no, Ianto. He isn't your Jack. You mean Torchwood Jack.

Jack felt a lump rising in his throat. "I am your Jack," he whispered, feeling tears burning at the backs of his eyes. He blinked rapidly a few times then turned back to the screen.

Gwen dragged me to the pub after work last night to confront me about the snog. She was terrified that Jack told me secrets about himself that he didn't tell her. I could feel her jealousy. I told her that I knew nothing about him. That's all we need – a pissing contest between me and Gwen over Jack Fucking Harkness. She can have him.

Jack raised his eyebrows slightly after reading that passage. "What's that supposed to mean? Okay, okay, I get it. You were angry," Jack mumbled. He continued reading.

Owen and Tosh joined us a few minutes later. Seems they all consulted each other on how best to squeeze information out of me about the snog… and about Jack. They're terrible at interrogation. I should give them lessons. None of them got any more out of me than I was willing to share – which wasn't much. How could I share anything? I don't even know what we were… Yes I do. I was his part-time shag. I was a distraction while he waited for the Doctor to come. I was his bit on the side, nothing more. But I was fine with that. He's the one that tried to convince me that it was more than that. If he hadn't, then maybe the world wouldn't seem so empty now that he's gone. So now the whole team thinks I have some great insight into Jack Harkness. If they only knew how successfully he played me…

Jack stopped reading and rubbed his eyes, feeling the tears burning again. It was almost enough to get him to stop reading – almost. He was ashamed of his behavior. "I'm lucky that he's forgiven me," he mumbled. He turned back to the screen.
Gwen asked me about the Doctor. I thought about not telling her anything, but if she'd bothered to read the history of Torchwood, she'd know about him, so I figured she could have that much. I pulled up the Torchwood history on my PDA and let her read it. That's the only hint I'll give any of them. I respect Jack's privacy. Besides, he can clean up his own damn messes.

"That's fair, I suppose," Jack said. He kept reading.

We decided to get thoroughly intoxicated. Tosh surprised us all by asking me how Jack was in bed. I was so shocked that I spit my scotch out all over Gwen and Owen. Luckily we were all so pissed by that time that it didn't matter. I told them that his manners in bed, like his manners in general, were atrocious. Don't know where that came from, but it was funny as hell at the time. And... we got kicked out of the pub. Luckily I was too drunk to make it down to Jack's bedroom to sleep. I passed out on the Hub sofa. No dreams of Jack last night, thank you very much. I need to spend a night at home – away from his bedroom, away from his scent, away from memories of him...

The sound of movement startled Jack, and he looked up, catching sight of Ianto. He was about to reach for his computer to shut it off, when he realized that Ianto was naked, striding purposefully towards him sporting a raging hard-on and carrying a bottle of lube. Jack thought he'd finally died and gone to heaven. He felt all the blood in his body rush straight to his cock. He jumped up out of his chair in eager anticipation, Ianto's diary still open on his computer, completely forgotten.
Jack couldn't help the grin that spread over his face. He loved when Ianto took control. It was a thrill that never diminished. All thoughts of Ianto's diary fled his mind as Ianto swept everything off his desk and practically tore off his briefs. Ianto forced him back on his desk and traced his entire body with his hands. Jack lay on his back with his eyes closed and just enjoyed the feeling of Ianto touching him. Then Ianto put his mouth on him, pushing his tongue inside Jack's opening, and Jack was in ecstasy. Ianto was talented at everything he did, and sex was no exception. When Ianto took him, hard and fast, it was incredible. Ianto was loud – louder than he'd ever been before. It was as though he had finally let go of all of his inhibitions, and it drove Jack wild with excitement. He was unable to control his body, and he came in an almost embarrassingly short time.

Ianto came deep inside of him and then collapsed on top of Jack, panting to catch his breath. I love sex with Ianto, Jack thought, caressing Ianto's arse, especially when it comes out of no where. Jack couldn't help chuckling over the thought. Ianto always surprised him, and he just couldn't get enough of him. "What?" Ianto asked, lifting his head up and looking at Jack.

"Where did that come from?" Jack asked with amusement. "I thought I left you asleep in my bed."
Ianto shrugged a shoulder. "Just woke up and wanted you," he said simply.

You can have me, Jack thought as he touched Ianto's face. "I don't think I've ever heard you be so loud." He grinned. "That was hot. Can you be that loud all the time?"

Ianto blushed, and Jack noticed. He pulled Ianto down into a quick kiss. "Don't be embarrassed," Jack said. "Why do you think I came so fast? You were driving me crazy with the noises you were making."

"Really?" Ianto asked, looking surprised.

"Yeah, really," Jack said, amused that Ianto would find that revelation startling. "Whatever it was you were dreaming about, I hope you have that dream more often," Jack added.

"I was dreaming about you," Ianto said candidly.

Jack felt his heart start to beat a little faster. I wish I could read your mind, he thought, looking hard at Ianto. "And what was I doing in the dream?" he asked with genuine interest.

Ianto didn't answer. His eyes moved around the room, as though he were stalling for time. Jack watched him with growing curiosity. He saw Ianto's eyes focus on something, and Jack turned his head to see what Ianto was looking at. Ianto's eyes had come to a rest on Jack's computer, and he leaned closer to the screen as though to get a better look. All at once Jack remembered Ianto's diary. Oh, gods, I left it open! Jack struggled underneath Ianto and managed to wriggle his way out from under the younger man. He quickly hit the button to turn his screen off, but he knew he'd been caught red-handed. He also knew Ianto would sense the guilt that was welling up inside him. Damn,
"What is that, Jack?" Ianto asked, looking at the now blank computer screen.

"Nothing," Jack said quickly, hoping Ianto would drop it, and feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

"What language was that?" Ianto asked, not at all deterred by Jack's discomfort.

"It's nothing," Jack repeated, crossing his arms over his chest and jutting his chin out, trying to look intimidating.

"I know that look, Jack. What's going on?" Ianto persisted.

"Really, just some work stuff," Jack said, putting his mental barriers back up.

"Okay, now you have me worried. I felt that, Jack. What is it? Is it something bad? Is it Torchwood related? Oh God, is the world ending again? Because I don't think I could stomach another orgy with Owen."

"No, Ianto. It's nothing like that... wait, what was that about an orgy with Owen?" Jack asked, finally registering what Ianto had said.

Ianto grinned at him, and Jack shook his head in exasperation. Ianto's expression turned serious, and he took Jack's hand. "What is it, Jack?" he asked softly.

 Damn it. He has to go and pull the sensitive lover bit. I can't tell him. He'll kill me.

"It's Galactic Standard," he said, looking at Ianto. "It's one of the universal languages of the galaxies. I know you've heard of it."
Ianto nodded, his face was as impassive as ever. "And that," Jack went on, sucking in a deep breath, bracing himself, and looking fearfully at Ianto, "... is your diary," he said through gritted teeth.

Jack winced in anticipation of the tirade to come, but he never took his eyes off Ianto's face. Ianto blinked. He blinked again. And then he laughed. He laughed so hard that tears leaked from his eyes. He laughed so hard that he had to sit down on the floor. Jack looked at him in utter astonishment, mouth hanging open, eyes bulging. *Not at all the reaction I expected*, he thought with bewilderment. *Of course he never stops surprising me... That's why I love him.* Ianto kept trying to speak, but another bout of laughter would overtake him and he would collapse into fits of hysterics again. He laughed so hard that he clutched his stomach and looked like he was struggling for air. He finally calmed down enough to look up at Jack's face. But with one look at Jack's expression, he exploded into another fit of giggling. "Wanker," Ianto finally managed to get out.

"Ianto Jones," Jack said with awe. "You NEVER cease to amaze me."

Ianto finally managed to pull himself together. He got up off the floor and wiped the dust from his backside. Then he leaned down and took Jack's face in his hands. "Wanker," he said again before he kissed Jack passionately.

"You're not furious?" Jack asked when Ianto pulled away.

Ianto sat on the edge of Jack's desk facing him and shook his head with vexation. "Jack, I would expect nothing less from you. You warned me that you were going to try to get your hands on it. I hid it from you, but you found it anyway. Still don't know how you managed that one, but it's impressive nonetheless. You referred to something that I'd written in it when you gave it back to me, so I assumed that you'd read it. The fact that you scanned it into your computer is... well... very you," Ianto said with what sounded like affection.

Jack half smiled, but he was still unconvinced. "Besides," Ianto went on, "I know the password for that computer," Ianto said, indicating the screen.

"I thought you might – hence the translation into Galactic Standard," Jack said grinning at him.

"I also know the password to your email account," Ianto added.

"Doesn't surprise me," Jack said, shrugging a shoulder.

"And your secret email account..." Ianto continued.

Jack just shook his head with mild amusement. "And your Captain's Log," Ianto went on, smiling.

Jack rolled his eyes. "And the combination to the restricted weapons section of the Hub."

Jack raised his eyebrows. "And the secure archives inside the secure archives," Ianto said grinning broadly.

Jack's eyebrows rose even higher. "And the safe under your bed," Ianto finished with glee.

Jack leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms over his chest. "I thought you said that you respected my privacy," he said, considering Ianto.

"Oh, I do," Ianto said seriously. "I've never read anything that I didn't have to read. You need to remember that you were gone for almost four months, Jack. I had to run Torchwood in your absence. I only read what was necessary to keep your disappearance hidden from UNIT and make sure everything was taken care of. I never read your Captain's Log. I opened it to run a search for an alien
species we were facing while you were away, but when the search came up empty, I closed the file again. As for the restricted weapons, the secure archives in the secure archives, and the safe under your bed… It was more about getting in than seeing what was inside. I do love a challenge," Ianto said grinning and looking rather pleased with himself.

Jack shook his head in disbelief. "You are something else, you know that Jones, Ianto Jones?"

"Hey, you're the one who scanned my diary into your computer and translated it into Galactic Standard," Ianto said with amusement.

"That's because you wrote it in about four different languages," Jack retorted.

"Seven, actually," Ianto said mildly.

"Show off," Jack said

"Well, I think there's a Latin phrase in there too so that's eight," Ianto added contemplatively.

Jack harrumphed. "Well, you don't know Galactic Standard," Jack said, crossing his arms over his chest. He was still completely mystified by Ianto.

Ianto raised an eyebrow at him and suppressed a grin. "Teach me?" he asked.

"I'll think about it," Jack grumbled, but he couldn't quite keep the smile off his face.

Jack was silent for a moment, thinking about the extraordinary young man sitting naked on the corner of his desk, smiling proudly at him. He would never understand Ianto Jones. Not five minutes ago, Ianto had become completely stoic and looked like he was going to walk out. Jack would much rather suffer Ianto's wrath then have him turn emotionless when they were alone. He thought he was in for the ticking off of his many lifetimes when he'd admitted that he'd copied Ianto's diary, but Ianto had just laughed. Not just laughed, but laughed uproariously. He studied Ianto, desperately wishing he had Ianto's gift of sensing emotions. "What did you think that file was?" Jack asked curiously.

The smile fell off of Ianto's face and his expression went blank again. He looked away from Jack. "Ianto…" Jack said, reaching out and putting his hand on Ianto's leg. "Tell me what's going on in that enigmatic brain of yours." And please don't shut me out again.

Ianto was silent for so long that Jack thought he would refuse to answer. He felt a dead weight settle in his stomach. When Ianto finally spoke, he wasn't looking at Jack, and his voice betrayed no emotion. "I thought maybe there was someone else. Figured it was none of my business," he said with a mild shrug.

Jack looked hard at him, his mind racing. Ianto's expression remained impassive. He thought there was someone else and that made him shut down? I don't understand. Where did that come from? Why would he think that? And if he did think that, why wouldn't he rage at me like any other jealous lover would do? Who does he think… "Well, I should get some sleep," Ianto said, interrupting his thoughts.

He stood up and walked quickly to the ladder. He was out of sight before Jack had even gathered his wits. Jack sat at his desk lost in thought. I suppose I have some explaining to do. Now that I know how much my telling the real Captain Jack that there was no one hurt him… He always takes care of me. He always makes sure that I feel… loved. He's always sensitive to my insecurities. I owe him the same courtesy. I owe him a lot more than that…

Jack stood up and followed Ianto down into his bedroom. Ianto was lying facing the wall, his back to
Jack climbed into his bed and pulled Ianto's body against his chest, holding him close. Ianto settled into his embrace. "There's no one else, Ianto," Jack whispered into his ear.

"Jack, I know what you're like. You're like the shag king," Ianto said, not turning to look at him.

Jack sighed, and then he said honestly, "Ianto, I've lived a long time, and I've had a lot of lovers…"

"I know, Jack, and I would never ask you to be anything you're not," Ianto said, interrupting him.

"Ianto, you didn't let me finish. Don't you see? I've done that already. I really don't need to do it again right now."

Ianto turned and looked at him. "Ianto, I know it really bothered you when Tosh told you that I told the real Captain Jack Harkness that there was no one in my life," Jack started.

Ianto stiffened and turned away from him again. "Wait, come here. Don't turn away from me," Jack said, pulling on Ianto's shoulder to get him to look at him again.

Ianto turned his body, but his eyes didn't meet Jack's. Jack knew it was the best he would get from Ianto at that moment. He said, "You have to understand, I thought we would be trapped in 1941. I thought there was no way back. I thought that I would have to live through another sixty-six years before I saw you again. I thought Tosh would die before she caught up with her timeline."

Finally Ianto's eyes met his. "That's what I was thinking when I said that there was no one, Ianto," Jack continued. "I thought there wouldn't be you for another six decades."

Ianto looked into his eyes, blue into blue. Then Ianto nodded his acknowledgement, but he didn't speak. "Ianto," Jack said, stroking his face. "There's something else… I…" he started, but then he stopped, his mind whirling, his gut clenched in fear. I can't tell him that. I just can't. It will make it too real. "In your diary," he began instead, "You wrote about the real Captain Jack and you referred to me as my Jack to distinguish me from him. Then you chastised yourself for calling me your Jack, saying that I wasn't your Jack. I was Torchwood Jack."

Again Ianto nodded his understanding, but he didn't respond. Jack continued, "You must know by now, Ianto…" Jack stopped and looked away from him. He took a deep breath and looked back at Ianto. Ianto was looking at him, but his face was inscrutable. "I am your Jack," Jack said in a whisper, afraid of the words, afraid of what they meant.

He felt Ianto's lips on his, and he opened his mouth to let Ianto in. Ianto caressed his tongue with his, and they kissed for a few moments. Ianto pulled away and looked again into Jack's eyes. "I'm yours," Jack said, repeating the words that Ianto had spoken to him not that long ago. "I'm yours," he said again, making sure Ianto understood.
Four days after Martha left, Ianto was in the tourist office, having his morning coffee and reading the daily newspaper. Things had settled down at Torchwood. Owen was finding his place again, Gwen was getting married in a few weeks, and Tosh was... just Tosh. Since the diary incident, Ianto and Jack had a better understanding and respect for each other. Ianto felt more secure in his relationship with Jack. He still didn't have a word to describe it, but he knew that Jack cared for him deeply, and he was content with his role in Jack's life.

He had just about finished with the paper when the postman arrived with the mail and a certified package. The package was addressed to him and had a UNIT return address. Raising an eyebrow, he signed for the package and waited until the postman left before neatly slicing open the package with a letter opener. He removed a bundle wrapped in white tissue paper with a note taped to the top. Curious, he unfolded the note and read:

Ianto,

I wasn't quite sure if this was more of a present for Jack or for you, but I thought it might be safer in your hands. Not sure what Jack would make you do if I sent it to him...

You make him happy, Ianto. Thanks for that. Take care of him, will you? He's more vulnerable than he lets on. And keep in touch, yeah?

Enjoy your dabbling,

Martha Jones

p.s. Well, I couldn't just stop at the cap, could I?

Ianto quickly tore open the tissue paper, revealing a UNIT cap and the black UNIT infantry kit. Martha had sent him an entire UNIT outfit. Ianto felt himself simultaneous blush and grin as his nimble mind began to whirl with possibilities. Smiling slyly, he hit his comm. "Jack?"

"Ianto Jones," Jack's voice came into his ear.

"Plans tonight?" Ianto asked, grinning broadly.

"What did you have in mind?" Jack asked in the voice he reserved solely for Ianto.

"It's a surprise," Ianto said, fingering the red UNIT cap.

"I like surprises," Jack said, and Ianto could hear the grin in his voice.

"Rift permitting," Ianto said.
"Rift permitting," Jack echoed before he disconnected.

Several hours later, when the rest of the team had left for the evening, Ianto hit his comm again. "Jack, your office, half an hour."

"See you there," Jack replied, and Ianto disconnected.

Ianto snuck into staff shower room and donned the UNIT uniform, stowing his suit in his locker. He'd run out earlier in the day to buy a pair of combat boots. *Always the perfectionist,* he thought with a grin as he tied the laces. The clothes fitted him perfectly. Standing in front of the mirror, he adjusted the red cap to sit at just the right angle on his head and grinned at his reflection. *Jack's going to be shocked!* Ianto schooled his features into his impassive mask. It was an expression he'd practiced for hours when he was trying to get Jack to hire him. Now it came naturally to him. *Ironic,* he thought. *I worked it out to deceive Jack. Never thought it would come in so handy for sex games with him.*

Ianto spent an amusing ten minutes channeling his favorite spy movies while trying to get through the Hub unseen. Getting to Jack's office while avoiding all the CCTV cameras was no easy feat, and Ianto quietly hummed the theme to *Mission Impossible* as he darted around corners and ducked behind desks. When he finally reached Jack's office, he surreptitiously peered around the door. Jack was sitting at his desk reading. Ianto stepped into the doorway and stood to attention, his face blank. "Private Jones reporting for duty, Sir," he said in his best imitation of a soldier reporting to his superior officer.

Although Ianto stared straight ahead of him, he could see Jack out of the corner of his eye. Jack jumped at the sound of Ianto's voice and looked in his direction. His hand instinctually moved to reach for his Webley at the sight of a UNIT soldier standing in his office doorway, but then recognition dawned. His mouth dropped open in surprise. Ianto had to bite his tongue so as not to display any emotion. Jack stood up, staring at Ianto, taking in Ianto's appearance with the look of a starving man seeing his first meal. He walked slowly toward Ianto, and Ianto could sense the excitement in the air. *I owe you one, Martha Jones,* Ianto thought, reveling in the way Jack was looking at him. An enormous smile briefly lit up Jack's face before he schooled his features. Ianto felt his stomach turn over. "Three paces forward and about face, Soldier," Jack called.

Ianto took three marching steps, pivoted and stood to attention again. He could feel Jack's eyes roving over his backside, and he allowed himself a slight grin. "Face forward," Jack called again.

Ianto took one step, pivoted and stood facing Jack once more. He wasn't quite so fast in schooling his features, and Jack caught his smirk. "Something funny, Private?" Jack growled, leaning close to him.

"No, Sir," Ianto replied.

"I didn't hear you," Jack barked.

"Sir, no, Sir," Ianto called.

"You'd better wipe that smile off your face," Jack bellowed. "Now drop and give me twenty," Jack said, crossing his arms over his chest.

Ianto dropped to the floor and did twenty push-ups. Luckily, Torchwood – and Jack – kept him in pretty good shape. He did the required push-ups with ease. "On your feet," Jack called when Ianto had finished.
Ianto jumped up and stood to attention again. Jack walked in a slow circle around him, eyeing him from head to toe as he went. Ianto knew that Jack was trying to figure out exactly what he wanted to do with him, and it was with great difficulty that he kept his features neutral as he felt his excitement growing.

“What are your orders, Private?” Jack asked when he’d completed a circle around Ianto.

“Report to Captain Harkness and obey all commands, Sir,” Ianto called.

Jack leaned close to Ianto’s face and leered at him. “Is that right?”

“Sir, Yes, Sir.”

Jack smirked as he eyed Ianto one more time from head to toe. “On your knees, Soldier,” Jack said wickedly.

Ianto, biting the inside of his cheek not to laugh, dropped to his knees. Jack took one step closer to Ianto so his crotch was right in front of Ianto’s face. “Take it out,” Jack ordered, glancing meaningfully at his crotch.

Ianto thought he’d play it up a bit, so he glanced quickly at Jack’s face. “Sir?” he asked, acting the frightened subordinate.

“Do you have a problem with your orders, Soldier?” Jack menaced.

“Sir, no, Sir!” Ianto replied.

He reached out to Jack’s zipper. Where his fingers would usually be nimble, he purposely fumbled over unzipping Jack’s trousers, playing his role to perfection. He glanced up at Jack with what he hoped looked like a fearful expression. Jack growled at him, and Ianto quickly averted his gaze and pulled Jack’s briefs down, exposing his cock. “Put it in your mouth,” Jack ordered.

“Wha…what?” Ianto asked, still playing his part.

“What was that, Private?” Jack practically howled at him.

“I said, Sir, yes, Sir!” Ianto said.

He leaned forward and tentatively took Jack’s cock into his mouth. He glanced up at Jack, as though asking for further instructions. “Now suck,” Jack ordered.

Ianto did as he was told. His instinct was to revert back to himself. He knew exactly how to use his mouth to pleasure Jack the most. But this was part of the game, and he wanted to play the role of a soldier being taken advantage of by a superior officer, knowing Jack was thoroughly enjoying himself. *I’m quite enjoying myself too,* he thought with an inward smile. He feigned uncertainty and apprehension. After a few minutes of fumbling, Jack pulled back roughly. “You’ve got a lot to learn, Private. Now on your feet.”

Ianto jumped to his feet and stood to attention. “Hands on the wall,” Jack growled.

Ianto turned and marched to the wall. He spread his hands on the wall, grinning to himself. He felt Jack kick his legs apart. Then he felt Jack reach around him and start to undo his trousers. “Sir?” Ianto asked, trying to sound nervous.

Jack leaned close to his ear and snarled, “Did I say you could speak, Private?”
"Sir, no, Sir." Ianto responded.

Jack pushed Ianto's trousers and briefs roughly down, exposing his arse. "Wh… what are you doing, Sir?" Ianto asked, turning slightly towards Jack and trying to grab at his trousers.

Jack grabbed his hands and forced them back on the wall. "Did I tell you that you could move? You're going to take my cock up your arse, and you're going to beg me for more. Now stand still, that's an order," Jack roared.

Ianto made a whimpering noise. "What did you say, Private?"

"I said, Sir, yes, Sir," Ianto responded, putting his hands back on the wall.

Jack put a hand on his back and forced him down so he was bent lower, his arse thrust further out. A moment later, he felt Jack's tongue in his arse, and he moaned with pleasure, momentarily forgetting the game. "You like that, Soldier?" Jack said from behind him.


Jack pushed two slick fingers inside of him, and Ianto moaned again. "You've been wanting this for a while, haven't you? I've seen the way you look at me, Soldier, trying to act all innocent. You're been quite the little cock tease, haven't you? Well you should be careful what you wish for," Jack growled, removing his fingers and impaling himself into Ianto.

Ianto sucked in his breath. "Is this what you wanted, Private?" Jack asked, pushing himself deep into Ianto.

Ianto scrabbled at the wall, trying to gain purchase. "I asked you a question, Private. Is this what you wanted?" Jack asked, pulling out almost all the way, and then thrusting deep into Ianto again.

"Since the day we met, Sir," Ianto answered honestly.

Jack withdrew suddenly, and Ianto felt himself being dragged across the floor. He stumbled, as his trousers were around his knees, but Jack caught him and yanked him roughly towards the sofa. He threw Ianto down on his back and tugged his trousers off over the combat boots. Then he took hold of Ianto's ankles and spread his legs. Jack knelt on the sofa and entered him again, holding his ankles wide apart. They both moaned with pleasure. Jack began thrusting ruthlessly, and Ianto held on to the side of the sofa as Jack pounded into him. He was completely enthralled just watching him. It permeated the air. "You like having my cock up your arse, Private?" Jack grunted.

"Y…yes…" Ianto could barely get the word out.

Jack thrust harder. "I didn't hear you," he shouted.

"Sir, yes, Sir," Ianto managed to say.

Jack pushed Ianto's legs even farther apart and increased his pace, sweat dripping down his face. He was grunting with every thrust, and Ianto was captivated just watching him. When Jack came, he was so loud that Myfanwy screeched and flapped noisily around the Hub. Jack withdrew quickly and took Ianto's cock into his mouth. It didn't take long before Jack's skilled tongue had Ianto cumming down his throat.

Jack collapsed on top of Ianto, and they lay there silently for a moment catching their breath. Ianto finally broke the silence. "Well, I'll have to write Martha a thank you note."
Jack laughed. He turned them on the sofa so they were both lying on their sides facing each other. "Ianto Jones, you are so sexy," Jack said, running his hand up under Ianto's shirt and tracing his nipple with his finger.

"I'm glad you think so," Ianto said, blushing slightly at the complement.

"Mmmm," Jack replied, kissing Ianto's neck. "You are something else, you know that, Private?"

Ianto chuckled softly, running his fingers through Jack's hair. Myfanwy was still flying noisily around the Hub. "I think we've upset the pterodactyl," Ianto said mildly.

"She's just jealous," Jack replied, tracing Ianto's jaw line with his finger.

"Of you or me?" Ianto asked curiously.

"Oh, I know she has the hots for you," Jack said, kissing Ianto's neck again. "Who could blame her?"

"Well, she is quite beautiful…" Ianto began, but Jack silenced him with a kiss, and Ianto responded with enthusiasm. Jack broke off the kiss asking, "Hey, how come she sent the outfit to you and not me?"

Ianto smiled. "I think she wanted to make sure my intentions towards you were honorable."

"What makes you say that?" Jack asked curiously.

Ianto shrugged his shoulders. "Her note," he replied casually.

"There was a note?" Jack asked, looking interested.

"In the pocket," Ianto said, nodding towards the trousers which Jack had thrown carelessly on the floor in his haste.

Jack jumped up, pulling up his trousers which were around his knees. He grabbed Ianto's discarded trousers and reached into the pocket. He took out the note and turned back to the sofa. He looked at Ianto, lying naked from the waist down – except for the combat boots. "Cold?" Jack asked, grinning at him.


Jack grabbed his greatcoat from the coat stand and draped it over Ianto. He lifted Ianto's head and slid onto the sofa, placing Ianto's head in his lap. He unfolded the note and read it. He looked down at Ianto and then read the note again. A strange look crossed Jack's face, and Ianto caught it. "What is it, Jack?"

Jack was silent for a minute, staring across the room. Then he looked down at Ianto and asked, "So are your intentions honorable?"

Ianto wrinkled his brow. "Would this be a good time to ask for a raise?"

Jack threw back his head and laughed. Ianto felt his stomach flip over. I love his laugh, he thought, reaching a hand up and caressing Jack's cheek. Jack kissed the hand that was stroking his cheek, covering it with his own hand. "Is that why you're shagging me?" Jack asked.

"Of course. Why else would I be?" Ianto said, looking innocently at Jack.
"Smart arse," Jack said, running his fingers through Ianto's hair.

"What is it about the note, Jack?" Ianto asked, looking up at him.

The hand that was in Ianto's hair stilled, and the same look that Ianto had noticed before crossed his features. Ianto felt his heart start pounding. "You do make me happy," Jack whispered with what sounded like surprise, as though he were just realizing it himself.

Ianto didn't respond. He knew Jack well enough by now to understand how much that scared the older man. He took Jack's hand and squeezed it gently. Jack's expression quickly reverted back to the mischievous one that Ianto knew so well. "You know what would make me really happy?" Jack asked slyly.

"I'm afraid to ask," Ianto said blithely.

"If you wore the cap and the combat boots to bed… and nothing else…" Jack suggested hopefully.

Ianto sighed dramatically. "If I must," he said with exaggerated martyrdom.

Jack's smile lit up the room.
On the morning of Gwen's wedding, Jack woke up before Ianto as usual. He didn't sleep that much, and though he slept a lot better with Ianto, he tended to get up early and prowl around the Hub. However, he wasn't plagued by his usual restlessness that morning. He was content to stay in bed, watching Ianto sleep, and remembering their rather vicious game of Naked Hide and Seek the night before. Ianto had caught him cheating and had given him hell...the good kind of hell...the kind that leaves you sore for days...Jack smiled at the memory. Ianto had said that he owed him for all the times that he'd cheated. Of course, I always cheat, Jack grinned to himself. But getting caught cheating was just as fun...Ianto had tied him to the water tower...definitely some CCTV footage worth preserving.

He felt unusually cheerful that morning. Gwen was getting married, and Jack enjoyed weddings. They were usually highly entertaining. Besides, he was truly happy for Gwen. It was the life he had wanted for her...the life he'd told her to hold on to. It was the stability she needed. Sometimes I just wish that I...but he silenced the thought that would turn him melancholy. He wanted to enjoy the day. He looked down at Ianto, sleeping peacefully, and Jack's mind impishly started thinking up ways to irritate the young man. I do love getting him all riled up, Jack thought gleefully. Jack reached out a hand and began to shake Ianto gently, peering into his face. When Ianto finally opened his eyes, Jack grinned. "So, you going to dance with me at the wedding today?" Jack asked, looming over him.

"You've got to be joking," Ianto said irritably, his voice still rough with sleep. "I haven't even had my coffee yet."

"You know, you're really grumpy in the mornings," Jack said, poking him in the ribs.

"Clearly I'm in the middle of a nightmare, and I'm going to wake up in a few minutes," Ianto said closing his eyes again.

"No! No going back to sleep!" Jack continued poking him.

"Jack, have you gotten into Owen's supply of alien pharmacology again?" Ianto asked, keeping his eyes shut tight.

"I just want to know if you're going to dance with me today," Jack persisted. It had been an ongoing argument since they had practiced dancing in Jack's bedroom, and Jack was determined to win.

"Sure, I'll dance with you...when you let me drive the SUV," Ianto said, grinning mischievously, but keeping his eyes closed.

"You get to drive the SUV," Jack retorted.
"Yeah, out of the garage and around to water tower to pick you up," Ianto said sullenly.

"That's driving," Jack argued.

Ianto snorted, opening his eyes and looking at Jack with askance. "But I'm the Captain," Jack continued. "I should drive the SUV!"

Ianto rolled his eyes, threw back the covers and got out of bed. He walked into Jack's bathroom, muttering something about needing coffee if he was going to have this conversation. Jack grinned wickedly and jumped out of bed, following Ianto into the bathroom. Ianto started the shower and got in, and Jack stepped in behind him. He grabbed Ianto in a dance embrace and started swaying them back and forth. "Seriously, Jack," Ianto said, wrinkling his brow. "Are you on drugs? Should I call Owen?"

Jack laughed. "Come on, Ianto. Where's your sense of fun? Gwen's getting married today! I love a good wedding. Someone always gets drunk and makes a fool of themselves, someone's always crying in a corner, people who shouldn't shag, shag, and everyone finds out about it, and in general, there's an agreeable amount of drama for our entertainment."

Ianto just shook his head at him, looking at him dubiously. Jack laughed again and kissed Ianto on the nose. "You're cute when you're being petulant," Jack said affectionately.

Ianto frowned. "I'm not petulant," he said, petulantly.

Jack laughed again. He saw Ianto smile and then quickly try to hide it. "I saw that," he said, running his fingertip over Ianto's mouth.

Ianto bit Jack's finger. "Ow!" Jack said, pulling his finger away and shaking his hand.

Ianto stuck his tongue out at him. Jack grabbed him and shoved him up against the shower wall, pressing their bodies together. "Aren't we feisty today?" he asked, kissing Ianto's neck.

Jack trailed kisses down Ianto's chest, landing on his nipple. He sucked gently, and Ianto moaned. "Thought I could cheer you up," Jack said, moving to the other nipple.

He ran his hand down Ianto's stomach and grazed his cock with his fingertips. He smiled when he felt that Ianto was already getting hard. He began to stroke Ianto's cock, still sucking on his nipple. He glanced up at Ianto, whose head was tilted back against the shower tile, a look of pure bliss on his face. You're beautiful, he thought, with a clenching of his gut. He dropped to his knees and ran his tongue up Ianto's shaft and around the head. Ianto moaned again, and Jack took him into his mouth, sliding him deep into his throat.

You're beautiful, he thought, with a clenching of his gut. He dropped to his knees and ran his tongue up Ianto's shaft and around the head. Ianto moaned again, and Jack took him into his mouth, sliding him deep into his throat.

He worked his talented mouth on Ianto as he simultaneously stroked himself. When he felt Ianto nearing orgasm, he stood up and kissed Ianto's lips, wrapping his hand around both of their cocks. Ianto entwined his fingers with Jack's, and they moved their hands as one, kissing fervently as they both came. It was their favorite way to start the morning.

Ianto stood naked in front of Jack's bathroom mirror shaving, and Jack leaned against the wall watching him fondly. You are so beautiful, the thought again. He took a step forward and put his arms around Ianto's waist. "Wear the pink," Jack said.

Ianto raised an eyebrow at him in the mirror. "I like the pink," Jack continued, kissing his shoulder. "It reminds me of when I first got back to Cardiff and that night in the five star hotel."

Ianto smiled at him in the mirror. "If you wear the dark blue," he said. "I like the dark blue."
"Deal," Jack said, beaming.

They gazed at each other in the mirror for a few moments, smiling at each other. *We do look hot together,* Jack thought proudly. *We'd look gorgeous dancing together.* Jack grinned playfully. "So ARE you going to dance with me at the wedding today?" he asked.

Ianto rolled his eyes, but before he could answer, Jack's cell phone rang. "Saved by the bell," Jack said, walking into the bedroom and picking up his phone from the nightstand. "Well hello, soon-to-be Mrs. Williams."

"Jack, I need you. And you'd better bring Owen," Gwen said, sounding agitated.

Jack felt his heart sinking. "What's wrong?" he asked, his expression turning serious.


"We'll be there as soon as we can."

Jack closed his phone and turned to Ianto who had stopped shaving and was standing in the doorway of the bathroom looking concerned. "I've gotta run. Something's wrong with Gwen. She didn't say what. Call Owen and tell him I'll pick him up on the way to Gwen's."

Ianto quickly went to Jack's closet and began taking out clothes for Jack to wear (including the dark blue shirt) as Jack put on briefs and socks. He handed Jack his clothes, and Jack rapidly dressed. Then he scrambled up the ladder and grabbing his greatcoat, raced out of the Hub.

Owen was waiting for him outside when he reached his flat. He hopped in the SUV, and they sped to Gwen's flat. *Expect the unexpected,* Jack thought as he looked at Gwen's pregnant stomach. *Gotta love Torchwood…*

Several hours later, Jack called Gwen to see how she was coping. He was worried about Gwen going through with the wedding, but she was determined, and he knew better than to get in the way of a pregnant woman with raging hormones. He was relieved to hear that she sounded composed. Rhys, on the other hand, was irate. He came on the line abruptly, interrupting his conversation with Gwen to give Jack an earful, telling him in no uncertain terms to stay the hell away from their wedding. Jack tried to smooth things over by congratulating Rhys, but Rhys was having none of it. He unceremoniously hung up on Jack. *Ouch, that hurt,* Jack thought, looking at his phone. He sat down at his desk, feeling intensely disappointed. Ianto appeared a moment later. He put a hand on Jack's shoulder. "What is it, Jack?" he asked softly.

"I think we were just uninvited to the wedding," Jack said with regret. "Rhys is pretty pissed."

"I'm sorry," Ianto said, squeezing his shoulder. "I know you were looking forward to it."

Jack shrugged his shoulders and looked away. He was more despondent that he wanted to admit. "Want to see the dress I chose for her?" Ianto asked, taking something out of his inside pocket. "It will almost be like being there."

Jack inwardly shook off his dejection and smiled at Ianto. "Sure," he said with what he hoped was enthusiasm.

Ianto opened the booklet and flipped to a marked page. He held it out to Jack. Jack looked at the picture of the wedding dress Ianto had chosen for Gwen. Then out of curiosity, he started flipping through the book, looking at the other pictures. "Hope you don't fancy a different one," Ianto said, leaning over his shoulder and looking at the pictures with him.
The one Ianto chose was perfect. *Ianto always does everything right,* Jack grinned to himself. *His taste is impeccable.* "Nope, I like that one," Jack said, indicating the dress Ianto had chosen.

"I estimated Gwen's size from the Hub security laser scans. As you know, my dad was a master tailor. He could size a man's inside leg measurement from his stride across the shop threshold," Ianto said, raising an eyebrow, an evocative note in his voice.

"Ah, the family eye," Jack teased. "Remind me to test it sometime."

"Well, if…um…later on…" Ianto started suggestively.

"Jack," Owen burst into the room, cutting Ianto off.

Ianto moved awkwardly, and trying to conceal his discomfort said, "Yeah, brilliant. Like that one."

Jack was still bemused by Ianto's embarrassment at showing him any kind of affection in front of the others, and he couldn't help smirking at the young man. "We've got a problem," Owen said, oblivious to the exchange between Jack and Ianto.

*Looks like we're going to the wedding after all,* Jack thought with triumph. Jack tossed the keys to Ianto with a significant look. "Why don't you drive us to the wedding, Ianto? I don't really feel like driving today."

Ianto caught the keys and looked at him suspiciously. Jack did his best to maintain a straight face. Ianto turned and headed for the garage, but Jack caught the eye roll before Ianto turned away. He mentally stuck his tongue out at Ianto. *That's right, Jones, Ianto Jones. Now you're going to have to dance with me!*
Jack stood in front of the water tower with Owen as they waited for Ianto to bring the SUV around. He was still reveling in the fact that now Ianto would have to dance with him at Gwen's wedding. He knew he shouldn't be glad that Gwen had been impregnated by a Nostrovite, yet he couldn't help but feel grateful for the excuse to go to the wedding. He looked at Owen standing next to him, a determined look on his face. Jack frowned.

"Is Owen ready for this?"

He spent the next several minutes trying to convince Owen to stay at the Hub, but Owen was determined to go. Jack was still undecided when Ianto pulled up with the SUV and Owen threw his bag into the back seat. "We do need his medical expertise," Jack admitted to himself. However, when he saw that Owen had the singularity scalpel, he began to feel nervous. Both he and Ianto tried to talk him out of taking it, but Owen was adamant. "Listen, you two, you'd better start trusting me, okay? I've been working on it, and I reckon I've got it sussed. Besides, with that Nostrovite around, we really don't have too many options."

"He's got a point," Ianto conceded.

"What is it with you?" Jack asked, turning to Ianto. "Ever since Owen died, all you ever do is agree with him."

"I was brought up never to speak ill of the dead, even if they still do most of the talking for themselves," Ianto replied glibly.

"Smartass, Jack thought. I'll deal with you later. "Okay, Owen. But you better be sure you know what you're doing," he said aloud.

Jack was not used to sitting in the passenger seat, and it was making him antsy. He flipped down the sun visor, and flipped it back up again. He played with the air vents. He turned the heat up and then back down. He checked that the air conditioner was working. He turned on the radio and started flipping though the stations, but he couldn't find anything he wanted to listen to. He saw Ianto glance meaningfully at him, but he ignored him.

I wonder what Ianto keeps in the glove box, he thought, leaning forward and opening the flap. He stuck his hand inside and pulled out a stack of papers. He started to flip through them, but at that moment the SUV hit a pothole and the papers slipped out of Jack's hands. He watched them fly around the SUV and land scattered over the front seat. "Jack!" Ianto admonished. "I had those organized by date."

"Of course you did," Owen muttered from the back seat, handing some of the papers that had landed on him back to Jack.

Ianto scowled at Owen in the rear view. "Sorry, "Jack said, trying to collect everything.
"Now I'm going to have to re-sort them," Ianto grumbled.

"I can do it!" Jack offered, eager for something to do.

"No, just leave it!" Ianto snapped. "I'll deal with it when we get back to the Hub."

Jack let the papers fall back on the floor. "What are you doing, Jack?" Ianto exclaimed.

"You told me to leave it!" Jack argued.

"Well, you could at least put them back in the glove box!" Ianto said with exasperation.

Jack made a face at Ianto, but picked up the papers and shoved them unceremoniously back into the glove box. He couldn't get the flap closed because there were papers sticking out, and Ianto flinched each time he tried to close the flap and mangled a few more sheets. Jack finally got the flap closed and glanced cautiously at Ianto. Ianto's hands were clenched on the steering wheel, a look of long suffering patience on his face. Jack flashed a grin at him, but Ianto ignored him.

Jack looked around for something else to do. He began to randomly press buttons on the dashboard. It had been a long time since he had looked at the specifications of the SUV, and he couldn't remember what each button was for. The windows rolled up and down. The wing mirrors tilted and swung. The radio antenna protracted and retracted. Jack was really beginning to enjoy himself when Ianto yelled, "Jack!"

"What?' he asked, innocently.

"Will you stop fussing and sit still? It's very distracting," Ianto chastised.

"Well you drive like an old lady!" Jack retorted.

"I'm driving 20 miles per hour over the speed limit," Ianto argued.

"Like I said, an old lady," Jack replied, starting to enjoy the banter.

"Not all of us are immortal you know," Ianto rejoined.

Jack opened his mouth to respond when Owen cut him off. "How much further?"

"A few minutes," Ianto replied.

"What I don't understand is, if people are going to make such a big deal about getting married, why come all the way out into the middle of nowhere, where no one can find you to do it? That, to me suggests inner conflict," Jack said, ready to expound further on the subject if anyone let him.

"It's because the happy couple want everything to be perfect," Ianto said irritably.

"An alien egg in your belly and its mother coming to rip you open. Yeah, perfect..." Owen murmured. Owen leaned forward and, looking from Jack to Ianto, said, "You do realize that the two of you bicker like an old married couple, don't you?"

"Well, if Jack would stop messing about with everything," Ianto said at the same time as Jack said, "Well, if Ianto wasn't such a slow driver, we'd be there by now."

"And I rest my case," Owen muttered.

They finally arrived at Margam Country Park and pulled up to the Orangery where Gwen's wedding
ceremony was being held. They hopped out of the SUV and ran into the building. Jack ordered Ianto and Owen to find Tosh, because Jack was going to do something he had always wanted to do – interrupt a wedding in progress. He ran down the aisle yelling, "Stop! Stop the wedding!"

Jack couldn't remember the last time he'd had that much fun without taking his clothes off.

Several hours later, after the Nostrovite was finally dealt with, the team watched as Gwen and Rhys exchanged their vows. It was a bittersweet moment for Jack as he watched Gwen say 'I do'. She was radiant. She's happy, Jack thought with a mixture of gratification and sorrow. Was I that happy at my wedding? I don't remember. It was so long ago... lifetimes ago. And I never tried it again... Jack thought with melancholy over the lovers he'd had and the lovers he'd left since his own wedding in the early 1900's. He knew he'd never have what Gwen and Rhys had. He stole a glance at Tosh, Owen, and Ianto, sitting beside him in the pew. Each one of them was looking at the happy couple with varying degrees of wistfulness. Perhaps none of us will...

Jack shook himself. Now let's not get maudlin, Harkness. It's a wedding. You love weddings, and the reception's the best part. It's where the real drama happens. And reverting to his usual boisterous demeanor, he eagerly followed the wedding party into the dining room. Besides, he reminded himself. I believe a certain Mr. Jones owes you a dance.

Jack sat down next to Ianto at their table. He leaned towards him suggestively and grinned. "So, I let you drive the SUV..." he hedged.

Ianto looked at him with something that closely resembled dread. Jack broke into a grin. I win! "Jack," Gwen raced up to their table looking harassed. "The Nostrovite killed Mervin!"

"And Mervin would be..." Jack asked, raising his eyebrows.

"The DJ, Jack," Gwen replied. "The Nostrovite killed the DJ. How are we going to have a wedding reception..."

"I'll DJ the party," Ianto interjected, stealing a glance at Jack.

Jack crossed his arms over his chest and glared at him. "Oh, Ianto, would you? That would be spectacular! Thank you, sweetheart." Gwen kissed Ianto on the cheek and hurried away again.

Ianto grinned triumphantly at Jack before turning and heading for the DJ booth. You sneaky little bastard, Jack thought with amusement. And then he felt a little hurt. Why doesn't he want to dance with me? "Jack," Owen said, pulling him back into the present. "We've got work to do."

"Work?" Jack asked, confused.

"Uh, yeah, Jack. We're going to have to retcon the whole lot of them," Owen said, looking around the room.

Jack was stunned to realize he had been so lost in his own thoughts that he had completely forgotten about Torchwood business. "Right," he said, as he stood up. "Work to do. Tosh, Owen, we've got a wedding to retcon."

He was almost relieved to have something to do.

Jack thoroughly enjoyed flirting with everyone at the wedding while getting them to drink the retcon laced champagne. It took them quite a while to finish the job, but when they finally got through the entire wedding party, Jack grabbed Tosh and pulled her out onto the dance floor. The last time Tosh and I danced together was in 1941... So much has happened since then. The real Captain Jack...
"I don't think he wants to dance with me," Jack answered truthfully. "You know how he is," he added lugubriously.

"Yeah, I know." Tosh looked at Ianto and smiled. "Still, he might surprise you…" She turned back to Jack. "You two are lucky, Jack - you and Ianto, Gwen and Rhys…” her voice drifted off as she stole a glance at Owen.

Jack didn't answer. He didn't know what to say. He pulled Tosh closer to him in a protective embrace, wishing he could give her more. *I wish I could give all of them more. They all deserve to be happy…*

They danced the rest of the song in silence, and then returned to their table. He and Tosh watched Gwen and Rhys dancing for a few minutes, both lost in their own thoughts. Then Owen returned and took Tosh out onto the dance floor, and Jack was left sitting alone at their table.

"Well, we certainly can't have that. I think it's time you danced with the blushing bride," he told himself. He walked up to the newlyweds and tapped Rhys on the shoulder. "Mind if I cut in?"

"Why not? I'm danced off my feet. I'm gonna find a beer," Rhys said as he walked away.

Jack took Gwen in his arms. He smiled at her. "Enjoy the honeymoon."

"I will. What will you do while I'm gone?"

"Oh, the usual. Pizza… Ianto," Jack joked, and they both laughed. "… save the world a couple of times," Jack continued.

"Will you miss me?" Gwen asked.

"Always," Jack answered honestly. "Rhys is a lucky man, a perfect husband. He's loyal… brave… he's got a hell of a swing on him! And best of all, he really loves you."

"I know," Gwen said.

She stared into Jack's eyes with something that resembled yearning. *I let it go too far,* he thought. *I should have never encouraged the flirtation between us. You made the right choice. Rhys is the man you're supposed to be with. But I know that one day you're going to want to leave all this behind… You'll leave Torchwood and you'll leave me…* Jack felt a little part of his his heart break.

"May I… erm… Achem…" Ianto's voice started him out of his ruminations.

They both turned to Ianto, who was asking to cut in. "Yes," Gwen answered, and moved to dance with Ianto, but Ianto turned instead to Jack.

Jack smirked at Ianto's timing as he took Ianto in his arms. Jack watched Gwen walk back to Rhys and saw the look of happiness on her face. *I'm going to lose her,* he thought again. *She has the chance for a normal life. She should take it, and I should let her go.* He turned his attention to the man in his arms.

"Afraid she'll leave Torchwood?" Ianto asked him, recalling him to the present.
"How did you know?" Jack asked, surprised.

Ianto didn't answer. Jack was silent for a moment. He was always in awe of Ianto's perceptiveness. *Was that why he interrupted me and Gwen? Or was it for more selfish motives? Is Ianto jealous?* Jack couldn't help but be gratified by the notion. "Staking your claim?" Jack asked Ianto with amusement.

"Sorry?" Ianto asked, sounding confused.

"You could have picked any moment to dance with me tonight, but you chose to cut in when I was dancing with Gwen."

"You were busy retconning the wedding party," Ianto replied mildly.

Jack scoffed, not fooled for a moment. "Are you staking your claim on me?" Jack repeated the question.

"Do I need to?" Ianto asked calmly.

Jack pulled back to look at Ianto's face. Ianto looked back at him with nothing but affection in his blue eyes. "No," Jack said, honestly. He leaned his forehead against Ianto's and caressed his cheek. "No, you don't."

They danced like that for a few beats, foreheads pressed together, oblivious to the rest of the world. Unbeknownst to both of them, it was at that moment that Tosh, Owen, Gwen and Rhys all took out their mobile phones and snapped photos of them dancing.

Jack pulled back into a more traditional dance embrace, remembering their earlier banter. "You're just dancing with me because you know that everyone here has been retconned," he said huffily.

"Not the team," Ianto replied placidly.

"No, not the team," Jack conceded.

Jack pulled Ianto closer to him and pressed his cheek against Ianto's. *My Ianto,* he thought, but he was suddenly overwhelmed with guilt. *How can I take away his chance for a normal life? He'll never have that if he stays with me. I could never give him this... He had that chance once with Lisa, but he lost her... Did he think about Lisa today? Was it painful for him to watch Gwen get married? He's so young, he deserves so much more. It's selfish of me to keep him from having that chance again...*

"Jack," Ianto whispered in his ear. "I'm not going anywhere."

Jack closed his eyes and pulled Ianto tight to his chest. *I don't think I would have the strength to let you go anyway,* he admitted to himself. The lyrics of the song they were dancing to finally registered, and Jack heard, *You do something to me, somewhere deep inside. I'm hoping to get close to a peace I'll never find.* He made a mental note to search for the lyrics on the internet when he got back to the Hub.

Jack put his hand on the back of Ianto's neck and ran his fingers through his hair. *I could never let you go...*

The song faded and a silence filled the room. Ianto pulled away from him, looking into his eyes. "Thanks for dancing with me," Jack said sincerely.
Ianto reached up a hand and gently stroked Jack's cheek. Then he turned from Jack and walked back to the DJ booth.

Jack watched him go with love and regret in his heart.
Chapter Notes

Thanks so much to the amazing riftintime for helping me get this chapter together and stay sane. You rock.

On the morning of Gwen's wedding, Jack began pestering Ianto about dancing with him from the moment Ianto opened his eyes. *I'm so not ready to have this conversation,* Ianto thought irritably. He knew he was rather grouchy in the mornings before he had his coffee, *but really, does Jack have to point it out? And what's with Jack anyway? Why does the two of us dancing together mean so much to him? And why is he so bloody chipper? *"Jack, have you gotten into Owen's supply of alien pharmacology again?"* he asked without opening his eyes.

"I just want to know if you're going to dance with me today," Jack persisted.

Ianto wasn't alert enough yet to discuss the subject. He and Jack had been arguing about it since they had practiced dancing in Jack's bedroom, and Ianto kept trying to quip his way out of having a serious conversation. *I'm just not ready for this.* But Jack was tenacious, and Ianto knew at some point there would be a confrontation. His nimble mind tried desperately to come up with diversionary tactics, and he grinned mischievously when he alighted on an idea. "Sure, I'll dance with you… when you let me drive the SUV." *No way will that ever happen,* he added triumphantly in his mind.

Jack took the bait. They bickered for a while about whether driving the SUV out of the garage and around to the water tower to pick Jack up actually constituted driving. Ianto got out of bed muttering, "I'm going to need coffee if we're going to have this conversation."

He was relieved, however, because he felt that he had once again diverted Jack's attention from the topic. He got into the shower and Jack followed him in, grabbing him into a dance hold and swaying them back and forth. *Or not...* Ianto thought, dismayed. *Why is this so important to him?* He tried to maintain his petulant demeanor, but Jack was so excited about Gwen's wedding that Ianto couldn't help being caught up in Jack's enthusiasm. He began to smile, but then quickly tried to hide it. "I saw that," Jack said, running his fingertip over his mouth. *Damn!* Ianto bit Jack's finger, just to add emphasis to the fact that he was still grumpy. *"Ow!"* Jack said, pulling his finger away and shaking his hand.

Ianto tried desperately to keep the petulant expression on his face, but was impossible to remain cranky when Jack's excitement was so infectious. In a moment of whimsy, he stuck his tongue out at Jack. Jack grabbed him and shoved him up against the shower wall, pressing their bodies together. "Aren't we feisty today?" he declared as he kissed Ianto's neck.

Jack started kissing down his chest, and by the time Jack dropped to his knees in front of him, Ianto had forgotten all about Gwen's wedding and Jack pressuring him to dance.

Later, while Ianto shaved, Jack leaned against the wall staring at him. *What has gotten into him?* Ianto thought again. Jack took a step forward and wrapped his arms around Ianto's waist. *"Wear the pink,"* Jack said, looking into his eyes in the mirror.
Jack is in a really strange mood today, Ianto thought, raising an eyebrow at him. "I like the pink," Jack continued, kissing his shoulder. "It reminds me of when I first got back to Cardiff and that night in the five star hotel."

Ianto felt a fluttering in his chest at the memory. That night had meant a lot to him, and he was touched that Jack remembered it fondly as well. He smiled at Jack in the mirror. "If you wear the dark blue," Ianto said. "I like the dark blue."

"Deal," Jack said, beaming.

They gazed at each other in the mirror for a few moments, smiling. He's beautiful, Ianto thought… and he makes me happy. Even if I'm still not sure what we are… Jack grinned playfully. "So ARE you going to dance with me at the wedding today?" he asked.

Ianto rolled his eyes, but he was spared from having to reply by Jack's mobile phone. "Saved by the bell," Jack said, going to retrieve his phone from the nightstand.

Indeed, Ianto thought, feeling relieved once more.

Ianto listened to the tone of Jack's voice change from cheerful to concerned as he talked to Gwen. Ianto quickly wiped the shaving cream from his face, and stood in the bathroom door, prepared to go into Torchwood mode. Almost before Jack began to explain that he needed to go and see Gwen, Ianto was at Jack's closet, pulling out clothes for him to wear. He made sure to include the dark blue shirt.

He watched Jack dress quickly and scramble up the ladder. He grabbed his phone and made a quick call to Owen. Then he finished his morning rituals. He smiled and blushed a little as he buttoned up his pink shirt.

Ianto was at the coffee machine when Tosh arrived. "Morning, Tosh," he called. "Just making a fresh pot."

"Hi Ianto," Tosh replied.

Ianto smiled as he fixed their morning coffee and brought it to her desk. He set her coffee down and sat on the edge of her desk while she took off her coat and put down her bag. "Where is everyone?" Tosh asked as she settled in for the day.

"Gwen called this morning and Jack raced out, picking up Owen on the way to her flat. She didn't say what it was about."

Tosh looked around her desk and found a com unit. Placing it in her ear, she said, "Jack, what's going on?"

Tosh's eyes grew wide and she said, "Can you repeat that Jack?"

Ianto put his coffee down and scrambled for another com. He placed it in his ear. "… impregnated by a Nostrovite," he heard Jack say.

"Who's impregnated by a Nostrovite?" Ianto asked.

"Gwen," Jack said, "And she's not happy about it. She wants to go ahead with the wedding. We're trying to talk her out of it."

"How big is she?" Ianto asked.
Tosh glared at him and he mouthed *what?*

"Well, if it were a human baby, I'd say she'd be ready to pop any day now," Jack said into their ears. "And let me tell you, the hormones are raging," Jack added sounding amused.

Tosh and Ianto looked at each other. "Right," Jack came on in their ears again. "Tosh, Ianto, see what you can find out about the Nostrovite species. We'll be back shortly."

They heard Jack disconnect and they looked at each other again. Ianto pursed his lips together and Tosh looked concerned. Then they looked into each other's eyes and burst out laughing. "It's not funny," Tosh said, wiping a tear from her eye.

"No," Ianto said, trying to catch his breath, "It's really not funny," he agreed.

They both made an effort to stop laughing, desperately trying to recover their composure, but they caught each other's eye and burst out laughing again. When they finally regained control of themselves, Ianto said, "Right, well I suppose we'd better…"

"Right," Tosh agreed quickly, turning to her computer.

"Still," Ianto said before he walked away. "Glad we got it out of our systems."

He smiled when he heard Tosh start giggling again.

Unfortunately, neither Ianto nor Tosh were able to find anything on the Nostrovite species, and their initial amusement turned into genuine concern as they began to appreciate the severity of the situation.

Jack and Owen returned within the hour, announcing that Gwen had decided to go ahead with the wedding. Ianto was simultaneously concerned for Gwen's safety and amused at the absurdity of the situation. *Gwen giving birth to a razor toothed monster that eats half of their family during the wedding? Sounds like a bad horror movie…* Ianto was lost in thought, trying to picture the scene when Jack's voice recalled him to the present. "Ianto!"

"Jack," he replied.

Jack turned to face him. "Gwen's gonna need a new wedding dress… bigger."

Ianto grabbed his coat and headed out of the Hub.

Ianto went to one of the nicest bridal shops in Cardiff. He was feeling guilty about his initial reaction to Gwen's unfortunate circumstances, and he wanted to make it up to her by getting her a really lovely dress. He flipped through a rack of dresses, trying to decide what style Gwen would prefer. One of the dresses caught his eye, and he took it out and held it up to his body. He was looking in the mirror, trying to imagine the dress on Gwen when he heard, "Can I help you?"

He turned to see the shop attendant looking at him with raised eyebrows. "Yeah, I'm looking for a wedding dress for a friend," he replied, hoping that the attendant would help him choose something appropriate.

The man looked him up and down and smiled knowingly. "Ah," he said with an amused expression. "Of course you are, Sir. You'd be surprised. We're quite used to men buying for their friends," he added suggestively.

Ianto stood holding the dress and watching the shop attendant walk away, completely confused by
the situation. Why is he walking away? Isn't he going to help me? And then suddenly he understood. He thinks that I'm buying it for myself? Ianto felt his face flush crimson, and he quickly hung the dress back up as he tried to compose himself. His mind was reeling. What would make him think I was buying myself a wedding dress? All sorts of issues flared up in Ianto's mind, but he didn't have the time to delve into them. This was Torchwood business. He swallowed his pride and walked up to the same man, explaining quickly and succinctly what he needed. He received several more knowing looks, but Ianto was nothing if not professional. In the end, the shop attendant helped him chose a beautiful dress for Gwen.

Ianto carefully placed the box containing the dress into the boot of his car. Then he slid into the driver's seat and sat gripping the steering wheel. He was completely thrown by what had happened in the wedding shop. Would that have happened if I had never started shagging Jack Harkness? I don't understand... I start sleeping with a man and suddenly everyone thinks I fit into some stereotype? He sighed and rested his head on his hands. And all this started because I was trying to seduce Jack in order to con my way into Torchwood Three so I could save the woman I loved... I've come a long way since the day I researched gay sex on the internet... Somehow it was easier then... And now he wants me to make an open declaration of our relationship...

Ianto shuddered. There was a small part of him that had hoped Gwen would decide to postpone the wedding so he would be spared the ordeal of dancing with Jack in public. For some reason it was important to Jack, and Ianto didn't want to hurt his feelings. But he was just not comfortable with it.

Behind closed doors, he and Jack were lovers. But he was still getting used to being open about his relationship with Jack around the team. And now he wants me to dance with him at Gwen's wedding? I still think it's kind of weird – too men dancing together. It seems... bizarre somehow. Ianto sighed again, knowing he was being narrow minded. It wasn't only the thought of two men dancing that worried him. It was also that he was by nature an undemonstrative person. Jack, of course, is the opposite. Jack is flamboyant in everything that he does. Ianto smiled affectionately at the thought. That's just Jack, and I wouldn't change him for anything. But can I keep up with him? And will he decide that I'm not worth it if I can't get over this?

Ianto dropped his head onto his hands, taking a deep breath and trying to calm the churning of his stomach. He and Jack had just begun to find their footing with each other after their very tumultuous history. And they hadn't really been out of the Hub together since the whole incident with Alun. The opportunity just hadn't arisen. They usually spent their nights at the Hub. I wonder if it's intentional. Is Jack afraid of something like that happening again? Would I act any differently if we ran into someone else from my past? I'd like to think I would, but I don't know...

Ianto rubbed his face with his hands. It's not only that. There's the whole shagging the boss stigma as well. Tosh, Owen and Gwen have finally accepted me as a member of the team. If my relationship with Jack becomes too blatant, they might lose respect for me. He had made it pretty clear to Jack that what there was between them was strictly after hours. And Ianto had been grateful to see that Jack followed his lead. Jack was fairly professional towards him during working hours. But he knew that Jack would be more open about their relationship if Ianto let him. In fact, Ianto knew Jack wanted him to be more open about their relationship. He wants me to dance with him...

Ianto groaned and banged his head against his hands. "Why is this so hard?" he asked aloud.

He put the keys in the ignition and started the car, knowing that Jack would wonder what was taking him so long. With one last sigh, he put the car in gear and turned it towards the Hub.
Chapter Notes

Thanks so much to the extraordinarily brilliant riftintime for helping it all come together and for having interminable patience. This chapter was truly a collaborative effort. You still rock!

Ianto arrived back at the Hub and walked in to see Tosh all togged up for Gwen's wedding. He put the box containing the wedding dress down and walked up to Tosh, giving her the once over. "Tosh, you look gorgeous," he said with conviction. "Lilac is a beautiful color on you."

Tosh beamed at him. "Really?" she asked shyly.

"Oh yeah," he said, grinning at her. "Jack?" he called.

"Ianto," Jack replied from his office.

"Come check out Tosh."

Jack appeared at his doorway and wolf-whistled. "Wow!" Jack said with a leer.

Tosh blushed prettily and looked shyly away. "It's just not going to do if you outshine the bride," Jack said grinning.

"Like that will ever happen," Tosh muttered self-deprecatingly.

Ianto and Jack looked briefly at each other. "Has Owen seen you yet?" Ianto asked.

"I just got in," Tosh replied, still not looking at him.

"Go see if you can talk our cranky medic into going to the wedding. We could all use a good party," Jack said, winking at her.

Tosh smiled and turned towards the autopsy bay. Jack and Ianto looked at each other. Ianto gave him a slight smile, indicating his thanks for helping to bolster Tosh's ego, and Jack nodded his understanding. "Dress is over there," Ianto said, indicating the box.

"Thanks, Ianto," Jack said, winking at him and turning back into his office.

Ianto went down to the archives to get some work done.

An hour later, Ianto returned to the main area of the Hub to make coffee, however he immediately sensed Jack's perturbation. He walked into Jack's office and placed a hand on his shoulder. "What is it, Jack?"

"I think we were just uninvited to the wedding," Jack said, sounding disheartened. "Rhys is pretty pissed."

"I'm sorry," Ianto said, sincerely. "I know you were looking forward to it."
Jack shrugged his shoulders and looked away. Ianto was torn between feeling relief at his reprieve and sympathy with Jack's disappointment. He wanted to shake Jack out of his mood. "Want to see the dress I chose for her?" Ianto asked, taking the booklet from his inside pocket. "It will almost be like being there."

"Sure," Jack said with an attempt at enthusiasm that Ianto didn't believe.

He could feel Jack's disappointment, even though Jack put on a good show. *Well, sexual innuendo always cheers him up...* "I estimated Gwen's size from the Hub security laser scans. As you know, my dad was a master tailor. He could size a man's inside leg measurement from his stride across the shop threshold," Ianto said, raising an eyebrow evocatively. *One day I'm going to have to come clean about that, but not today...*

"Ah, the family eye," Jack teased. "Remind me to test it sometime."

"Well, if...um...later on..." Ianto started suggestively, but he became flustered when Owen burst into the room.

He tried to cover and thought he'd made a fair job of it, but he saw the look Jack gave him. *Damn...*

As soon as Owen started to explain about the Nostrovite, Ianto knew that they were going to the wedding after all. Resigning himself, he went to get Jack's Webley from his desk, and then helped Jack with his greatcoat. Jack tossed the keys to Ianto with a significant look. "Why don't you drive us to the wedding, Ianto? I don't really feel like driving today."

Ianto caught the keys and looked at him suspiciously. He saw the smirk that Jack was trying to hide. *Fantastic,* he thought sarcastically. *That was my last excuse...* Ianto turned to head for the garage, rolling his eyes as he went.

Ianto was feeling irritable and tetchy, and Jack was being thoroughly annoying in the passenger seat of the SUV. *Can't he just sit still?* Ianto's mind was reeling because what should have been a victory - *I am driving the SUV after all* – was tainted by the notion of having to uphold his end of the bargain. *Now I have to dance with Jack, and I'm just not ready for this. And I lied to him again... Why is this so important to him? And why is it so hard for me? And I'm going to kill him if he keeps on...* "Will you stop fussing and sit still? It's very distracting," he snapped at Jack.

He and Jack bickered all the way to the wedding. Usually Ianto enjoyed their persiflage, but today he just found it exasperating. *We do not bicker like an old married couple,* he thought crossly.

He gradually realized that he'd been in a bad mood all day. It wasn't only that Jack wanted him to make a public declaration of their relationship. It wasn't that the stupid shop assistant had assumed that he was buying himself a wedding dress. It was that Gwen was getting married. She was getting something that he would never have. He had lost his chance when Lisa died. He had lost his chance at finding someone else when he committed himself to Torchwood as penance for the blood on his hands. And then he'd fallen in love with Jack Harkness, and that effectively precluded any semblance of conventionality. *I'll never be married. I'll never have a family of my own. I'll never have a normal life...* And he was taking it out on Jack.

Luckily the first few hours of the wedding were so hectic that he didn't have a chance to think about it again. Not until they were sitting in the pew watching Gwen and Rhys exchange their vows did Ianto return to his reflections of the past. It was with a heavy heart that he watched Gwen say *'I do.'* He blinked back the tears that were threatening to fall. *I should have had this. I almost had this. I've
After the ceremony, Ianto sat at their table in the dining room, still lost in his thoughts of what might have been. He was recalled back to the present when Jack leaned towards him and said, "So, I let you drive the SUV…"

Ianto felt dread gripping his heart. *I'm not ready for this…* Ianto's mind started desperately searching for an excuse, but he was saved when Gwen raced up to their table. "Jack! The Nostrovite killed Mervin!"

It was all Ianto needed to hear. *Oh thank god…* "I'll DJ the party," Ianto interjected quickly, glancing at Jack to see how he would react.

Jack crossed his arms over his chest and glared at him. *Well, I supposed it could have been worse. Besides, I win that argument,* he thought feeling a little bit smug at his cleverness… "Oh, Ianto, would you? That would be spectacular! Thank you, sweetheart." Gwen kissed Ianto on the cheek and hurried away again.

Ianto grinned triumphantly at Jack before heading to the DJ booth. His victory was short lived, however, when he sensed Jack's initial amusement turn into dejection. *Brilliant, now I feel guilty on top of everything else…* He spent the first part of the wedding reception wistfully remembering how easy everything had been with Lisa and chastising himself for hurting Jack. But as he watched Jack using his charm to get everyone to drink the retcon laced champagne, he felt his affection for the older man welling up inside him. *I love him…* He smiled fondly as he watched Jack flirt with an elderly woman who was coyly batting her eyelashes at him like a teenage girl… *and even now I'm surprised by how much he means to me.*

He watched Jack and Tosh dance feeling immense affection for both of them, but he could sense Jack's melancholy. *I wonder what he's thinking about. Does he ever long for a normal life? It seems so unlike Jack, but he did tell me that he'd been married before. That must mean that he wanted this at some point in his life…Is he remembering his own wedding with the same wistfulness that I'm remembering Lisa? Do we both secretly long for the same thing? Sometimes I think our similarities are more numerous than our differences…* He suddenly felt Jack's grief as though it were his own. *Both of us have lost so much…* It was at that moment that he knew he wanted to dance with Jack. *I just have to find the courage to do it…*

He watched Jack and Gwen dance with mixed feelings. He knew Jack was saying goodbye to Gwen in his own way - he could sense his fear of losing her, but he couldn't help feeling slightly territorial. *Gwen's married, and Jack's… with me, yet they're looking at each other like they…* *Time to make your move Ianto Jones.* It was with a mixture of terror, exhilaration and a sense of liberation that he finally cut in. It was probably the boldest thing he had ever done in his life.

"May I… erm… Achem…"

His heart was pounding as Jack took him into his arms, but his face remained passive. He wanted Jack to know that he'd noticed the way he was looking at Gwen. "Afraid she'll leave Torchwood?" he asked Jack casually.

"How did you know?" Jack asked, surprised.

*Because I could sense it across the room… and your regret at letting her go…* "Staking your claim?" Jack asked.

"Sorry?" Ianto asked, confused out of his musings.
"You could have picked any moment to dance with me tonight, but you chose to cut in when I was dancing with Gwen."

"You were busy retconning the wedding party," Ianto replied mildly, though he was feeling somewhat defensive.

"Are you staking your claim on me?" Jack repeated the question.

Ianto was surprised that Jack had picked up on that. *I suppose I am...* His first instinct was to deny it, but he chose instead to be honest. "Do I need to?"

Jack pulled back to look at Ianto's face. "No," Jack said, leaning his forehead against Ianto's and caressed his cheek. "No, you don't."

Ianto felt like his heart had momentarily stopped beating. He closed his eyes, allowing himself to forget about the rest of the world for a few precious moments and just enjoy being in the arms of the person he loved. *I wish this moment would never end...* Then Jack pulled back into a more traditional dance embrace. "You're just dancing with me because you know that everyone here has been retconned," he said huffily.

"Not the team," Ianto replied pedantically, not wanting his moment of triumph to go unrecognized.

"No, not the team," Jack conceded.

Jack pulled Ianto closer to him and pressed his cheek against Ianto's. *And now he's worried that I'm going to leave him too... But I belong with him...* "Jack," Ianto whispered in his ear. "I'm not going anywhere."

Jack pulled Ianto tighter to him, and Ianto knew that he was exactly where he wanted to be. He heard the lyrics to the song that was playing, 'You do something to me, somewhere deep inside. I'm hoping to get close to a peace I'll never find," and he was struck by their significance.

The song faded and a silence filled the room. Ianto pulled away from him, looking into his eyes. "Thanks for dancing with me," Jack said.

Ianto reached up a hand and gently stroked Jack's cheek. *I've lost so much, but I've gained so much more...*
Chapter Notes

My eternal gratitude to the scintillating riftintime, who is my sine qua non of this story.

After a long night of clean-up, Jack, Ianto, Tosh and Owen walked wearily to their cars. Tosh yawned widely and turned to look at Owen. "Could you drive my car back to Cardiff, Owen? I'm exhausted," she asked, holding out her keys.

"Yeah, no problem Tosh," Owen said, taking the car keys from her hand and putting a protective arm around her shoulders. "Let's get you home," he said, leading her to her car.

Jack and Ianto caught each other's eye and smiled. They bid Tosh and Owen goodnight and watched them drive off. Then Ianto turned to Jack and held out the SUV keys. "No, you drive," Jack said smiling. "You've earned it."

Ianto smirked and raised an eyebrow at him. "So this is my reward for dancing with you? I get to drive the SUV home?"

Jack pushed Ianto against the SUV and pressed their bodies together. "No, you'll get your reward later," he whispered into Ianto's ear.

"Promises, promises," Ianto teased.

"You know I get all excited when I have a chance to use my massive weapon," Jack said, kissing his neck.

Ianto chuckled. "Oh lord, we'll never hear the end of that one will we? Jack had to use his massive weapon to kill the Nostrovite."

Jack grinned at him, and Ianto rolled his eyes. "Get in the car, Jack," he said, pushing Jack away, but Jack caught Ianto's smile as he turned.

They were unusually silent on the ride back to the Hub. Jack spent most of the time staring out the window at the dark Welsh countryside, lost in his thoughts. He felt emotionally exhausted after the whirlwind of Gwen's wedding. His mind raced through the myriad of emotions he'd experienced that night… My own wedding… my team, destined for a dangerous and unpredictable life… my immortality… all the lovers I've lost… losing Gwen… Ianto… He made a restless movement as the feelings threatened to overwhelm him, and he suddenly wanted to be alone for a little while. He needed some time to think. He glanced over at Ianto, and as if reading his mind, Ianto asked, "Do you want me to go back to my flat?"

Jack was silent for a minute, not knowing how to respond. I don't want him to go… not after he was brave enough to dance with me. I know it was hard for him… "Why don't you drop me off at the Hub, then go and get us some breakfast. I'm starved after all that work," he said, attempting a smile.

"Really, Jack. I can go home…" Ianto started.

Jack reached over and took Ianto's hand. "No, I want you there. I just need a few minutes to myself."
Ianto nodded his understanding and squeezed Jack's hand. Jack smiled at how easy things were with Ianto. At least some things… He seems to understand me so well, better than anyone I've ever been with…

A few minutes later Ianto pulled up by the water tower and Jack jumped out. "See you in a few," he said to Ianto as he closed the passenger door.

He strolled around to the waterfront and spent a few minutes gazing out over the bay, watching the sun rise. How many millions of sunrises will I witness? Will they ever lose their majesty? Will this ever get any easier? Will it ever stop hurting so much…? With a sigh, he turned his back to the water and headed into the tourist information office.

As the cogwheel door rolled opened, he put his hand in his coat pocket and pulled out the confetti that he'd saved from the wedding. He blew it out of his hand and watched it flutter to the ground with a smile on his face. I do love weddings…

He went into this office and took out the small lock box from his desk drawer. He chuckled as he looked at some of the photographs of himself in uniform. Then he found the picture he was looking for. My wedding day… so long ago... He stared at the picture, thinking about her. I was happy that day. I knew that I was trapped in this time period, and I made the best of it. I didn't realize then what my immortality meant. I didn't know the heartache I would suffer because of it. I didn't know how many people I would lose…

He heard the Hub door roll open, and he quickly put the pictures back in his box and wiped the tears from his face. Ianto appeared in his office doorway a moment later. He stared at Jack for a few moments. Then he set the paper bag he was carrying down on Jack's desk. "I've brought some muffins. I'm going to go catch up on some sleep at my flat."

Jack didn't respond. He couldn't decide whether or not he wanted Ianto there. "I'll be back in a few hours," Ianto said, starting to turn from his doorway.

"No, wait," Jack said, before he had even realized that he wanted Ianto to stay.

Ianto turned around and looked at him. "Stay…" Jack said, indicating the chair across from him.

Ianto sat across from Jack and looked at him with an unreadable expression on his face. Jack sighed and opened the box again. He took out the photograph of him and his wife and handed it to Ianto.

Ianto looked down at it, and then looked back up at Jack. "We were married in 1904," Jack said, indicating the photo. "She died a year later during childbirth."


He felt the tears well up in his eyes again, and he let them fall unchecked. "It was the first and only time I've ever been married," Jack finished, wiping another tear that was sliding down his cheek.

Ianto was silent, staring at the photograph that he still held in his hand. Jack realized that he was grateful for the chance to talk about something that had pained him for so long. "You must have loved her very much," Ianto said with something in his voice that Jack couldn't quite identify.

Jack sighed. "I loved her with innocence."

Ianto looked confused so Jack explained, "I had only just realized that I was immortal. I hadn't even begun to understand what it meant, what the implications were… I'm not even sure that I believed it
"I was still looking for a way to fix my Vortex Manipulator. I knew that I had to get to twenty-first century to find the Doctor, but so far I'd been unsuccessful, and a part of me had given up. I'd begun to accept that I was stuck here, so I fell in love and got married," Jack shrugged. "But I kept working for Torchwood. It paid well, and I was still hoping that one day I'd find some alien tech that would fix this," he said, fingering his wrist-strap.

Ianto looked like he was about to ask a question, so Jack continued, "She didn't know about Torchwood. She was completely innocent, but kind. I don't think I've ever met a kinder person in my life. She was good through and through. She didn't have a cruel bone in her body. Nothing like me…"

He stopped and looked into Ianto's eyes, but he saw only affection looking back at him. How can he know what I'm capable of and still not judge me…? Because he doesn't know everything. If he did… "She didn't know about me. She didn't know anything about me. She saw me as a dashing hero who saved her from a vicious attacker."

Ianto raised his eyebrows. "Blowfish," Jack explained. "There were a lot of them around in the early 1900s. Not sure why…"

Ianto nodded once in understanding. He looked back down at the photograph. "She was beautiful," he said before he handed it back to Jack.

Jack took it from Ianto's hand and had one last look at his wife before he opened his lock box and placed it carefully back inside. "It was better that she died not knowing about me. It would have broken her heart," Jack said sadly.

"Maybe you didn't give her enough credit," Ianto said, looking at him. "Sometimes people surprise you."

"Not much surprises me anymore," Jack said bitterly.

But that's not true... He looked up at Ianto, looking back at him without any judgment in his blue eyes. "Except for you…" he added honestly.

Ianto reached across the desk and took Jack's hand. "Ianto… I long ago realized that marriage… that normal life… well, I'll never have it."

Ianto squeezed his hand, and Jack looked at the remarkable young man sitting across from him. All of the guilt he'd felt earlier rose again to the surface. Using all of his willpower, he forced himself to say, "But there's still a chance for you. You're young, handsome, brilliant. You could make someone really happy. You could leave all of this behind, find someone nice, start a family…" Jack's voice faded and he looked around him, trying to find the strength to go on.

He glanced up at Ianto who was shaking his head. "No, Jack. I belong here," Ianto said calmly.

"Why, Ianto? You don't have to choose this life! Is it because of Lisa?" Jack asked.

Ianto let go of his hand and leaned back in his chair, sighing. "After she died, I stayed at Torchwood to make amends. I had the blood of two innocent people on my hands, not to mention the guilt from betraying you and the team." He paused, frowning at the memory. "But I found my place here. This is where I'm supposed to be, Jack. Here, with the team, and Torchwood," he looked into Jack's eyes, "And with you."
"But…” Jack started to say, but Ianto cut him off.

"I made my decision a long time ago, Jack. I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be."

Ianto rose to his feet and held out his hand. Jack took it, wanting to say more, but he saw the determined look in Ianto's eyes. *I know that look…* Ianto pulled him to his feet and into his arms, holding him close for a few moments. Then he pulled back and looked into Jack's eyes. "And I have no regrets," he added.

Jack felt his stomach knot, and he blinked back tears as he caressed Ianto's cheek. Ianto kissed him tenderly on the lips and whispered against his mouth, "Let's go to bed, Jack."
Ianto took Jack's hand and led him to the hatch. He was exhausted. It had not only been an emotionally exigent day, but a physically strenuous one as well. He had a throbbing headache and his whole body was sore. *When was the last time I ate…?* He had skipped the dinner as he was busy DJing the wedding reception. He thought with regret for the muffins he had left sitting on Jack's desk. *The two glasses of champagne didn't help either. Maybe I should have just gone home… But then would Jack have ever told me about his wife?*

He climbed wearily down the ladder into Jack's bedroom. He felt completely drained. His emotions were a chaotic muddle that he needed some time to sort through, and part of him craved the quiet and solitude of his flat. He had almost been relieved when he sensed that Jack wanted to be alone. *But Jack wanted me to come back to the Hub…* and it was in Ianto's nature to put the needs of others before his own.

He had meant what he'd said to Jack. *I do belong with Torchwood, and with Jack. I just wish I knew exactly what that means – being with Jack…* He sighed inwardly as he took off his suit jacket and hung it over a chair. *So much has happened today… memories of Lisa, Jack and Gwen's dance… Jack and my dance… Jack's unexpected confidences… Gwen's wedding has had a profound effect on all of us…*

He was touched that Jack had shared his wedding photo with him and told him about his wife, but at the same time, it filled him with uncertainty… *So Jack's capable of love after all… and commitment… Or at least he was once… Why does that simultaneously scare the hell out of me and fill me with… envy? Because thinking that Jack was incapable of committing himself to someone… it was safer somehow. But at the same time, that was a Jack of over one hundred years ago. The Jack now would scorn the very idea of love…*

Ianto begun to undress mechanically, and he was so lost in his thoughts that he was startled when he felt Jack's hands fingering his collar. "I love this shirt," Jack said, unbuttoning the top button and kissing his neck. "You look really hot in pink…" he murmured against Ianto's skin.

Ianto tried to pull himself into the present and pay attention to Jack, but his mind was still whirling. *I thought this thing we have couldn't possibly go any further. It was safe in the confines of the Hub and of Torchwood… But dancing with Jack tonight… it made it more real somehow… Just like it did when we ran into Alun…*

Jack kissed up Ianto's neck and along his jaw until he reached his lips. He pressed his tongue into Ianto's mouth, and Ianto responded mechanically, still lost in his thoughts. *Knowing that Jack's capable of falling in love changes my concept of him… not that he'd ever fall in love with me. I know he cares about me, but I don't think it will ever go any further than that. Is that what's bothering me? I desperately want him to love me but at the same time I'm terrified of him loving me?*

Jack unbuttoned the rest of Ianto's shirt and slid it from his shoulders. He put his arms around Ianto
and kissed him again. Ianto closed his eyes and tried to focus on Jack, but he couldn't quell his racing thoughts. And the way he said it too, so nonchalantly... 'I fell in love and I got married'...and he actually shrugged, like it was no big deal... I can't imagine the Jack of this century being so cavalier about falling in love... I can't imagine the Jack of this century falling in love period. What happened to him in those hundred years that changed him so drastically? How many loses has he had to endure? What must it have been like to be with the Jack of a hundred years ago...? But then it wouldn't be my Jack...

As though on autopilot, Ianto slid Jack's suspenders off his shoulders and unbuttoned his shirt. He slipped his hands under Jack's t-shirt and ran his fingers down the skin on Jack's chest. And I don't understand the rules of dating a man, let alone an immortal one from the 51st century. With women, there are the obvious milestones... dating, commitment, moving in together, proposal, engagement, marriage, family, growing old together. There's always something with which to measure the relationship. With Jack, I'm completely lost. None of those things will ever happen with him, so I'm never sure where we are. I don't even know if we're in committed relationship. Does Jack even do that? It seems so unlike him, yet he's done it before... Somehow knowing that changes things...

Jack undid Ianto's trousers and let them slide to the floor. Ianto perfunctorily kicked off his shoes and stepped out of the trousers. What are we? He's always saying 'I used to have a boyfriend who...' but he's never called me that. Oh god, do I even want that? Well I don't have to worry about it because it will never happen. I think this is all we'll ever be... stolen moments in the dark, hiding in this cave of a bedroom or in the confines of the Hub... with the occasional public gesture to add to the drama.

Ianto watched Jack undress without really seeing him. Is that why he's with me? I'm easy because I'll never ask him for anything? I heard what he said to Gwen when she asked what he was going to do when she left... 'Pizza, Ianto, save the world a couple of times'... like I'm some idle pastime – more fun than pizza, but less fun that saving the world... At the time I thought he was joking, but maybe he wasn't... Maybe that's how he actually sees me... Maybe I'm just convenient shag after all...

Jack put his arms around Ianto and pressed their naked bodies together, and Ianto suddenly felt the familiar urge to bolt rising up inside him. "I can't do this..." Jack sensed his reticence because he pulled back abruptly. "Where are you?" he asked, looking hard at Ianto. "Because you're not here."

Ianto opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. He stared stupidly at Jack, completely at a loss for words. After a long moment of silence, Jack pressed him. "What's going on with you?"

I don't know how to explain it, Ianto thought with momentary panic. I don't know what to say... When he still didn't reply, Jack stepped back further and crossed his arms over his chest. "Is it Lisa?"

Ianto started to deny it, but the words couldn't find their way out of his mouth. "Is this because of my dance with Gwen?" Jack persisted.

Ianto sighed and sat down on Jack's bed. "Is it because you danced with me in public?" Jack continued with what sounded like anger.

Ianto groaned and dropped his head into his hands. "It's everything."

He wanted to elaborate, but he just couldn't find the words to explain the multitude of thoughts running through his head. "I don't understand you. Fifteen minutes ago you told me that you're exactly where you're supposed to be, but now you're acting like..." Jack waved his hand in a frustrated gesture.

"And I meant that, Jack. It's just..." Ianto stopped again, not knowing how to continue.
"It's just what? As long as it's in private? If I'd known dancing with me was going to cause this much drama, I'd have said forget it. It wasn't worth it," Jack said, jutting his chin out in his familiar defensive posture.

_It wasn't worth it?_ Ianto felt resentment rise up in him. He narrowed his eyes. "Fuck you, Jack," he spat.

"You know what, Ianto? Fuck you for being ashamed to be with me!"

Ianto was surprised at that. "I'm not ashamed," he said instinctively. _Am I? Is that what this is? But it's more than that…_

"Why didn't you want to dance with me then?" Jack asked furiously.

"I did dance with you," Ianto replied defensively.

Jack scoffed. "That was just to mark your territory… and get one up on Gwen."

"That's absurd," Ianto was feeling distinctly uncomfortable and he shifted on the bed.

"Is it?" Jack asked meaningfully.

When Ianto didn't answer, Jack said, "Why don't you just go home, Ianto. It's pretty obvious that you don't want to be here."

Ianto recoiled. He felt like he'd been slapped in the face. He blinked as the implication of Jack's words permeated his addled mind. He realized that he'd come to treat the Hub and Jack's bedroom as his own. _I almost forgot that this is Jack's home, not mine... and definitely not ours…_

Ianto looked at Jack, who was glaring back at him with his arms crossed over his chest, his emotions completely closed off. Ianto shut his eyes, feeling the familiar burning in the back of his eyeballs. He rubbed his hands over his face. _I will not lose control. I will not let him see me shed tears over this._

He took a minute to compose himself, then got up and started retrieving his scattered clothing.

He stiffened as he felt Jack's hand on his arm, and he looked up at Jack. They stared into each other's eyes for a moment. Ianto saw the hurt in Jack's eyes. _This is absurd_, he thought, and then they were in each other's arms. Ianto felt the regret radiating off Jack in waves. "I'm sorry," Ianto whispered in his ear. "I'm exhausted. It's been… well, it's been a difficult day."

He kissed Jack's mouth, this time giving Jack his full attention. They kissed sweetly, rather than passionately, and Jack pulled back, running his fingers through Ianto's hair. "Let's get you into bed before you collapse," he said with a melancholy smile.

Ianto touched Jack's cheek briefly in acknowledgement. _I'm sorry I can't explain it to you. And I'm sorry that I'm too tired to try…_ He pulled gently away from Jack, slid into bed and felt Jack get in behind him. He shifted so his back was pressed against Jack's chest, and he pulled Jack's arm around him, entwining their fingers. Jack held him close and kissed his shoulder. _Maybe it doesn't matter what we are… I just know that I want to be here…_ Ianto thought as he drifted off to sleep.
Jack lay with his arms wrapped around Ianto, feeling the rhythmic beat of his heart beneath their entwined hands. His slow, steady breathing was the only sound Jack could hear. Sleep eluded him – his mind was still racing with the tumult of emotions from the last twenty-four hours. He needed some time alone, and Ianto needed sleep. He pressed his lips gently to the nape of Ianto's neck, and carefully extricated himself. He grabbed his discarded clothes from the floor, and quietly climbed the ladder up to his office.

After quickly donning his trousers and t-shirt, Jack settled into his chair and took a moment to savor the solitude of the darkened Hub. He'd told Tosh and Owen not to come into work until after lunch, so he hoped that he and Ianto would have a few more hours of uninterrupted privacy.

He sighed deeply, thinking back to the argument they'd had earlier. Was this always going to be an issue between them? I thought we were past this… or at least I'd hoped we were past it… Will Ianto ever get over his 21st century hang ups? Given their lives working for Torchwood and his immortality, it shouldn't really matter. It wasn't as if they could ever have a normal life together, but it upset him nonetheless. It didn't matter what anyone else thought about them. With everything they'd been through together, seeing each other at their best and worst, nobody else could understand the bond they shared. Ianto knew more about him than anyone ever had, and despite all the recent turmoil, Jack was happier than he'd been in a very long time. Of course, Jack knew from bitter experience that things were rarely that simple.

He didn't want Ianto to feel ashamed of himself, or be ashamed to acknowledge that he and Jack were… well, whatever they were. He wanted Ianto to feel the same pride for himself that Jack felt for him. And, damn it, Jack wanted Ianto to be proud of him too… he wanted to feel worthy of Ianto's devotion and affection.

He felt an intense stab of remorse as he recalled the look of horror on Ianto's face when he'd suggested Ianto should go home – dismissing him as if he was nothing more than his employee. He hated the look of pain he saw in Ianto's eyes, despite his efforts to conceal it. And he hated being the cause of that pain.

Jack wasn't used to having to work so hard to get what he wanted. He wasn't used to having to work to understand someone. While it was strangely exhilarating, it was also confusing and frustrating. Ianto continued to challenge him in ways no one else ever had. But Jack loved a challenge, and he felt a renewed determination to truly understand Ianto Jones. And I do still have his diary, he thought smugly.

Mentally shaking himself from his reverie, he turned on his computer screen and opened the file containing the translation of Ianto's diary… I have some more reading to do.

Day 5 of Jack's disappearance.

I keep thinking about what Tosh said the other day; how Bilis manipulated Jack just like he did the
rest of us. I want to believe she's right – that Bilis somehow managed to discover our deepest fears and insecurities and exploited them to turn us against each other. I was so angry at Jack that day… If I had stood by his side instead of betraying him again, events might have played out very differently… Tosh is right about one thing at least – the vision of Lisa on its own wouldn't have been enough to cause me to betray Jack. I'm sure of that.

Jack paused, thinking back to that terrible day. You were angry because I hurt you, he thought regretfully. I know that now. It wasn't your fault. I know you wouldn't have turned against me otherwise. You're far too clever to fall for such an obvious trap. Bilis was smarter than we gave him credit for… Jack didn't doubt Ianto's loyalty to him, not then, and certainly not now.

He resumed reading the entry.

Tosh said that Jack and I had the strongest connection. Is that really true? I thought we had, well… something… indefinable yes, but something that was real. When we were together, if I tried hard enough, I could almost imagine being happy again… I was starting to feel… hopeful. And now I feel lost…

I want to understand why Jack said there was no one in his life. Of everything that's happened, these few words hurt more deeply than anything else. Is it simply that Jack didn't care about me at all? Or is there something more I could have done? Did he doubt my motives or sincerity? He always wanted me to stay, and I'd always want to leave… Did he think all I wanted from him was a warm and willing body? I can't bear the thought that he left thinking that's all he was to me.

Jack always seemed so lonely. He hid it well most of the time, but I could see it, because I felt so alone as well. He wore the mask of the fearless leader, but I caught glimpses of the man behind that mask. I suppose that's the curse of immortality – unrelenting loss and loneliness. And I foolishly thought I could make a difference. Is that why Jack said there is no one? Because the people in his life are not enough to assuage the torment of such profound loneliness? Perhaps believing he has no one makes it easier for him…

Tosh said that she's sure Jack cared about me. I wish I could believe that. When he kissed me in front of the others, there was a sense of such desperation in that kiss. It was both thrilling and terrifying. I was so overwhelmed with relief that Jack was alive, I didn't even care that he was kissing me in front of the rest of the team. Well, not in that moment anyway. In that one glorious moment, nothing else mattered. It was almost as if he was afraid of losing me. But that can't be right. I'm just being fanciful again… Although there was the briefest instant where I thought I could sense him – a momentarily burst of intense emotion – a turbulent mix of remorse, pain, longing, desire, and affection. Perhaps I imagined it, but I've been wondering if Jack's shields slipped for just a fraction of a second while he was still in his weakened state.

Does any of this really matter now? Jack is gone, and I can't delude myself into thinking he'll ever come back – at least not in my lifetime. And the worst part… I find myself already thinking of him in the past tense.

Jack stopped again, feeling his throat constrict with emotion and his eyes start to burn. Yet again, he was astounded by Ianto's perceptiveness and the depth of the younger man's feelings. "I did care, Ianto," he whispered. "And it was real." I'm sorry I let you doubt that. Everything you felt from me was true. I'll always care about you – more than you know.

He recalled how desperately he'd clung to that memory of kissing and embracing Ianto after Abaddon during his time on the Valiant. Not for the first time, Jack wondered if anyone else had made the effort to try and understand him the way Ianto did. He very much doubted it.
Day 6 of Jack’s disappearance.

I want to hate Jack for leaving, for abandoning the team, for abandoning me. I can't though, not really. Somehow, I can never bring myself to truly despise him. It might be easier if I could. He never promised me anything. But he let me think I could count on him, that I had a friend, one person who understood what I've lost. It didn't matter whether we talked or not, his presence alone made life more bearable. He gave me hope that my life could be about something more than merely enduring. I hate him for giving me that, and then so carelessly tearing it away and casting me adrift once more, lost and alone.

I used him… But he also used me, took what he wanted, and now he's moved on. Was this part of my punishment? A cruel reminder that he'll always be the master conman? Jack can appear cold-hearted and ruthless, but I'm certain that underneath it all, he's not a cruel or vindictive man. He likes people to think he's narcissistic, ruthless and unfeeling, but I've seen beyond that. And I liked what I saw there, the real Jack… I deluded myself into thinking he liked what he saw in me too. How pathetic is that? I feel like such a fool… but it doesn't make me miss him any less.

More than anything, I wish I'd had the chance to say goodbye. To be wrapped in the warmth of him just once more, to feel his touch, see his beautiful smile. I wish I didn't miss him. It's ridiculous all the daft things I miss about him – his outrageous flirting, the harassment, innuendos and double entendres, his ludicrous histrionics, even the way he shovels food into his mouth with complete abandon – every intensely annoying habit and mannerism… I miss them all. In anyone else, I wouldn't be able to stand it, but in Jack, they seemed almost endearing. I wish I could see him just one more time… even if I meant nothing at all to him, he still saved me. He gave me a chance to redeem myself, and I never took the opportunity to thank him.

Jack couldn't help but smile briefly at Ianto's colorful description of his habits. He couldn't muster much indignation knowing that Ianto found him endearing. You never needed to thank me, he thought sadly.

I hope he's happy wherever he is now. He deserves to be happy. We can't begrudge him that when he's given so much. We must seem so small and limited to him, when he can have all of time and space as his playground. It's beyond naïve to think this could ever be enough for someone like him. In a few years time, I wonder if he'll even spare a thought for me, if he'll wonder what became of me.

I should hate Jack for abandoning me, but I hate myself more for giving him the power to make me feel abandoned… leaving me to feel like I've lost my best friend.

Jack quickly averted his eyes from the screen. His stomach churned. Each word felt like a nail being driven into his heart. I abandoned him, he thought, just like the Doctor and Rose abandoned me. He'd never thought of it in such absolute terms before, but Ianto was right. Ianto's usually right… Jack thoughts were drawn back to that fateful day on Satellite Five… they had been his closest friends, like family to him, and they had left him behind. He'd never felt more worthless and alone. He'd trusted them, counted on them. Just as Ianto had trusted and counted on me.

He knew Ianto had forgiven him for leaving, and understood why Jack had to take his chance to get some answers. However, no matter how justified his reasons, it didn't mitigate the pain he'd caused. Despondently he realized Ianto would always have doubts. How could he ever trust me not to leave again? Nothing he could say would ever reassure him, just as Jack knew he would never entirely trust the Doctor again either…

He couldn't make any promises to Ianto, and he suspected Ianto wouldn't want him to. He may be required to leave again if he was needed. But I'll come back, he silently pledged. As long as you're here and you want me, I'll always come back.
Chapter Notes

This chapter was also written by my incredibly talented beta riftintime.

Jack was lost in his memories of the distant past. The anguish of being left behind by the Doctor and Rose was a wound that had never fully healed. *I spent so long cursing you, Doctor,* he thought. *Wondering what I did wrong... why I was being punished... why I was left behind like I meant nothing to you.* He'd felt so bitter and confused, and consumed with self-doubt. He knew only too well how deeply it hurt to feel abandoned.

"I'm so sorry Ianto", he murmured.

With a heavy heart, he turned reluctantly back to the screen and continued reading. The next two entries mainly detailed the daily activities of the team, and he was familiar with those events, so he quickly skimmed ahead...

**Day 9 of Jack's disappearance.**

*I stayed at my flat last night. I needed to get away from the Hub for a bit, away from the memories, away from his scent. It's hard being there. Everywhere I go, everywhere I look, everything I do, I'm reminded of Jack. All the things I used to enjoy doing – working in the archives, making coffee, taking care of Myfanwy – they're all painful reminders of him and leave me feeling empty.*

*At least at my flat, it's not as bad. Jack hadn't been there since I returned to work after Lisa. The memories there aren't as recent, and I keep them firmly locked away.*

*Despite my efforts, I had another dream about Jack. Again, it was unlike my usual dreams of him. The dream was strange, elusive... just out of reach, yet, it's in there somewhere, like it's buried away in my subconscious. Jack was different – older, broken, and sad. Why would I dream of Jack being older? And he was so terribly sad. That's the one impression I've been able to hold on to. It's very unsettling.***

*A phrase keeps going through my head today... "sine qua non"... Latin for "without which, nothing." It was originally a legal term, referring to something which is essential – a condition without which, it could not be. I don't know why I'm thinking about this – I can't remember reading it anywhere recently, or hearing anyone say it. It's hardly the sort of thing any of the others would say, and if they had, I would remember. It just seems to have popped into my head from out of nowhere. Brilliant, I might actually be going mad.*

Jack stared at the screen and frowned. He felt slightly dazed. *Without which nothing... "Sine qua non",* he whispered distractedly. *But that's... what made him say that? I haven't heard that phrase since... Can that possibly be a coincidence? And another unusual dream of me being older? Is it possible that... but I can't have... can I?*

Shaking his head in confusion, he focused back on the screen and started to read the next entry.

**Day 10 of Jack's disappearance.**
I've been dreading this day. One year ago today, my entire world fell apart. Exactly one year ago, the Battle of Canary Wharf took place, Torchwood One was destroyed, and over 800 people lost their lives. Not all of them were innocent, but most of them were... Lisa was.

Lisa... she was beautiful in mind, body and spirit. She was the kindest person I've ever known, so warm and generous and loving. It tears me apart when I think of what those metal monsters turned her into – to so utterly pervert someone so beautiful. She always saw the best in me, made me want to be better than I was.

I miss you Lisa. I'll always love you, and I'll never forget you. I promise. I hope I can make you proud. I'm trying to make a difference to honor your life.

Jack paused again, feeling a deep sorrow for Ianto's pain. He knew the heavy burden of guilt Ianto carried. He understood how it felt to live with the blood of innocent people on one's hands... how it rips your soul apart and you spend the rest of your life trying to make amends. But you deserve more, Ianto... Lisa loved you, and she would want you to be happy, he thought sadly.

Is Ianto happy? he asked himself. Jack didn't know if that was even possible with the insanity of their lives. Or has he resigned himself to this life? Ianto seemed less haunted, more alive and at peace with himself lately, but Jack couldn't be sure. Even now, he wondered if he only saw rare glimpses of the real Ianto Jones.

Jack found himself thinking again about the life Ianto should have. I should push you away. Tell you to go and never look back, forget about Torchwood and forget about me. I should force you to leave before you pay the ultimate price. Jack felt a churning in his gut at the thought of life without Ianto. But I can't. I need you too much. And I don't think I could bear the thought of you out there somewhere, on your own, and hating me for abandoning you again.

Jack closed his eyes, willing his stomach to settle and the constriction of his heart to ease. After several long moments, he took a deep breath, and focused again on his screen.

I don't think I'll ever understand why I was spared. Sometimes I still wish I hadn't been. I know I was one of the lucky ones. I couldn't save Lisa, but she saved me, even at the end. And when I finally had to let go, Jack was there, and he never gave up on me. If things had been different, I might have ended up like Matthew. I wasn't able to save him either. I was so consumed with trying to save Lisa, I couldn't think about helping anyone else. That's another contrition I have to live with, part of my penance.

I don't think the others have remembered what today is, and I didn't tell them. I didn't want them looking at me with more pity than they already do. I wish Jack was here. He would understand, and while we probably wouldn't have talked about it, his presence would be comforting. It always was.

I've scheduled a trip to Flat Holm for tonight. I need to get away from the Hub, just for a few hours. The Flat Holm survivors are more innocent souls whose lives have been torn apart. I couldn't help the survivors of Torchwood One, but I can do my part to help the victims of the Rift.

Jack looked away as he tried to hold back the tears that were threatening to fall. He felt devastated, knowing what Ianto had to go through alone.

He recalled that fateful evening in Bute Park where he had met an intriguing young Welshman, and everything had changed... He didn't want to think about what might have happened if Ianto hadn't stalked and flirted his way into Torchwood Three. And I might have been travelling with the Doctor now, he told himself. It would have been exciting and wonderful... free of burdens and responsibilities. But I would have missed out on so much...
Jack turned and gazed down through the hatch door to where Ianto was still sleeping. "I meant what I said, Ianto – I wouldn't change this for the world," he quietly affirmed.

With a heavy sigh, he roughly wiped at his eyes, and continued to read.

**Day 11 of Jack's disappearance.**

Yesterday was my first trip to Flat Holm since Jack left. It was only the second time I've travelled there on my own. The other times, it was always with Jack. I know he hated going there, and despite my attempts to reassure him, he never felt like he was doing enough. But some things just can't be fixed. I learned that lesson in the worst possible way. Ironically, it's one of the things I admired most about Jack – he made the impossible choices time and time again. That's what defines Jack as a hero to me. And it costs him dearly. I've witnessed that first hand. "Sometimes when you look into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you."

I don't think the others saw how much he suffered, not really... or they chose not to. If anything, Jack cared too deeply. Maybe that's something we had in common.

Jack paused, awestruck. He was stunned to learn that Ianto thought of him as a hero. He could scarcely believe that was possible after everything that had happened. He had perfected the role of the dashing hero, but deep down, he didn't feel heroic. More often than not, he felt like the monster Ianto had once accused him of being. But Ianto seemed to understand him. And he doesn't judge me... he doesn't see me as cold and heartless like the rest of the team seem to.

He continued reading.

It's going to be difficult keeping Flat Holm from the team, finding excuses to be away from the Hub for the time required to make these trips. But if they knew, it would just give them another reason to be angry at Jack. In any case, I won't betray Jack again. I keep his secrets, and I'll take them to my grave. I respect his reasons for not telling the others, but sometimes I wonder if it's the wisest choice... And while I was suspicious of his motives at first, he trusted me with this when he had no reason to. This is part of Jack's legacy, and I won't let him down.

I left the Hub early yesterday afternoon, using the excuse of needing to pick up supplies. I think the others were just relieved that I was getting some time above ground, so they didn't question me. Sometimes I can't stand the way they look at me... I don't want pity or sympathy or hollow reassurances. I know that's unfair, and that they care about me, but sometimes it feels unbearable. Sometimes I just want to run – get as far away as I can, and never look back. But I have a job to do. So I welcomed the solitude of the voyage out to the island. I kept thinking back to my first trip when we took Jonah there, and how distressed Jack had been. It was one of those rare glimpses of Jack the person, not Jack the Captain.

Helen welcomed me warmly, as she always does. I explained to her that Jack was away for an indefinite period of time, and I reassured her that I would continue to take care of everything. No need to concern her unduly just yet. I spent time with each of the residents. It's not easy – they're all so damaged and broken, but they seem to respond to me. I suppose it's just nice to have a visitor and someone different to talk to. And it reminded me that I can do some good here.

I stayed for the night, and returned this morning. I needed the time away, a brief respite from everything. It was a gamble, but I checked the Rift predictions before leaving the Hub. Before I left the island, I sat on the cliff top and watched the sunrise. It's so beautiful there, so remote, wild and untouched. Jack and I sat there once, huddled together against the chilled sea breeze, with his greatcoat wrapped around both of us. A simple moment of quiet companionship... I'll always treasure those stolen moments where nothing else seemed to exist.
Jack felt his eyes well up, and this time he couldn't stop the tears from falling. He fondly recalled that time on the cliff top. He remembered how relieved he'd felt at no longer having to bear the terrible burden alone, and how reassuring Ianto's gentle presence had been. Jack knew he had made the right decision in telling Ianto about Flat Holm, and this only confirmed it. Ianto's compassion and empathy were remarkable, and from that very first trip, Jack had witnessed how good Ianto was with the residents.

Reading Ianto's diary had again proved to be enlightening. Each word brought him a little closer to understanding the enigma of Ianto Jones, and each word only deepened the respect and affection he felt for the young Welshman. He continued to marvel at Ianto's inner strength and resilience.

Jack wiped at his face with the palms of his hands. He felt emotionally drained, overwhelmed with guilt and sadness. He couldn't fault Ianto for not completely trusting him, for holding back, and keeping parts of himself safely locked away. He realized he had given Ianto few reasons to trust him, but ample reasons to doubt him. He knew he had a long way to go if he ever hoped to truly earn the younger man's trust.

Amidst his turbulent dark emotions, he felt a surprisingly glimmer of hope. Ianto wanted him, the real him, and had written that he thought of Jack as his best friend. There was no doubt in Jack's mind that Ianto was the closest and most trusted friend he'd had in a very long time. He'd tried so hard to hold back, but he couldn't deny his feelings anymore. He was tired of fighting it, tired of keeping himself at a distance, tired of stopping himself from caring too much.

He knew the inevitable loss could very well break him.

Jack sighed wearily and closed the file. He didn't want to read more for now. It was painful – an all too potent reminder of his failings and missteps. He would read more of the diary soon, but now he just wanted to be with Ianto.

His eyes fell to the neglected bag of muffins sitting on the corner of his desk. He realized forlornly that he couldn't remember seeing Ianto eat in the best part of the last twenty-four hours. He takes care of everyone else, but never himself, he thought dejectedly. Maybe I should take care of him for once…

He smiled to himself as a plan formed in his mind. He could risk Ianto's wrath just this once, and make coffee for Ianto for a change. I'll serve Ianto coffee and muffins in bed… Jack chuckled as he thought of how Ianto would react… He'll think the world is ending… again. Jack hoped the sentiment would overshadow any issues Ianto might have with the quality of Jack's coffee. Jack knew he was perfectly capable of making a half-decent cup of coffee. It would never be in the same galaxy as Ianto's of course, but it wouldn't be that bad.

He would also take Ianto out for lunch and make sure he had a proper meal. It would be fun to do something so normal. Rift permitting, he reminded himself.

It was the least he could do.
Chapter Notes

A resounding round of applause to riftintime for giving us two fabulous chapters. You're amazing! And thanks too for being the most brilliant beta... you gave me so many ideas for this chapter and helped me get back into the swing of things.

Ianto woke to the smell of coffee and was momentarily confused. He opened a sleepy eye and immediately shut it again. That can't possibly be right, his sluggish brain told him. I could have sworn I just saw Jack standing there holding out a mug of coffee and a muffin on a plate. Is this a dream? He reached a hand up and rubbed his eyes to clear away the last vestiges of sleep. He cautiously opened his eyes again. Jack was still standing there proffering the mug and plate with a grin on his face. "I've made you breakfast," Jack announced, his grin broadening.

Ianto sat bolt upright in bed and wrenches open the drawer in the bedside table. His fingers scrabbled for the gun that was always kept there. Jack took a step backward. "Ianto, what are you doing?" he asked bewildered.

"Who are you?" Ianto demanded, finally clasping his hand around the gun. "And what have you done with Jack?" he finished as he pulled the gun from the drawer.

He quickly pulled out the clip to check that the gun was loaded. Jack laughed nervously. "I just thought I'd make you coffee for a change," he said, putting the plate and the mug of coffee down on the bedside table.

Ianto pushed the clip back into place and pointed the gun at Jack. He wasn't quite sure if he was joking around with Jack, or if he really thought that an alien had taken over Jack's body. Stranger things have happened, and Jack bringing me coffee is about the strangest one yet... It is Torchwood after all...


Ianto put his left hand under his right to steady his arm and looked at Jack. It's probably him, he reasoned to himself. But I might as well make sure... "Prove it," he said aloud.

"Ianto, put the gun down," Jack said in his best commanding voice.

"Oh sure. And if you're an alien who's taken over Jack's body, I should just obey you then because you told me to put the gun down authoritatively," Ianto said sarcastically.

Jack huffed and mumbled something that sounded like, "I'm not that bad, am I?" but Ianto couldn't be sure what he'd said.

"Tell me something only Jack would know," Ianto challenged as he readjusted his grip on the handle.

Jack looked hurt. "Is it that unusual that I would bring you breakfast?"
"Yes." Ianto cocked the trigger and took aim.

"Alright, alright," Jack said, "But you know that bullets won't kill me – well at least not permanently."

"Common knowledge," Ianto said, not lowering his hand. "Prove that you're Jack Harkness," he repeated. *This is going to be good*, he thought with amusement.

"I'm from the 51st century. I was born on the Boeshane Peninsula. I'm a former companion of the Doctor, and now I'm the leader of Torchwood Three."

"Easily discovered," Ianto replied coolly.


Ianto narrowed his eyes and raised the gun to aim at Jack's temple. "Who are you and what have you done with Jack Harkness?"

"Alright," Jack said, raising his hands up in surrender. Then he muttered, "I feel like I should be offended."

Ianto just kept his eyes on his target. "We just stopped a Nostrovite from using Gwen as a surrogate mother at her wedding to Rhys, Owen is a walking dead man which hasn't lessened Tosh's obsession with him, and I had to practically beg you to dance with me at Gwen's wedding, even though you're my…" Jack stopped and looked away.

Ianto raised an eyebrow, fairly certain that it was indeed Jack Harkness standing in front of him, but not quite ready to give up the charade. "I'm your what?" he managed to say with a straight face.

Jack was silent for a moment, then he continued on. "I was dead for three days after Abaddon, then I left with the Doctor for three months, but it was actually a year – the year that never was – where I was imprisoned aboard the Valiant."

"I'm sure if an alien species had cloning capabilities, they would be perfectly able to discover that about you," Ianto stated practically.

Jack made an irritated noise. "Come on, Ianto."

Ianto raised his eyebrow higher. Jack sighed. "We've been sleeping together since you started working here, though at first you did it to con your way into Torchwood."

"On record," Ianto replied.

"The first time we had sex was over my desk and the second time was in the firing range," Jack offered.

"CCTV cameras," Ianto responded swiftly.

"We erased them," Jack argued.

Ianto shrugged mildly. "They could probably be recovered."

"You taught me how to play Naked Hide and Seek," Jack tried hopefully.

"Again, CCTV cameras. You're going to have to do better than that…" Ianto said smoothly, still
aiming the gun at Jack's head and now thoroughly enjoying himself.

Jack thought for a moment. "I asked you out on a date in an office when we were looking for the fake canisters for John Hart after I returned from traveling with the Doctor."

Ianto scoffed. "The whole team knows that."

"And after our first date we shagged in the back seat of the SUV with an unconscious Weevil in the boot," Jack continued with a lascivious grin.

"Tosh knows about that, so that probably means the whole team knows too," Ianto said, willing the muscles of his face to maintain their neutral expression.

Jack threw up his hands in a desperate gesture. "Martha sent you a UNIT outfit…" Jack started and before Ianto could protest he said, "I know, I know, CCTV cameras… Hell…"

Jack looked lost in thought for a moment, but Ianto was sure that Jack was enjoying the game as well. He couldn't get a read on Jack's emotions, so either it was an alien or Jack was playing along. Jack crossed his arms over his chest as a devilish look spread across his features. "So," he said slyly. "Did you ever find out whether or not that measuring tape was an alien device that lied?"

Ianto had to bite his tongue not to laugh. "You have a copy of my diary on your computer. It could easily have been hacked," Ianto responded, shrugging a shoulder nonchalantly.

Jack sighed theatrically. "Oh!" He snapped his fingers. "I've got it! We always have scotch when we're going to have a serious discussion! You didn't write about that in your diary… or if you did, I haven't gotten that far…" Jack cut himself off and looked distinctly guilty.

"You what?" Ianto said, almost dropping the gun. "You haven't gotten that far yet?"

"I mean… er… I didn't read… I… you know…" Jack faltered pathetically.

"What are you doing? Committing it to memory?" Ianto pressed.

Jack didn't respond, but he looked embarrassed. "You bastard! I'm deleting that file from your computer," Ianto growled. "I should have done it ages ago."

Jack looked momentarily alarmed, but then he smirked. "I've already saved it to my Vortex Manipulator," he said, holding up his arm and grinning victoriously.

Ianto glanced at the device that never left Jack's wrist and rolled his eyes. "Of course you did. But I'll get it some day…"

"No you won't," Jack said confidently.

Ianto considered sticking his tongue out at Jack, but he wasn't quite finished with their game. "Maybe I should shoot you, just to be sure that you really are Jack…" Ianto taunted.

Jack groaned audibly. "I'd rather you didn't. Besides, you'd have to clean up the mess."

Ianto rolled his eyes and shook his head deprecatingly. "This is what I get for trying to do something nice for you?" Jack made another dramatic gesture. "And you're not even going to try the coffee I made for you?"

"You actually made that?" Ianto asked, so shocked that he lowered the gun briefly, but he caught himself and took aim again. "You didn't go out and buy it?" he asked.
"Nope, I made it myself," Jack responded proudly.

"With *my* coffee machine?" Ianto asked horrified.

Jack rolled his eyes in a very Ianto-like fashion. "I can fly several different types of spacecrafts and handle technology that you people haven't even dreamed of yet. I think I can work a coffee machine," he chastised.

Ianto snorted. "Yeah, but will it still work after you're done with it?"

"I didn't hurt your precious coffee machine," Jack said sardonically. "Besides, that's not the point. It was supposed to be about the gesture…"

Jack looked so hurt that Ianto almost relented… almost, but not quite. "You just need to prove to me that you're Jack Harkness and I'll lower my weapon," he said evenly.

Jack looked lost for a moment before he grinned mischievously. "I may not be able to convince you with words… but I can show you…” he suggested with a salacious leer.

"Oh, you can, can you?" Ianto asked coyly.

Jack leaned forward and took Ianto's face in his hands. He kissed Ianto, sliding his tongue into Ianto's mouth. Ianto put the gun down and put his arms around Jack, kissing him back ardently. Jack pushed him down on the bed and they kissed until they both ran out of air. "Jack," Ianto breathed.

"Told you it was me," Jack whispered into his skin. "I just thought I'd make you coffee and bring you breakfast for a change. You didn't have to go pulling your weapon on me... Well, actually…” Jack started.


"Ianto…"

"Is the world ending again?"

Jack burst out laughing.
Jack was still laughing when Ianto asked, "No seriously, Jack. Is the world ending again?"

"I knew you were going to ask me that! No, the world isn't ending, aliens haven't invaded my body…"

"Clone?" Ianto suggested.

"Not a clone…" Jack said, kissing his neck. "Just me…"

Jack kissed up his neck, sucking on the skin behind his ear. "Convinced yet?"

"Nope, you're going to have to do better than that…" Ianto teased.

Jack sat up grinning with excitement. He pulled off his t-shirt and then stood and removed his trousers. Ianto stared at him. "You certainly look like Jack…" he said coyly, as he eyed Jack up and down.

Jack chuckled and lay down on top of Ianto, kissing him again. Ianto pulled him close and ran his hands down Jack's spine. "You taste like Jack…" he said in between kisses. "Well, maybe I should make sure," he said, as he rolled them over so Jack was on his back and Ianto was on top. He kissed and tongued his way down Jack's chest, stopping to suck on his nipples. Jack groaned as Ianto bit on the sensitive flesh.

Ianto ran his tongue down Jack's stomach until he came to his cock which was already hard. He kissed the skin around his groin and bit on his inner thighs. Jack started panting as Ianto teased him mercilessly with his lips, his tongue and his teeth. Ianto ran his tongue up Jack's shaft. Then he took Jack into his mouth, allowing Jack to slide deep inside him. He slowly drew his mouth up Jack's shaft. Then he took Jack into his mouth, relaxing his throat, and used his tongue to put pressure on all of Jack's sensitive spots. He licked at the cum that was already leaking from the head of Jack's cock. "I think you taste like Jack," he said, grinning impishly. "One more thing to check," he said as he spread Jack's legs.

Jack moaned as Ianto tongued the ring of muscle at his entrance. "Yeah, you taste like Jack," Ianto confirmed, smiling wickedly.

*I love when he takes control*, Jack thought as he reached into the drawer in the bedside table and took out the bottle of lube. He held it out to Ianto who took it from him with a grin and flipped the cap open. He coated a finger and inserted it gently into Jack. Jack sucked in his breath as Ianto pressed against the bundle of nerves inside.

Ianto quickly prepared Jack while using his tongue against Jack's cock to tease him mercilessly. Jack was panting by the time Ianto laid down beside him, turning Jack so his back was pressed to Ianto's chest. Jack felt Ianto slowly breach him from behind, and he sighed with pleasure. Ianto pushed himself deep into Jack and paused to let Jack adjust to his presence. Jack groaned as Ianto filled him,
loving the feeling of Ianto buried deep inside him. Jack turned his face and kissed Ianto, tasting himself in Ianto's mouth. Ianto pulled him close and thrust into him from behind, running his fingers over Jack's chest, grazing his nipples with his fingernails. "Yep, you definitely feel like Jack," Ianto whispered into Jack's ear.

"Told you it was me..." Jack managed to get out in between cries of pleasure.

Ianto held Jack's body close to his as he thrust into Jack. They kept their lips pressed together, alternatingly kissing and panting as they moved together. Ianto reached around and took Jack's cock in his hand. Jack put his hand on top of Ianto's and together they stroked him as Ianto continued to thrust, moaning into each other's mouths as they both climaxed.

Ianto rolled away from Jack as he caught his breath. Jack sat up and leaned against the wall, pulling Ianto in between his legs. Ianto lay back against Jack's chest, and Jack put his arms around him.
"Was that my reward for bringing you breakfast? Having a gun pointed at me then getting thoroughly buggered?"

"Something like that," Ianto replied nonchalantly.

Jack chuckled and kissed the top of Ianto's head. He reached over and took the muffin off the plate. He broke it in half and handed half to Ianto. He took a bite out of the other half. "You're just dying to say something about crumbs in the bed, aren't you?" he asked Ianto affectionately.

"Well, I suppose these sheets are due for a wash anyway," Ianto said, taking a bite from his half of the muffin. "Besides," Ianto said after he'd swallowed. "I've quite gotten used to your atrocious manners in bed."

"You know," Jack started, "I'll have you know that I slept with Miss Manners..."

"Of course you did," Ianto said sarcastically.

"Yeah, she was going to write a whole chapter on the etiquette of sex, just for me," Jack continued cheerfully.

"You would inspire a Weevil to write a chapter on the etiquette of sex, Jack," Ianto retorted.

"Hey," Jack said, slapping him on the head.

"Ow," Ianto complained rubbing his head. "That hurt."

"Good!"

They were silent for a few minutes as they both finished the muffin. "So, you going to try that coffee..." Jack suggested. "Though it's probably cold now."

Ianto turned in his arms and looked at him. He looked like he was about to make a snide comment but then changed his mind. "Yeah, Jack. I'll try the coffee," he said smiling.

Jack suppressed a grin as he reached out for the mug and handed it to him. Ianto raised the mug to his lips, then paused, turning again to look at Jack. "You didn't put some kind of alien aphrodisiac in it, did you?" Ianto asked wryly.

Jack chuckled, "No, nothing like that... though now that you mention it, there's this race called the..."
"Yeah, yeah, alright. You can stop right there. It's too early in the morning for tales of your sexual escapades… I'm trying it," he said, quickly taking a swallow.

Jack started to feel a bit nervous. "I know it's not up to your standards, but I did make it for you," he hedged.

Ianto raised his eyebrows, "It's not bad, Jack. It's actually better than I expected."

"Well, I have lived for over one hundred years. I did have to survive without you for a long time," Jack said, leaning back against the wall and putting his arms behind his head.

Jack saw an expression that he couldn't identify travel quickly across Ianto's features before they relaxed again into their neutral expression. Jack suddenly recalled everything he had read in Ianto's diary – all of the pain that Ianto had suffered, all of the doubts Ianto had about him. He wanted to reassure Ianto, but he didn't know how. He didn't know what to say. He watched as Ianto drank the rest of the coffee, then he took the mug from him and set it back on the bedside table. He pulled Ianto back against his chest and held him close. I wish I could tell you… Jack thought, but I can't. I just can't go there… It would make this too real…

"Do you think it's strange that Tosh still wants Owen?" Ianto asked.

"Where did that come from?" Jack asked, confused by the turn of the conversation.

"Don't know," Ianto replied. "Just thinking about them dancing last night…"

"Ianto, I've been a lot of places and seen a lot of strange things. I can't say that Owen and Tosh would be the strangest thing I've seen."

"Yeah, I suppose you're right. Just not sure if I should be worried about her or not."

"Well, it's like you said, nobody's perfect," Jack said, shrugging his shoulders and pulling Ianto closer to him.

"Not even you?" Ianto asked ironically.

"No, apparently I'm histrionic." The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them.

Ianto sat up and turned to face him, a look of indignation on his face. "And where, exactly did you hear that?" he asked.

"Oh, I might have read it somewhere," Jack said, amused by Ianto's reaction.

"I should have deleted that file," Ianto said, looking askance at him. "Not only is it bad enough that you read my diary, but you're quoting it back to me?" Ianto huffed. "That's just wrong."

Jack laughed. He couldn't help it. Ianto looked adorable when he was indignant. "And now you're laughing at me," Ianto huffed again.

"You're cute when you're irritated with me," Jack said, pulling him close once more.

"Then I must look cute quite often," Ianto quipped.

"You're a real smart ass, you know that?" Jack said affectionately, holding Ianto tight to his chest.

"So you keep telling me…" Ianto murmured.
I want to say something... after what I read in his diary. I owe him that much, Jack thought, frustrated by his own reticence, but I just don't know what to say, or how to say it... "Ianto..." he started, then hesitated.

"Jack..." Ianto replied in a slightly mocking tone.

"I can't promise you that I won't leave again Ianto," Jack said into his hair, "But I will always come back for you."

Ianto didn't reply. He lay still in Jack's arms. Jack couldn't even feel him breathing. "I want you to know that, Ianto. I know how it feels to be left like that – to be abandoned by people that you considered your closest friends. I'm so sorry that I did that to you and to the team. I did to you what the Doctor did to me..." Jack broke off, unable to continue.

Ianto turned in his arms and took Jack's face in his hands, "No, Jack. It wasn't the same thing. And why are you bringing this up now? This is in the past."

Jack shrugged, unable to admit to having read Ianto's diary not that long ago. "I might have to leave again someday. If the Doctor comes and he needs me, I'll have to go, but I just want you to know that I'll come back. The TARDIS will bring me back as near to the time I left as I can manage."

Ianto stroked Jack's cheeks with his thumbs. "I just want you to understand, Ianto. I'll come back... " Jack said, willing Ianto to understand, hoping it would be enough.

Ianto leaned in and gently kissed Jack on the lips. "I understand, Jack," he said. Then he grinned mischievously. "Oh by the way, I heard what you said to Gwen when she asked what you were going to do while she was away... 'Pizza, Ianto, Save the world a couple of times.' I'm more fun than pizza, but less fun than saving the world...?" Ianto asked with a raised eyebrow.

Jack laughed. "You know that's not true," he said before he kissed Ianto again. "Beside, you like saving the world almost as much as I do."

"Yeah," Ianto agreed. "I kind of do..."

They smiled at each other with an unspoken understanding between them. Then they kissed gently, tenderly. Jack felt the love he had for the younger man welling up inside him. Ianto broke away and asked, "So when is the rest of the team coming in?"

Jack smiled slyly. "We've got enough time for a long shower..." he suggested.

Ianto smiled his sexiest smile and Jack felt his cock respond immediately. Ianto untangled his limbs and got out of bed. He held out his hand and Jack took it. Ianto pulled him to his feet and led him into the bathroom.

I've got to remember to save Ianto's diary onto my Vortex Manipulator, he thought before Ianto started kissing him.

Soon all thoughts of Ianto's diary quickly fled his mind.
Ianto was at the coffee machine making his second coffee for the day when he heard the cogwheel door roll open. "Morning Tosh," he called, certain that she would be the only team member to arrive earlier than Jack had specified.

"Hi Ianto," Tosh called. "Is that fresh coffee I smell?"

Ianto smiled. "Yep, ready in five minutes."

When the coffee was ready, Ianto took a mug to Jack and returned to the coffee machine to make one for himself and Tosh. She appeared in the doorway a moment later. "I have something for you," she said, handing him a manila envelope.

Ianto took it from her with a raised eyebrow. "Is it the solution to the Hodge conjecture?" he teased.

Tosh made a dismissive gesture. "I solved that one ages ago," she replied. "The answer is 42, of course."

Ianto chuckled as he opened the envelope and pulled out its contents. It was a photograph of him and Jack dancing at Gwen's wedding. Their foreheads were pressed together and they were looking into each other's eyes. Ianto stared at the photo while conflicting emotions battled within him. He was simultaneously embarrassed and touched by the gesture. He felt the color flame into his cheeks, and he quickly stuffed the photo back into the envelope. "Er, thanks," he said, trying to maintain his dignity.

Tosh frowned at him. "What is it, Ianto? Don't you like it?"

"It was really thoughtful of you, Tosh," he said politely.

Tosh promptly sat down and looked expectantly at Ianto, waiting for him to explain. Ianto couldn't help but laugh. Then he sighed as he poured out their coffee. He handed Tosh her mug and sat down across from her. Tosh raised her eyebrows. Instinctually, Ianto looked around at the CCTV cameras. Tosh, understanding the movement, slid her chair over to the nearest computer and typed furiously. Then she turned to Ianto. "There, the sound recording is turned off."

"Hey!" they heard Jack call from his office. "I was watching that!"

Ianto and Tosh looked at each other. Ianto snorted and shook his head. "Bugger off, Jack," he called in response.

Tosh giggled, and Ianto rolled his eyes. " Seriously, Ianto," Tosh continued when she'd stopped laughing. "It's a beautiful photograph of you and Jack."

Ianto nodded once in acknowledgement. "But..." Tosh hedged.
Ianto shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, Tosh…” he started, uncertain of how to continue. *What is my problem,* he thought with irritation.

"It was brave of you to dance with him," Tosh said perceptively. "Do you wish that you hadn't?"

"No," Ianto answered quickly. "No, it's not that…” Ianto hesitated again. "I guess it just makes it more real somehow," he attempted to explain.

"And it wasn't real before?" Tosh asked, confused.

"Well, before it was… private," Ianto clarified.

"Private?" she asked incredulously. "Just where do you think you work? No one can sneeze around here without the whole team knowing," Tosh said despairingly.

Ianto half-smiled. "I guess I mean that it was just here… in the Hub… at Torchwood."

"So you're ashamed to be seen with Jack outside of the Hub?" Tosh asked.

Ianto was taken aback. *That's what Jack keeps saying… Am I ashamed? Is that really what this whole thing boils down to? Am I really that concerned with how the rest of the world sees me that I'm willing to make the same mistakes over and over again with Jack and risk losing him? That's not who I want to be… but I'm undemonstrative by nature… "I'm a really private person," Ianto tried, though it sounded lame even to his ears.

"I know, Ianto," Tosh said with a smile. "And that was probably the bravest thing you've ever done, cutting in on Jack and Gwen like that…"

Ianto grimaced at her. "Were you being a bit possessive?" Tosh asked quietly.

Ianto shrugged again, not meeting her eyes. Tosh took the envelope from Ianto and removed the photograph. "Do you know what I see when I look at this?" Tosh asked.

Ianto shook his head. "I see two people who are so enamored with each other that in that moment, the rest of the world ceased to exist."

Ianto looked down at the photograph again, trying to see it as though he were looking at two people that he didn't know. "I see two people who are extremely lucky to have found each other…” Tosh continued with a faraway look in her eyes.

Ianto continued to stare at the photograph. *What do you see when you look at this, Ianto Jones?* He asked himself. "Our lives are so dangerous, Ianto. In the blink of an eye, it could be over. We should hold on tightly to each moment, because it could all be snatched away in an instant." Tosh put her hand on his arm. "For all of the pain you suffered by losing Lisa, would you trade one second of the time you had with her?"

Ianto shook his head thinking about the first person he'd ever loved. "No… I wouldn't," he whispered.

"Then why is this any different? Why are you wasting time worrying about what everyone else thinks about you? Grab every moment of happiness you can, Ianto. Wouldn't you rather remember what was, than wonder what might have been?"

Ianto put his hand on top of hers and squeezed gently. He knew that she was thinking of Owen and of the opportunities that she had let slip by her. And he knew that she was right… "Sometimes it just
isn't that simple, Tosh," he said regretfully.

"Sometimes it is," she replied. "Don't make the same mistake I did, Ianto," she whispered.

They looked at each other for a few moments, a silent understanding between them. Then Tosh turned back to the computers and hit a few keys. "Done talking about me then?" Jack called from his office.

Ianto didn't bother to respond. "How do you know we weren't talking about me?" Tosh called out to Jack, smiling at Ianto.

"Yeah, right!" Jack called.

Ianto slid the photo back into the envelope. "Thanks for this, Tosh. Really…" he said.

"You're welcome, Ianto." She squeezed his hand. "Thanks for the coffee." She smiled at him before turning back to her computer.

Ianto took his mug of coffee and the photograph and headed for the solace of the archives. He sat down at his desk and pulled out the photograph again. He stared at it for a long time while he finished his coffee, remembering Tosh's words. I see two people who are so enamored with each other that the rest of the world ceases to exist… wouldn't you rather remember what was, than wonder what might have been? Ianto knew all too well how fleeting love could be, and how one moment in time could change your life forever. He thought about everything he and Jack had been through together - all of the arguments and misunderstandings and mistakes, all of the excitement and pleasure and laughter and passion. Jack… "I wouldn't change it for the world…" he whispered aloud.

He slid the photograph carefully back into the envelope and tucked it into the inside pocket of his jacket. Then he turned on his computer to begin the day's work. He logged into his email account. There was a message with an attachment from Owen. The subject line read, "So sweet…"

This is from Owen? Ianto thought incredulously. Can't be! Owen would never say that. Maybe I should run a virus scan, Ianto thought nervously. He hit several keys on his computer to start a scan, however there were no viruses in the message. More than a little confused, he opened the email. It read, "…that I think I'm going to vomit."

Ianto smiled. That sounds more like Owen. He continued to read.

"You'll never live this one down, Tea Boy!

Oh lord, now what, Ianto thought as he opened the attachment. It was a photograph similar to the one Tosh had given him, but from a slightly different angle. Owen must have been standing behind Jack because only Ianto's expression was visible. He was gazing into Jack's eyes with a look of… adoration. Ianto groaned. "I never am going to live this one down, am I?" he asked aloud.

Just then an instant message popped up on his screen.

twdoc: good thing I'm dead or I'd still be vomiting

Ianto rolled his eyes and typed into the message box.

twcoffee: Is that the best you can do, Owen? I'm disappointed in you.

twdoc: I've had several copies made… poster sized. I'll be hanging them around the Hub…
Ianto felt his cheeks start to flame again. He wouldn't put it past Owen. *No, Ianto! You won't be ashamed of this anymore. You are with Jack. Deal with it!*

twcoffee: If you must…

twdoc: who are you and what have you done with the Tea Boy?

twcoffee: Your wit is staggering.

twdoc: I'm just shocked that you've finally decided to come out of the closet.

Ianto drew in his breath sharply. He typed furiously.

twcoffee: What's that supposed to mean?

twdoc: done being ashamed of the fact that you're shagging the boss? Was it that he's the boss or that he's a man?

Ianto felt himself getting defensive.

twcoffee: I'm not ashamed.

twdoc: yeah, right… you just keep telling yourself that

Ianto stared at the words Owen had written. As quickly as his anger grew, it faded. *Well, Jones, you really haven't handled this one well if even Owen has noticed and thinks you're ashamed of being with Jack*… He suddenly felt thoroughly mortified by his behavior, and it prompted him to tell the truth.

twcoffee: It was that he's a man.

twdoc: wow… honesty. I wasn't expecting that. Good for you, Ianto.

twcoffee: I know, I'm a total wanker.

twdoc: yeah, you are

Ianto stared at the screen. *Is he just being Owen, or does he really mean that?*

twcoffee: Thanks.

twdoc: you should just be happy that you can shag anyone…

Ianto paused, wanting to say something. *I'm so sorry, Owen… But he didn't think Owen would want to hear that. And there was something that he wanted to say. One thing I've never really been able to let go of…*

twcoffee: Even if it's only part-time?

Ianto bit his lip as he waited for Owen's reply.

twdoc: alright alright. I take it back. Happy now?

Ianto rolled his eyes. *I guess that's the closest thing to an apology that I'll ever get from Owen. At least it's something…*

twcoffee: Thrilled.
so I guess it's not just shagging then?

guess not…

but…

But what?

so what's the problem?

Ianto paused again. It was rare for Owen to ask a direct question like that, without any snark, and Ianto wanted to give him an honest answer. However, nothing was coming to him.

oy, Tea Boy! Spit it out!

It's complicated…

it's always complicated. But sometimes it's really simple.

What's that supposed to mean?

? What do you mean?

are you happy with him?

What do you mean?

it's a simple yes or no question, Ianto. Does he make you happy?

Ianto sighed heavily, watching the cursor blinking at him, as if mocking him, daring his fingers to move across the keyboard. It's just three letters… And he typed them slowly, with determination. Then he paused, staring at the word on his screen. With a final sigh, he hit the Enter key.

Yes

Then he held his breath.

then get the fuck over it!

Typical Owen…

Your eloquence is astounding.

I'm only going to say this once. You're an idiot.

You're only going to say that once?

I'm sure you're going to call me an idiot several more times throughout the course of our tenure together.

probably, but not what I meant. You're being an idiot about Jack. Are you really going to risk losing him because you're a coward?

"I'm a coward?" Ianto said aloud. He thought back to the fight he and Jack had after the scene with Gwen, when Jack had accused him of dropping him because he was having a "21st century existential crisis." He would never forget Jack’s words. "Ianto Jones, I would have never taken you for a coward." He had punched Jack for saying that. But isn't that exactly what I did? Isn't that why I
hit him? Because he told me the truth… He stared again at the blinking cursor.

twcoffee: You don't think it's weird that I'm with Jack?

twdoc: I think it's beyond weird. I think you're completely barmy, but not because he's a man.

Ianto chuckled. Leave it to Owen…

twcoffee: Thanks, Owen.

twdoc: don't go getting all soft on me, Tea Boy. I'm still recovering from the picture of you two all lovey-dovey in my head. I wish I could pour bleach into my brain.

Ianto laughed again.

twcoffee: If you like, we can do a reenactment for you…

twdoc: oh, God! I'm already dead! How much more do I need to suffer?

twcoffee: Oh, I'm sure I could come up with innumerable ways…

twdoc: Isn't there something that needs cleaning around here?

twcoffee: Don't you have an alien corpse to dissect?

twdoc: anything to get out of having to continue this conversation!

Ianto smiled.

 twcoffee: I have nothing but the utmost disdain for you, Owen.

twdoc: thank god for that! And Ianto?

twcoffee: Owen?

twdoc: he really cares about you

 twdoc has signed off. Do you want to save this conversation?

Ianto stared at his computer screen. Then he slowly moved the cursor over "YES" and clicked his mouse.
As always, my undying gratitude to my irreplaceable beta riftintime. You are still my hero.

The week that Gwen was away on her honeymoon passed agreeably, by Torchwood standards. There was just the right amount of action to keep Jack from getting antsy and just the right amount of down time for him to enjoy hanging out with Tosh, Owen, and especially with Ianto. He, Ianto and Tosh got very drunk one night, while Owen watched with both amusement and envy - though Owen did thoroughly enjoy making fun of them.

Jack studied his three employees with affection as they laughed and talked animatedly, and he wondered how the evening would have been if Gwen had been there. *It wouldn't be like this*… As much as he loved Gwen, he had to admit that the dynamic of Torchwood was different without her. The atmosphere was more relaxed. There was a little less drama and a lot less angst.

Ianto got so drunk that he started doing a remarkably accurate imitation of Jack – even going as far as putting on his greatcoat and swaggering around the Hub. Tosh and Owen were literally rolling on the floor laughing, and Jack was torn between laughing himself and being offended. In the end, he chose the former. *It is a remarkably good imitation*, he admitted to himself. *Plus he looks pretty sexy in my coat*…

But Jack got his revenge. He started imitating the sounds Ianto made when they were having sex. Ianto turned red to the tips of his ears and dove at Jack, slapping his hand over his mouth. To Jack's great amusement, both Tosh and Owen pulled Ianto off of Jack and held him back while encouraging Jack to continue. Ianto struggled in vain to free himself from Owen and Tosh's grip, but he wasn't a match for the two of them, and Jack knew that Ianto wouldn't do anything to risk harming Owen's now fragile and irreparable body.

He went on mimicking Ianto with great animation and was just getting to the point of Ianto's orgasm when Ianto called out the one word that sent a jolt of fear into his heart and stopped him cold.

"Decaf!"

Tosh immediately let go of Ianto, and Jack snapped his mouth shut, putting his hand over it for good measure. Only Owen was left holding Ianto. "Oh come on you wankers. You can go out for coffee," Owen said, sounding disappointed. "You were just getting to the good part!"

Ianto looked at Owen, raised one eyebrow and said, "Banshees."

Owen immediately released Ianto and looked maliciously at Jack. "You promised that you would never tell ANYONE that story!" he growled.

Jack shrugged a shoulder nonchalantly. "Never underestimate the power of pillow talk," he said mildly with a wink at Ianto.

Ianto straightened out his suit with a triumphant smirk on his face. "I'll get you Jack Harkness,"
Owen threatened. "One day when you least expect it, I'll get you…"

"That makes two of us," Ianto said significantly, looking hard at Jack.

The three of them turned to look at Tosh who was trying her hardest to look innocent. Ianto narrowed his eyes. "And don't think for a moment that I didn't notice your part in this, Toshiko Sato," Ianto said serenely. "And I thought we were friends." He tsked and shook his head sadly.

"Uh oh," Jack said, suppressing a laugh. "I know that tone. It's when Ianto sounds his calmest that he's at his most devious. I'd be terrified if I were you, Tosh."

Thus began a series of practical jokes that continued until Gwen's return. The following morning, Ianto and Tosh changed Owen's screen saver to show pictures of canoodling kittens with messages like "be happy!" and "best friends!" Tosh worked her magic so that Owen was unable to change it, and when he tried, an image of two kittens sleeping with their faces pressed against each other with the word "snuggles!" froze on his screen. "You've got to be fucking kidding me!" Owen snarled, looking at the picture with disgust.

He tried turning off the monitor, but Tosh had rigged it so that it would stay on. "Oh come on!" he yelled as he typed frantically on his keyboard.

He finally gave up, grumbling, "I refuse to look at that picture all day!"

He bent down and unplugged the power cable to his computer with a mutinous look and Tosh and Ianto, who were leaning over the railing of the autopsy bay, giggling shamelessly. "I'll get you for this," Owen threatened.

As revenge, Owen spent several hours rearranging the archives, which so infuriated Ianto that he gave the entire team the silent treatment for the rest of the afternoon. Tosh made popcorn, and the three of them settled down to watch Ianto on the CCTV as he furiously reorganized the files, muttering and swearing to himself. They placed bets. Tosh got one point for every time he said something in Welsh, Owen got one point for each swear word, and Jack got one point for every time he put his hands on his hips.

They called the game when it got past 7:00pm, and Ianto was still stomping around the archives grumbling. To Jack's great surprise, Owen won the bet. "Damn," Jack said, grinning. "I was so sure I had that one in the bag! Ianto's not really one for swearing. What on earth did you do down there, Owen?"

Owen grinned slyly. "Believe me. I know exactly how to ruffle Tea Boy's feathers. What do you say we leave him to it and hit the pub? I'm buying."

"You can't drink," Jack said, crossing his arms and looking at Owen suspiciously. "And you're offering to pay for us to drink? What are you planning Dr. Harper?"

"I still like pubs, Jack. Makes me feel a bit more normal to be in one," Owen replied. "And whoever takes everyone else's money always buys the drinks. Besides, he doesn't look like he'll be going anywhere for a while," he said, nodding towards the CCTV footage.

"Maybe we should invite him along," Tosh suggested.

"You call him. I'm not going near that one!" Jack said, putting his hands up defensively.

Tosh took out her mobile phone and dialed. "Hi Ianto. We're going to the pub. Would you like to…"
Tosh quickly removed the phone from her ear as Ianto’s tinny voice rang out from the speaker. "… took me a year, Tosh, A YEAR to organize this mess down here and you wankers go and destroy it in one day! ONE DAY! I'll have you all on decaf for life! Actually, I'm never making coffee for any of you ever again! You people can make your own sodding coffee, because I'm going to be reorganizing the archives for MONTHS!"

Tosh quickly flipped the phone closed with a horrified look at Jack and Owen, who were looking at each other with their mouths slightly open. Jack finally broke the silence. "Right, pub it is then."

"Right!" Owen and Tosh said simultaneously.

The three of them beat a hasty retreat. On the way out the door, Tosh whispered to Jack, "You don't think he was serious about the coffee, do you?"

"Don't worry. I'm going to tell him that it was all Owen and that we had nothing to do with it," Jack whispered in reply.

"I heard that!" Owen called out.

Ianto turned up at the pub a couple of hours later looking distinctly disheveled compared to his usual standards. He was no longer wearing a tie, his shirt was unbuttoned at the top and wrinkled, he was unshaven, and there was a smear of dirt on his face. He was glaring hostilely at them with an adorable frown on his face. Jack thought he looked delectable. "We're sorry, Ianto," Tosh said when she saw him.

Before Ianto had time to reply, Jack jumped out of the booth, took Ianto's face in his hands and kissed him hard on the mouth. To his great astonishment and delight, Ianto didn't pull away. He didn't even stiffen. Rather, he put his arms around Jack and kissed him back. *Is he finally over his hang-ups about being with me in public?* Jack wondered hopefully. *What brought this on?*

Jack pulled back and smiled his best genuine Harkness grin at Ianto. "You look hot! I love it when you get all ruffled up and dirty," he said fingering Ianto's collar.

Ianto smiled back at him and winked. Jack felt his stomach turn over. "Yeah, and how is it that you can fight Weevils and come out looking so pristine," Owen said, "but organizing the archives has you looking like you were ridden hard and put away wet?"

"Hey!" Jack said. "I'm the only one who gets to make Ianto look ridden hard and put away wet!"

Tosh giggled, Ianto rolled his eyes, and Owen shouted, "Overshare!" putting his hands over his ears.

Ianto and Jack settled into the booth and the four of them spent a few hours talking and laughing. But each of them kept looking suspiciously at the others, wondering what, when, and on whom the next prank was going to be.

When Jack and Ianto returned to the Hub for the night, Jack spent some time making Ianto forget the mess in the archives, and hoping that he could get Ianto to disregard any plans he might have made for retribution. He was successful in the former. The latter, however, was not to be. When Jack went to get dressed the following morning, he discovered that Ianto had hidden all of his suspenders and replaced them with a single pair patterned with rainbows and smiley faces.

At first he was mortified. *No way I'm wearing these! What am I going to wear?* But then he had an idea. He grinned as he climbed up the ladder into his office. Ianto was waiting for him, and Jack watched with amusement as the smirk on Ianto’s face quickly turned into chagrin. Jack had decided not to wear trousers at all. Ianto turned and left his office muttering about needing to finish sorting the
archives.

When Ianto returned several minutes later, bringing him his morning coffee, Jack couldn't help but gloat at the sour look on Ianto's face. "Guess your plan backfired," he said triumphantly.

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "So you're just not going to wear trousers today?"

"Nope!" Jack grinned.

Ianto harrumphed at him and turned to leave the office.

"So does that mean I can have my suspenders back?" Jack asked, still grinning.

"No!" Ianto called out, not bothering to turn around.

"Fine by me," Jack said to his retreating form. "I like being naked!"

Ianto muttered something unintelligible, but Jack could have sworn that he heard the words "overinflated ego."

Jack thought that Ianto might give him back his suspenders when Tosh and Owen arrived, but Ianto stubbornly refused, telling him that he could explain it to them. To Jack's great enjoyment, and Ianto's vexation, Owen and Tosh played along with the joke. They didn't give Jack a second glance and pretended that there was nothing unusual about their Captain giving orders in his underwear.

Ianto finally relented, however, when the Rift alarm sounded, and Jack took off running. He got as far as the Plass, still pantless, before Ianto caught up with him. Tosh and Owen were in hysterics as they watched the CCTV footage of Ianto chasing after Jack with a pair of trousers in one hand and his suspenders in the other calling, "Damn it, Jack! I am NOT bailing you out of jail for public indecency AGAIN!"

The next morning, Jack and Ianto left the Hub before Tosh arrived, shutting off all of the lights and putting the Hub into sleep mode. They called Owen and told him to meet them at the café across the Plass. Ianto had brought his laptop, and he pulled up the live CCTV feed for the Hub. They watched as Tosh arrived, turned on the lights and called for Jack and Ianto. They watched as she looked around the Hub, confused by their absence. They watched as she tried to call all three of them, but they just let their calls go to voicemail.

Then Jack used his Vortex Manipulator to make the Rift alarm go off, and Ianto rigged the computer to report a Weevil sighting in Splott. They chuckled as Tosh called all three of them over and over again, becoming more and more frantic as the calls went to voicemail. Then they laughed as they watched Tosh go tearing across the Plass to her car, cursing her high heels as she ran.

Jack and Owen wanted to let her get all the way to Splott, but Ianto relented and phoned her, telling her that it was just a joke and that breakfast was on Jack for her trouble. She arrived sweaty and limping at the café. "I thought you were all abducted by aliens!" she scowled as she made her way to their table.

"And I broke a heel!" she added, glaring at them and slamming the broken shoe on the table. "I loved these shoes!"

The last comment sent Jack and Owen into fits of laughter, but Ianto made a special trip out that afternoon to buy her an expensive pair of shoes to replace the damaged ones.

In the last two days before Gwen’s return. The pranks became more and more childish. They resorted
to whoopee cushions, krazy glue, silly string, greasing the toilet seat, and unscrewing chairs so they would collapse when someone sat down. It was a good week for the four of them, filled with humor and deviousness. The stress relief was sorely needed by all of them.

Then, as if by common consent, all of the practical jokes ended the day Gwen came back to work. With the whole team together again, it was back to business as usual at Torchwood.
Gwen returned to work with all of the fury of a tornado, which was her usual state of being. She walked into the Hub demanding attention from everyone. She wanted to know what had happened at Torchwood, what everyone had been doing while she was away, and all of the latest gossip. She insisted on knowing if each of them had missed her. They all got to hear about her honeymoon with Rhys ad nauseum, and her pronouncements about married life.

Jack watched Gwen with a mixture of both amusement and irritation. He also watched his team's reaction to her, seeing her perhaps from a different perspective. Does she even realize that we all envy her chance at normalcy? If she did, she might not be so insensitive. And I thought she was supposed to be the most sympathetic one of all of us… Sometimes I think Owen is more sensitive than Gwen is… and Ianto is certainly more compassionate…

There would always be a small part of him that wished that he could have a normal life. He glanced briefly at Ianto, wondering if he envied Gwen. But Ianto was smiling at her and listening politely, showing no trace of any negative emotion.

Jack sighed heavily. Business as usual…

Later that morning, Jack was sitting at his desk when Gwen came into his office and sat down across from him with a determined look on her face. We're going to have a "conversation," aren't we, Jack thought to himself, cringing inwardly. At least when Ianto and I have a "conversation," I get to drink large quantities of scotch…

"So how was the honeymoon?" Jack asked her, smiling.

"It's was good," Gwen replied, looking at him with an expression Jack couldn't identify. "What's been happening here?"

"Oh, the usual; catching aliens, saving the world, eating pizza," Jack replied, flashing back his trademark grin.

"I have something for you Jack," she said, handing him a photograph.

He took it from her and smiled warmly as he looked at it. It was a photograph of him dancing with Ianto at her wedding. Their foreheads were pressed together, and Jack's expression was visible. He was looking into Ianto's eyes. I look happy… Jack thought. I look besotted, he added to himself with a grin. "So it's really serious then, is it?" Gwen asked.

"Yeah, I guess it is," Jack responded, still looking down at the photograph.

"I thought he was just a bit of fun for you, Jack. You know, "pizza, Ianto, save the world a couple of times..." I didn't realize that it was…"

Jack looked up from the photograph. "That it was what?"
"Like that." Gwen pointed at the photograph in Jack's hands.

Jack looked down at the picture again. "When did it start, Jack, with Ianto?" Gwen asked, her voice catching slightly.

"A while ago," Jack replied.

"Before I started at Torchwood?"

Jack didn't reply. He was still looking at the photograph, mesmerized by the expression on his face. *How long has it been since I looked like that?* he mused.

"I see. So all of the time… with me…" she drifted off.

Jack looked up sharply. "What are you talking about, Gwen?"

"When you came running down that aisle yelling for us to stop the wedding, I thought… just for a moment I thought…" she hesitated, gazing deeply into Jack's eyes.

"You thought that I was coming to take you away?" Jack asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Is it so crazy that I would think that Jack?" she asked, still looking hard into his eyes.

Jack sighed heavily. "Why would I do that, Gwen?"

Gwen reached across the desk and took Jack's hand. "I thought there was something between us, Jack. Don't tell me that you didn't feel it too because I know that you did."

Jack didn't respond.

"But all that time, you were with Ianto?" Gwen continued, sounding hurt.

"And all that time, you were with Rhys," Jack stated imperturbably.

"But what about… what was that, Jack? You and me?" she hedged.

"There was no you and me, Gwen. There never could be," Jack said definitively.

"Why not? Why didn't you choose me, Jack?" she asked, squeezing his hand tightly.

Jack was starting to feel mildly irritated. *I really let our flirtation go too far… I should have nipped this in the bud a long time ago…* "Why was that my choice to make? Didn't you make a choice, Gwen? You chose to marry Rhys."

"Yes, but…"

"But you wanted me to tear your life apart?" Jack interrupted her.

Gwen opened her mouth, but no words came out.

Jack sighed. "You wanted me to choose for you," he said quietly, shaking his head. "I would never have done that – even if I wasn't with Ianto. Whatever you might think about me, I'm not in the habit of destroying relationships," he added wryly.

"But you never asked me. You never…"

"And I wouldn't Gwen," Jack cut her off again. "It would have never worked. And when it all went
wrong, you would hate me for ruining your life," he continued, willing her to see the truth of his statement.

"You can't know that," Gwen challenged.

"I can and I do," Jack replied positively, pulling his hand away from hers.

"And it's not going to go wrong with Ianto?" Gwen asked bitterly, narrowing her eyes.

Jack inwardly rolled his eyes. He was growing weary of this conversation, and he wasn't sure what Gwen's motivation was. Is she looking for closure? And why now, after she's already married? Is it that now she feels safe asking...? "What do you want me to say, Gwen?"

"But why Ianto?" Gwen pressed. "He can be so... uptight."

Jack laughed. "Yeah, he is that," he said affectionately. "I think he would iron my underwear if I let him." Jack chuckled to himself as he recalled the time he caught Ianto attempting to do precisely that.

"But you're so..." Gwen stopped, as though she was searching for the right adjective.

"I'm so what, Gwen?" Jack was simultaneously amused and uneasy.

"You're just so different... Ianto is... well, he's always struck me as the traditional sort. He was so in love with Lisa - if she hadn't died, he probably would have married her. Whereas you... I didn't think you did that - have serious relationships."

"Yet you wanted me to stop your wedding and steal you away from Rhys?" Jack asked incredulously.

Gwen didn't respond. *She really doesn't know me at all...* Jack shook his head. "You know about Estelle, what she meant to me."

"Yes, and you left her, Jack," Gwen rejoined.

Jack looked away, remembering Estelle and how painful it had been to leave her. *But it was the right thing to do...* He looked back at her. "I didn't have a choice Gwen."

"So will you leave Ianto too?" she asked dubiously.

Jack felt his hackles rising. He didn't want to justify himself to Gwen. "Is that what this is about? Are you jealous, or do you think Ianto's not good enough for me?" he spat angrily.

"Are you really telling me that someone like Ianto will keep you interested?" she demanded spitefully.

"But you would?" Jack snapped.

Gwen looked away and didn't respond.

Jack closed his eyes for a moment, trying to regain control of his temper. He wanted to defend Ianto, but at the same time he was furious that he had to - especially to Gwen. He opened his eyes, and looked at her. "Ianto's... extraordinary... There's so much passion hidden behind that reserved exterior..." Jack drifted off, thinking about just how passionate Ianto could be. "He always surprises me," he whispered, forgetting for a moment that Gwen was sitting there. *Ianto...* 

Jack shook himself out of his reverie and focused on Gwen. "I've lived a long time, and I've known a
lot of people. I thought no one could surprise me anymore…” He looked hard into Gwen's eyes. "You said that we all thought it was cold and lonely out there, but it wasn't for you because you had Rhys. Do you remember saying that to us? Well you were wrong, Gwen. It's not cold and lonely out there for me."

"Because of Ianto?" Gwen whispered.

"Yes, because of Ianto," he confirmed.

"He's not just an amusement for you?"

"No, Gwen. He's not," he responded with conviction.

"And are you faithful to him? I can't imagine that Ianto would put up with you sleeping around. He seems to be the possessive type," she said with deprecation.

Jack felt his anger rising again. "Frankly, Gwen, that's none of your business. But I'm going to pretend you asked because you care about Ianto. Since I met him, there hasn't been anyone else."

Gwen stared at him openmouthed, a disbelieving expression on her face.

She really doesn't know me at all, he thought again. "And maybe I'm the possessive type too," he added aloud.

Jack looked down at the photograph again. Then he slid it back to Gwen. "What do you see when you look at this?"

Gwen stared at the photograph. "You look…” she looked up at Jack. "… happy," she finished softly.

"Do you know how long it's been since I genuinely felt that way?" he asked.

Gwen stared at him. "A long, long time," he continued before she had a chance to respond. "And then Ianto found his way here, and he found me…” Jack stopped, feeling a burning at the back of his eyes.

"And is he happy Jack?" she challenged. "How much will he have to give up for you?"

Jack was momentarily taken aback. She had struck a nerve. But then he remembered Ianto telling him that this was where he was supposed to be, in that determined way of his. Jack smiled at the memory. "He chose this, Gwen. This is what he wants. I didn't coerce him, or choose it for him. He chose me…” Jack drifted off, realizing, perhaps for the first time, the truth of his statement. He chose me...

"But why are you so sure that it will work with him?" she asked, almost pathetically.

Jack wanted this conversation to be over, but he realized that Gwen needed this to move forward. So he did his best to maintain his composure, determined to answer her questions until she was satisfied. Then hopefully she can embrace the life she chose and let go of the fantasy… "Because he never asks me for anything," he replied to her question. "He doesn't want me to be anything more than who I am."

"What's that supposed to mean?" she asked.

"I would disappoint you, Gwen, and sooner or later, you would be disillusioned by me. Hero
worship fades quickly. You would always want more than I could give."

"That's not true," she said, sounding offended.

Jack sighed. "It is, and you know it. Rhys gives you everything you need – everything that I never could. You have this idea of the person you think I am, Gwen. But you don't see past that. And I could never live up to that image."

"And you're not going to disappoint Ianto?" she pressed.

"He doesn't see me like that. To him, I'm not a hero. I'm just a man… and a fallible one at that. But he accepts me, understands me… Probably better than anyone ever has…"

"But I thought you confided in me, Jack. I thought we had a connection…” she looked at him hopefully.

Jack was beginning to feel exasperated. He didn't know how many different ways he could explain it to her before she'd understand. "Let me ask you something," he tried, switching tactics. "If I had asked, would you have given up Rhys?"

"I thought I would have…” she hesitated, looking down at her hand. She twisted her wedding ring around her finger. "But if I actually had to choose… I don't know. Maybe I wouldn't have been able to. I love Rhys, Jack. I really do. I want to spend my life with him."

"And that's exactly how it should be. Embrace your chance for a normal life, Gwen. That's all I've ever wanted for you," Jack said sincerely.

"Would you have given up Ianto?" she asked candidly.

"Honestly Gwen?"

"Yes…"

"No, I wouldn't have," he replied frankly.

Gwen recoiled slightly, as though Jack's words stung. She looked again at her wedding ring as she continued to twist it. "When you came back, after you left us, you said, 'I came back for you.' You were talking to Ianto weren't you?" She didn't meet his eyes.

"I came back for all of you… but yes, I was talking to Ianto," he confirmed.

She was silent for a moment. "Have I been a fool?" she asked with some embarrassment.

"No Gwen, not a fool. It's partly my fault. I should have made it clear to you that the flirtation between us would never be anything more."

Gwen looked at him with her big dark eyes, and for one terrible moment Jack thought she would begin to cry. "Look, Gwen," he said quickly. "I know what it's like to cling to a fantasy…” he thought of the Doctor and how much pain he'd endured. "It never ends well. It's destructive, and it always ends in heartache."

Gwen spent a few minutes staring off into space, as though she were considering all that Jack had said. Jack watched her with cautious anticipation. Then she seemed to come to a decision. Her expression cleared, and she looked at Jack. "You deserve to be happy, Jack," she said, taking his hand again and squeezing it tightly. "Both of you do."
Jack smiled genuinely at her, feeling immensely relieved. He squeezed her hand in return. "Thanks, Gwen. And remember what I said – don't give up your life outside of Torchwood – not for me. Not for anyone."

Gwen squeezed his hand once more. "I won't," she promised.

Then she got up and walked out of Jack's office. Jack dropped his head into his hands. *I really hope that was the closure she needed. Please let that be the end of it.*
Thanks to my seriously pedantic, but wonderfully proficient beta riftintime, without whom, chaos would reign.

From his desk in the archives, Ianto closed the CCTV window on his computer and hastily wiped the moisture from his eyes. He hadn't meant to eaves-drop. He'd pulled up the CCTV to see if Jack was in his office and accidently overheard the beginning of his conversation with Gwen. But once he'd started listening, he couldn't tear himself away.

There had always been a part of him that believed that had Gwen been available, Jack would have chosen her, and he was merely the consolation prize. He couldn't help but remember how Jack reacted to Rhys finding out about Torchwood and Gwen threatening to quit and be retconned. That had been the last straw for him at the time. He had been determined to be through with Jack Harkness once and for all.

But then Jack had come down to the archives… And they'd had what could only be described as a "scene." Ianto smiled as he remembered the fight and the sex and the two of them dripping with sweat, blood and cum… It had been brutal, primal, thrilling… He grinned and shook his head. "Only with Jack," he whispered aloud. "Still, not a bad way to spend an afternoon," he mused.

Then during the conversation they'd had afterwards, Jack told him that there hadn't been anyone else since they'd met. And I didn't believe him, Ianto remembered. But he just told Gwen the same thing. Does that mean it's true? How can that be possible? I know he's snogged at least a dozen people since we've met – very probably more… He'd told Jack that it didn't bother him, and the truth was, it really didn't. Ianto chuckled to himself when he thought of how he'd have reacted to Lisa kissing someone else while they were together. Not like this… Maybe I'm different now. Or maybe it's just Jack…

There was a part of him that wanted to feel offended by Gwen's deprecating remarks. She said I was uptight! And Jack laughed and agreed! Ianto huffed. But his underwear was extremely wrinkled! It would cause unnatural looking creases under his trousers, and it's my job to make sure the Captain always looks his best.

Yet there was an equal part of him that agreed with Gwen. He had often asked himself how he could keep someone like Jack interested. Jack could have anyone he wanted. Why would he choose me? I'm nothing special. But he made it sound like I'm really who he wants…

He had been flattered and moved by Jack's portrayal of him. He said that I'm extraordinary… He's lived so long, known and loved so many people. How can I possibly surprise him? He's always saying that I'm full of surprises, but I always took it as cheek. Hearing him tell Gwen makes it different somehow… But it wasn't until Gwen had asked Jack if he would have given him up for her that Ianto had become emotional. That's one thing I've always feared, that I'm just convenient. He'd held his breath as he waited for Jack's answer. And when Jack said "No, I wouldn't have," Ianto was so relieved that his eyes filled with tears.

He had never quite allowed himself to believe what Jack told him. There always remained a fear that
Jack was just flattering and charming him to get what he wanted. But hearing him say what he'd said to Gwen – it made it seem real, and more credible. Can I allow myself to believe that Jack really does choose me? He sat perfectly still as the thought took form in his mind. What will that mean? He sighed as he realized that it would mean that the last obstacle would be removed. The part of himself that he'd always held back, kept locked away, he would finally cede to Jack Harkness. It means that if I let go, if I allow myself to let go, there's no turning back. He will become my everything. I don't know if I'm ready for that again. I don't know if I'll ever be ready for that again...

Ianto wondered how Jack felt about the conversation with Gwen. He also wondered about the expression on Jack's face that he and Gwen had been referring to. He hadn't been able to see the photograph clearly through the CCTV, but he was struck by Jack's words about his own expression in the image. "Do you know how long it's been since I've genuinely felt that way?" Ianto remembered lying on the sofa after the success of the UNIT outfit, and Jack's strange expression when he'd read Martha's letter. He'd said, "You do make me happy," as though he'd just realized it himself.

Ianto was determined to get his hands on that photograph and see for himself. He decided to use a coffee delivery as a pretense for having a glance at it and as an opportunity to assess Jack's emotional state. His plans, however, were momentarily thwarted by Gwen. He sensed, rather than heard Gwen's approach, and he rolled his eyes. I should have known that she would come straight to me after her conversation with Jack.

"Ianto?" Gwen called.

"I'm here Gwen," he responded.

Gwen was radiating so many emotions that Ianto couldn't get hold of any one dominant feeling. She walked towards his desk with a purposeful stride and a determined look in her eyes. Ianto braced himself for impact. She sat down on the edge of Ianto's desk, crossed her arms over her chest and looked straight into his eyes.

Defensive posture, Ianto thought. This doesn't bode well. "What can I do for you, Gwen?" he asked politely.

"So you and Jack…" Gwen started.

Ianto inwardly cringed, but he didn't move a muscle of his face. He just looked at her expectantly. "It's serious then, is it?" she continued.

Ianto didn't reply. He just continued looking at her with a bland expression on his face. Where is she going with this? "Ianto, you're so young… You could still have a normal life, find someone nice, settle down. You don't have to do this…"

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "I mean, Jack is… well, we all know how Jack is…" Gwen continued.

Ianto wanted to defend Jack, but he didn't think Gwen was in a receptive mood at the moment, and it would probably fall on deaf ears. Despite her obvious infatuation with Jack, she often seemed to think the worst of him. She really doesn't know him at all. Jack was right about her distorted image of him.

He continued to stare at her, waiting for her to talk herself in circles, or get to the point. "I thought you wanted to get married, have a family some day," she went on.

Ianto sighed. "Things change, Gwen. People change."

"Is it because of Lisa? Is it because she died and you don't think you'll ever find anyone to replace
Ianto recoiled as if Gwen had struck him. The callousness of her words cut him deeply. He narrowed his eyes at her with something very much like hatred filling him. Gwen must have caught his expression because she went on hurriedly, "It's just that I worry about you, Sweetheart. I don't want you to throw your life away on someone who can't give you everything you deserve."

Ianto took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. "Gwen, I'm happy for you. Truly, I am. But that 'normal life' as you and Jack like to call it – it's not for everyone. The life that I wanted with Lisa… it's seems so far away now…" he voiced faded as he realized the truth of his words. It seems like another lifetime…

"But it could be again for you, Ianto? How much will you have to give up for Jack?"

"I'm not giving up anything for Jack," Ianto stated mildly, knowing that he wasn't being entirely truthful.

"But that life…"

"Isn't the life I want anymore, Gwen. I'm where I want to be," he said with conviction.

"Really, Ianto? Are you sure you're not just saying that because you're totally infatuated by Jack?" she asked boldly.

Ianto felt himself losing his temper, but he wanted to explain in a way that would close the subject forever. He closed his eyes for a moment. "I have no regrets, Gwen," he stated, hoping that would be enough.

"But what if he leaves again, Ianto? You know that if that Doctor of his shows up again and needs him, he'll go."

"I know he will, and I would want him to. He'd never be happy staying here if he thought the Doctor needed his help. But he'll come back if he can."

"You can't know that for sure, Ianto. Maybe next time he won't come back," she said ruthlessly.

"I trust him," he stated simply.

"And that's enough for you?" she asked incredulously.

Ianto sighed inwardly. "Yes, Gwen. That's enough."

"But don't you want more, Ianto? I'm sure that Jack Harkness will never make you any promises. He seems to have a track record of leaving lovers left and right," she said harshly.

Ianto felt a clenching in his gut, but he didn't let it show in his face. It's true. He might leave me one day. Maybe what we have, whatever this is, won't last. But is it worth the risk Ianto Jones? Is Jack worth the risk? That's what you really need to decide here, isn't it? But he knew in his heart he'd made that decision a long time ago.

He realized that Gwen was looking at him expectantly and somewhat smugly, as though she'd finally found his weak spot. He looked her straight in the eyes. "When I'm with him, I'm happy, Gwen. He makes me happy."

Gwen looked at him for a long moment. "Really?"
"Yes, really," he affirmed.

Gwen put her hand on his shoulder and gave him a slight squeeze. "I just don't want to see you get hurt, Sweetheart," she said staring hard at him, as though searching for any hint of doubt or weakness. Ianto looked calmly into her eyes, giving nothing away. Finally, with a small sigh, she seemed to give up. "If you're sure, Ianto..." she paused looking questioningly at him.

Ianto nodded. She squeezed his shoulder again. "Then I'm happy for you."

Ianto nodded his acknowledgement, and Gwen got up and walked out of the archives. Ianto watched her retreating form, and with childish glee, imagined shooting a spit ball at her back. But that's not fair, Ianto, he scolded himself. You know she really does care about you. They all do. She's just Gwen... He sighed heavily. "Please let that be the end of it," he whispered to the empty room.

He sat staring for a few moments, thinking about the confrontation. Then he stood and headed for the coffee machine.

When he brought Jack his coffee, Jack was still sitting at his desk with a faraway look in his eyes, and his emotions were unreadable to Ianto. He set the mug down in front of Jack and sat on the edge of the desk. Jack looked up at him and smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. Ianto wondered how Jack was feeling and why his mind was closed. He looked down at the desk and saw the photograph. He picked it up and looked at it, studying Jack's expression in the image. He does look happy... Ianto thought as he stared at it. And he's looking at me like he... "From Gwen," Jack said, nodding his head towards the image in Ianto's hands.

Do I play dumb or admit that I heard the entire conversation? Jack would probably just admit that he'd eaves-dropped – and be proud of it... "I heard your conversation with Gwen in the archives," Jack said mildly.

Ianto had to bite his tongue not to laugh at the irony. "You really are shameless, you know that?"

Ianto said affectionately.


Jack looked at him with amusement. "Did you now? That's not like you."

Ianto started to justify it to Jack, but instead he shrugged, mimicking Jack's movement.

Jack chuckled. "Well, well, well... I must really be corrupting you."

Ianto grinned at him with a mischievous glint in his eyes. "Oh, undoubtedly."


They were both silent for a few minutes. Ianto didn't know what to say. He suddenly felt uncomfortable with their mutual disclosures, and it didn't seem like Jack was going to offer anything either. Ianto looked around Jack's office for inspiration. I could really use a night away from Torchwood. He looked again at Jack. Maybe we both could. "Why don't we get out of the Hub for the night," Ianto finally broke the silence. "We could go to my flat..." he hesitated. "I'll make you dinner."

"Aww, you're going to cook for me?" Jack teased.

Ianto snorted, feeling defensive. "Not if you're going to be like that about it!" he said with as much
dignity as he could muster.

Jack laughed. "I would love to get out of the Hub for the night, Ianto. Thanks."

Ianto smiled. "Why don't you come by around eight then," he said, standing and straightening his suit.

Jack nodded and Ianto put his hand briefly on Jack's shoulder as he walked out of the office, already preparing the menu in his head.
Jack watched Ianto walk out of his office, amused by Ianto's revelation at having eaves-dropped on his conversation with Gwen. But then his thoughts returned to Ianto's conversation with her. *I knew that Gwen would run straight to Ianto after her conversation with me.* It was why he had pulled up the CCTV in the archives.

He was still reeling from Gwen's words to Ianto. *"You could still have a normal life, find someone nice, settle down... You don't have to do this... How much will you have to give up for Jack? What if he leaves again? Don't you want more?"* It was as though Gwen had voiced all of Jack's fears in one conversation. *Leave it to Gwen...*

But then he remembered Ianto's words, and he couldn't help but feel moved by them. *"When I'm with him, I'm happy. He makes me happy."* Jack smiled. *Does the rest really matter?* He sighed. *I hope I'm enough for you, Ianto Jones...*

Jack was surprised to find himself becoming excited as 8:00pm neared. Ianto had left the Hub hours ago muttering something about cooking times. Jack had just smiled affectionately at him. *What does he have up his sleeve?* he wondered with eager anticipation. It had been a very long time since anyone had cooked for him.

He was almost nervous as he pulled up outside Ianto's flat and stepped out of the SUV carrying a bottle of red wine. *I feel like I did on our first date,* he thought with amusement. He arrived at Ianto's doorstep and started to reach into his pocket for his keys, but he hesitated. He decided instead to ring the doorbell. *Well, it will make it more date-like.*

Jack pressed the button with a fluttering in his stomach. Ianto answered the door a moment later, wearing a neatly pressed white apron over jeans and a black t-shirt, and looking absolutely adorable. Jack smiled at him and handed over the bottle of wine. *"Why did you ring the bell?"* Ianto asked, smiling back.

Jack shrugged. *"Makes it more official,"* he said grinning.

Ianto raised an eyebrow at him, but then he stepped forward and kissed Jack on the lips. Jack wrapped his arms around Ianto and held him tight, kissing him back fiercely. He couldn't help but revel in the fact that they were standing in Ianto's open doorway and Ianto was kissing him openly for anyone to see. *He's much less reserved now about being with me in public. I wonder what changed... Not that I'm complaining...*

Ianto pulled away and stepped back to allow Jack inside. Jack was met by a mouthwatering aroma coming from the kitchen. He breathed in deeply. *"Wow! It smells fantastic, Ianto. What are you making?"* Jack asked as he handed Ianto his greatcoat.

*"Lamb Stew,"* Ianto replied as he took Jack's coat and neatly hung it in the closet.
"Cawl?" Jack asked excitedly. "I haven't had that in years!"

Ianto looked at him in surprise, and Jack caught the expression. "Ianto, I've lived in Wales for over a hundred years. You can't help but eat the traditional dishes every once in a while."

"Is it okay?" Ianto asked, looking nervous.

Jack pulled him into his arms again. "It's perfect," he whispered into Ianto's ear. "It's been a long time since anyone's cooked for me. Thanks for this."

Ianto kissed him softly. "Why don't you open the wine," he said, smiling warmly.

Jack walked into the kitchen and lifted the lid of the pot simmering on the stove, inhaling deeply. His stomach started growling. He reached over to pick up the stirring spoon so he could have a taste, but Ianto slapped his hand away before his fingers could grasp the handle. "Not until it's ready," Ianto scolded.

Jack threw back his head and laughed. It was so Ianto. "Yes, Sir," he said, saluting.

Still chuckling, he took down two wine glasses and looked in the drawers for a corkscrew. "Good thing I brought red," he said as he neatly sliced through the foil wrapper and inserted the corkscrew. "It needs a few minutes to breathe," he continued, as he quickly and proficiently removed the cork.

"I didn't take you for a wine snob, Jack," Ianto teased.

"I only bother when it's a really good bottle of wine," Jack said, winking at Ianto.

Jack looked around Ianto's impeccably tidy kitchen. "So, can I do anything?" he asked.

"You can set the table," Ianto suggested.

Jack nodded excitedly. It had been a long time since he'd done something so domestic, and he took to the task with glee. Ianto stood in the doorway to the dining area, watching him with growing amusement. "I've never seen anyone so excited about setting a table," he commented.

"Hey," Jack said defensively. "To me this is exotic."

"Like offices," Ianto said with a smirk.

"Yeah, like offices," Jack replied smiling, knowing Ianto was referring to the time he'd asked Ianto out on a date.

They grinned at each other. Jack marveled again at how Ianto always seemed to know exactly what he needed. "You look absolutely edible in that apron," Jack said, eyeing Ianto appreciatively. He stepped closer and fingered the starched fabric. "Maybe you could wear that and nothing else..." he suggested, becoming aroused at the notion.

"Maybe later," Ianto teased, pushing his hand away. "If you eat all of your vegetables," he continued in a stern voice.

"You're the one who doesn't eat enough vegetables," Jack retorted.

Ianto rolled his eyes and Jack laughed. He picked up the bottle of wine and the glasses and set them on the table.

Ianto dished the stew into bowls and set it out with bread that he'd warmed in the oven and a large
chunk of cheese. Jack poured out the wine and they raised their glasses together.

"Iechyd da," Ianto said.


They both sipped their wine, which was superb. Jack dove into his food with vigorous enthusiasm. "Mmmmm, Ianto. This is incredible!"

Ianto chuckled at him. "Your table manners really are atrocious," he teased affectionately.

"Just like my manners in bed?" Jack asked through a mouthful of stew.

Ianto laughed. "Yeah, Jack. Just like your manners in bed."

They finished their meal together, mostly in comfortable silence, just enjoying each other's company. Jack was genuinely moved by the effort Ianto had put into cooking for him. It satisfied his transient cravings for a little piece of normalcy in his otherwise chaotic and unconventional life.

Jack finished his second glass of wine, and pushed his plate away with a satisfied moan. "So, what's for dessert?" he teased.

"Well, it's so rare that I get a chance to cook, I thought I would make muffins and take them in for the team tomorrow," Ianto replied.

"What kind of muffins?" Jack asked.

"Chocolate, of course," Ianto replied with a grin.

"Can I help you make them?" Jack asked. "I can't remember the last time I baked anything!"

Ianto looked askance at him. "You want to help me bake muffins..." he said incredulously.

Jack nodded enthusiastically. He jumped out of his chair and headed into the kitchen before Ianto had time to respond. Ianto remained sitting at the table, staring at the space Jack had recently occupied, feeling completely bewildered. "Okay..." he hesitated. *I have a really bad feeling about this*, Ianto thought as he stood slowly and followed Jack into the kitchen.

Ianto quickly and neatly laid out the ingredients needed for the muffins as Jack watched him. *Maybe he'll decide to just watch instead*, Ianto hoped. "So, what do you want me to do?" Jack asked, grinning at him eagerly.

*Or maybe not... But Ianto couldn't help smiling fondly at Jack's obvious excitement about doing something so mundane. There's so many of the simple things in life that we miss out on... We'll never have a normal life, but maybe we should try to get out of the Hub more often...*

He quickly donned his apron as Jack watched admiringly. Ianto indicated a worn sheet of paper contained in a clear protective sleeve next to the ingredients. "Right, here's the recipe. It was one of..." he paused, closing his eyes for a moment. "It's one of my favorites," he continued, quickly pushing aside his melancholy before Jack could notice.

Ianto meticulously measured and sifted flour into a large bowl and passed it to Jack. "Mix the rest of the dry ingredients in with the flour. I'll melt the chocolate."

Jack nodded and took the bowl, as he studied the recipe intently. Leaving Jack to do as he'd instructed, Ianto turned his attention to the dark chocolate. It was his favorite part. He precisely
measured out the required amount and placed the small bowl in his microwave oven. As the microwave hummed, he turned on the regular oven and set the temperature, double-checking it was correct. Then he dug his muffin tray out from the cupboard.

As he worked, he listened to Jack clattering around noisily and reciting the ingredients one by one as he added them to the bowl. *This isn't so bad, Ianto thought. It's actually kind of fun.* He couldn't help but chuckle to himself at how absurd his life had become. *I'm in my kitchen with my male lover… my immortal male lover from the 51st century. We chase aliens for a living… and we're baking muffins.*

The microwave beeped, and Ianto carefully removed the bowl of melted chocolate. He took a moment to indulge in the rich, intoxicating aroma. Then he turned and placed the bowl gently on the bench next to Jack. While he thought about what he needed to do next, he glanced at the older man. He stared in confusion as Jack casually dumped two large spoonfuls of baking powder into the mixing bowl. Ianto's eyes moved to his set of measuring spoons and cups, sitting where he'd left them ready for use. They were still clean and untouched. His confusion quickly turned to horror. "Jack!" he exclaimed frantically. "What are you doing?"

Jack looked up calmly. "Just what you told me to do. I'm mixing all of the dry ingredients together."

Ianto continued to stare at him, eyes wide. "But… but…" he stammered, as his mind struggled to catch up and form a coherent thought. "You aren't measuring anything," he cried in despair.

"What do you mean? I've just added the two teaspoons of baking powder," Jack responded, looking confused.

"That's not a teaspoon!" Ianto grabbed the measuring spoons. "THIS is a teaspoon!" he yelled, waving them in Jack's face.

Jack made a dismissive gesture. "It'll be fine, Ianto. It's close enough."

"Close enough?" Ianto sputtered angrily. "You haven't measured anything properly, have you?"

Jack shrugged. "What are you getting so worked up about?"

"Don't you know that the first rule of successful baking is to follow the recipe and measure the ingredients precisely?" Ianto retorted.

Jack rolled his eyes. "You're so pedantic!"

"I am NOT pedantic!" Ianto crossed his arms over his chest. "You've buggered the whole thing up, and I'm going to have to start all over again!"

Jack started chuckling. "Do you know how adorable you are when you get all worked up?"

Ianto scowled at Jack, his eyes narrowed. "I'm not pedantic, and I'm not adorable either," he declared indignantly. "And the mixture is ruined!"

Jack just laughed even harder. Ianto glared furiously at him. *He's laughing at me! Mocking me in my own kitchen! He's going to pay for that…* He calmly picked up the large bag of flour still sitting on the bench and upended it over Jack's head.

The kitchen was instantly enveloped in a white cloud. In the centre stood Jack, covered from head to toe in flour. Jack had stopped laughing. "What the hell did you do that for?" he gasped.

Ianto smirked triumphantly at him, torn between laughing at the ridiculous sight in front of him, and
cringing in dismay at the state of what had only a moment ago, been his immaculately clean kitchen. He looked around. *My kitchen...* He groaned. "Look what you've done to my kitchen," he cried desolately.

"What I've done?" Jack bellowed, outraged. "You're the one who dumped a bag of flour over my head!"

Ianto snorted. "You've been covered in far worse things!"

Jack's angry expression turned arch. "Well in that case..."

Before Ianto could react, Jack pounced. He grabbed Ianto tightly, making as much bodily contact as possible, and rubbed his flour covered head over Ianto's face, neck and hair.

"Jack, get off me," Ianto growled as he struggled to escape.

"I don't think so Mr. Jones."

Jack grabbed Ianto's face in both hands and kissed him mercilessly. Ianto continued to struggle for a moment, but then he relented. He wrapped his arms around Jack and returned the kiss vigorously. After several long moments, they surfaced for air, spluttering from the flour that had found its way into their mouths. They stared intently at each other, taking in their ridiculous appearances. Then they both burst into laughter.

Jack lifted his hand to Ianto's cheek and stroked it tenderly. Then he stepped back and smiled salaciously as he unbuttoned his shirt, pulling it off roughly and tossing it aside. His t-shirt quickly followed. Ianto felt his arousal increase as Jack stalked towards him and pushed him back against the cupboard. Jack grabbed at Ianto's apron, untying it and pulling it off. "Jack, I need to clean the kitchen," Ianto protested weakly, but his body already had other ideas as he lifted his arms and allowed Jack to remove his t-shirt.

Their bodies pressed together as Jack's mouth engulfed Ianto's in another hungry kiss. Jack pulled back, and Ianto gazed at him, his white clown like face in stark contrast to his dark lust blown eyes. Jack grinned impishly and shook his head rapidly from side to side, sending a fresh cloud of flour over them both. Ianto groaned and closed his eyes tightly, not wanting to witness his kitchen being further decimated.

Jack kissed his way down Ianto's flour covered chest. He unfastened Ianto's jeans and pulled them down, gazing lasciviously at the tight dark blue briefs and the bulge of Ianto's prominent erection. He yanked the briefs down and nuzzled his face into the thick dark curls, moaning softly. Ianto worked his hands through Jack's hair, and over his neck, shoulders, and arms, desperately seeking contact. Jack caressed Ianto's buttocks and hips with both hands as he lapped his tongue over the length of Ianto's erection. Ianto moaned loudly in response.

Jack worked his way back up Ianto's body, licking and nipping as he went, and running his hands over Ianto's firm, flour coated flesh. He paused to draw each soft pink nipple into his mouth and suck until it became hard. Then he kissed Ianto again deeply. Ianto stepped out of his clothes as Jack quickly stripped off his own trousers and underwear. Before Ianto could protest, Jack pulled him down onto the flour covered floor.

They rolled around, hands and mouths everywhere, each struggling for dominance. Eventually, Jack managed to gain the upper hand. He lay on top of Ianto, pinning his arms firmly above his head and kissing him brutally. Ianto finally ceded control, and thrust up against Jack, relishing the feel of Jack rubbing against him.
Grinning mischievously, Jack released his grip on Ianto and reached up to the bench top. He put down the bowl next to Ianto's shoulder and stared intently into Ianto's eyes as he raised a chocolate coated finger to his mouth and sucked it provocatively. Ianto's breathing hitched as he watched in awe. Jack ran a chocolate coated finger over Ianto's mouth and kissed him hungrily, lapping at Ianto's chocolate covered lips.

Ianto stared up at him with alarm as Jack lifted the bowl and held it over him, grinning wickedly. "Oh, God," he moaned as Jack emptied the contents of the bowl onto Ianto's chest and smeared it over the length of Ianto's flour covered torso.

Ianto closed his eyes, groaning as he felt Jack's tongue lap at his chocolate coated flesh. Jack reclaimed Ianto's mouth, plunging his tongue deep inside. "Mmm… you taste so good," he murmured.

He spent several minutes licking the chocolate off Ianto's body, while Ianto became increasingly agitated. "Jack…" he finally pleaded, frantic with desire.

Grinning, Jack wrapped his hand tightly around both of their erections. Ianto gasped in pleasure and writhed beneath him. Jack pumped his hand furiously, both of them desperate for release. Ianto tilted his head back as Jack bit and sucked at his throat. Moments later, Jack groaned as he climaxed and emptied himself over Ianto's chest. Ianto followed almost immediately, moaning Jack's name.

Jack collapsed on top of Ianto, panting for breath. They kissed languorously, neither of them wanting the moment to end. Reluctantly, Jack rolled off Ianto and onto his back. He pulled Ianto with him as he leaned against the nearest cupboard. He spread his legs, and gathered Ianto in close against his chest, wrapping his arms around him, as he pressed soft kisses to the younger man's neck and shoulders. "Thanks for dessert," he said between kisses. "My favorite… chocolate coated Ianto."

Ianto snorted and rolled his eyes. As he slowly regained coherency, he took in the sight of his kitchen and groaned in despair. He looked down at his body. He was covered in flour, chocolate, sweat, and cum. Jack does seem to love getting me dirty, he mused. Not that I'm complaining…

He couldn't help but smile contentedly as he entwined his hands with Jack's and turned his head to rest against Jack's shoulder. He pressed a gentle kiss to the side of Jack's neck and nuzzled closely. Not a bad way to spend a quiet evening at home, even if I will be cleaning up this mess for the next month. And I'll never be able to look at chocolate the same way again… "Jack," he murmured. "I'm disconcertingly sticky." He paused, looking around again at the devastation. "The kitchen's a mess… We haven't made the muffins…" he sighed despondently. "And now I'm out of flour."

Jack's laughter filled the room.
Chapter Notes

Without my beta, riftintime, I would be redundant, disoriented, incoherent, and vague…

The next few weeks were relatively typical by Torchwood standards. There were the usual share of Weevils, Blowfish, and assorted exotic aliens. It wasn't a slow time for the team, but it was nothing that they hadn't dealt with before.

Ianto fondly remembered the night he and Jack had spent at his flat, and they had enjoyed the best night's sleep either of them had managed in a long time. But despite Ianto's resolution to get Jack out of the Hub more often, they hadn't spent another night at the flat since. It was just easier to stay at the Hub and be ready when they were needed. But it's more than that, he admitted to himself. Being here, at the Hub with Jack… this is our reality. Those rare stolen moments of normalcy are just that… extraordinary. And with our lives at Torchwood, that's all they ever will be. I can't allow myself to want more than this. What I have here, with Jack… it's enough.

Ianto had finally relinquished much of his reticence about being with Jack in public. Somehow, it was Owen's words that had the most impact on him. 'Are you really going to risk losing him because you're a coward?'

As much as he hated to admit it, he had to acknowledge that he had been a coward. The notion humbled him. That's not how I want them to see me, especially not Jack. I don't want Jack to think I'm ashamed of being with him. What does it really matter in the grand scheme of things? I could get mauled by a Weevil tomorrow, or worse… Tosh was right, we should hold on tightly to each moment, and take every chance for happiness. And this is my chance… So he had forced himself to let go.

Jack hadn't said anything, but Ianto knew that he'd noticed. He could tell by the smile Jack had given him when he'd kissed Jack openly at the pub. And Ianto loved making Jack happy. He could tell that both Tosh and Owen approved of his change of heart as well, though neither of them mentioned it. Even Gwen seemed to have accepted them. She no longer flirted with Jack, and that made her easier to deal with. She still teased them sometimes about their sexual relationship, but Ianto had learned to ignore her. Though secretly it still irked him, he knew it was Gwen's way of showing her acquiescence.

Jack and Ianto liked to banter flirtatiously. It was an integral part of their rapport – it always had been – and they both thoroughly enjoyed it. But every time Jack made a comment about Ianto being the son of a master tailor, Ianto felt a stab of guilt. It's almost as though he knows I lied to him about that, and he's testing me. Ianto couldn't decide if he was being paranoid, or if Jack had actually found out somehow. Regardless, it nagged at his conscience.

He tried to rationalize it away. I'm sure Jack has lied to me about many things – or at least deflected from telling me the truth. But he wasn't sure if he truly believed that. He knew that Jack often spoke the absolute truth, it was just that no one believed him.

Ianto almost came clean one night when Jack suggested that they test out Ianto's inheritance of 'the family eye' by sizing Jack's inside leg measurement by his stride across the Hub. However, when
Jack decided to stride naked across the Hub, Ianto's impulse for full disclosure faded quickly. *Jack is so amused by the idea that I'm the son of a master tailor. I don't want to disillusion him...* So he eventually decided that the truth was better kept to himself. It seemed fate, however, had different ideas.

When Ianto heard that the Electro cinema was reopening, he couldn't help but be intrigued. He had fond memories of going to the Electro with his father on Saturday mornings. He remembered how he had looked forward to those Saturdays all week long. It was only during those brief moments that his father had seemed happy. It was one of the few good memories he had of his father. The rest were tainted with darker recollections.

It was those memories that made him want to see the place again. When there was a report of some Rift activity in the area, it gave him the perfect excuse. Jack was out of the Hub when the readings came in. He considered calling and asking Jack to go with him to the Electro, but he felt uncomfortable about the situation. He didn't want to have to explain anything. *I'm just not sure I want Jack to know that much about me...* Tosh was his second choice, but she was also too close and too perceptive not to realize that the place held special significance for him. So he asked Gwen and Owen to go with him instead. He knew they wouldn't ask him awkward questions.

What started out as a nostalgic trip down memory lane quickly became an event that had a profound affect on him. Ianto was fascinated by the circus clips – almost spellbound. Then seeing Jack in the film had captivated him even further. He'd always been enthralled by history, and Jack Harkness was living history.

The mysteriously appearing film clips and Jack's mention of the Night Travelers deeply disturbed him, even though Gwen and Owen seemed at first to think it was more amusing than threatening. As they watched the film back at the Hub, he knew that something was very wrong. He was determined to get to the bottom of it. He made Tosh play the film over and over again until he spotted it. Then he called Jack back in and succinctly explained what he'd found. He was grateful to Jack for taking him seriously, and he could see that Jack was also unsettled. *I knew something was wrong, and I have a bad feeling about this...*

Jack went into Captain mode. "Toshiko, keep checking for sightings. There's got to be a way of tracing them. Ianto, with me. I need your local knowledge."

"Oh, is that what you're calling it these days?" Gwen quipped.

Ianto rolled his eyes as he followed Jack into the boardroom. *One day I'm going to tell her to sod off.* But there were more important matters at hand. "So, two people who should have been dead for years," he said, sitting down at the conference table. "What kind of creatures are they?"

He loved when Jack was in the mood to talk about his past. He was mesmerized by Jack's stories of being in the traveling show. *What must it be like for him, living through history, watching the world change...?* Yet he was a little disappointed when he asked Jack who had sent him to investigate and Jack responded with, "Long story."

However, when Jack finished his story, he looked at Ianto apologetically. "I suppose it's not really a long story. I was sent to investigate by Torchwood," he explained.

Ianto nodded, and Jack put his hand on Ianto's face. "I forget sometimes," he continued, stroking his cheek gently. "I'm so used to deflecting when people ask me about my past."

"It's okay, Jack," Ianto said, understanding all too well the desire to keep the past buried. "Now what do we need to do to track them?" he asked, turning the conversation back to Torchwood matters. "I
have a bad feeling about this," he added portentously.

Ianto would have felt gratified that his foreshadowing of disaster was entirely justified, but as he stood with Jack in the hospital, looking at the children who had fallen victim to the Night Travelers, he felt only horror. "They came from out of the rain," Jack whispered to him.

The nurse caring for the children overheard. "Those words, 'from out of the rain.' I'm sure I've heard them before. Oh, I remember, it was Christina. She was a patient."

"Here?" Jack asked.

"No, at Providence Park. It's a psychiatric hospital," she replied.

"I know it," Ianto said before he could stop himself.

Jack looked sharply at Ianto, and Ianto quickly looked away, but he could feel Jack's eyes linger questioningly on him.

It had been a long time since Ianto had been to Providence Park Hospital, and it was with acute anxiety that he walked through the doors again, but he kept his expression neutral. Work to do, Jones, he told himself sternly. From the moment they met Christina, Ianto had a strange feeling about her, but it wasn't until Jack sat down and she was able to look him in the eyes that Ianto knew for sure what she was. "Your eyes are older than your face," she said, peering intently at Jack.

"Is that a bad thing?" Jack asked, trying to be cheeky.

"Yes," she answered seriously. "It means you don't belong. It means you're from nowhere."

Ianto felt a chill run through him at her words, and he felt Jack close himself off. He glanced nervously at Jack, wondering how he would react to such a penetrating and discerning statement, but Jack quickly changed the subject. "Christina, tell us about them – the people who came from out of the rain."

Ianto listened to her story with a growing sense of uneasiness. This case is no stranger than any other ones we've handled. Why do I find it so distressing? As though answering his thoughts, Christina looked at him and said, "They touched you. I can sense it. They touched you as they passed you by."

Ianto was momentarily taken aback. Is that how it feels when I respond to someone's unspoken emotions? It is rather disconcerting. Then he quickly reminded himself of the children who were lying in the hospital beds, their last breaths stolen from them. "Tell us about the man, Christina," he urged, trying to put aside his own feelings.

Ianto could feel her pain and terror as she described the Ghostmaker. He reached out and took her hand. "You're like me," she stated candidly.

Ianto nodded. "I can always tell," she continued looking at him.

She looked back at Jack, then looked again at Ianto. "And the two of you..." she started, but she didn't finish her thought.

Ianto wasn't sure he wanted to hear the end of the sentence.

They sat with her for a while, both of them reassuring her that they would do whatever they could to stop the Night Travelers. But Christina just shook her head sadly. Eventually they took their leave.
"Remind me to never have another conversation with two of you at the same time. It's creepy," Jack said, trying to make light of the situation.

But Ianto didn't respond. He was too unsettled by Christina's words. Jack studied him as they walked to the SUV. "What's going on with you?" he finally asked.

*If you only knew…* "I just want to save those kids, Jack," Ianto replied tersely.

Ianto would never forget how desperately he'd run to catch the silver flask as it flew through the air with the souls of those people trapped inside, and how devastated he was that he only managed to save one. There were so many things that had distressed him about the case – the child whom they had saved, but who had lost his entire family, Jonathan, who had lost his parents, the Night Travelers, the visit to Providence Park, and all of the painful memories from his own past that he kept tightly locked away… He was anxious to be alone.

After Ianto finished filling out the paperwork on the Ghostmaker and handed the flask over to Jack to lock away, he retreated to the archives. He felt completely overwhelmed. As he walked through the basement of the Hub, the tears he'd held so tightly in check finally fought their way to the surface. He hardly knew where he was heading until he found himself in the room where he'd hidden Lisa, all that time ago. He realized that he wasn't there because he wanted to feel close to Lisa… *This room represents all of the pain and heartbreak I've suffered.*

He slid slowly to the floor, sobbing with abandon as he finally surrendered himself to the tempest of emotions raging within.
Ianto cried until he felt there was nothing left in him. He felt movement next to him and something cold pressed against his cheek. He looked up blearily with tear-filled eyes. Jack was standing over him, holding a bottle of water. He took the bottle as Jack sat down on the floor next to him.

They were silent for a few moments as Ianto tried to wipe his eyes and calm the raging storm within. He opened the water bottle, drinking gratefully. Jack didn't touch him. He just sat next to him as Ianto drank the water and wiped his nose with a handkerchief from his pocket. Finally Jack broke the silence. "I knew there was something wrong," he stated, looking at Ianto.

Ianto didn't respond. He didn't know what to say. "Ever since the first mention of Providence Park and the look on your face when you said you knew the place," Jack continued.

Ianto stared straight ahead at the empty room, but his eyes wouldn't focus on any one particular detail. He didn't know what to say to Jack. He wasn't sure that he wanted to say anything at all. He'd held on for so long that he no longer knew how to let go. They sat in silence as Ianto tried desperately to reestablish order in his chaotic mind. Jack broke the silence again, "Are you going to tell me what's going on with you, Ianto?"

Ianto found himself fighting an internal battle. Part of him wanted to confide in Jack, desperately wanting to seek comfort from him. But there was also the reticent part of him that had always clung fiercely to his secrets. As the silence filled the room again, Jack stood. "You know where to find me," he said, dusting off his trousers.

Ianto watched him walk out of the room feeling both relieved and disappointed; uncertain which feeling was the stronger of the two. He sat for another half an hour, wavering between remaining silent and confiding in Jack. It wasn't a conversation he wanted to have, but part of him felt like he should tell Jack – *like I owe it to him for some reason*... But this was his last holdout – the final part of himself that he hadn't given to Jack. *I didn't even tell Lisa,* he thought, studying the room that had once housed her twisted metal body.

He stood and walked slowly back up to the main area of the Hub, still undecided about what he would do. The Hub was eerily silent. It seemed the rest of the team had left for the evening. He stood half-way between the cogwheel door and Jack's office, feeling torn. He caught a glimpse of Jack sitting at his desk reading a file. Fear welled up inside him as his heart pounded furiously. *I can't do this,* he thought as he hurried to the cogwheel door, desperate to escape from the oppressive confines of the Hub.

As the cool night air hit him full in the face, he breathed a deep sigh of relief. He looked out over the bay, watching the boats bobbing slowing up and down in the water. He leaned over the rail, breathing heavily as he looked into the murky black of the ocean. *If I had only been more successful at concealing my emotions... I've had enough practice. Why did my talent for maintaining an impassive persona fail me now?*
He turned slowly and walked to a bench nearby, dropping unceremoniously into a heap on the cold seat. What am I doing? he asked himself, dropping his head into his hands. Can I really tell Jack about this? I'm not sure that I want to be so close to someone… I don't know if I want to be that close to Jack – to let him in that much… Jack will always keep a part of himself at arms length from me. There is so much I don't know about him, so much I'll never know. Why should I share this secret with him? Do I really want to make myself that vulnerable? What if he sees me differently, or thinks I'm weak or pathetic? What if I bare my soul to him and then lose him? How could I ever look him in the eyes again?

He sat shivering on the bench as he thought over everything that he and Jack had been through together. He has shared so much with me… he trusts me… I feel like I owe him an explanation. I don't want him to think that I don't trust him. Even though I'm not sure I can talk about it…

As he sat on the bench shivering, trying to make up his mind, he felt something warm being draped around his shoulders. He looked up sharply. Jack had brought him his coat. He gratefully slipped his arms into the sleeves and pulled it tightly around his body. Jack sat down next to him, and Ianto was thankful for Jack's body heat, though not sure how he felt about his presence. "I told myself that I was going to let you decide to come to me on your own," Jack said staring out over the bay. "I felt that you needed to choose to let me in."

Jack paused before continuing. "But it's too late for that now. It doesn't work that way anymore."

Ianto looked curiously at him. "I couldn't leave you sitting out here alone, knowing that you were in pain. I needed to do something." He turned to look at Ianto. "Don't you understand, Ianto? I can't stand to see you like this. Your pain has become mine," he whispered, not looking Ianto in the eyes.

Ianto stared at him with bewilderment. "I couldn't just leave you alone," he murmured, putting his arm around Ianto.

Ianto smiled in spite of himself. "You've never been good at leaving things alone, have you?" he said with affection.

"No," Jack agreed, smiling in return. "I never can."

Jack brought his other hand up to Ianto's cheek, caressing it gently. "Please tell me what's going on," he pleaded quietly.

Ianto looked into Jack's eyes. He could sense the affection that Jack felt for him. And he could also sense the pain Jack felt at his distress. I'm causing him pain… That's not what I wanted. He sighed, knowing that his decision was made. He nodded his consent.

Jack took his hand and stood, pulling Ianto up with him. "It's cold out here. Can we go somewhere warmer?"

Ianto nodded again, leading them back to the water tower and the platform hidden by the perception filter. They stepped on, and Jack used his wrist strap to activate the lift. Jack wrapped his arms around Ianto and pulled him close as they descended into the Hub. Ianto closed his eyes, allowing himself a moment to appreciate the comforting warmth of Jack's body pressed against his. What will he think of me after I tell him about my past? What if this is the last time he holds me like this?

As fear gripped him again, he pulled away from Jack and stepped off the platform. He headed straight for Jack's office. He retrieved two glasses and the ever present bottle of scotch. Then without looking back, he climbed down the ladder into Jack's bedroom. Not in his office… This isn't Torchwood. It's me and Jack. And this tiny bedroom is the closest thing we have to something that's
He quickly kicked off his shoes and removed his coat and suit jacket, hanging them neatly over a chair. Jack appeared at the foot of the ladder. He watched as Ianto sat on the edge of the bed and poured himself a generous glass of scotch. Ianto quickly swallowed the contents of the glass before refilling it and holding the bottle out to Jack. *I don't even know where to begin…* he thought frantically.

Jack took the bottle and sat down beside him. Ianto handed him the second glass. Jack began to pour himself a glass when Ianto blurted out, "My father wasn't a master tailor."

Reluctantly, Ianto looked at Jack. He had paused in the act of pouring the scotch, but he didn't speak. Ianto could read nothing in his expression – no surprise, no accusations. His emotions were closed. Ianto sighed heavily and took another sip of scotch. "He worked at Debenhams," he whispered.

Still Jack was silent. Ianto braved another look at him. Jack's face was expressionless. "I lied to you," Ianto pressed, as though trying to illicit a reaction from Jack.

"I know," Jack replied mildly.

Ianto was surprised. "How?" he asked incredulously.

"Can we go into that later?" Jack asked, finally looking at him. "How I know isn't important right now. It's why you lied to me that I'm interested in. And about something as mundane as what your father did for a living. Why did you think I would care one way or another?"

"It wasn't about you," Ianto started, but then he corrected himself. "Well, maybe it was a little…” he stopped, unsure how to continue. "I've never told anyone about my childhood before. Not even Lisa…” he paused again. "She knew some details, but not the whole story…” He looked at Jack. "I don't know how this is going to come out. Please just let me tell it in my own way."

"Okay," Jack agreed as he finished pouring out his drink and set the bottle down on the floor.

Ianto looked down at the scotch he was holding. He swirled the liquid, watching it move smoothly around the glass. "I hated my father," Ianto continued, still looking at the glass in his hand. *But that's not where it begins…* He tried again, "My mother was a patient at Providence Park before she died."

He couldn't look into Jack's eyes. He stared intently at his glass, trying unsuccessfully to organize his racing thoughts. "She was sick," Ianto added, realizing that it was a poor explanation.

"When she had what Dad called her 'good spells,' she was brilliant. She was fun and exciting and full of life." He smiled slightly as he recalled those memories. "But during her 'bad spells,' she was terrifying. And as I got older, the 'good spells' became more and more infrequent…”

He paused to take a sip of scotch before continuing. "I lived in constant fear, not knowing what each day with her would bring. I think it's why I can read people and sense their emotions. It was a survival mechanism. I had to know as soon as I woke up each morning what kind of mood she was in… so I could be prepared… or hide."

He shuddered as he remembered those horrible mornings when he would wake up and know instantly that his mother was in one of her moods. He chanced a look at Jack who was sitting with his elbows on his knees, hands clenched around his glass. Ianto quickly looked away and took another sip of his drink. He sat for a moment, not knowing how to continue. "When it finally got too bad, she was sent to Providence Park," he finally went on, knowing he was telling the story out of order, but his usually orderly mind was in disarray. "I was twelve," he added as an afterthought.
"I saw her the day before she killed herself," he paused again, realizing that he'd said that badly.

Jack looked sharply at him. But Ianto didn't want him to speak, and Jack seemed to understand his silent plea. Ianto drained the rest of his scotch, and Jack refilled his glass. "I knew that she wasn't well that day," he continued. "And I knew something bad was going to happen. But she was extraordinarily cruel. She told me that it was me who was the monster, not her. She said that she wished she had never had me - that I was a mistake, and that I'd ruined her life. She told me that it should have been me sitting in the hospital room instead of her. She said it was all my fault…"

Ianto paused to catch his breath. There was a knot forming in his stomach and he felt bile rising up his throat. Saying those words aloud hurt more than he'd anticipated, and he knew he was fighting a losing battle to maintain his composure. Jack reached out his hand and Ianto took it gratefully, lacing their fingers together. He tried to pull himself together. "It wasn't anything I hadn't heard before…" his voice faded. He took a deep breath. "But I'll never forget the hate in her voice that day. And that day, I hated her too…"

He stopped again, not sure how to describe something he'd never before put into words. He didn't know how to explain how much his mother's constant litany of hateful words had shaped and molded who he was. He didn't know how to express the constant fear and pain of his childhood and how it had extended into his adulthood. He had never understood why all of his mother's rage had been directed at him. I never understood why she hated me so much…

And he certainly didn't know how to explain to Jack why, several years later, he'd been a patient at Providence Park as well…
Ianto was silent for a while, as he tried to gather the courage to continue his story. Finally Jack broke the silence. "What was your mother diagnosed with?"

"Borderline Personality Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Clinical Depression – take your pick," Ianto replied, waving his hand disdainfully. "I understand the illness a bit better now that I'm older, but at the time, I didn't realize… I thought it was… well, I believed her when she said it was me…” His voice cracked and he looked away from Jack, willing the tears to remain unshed.

"You don't have to tell me any more if you don't want to," Jack said, squeezing his hand.

Ianto looked back at Jack. He considered ending the conversation, but he knew that his dam had broken. He had to finish the story now. "Now that I've begun, I need to tell you the rest," he said quietly.

Ianto shut his eyes and desperately attempted to regain his composure. He concentrated on the sensation of his fingers entwined with Jack's, gathering strength from their tangible warmth. He opened his eyes and continued. "I blamed myself for her death. Not only because she had convinced me that I was the reason she was so miserable, but also because I could sense that she was… I knew something bad was going to happen…” he broke off again.

"Ianto, it wasn't your fault. She was ill," Jack said, trying to soothe him.

Ianto didn't reply. He waved off Jack's comment and continued speaking. "After my mother killed herself, my father changed. He became withdrawn and absent or he was demanding and cruel. I think he blamed me for her death."

He paused before he added nonchalantly, "He broke my arm once – pushed me off a swing. He always pushed me too hard…”

He halted again as he remembered how much he had longed for comfort from his father after his mother's death, and how it had never happened. He felt the old anger rising up in him again. He narrowed his eyes. "I hated him not only because he was a hard man, but also because he let my mother abuse me for so long… and he never did anything to stop it."

He stomach churned, and he swallowed hard. He pulled his hand out of Jack's and took another sip of his scotch, but that just seemed to make it worse. He put the glass down and took several deep breaths. *If anyone ever treated a child of mine the way she treated me, I would kill them. But he just let it happen…*

He tried to rationalize. Aloud he said, "He was in complete denial of her illness. Even after she killed herself – he just couldn't admit that she was sick. He preferred to think it was my fault. I was almost relieved when he had a heart attack and died when I was seventeen. I left home after that. I left and
never looked back. My sister and I were never close anyway. I think she was in denial too… She's older and she was out of the house by the time my mother got really bad. She never bore the brunt of her rage like I did. I'm not sure why…”

He sighed, feeling again the pain that he'd spent so many years trying to bury. "I rarely see my sister. Part of it is this job, of course. But part of it is that I blame her too. Besides, she married a total wanker. But I am quite fond of my niece and nephew, although I rarely see them. They get everything if something happens to me. It's not their fault…” He paused, considering his strained relationship with his sister. "She never stood up for me either…” he whispered.

His eyes filled with tears as he remembered how intensely alone he had been for all those years. He'd felt abandoned by the people who should have loved, nurtured and protected him. He had been so confused, and never understood what was wrong with him or what he'd done to deserve to be treated so cruelly. For the longest time, he'd felt worthless and unwanted.

Jack raised his hand to Ianto's cheek and gently wiped away the tears with the pad of his thumb. "Ianto, I…” he started.

Ianto shook his head slightly, forcing the painful recollections back into the recesses of his mind. Jack lowered his hand.

Ianto continued, needing to finish what he'd started. "I do have one good memory of my childhood. My father used to take me to the Electro when I was younger – before my mother died. That's why I wanted to go there when I heard about the Rift activity. I just wanted to see the place one more time."

Jack was silent for a few minutes. Ianto picked up his glass of scotch and took another sip. He was starting to feel a bit tipsy, and the burn of the alcohol helped to soothe the ache in his heart. He had one more thing to confess, and it filled him with dread. Finally Jack spoke. He asked, "Why didn't you ask me to go with you?"

"Too many questions that I wasn't ready to answer," Ianto replied quickly.

"Was that why you were so upset? Because we went to Providence Park?" Jack asked.

"Well, yes…” Ianto hesitated.

"But there's more to it than that?" Jack hedged.

Ianto nodded. The dreaded moment had arrived. He spoke quickly, only hesitating twice as he struggled to get the words out. "As a teenager, I was… well, I was damaged. I acted out, rebelled, hung with the wrong crowd, got into trouble… I was miserable, and I just wanted the pain to end. One night I got really pissed and swallowed all of my mother's pills. My father never threw any of her things away…”

"You tried to kill yourself," Jack clarified.

Ianto stared hard into his glass of scotch. "And I woke up at Providence Park."

"So you were a patient there too," Jack stated.

"I was only there a few weeks. I was just on fifteen years old."

The silence filled the space between them and Ianto became acutely aware of the muffled sounds of the Hub from above. He shifted uncomfortably, terrified of what Jack would say and still unable to
look him in the eyes. He squeezed the glass so hard between his hands that he thought it would shatter under the pressure. "Did you ever try again?" Jack asked quietly.

"You were there the only other time I tried…" Ianto replied honestly.

"Ah…" Jack said. "I remember. After Lisa."

"Yes," Ianto whispered. "At that time, she was the only family I had…" But now I have you and the team… at least I hope I still have you…

"Ianto, why didn't you want to tell me?" Jack's voice held a note that Ianto couldn't identify.

Ianto sighed. "A lot of reasons," he replied. "I'm a private person. I don't like talking about my past. In fact, I've never spoken about it. You of all people should understand not wanting to talk about your past." Ianto finally looked at him.

Jack stared hard into his eyes. "Is that the only reason?"

Ianto shifted uncomfortably again under Jack's scrutiny. No… that's not the only reason. "I didn't want you to think I was weak and pathetic." I've finally said it out loud, he thought to himself, cringing inwardly as he waited nervously for Jack's response.

"Why would I think that?" Jack looked surprised.

"It wasn't my proudest moment, Jack. We fight every day for the continued existence of the human race. I thought you wouldn't respect anyone who wanted to take their own life."

"You think I don't understand what it feels like to want to die?" Jack asked incredulously. "How many times have you washed the blood off the walls after I shot myself?"

Ianto almost smiled – almost, but not quite. "Well, technically, only once," he replied pedantically. "But it's different for you. You've already lived several lifetimes."

"Ianto, only someone with immeasurable inner strength could endure that kind of abuse and still function as well as you do. You're leading a successful and valuable life. You've survived what would destroy most people."

"I'm not sure if I agree with that," Ianto murmured. I'm not sure I'm coping all that well… especially after these last few days.

Jack's reactions to his revelations had confused him. He looked at Jack for a long time. He doesn't seem surprised by any of this… It's as if… "You already knew most of this didn't you," he said aloud.

"Yes," Jack admitted.

Ianto felt anger begin to boil inside him. "But you still made me tell you?"

"I didn't make you do anything," Jack replied calmly. "You chose to tell me."

"You didn't give me much of a choice," Ianto retorted.

"You always have a choice, Ianto," Jack countered.

Heat rose from his chest and he felt his cheeks burn hot. "But you already knew! Why did you make me say it all out loud?"
"I wanted you to choose to tell me yourself," Jack replied.

Ianto anger turned to fury. "You just made me relive my most painful memories for some kind of power trip?" he spat bitterly, pulling away from Jack.

"Ianto, that's not what this is about and you know it."

Jack's voice was still calm, and it dampened his rage. "How long have you known?"

"Since you told me that you had fabricated your entire history in our system. I can do research too, you know," Jack added pointedly.

Ianto's temper flared again. "So every time you teased me about my father being a master tailor, you were baiting me."

"No, not exactly. The 'master tailor's son' had become a kind of a joke between us. I enjoyed the banter. I knew that it wasn't true, but I also knew that for some reason it was important for you to pretend to be that person… Although I'm still not sure I understand why."

Ianto took a deep breath. Of all of the things he'd admitting to Jack that evening, he knew that this one was going to be the most difficult. "I created a persona when I started working for Torchwood…" he hesitated as he steeled himself. "I thought that was the person you liked…"

He couldn't look Jack in the eyes. He was expecting confirmation of the statement, and he realized that this was the thing he was most afraid of. So Jack's words surprised him. "Do you really think so little of me?"

Ianto looked up sharply. "What do you mean?"

Jack was shaking his head sadly. "Do you really think that I'm so shallow? You must not have a very high opinion of me."

Jack's words hurt, and Ianto found himself becoming defensive. "You're quite fond of your own facade," he snapped, glaring at Jack.

He saw anger pass across Jack's features and then quickly subside. "Ianto, part of what makes you so remarkable is that you see past my facade and like me for who I am, not who I pretend to be. I haven't had that in a long time. I just wish you felt the same way about me."

Ianto saw the hurt in Jack's eyes. He looked away, suddenly feeling guilty for lashing out. "I do," he replied vehemently, but even as the words left his lips, he wasn't sure if it was entirely true. The thing I was most afraid of was that he fell for the image I portray, not the person I really am. With everything that's happened between us, I still find myself doubting him. But I don't want him to question how I feel about him. If only I could tell him what he means to me…"

"It's not you. I don't think you're shallow," he murmured.

"Then why?"

Ianto tensed and found his eyes gazing towards the ladder. His former instinct to bolt resurfaced as he realized their conversation was edging into perilous territory. He wondered how far he'd get if he attempted to leave, or if Jack would even try to stop him. He sighed inwardly as he struggled to clamp down on his fear. It was far too late to escape. He needed to hold himself together and see this through. He quickly drained the remaining scotch from his glass and put it down on the floor.
As if sensing Ianto's desire to flee, Jack took his hand again, grasping it firmly. He moved closer until their shoulders were touching.

Ianto exhaled unsteadily as he tried to gather his thoughts. "I hated lying to you, but I was scared," he started. "I was worried that if you knew the truth… if you knew how damaged I really was…"

He stalled, as he frantically tried to find the words. He owed Jack the truth, but he also knew there was a line he couldn't cross, at least not yet, and certainly not here. "I mean, you could have anyone you wanted…" He stopped again, realizing he was rambling.

He glanced down at their intertwined hands. "I was afraid I'd lose you," he whispered, feeling his voice break as he finally articulated his greatest fear.

Jack looked at Ianto in shock but then tightened the grip on his hand. "I don't feel any differently about you, Ianto."

Ianto was tempted to say spitefully, 'Don't you?' but the words died on his lips. That's why I was afraid to tell him. I thought he would see me differently… But he's known this whole time… And he's known that I was lying to him, yet he never said a word…

Jack continued. "Everything you've told me only deepens my respect for you. It reminds me of your incredible strength and resilience. It reaffirms what an extraordinary person you are."

Ianto stared at Jack in disbelief. He looked deeply into Jack's eyes, searching for any sign of insincerity, doubt or disappointment. He found none.

"You don't believe me do you? You can't let yourself believe?" Jack pressed.

Ianto slowly shook his head. "I want to, I just…"

Jack sighed and closed his eyes. Ianto gasped as he felt Jack open his mind to him. He was almost overwhelmed by the sudden torrent of emotions radiating from Jack. He sensed the deep sorrow and remorse Jack felt for Ianto's painful past, and Jack's grave concern for Ianto's wellbeing. But layered over those melancholy emotions were intense feelings of affection, pride, admiration, respect and trust. Ianto was stunned. He felt his anxiety start to slip away as his conscious mind was enveloped by the warmth of Jack's feelings for him.

He stared at Jack who was looking at him the same way he'd always looked at him. He's the one who is remarkable… he thought tenderly. He truly does see the real me, and he likes what he sees.

Jack looked at him intently. "Do you believe me now, Ianto?" he asked, his tone pleading.

Ianto tried to respond, but his throat felt constricted. He nodded, suddenly feeling self-conscious and exposed.

Reluctantly, he tore his gaze from Jack. He had bared his soul, and Jack now knew more about him than anyone ever had. He wasn't sure how he felt about that. There was a large part of him that was relieved, thankful that he no longer needed to hide that piece of himself from Jack. He would not have to lie to Jack anymore. But another part of him couldn't quite let go of his insecurities and fears. I've jumped off the precipice. I can't hide from him anymore. Does he understand the enormity of this? And if we don't last… I could never do this again, not with anyone else. His thoughts raced. Regardless of what the future would bring, he knew this day would be a defining moment in his life.

He felt raw and emotionally shattered. He needed time to organize his turbulent mind. Standing somewhat unsteadily, he reached for his jacket. "I should go home."
Jack looked at him in concern. "What's wrong? Do you regret telling me?"

"No!" Ianto replied hurriedly, feeling distraught. *It's not regret. I'm terrified… I didn't want to be this vulnerable.*

Jack continued insistently. "Then, stay. Please, Ianto. You don't have to talk anymore, unless you want to."

He paused for a moment and then resumed more cautiously. "But if you don't want to be here, I'll take you home. You're not in a fit state to drive yourself."

Ianto could feel Jack's fear, his worry that he had failed Ianto in some way, that he hadn't done enough. He sensed Jack's desperate desire to comfort him and subjugate his pain. Jack hadn't given up on him. He hadn't allowed Ianto to suffer alone, and Ianto didn't want Jack to feel that he'd been inadequate in any way. And if Ianto was completely honest with himself, he didn't want to be anywhere else. "I'll stay," he said, hoping he sounded more confident than he felt. He sat back down next to Jack.

Jack smiled at him. He placed his hand on Ianto's shoulder and squeezed gently. "Good. Why don't you check on that pet dinosaur of yours, and I'll go out and get us some dinner? I won't be long."

Without waiting for Ianto to reply, Jack moved to the ladder. Ianto felt some of the tension leave his body, grateful to Jack for realizing that he needed some time alone to compose himself.

"Jack…"

Jack turned around. "Ianto?" he queried.

Ianto looked at him nervously. "I… err… thank you," he said quietly. The words seemed woefully inadequate, but he didn't trust himself to say anything else.

Jack walked back over to the bed and leaned down. He pressed a soft kiss to Ianto's forehead, and trailed his fingers gently down the side of Ianto's face. "You'll be here when I get back? You won't run away on me again?" he asked warily.

Ianto smiled and shook his head. He remained sitting on the bed, lost in thought, as he watched Jack disappear up through the hatch.

For the first time, his dark past didn't seem to be the vast looming presence it had always been. He wondered if it was possible for his innermost torment to no longer overshadow his life. *Is it possible that I've found someone who knows my deepest secrets and still likes me for who I am?* He dared to hope that it just might be.
Chapter Summary

Another chapter co-written by riftintime, the best beta EVER!

Jack had noticed Ianto’s change of heart about showing affection toward him in public immediately, although he never said a word to Ianto. He had not forgotten the night that Ianto walked into the pub (looking deliciously disheveled after Owen had rearranged the archives as a practical joke) and kissed him in public. It was one of his favorite memories.

He’d suffered his share of narrow minded thinking for his omnisexuality – especially since he had landed here in the eighteen hundreds. He’d even been killed a few times for his openness about his proclivities. He’d been with men who’d been uncomfortable with their sexuality before. He’d also been with men who weren’t afraid of being with someone of the same sex. Neither attitudes were foreign to him – he’d had to adapt and learn to be more discrete, although he’d never truly understood the hang-ups of this time. Sexuality didn’t exist in the 51st century. But somehow, he wanted Ianto to be different. Because Ianto is different to me…

So the day Ianto had appeared to relinquish his inhibitions had been a happy day for Jack. He couldn’t help but wonder what had changed. He knew that Tosh had spoken to Ianto, but much to Jack’s dismay, they had turned off the audio on the CCTV camera during the conversation. Feeling frustrated, he had hacked into Ianto’s email account and read his exchange with Owen. And that was when things had changed between them. Owen of all people, Jack thought with amusement.

He knew that Ianto still kept secrets from him. When he’d learned that Ianto had fabricated everything in his personnel file, Jack had made it his mission to find out everything he could about the enigmatic Ianto Jones. What he’d found was a heart wrenching tale of a tragic childhood.

Jack wanted to know more about Ianto’s past. He wanted Ianto to tell him about it in his own words, but he’d been reticent to push the issue. He’d had a feeling that there was some darkness in Ianto’s life that he kept safely hidden away. He wished that Ianto would choose to confide in him, especially after he’d told Ianto about the year that never was. Jack trusted Ianto and it frustrated him because he wanted Ianto to trust him in return.

He tried to rationalize away his disappointment. He'll choose to tell me if and when he's ready. I keep so much of my own past hidden away from him... There's so much he doesn't know about me... So much I'm afraid to tell him... He was aware of his hypocrisy, so he'd remained silent.

The banter about the master tailor’s son was a sticking point with Jack. He knew that it was a lie – Ianto’s father had worked for Debenhams. That information was easily discovered if one only looked for it. But he appreciated the romantic back-story that Ianto had fabricated for himself, and he accepted that it was somehow important to Ianto to portray this image he'd created. Besides, Jack truly enjoyed their persiflage. The one thing that bothered him was that he didn't understand why Ianto was so insistent on maintaining the façade with him. Haven't we been through enough together?

Part of him understood that it had become a bit of a joke between them. But part of him was hurt that Ianto didn’t trust him with the truth. If he was being honest with himself, he would have to admit that
he did push Ianto every time he made reference to him being a master tailor's son. He liked to tease, but each time part of him wondered if this was going to be the time when Ianto came clean. However, Ianto was persistent in maintaining his subterfuge.

Besides his lingering discomfort over Ianto's lies about his past, Jack was happy that Ianto seemed to finally accept him as his lover. He'd thoroughly enjoyed their moment of domestic bliss at Ianto's flat, but it also saddened him. *I can't ever give him this... nor can I ever have it for myself.* He was more comfortable when they stayed at the Hub, and Ianto seemed to understand. He didn't seem to care much about the trappings of modern domestic life, with the exception of his beloved suits. Ianto's cravings were far more fundamental. What he seemed to want most was companionship, affection, and respect. Thankfully those were things Jack could give him, and he did so freely and willingly. They hadn't stayed at Ianto's flat again.

Jack was secretly grateful for Ianto's undemanding nature. He knew that Ianto would never ask him for anything that he suspected Jack might be hesitant to give. It made things easier, but it left Jack with feelings of guilt and inadequacy. It would be easy to attribute Ianto's temperance to his selflessness, but Jack suspected that Ianto didn't believe his own needs worthy of consideration. The notion was distinctly unsettling. *He deserves more than this... He deserves someone who can give him more...*

Yet Ianto had told both Owen and Gwen that he was happy, so Jack tried to accept the statement, hoping it was genuine. He was beginning to come to terms with the fact that Ianto might never choose to open up about his past when things suddenly changed. It began when Jack heard familiar but old music in the Hub one evening, apparently coming from nowhere. It stirred something in him which he couldn't quite place. *Am I hearing things?* He looked around the Hub only to find it deserted but for Tosh. "Tosh," he called out. "I heard this sound. An old sound, like a pipe organ."

"A what?" Tosh asked, not really paying attention to him.

"No," Tosh replied succinctly, returning her attention back to her work.

"Is there a circus in town, or a traveling fair, something like that?" Jack asked, finally placing the music he'd heard.

"On a night like this? They'd be wasting their time," Tosh responded casually.

"Where's Ianto? He would know," Jack asked, feeling confident that Ianto would have the answers.

"He's gone to the cinema with Gwen and Owen. Some kind of opening night he wanted to check out..."

Jack barely heard the rest of Tosh's words, as he was already out the door. *Ianto's gone to the cinema... with Owen and Gwen? He didn't tell me where he was going? That's unusual. It's more than unusual. It's downright weird,* Jack thought as he hopped into the SUV and tracked Ianto's mobile phone.

When he found that Ianto was at the Electro theatre, he turned the SUV in that direction, burning rubber as he tore down the street. *Why did he go to the Electro? Why did he go without telling me? Does it have something to do with the music I heard in the Hub? I have a bad feeling about this...* He pulled up in front of the theatre, jumped out of the SUV and raced inside the building.

He found Ianto standing in an empty theatre, staring at a blank movie screen. As Ianto described the
events, Jack's anxiety increased, not only because of the situation, but also because Ianto seemed to be deeply affected by what he'd seen. He was slightly embarrassed on hearing that he'd been in the images as well. *That's part of my past that probably should have stayed buried,* he thought with chagrin.

Jack helplessly watched Ianto become more and more distraught as the investigation progressed. He wanted desperately to say something or do something to alleviate Ianto's suffering. *I can't stand seeing him in pain… but I don't know what I should do. Do I let him suffer alone and wait for him to come to me? Do I intervene and beg him to confide in me? Do I ignore it and hope it goes away?* None of those options seemed like the right choice.

He saw how much the visit to Providence Park affected Ianto, and he thought that he knew why. He knew Ianto's mother had been a patient and had died there by her own hand. He was also taken aback by their meeting with Christina. *Two of them in one place is really unsettling.* He closed his emotions to both Christina and Ianto. *It's just easier that way… I don't want Ianto to feel my pain on top of his own…*

He asked Ianto what was bothering him when they left the hospital, but Ianto quickly deflected. *I guess he's not ready to tell me,* Jack thought regretfully. *Be patient, Jack. Let him do this in his own time.*

When the case came to a close, Jack could see that Ianto was barely hanging on by a thread. With a heavy heart, he watched the CCTV feed as Ianto walked through the archives. When he saw Ianto make his way towards the room that he'd hidden Lisa in all that time ago, Jack knew that he needed to intervene. He still didn't know how to handle the situation. *I at least want him to know that I'm aware that he's upset. I want him to know I care. And I want him to know that he can talk to me if he chooses to do so.*

He grabbed a bottle of water from the refrigerator and followed Ianto into the bowels of the Hub. He was almost moved to tears himself when he saw the unrestrained emotion pouring from the young man of whom he had grown to care for deeply. Ianto usually kept his emotions so tightly contained, which made it all the more devastating to see him so raw and vulnerable. *If I could bear his pain for him, I would,* Jack thought, holding the water bottle against Ianto's cheek to cool his burning skin. Jack's heart nearly broke as Ianto looked blearily up at him, the pain radiating off of him in waves. *I don't have to be empathic to feel what he's suffering,* Jack thought, sliding down next to him.

He watched silently as Ianto tried to pull himself together. He didn't touch Ianto, though it pained him not to. He wanted nothing more than to wrap his arms around Ianto and comfort him. However, he felt instinctually that it would be the wrong thing to do. Finally he could bear the silence no longer. "I knew there was something wrong," he stated hesitantly, looking at Ianto.

When Ianto didn't respond, Jack continued, "Ever since the first mention of Providence Park and the look on your face when you said you knew the place."

Ianto wouldn't look at him. *I know that Providence Park is significant to you… Please tell me,* Jack screamed in his head. *I can't stand to see you like this… It tears me apart. Don't you understand that I feel your pain as if it were my own?* Jack tried again. "Are you going to tell me what's going on with you, Ianto?"

Ianto still wouldn't look at him and still didn't respond. Jack fought back the urge to say things he might later regret. *I love you, Ianto! Can't you see that? Don't you know that nothing that you could tell me about your past will change that! I just can't stand to see you in pain… I want to comfort you, reassure you, protect you…* Jack felt his own tears threaten to break free. *Give him time,* he thought, trying to hold back his own emotions. *Let him come to you.* He stood. "You know where to find
me," he said aloud, dusting off his trousers.

It took all the strength Jack could muster to leave Ianto sitting on the floor of the room that had once housed the twisted and broken frame of the woman Ianto had loved. *I hope I'm doing the right thing,* he thought mournfully as he made his way back to his office.

Jack heard Ianto come up from the sub-basement into the main area of the Hub. He watched as Ianto wavered indecisively. Then with regret, he watched Ianto bolt out of the Hub.

Jack quickly pulled up the CCTV feed again and watched Ianto outside, looking out over the bay, then sitting down on a bench and shivering. Jack could stand it no longer. He grabbed their coats and headed out into the night.

Jack draped Ianto's coat around his shoulders and sat down next to him. "I told myself that I was going to let you decide to come to me on your own," Jack explained. "I felt that you needed to choose to let me in. But it's too late for that now. It doesn't work that way anymore. I couldn't leave you sitting out here alone, knowing that you were in pain. I needed to do something. Don't you understand, Ianto? I can't stand to see you like this. Your pain has become mine."

Jack fought the urge to flinch. His statement had been difficult for him. It was hard for him to admit aloud how much Ianto's suffering affected him. But this isn't about me, he chastised himself. "I couldn't just leave you alone," he said, putting his arm around Ianto.

Jack succeeded in convincing Ianto to open up to him. He was intrigued by the fact that Ianto chose to have their conversation in his quarters rather than in his office, but it was something he would have to consider later on. Ianto needed his full attention.

As Jack listened to Ianto's story, some of which he knew, and some he didn't, he felt an increasing sense of helplessness. More than anything, he wanted to be able to take Ianto's pain away, but he knew there was nothing he could say. *And it drives me crazy that I can't do anything to make it better. All I can do is be here,* he thought, reaching out and taking Ianto's hand. *We've both suffered so much… but I've had lifetimes to come to terms with my past, whereas Ianto's only had a few short years…*

Amidst the horror of Ianto's revelations, Jack felt an intense swell of pride and admiration. He marveled at the younger man's strength and resilience. *Most people wouldn't survive that kind of abuse… You are truly remarkable…* He tried to reassure Ianto of just how remarkable he was, but Ianto didn't seem to believe him.

"You already knew most of this didn't you." It was a statement from Ianto, not a question.

*I didn't know that you tried to kill yourself and were a patient yourself at Providence Park… Those records must have been expunged…"* Yes," Jack admitted aloud, deciding against admitting the gaps in his knowledge.

Jack tried to stay calm as Ianto raged at him. *He's projecting,* he told himself. *Don't lose your temper. And then the truth came out. "I created a persona when I started working for Torchwood. I thought that was the person you liked."*

Jack was stunned and slightly hurt. *All that we've been through together… All that he knows about me… And he thinks I'm taken in by his façade?"* He blurted out angrily, then inwardly cursed his momentarily lapse.

It almost turned into an argument – Ianto's lack of trust upset him. But after mutual reassurances, Jack
managed to keep his emotions reined in. He sensed the tension building within Ianto and saw him look furtively towards the ladder. *It's too much for him, he wants to bolt. I can't let that happen. He needs to see this through.* He grabbed Ianto's hand again and held it tightly. He moved in closer, hoping the gesture would reassure Ianto enough to keep talking.

Jack was relieved when Ianto continued his explanation. Then Ianto voiced what Jack himself had often feared. "I was afraid I'd lose you."

Jack looked at Ianto in shock as his mind reeled. *Lisa was probably the first person in his life to give him any kind of love or validation... 'She was the only family I had at the time.' Now I'm that person for Ianto. I'm the one he depends on to give him self-esteem and meaning. Is that really how he sees me – as his family? Is that what I want? Can I take on that responsibility? I don't know if I'm capable of playing such a crucial role in his life. Am I worthy?* His thoughts raced and his own issues threatened to overshadow Ianto's. He had to consciously resolve to focus on the man in front of him. "I don't feel any differently about you, Ianto," he said, trying to reassure him.

He winced internally at the words he'd spoken, realizing immediately at how lacking they were in comfort. *You were never any good with words,* he berated himself. But he couldn't lie to Ianto and he knew that Ianto would resent any hollow promises. So he hoped it was enough.

As he gazed at Ianto and saw the fear and distress in his eyes, he knew that his words were not enough. *He doesn't believe me...* Jack sighed, again feeling disappointed and frustrated by Ianto's apparent lack of trust in him. *But I need to reassure him, and there is one other thing I can do...* He closed his eyes and lowered his mental barriers. He concentrated on all of the things he was feeling, letting them radiate from him – his deep sorrow and remorse at hearing Ianto's story, his concern for his wellbeing, his affection, admiration, respect and trust. He let the emotions flow freely, with no regard for his own feelings and misgivings. His only concern was to reassure Ianto.

Jack carefully watched Ianto as he tried to gauge his reaction. After several tense moments, the expression on Ianto's face was of incredulity, but it slowly transformed into awe. Jack's breath hitched as the look in Ianto's eyes softened with deep affection. He was so relieved he'd finally gotten through to Ianto that he felt tears start to form in his own eyes. But Jack's relief was short lived as Ianto turned away and declared he was leaving.

He understood that Ianto might be feeling embarrassed and anxious, and he was undoubtedly overwrought. Jack had felt the same way after revealing his own traumas on the Valiant. But he couldn't let Ianto leave – not like this. He didn't like the idea that Ianto would go back to his flat to suffer alone. He didn't want this to end in awkwardness. He thought of the countless times that Ianto had been there for him, and how comforting his gentle yet resolute companionship always was. *He's always taking care of me. He always seems to know instinctively what I need.* Jack wanted to give him nothing less.

He started to panic, worrying that he had failed in some way. He resorted to begging. "Then stay. Please, Ianto. You don't have to talk any more if you don't want to."

Jack felt profoundly relieved when Ianto agreed to stay the night. He left Ianto alone, giving him time to pull himself together. But there was still a part of him that feared he'd return and Ianto would be gone.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my beta riftintime for inexpressible talent and brilliance.

Jack paused at the top of the ladder, fighting the urge to descend once again. **No, Jack. Give him some time alone. If he bolts, there's nothing you can do about it. You both need to eat anyway.** His stomach growled as if to emphasize the point. Grabbing his coat, he strode purposefully out of the Hub and into the cold night air.

He tried to remember what Ianto's favorite food was, but he realized with annoyance that he couldn't remember. **Damn it! What does Ianto like? Is it possible that I really don't know him that well?** He walked along the plaza, glancing at the restaurants he passed. **Pizza? We always have pizza… Japanese? Indian? Mexican? Damn it! What does Ianto like? He's always catering to everyone else's tastes. How the hell should I know what he would chose if he was alone…**

Jack stopped abruptly and sat down on a bench. He wanted to find a rooftop and lose himself for a few hours. Ianto's story had shaken him more than he'd imagined it would, and he wasn't sure if it was because it really was a horrible story, or if it was because he couldn't stand the idea that Ianto had suffered so terribly. He dropped his head into his hands and groaned.

He felt an intense desire to move, to run, to shoot something. He jumped up and looked regretfully at the roof of the Millennium Center. He yearned for the solitude of that removed vista. **I can't…**

As he paced, he fingered his wrist strap longingly. **Back in the day, I could punch a few buttons and be in another galaxy,** he thought nostalgically. **If things got too intense, I could just disappear…** For the first time in a long while, he cursed his situation and his entrapment on 21st century Earth. **I can't do it. I can't be his raison d'être. That's too much responsibility for one person. Besides, I'm selfish and self-centered and generally unworthy of the job. Maybe I should have just gone with the Doctor…**

As soon as the thought formed in his mind, he stopped dead in his tracks. He remembered his time aboard the Valiant and shuddered at the recollection. He remembered how his thoughts of Ianto had kept him sane through the year of torture. And he remembered his vow to endeavor to be worthy of Ianto should he ever see him again. **You're being absurd, Jack,** he scolded himself. **You don't mean that and you know it! You're too old to just run away like a coward anymore.** He sat again on the bench again, breathing deeply. **Ianto has just confided in you. He trusted you. He opened up to you. Would you ever forgive yourself if you abandoned him again? After everything that's happened? Be a man and deal with it.**
He stood and walked quickly into Jubilee Pizza. *Pizza's always a safe bet. Everyone loves pizza. We always have pizza. I think Ianto likes pizza... I know Ianto likes pizza.* He placed his order and stood outside as he waited for the food, trying to calm his pounding heart. He realized that he had panicked. He also realized that he'd been in this position before. *How many lovers have you abandoned because things got too intense or too serious or too difficult? It was never the right thing to do... Besides, Ianto deserves better.*

You wanted him to confide in you. You asked for this, Jack. You wanted him to let you in... You can't abandon him now. He took several more deep breaths. He thought of the pain Ianto had suffered, and the pain he himself had suffered. *Pain is something I understand... I've lived so long... seen so much... endured so much... I've died so many times... Death after death... and it never sticks... I'm always alone... I'll always be alone.* He started pacing again.

He thought again of Ianto, ostensibly sitting in the Hub waiting for him. *If he hasn't bolted again, Ianto had just poured his heart out to me. How many times has he been there for me?... This time I need to be there for him.* He sighed heavily, knowing he was being selfish. *This isn't about you, Jack. Now pull yourself together!* With determination, he turned and walked back into Jubilee to collect the pizzas.

He entered the Hub with an apprehension that was a mixture of both fear of facing Ianto and fear that Ianto was gone. The Hub was in exactly the same state that he'd left it. There were no noises coming from Myfanwy's nest, and it didn't seem like Ianto was about. He opened his mouth to call out, but the words stuck in his throat. He set the pizzas down carefully on his desk and slowly hung up his coat. *What am I going to do if he's gone? Do I go after him? Do I leave him in peace? Damn, I'm terrible at this!*

He steeled himself and descended the ladder into his bedroom. Ianto was sitting in the same place he'd left him. It looked like he hadn't moved. His face was red and puffy, but it was dry. If Ianto had shed any further tears, he'd shed them privately. Jack's heart ached again at the sight of Ianto, who looked even younger and more vulnerable than his twenty-five years. "I brought pizza," he said and grimaced at the lameness of his statement.


"Want me to bring it down here?" Jack asked, looking around the room.

"And get pizza sauce all over the sheets?" Ianto asked, looking horrified.

Jack couldn't help himself. He threw back his head and laughed. *There's the Ianto I know and love!* "Could be fun!" Jack leered at him.

Ianto snorted and rolled his eyes in a most Ianto-like fashion, and Jack felt a wave of relief wash over him. *Thank the gods!* Ianto stood, unbuttoned the top button of his shirt and rolled up his sleeves. Jack watched him with admiration. He felt a rush of desire which he quickly tried to suppress. *Time and place, Jack.*

They climbed up the ladder and sat down at Jack's desk. Jack dove hungrily into the pizza, but Ianto merely picked at his, looking lost in thought. Jack's anxiety returned in full force. They sat in silence as Jack tried desperately to think of a funny story to tell Ianto. Usually he had several anecdotes readily at hand, but his mind was a blank. *Say something, Jack!* He opened his mouth to ask if he'd gotten the wrong kind of pizza when Ianto broke the silence. "Jack, can Torchwood survive without me for a couple of days?"

Jack felt his stomach churn, and he looked into Ianto's eyes. "Planning on going somewhere?" he
asked, trying to keep his tone relaxed, but he nearly choked on the words.

"I want to go out to Flat Holm for a day or so," Ianto explained, his expression neutral.

Jack was silent. Why does he want to go out there? It's so depressing. If he's already upset, won't that just make it worse? "Why?" he asked aloud.

"Perspective," Ianto answered succinctly.

Jack understood what he was getting at. Seeing those destroyed lives could certainly make one's own problems seem insignificant in comparison. Should I offer to go with him? Does he want to be alone? Should I ask? If he wants me along, would he ask me to go? "Okay…" he hesitated. "If that's what you want to do."

"It is." There was certainty in Ianto's voice.

"Whatever you need, Ianto," Jack said sincerely.

Ianto looked at him gratefully. "I'll leave first thing."

Jack nodded, still not knowing if he'd handled the situation well. Does he want to get away from me? Did I totally fail him? Should I go with him? Should I order him to stay? Why am I so bad at this?

They finished their meal in silence. Jack wanted to fill the silence with outlandish stories or sexual innuendo, but he held his tongue. He felt that it would be the wrong thing to do. Silence between us has never bothered me before… But there seems to be so much left unsaid…

When they both finished eating, Jack stood and held out his hand. "Let's go to bed, Ianto."

"Jack, I…" Ianto started, and then stopped. He looked pleadingly at Jack.

"What is it, Ianto?"

"I don't think I can… I mean, I don't know if I'm… I'm just not…" he hesitated again.

Jack's wrinkled forehead cleared as he realized what Ianto was trying to say. "You don't want to have sex tonight," Jack supplied for him.

"Is that okay?" Ianto asked, sounding nervous.

"Of course that's okay, Ianto!" Jack exclaimed.

"Should I go home then?" Ianto asked, looking away from him.

Jack felt a stab of guilt. "Ianto, do you think sex is the only reason I want you here?"

Ianto didn't respond and didn't look at him. Jack began to get frustrated. How could he think that of me? "You've stayed here before when all we've done is sleep."

"Yeah, but that was when we just fell in a heap after an investigation," Ianto explained.

Jack shook his head sadly. "Ianto, I don't know what to say. If you really think that I only want you here for sex…" Jack hesitated… Then I've truly failed you, he finished in his head.

"I… erm… I don't… " Ianto sputtered.
Jack relented. *He's emotionally shattered. Cut him some slack.* He stood and pulled Ianto into his arms. "Ianto, that's not why I asked you to stay. Let's just get some sleep, okay?"

Ianto nodded and put his head on Jack's shoulder. *I'm so sorry that you think that's all I want from you. Why am I so bad at this?*

He pulled away gently and took Ianto's hand, leading him to the ladder. They descended into the bedroom, undressed down to their underwear, brushed their teeth and crawled into bed. Jack took Ianto in his arms and held him tightly. Ianto put his head on Jack's chest and Jack stroked his hair. *I'm so sorry for what you've suffered. And I'm sorry that I'm so bad at this… You deserve better…*
Ianto lay with his head on Jack’s chest as Jack stroked his hair. He felt emotionally drained. Relief at having finally unburdened himself was mixed with a horror of Jack knowing so much about him.

Can I really trust him? Should I have told him? Do I really mean that much to him?

His nimble mind scanned through various memories of him and Jack – some good and some painful. But one particular memory stood out in his mind – his 25th birthday, several months ago. His near photographic memory allowed him to relive the time as if watching a film. He mentally played back the memory.

Ianto woke on the morning of August 19th in Jack's arms. Usually Jack was up well before Ianto had even stirred, but since the event with the space whale, all of the drama with Gwen, and the fight in the archives that culminated in brutal but fantastic make-up sex, he found himself waking up in Jack's arms more and more often.

You’re twenty-five today Ianto Jones, he thought to himself. I wonder if Jack will remember what today is… He turned and looked at Jack, who was staring at him. "What?" he asked.

"Nothing," Jack replied with a grin. "Just wondering if you're up yet."

"I'm up," Ianto said, stifling a yawn.

"Good," Jack murmured, kissing Ianto's lips and running his tongue over his teeth. "Because I'm definitely up!"

Jack's grin turned into a leer as he ran his hands down Ianto's chest, pausing to caress each nipple. Then his hand reached lower, taking Ianto's hardening cock in his strong hand. Jack stroked him until he was hard and dripping with precum. Then Jack spun them around so Ianto was lying on his back and Jack was on top of him. Jack guided Ianto's cock to his entrance. "Jack, you're not ready," Ianto protested.

Jack chuckled. "What do you think I was doing while I was watching you sleep," he said mischievously as he impaled himself on Ianto.

Ianto groaned as he entered Jack's well lubricated warmth. Jack pressed their bodies together and sought Ianto's mouth with his. Their tongues met languidly as Jack slowly moved on top of Ianto, taking his time, wanting to make it last. When finally they became frantic with desire, they clutched at each other, their mouths locked together as they came simultaneously.

Jack rolled off Ianto and pulled him over so Ianto was lying with his head on Jack's stomach. They both lay quietly, catching their breath, as Jack stroked his face. Not a bad way to start my birthday, he thought with a satisfied smirk, even if Jack forgets... He thought back to his last birthday, which he could barely remember. So much had been going on at that time; he was hiding Lisa, desperate
to find a cure, he was fooling around with Jack to distract him from what he was hiding in the basement. Gwen had recently joined Torchwood, and he had tried his hardest to blend into the background. No one had noticed that it was his birthday, including him. It had come and gone before he had even realized that he'd turned another year older.

So much has changed since then, he thought as he caressed the smooth, muscular skin of Jack's abdomen. He had lost Lisa, and thought he would never be able to face the world again. But he had survived. He had become a respected member of the team. And I fell in love with Jack…

He turned his head so he could see Jack's face. Jack was smiling at him with a satiated expression. I've found my place, he thought, smiling back at Jack.

"What are you thinking about?" Jack asked.

"Coffee," Ianto replied promptly, not wanting to admit the truth.

Jack chuckled. "When are you ever not thinking about coffee?"

"When I'm asleep," Ianto replied succinctly.

"Yeah, but I'll bet you're dreaming of coffee," Jack teased.

"Probably," Ianto returned with a shrug. Or I'm dreaming of you…

Ianto picked his head up and looked at the clock on Jack's bedside table. "Time to get to work, Jack."

"Can't we just stay here all day?" Jack asked with a pout.

"Sure," Ianto shrugged. "Aliens are invading? Sod that. We're staying in bed," he quipped, laying his head back down on Jack's stomach.

Jack groaned. "Okay, okay, I'm getting up."

"Usually you can't sit still for three minutes straight, Jack. What's gotten into you today?" he asked curiously.

"I guess I'd rather just stay here with you," Jack replied, gently stroking Ianto's cheek.

Ianto picked his head up again and looked at Jack. He raised an eyebrow archly. "Jones," he said holding out his hand. "Ianto Jones. And you are?"

Jack rolled his eyes. "Come on. I'm not that bad," he said, getting out of bed and heading into the bathroom.

Ianto snorted as he slid off the bed and reached his arms over his head. He closed his eyes and yawned again as he stretched out his muscles. "You're beautiful," he heard Jack say.

Ianto opened his eyes. Jack was standing in the doorway to the bathroom, staring appreciatively at his body. Ianto felt himself start to blush. "Oh no you don't," Jack said with a grin.

He took two steps forward and wrapped Ianto in his arms. "How is it that I can still make you blush after everything we've done together?" There was amusement in Jack's voice.

Ianto shrugged. "I'm bashful," Ianto responded, trying to control his embarrassment.
Jack threw back his head and laughed. "Bashful?" he asked incredulously as he started walking them backwards into the bathroom. "You're kidding me, right?"

Ianto shrugged again. "Well... I'm just... I was..." he stammered. "I guess I was a bit innocent until I met you," he finished quickly.

Jack turned the shower on and stepped in, pulling Ianto with him. "Is that so?" Jack asked salaciously.

Ianto nodded, feeling the blush creeping up his neck again and grateful for the cool water against his skin. He tilted his face up into the spray. "I guess I just bring out your inner sex kitten," Jack said, biting his neck gently.

Ianto nearly choked on the water cascading into his mouth. "Sex kitten?" He could barely get the words out as he was both laughing and coughing.

"Yeah, sex kitten," Jack repeated, looking highly entertained.

Ianto shoved Jack against the shower wall and meowed loudly in his ear. "I'll show you sex kitten," he purred.

An hour later, Ianto was at the coffee machine making his first cup of the day when Tosh walked in. "Morning, Tosh," he called. "Coffee?"

"Thanks, Ianto. Would love a cup," she called back.

He smiled to himself. I know I can count on Tosh to remember that today's my birthday. He whistled as he finished brewing coffee for himself, Jack and Tosh. Then he filled their mugs and put them on his tray for delivery. He stopped first at Tosh's desk. "Thanks, Ianto," she said smiling at him and taking her mug.

Ianto paused for a moment, waiting for the 'happy birthday' that he was sure would come. But Tosh just sipped her coffee, then set it down on her desk and turned towards her computer. Ianto wrinkled his forehead in confusion. There's no way that Tosh would forget! Tosh looked up at him. "Is there something I can do for you, Ianto?" she asked casually.

"Um... Nope," Ianto said hurriedly. "Coffee alright?" he asked as an afterthought.

"It's great, Ianto. Thanks," Tosh replied, pushing her glasses higher up on her nose and turning back to her computer screen.

I guess Tosh forgot, Ianto thought dejectedly as he headed towards Jack's office. I expected Jack to forget, but not Tosh. "Something wrong?" Jack asked when Ianto placed his mug by his elbow.

"No, nothing," Ianto said turning and walking out of the office again.

Owen arrived next, but Ianto was sure that Owen wouldn't remember his birthday. And true to form, Owen took his morning coffee with barely a gruff, "Thanks."

Well, that's just Owen, he told himself. I think I'd be terrified if Owen wished me a happy birthday. I'd think an alien had taken over his body... But there's still Gwen. She's supposedly the 'heart' of the team. Isn't she the sort to remember things like birthdays? he thought hopefully as he heard the cogwheel door roll open announcing her arrival.

However, he was disappointed when all he got from Gwen on handing over her morning coffee was,
"Thanks, Sweetheart."

I guess everyone forgot, he thought lugubriously. With a heavy sigh, he headed down to the solace of the archives.

Ianto passed an uneventful morning filing various artifacts. He was starting to think about lunch when his mobile phone rang. The caller ID read 'Torchwood.'

He smiled, flipped open the phone, and held it to his ear. "Yes Sir," he said slyly, hoping to get a rise out of Jack by calling him 'sir.'

However, Jack was all business. "Ianto, team meeting in twenty minutes in the boardroom."

Ianto frowned. "Is everything okay?"

"Just be there," Jack replied tersely.

"What about lunch?" Ianto asked quickly before Jack could disconnect.

"No time. Forget the coffee too. Boardroom in twenty." Jack repeated and broke the connection.

Ianto stared at his phone. That was odd… and no coffee? There's always time for coffee! He huffed. But then he remembered that he worked for Torchwood, and he felt his heart sinking. Oh God, is the world ending again? Does it have to end on my birthday? He quickly sat down at his desk and pulled up the Rift readings for the day. He spent a few minutes scanning the reports, but he couldn't find anything unusual. Feeling confused, he spent the rest of his twenty minutes looking through police reports, but again he found nothing out of the ordinary. With a growing uneasiness, he stood and headed to the meeting.

Exactly twenty minutes later, Ianto walked into the boardroom. He was surprised to find Jack, Tosh, Owen, and Gwen already assembled, all of them with solemn looks on their faces. He was also perplexed to find that he couldn't grasp any one particular emotion from any of them. Very odd… Ianto felt his heart rate increase as he slid into his usual seat. He turned to look questioningly at Jack, but Jack was staring straight ahead of him, and Ianto could sense nothing from him either.

"Right," Jack started. "I've called you all here to discuss a very serious matter."

He looked slowly around the room, his eyes coming to rest on each of the team in turn. His gaze landed last on Ianto where he lingered. Slowly each one of the team turned to look at Ianto as well. Ianto felt the heat creeping up his neck as he realized that everyone was staring at him. He tried his best to maintain his impassive expression, but the weight of four pairs of eyes was heavy upon him.

He shifted nervously in his seat. "What's going on, Jack?" he asked in almost a whisper.

Jack looked hard at him, narrowing his eyes. Ianto felt the heat climbing from his neck up the sides of his face. Then suddenly Jack broke into his trademark grin. "Happy birthday, Ianto!"

The room exploded into noise and action. Ianto sat stunned as he heard choruses of "happy birthday" and saw movement all around him. Suddenly there was a cake sitting in front of him with candles burning brightly and several gifts at his elbow. He felt Tosh and Gwen each kiss him on the cheek, and Owen clap him on the shoulder. "You thought we all forgot, didn't you," he heard Tosh say.

"We would never forget your birthday, Sweetheart," Gwen piped in.

"You should see the look on your face, mate," Owen said with a chuckle. "Jack told us that we
weren’t allowed to mention your birthday this morning.”

"He told us to clear our minds and look stoic when you walked in," Tosh added.

"Then we all had to stare at you without cracking a grin," Gwen explained as she laughed. "I was clenching my fists so hard under the table that I thought I was going to draw blood."

Ianto was so disconcerted that he didn’t even feel Jack pull him up out of his chair until he was standing in Jack’s arms. Then Jack was kissing him passionately in front of the whole team. He could barely hear the whistling, cheering, and Owen shouting “get a room!” over the deafening thumping of his heart.

Jack broke the kiss and whispered into Ianto’s ear, "You didn't really think I would forget, did you? You’ll get your present from me later tonight."

Ianto felt himself blush to the tips of his ears. "Told you we could make him turn beet red!" Jack said, grinning at the team. "Mission accomplished."

Everyone applauded, and Ianto looked daggers at Jack, but Jack just smiled sweetly at him. "Aren’t you going to blow out the candles?" he asked innocently.

In spite of his embarrassment, Ianto couldn’t help but be touched by the effort they had all put into surprising him. He sat down again and looked at the cake. It was shaped like a giant coffee mug. "This is brilliant," he smiled, admiring it.

"It was Tosh’s idea," Jack explained, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Now make a wish."

Ianto closed his eyes, but he realized that he had nothing to wish for. I'm happy, he thought, surprised at the revelation. Please let them all find happiness too, he wished as he blew out the candles.

Gwen left the room and returned momentarily carrying a big box of Chinese food. "Reminds me of my first lunch here at Torchwood," she said with a smile, setting it down on the conference room table. "I'll never forget it. Owen and I had practically come to blows and you walked up wearing your tidy suit with this big box. Do you remember? 'Who’s for Chinese,' you asked with this innocent grin, completely breaking the tension."

Everyone laughed and Owen remarked, "Yeah, who would have known that the innocent Tea Boy wasn’t so innocent after all?"

The team enjoyed their lunch, birthday cake, and coffee that they’d purchased from the café. (No one would dare touch Ianto’s coffee machine – especially on his birthday). They talked and laughed with many ‘remember when’s’ and other Ianto-centric stories. The stories and banter continued as Ianto opened his gifts. Owen’s gift was an exotic and expensive pound of coffee. When he looked at Owen in surprise, Owen shrugged and said, "What? It's like a present for all of us!"

Tosh gave him an assortment of dark chocolates from Switzerland, and Gwen gave him a nice bottle of scotch. There was an envelope with his name written on it in Jack’s handwriting. Ianto opened it and pulled out the card inside. It had one word written on it. "Later…” He smiled to himself as he shoved it back into the envelope.

Ianto couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt so much a part of something and so appreciated. He looked around at the team, talking and laughing and just enjoying being together. He felt like he belonged. He glanced in Jack’s direction, and caught Jack looking at him affectionately. Jack winked at him. "Thank you," Ianto mouthed.
Jack nodded and smiled in reply.

The rest of the day passed in a satisfactory manner, with a good Weevil chase to get everyone’s adrenaline pumping. After the Weevils were dealt with and driven back into the sewers, and they all had returned to the Hub to write up their reports, Tosh, Owen and Gwen left work for the evening. "Well, Mr. Jones," Jack said, pulling Ianto close and kissing him gently on the lips. "Alone at last. What will we ever do to pass the time?"

"I can think of a few things," Ianto murmured against Jack's lips.

"I'll bet you can," Jack replied before he kissed Ianto deeper, opening his mouth and seeking Ianto’s tongue with his own.

Then he pulled back abruptly. "Wait a minute. Weren't you just trying to convince me this morning that you were all innocent and bashful?" Jack asked with a smirk.

"Oh, I was innocent. You've completely corrupted me," Ianto replied smoothly.

Jack looked hard at him. "Somehow I highly doubt that."

Ianto tried his best to don a virtuous and childlike expression, which sent Jack into peals of laughter. "Come on," he said, taking Ianto's hand. "I want to show you something."

Jack led him to the SUV, and he slid into the driver's seat. Ianto opened the passenger door. "Where are we going?" he asked curiously.


Ianto amused himself by trying to figure out what Jack had planned for him while they drove. Dinner and a movie? Hmmm… too mundane. Drinks and dancing? He cringed inwardly. God, I hope not. Flowers? That's maybe a tad much… A grand romantic gesture…? He glanced sideways at Jack. Mmmm… not really Jack. I could use a new car, he thought with amusement. How about a raise? He chuckled to himself. Knowing Jack, it will probably be something alien… and it might very well involve getting dirty. He inwardly rolled his eyes. I like this suit! Oh well, as long as Jack pays for the dry cleaning…

Jack pulled up outside of the tallest building in Cardiff. Feeling perplexed, Ianto followed Jack out of the SUV and into the building. Jack headed straight for the roof. Ianto stood beside Jack as they looked out over the city. The crisp night air felt good on his skin and he took a deep breath. They stood silently, admiring the bright lights of the bustling world below. "I come here a lot," Jack said, "As you know."

Ianto nodded. "You're good on roofs," he quipped, repeating the line he'd used when Jack asked him out on their first proper date.

Jack glanced at him and smiled. "Right," he agreed. "But I don't come here as often as I used to."

He paused and looked again at the city below. "I guess I never really felt like I belonged here and this vantage point was in a way a reflection of that. First I came here to this time trying to find the Doctor. Then I was resentful when I realized that I was trapped here in the wrong century."

He sighed heavily. Ianto shivered slightly as the cool breeze found a way into the gaps in his clothing. Jack noticed he was cold. He stood behind Ianto and wrapped his arms around him, pulling him back against his chest and holding him close. Ianto was instantly warmed by Jack's body heat. He couldn't help letting a satisfied sigh escape his lips. Jack rested his chin on Ianto's shoulder.
"I'm ashamed to admit now that the resentfulness lasted as long as it did. But when I stopped feeling sorry for myself, I decided that I was here for a purpose – to protect these people. I would stand up here for hours thinking that it was my job to oversee this city, and keep it safe."

A few moments passed in silence as they both admired the view. Ianto was comfortably wrapped in the warmth of Jack. I could stay right here until the end of time, he thought, until the Earth stops turning… "When the Doctor came back," Jack continued, "I had to go… I had to find out why I can't die…"

Ianto heard the rawness in Jack's voice. He found Jack's hand and laced their fingers together. "But I came back…"

Ianto remembered Jack's words the day he returned. 'I came back for you,' he'd said, looking directly into Ianto's eyes. Jack held Ianto even closer as he placed a gentle kiss on Ianto's neck. "I didn't buy you anything," Jack said apologetically. "I decided on and rejected at least twenty different things, but nothing seemed good enough for you. But I do have a gift for you. I'm not really good at stuff like this," Jack shifted uncomfortably. "I brought you up here to explain to you the significance of this place for me…"

He paused again, leaning his chin back on Ianto's shoulder. "And to also tell you why I rarely come up here anymore…"

Jack was silent for a moment. Then he said in a low voice, "For the first time in a long, long time, I feel like I belong down there, among those people, instead of up here, watching them from above…"

He turned Ianto in his arms and held his face gently in his hands. He pressed their foreheads together and looked into Ianto's eyes. "And that's because of you."

Ianto was silent as he began to comprehend the significance of Jack's words. Then he was so overwhelmed by Jack's statement that he felt tears burning at the back of his eyes. "I'm sorry I didn't buy you anything," Jack said, stroking his cheeks with his thumbs. "I just couldn't find…"

"Jack," Ianto cut him off. "This is… it's perfect," he murmured before he kissed Jack passionately.

It was the best birthday present you could give me… he thought as he lost himself in kissing Jack.

Ianto sighed as he came back to the present. He turned his head and looked at Jack. Jack stroked his cheek gently. I'm glad I told him about my childhood, he decided at last. And I'm glad I came clean about what my father did for a living – even if he already knew. But I still need to get away for a day or so… I need some space, and some perspective.

He began mentally preparing himself for his trip to Flat Holm as he fell asleep in Jack's arms.
What is Essential is Invisible to the Eye 125/?

It was with mixed feelings that Jack said goodbye to Ianto that morning as he left for Flat Holm. Jack sat at his desk pondering everything that had happened over the last few days. He felt emotionally exhausted. He was truly hurt that Ianto thought he'd only wanted him to stay for sex. After all this time, does he still not know how I feel about him? I thought I made it clear without having to actually say the words. And that's something I don't think I'll ever be able to do. I just can't… Does it matter to him? I thought he understood...

How is it that we keep misunderstanding each other? Even with his empathic abilities, it still seems we're always at cross purposes. Is it that difficult for him to accept that I care about him, that I enjoy his company, that it's more than just sex? Why is this so hard? I love him. I think he loves me… He shook his head. Love is the easy part, it's everything else that's difficult. He sighed audibly. This is why you didn't want to go there again, isn't it Jack? he asked himself. Well, that and the fact that you outlive everyone you've ever loved...

For the first time in a long time, he seriously contemplated ending things with Ianto. I don't seem to make him happy. How can he be happy if he doubts my feelings for him? How can I be happy if I'm always having to prove that I care about him? I feel like I have to keep reaffirming my feelings for him… Surely he must know by now that it's more than just physical between us. He's my closest friend and confidant… the person who knows me best and accepts me for who I am. Will he ever just accept that I genuinely want to be with him?

He shook his head and sighed despondently. I know that I abandoned him… and I was prepared to earn back his trust, but it's been almost six months since I came back. And so much has happened. How much longer will I have to go on proving myself? Maybe it will never be enough...

What would happen if I ended things? Could we still work together? It would be… difficult, to say the least. This is why I made it a rule to never get involved with my employees… Would he leave Torchwood? Would I want him to leave? Oh gods, would I rejoin him? He felt a coldness permeate his heart. I couldn't… could I? If I did, it would be one of the worst things I've ever had to do. But I would do it for him, so he would forget me. He could start over and have a better life, a normal life, a safe life. He could have everything that I can never give him. He's so young… and brilliant. He has so much to offer someone...

Maybe it's time to let go. He felt a clenching in his gut. Tears spilled from the corners of his eyes and ran down his face. Life without Ianto… the thought is almost unbearable, but it's going to happen some day. Maybe it's better now when he has a chance to do something with his life instead of when I'm mourning over his dead body...

He heard the cogwheel door roll open, announcing Tosh's arrival. He quickly wiped the tears off of his face and rubbed his eyes. He picked up the report that was sitting on his desk and tried to read, but the words blurred before him.
After several minutes, he heard a quiet knock. He wiped his face again and called out, "Come in, Tosh."

Tosh cracked open the door and poked her head into the office. "How did you know it was me?"

Jack tried to grin. "First of all, you're the only one who gets here this early, and second, you're the only one polite enough to knock. Owen and Gwen just come barging in."

Tosh opened the door the rest of the way. "True… but what about Ianto?"

The grin fell from Jack's face. He looked back down at the report in his hands. "Ianto's different," he muttered, aware of the pain that the statement caused him.

Tosh walked towards the desk and sat in the chair opposite him. "What happened, Jack? Where's Ianto?"

"He's having a couple of days off," Jack replied tersely.

"Where did he go? Is he okay?" The concern was apparent in Tosh's voice.

"He's fine, Tosh. He just needed a couple of personal days," Jack replied, trying to reassure her.

Tosh looked hard at him and narrowed her eyes. "What did you do, Jack?"

Jack's toes curled at the obvious threat that underlined her tone. *She really is scary…* "Why do you assume I did something?" he asked defensively.

Her eyes narrowed even further. "Did you?" She was practically menacing.

Jack remembered Owen's warning about getting on Tosh's bad side. *He wasn't kidding! "I… I don't think I did anything…"* Jack hesitated.

"What do you mean you don't think you did anything? It probably means you did. Jack, what happened?"

Her tone made the small hairs on the back of Jack's neck stand on end. "I… nothing. I didn't do anything! He was upset about the Night Travelers and the boy who lost his family. He just needed some time off. I… I did my best to console him," he added hopefully.

Damn it! I sound like a kid trying to get out of being grounded by his mother. This is ridiculous. I'm the captain!

"Then why are you acting so guilty?"

"I'm not!" Jack replied quickly.

She raised an eyebrow at him and looked so much like Ianto that Jack almost laughed. Then he wanted to cry. He closed his eyes. "I don't think I'm very good at this, Toshiko," he said honestly.

He felt Tosh's small hand cover his and he opened his eyes and looked down, placing his other hand on top of hers. "Jack," she said gently. "Do you think this comes with an instruction manual?"

"What?" he asked in confusion, looking up at her.

"Love," she replied, looking steadily into his eyes.

Jack blinked rapidly and looked away. He could barely admit to himself that he loved Ianto. To have Tosh state it so boldly made him extremely uncomfortable. He shifted uneasily in his chair. "Jack,"
Tosh repeated.

He steeled himself and looked at her. "What happened?"

Jack felt like her eyes were burning into his soul. He let go of her hand and rubbed his temples. "He confided in me about… something… and I'm not sure I handled it very well. And he still seems to think I only want him for sex. I'm not sure he trusts me… And I'm tired of having to prove myself to him over and over again."

Tosh was silent and Jack looked up at her. She had an amused expression on her face. "Do you realize the irony of the statement you just made?"

Jack wrinkled his brow in confusion. "You just told me that he confided in you and that he doesn't trust you in the same sentence."

Jack opened his mouth to respond, but no words came out. He did, didn't I… "I'm sure you know how hard it is to confide in someone, Jack, to trust someone that much. We don't even know what time you're from…"

Again, Jack opened his mouth to speak, but Tosh gestured for him to remain silent. "I'm not saying that to make you feel guilty. I'm just pointing out that you're pretty secretive yourself. Surely you know how hard it was for Ianto to tell you whatever he did."

Jack thought about Tosh's words, and then he nodded slowly. "Ianto was probably feeling really vulnerable afterwards. He was probably just looking for a little bit of reassurance from you and didn't know how to ask for it. And you probably took it personally."

Jack realized the truth of her statement. I overreacted, didn't I? I'm being irrational. Ianto never asks for anything from me. This is all in my head. "Besides," Tosh continued, "It's easy to forget how young Ianto is because he seems so wise. But he probably hasn't had that many relationships, Jack."

Tosh paused, looking lost in thought. After a moment she continued, "We all know what he went through with Lisa, and how broken he was afterwards. And I think I'm right in saying that he'd never been with a man before you came along. It's confusing for him. You have to cut him a little slack."

Jack looked at Tosh. "How did you get to be so wise?" he asked, a grin spreading over his features.

Tosh rolled her eyes. "It's easy for me sitting here and watching things. I'm not emotionally involved, other than the fact that I care about both of you. But I can see things from a more rational perspective. It's obvious how you two feel about each other, but I'd be willing to bet that neither of you truly believes in the other one's feelings." She shook her head in irritation. "Sometimes I want to knock your heads together. You're ridiculous, the pair of you."

Jack started chuckling. He couldn't help it. Tosh started giggling as well and soon they were both laughing. When Jack caught his breath he said, "Thanks, Tosh. I needed that."

Tosh smiled and put her hand on his again. "Why don't you take him away somewhere for a weekend? The three of us can handle things for a day or two. Get out of the Hub and away from Torchwood. You both need some perspective."

"Funny, that's what Ianto said," Jack muttered.

She squeezed his hand. "Call him," she said. "Tell him that when he comes back, you and he are going away for the weekend."
"I think I just might do that…"

"Good. Feel better?" Tosh asked.

Jack nodded distractedly, a plan already forming in his mind. He barely noticed Tosh leave his office as he turned to his computer and logged onto the internet, beginning a search for weekend getaways.
Ianto sat on the cliff top overlooking the ocean at Flat Holm on the second day of his visit. He had come seeking refuge from his life at Torchwood and from the memories of his childhood that haunted him to this day. He had also come to seek refuge from Jack. He didn't regret telling him about his past, but he still wasn't entirely comfortable with Jack knowing everything about him. For so long, they had each held tightly to their secrets, and it had provided a measure of equality between them. But now I have nothing left to hide, yet Jack still has so many secrets... so much that I'm sure I'll never know. He trusted Jack, but nonetheless, he now felt at a disadvantage... and somehow diminished.

Ianto was always deeply affected by his trips to Flat Holm and the fates of the victims of the Rift. After spending time with them, he would leave feeling humbled and chastised, grateful that he did not share their fate. It was a reminder of what Torchwood was fighting for – if only a reminder of those they could not save. His own problems seemed mundane in comparison, and he would return to Torchwood with a strengthened resolve and renewed sense of purpose.

He thought about the fact that he was the only one who knew of the existence of Flat Holm. He was honored that Jack had trusted him with this secret, but he wasn't entirely sure that the rest of the team shouldn't know. They might be able to help in some way. They may have ideas that neither Jack nor I have thought of. I would really like to know Tosh's opinion of this place and the people here, and Owen's... and even Gwen's. How would they react? What would they say? Would they agree that Jack has done all he could to help these people? I think he has, but maybe they would see things differently. Maybe that's what Jack's afraid of...

He watched the tide come in beneath the setting sun, and he shivered under his thin jacket and T-shirt. He felt something warm cover his shoulders and he smelled an all too familiar scent. He looked up to see Jack standing next to him, looking out over the water. Jack had draped his coat over him. Ianto stared up at him, surprised by his sudden appearance. "I hate coming here," Jack murmured into the wind.

"I know," Ianto replied softly.

Jack sat down next to him, wrapping his arms around his knees. "What are you doing here?" Ianto asked.

Jack shrugged. "I wanted to see you," he whispered.

Ianto wanted to ask why, but something about Jack's demeanor made him hold his tongue. They remained sitting silently as the sun drifted below the horizon and darkness fell like a blanket over the landscape. Ianto was content to sit with Jack's coat draped warmly around him, surrounded by his comforting scent, as though Jack himself were embracing him. He didn't feel the need to speak. He just enjoyed the magnificent vista before him and Jack's quiet company.

He had just let out a sigh of contentment when Jack's voice broke through the wind. "I'm sorry."
Ianto looked at him in confusion. "For what?"

"I don't think I handled that very well," Jack explained. "Everything that you told me…" his voice faded away as he hesitated.

Ianto was silent, uncertain how to respond. He remembered sensing Jack's fear that he had failed him in some way after their conversation when Ianto had wanted to leave. He hadn't thought Jack had reacted badly. He had just been feeling incredibly vulnerable and exposed. But Jack had already known much of what Ianto had told him. His story hadn't been the great revelation that he'd expected. And he had agreed to stay the night. Where is this coming from? "How do you mean?" he asked aloud.

"Ianto," Jack sighed. "I don't have a very good track record with lovers," he said regretfully. "Even though it's so very long," Ianto joked.

But Jack only frowned, not dissuaded by Ianto's repartee. "In all that time, you'd think I'd have learned something," he muttered.

"Where is this coming from, Jack?" Ianto asked.

"I just…" Jack shook his head. "Can we talk about it later? I actually came here to pick you up."

"Um, I'm already sleeping with you," Ianto quipped. "I'm a sure thing. No need to pick me up."


Ianto shrugged. He decided that he was becoming tired of all of the angst and he wanted desperately to lighten the mood. He had come to Flat Holm seeking solace, and he had found it. He was ready to return home. I'm glad Jack came… "Is Cardiff being overrun with Weevils?" he asked, "And you just can't cope without me?"

"Not quite," Jack replied. "But I do want to take you somewhere."

Ianto looked at Jack. He could sense nothing coming from the older man. "How very mysterious."

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "Should I be worried?"

"It's not Torchwood related," Jack explained.

"Now I think I'm even more afraid," Ianto teased.

An unreadable expression passed across Jack's handsome features. "Are you ready to leave or were you planning on staying longer?" he asked.

"No," Ianto replied, staring with curiosity at Jack. "I'm ready to go."

"Good." Jack smiled at him. "Let's get off this rock."

Ianto spent some of the boat ride back to Cardiff trying to guess where Jack was taking them, but Jack gave nothing away. When they landed, Jack headed to Ianto's car which was parked by the docks. "I left the SUV for the rest of the team," Jack explained. "And I put some food and a change of clothes for us in the boot."

Ianto raised an eyebrow questioningly at Jack. "I'm driving," Jack added, using his copy of Ianto's car key to unlock the door.
"Are you now?" Ianto asked with bemusement, but he got into the passenger side nonetheless. *What is all this about?*

Jack drove onto the M4 motorway, and they headed west out of Cardiff. As they drove, Ianto thought again about Flat Holm and the team's ignorance of its existence. It was something he hadn't mentioned in a long time, and he decided that it was time to discuss it again. "Jack, do you ever think you'll tell the rest of the team about Flat Holm?"

Jack eyed him. "We've had this conversation before, haven't we? You know how I feel about the rest of the team knowing."

Ianto nodded thoughtfully. "I think you may underestimate them though. Besides, don't you think they have a right to know?"

"Why? So Owen could drive himself crazy trying to cure all of them, Tosh would work herself to death trying to come up with a way to predict the time and place of the negative Rift spikes, and Gwen…?"

"What about Gwen?"

"Gwen's the one that I'm most afraid of."

"Why?"

"Because I'm not sure what she'd do. She's unpredictable. I don't think she would see the whole picture. She'd want to do something, and I think her emotions would cloud her judgment. There's a reason why I only chose to tell you. Besides," Jack glanced at him. "You didn't tell them when I was away. Even when you thought I wasn't coming back, you still kept the secret."

"I was honoring your wishes. But I'm not sure that I agree with them. Five minds are better than two, and they may have other ideas or solutions we haven't thought of. Besides," he glanced at Jack's profile, "We're a team," he finished, thinking of just how much more unified they'd become after Jack left with the Doctor.

"Ianto, I've thought long and hard about this. Flat Holm is often on my mind. I have done what I can for the victims of the Rift. I don't want to burden the rest of the team with the knowledge, nor do I want their focus to be taken away from the work we do at Torchwood. They have enough on their plates."

"Maybe you should give them a chance, Jack."

"Ianto, I respect your opinion, but my decision is final. No one is to know about Flat Holm," he said with determination, the authority and implicit "that's an order" clear in his voice.

Ianto sighed resolutely. He knew that he wouldn't persuade Jack so easily, but he felt that he was right and Jack was wrong. The rest of the team should know about Flat Holm.

The remainder of the journey was made in silence. It wasn't an uncomfortable silence, but Ianto was lost in his thoughts about Flat Holm and the team. Jack's emotions were closed to him. Every once in a while, he glanced in Jack's direction, but Jack's eyes never left the road. *Where are we going, and what is all of this about?*

After about half an hour's drive, Jack exited the motorway and headed north. Ten minutes later, they pulled up to a picturesque cottage in Llangeinor. He turned off the car and looked at Ianto. "Ever been here before?"
"No, can't say that I have." Ianto looked around, confused. "What are we doing here?"

"I thought we both could use some perspective," Jack said, glancing at their surroundings. "And Flat Holm is not the place for me..."

Ianto reached over and put his hand on Jack's. "Anyway," Jack continued. "I figured we both needed a break. You know, get away from the Hub... have some time to ourselves." Jack looked nervously at Ianto. "It's not too reminiscent of the Beacons, is it?"

Ianto surveyed the landscape around him. Jack had chosen a quaint but well maintained cottage with a lovely garden, a freshly mowed lawn, and a fantastic view of the hilled countryside. Nothing about the place had the desolate feel of that horrible experience in the Beacons. Plus I'm here with Jack...

"No, not at all," Ianto replied, smiling at the man sitting next to him. "What brought all this on?" Then, looking askance at Jack, he raised an eyebrow. "What did you do?"

Jack laughed. "What makes you think I did something?"

Ianto continued staring questioningly at Jack. Jack put up his hands in a defensive posture. "I didn't do anything. I swear!"

"Mmm hmm," Ianto muttered skeptically.

Jack looked petulant. "Wow, I just wanted to do something nice..."

Ianto cut him off by launching forward and kissing him hard on the mouth, parting his lips to seek Jack's tongue. Jack responded, putting his hands behind Ianto's head and pressing their faces firmly together. Ianto broke off, panting slightly. "Let's check out the bedroom, yeah?"

Jack chuckled. "Ianto Jones! You naughty boy. And here I thought we were going to have this long, serious discussion."

Ianto kissed him hard again, and then pulled away. "Sod that!" he said as he opened the passenger door and nimbly hopped out of the car.

Jack jumped out and walked up to the door of the cottage, reaching into his trouser pockets and pulling out a key. Ianto stood behind Jack as he fumbled to open the door. Ianto suddenly felt extremely impatient. He reached around Jack, pressing his body against the older man's back and groped the front of his trousers, running his hands over the prominent bulge while he sucked on the back of his neck.

Jack groaned as he fumbled again with the key, finally getting it inserted into the lock and thrusting the door open. They practically fell inside the cottage, a mess of limbs as they scrambled to take off their clothes.

Ianto was quicker than Jack, and had him pinned to the floor in record time, both of them still wearing various articles of clothing. Ianto put his hands on the back of Jack's thighs and roughly shoved his legs up, pressing them into his chest. He tugged back Jack's trousers, bent down and ran his tongue over Jack's opening. He smiled to himself as Jack groaned and scrabbled at the floor. Ianto pushed his tongue as deep inside Jack as he could, and then withdrew. He continued the motion until Jack was writhing on the floor underneath him.

Then he reached into Jack's trouser pocket and drew out the small bottle of lube that Jack always kept handy. He quickly pushed his own jeans down, and coated himself and Jack. Then he pushed Jack's legs back again and swiftly entered him, burying himself deeply.
Jack sucked in his breath as Ianto repositioned himself, let go of Jack's legs and pressed his body against Jack's. They moved in a frenzy of kissing, thrusting, and clawing at each other, both desperate for release.

They both quickly reached climax, moaning as they came. They laid in a tangle of clothing and limbs on the floor of the cottage, gasping for air. "I guess you're feeling better," Jack said with amusement.

Ianto chuckled. "Guess so, Sir."

Jack lifted his head and propped it on his hand, running a finger down Ianto's bare chest. "Sir?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

Ianto shrugged and gave Jack a half-hearted salute. Jack laughed and laid his head back down on the floor. Ianto lifted his head up and looked around the cottage. "Perfect," he said, taking in his surroundings. He returned his gaze to Jack and grinned impishly. "Guess we didn't make it to the bedroom."

"No, I suppose not," Jack replied.

He lifted himself up on his elbow and kissed Ianto softly on the lips. He stroked the side of his face. Ianto closed his eyes and enjoyed the sensation of Jack's fingers caressing his skin. After a few minutes of silence, Jack whispered, "I don't deserve you, do I?"

Ianto opened his eyes, a witty retort on the tip of his tongue. But he saw the look on Jack's face, and the words died abruptly on his lips. Jack's eyes were full of pain.

Ianto felt the floor sinking beneath him as a cold chill ran down his spine.
Ianto sat up and looked around vaguely for his clothes. If Jack was going to say something serious, he wanted to be dressed. Naked, he felt too vulnerable. *Did he bring me out here to end things? Was that the point of this little journey? To get me out of the Hub and out of Cardiff so he could…*

"Ianto, what are you doing?" Jack asked, sitting up.

"Getting dressed," Ianto replied coolly, pulling his jeans back up and reaching for his T-shirt.

"I can see that," Jack responded. "But why?"

"What do you want to talk to me about, Jack?" Ianto asked in as steady of a voice as he could muster.

"What makes you think…"

"Look," Ianto was beginning to lose his temper. He took a deep breath before he continued. "You bring me out to this cottage ostensibly for a little getaway, but it's obvious there's something on your mind. Whatever it is you're going to say, just get it over with, yeah?"

"Ianto," Jack reached out his hand, but Ianto pulled away.

Jack frowned and began to get dressed himself. "What is it you think I'm going to say?" Jack asked as he refastened his trousers.

*I think you're going to end this… "Just get on with it," Ianto said, walking into darkened kitchen and flicking on the light switch.

He started opening cupboards at random. "Is there anything to drink in this place?" he asked, feeling the need for some liquid courage.

"I have a bottle of scotch in the car," Jack replied.

Ianto froze in his movements. *He planned this. Oh God, he brought me out here to… to abandon me…* He felt sick to his stomach. "I'll go and get it," he heard Jack say.

Ianto listened to the sound of the cottage door open and then close. He leaned his head against the cupboard, breathing deeply. *I've ruined everything… I should have never told him about my past… It was too much for him to deal with. I should have just…*

He found two glasses and took them into the cottage's living room. He set them down on the coffee table. Then after locating the bathroom, he cleaned himself up and took a moment to gather his strength. When he heard the cottage door open again, he steeled himself. Masking his features into an impassive expression, he opened the bathroom door.
Jack was standing uncertainly near the doorway carrying a large shopping bag. "I brought us some food," he said, trying to smile.

"Not hungry," Ianto said quickly, walking back into the living room and falling into a heap on the sofa. Will he just get on with it!

Jack went into the kitchen and set the bag down. He reached into it and pulled out the bottle of scotch. He walked slowly over to the sofa and sat down next to Ianto. As Ianto anxiously watched him fill the two glasses, his stomach churned violently. His heart pounded in his ears, and he felt panic rising in his chest. This is it… I'm about to lose him and everything that matters to me.

He picked up a glass and downed it in one go. Jack looked curiously at him. "Ianto, I don't know what you think is happening here," he began.

"Why don't you just tell me then," Ianto replied curtly, wanting the worst to be over with as quickly as possible.

Jack looked at the drink in his hand. "I don't really know how to begin," he said. He half laughed. "This isn't exactly how I pictured this going."

Ianto resisted the urge to pull his knees up and curl into a fetal position. Oh God, we're going to have to drive back to Cardiff together… I don't think I can do it. Maybe Tosh would come pick me up. Tosh… Torchwood… will I have to leave? Is he going to fire me? Retcon me? Make me forget…

"Remember that case we had back before Gwen was married, with the taxi driver that sent people to the hell dimension with those matches?"

Ianto looked up in surprise. "The Lucifer's," he confirmed.

Jack nodded, looking lost in thought. "It was only hours here, but years passed for me while I was trapped in that dimension. I thought I was going to be alone there for eternity. I'd given up hope… and then you came… you found me in the darkness… and you saved me from hell…" Jack's voice faded and he quickly took a large swallow of his drink.

Ianto continued to stare at Jack in bewilderment. He wished he could sense what Jack was feeling, but the older man's emotions remained closed to him. "Jack… what makes you bring this up now? You've never mentioned it before? And that was months ago."

"I never knew what to say… how to react…" Jack hesitated again.

Ianto nodded distractedly, wondering where Jack was going with this. "At the time I couldn't believe you would do that for me. I didn't think I deserved it, so I didn't mention it… I never thanked you for that. I never told you how grateful I was," Jack said, still not looking at him.

Jack tentatively raised his hand to touch Ianto's face but quickly lowered it again. "You're always saving me," he whispered.

Ianto had no idea how to respond. He was still completely baffled by the conversation. "Er… You're welcome?" His reply was more of a question.

Jack sighed. "I'm not doing this very well."

He set his drink down on the coffee table and turned to face Ianto. "I never acknowledged what that meant… I was afraid… I couldn't…"

Ianto stared at Jack, completely dumbfounded. Where is he going with this? He tried to force his
mind to make a connection, but nothing was making sense. "Um…" he started, but no words came to him.

"Ianto, what did you think I was going to say to you, just now? What is it that you thought I wanted to talk to you about?"

Ianto inwardly cringed. "I dunno," he muttered, reaching for the scotch and refilling his glass.

Jack eyed him quizzically. "Ianto? Please… don't… don't shut me out, not now," he pleaded.

Ianto glanced up at Jack and then quickly gazed back at the glass in his hands. He couldn't lie to Jack, not anymore. "I thought you were going to tell me to bugger off," he said matter-of-factly before he swallowed the contents of the glass.

"See, this is exactly what I'm talking about," Jack said, waving a hand and sounding exasperated.

Ianto wrinkled his brow. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but you haven't exactly talked about anything, except to bring up a case from several months ago."

Jack slumped back against the sofa with a heavy sigh. "I'm terrible at this," he muttered.

Ianto was beginning to feel exasperated, and the alcohol was loosening his tongue. "Jack, what the hell are you on about?"

Jack closed his eyes for a moment and sighed again. "I hate that you doubt me, that you would think I'd see you differently if I knew about your childhood, that you thought I fell for the image that you created for yourself, that I only wanted you to stay with me the other night for sex, that you would think I would bring you out here to… to end this!" he shot out hurriedly.

Ianto opened his mouth to rebut, but Jack continued, "I know it's my fault. It's my fault that you feel this way. I've given you more than enough reasons to doubt me. You're so good to me… You're always there when I need you. I can always confide in you, trust you, count on you… And you confided in me, and I was a total arse, and that whole thing with going to hell to rescue me… and forgiving me for my sins… And I never even thanked you…" Jack shook his head miserably, "I don't deserve you."

Ianto stared at him in astonishment. "Jack, that's not true…" he started to say.

But Jack interrupted him. "So I should tell you… I should tell you now so that you know… So that you don't doubt me anymore…" Jack stopped again, his expression clouded.

And suddenly Ianto understood. *He's going to tell me that he… that he loves me… He's going to say it out of guilt. No! he screamed in his head. Not this way! That's not how I want to hear it! No matter how much I want it to be true, I don't want him telling me out of a sense of obligation. I can't hear it like that. That would be… horrible… That would be worse than never hearing it at all.*

Jack swallowed the rest of his drink and put the empty glass down on the coffee table. He turned to face Ianto. "Ianto… I…"

STOP! Ianto mind roared. "Jack," Ianto cut him off. "Please, you don't have to say anything. *Not like this. Please not like this…"

"I want you to know…"

"Jack," Ianto cut him off again. "I don't understand where this is coming from. But you haven't done
"anything wrong."

"But you…" Jack started.

"Have doubts sometimes, yes. But so do you."

Jack nodded his agreement. Ianto quickly continued, "Would it really make that much of a difference? It might make it worse."

"How?" Jack asked.

"Because you feel guilty. That's not how I want…" Ianto shook his head, trying desperately to find the right words. "Please don't, Jack. Not like this."

He looked at Jack anxiously, silently pleading with him. Jack gazed back at him, and Ianto saw the confusion in his eyes, and beneath that… the hurt. This is all going horribly wrong, he thought frantically.

"The other night… you didn't do anything wrong, Jack. You were brilliant actually. But I was… afraid."

"Why?" Jack demanded.

Ianto paused as he tried to figure out how to explain it to Jack. "Because now there's nothing left. I have no more secrets. You know everything."

Jack frowned. "And that's a bad thing?"

"No, it's not that… But…" Ianto paused, not wanting to continue the train of thought aloud.

Jack spared him. "But there's still so much you don't know about me."

Ianto nodded and turned away. Jack sighed. "Ianto, I've lived so many lives, and I've done many things I'm not proud of. Terrible things. Things I'm truly ashamed of. But you know more about me than anyone… I know that maybe it's not enough, but what you know about me… the person you know me as, that's the person I'm proud of. That's your Jack."

Jack paused and seemed lost in thought. "There's something I could tell you. Something I've never told anyone since I first came to Earth. Something I never even told the Doctor. Maybe if I told you, you would understand how much I trust you."

Ianto's curiosity was piqued despite himself. "What's that then?"

"My real name."

Ianto felt his mouth fall open as he stared at Jack. "Jack, I…" he started to say, but found that he'd lost the ability to form coherent thoughts.

Jack looked at him earnestly. "I'll tell you if you want me to. It wouldn't change anything… I mean, I'd still want you to call me Jack. That's who I am now. But it would be something only you would know."

Ianto was silent for a long moment as he tried to comprehend what Jack was telling him. "You've always been Jack to me. I'm not sure if I want to think of you as anyone else," he trailed off. "Is it okay if… if I don't want to know?"
His thoughts raced and he couldn't quite believe what he'd just said. Jack has just offered to tell me one of his most closely guarded secrets, and I don't want to hear it? Am I insane? Quite possibly. But... he'll always be Jack to me.

Jack smiled at him and said, "Yeah, it's okay."

"But if I did want to know, you really would tell me?" Ianto pressed, still struggling to grasp the magnitude of what Jack was saying.

"Yes, Ianto, I would."

Ianto nodded as he tried to organize his jumbled thoughts. He felt immeasurably relieved. Those other words... too much has happened lately, and it's not the right time. If Jack does say them someday, it should be because he wants to, not because he thinks I need to hear them or he has something to prove... or even worse, out of guilt. And I want to feel comfortable saying them back... It's better this way. Perhaps it's better to never say them at all... maybe that will make things easier for him...

He tentatively reached out, found Jack's hand, and entwined their fingers. He stared down at their joined hands for several moments, hoping the gesture would communicate to Jack what he wasn't able to say.

He felt more than a little embarrassed by his behavior. Bloody stupid git, he chastised himself. And I accuse Jack of being histrionic! He thinks he doesn't deserve me, and I'm starting to wonder why he puts up with all of my insecurities... But he's just as self-doubting as I am, and sometimes I forget that... Because you would never know it to look at him... But he lets me see that part of him. He trusts me with that... We've both made ourselves vulnerable... and I suppose it makes us both a bit ridiculous sometimes...

He looked up at Jack warily. "Jack," he said quietly, his voice thick with emotion. "Thank you for trying to explain..." He paused and glanced around at the comfortable interior of the cottage. "And for all of this..." Then he grinned and asked slyly, "So, is this my early Christmas present?"

Jack squeezed his hand in response and cracked a smile. "Oh, you expect a Christmas present, do you?"

Ianto raised an eyebrow and smirked. "Of course."

Jack's smile broadened. "Well," he continued, "I did have this whole romantic evening planned, but you had to go and force my hand. Damn you for being so perceptive."

Ianto smiled, feeling the tension ease and relief break like waves over his body. "Would you prefer me dense and oblivious? I can do dense," he quipped.

"You couldn't do dense if your life depended on it!" Jack's smile was genuine.

"You have no idea how talented I am, Sir," Ianto emphasized the honorific.

"Well," Jack said, fingering the zipper on Ianto's jeans. "I have some idea..."

Ianto decided they'd done enough talking for the night.
Jack leaned in and kissed Ianto softly, just barely grazing his lips. He lingered for a moment before he leaned in further, deepening the kiss.

He'd had every intention of telling Ianto how he felt... but Ianto was right. I would be saying it out of guilt. He knows how hard it is for me to admit it... he understands... he always understands. He felt emotion well up in him as he took his hand away from Ianto's zipper and cradled Ianto's face as he kissed him tenderly. Suddenly he didn't want hard and fast anymore. We have the whole night together... no Hub, no Rift alerts, no team...

He pulled back slowly. Ianto's hand reached out to unbutton Jack's shirt, but Jack caught it, turning it over and kissing the palm. Ianto looked quizzically at him, and Jack smiled slyly. "What's the rush?" he asked. "We have all night."

Ianto looked like he was about to say something, but thought better of it. Jack's grin broadened. "Maybe I want to seduce you."

Ianto snorted. "Seduce me? Err, Jack, isn't it a bit late for that? What was that on the floor not an hour ago?" he asked waving vaguely in that direction.

"Oh, that was all you," Jack said smoothly.

"It was, was it?" Ianto asked ironically.

"Yes, you took advantage of me," Jack said, managing to keep a straight face.

"Did I?" Ianto asked wryly.

Jack nodded, as he fought to keep his features neutral. "I didn't hear you complaining," Ianto remarked dryly.

Jack shrugged. "No complaints. We did it your way, now we're going to do it mine."

To Jack's delight, Ianto started laughing. I love when he laughs... "Sometimes, you're very strange," Ianto said between chuckles.

Jack shrugged. "What can I say? I'm a 51st century kind of guy." He smiled at Ianto. "Can we have our romantic evening now?"

Ianto grabbed hold of his hand, a serious expression darkening his features. "Jack... you don't have to prove anything to me."

Jack brushed Ianto's cheek with his free hand. But I have something to prove to myself... and I wanted to do something nice for you... to make it up to you... He kissed him on the forehead. "I know," he whispered.
Again Ianto looked like he was going to say something, but then thought better of it. Jack smiled reassuringly at him. "So," he said, wanting to change the subject. "Hungry now?"

Ianto shrugged, still looking unconvinced. "I could eat. What did you bring us?"

"Nothing special. Just some sandwiches. You know I'm not very good at that kind of stuff." He looked affectionately at Ianto. "That's more your department."

Ianto smiled in return. "Sandwiches are fine."

"I brought a bottle of wine too," Jack added hopefully.

Ianto chuckled. "Trying to get me drunk so you can have your way with me?"

Jack mocked offense, "Would I do that?"

"Yep," Ianto deadpanned.

"Not tonight. Tonight I'm going to be the perfect gentleman."

"Hmmm," Ianto replied, looking skeptical.

"Back in a minute," Jack said, rising to his feet. "Don't move."

Ianto put up his hands in mock surrender. Jack grinned and headed out the cottage door. He went to Ianto's car and took out the overnight bag he'd packed for them. Then he reentered the cottage, set the bag down in the bedroom, and cleaned himself up in the bathroom. He returned to the living room where Ianto was sitting obediently on the sofa with his hands folded neatly in his lap, smirking at him.

Jack wanted to laugh at the expression on Ianto's face. He knew that the entire getaway and the romantic evening he'd planned was a bit over the top for them, but he still felt guilty about everything that had happened recently. Besides, it was a nice when they had the opportunity to briefly indulge in normalcy. Even if Ianto thought he was being silly, he knew that Ianto would understand his intentions. At least I hope he does…

He stood in front of Ianto and reached out his hand. Ianto placed his hand in Jack's, and Jack pulled him to his feet. He kissed Ianto on the cheek. Then he walked into the kitchen and took sandwiches, crisps and a bottle of wine and a bottle opener from the shopping bag. He deftly opened the wine and began opening cabinets looking for glasses and plates. Finding what he needed, he unwrapped the sandwiches and put them on the plates, adding crisps from the bag. He gathered up everything, balancing it precariously as he turned to walk out of the kitchen.

Ianto was leaning against the doorframe with a half smile on his face. He looked so gorgeous that Jack contemplated dropping everything on the floor, forgetting his seduction plan, and taking him right then and there. But he steeled himself. He was beginning to enjoy his game of seduction. "What?" Jack asked innocently.

Ianto indicated the plates Jack was carrying with his head. "Very romantic, Sir."

There was affection in his voice, and Jack knew that Ianto was teasing him. Cheeky bastard... and he knows I love it. He always keeps me on my toes. "Hey, I'll have you know that this is a five star meal on many planets in the galaxy," he lied smoothly.

"Really?" Ianto looked surprised.
"Well, no… not on any that I've been to," he admitted. "But I'm sure it is on some planet."

Ianto laughed again and took one of the plates and the bottle of wine, helping Jack with his burden. "Let's sit outside," Jack said, heading towards the cottage door.

They settled themselves on the patio and chewed on their sandwiches as they gazed out at the darkened Welsh countryside. "It's so quiet," Ianto said staring at the scenery. "It's a bit creepy, really."

Jack put his arm around Ianto. "Worried that monsters are going to come and get you?" he teased. "I'll protect you."

Ianto rolled his eyes. "That's the thing I love about Torchwood. We know exactly what monsters lurk in the dark."

"True…" Jack said, contemplating the inky blackness around them and starting to feel a little uneasy.

"Think Weevils get out this far?" Ianto asked.

"It wouldn't be Weevils that I would worry about…" he thought of just how many creatures there were that liked the darkness.

They were both silent as they listened to the hushed sounds of the night. Crickets chirped and leaves rustled. Something moved in the nearby foliage. Jack shifted in his chair. There really could be all sorts of aliens out there… And we'd never see them coming… They looked at each other. "Back inside?" Jack asked.

"Yup," Ianto agreed quickly, jumping out of his chair.

They gathered up the remains of their dinner and headed back inside the cottage.

"Not that I'm afraid," Jack explained as they returned inside. "I'd just like to keep work out of it tonight."

Ianto looked at him with an amused expression. "Oh, I believe you completely," he said sarcastically.

"You're the one who's scared," Jack taunted, setting the plates down in the kitchen and pouring them both another glass of wine.

"Am not!" Ianto retorted crossing his arms over his chest.

Jack handed Ianto his glass of wine and grinned impishly. "I'll still protect you," he said.

Ianto rolled his eyes again. "So what do you have planned next for your little seduction," he asked, changing the subject.

Jack grinned. "I brought something," he said eagerly. "Something we never get a chance to do."

"Some kind of alien sex toy?" Ianto asked, looking a bit worried.

"You wish," Jack said as he set his glass down on the coffee table and picked up his greatcoat.

"I wish? Who's the deviant here?" Ianto asked, watching with a look of apprehension as Jack reached into the pocket of the coat.

Jack grinned to himself as his hand grasped what he was looking for, knowing that he was going to

"Why?" Ianto asked, looking suspiciously at Jack.

"Don't you trust me?" he asked, pretending to be affronted.

"In most things... yes," Ianto replied.

"Just close your eyes," Jack said.

He smiled as Ianto gave him one last suspicious glare before he shut his eyes. Jack placed the object in Ianto's hands and watched with amusement as Ianto opened his eyes and looked down at a DVD of Casablanca.

"You're kidding," Ianto said, staring at the title.

"Nope," Jack said grinning. "We never have time to sit on the sofa and watch a movie!"

Ianto chuckled and shook his head. "You're mad."

"I love that movie," Jack said defensively.

"You know, they have made movies since the 1940's," Ianto suggested.

"Not any good ones," Jack retorted.

They continued their banter as Jack put the DVD into the player and they settled on the sofa. Jack put his arm around Ianto, and Ianto rested his head on Jack's shoulder. "No popcorn?" Ianto teased.

"We just had dinner!" Jack exclaimed.

"How can I watch a movie without popcorn?" Ianto asked, sounding affronted.

"You can. Just try," he responded, kissing Ianto on the head.

"Well, you could have at least brought chocolate," Ianto muttered under his breath.

"Oh, yeah!" Jack said, jumping up. "I forgot."

He went into the kitchen and reached into the bottom of the shopping bag. He returned and set a bar of dark chocolate on Ianto's lap, grinning affectionately as he thought, _cheeky AND demanding..._ He slid back into his seat and resumed his previous position. "Happy now?" Jack asked, smiling at Ianto.

Ianto looked at him with an expression that Jack couldn't identify. "Yeah, Jack. I'm happy now," Ianto said softly.

Jack smiled as Ianto settled back against his shoulder and opened the bar of chocolate, handing a piece to Jack. As the movie began, Jack launched into his tale of a brief but steamy encounter he'd had with Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart in the 1940's which earned him several eye rolls from Ianto and a muttered, "Here we go again."

They sat happily watching the movie, eating chocolate and commenting on the clothing, the scenery, the dialogue, the war, and politics. They argued about whether Ilsa should have stayed with Rick or gotten on the plane with her husband Laszlo and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Several times throughout the movie, Jack glanced at Ianto, _I hope this is enough to convince you... even if I can't say the words... or if you don't want to hear them..._
After the movie finished, Jack stood and turned off the television and DVD player. He removed a CD that he'd stuck in the DVD case and placed it in the stereo. He turned to Ianto as Billie Holiday started singing 'You Go To My Head'.

Ianto raised an eyebrow at Jack. "I'm sensing a 1940's theme tonight."

Jack shrugged his shoulders. "I liked that decade."

"Really?" Ianto deadpanned. "I never knew that about you."

"Smart arse," Jack laughed as he held out his hand to Ianto.

"What?" Ianto asked, looking askance at him.

"Dance with me?" Jack asked hopefully.

"Seriously?" Ianto's expression grew more doubtful.

"Seriously," confirmed Jack, leaning down and grabbing Ianto's hand.

He hauled Ianto to his feet and took him into a dance embrace. He began to dance them around the room. Ianto was a little resistant at first, but he soon gave in and relaxed in Jack's embrace. Jack smiled when he knew he'd won. "You really are mad, Jack. You know that?" Ianto asked.

"Come on. I know behind that sarcastic exterior, you're a romantic at heart," Jack teased.

"Am I?" Ianto asked doubtfully.

"Admit it," Jack went on. "I've swept you off your feet."

Ianto muttered something under his breath, but he pressed his body closer to Jack's nonetheless. "I've been looking forward to dancing with you again," Jack whispered into Ianto's ear.

Ianto muttered something in reply which sounded like it was meant to be sarcastic, but he laid his head on Jack's shoulder anyway. Jack smiled, feeling he had redeemed himself in some small way. I just hope it's enough... because I can never give him what he truly deserves... And even though we've been a bit ridiculous, I hope he understands what I'm trying to tell him... I hope he knows how important he is to me... He placed a soft kiss on Ianto's temple.

They danced in silence until the final verse. Then Jack sung the words into Ianto's ear, "You go to my head, with a smile that makes my temperature rise. Like a summer with a thousand July's. You intoxicate my soul with your eyes. Though I'm certain that this heart of mine hasn't a ghost of a chance in this crazy romance, you, go to my head."

They continued to hold each other close as the song faded into silence. Ianto pulled away slightly, and looked into Jack's eyes. Jack could read the emotion he saw there as clearly as if it were written across his face. You're intoxicating, Jack thought as his heart constricted painfully. I can't get enough of you, and that terrifies me more than anything that lurks in the darkness. He brushed his fingertips down the side of Ianto's face. I'm yours... for as long as you want me, I'm yours...

"Jack," Ianto whispered as he leaned in and kissed Jack's lips gently. "Take me to bed."

Without a word, Jack turned and led Ianto into the bedroom.
Jack and Ianto spent the rest of the night and a better part of the next day, alternately in the throes of passion or having quiet conversations about nothing in general. Finally in the late afternoon as the sun began to set, Jack sighed heavily and murmured something about them needing to get back to the Hub.

Ianto wanted to thank Jack for the gesture he had made. He understood that Jack had felt guilty, but he also understood that this was Jack's way of showing Ianto that he cared. He tried and dismissed various statements in his head as they showered, dressed, gathered their belongings and loaded his car, but nothing seemed adequate. He finally compromised with a simple, "Thank you, Jack, for doing this, and for everything," as they shut the boot of the car on the last of their belongings.

Jack smiled at him. "You're welcome," he said, looking into Ianto's eyes.

In that moment, as they looked at each other, more passed between the two men than either of them was capable of verbalizing.

Then almost simultaneously, they both shifted uncomfortably, as if the emotion they saw in each other's eyes suddenly overwhelmed them. "Right, well," Ianto started at the same time Jack said, "So, we should…"

Then they both laughed. "Back to work then?" Ianto asked, snatching his car keys from Jack's hand with a mischievous grin as he added, "I'm driving."

Immediately Jack protested. "I'd like to get back to the Hub some time this evening. With the way you drive, it will take us until morning to get back to Cardiff!"

"It's only about thirty miles, Jack," Ianto countered, opening the driver's side door and sliding in. "You can handle it for an hour."

Jack muttered as he climbed into the passenger seat. "You drive like an old lady."

"I do not!" Ianto retorted.

They happily bickered as they made the short journey back home, thoroughly enjoying their banter. Ianto had never felt so close to Jack. And it feels good, he thought with contentment.

The Hub was in its usual state of chaos when they returned. "Took you long enough," was Owen's greeting comment as the cogwheel door rolled open and Jack and Ianto stepped into the Hub. "Right mess you left us with! And Tosh wouldn't let us call because you were on holiday," he added in a seething tone. "How come I never get a holiday?"

"Right," Jack said, assuming his captain's role. "What've we got?"

Ianto smiled to himself as they turned their attention to tackling the latest alien threat. It's nice to be
back, he thought as Jack started shouting orders at the team. Ianto turned and headed towards the coffee machine. We're going to need it. It's going to be a long night. Luckily, he felt surprisingly relaxed and well rested. He grinned to himself as the coffee brewed.

The next couple of weeks were a whirlwind of activity at the Hub. Ianto hardly realized that Christmas was upon then until several days before the date. And then Ianto started to fret. He didn't know how to handle the holiday with Jack. He didn't know what was expected of him or what Jack would want to do. Last Christmas they had spent the day together, but almost by default, and neither one of them had paid much attention to the significance of the date, nor to New Years, for that matter. They had been together, but they had worked.

Ianto tried in vain to come up with a way to broach the subject with Jack, but he just couldn't think of a way to bring up the topic. He was relieved when his phone rang and the caller ID showed his sister's number. He knew that she was ringing to offer her yearly invitation to Christmas dinner with her husband and children. He'd only gone to his sister's for the holiday a couple of times since her marriage. He always preferred to spend the day with friends, then later with Lisa, and now at the Hub.

*But at least I'll have somewhere to go... or at least an excuse to get away if things get awkward with Jack,* he thought as he flipped open his phone and greeted his sister. "Ianto, are you going to grace us with your presence this year?" Rhiannon asked sarcastically.

"If I can get away from work, I'll come," he promised.

"What kind of civil servants work on Christmas?" she asked, sounding outraged. "I thought all of you had holidays off."

"No, not all of us," Ianto replied calmly, used to his sister's antics. "I'll come if I can," he repeated. "How are Mica and David?" he asked quickly hoping to stave off her tirade before it began.

He only half listened as his sister talked at length about her children. He loved his niece and nephew, but he wasn't really good with children. He never knew how to talk to them. He solved his discomfort by giving them money every time he saw them. He knew that handing out a few quid would be sufficient to esteem him in their eyes. And it was the simplest solution, really. He didn't have to relate to them, yet he still earned their respect.

He ended his conversation as quickly as could, claiming that he was needed for a work emergency. He cut short his sister's protestations with a hurried, "I really have to go. I'll talk to you soon," before shutting his phone and sighing heavily.

Tosh had actually gestured at him, indicating that she wanted to talk to him, so he hadn't entirely lied to his sister. *I just exaggerated the truth a bit,* he reasoned to himself, trying to assuage his guilt. He didn't have anything against his sister... *at least not anything I'm willing to go into...* but every time he was with her, he was reminded of his childhood. And those were memories he didn't especially relish in recollecting.

He plastered a smile on his face and walked over to Tosh's work station. "What's up, Tosh," he asked, leaning against her desk.

"Want to play hooky with me today and go Christmas shopping?" she asked, grinning impishly.

Ianto laughed at the expression on her face. "Toshiko Sato, you naughty girl. Are you suggesting that we shirk our responsibilities and leave the others to deal with whatever life threatening situations arise so we can go shopping?" he asked, feigning horror.
He saw the moment of uncertainty flicker across Tosh's face and he laughed again. "Grab your coat and bag," he said.

He walked over to his desk and picked up his coat. As he slid it on, he called out, "Jack, Tosh and I are going to do some Christmas shopping this afternoon."

Jack popped his head out of his doorway. "What are you two getting me?" he asked with his trademark grin.

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "Tosh," he called. "Do you feel like Jack deserves a Christmas present from us?"

Tosh shrugged nonchalantly. "Not really," she replied coolly. "I mean, what has he done to earn one?"

"My thoughts exactly," Ianto responded.

"It better be something good," Jack said as he retreated back into this office.

Ianto and Tosh smiled at each other. They headed out of the Hub and into the crowded streets of Cardiff.

"What are you getting Jack?" Tosh asked as they walked arm and arm down the street, peering into shop windows.

Ianto was silent. "I'm not sure..." he hesitated. "Do you think I should get him something?" he asked, glancing at her.

"You were considering not getting him something?" she asked, sounding surprised.

"I don't know, Tosh..." he hesitated again.

"Ianto, he's your lover! How could you not get him something?"

Ianto inwardly cringed at the word, even though he knew it was an accurate description. "I don't know that he's going to get me something, and then I'd feel foolish," he muttered.

Tosh shook her head and made a frustrated noise. "Really! Ridiculous, the pair of you," she said rolling her eyes.

"So I should get him something then?" Ianto asked uncertainly.

Tosh laughed. "Come on," she said, pulling on his arm and picking up their pace. "I'll help you pick something out. Are you spending the day together?"

"Dunno," Ianto said as he lengthened his strides to keep up with her. "We haven't talked about it."

Tosh muttered something under her breath which Ianto didn't quite catch, but he was sure he heard the word "ridiculous" again.

They had an enjoyable afternoon. Ianto always valued his time with Tosh. She was easy and pleasurable company. He didn't understand Owen. He just doesn't know what he's missing...

He managed to find gifts for his family and for Owen, Gwen, and even Tosh — he made her wait outside of the shop while he made his purchase. Right, that's everyone except for Jack...
"Only one gift left to buy," Tosh said, as they walked into a café for some much needed coffee. They sat in a booth at the window. Tosh excitedly looked through her bags of purchases as Ianto sipped his coffee. "What are you getting Jack?" she asked, looking up at him briefly.

Ianto started to panic. *What on earth could I possibly get for Jack? Am I supposed to get him something? Is he getting me something?* He inwardly groaned. *Why is this so difficult? With Lisa, I knew it was expected, but with Jack, it's just not that simple.*

He glanced out the window as if looking for inspiration from the surroundings. They were across the street from a bookshop. And then all at once an idea came to him. *Could I do it? I mean, it doesn’t really matter at this point... but it would be rather symbolic after everything that's happened... Am I brave enough? Would he think it strange? Is it enough?*

"Ianto?" Tosh interrupted his musings.

He smiled at her. "Don't worry, Tosh. I've had an idea."

Tosh smiled back at him. "Well that's settled then. My work here is finished."

Ianto laughed.

The days leading up to the holiday were unusually busy, and there was a point when Ianto thought none of them would get the holiday off. The team had hurriedly exchanged gifts with one another whenever they’d had a moment. *All except me and Jack...* Ianto thought with a growing feeling of apprehension in his stomach.

He listened with sympathy as Gwen fought on the phone with Rhys and Tosh fought on the phone with her parents over their probable absence from various family festivities. But all at once, the day before Christmas, all Torchwood business was settled, and the Hub was quiet once again.

Jack came out of his office and looked at his team who were all sitting on various chairs and sofas looking exhausted. "Go! Get out of here, the lot of you," he ordered. "Go while you still can."

They all looked at each other for a minute without moving. Then there was a flurry of activity as Gwen, Tosh and Owen all scrambled to collect their belongings and get out of the Hub before the Rift alert could sound again.

Ianto started straightening up around the Hub, unsure of what to do. *I could go home,* he thought as he picked up coffee mugs and threw away the debris left by the team. *It's been a long time since I had a chance to be alone in my flat. I could watch telly or listen to music...*

He was standing at the sink washing the last of the mugs. *It would be nice to have a bit of time alone...* He had almost convinced himself that that was exactly what he wanted when he felt Jack's powerful arms wrap around him from behind. "Alone at last," Jack whispered into his ear.

Ianto calmly finished rinsing the mug and set it on the drying rack. He turned in Jack's arms. Jack kissed him. "What are your plans for tomorrow?" Jack asked, pulling back and looking at him.

Ianto shrugged. "Well, my sister always wants me to go to hers, but I try to avoid it as often as possible."

"Ianto," Jack chided. "You should spend time with your family. It's Christmas. Christmas is for family and they're the only one you have."

"I'm not that close to my family, Jack. The team is more my family than my sister is."
Jack looked hard at him. "What are your plans?" Ianto asked, changing the subject.

"Oh, I thought I'd go out and get drunk, pick up some cute young thing, bring them back here and have my way with them."

For a minute, Ianto thought he was serious. Jack burst out laughing. "You should see the look on your face." He ran his fingertip over Ianto's lips. "I didn't have any plans," he went on. "I usually work on Christmas. Someone has to watch the Rift, and it usually means more to the other members of Torchwood than it does to me. It doesn't exist where I come from, so it doesn't have the same meaning to me."

"But you've been in this time for well over a hundred years," Ianto argued. "You must have grown accustomed to it."

Jack shrugged. "I can take it or leave it," he explained. "How do you usually spend the day?"

"I used to spend it with friends. Then I spent it with Lisa and her family…" Ianto hesitated a moment as a melancholy threatened to take hold at the memory of his Christmases with Lisa. He inwardly shook himself. *Not the time, Ianto,* he scolded himself. He said quickly. "Last year I was here, as you know."

Jack nodded, looking at Ianto thoughtfully. He stared at him for a long moment before he asked. "So how would you prefer to spend the day?"

Ianto's stomach clenched in fear. *Do I tell him the truth? Do I lie?* Ianto was momentarily struck dumb by indecision. *Ianto?* Jack pressed.

Gathering his courage, he said, "I'd rather be here."

Jack's smile lit up the room. "I was hoping you'd say that."

Ianto punched his arm. "Ow!" Jack complained rubbing the spot. "What was that for?"

"Why didn't you just say so?" Ianto asked with exasperation.

"I didn't want to influence your decision. If you had family obligations, I didn't want to get in the way." He rubbed his arm again. "And that hurt," he added.

"Good," Ianto said, thinking seriously about punching him again. "Just for that, you have to hide first," he said, taking his stopwatch out of his waistcoat pocket.

Jack looked at him in confusion. "Naked Hide and Seek," Ianto explained calmly, looking at his stopwatch. "And you've already lost ten seconds."

Jack smiled again before he took of running through the Hub, already lowering his suspenders. Ianto smiled to himself.

Hours later they collapsed in a sweaty heap into Jack's bed and fell asleep almost immediately.

The following morning, Ianto woke to find Jack looking down at him. "Happy Christmas," Jack said when he realized Ianto was awake.


"I have something for you," Jack said, climbing out of bed and reaching into a drawer in his desk.
"I have something for you too," Ianto replied, getting up and looking around for something to throw on to walk through the Hub.

He grabbed one of Jack's shirts from his closet and pulled it over his head before he scrambled up the ladder. He retrieved the gift from where he'd kept it hidden and quickly descended back into Jack's bunker.

Jack was sitting on his bed and Ianto sat down next to him. He placed the package that he'd neatly wrapped in gold paper in Jack's lap. Jack stared down at it. "What is it?" he asked as he picked up the package and shook it.

Ianto laughed. "You'll have to open it to find out."

"Wait, me first," Jack said, handing Ianto an envelope. "But don't open it yet."

Ianto looked questioningly at Jack. "Inside is a card with my real name written on it. I know you said that you don't want to know, but I want you to know that it's there if you ever change your mind."

Ianto stared at the envelope Jack had given him. It was a plain white legal sized envelope. "Still don't want to know?" Jack asked with amusement.

Ianto looked at him, aware of the significance of the gift. "Thank you, Jack," he said seriously. "It means a lot."

Jack nodded. Then he looked again at the package and back at Ianto. Ianto almost bit his lip with nervous anticipation. Jack tore open the wrapping paper and it fell away revealing Ianto's diary. Jack stared at it.

"Ianto… I…" Jack started, but then he stopped, looking astonished.

"Well, you've already read it," Ianto smirked. "And I thought… some day, when I'm gone…" He shrugged.

Jack kissed him hard on the lips. "Thank you," he breathed into Ianto's mouth before kissing him again.

"Besides," Ianto said when they stopped for air. "I started a new one ages ago."

Jack pinned him down on the bed. "I'm going to torture you until you tell me where you've hidden it," Jack said, biting his neck.

"You'll never find it," Ianto laughed.

They spent the rest of the day in bed.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my awesome beta riftintime.

The few days between Christmas and the New Year were lazy ones, and Jack and Ianto enjoyed puttering around the Hub, watching movies, playing games, shagging, and generally holding down the fort so the rest of the team could enjoy their holiday.

New Years Eve found Ianto, Jack and Owen sitting on the roof of the Millennium Center watching the fireworks and sipping champagne. It had been Ianto's idea to invite Owen to spend the evening with them. He had been worried that Owen would be depressed by his inability to partake in any of the festivities. Jack had smiled at Ianto when he'd suggested that they call Owen. "You always think of everything," he'd said before he'd kissed Ianto and pulled him close.

Owen would never have admitted that he was grateful for the invitation. His only response was, "As long as I don't have to watch you and Jack snog at midnight, fine by me."

But Ianto could hear the relief in the medic's voice at his suggestion that he spend the evening with himself and Jack. And his snide comment lacked its usual venom.

As midnight approached, Owen and Ianto sat on the roof edge with their legs hanging over into nothingness. Jack stood on the ledge next to them, overlooking the twinkling city lights.

"Any New Years resolutions, Owen?" Ianto asked before he sipped his champagne.

"Yeah, I resolve not to loose any more body parts," Owen snarked in response.

Jack laughed and Ianto chuckled. "Jack?" Ianto asked, looking up at his lover as he stood towering over them.

"I resolve to try and spend one night a week doing something normal."

"Normal?" Ianto and Owen asked simultaneously.

"Yeah normal," Jack said, shrugging.

They looked at him in confusion. "And what exactly is normal in Jack Harkness' world?" asked Owen, looking longingly at Ianto's glass of champagne.

"Not sure yet, but when I figure it out, I'll let you know," Jack replied dismissively.

Owen looked questioningly at Ianto as if to ask 'what's he on about?', and Ianto shrugged his shoulders as though to say, 'no idea.'

"What about you, Tea Boy? Resolved to grow a backbone?" Owen quipped.

Ianto rolled his eyes. "I resolve to stop worrying about the past or the future, and just enjoy the here and now."
Jack didn't respond, but he glanced in Ianto's direction with an unreadable look on his handsome features. Owen looked at him curiously. "Carpe Diem and all that?" Owen asked.

Ianto shrugged in response.

"I get you mate," Owen continued, looking out over Cardiff. "I mean, you never know… Look at me…" he said with bitterness.

Both Jack and Ianto turned to look at the man – their friend and colleague – who had lost so much. Neither one of them could think of anything to say. The three of them watched in silence as the fireworks brought in the New Year.

Later that night when they were lying in bed, Jack turned to Ianto and said, "Let's try and spend Saturday nights at your flat – Rift permitting, that is."

"Why?" Ianto asked, turning to look at Jack.

Jack shrugged. "I don't know… We should try and do something normal every once in a while."

"We do try and do something normal every once in a while," Ianto replied.

Jack shrugged again. "You know…" he ran his fingers down Ianto's bare arm. "We should try and make it a regular thing."

"Is that what you were talking about on the roof earlier?" Ianto asked.

"Yeah… we'll never have normal, you and me. But maybe we should take it when we can get it."

"Jack," Ianto lifted his head up and looked into Jack's eyes. He gestured at Jack's bunker. "This is our normal."

"Well, it shouldn't be," Jack responded tersely, almost angrily.

Ianto started to respond, but then decided to let it go. Whatever was bothering Jack, no amount of reassurance from him would make a difference. If this is what he needs to do to prove… Well, I'm not sure what he's trying to prove to me, but I can at least let him have this…

Over the next couple of months, Jack and Ianto fell into a pattern. They would spend Saturday nights at Ianto's flat when they were able to, and relax on Sunday mornings watching telly and reading the paper. It was a nice little slice of domesticity that Ianto appreciated. However, something about it always felt a little strained. He's white knuckling it, thought Ianto looking at Jack one Sunday morning. Like he can never truly relax and let go… Like he's trying to convince himself that he wants to be here…

There was a part of him that wished he could convince Jack that it was unnecessary and they could go back to staying at the Hub, however he didn't want to rock the boat. For some reason this was important to Jack, yet at the same time it was a struggle for him. Ianto had the sinking suspicion that something was going to give. He didn't know what would happen or when, but he dreaded that moment. For the time being, however, things were relatively stable between them.

Ianto found himself at the Hub late one night with Gwen. Jack had taken Owen and Tosh to investigate Rift activity at the hospital, and he'd called to say that they would be held up for a while.

After Ianto hung up with Jack, he turned to Gwen. "Looks like they're going to be a while. Jack said you can go home to Rhys."
Gwen hesitated, and then she smiled at Ianto. "Guess we're not needed then."

Ianto smiled in reply. "Nope, I think we were just dismissed."

"What are you going to do?" she asked, looking at Ianto curiously.

"The usual. Clean, file, make some coffee." *Wait for Jack to come back*, he added in his head.

"I think I'll stay with you for a bit," Gwen replied, smiling at him.

Ianto shifted uncomfortably when he realized that he would be alone in the Hub with Gwen. He tried to think of something to say, but nothing came to him. He had recently begun to enjoy Gwen's company more than he had before. It was as though her marriage had calmed her somehow. She was still tenaciously passionate, but she was a bit less rough around the edges. *She's still a challenge… but not so abrasive anymore… but that doesn't mean I want to spend the evening with her. He frowned.*

"Fancy a drink?" Gwen asked.

"Don't you want to get back to Rhys?" he hedged.

"Oh, Rhys has gone out with his mates. I'm a free woman tonight. And I'd like to spend it with a handsome young Welshman," she said, winking at him.

"Oh?" Ianto raised an eyebrow. "And who did you have in mind?" he asked, making a show of looking around the Hub.

Gwen giggled. Then she hooked her arm through Ianto's. "What do you say? You, me, a bottle of wine and some gossip?"

Ianto stiffened at the prospect of the subject matter of Gwen's gossip. *She's going to ask me about Jack... but he could sense Gwen's sincerity, so he relented and tried to relax.* "I'd love to," he replied honestly, patting the hand that was resting on his arm.

"Should we stay here or go to the pub?" Gwen asked, looking tentatively around the Hub where they all spent so much of their time.

"I'd better stay here in case Jack needs me, but I have a few bottles of wine stashed away." Ianto winked at her.

"Of course you do, love!" Gwen said, smiling and squeezing his arm.

Gwen released Ianto's arm and plopped herself down on the sofa while Ianto went to retrieve a bottle of wine and two glasses from his hidden stash. He returned, sat down next to Gwen, opened the wine and filled their glasses. They silently raised their glasses and clinked them together, smiling at each other over the rims. Then they both took a sip. Gwen sighed appreciatively. "Mmmm. That's good, Ianto."

"Only the best," Ianto stated primly.

Gwen chuckled. Then her expression changed into a frown as she rubbed her finger around the rim of her glass. Ianto looked at her curiously. He was just about to ask her what the problem was when she blurted out. "I'm so sorry, Ianto."

Ianto raised an eyebrow at her.
"For everything with Jack… when I first started here…" she continued clumsily.

Ianto didn't reply, he just continued to look at her, letting her say what she needed to. She sighed and took another sip of her wine. "I didn't realize," she started, then stopped. "I mean, I didn't know… that you and he…" She fumbled over her words. "And then when I found out… well, it never seemed like it was serious between you two… It's not like you and Jack are the most demonstrative people I've ever met…"

She stopped abruptly and looked cautiously into Ianto's eyes. He could sense her regret, and he instinctually put his hand on top of hers. "I'm ashamed of my behavior," she said quietly. "I'm ashamed of the way I treated Rhys, I'm ashamed of what happened with Owen. I'm ashamed of the way I behaved around Jack – especially after I found out that you were lovers. I'm ashamed of the way I treated you…"

She sighed again as tears sprang into her eye. She wiped them quickly. "I am truly sorry, Ianto. I'm sorry if I ever hurt you. It was selfish and inconsiderate of me. Can you ever forgive me?"

She looked at him earnestly; the hope of forgiveness so apparent in her features, that Ianto felt a great rush of affection for her well up inside him. "It's okay, Gwen," he said, squeezing her hand. "Of course I forgive you." And he meant it.

"The only thing I can say for myself – not to justify it in any way, but as a sort of explanation – is that it was a very confusing and emotional time for me. Between finding out about aliens, then having to lie about everything to Rhys, then Rhys finding out… then us getting engaged…"

She shook her head and sipped her wine. "I'm not making excuses… I behaved badly… It was a bit of an emotional roller coaster, and I didn't handle it very well."

Ianto smiled at her. "Well, it's not like there's a handbook for how to deal with discovering that aliens exist… Well, not only that they exist but that many of them want to wipe out the universe. I think under the circumstances, you did remarkably well."

"Really?" Gwen asked, wide eyed and hopeful.

He patted her hand. "Really," he reassured her. "You had a life when you started here. The rest of us… we'll, let's say that we didn't have much to loose. You, on the other hand… You were different. I can't say that I would have done any better if I had been in your position."

He realized the truth of his statement as the words came out of his mouth. Gwen wiped another tear that had fallen down her cheek. "Gwen, we've all made mistakes. We've all done things we're ashamed of. We just have to forgive ourselves and each other and move on."

Gwen leaned forward and hugged him. Ianto returned the embrace and kissed Gwen on the top of her head. She means well, he thought to himself. And I know she has a good heart. "Maybe we should write a handbook," Gwen said as she sat back and took another drink of her wine."

A 'how to deal with your first alien encounter' handbook?" Ianto asked, amused at the thought.

"Sure," Gwen replied with a grin. "I mean, who better to write a book?"

"Could be amusing…" Ianto mused. "Chapter one would have to be the Weevil encounter…" Ianto said, starting to warm to his theme. "Lesson one – Growling."

Gwen laughed. "But before we get into all that, there is one thing that I have to ask," she said, looking slyly at Ianto.
"What's that then?"

"What IS Jack Harkness like in bed?"

Ianto burst out laughing.

He and Gwen finished the bottle of wine, chatting amiably. Ianto felt his affection and respect for Gwen growing throughout their conversation. They were well into their third bottle of wine, when Jack came back to the Hub to find them sprawled on the sofa, leaning against each other, and singing the Welsh national anthem.

Jack stood staring at them, arms crossed and looking stern until they finished their song with a flourish. "Is this what you two get up to when I'm not around?" he asked with an attempt at hiding the amusement in his voice. "What if the Rift alarm sounded and you two had to go out?"

Gwen snorted. "What? It's not like we're surgeons on call! Sod that!" She gestured wildly at him. "Come! Sit down! Have a glass with us. Ianto tells me you're brilliant in the sack."

Ianto made a concerted effort to shove Gwen, but he miscalculated the distance between them. He missed her completely, lost his balance, and fell off the sofa in a heap. Gwen giggled and reached to pour herself another glass of wine, but Jack was quicker and snatched the bottle before she could grab it. "I think you two have had quite enough," he said, putting the wine bottle out of reach.

"Spoilsport," Ianto mumbled from his position on the floor which he was suddenly finding quite comfortable.

Jack looked down at him with his hands on his hips. "I should just leave you there," he scolded.

Ianto stuck his tongue out at Jack which sent Gwen into peels of laughter. "That's it. I'm calling Rhys to pick you up," Jack said, looking at her. Then he turned to Ianto. "And you… You're going to be very grumpy tomorrow when you realize how dirty you've made that suit."

Ianto waved his hand dismissively, then immediately wished he hadn't as the room started to spin. It was the last thing he remembered.

The next thing Ianto was conscious of was waking up in Jack's bed with a throbbing headache and the taste of cotton wool in his mouth. "Have fun last night?" Jack asked ironically from next to him.

"Ow…" was all Ianto could muster.

Jack snickered. "Yeah, well that's what you get. Come on, Ianto. Time to get up. We've got work to do," he said, jumping out of bed and pulling the covers with him. "And don't think for a minute I'm letting you call in sick," he added.

"You're a horrible boss," Ianto said pouting.

"I know. I'm terrible. I can't imagine what you must suffer working for me. Now get up," Jack said without an ounce of compassion.

Ianto grumbled that he was unspeakably mean, but did as he was told. He moved very slowly and carefully.

When Gwen arrived, she was in no better shape than Ianto. She refused to take off her sunglasses, and Ianto looked at them with jealously. "Why didn't I think of that? And how come I never noticed that the Hub's so bright?" he grumbled as he set a mug of coffee in front of her.
Ianto and Gwen spent the rest of the day wincing at loud noises – which Jack and Owen took every opportunity to make, moaning about never drinking again, and trying to seek out the darkest recesses of the Hub. However, Jack and Owen took great pleasure in talking in their loudest voices, and Jack kept making up reasons why Ianto couldn't go down into the archives. It was a very long day for Ianto.

He and Gwen took their punishment like good sports though, grinning conspiratorially at each other throughout the day. Ianto knew that one day of hangover and taunting from Jack and Owen was worth the bond that he'd formed with Gwen. He wouldn't have changed a thing.

It was one of the reasons why a couple of weeks later, when Gwen became obsessed with finding out what happened to Jonah Bevin, Ianto betrayed Jack once again.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my outstanding beta riftintime.

Jack surprised himself when, on New Years Eve, he declared to Ianto and Owen, "I resolve to try and spend one night a week doing something normal."

"And what exactly is normal in Jack Harkness' world?" Owen had asked.

Jack had deflected. *I'm not sure myself what I mean,* he glanced at Ianto, *but I know that I want to do this for him…*

And when Jack heard Ianto's resolution, "I resolve to stop worrying about the past or the future, and just enjoy the here and now," he was even more certain of his motives.

He looked hard at Ianto. *Does he still worry that I'm going to leave again? Does he worry about his past or mine? I have a lot of history - more than anyone should have to deal with. He could spend decades worrying through it… I need to find some way to make this relationship more recognizable to him. Something more normal that he understands… Otherwise he'll never accept that we're together. He'll always doubt my sincerity, and it will always be an issue…*

Owen reminding them of his own fate made Jack ashamed of his selfishness. *How can I worry about me and Ianto when Owen will never have sex again…* He could think of nothing to say in response. The three of them watched in silence as the fireworks brought in the New Year.

Later that night when they were lying in bed, Jack was still thinking about his New Years resolution. He wanted to find a way to give Ianto some semblance of conventionality. *It's awkward enough as it is… I'm immortal, I've lived for close on two hundred years, we hunt aliens for a living, yet he's chosen to be with me and given up any chance he has to find a life outside of Torchwood. I want to give him something in return. Let's try and spend Saturday nights at your flat – Rift permitting, that is."

"Why?" Ianto asked.

Jack shrugged, trying hard to think of a way of explaining it to the younger man. "I don't know…" he hesitated, "We should try and do something normal every once in a while," he finished uncertainly.

"We do try and do something normal every once in a while," Ianto replied.

Jack shrugged again. "You know…" He thought hard about what it was he was trying to say, but he couldn't find the words to explain. He ran his fingers distractedly down Ianto's bare arm. "We should try and make it a regular thing," he finally said.

"Is that what you were talking about on the roof earlier?" Ianto asked.

"Yeah…" Jack knew that part of Ianto still believed it was only about the sex. Jack still felt guilty about that and about what Ianto was giving up to be with him. No amount of reassurance from the
younger man seemed to assuage Jack's remorse. "We'll never have normal, you and me. But maybe we should take it when we can get it."

"Jack," Ianto looked into his eyes and gestured around him. "This is our normal."

Jack felt fury rise up in his chest, but he'd have been hard pressed to explain where the anger was coming from. "Well, it shouldn't be!" Jack practically spat the words out.

He almost wanted Ianto to argue with him. He's so damn self-sacrificing. He should demand more from me! This shouldn't be enough for him… However, Ianto didn't respond, and Jack's anger quickly abated.

Over the next couple of months, at Jack's insistence, they fell into the habit of spending Saturday nights at Ianto's flat. Part of Jack enjoyed their lazy Sunday mornings, but part of him rebelled. He knew that he wasn't cut out for a life like this, and as much as he tried to stay in the moment, part of him always wanted to be back at the Hub and at Torchwood, maintaining his role as the defender of planet Earth.

This life, he thought, looking around one Sunday morning as Ianto read the editorials and Jack tried to focus on the comics, it's just not me... As much as I enjoy being with Ianto, I'd rather be with him at the Hub... He glanced at the younger man who was sitting with his legs thrown carelessly over the arm of the sofa, looking completely at ease. Ianto should find someone who can do this with him and be happy. I'm just not that person. I'm a man of action... Always have been, even before I became immortal. Isn't that how I became immortal in the first place? Isn't that why I joined the Time Agency – because I craved action and excitement? This was better when it was stolen moments of normalcy for us. This routine domesticity... I don't know if I can do it... And I think I'm starting to resent him for it – which is absurd because this was my idea in the first place...

The part of Jack that would always feel the urge to escape came creeping back. He fingered his wrist strap distractedly, remembering how easy it used to be to disappear in a flash. Then he felt ashamed when he caught Ianto's perceptive blue eyes boring into him. Feeling guilty, he smiled reassuringly at Ianto. He set his paper down and moved towards Ianto. At least our desire for each other hasn't faded, he thought wryly as he pulled off Ianto's T-shirt. Never any problems in that department, he thought as he kissed Ianto's bare chest.

The first inkling that Jack had about Gwen's growing obsession with the disappearance of Jonah Bevin was when she accosted him one afternoon about his involvement. He was in a hurry, preparing to leave the Hub, as Ianto had called about a Weevil hunt. Jack knew from experience that a Weevil hunt with Ianto could mean all sorts of things, but it almost always ended with sex. He was excited – looking forward to the rush of adrenalin of the hunt and capture, followed by the rush of adrenaline of shagging Ianto – preferably in some dark alley. He was distracted when Gwen came to talk to him, so it took him a while to register what she was saying. Something about P.C. Davidson, a missing person, and something about me being there? "When did you say this was," he asked as he picked up his Webley and holstered it.

"About seven months back. Were you on the barrage that night?" Gwen asked.

At first, Jack had no idea what she was talking about. "They have this cute little coffee shack. I sometimes stop by there," he said cheekily as he looped his gun holster through his belt and refastened it.

"A boy went missing. Just under an hour before you were there," Gwen added.

"Okay," Jack said, still not understanding.
"Jonah Bevin, fifteen years old. I thought maybe you were out there because of him."

And suddenly Jack remembered. *Jonah Bevin. A Rift victim. Came back an old man, scarred and broken. Horribly broken... It was Ianto's first time... Ianto... He caught his breath. Does she know Ianto was there too? "Maybe if we'd registered Rift activity," he said grabbing his coat, hoping to find an excuse for their presence if they had been seen.

"I just checked with Tosh. It was all clear," Gwen explained.

"Sorry, can't help," he said walking past her, wanting desperately to get out. But then he thought better of it. *If I act too disinterested, she might suspect something. He stopped and turned back to face her. "Want me to look into it for you?"

"No, it's fine. So it was just a coincidence then?"

"Guess so," he replied, feeling immensely relieved. "Gotta run. Weevil hunting with Ianto," he said gleefully as he ran out.

Ianto had brought the SUV around to the front of the water tower. Jack hopped in and Ianto sped off. "Gwen's starting to ask questions about Jonah Bevin," Jack said.

"Is she?" Ianto glanced at Jack. "What got her onto it?"

"That would be P.C. Andy Davidson," Jack replied. "Apparently he caught the missing person's case."

"Ah," Ianto responded and frowned.

Jack looked at him. He could almost hear the gears working in Ianto's brain, but his face remained stoic. "What?" Jack asked.

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "Don't you think maybe it's time to tell them about Flat Holm?" Ianto asked glancing at him in the rear view mirror.

"No, I don't," Jack said with determination.

Ianto shrugged and turned his attention back to the road. "Are we really going on a Weevil hunt?" Jack asked coyly, wanting desperately to change the subject.

"Are you accusing me of getting you out of the Hub for a shag?" Ianto smirked.

Jack reached over and caressed his leg. "Well, I know from experience that a Weevil hunt with you isn't always a Weevil hunt," he teased.

Jack slid his hands up and fingered Ianto's zipper. "Jack, I'm driving!" Ianto exclaimed.

A wicked grin spread across Jack's features. "So?" he asked as he yanked the zipper down.

Ianto slapped his hand away. "Weevils first, reward later," Ianto scolded, quickly zipping his trousers.

Jack pouted. "Spoilsport."

He sighed heavily, but it was only a pretense. He knew that Ianto would reward him amply after they'd driven the Weevils back into the sewers.
And Ianto did reward him... later. Ianto took him forcefully up against a brick wall in a back alley – his hands scratched from clawing at the bricks, his pants around his ankles, Ianto thrusting into him with a vengeance, cumming deep inside him, and shouting his name. Jack loved it when Ianto took charge.

Jack was surprised, and he had to admit, quite impressed by the thoroughness of Gwen's research on the missing people. *The victims of the Rift... But she can't know. None of them can know.* And when Gwen urged him to do something about it, he became defensive. *Am I really doing enough for them? Is there something more I could have done to stop this from happening?* "Weevils we can catch. If there are victims, we fix their wounds, but this, we don't know when it's gonna happen. We don't know where they end up. Seriously, Gwen. Practically, tell me what we should do," he challenged.

He was relieved when no one had an answer. Yet Gwen kept pushing, and he lost his temper when she accused him of being hard. "Close this down," he ordered before standing up and walking away.

He was fuming. "Jack," he heard Ianto's voice call from behind him.

He turned. "I think it's time they all knew," Ianto said calmly.

"We've had this discussion already," he snapped.

"Jack, you know Gwen. She's not going to let it go until she has some answers. Isn't it better that it comes from you?"

"Ianto," he said, pointing his finger at him, fury raging in his chest. "I don't want to have this conversation again. None of them are to know. That's an order."

He stormed off, grabbed his coat from the coat stand and walked out of the Hub. He needed air. He needed to get away. He needed to breathe.

Jack went to the roof of the Millennium Center to think. *I've done everything I could for them. There's no way to predict the Rift spikes. There's nothing else I can do. Some things we can't fix,* he told himself over and over again.

He didn't know how long he stood there looking over the city. He watched the sun disappear into the horizon and darkness fall like a blind being drawn over the world. Then he heard the sound of footsteps behind him. Jack knew without turning around that they were Ianto's. "They've all gone home for the evening," Ianto said from behind him.

"I've done all I could for the victims of the Rift," Jack said, still feeling defensive.

"I know," Ianto replied softly.

"We have no way of predicting when..."

"I know," Ianto interrupted him, putting his arms around his chest and resting his chin on Jack's shoulder.

"There's nothing more I can do," Jack tried again, and much to his dismay, felt tears forming behind his eyes.

"Shhh," Ianto whispered in his ear. "I know Jack. You've done all you can."

"But you don't agree with my decision not to tell them," Jack continued, not quite ready to let it go.
"No. I don't," Ianto replied simply.

Jack stiffened and tried to break free of Ianto's embrace, but Ianto held him tighter. "We're not going to agree on everything," Ianto reasoned.

He spoke in a soothing tone and gently caressed Jack's abdomen with his hands. Jack felt himself relaxing in spite of himself. "No. No, you're right," he sighed. "I suppose it would be boring if we did…"

"We may be a lot of things," Ianto chuckled, "But I don't think boring is one of them."

"No…" Jack hesitated, thinking briefly about Sunday mornings in Ianto's flat. Was that what I was feeling? Is that the nagging sensation? I'm afraid that we'll become boring?

"Speaking of interesting things," Ianto whispered into his ear. "It's been a while since we played Naked Hide and Seek."

A grin spread across Jack's features. Nope, not boring, he thought. Aloud he said, "Yeah, it's been a while… I should be generous and give you a chance to redeem yourself. What's the score now? I think I've won ten rounds to your measly two."

"That's because you cheat," Ianto huffed.

"Do not," Jack replied briskly.

"Do too," Ianto retorted.

They bickered all the way back to the Hub and continued until Ianto took out his stopwatch and set it down on a desk. Jack thoroughly enjoyed their banter, and even more so, the game that followed.
"Ianto," Jack said, pointing his finger at him, the fury evident in his voice. "I don't want to have this conversation again. None of them are to know. That's an order."

Ianto watched Jack's retreating form with a raised eyebrow and hands on his hips. He turned and looked at Gwen. She was still sitting at the conference table, her anger from the confrontation with Jack and her pain for the missing boy radiating off her like waves. He knew at that moment that he was going to defy Jack's order.

He's going to be furious… he thought as he heard the cogwheel door roll open and then closed, signaling Jack's exit from the Hub. He'll accuse me of betraying him again. Will he forgive me a third time? But Gwen's not going to let it go… And I can't put my personal relationship with Jack ahead of Torchwood and the team.

He walked over to Gwen and put a hand on her shoulder. "You did a fantastic job with the research, Gwen. Really," he said, trying to soften Jack's blow.

"Thanks, Ianto. Doesn't seem to have made a sodding bit of difference though. How can he be so heartless?" She stood suddenly and began to gather her papers.

Ianto watched helplessly as Gwen angrily brushed a tear from her cheek, and finished gathering her research. "This isn't over," she muttered as she walked quickly out of the boardroom.

Nope, she's never going to let it go, he thought as he watched her walk away. I hate her thinking Jack's heartless… Especially because those people affect him more than she'll ever know. Jack hates it when he feels useless…

A plan was beginning to form in his mind. He walked to his desk in the archives and took a GPS device out from a drawer. He entered the coordinates of Flat Holm Island and checked the location. Then he turned off the device, slipped it into an envelope, and sat staring at it. Am I really going to go against a direct order from Jack? But I know he's wrong about this. They're Torchwood. They should know everything about the Rift… Why should Jack have to carry this burden alone?

He sighed heavily and put the package down on his desk. What if he never forgives me? What if he never trusts me again? He fingered the edge of the envelope. But I know that this is going to go badly if I don't intervene. Gwen's not going to let it go, and Jack's just going to dig his heels in deeper. Then it's going to get ugly. Both of them are so stubborn. Neither one of them will give in.

He spun the package around with his index finger. And Gwen should learn to trust Jack. How can he be a successful leader if she doesn't trust him and constantly questions his decisions? But isn't that what I'm doing now? He spun the package in the opposite direction.

The last time we didn't trust Jack… He shuddered as he remembered the three days that Jack lay on that cold metal drawer in the morgue. I thought I'd lost him forever. His mind replayed Jack's
resurrection and the kiss in front of the whole team. *Our first public kiss… And then he disappeared without a word, and I lost him again. Will I lose him if I do this?*

He sighed again and dropped his head into his hands, looking beseechingly at the envelope as though if he stared at it long enough, it would tell him what to do. *But I know I'm right,* he thought, suddenly standing and grabbing the package from the desk. *This needs to end. Gwen and Jack both need to learn when to let go…*

He strode purposefully into the main area of the Hub and arrived in time to see Tosh getting ready to leave for the day. "Has everyone else gone?" he asked her as he placed the package on his desk.

"Yeah. Gwen stormed out of here not long after Jack did, and Owen left a short time later."

Ianto nodded distractedly. "You okay, Ianto?" Tosh asked with concern. "Fancy a drink?" she added. "All this angst makes me thirsty."

Ianto smiled at her. "Thanks, Tosh. But I think I need to go after Jack."

She smiled in return. "Yeah. I think you do."

She finished buttoning up her coat and picked up her bag. "Maybe you can talk some sense into the two of them."

She patted him on the arm and walked out of the Hub. Ianto picked up the package again and put it down on Gwen's desk. *I hope you understand why I'm doing this, Jack,* he thought to himself as he centered the envelope on Gwen's desk, giving it a last hard look before he turned away.

He grabbed his coat and headed to the roof of the Millennium Center where he knew Jack had gone to brood. "They've all gone home for the evening," Ianto said to Jack to announce his arrival.

Jack didn't turn around, but he could feel the older man stiffen. "I've done all I could for the victims of the Rift," Jack said, sounding defensive.

"I know," Ianto replied softly.

"We have no way of predicting when…"

"I know," Ianto interrupted him, putting his arms around his chest and resting his chin on Jack's shoulder.

"There's nothing more I can do," Jack said, and Ianto could hear the break in his voice.

"Shhh," Ianto whispered in his ear. "I know, Jack. You've done all you can."

Ianto did his best to soothe Jack and to get him to come back to the Hub. He wanted them to have an enjoyable evening together because he wasn't sure if Jack would be speaking to him after Gwen found the GPS.

"Speaking of interesting things," Ianto whispered into his ear. "It's been a while since we played Naked Hide and Seek."

He was relieved when Jack took the bait and happily bantered with him as they walked back to the Hub. *If he's going to be angry with me for a while, might as well make the most of tonight,* he thought as he took his stopwatch out and put it down on a desk. "I believe it's your turn to hide," Jack said, positively leering at Ianto.
Ianto rolled his eyes. "Just because it's easier for you to cheat that way."

Jack snatched the stopwatch off the desk and pushed the button on the top. Ianto crossed his arms in a mock huff, glaring at him. "You're wasting your precious ten minutes," Jack said gleefully, waving the stopwatch in front of Ianto's face and grinning salaciously.

Ianto arched one eyebrow, then turned and ran, pulling off his jacket and flinging it over a chair as he went.

He quickly and deftly shed his clothing and hid it along his path into the Hub's basement. He thought he'd try for somewhere obvious this time, because Jack always seemed to find him when he hid in the maze of the archives. He went into the boardroom and crawled naked under the table. He lay on his side with his head propped up on one arm and waited, catching his breath.

He looked at his watch. Eleven minutes had passed. He listened to his heartbeat slow down and resume it's steady pace. He thought again about the package he'd placed on Gwen's desk. *I wonder if I did the right thing…*

But his thoughts were interrupted as he heard footsteps. And a minute later, Jack had flung Ianto's clothes down beside him and pinned him on the floor on his stomach. "The boardroom, Ianto? Really? You disappoint me," Jack said in a low tone, his voice rough with desire.

"I thought I'd try the obvious… oh…" He moaned as Jack bit the back of his neck. It sent chills down his spine.

Jack bit him harder, and Ianto moaned again. He felt Jack force his legs apart with his knees, and he was instantly hard.

Jack ran his hands over Ianto's arse as he continued to nip and suck on his neck. Ianto broke into a sweat as Jack fingered his entrance. He felt Jack's weight lift off of him and heard Jack unzip his trousers. Ianto shivered with anticipation. Then Jack's hands were on his arse again, running down between his cheeks and spreading him wide.

Ianto cried out with pleasure as Jack's first finger breeched him. Within moments, Jack was inside him. After giving Ianto a few seconds to adjust to his presence, he began to thrust slowly, leaning over Ianto's back and wrapping one arm around his shoulders.

Ianto shivered again as Jack readjusted his position. Jack bit his neck hard and simultaneously thrust into him, hitting the bundle of nerves in his prostate. Ianto groaned loudly and surrendered his body to Jack.

Ianto turned his head and Jack kissed him hard on the mouth, biting his lower lip. He felt Jack give several more deep thrusts before he came hard inside him.

Jack collapsed next to him and pulled Ianto onto his chest, caressing his back. Ianto knew that Jack had taken some of his aggression out on him, but he wasn't complaining. *Actually, I quite enjoyed it… even though he always cheats.* "You cheated again," Ianto accused him playfully.

"Did not!" Jack rejoined. "You hid under the boardroom table. What kind of challenge is that? Personally, I think you want to be found."
Ianto snorted, and opened his mouth to respond, but then thought better of it. He wanted to take a few minutes to appreciate lying in Jack's arms. Will this be the last time? An overwhelming dread spread through him, and he instinctually nuzzled closer to Jack. Jack held him tighter and kissed his forehead. Please don't let this be the last time, Ianto silently pleaded.

Then Jack's stomach started rumbling audibly, breaking the mood. "Food?" Ianto asked with a chuckle.

"Food," Jack confirmed.

Half an hour later they were fully dressed, sitting in Jack's office, and sharing a pizza. "So that makes, what, eleven wins for me and two for you?" Jack asked nonchalantly.

Ianto narrowed his eyes. "Isn't it your turn to hide?" he asked mildly as he finished his last piece of pizza.

"I suppose so," Jack said, wiping his hands on a napkin.

Ianto picked up the stopwatch from the desk and pushed the button. "Hey," Jack said, jumping off his chair. "That's not fair!"


He grinned innocently as Jack glared at him before turning and running out of the office. Ianto sat quickly in Jack's chair and pulled up the CCTV camera feeds on Jack's computer. "Two can play at that game," he mumbled as he watched Jack run up the stairs and into the hothouse, unbuttoning his shirt as he went.

Ianto caught a glimpse of Jack's bare chest, and felt a stirring between his legs. Sod the game, he thought as he stood and followed Jack up the stairs. Jack turned his head when he heard Ianto open the door. He was holding his shirt in his hand and his trousers were unzipped and hanging low around his hips. Ianto stalked towards him with purpose.

"What happened to the game?" Jack asked as Ianto approached.

"Sod the game," Ianto said before he grabbed Jack and kissed him hard.

They kissed desperately as Jack unbuttoned Ianto's shirt and slipped it off his shoulders. Ianto had his hand around Jack's cock and his tongue in Jack's mouth when he heard, "Oh God!"

They both turned, startled to see Gwen standing in the doorway. Gwen's face displayed a mixture of embarrassment and amusement. She half laughed. "Sorry. Sorry," she said, turning and leaving.

Jack laughed, and Ianto muttered, "Oh God," under his breath.

He grabbed his shirt and followed Gwen out, trying to quickly regain his dignity as he put himself back together.

"Ianto, hi. I'm sorry, I didn't realize."

"Doesn't matter," Ianto reassured her as he started buttoning up his shirt. And he was surprised to realize that he meant it. He wasn't embarrassed.

"Always room for one more," Jack said, striding confidently out of the hothouse, his shirt open and his trousers barely staying up. Ianto inwardly rolled his eyes. "We could have used you an hour ago
for Naked Hide and Seek," Jack continued.

"He cheats. He always cheats," Ianto couldn't help adding. And I always let him, he thought gleefully.

But his humor was short lived. He looked back and forth between Gwen and Jack as they argued about Jonah Bevin. He finished buttoning his shirt and fastening his trousers, thinking hard about what he was about to do. The tension in the air between Jack and Gwen was palpable. It reaffirmed what Ianto had suspected would happen. This is going to end in tears...

"Uh..." he only hesitated for a moment before he continued. "There's a package on your desk."

He gave Gwen one last nod before he followed Jack back into the hothouse.

He thought Jack would be in a foul mood, and he stood motionless for a moment, uncertain of what to do. Finally he broke the silence. "That was a first for me. I've never been caught in flagrante delicto," Ianto stated, trying to break the tension.

Jack looked at him. He opened his mouth and looked like he was about to say something, then seemed to change his mind. Instead he broke into a grin. "Her face was rather priceless," he agreed.

"Rather," Ianto said, smiling in return.

"Oh God!" Jack said in a startingly good imitation of Gwen.

Ianto burst into laughter, and then Jack joined in. And all at once the tension broke. Jack spent a good twenty minutes imitating Gwen walking in on them, and every time he did it, they both started laughing all over again.

But in the back of Ianto's mind was the knowledge of what he'd just done, and he wondered if they would ever laugh together like this again.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my brilliant beta riftintime.

Ianto woke the next morning in a tangle of limbs. He and Jack had fallen into Jack's bed in an exhausted, sweaty heap after a night of marathon sex. And Ianto reveled in the memory.

After they had stopped laughing about Gwen walking in on them, they had picked up where they'd left off... and Ianto was sore. But a good kind of sore, he smiled to himself.

He turned to look at Jack. Jack was wide awake and staring at him. "What?" Ianto asked, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.


"Looking at what?" Ianto asked, confused.

"Looking at you," Jack replied, unabashedly.

"Why?" Ianto asked, knowing that he was fishing. If this is the last time...

"Because you're gorgeous," Jack replied nonchalantly.

Ianto snorted, but he was inwardly pleased. Jack caressed his face and looked into his eyes. Then he leaned down and placed a tender kiss on Ianto's lips.

Ianto wished the moment could go on forever. But it wasn't to be. Jack's expression changed. "I'm making the trip to Flat Holm today," Jack said through clenched teeth.

Ianto looked at him with surprise. "Because of Gwen?"

"Yeah... and I feel like I should..." Jack confirmed.

Ianto's stomach turned over. He felt an overwhelming sense of guilt. Jack looked at him as though waiting for his reaction. Does he want me to offer to go with him? I can't! He's probably going to run smack into Gwen... oh God, what a mess...

Ianto remained silent. He couldn't think of anything to say. "What is it?" Jack asked, looking curiously at him.

Ianto played dumb. "What do you mean?"

"Usually you offer to go with me," Jack replied cautiously.

"Do I?" Ianto asked, trying his hardest to remain impassive while his gut churned uncomfortably.

"Yeah, you do," Jack affirmed.

Ianto shrugged, still unable to think of a response. "Is it because you disagree with me about the
team?" Jack pressed.

"Er, no. I just think you should go alone," Ianto replied stoically, while his insides waged a war.

Jack looked sideways at him, and Ianto did his best to keep his features molded in a blank expression. The tension between them increased. Ianto squirmed uncomfortably.

"Right," Jack finally said, breaking the uncomfortable silence. He sat up and looked around him. "I suppose I should get ready to go."

With one last glance in Ianto's direction, Jack hopped out of bed and sauntered into the bathroom. Ianto lay on Jack's bed staring at the ceiling and exhaled heavily. He hadn't realized that he was holding his breath. Part of him wanted to come clean to Jack. It would be the brave thing to do. He's going to find out that I betrayed him anyway. Would it be better coming from me? Would he be more forgiving? I should tell him... I'm going to tell him.

Gathering his courage, he got out of bed and followed Jack into the bathroom where he could already hear the shower running.

"Jack," he started, pulling back the shower curtain. His mouth was open and the words were on the tip of his tongue. I have something I need to tell you...

"There you are," Jack said smiling and stroking his erection. "I was waiting for you."

All thoughts of confession quickly fled Ianto's mind as he dropped to his knees in front of Jack. And suddenly his mouth was too busy for conversation.

After they had showered and dressed, Ianto made coffee while Jack checked the overnight Rift readings. When Ianto brought Jack his morning coffee, Jack was already holstering his Webley and preparing to leave the Hub.

Ianto handed Jack his coffee and went to fetch his greatcoat. Jack quickly downed his coffee before Ianto helped him into his coat. Ianto fussed over the collar for a bit longer than usual. Then he looked into Jack's eyes. Again the thought crossed his mind to confess to Jack that he'd told Gwen about Flat Holm. Well, not told her, but gave her a trail of breadcrumbs to follow.

"Ianto, what's going on?" Jack asked, breaking into his thoughts.

"Nothing," Ianto replied quickly, giving Jack's collar one final tug and brushing the shoulders flat.

He instinctually pulled Jack in for a long kiss. Please don't let this be the last time, he silently prayed again as their kiss lingered.

"I'll be back later tonight," Jack said when Ianto pulled away.

Ianto nodded in response, his mind in torment. Again the words were on the tip of his tongue. I told Gwen about Flat Holm... but they just wouldn't make their way out of his mouth.

"Call me if the world is ending again?" Jack said cheekily.

"Yes Sir," Ianto replied, giving a small salute.

"Cheeky bastard," Jack smiled one last time at Ianto, brushed his cheek with his thumb, and then he was off in a flurry of coat tails.

Ianto stood in the wake of Jack's departure, staring at the space he had previously occupied. "I hope
you forgive me, Jack," he whispered.

He sighed heavily and turned his attention to the day's work.

Tosh arrived soon after Jack left, and Owen came in about an hour later, muttering and cursing as usual. However, when Owen learned that both Jack and Gwen were out for the day, he turned around and left again, grumbling, "Well bugger this. No one seems to do any sodding work around here anymore."

Tosh and Ianto looked at each other and smirked. They were alone in the Hub. Tosh turned again to her computer, murmuring something about a program she was working on. Ianto patted her affectionately on the shoulder. Then he went to find solace in the archives.

He spent most of the day there, trying to soothe his nerves by cleaning and filing. But he was restless and distracted. Even the monumental task of whipping Torchwood's archives into some semblance of order couldn't assuage his apprehension of the confrontation to come.

Finally, late in the afternoon, Ianto decided he'd had enough. He made his way into the main area of the Hub. Tosh was still sitting at her workstation. It seemed that she hadn't moved all day. He walked up behind her and put a hand on her shoulder. "Why don't we get that drink you were talking about last night?"

Tosh turned around and smiled up at him. "I'll forward the Rift alerts to our PDAs," she said, turning to her computer and typing furiously on her keyboard.

"I'll be back in a minute," Ianto said.

He quickly went down into Jack's bunker and took two of his favorite suits out of Jack's closet. He neatly folded them into a suit bag. Then he looked around the small room, wondering if there was anything else he would need. He was uncertain if he'd ever spend another night there. Deciding that everything else belonging to him in Jack's bedroom was replaceable, he headed back to Tosh.

"Ready to go?" he asked.

"Moving out?" Tosh indicated the suit bag hanging over Ianto's arm.

Ianto inwardly winced. *Maybe… "Dry cleaning," he said by way of an explanation.*

"I see," Tosh replied, looking hard at him.

Ianto could sense her disbelief, but hoped she wouldn't mention it. He was relieved when she hooked her arm around his and together they walked out of the Hub.

Once they were settled into a booth in the pub and nursing their cocktails, Tosh said, "Okay, Ianto. Spill."

Ianto raised his eyebrows but said nothing.

"What's going on? Did you and Jack have a row? Don't tell me that those clothes are really headed for the dry cleaners. Besides, you've been moody and distracted all day."

"You haven't seen me all day," Ianto replied defensively.

Tosh rolled her eyes.

"Let's text Owen and tell him to meet us," Ianto said, trying to change the subject.
He took out his phone and flipped it open.

Tosh grabbed the phone from his hands. "Nice try, Ianto. We'll text Owen, after you tell me what's going on."

"Aren't we nosy," Ianto tried again to distract her.

"No changing the subject. I won't be dissuaded. What happened?"

Ianto sighed heavily. He was still unused to confiding in anyone, but his relationship with Jack had softened his reserve. He looked across the table at Tosh's concerned expression. He could feel her affection for him. *It's not only Jack that has made me more open. It's my friendship with Tosh as well… and Owen, and even sometimes Gwen that has made me less aloof. They're not only my coworkers and teammates, they're my friends. I know it's just that she cares.* "I can't tell you all the details right now, Tosh," he began. "I promise I'll tell you later. But I've done something that Jack's not going to be happy about. I'm not sure how he's going to react."

Tosh looked at him for a long time, and Ianto shifted uncomfortably under her scrutiny. "Well," she finally said, "I know you, Ianto. And you don't do anything without thinking it through and analyzing it from every angle. I'm sure that if you chose a course of action, it was for a good reason and the decision was not made hastily."

Ianto was a bit taken aback by her words. "Er… um, thanks, Tosh."

She nodded and reached across the table, putting her hand on his arm. "I'm sure you did the right thing, Ianto. Whatever it was."

"I just wish I could be as sure as you are," Ianto muttered.

"I have a feeling that it is and that Jack will eventually see it that way too."

Ianto nodded uncertainly.

"That's not to say that he's not going to throw a fit initially," Tosh added with some amusement.

"He can be rather…" she stopped as though searching for the right word.

"Histrionic?" Ianto supplied.

"Well, I was going to say dramatic, but I think I like your word better."

They looked at each other and broke into laughter. "Let's text Owen," Tosh said when the laughter died down.

Owen arrived about half an hour later, and the three of them got down to some serious repartee. Owen was in rare form. He had a comment to make about everyone and everything, and Ianto and Tosh found themselves laughing uproariously at his rancor.

Just as Ianto was starting to feel buzzed, he decided that he'd had enough. If there was going to be an altercation between himself and Jack that night, he wanted to be at least partially sober for it. He made his excuses and said his goodbyes. Then he collected his suit bag, left the pub and headed home.

He entered his flat, toed off his shoes, and hung up his suits in the closet. He quickly shed the suit he was wearing and slipped on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt. He walked back into his living room,
surveying it with a disdainful eye. "Well you could do with a thorough cleaning," he scolded the empty room, as though it had defied him by becoming dirty.

If he was honest with himself, he would have to admit that he was filled with nervous energy at the prospect of how Jack would react to his betrayal. However he was determined to distract his mind. Pushing all thoughts of Jack aside, he set about cleaning his flat.

Ianto lost himself in the monotony of his chores. It soothed him, and he was able to push the trouble that was brewing to the back of his mind. He was unaware of the passing of time, and it took him a moment to come back to the present when he heard his front door slam and Jack's angry voice yelling, "Ianto!"

All at once the events of the past few days came flying back to him – Gwen's obsession with Jonah Bevin, her arguments with Jack, his quiet disagreement with Jack's choice not to tell the team about Flat Holm, Jack's order to him to keep silent, and his defiance of that order.

He slowly put down his duster, stood up, masked his features, and turned to face the music. Jack was standing in his living room, still wearing his greatcoat. He's furious… Ianto thought with a moment of utter terror. He took a resolute step forward and said calmly, "Jack."

Jack took a threatening step towards him. "You defied me!" he raged, his features contorted in anger.

"Yes," Ianto replied calmly.

"I gave you a direct order and you ignored it."

"Yes," Ianto affirmed.

Jack took another step towards him. Ianto's instinct was to step back, but he stood his ground. I chose to do this. Now I have to face the consequences, he reasoned with himself. He looked into Jack's eyes, determined not to flinch.

Jack took two more steps and made a quick motion. For one brief moment, Ianto thought Jack was going to hit him. But Jack had thrown his arms around Ianto, and Ianto was astonished to realize that Jack was crying.

Ianto returned the embrace and made soothing noises. Jack gripped him tighter. This isn't what I unexpected, Ianto thought. Aloud he said, "Let's get this off you."

He pulled away from Jack to help him out of his greatcoat. He threw it over the arm of the sofa and sat down next to it. Jack threw himself down, practically on top of Ianto.

Ianto pulled them down so they were lying on the sofa. Jack gripped Ianto desperately as sobs racked his body. Ianto held onto Jack tightly. He was horrified by Jack's reaction, and his heart ached with Jack's pain. What have I done?

He decided on and then rejected several stock phrases. I'm sorry I caused you pain, It's all my fault, but I had to do what I thought was right, It's going to be okay. But none of them seemed right. In the end he just remained silent, stroking Jack's back and whispering to him in Welsh.

Finally Jack's breathing slowed and changed into the deep rhythmic breaths that indicated sleep. Oh God, what have I done? Ianto asked himself over and over again as Jack slept in his arms. And why can't I shake the feeling that this isn't over yet…
Jack was mildly annoyed, but also highly entertained by Gwen walking in on them; however he was worried about how Ianto would react. But Ianto surprised him once again. He'd thought Ianto would be mortified, but Ianto was less embarrassed than he'd expected, and Jack was simultaneously relieved and excited by his relative composure. Is he finally over it? Jack thought hopefully. He strode confidently out of the greenhouse with a smile on his face. "We could have used you an hour ago for Naked Hide and Seek," he said cheekily, but there was some posturing behind his wit.

Ianto's remark about Jack always cheating thrilled him, and he grinned salaciously. But his playful mood quickly gave way to anger when he realized that Gwen still wouldn't let go of the Jonah Bevin case. How dare she question me? I'm the captain. She's my employee. We've already been through this and I told her to close the investigation down. I do not want to have this conversation again. "Coming back in? Work to do," he said to Ianto as he turned away from Gwen.

He knew that Ianto thought he was making the wrong choice, and he knew he was challenging Ianto to prove his loyalty, but he was so angry that he didn't care if he was being irrational. He was satisfied when he heard Ianto say "yup" and saw that Ianto was following behind him.

"Jack! We're not finished!" Gwen called out.

"Yes we are!" Jack replied before he walked into the hothouse and slammed the door for good measure. The nerve of her! He thought as he tore off his shirt. He wanted to show Gwen just how finished they were by picking up right where he and Ianto had left off. I don't care if she wants to stay and watch, he thought as he threw his shirt angrily down on the table. Let her watch. I'm done talking about this.

He stood half naked waiting for Ianto's return, knowing that he wasn't really in the mood for sex anymore. He was too irate at Gwen's blatant disregard of his orders, but he was determined to show Gwen that he was dismissing her.

Ianto came in a moment later and stood facing him with an inscrutable expression on his face. Is he going to argue with me? If Jack was honest with himself, he'd have to admit that he would have welcomed an argument with Ianto. He was worked up and rearing for a fight. He glared at Ianto, challenging him. They stared at each other and Jack felt the tension in the air grow to breaking point. But Ianto didn't take the bait. "That was a first for me. I've never been caught in flagrante delicto," Ianto finally said.

Jack wanted to hold on to his anger. He needed an outlet for his rage. But as he looked at Ianto, standing before him, looking so obviously and adorably disheveled, his anger faded and his humor broke through. "Her face was rather priceless," Jack agreed.

He spent the next twenty minutes imitating Gwen walking in on them which had them both in hysterics. Then they spent the rest of the evening the way Jack loved the most – having marathon sex.
"I'm making the trip to Flat Holm today," Jack said the next morning.

He was hoping that Ianto would offer to go with him. He hated going there alone. *I hate going there, period!* He waited for a response from Ianto, but none was forthcoming. *And he has such a strange look on his face...* "What is it?" he finally asked Ianto.

"What do you mean?"

"Usually you offer to go with me," Jack replied cautiously.

"Do I?" Ianto asked.

"Yeah, you do," Jack affirmed. *What is going on with him?* "Is it because you disagree with me about the team?" Jack pressed.

"Er, no. I just think you should go alone," Ianto replied flatly. *Something is not right here... but I know that stubborn look. He's dug his heels in. I'm not going to get anything more out of him.*

As he turned the water on, he thought about demanding that Ianto tell him what was going on, but he knew instinctively that it would only lead to an argument. *And I'm not in the mood for an argument. Today is going to be tough enough as it is. Besides, he grinned to himself. I'm horny. Where is that man? Is he going to make me take care of myself this morning?*

Just then the shower curtain was pulled back roughly, and Ianto stood in front of him. "There you are," Jack grinned at him as he stroked himself. "I was waiting for you."

He was more than gratified when Ianto dropped to his knees before him.

As Jack prepared to leave the Hub, Ianto helped him into his greatcoat as usual, but Ianto was taking an unusually long time in straightening his lapels and smoothing the shoulders. *Okay, this is fussy even by Ianto's standards.*

"Ianto, what's going on?" Jack asked, once more trying to understand the enigmatic young man standing in front of him.

"Nothing," Ianto replied quickly, giving Jack's collar one final tug and pulling Jack in for a long, lingering kiss.

"I'll be back later tonight," Jack said when Ianto pulled away. "Call me if the world is ending again?" he added cheekily.

"Yes, Sir," Ianto replied, giving a small salute.

"Cheeky bastard," Jack smiled one last time at Ianto, brushed his cheek with his thumb, and then he turned and left the Hub.

Jack backtracked through the tunnels, avoiding Ianto and the cameras, to the hidden boat dock deep within the bowels of the Hub. He took the Torchwood boat out to Flat Holm. *One secret I've managed to keep from Ianto... Or at least I think I have. Knowing Ianto, he's already nosed out the existence of this little baby, he thought patting the boat affectionately. Just as long as he doesn't tell Owen... The gods only know what he'd do to the poor thing...*
Jack did his usual inspection of the island and spoke with some of its inhabitants who were walking around the compound. Then he visited with a few of the others who were confined to their rooms. He was just getting up to leave when he heard an all too familiar voice raised in outrage, "Oh my God… They're here. What are you doing to them? What's going on here? Tell me!"

"Gwen," Jack whispered. "Damn it!"

And then all of the pieces fell into place – Ianto's strange behavior that morning, his not offering to go with Jack to the island, his moments of affection where he seemed to be almost clinging to Jack… Finally he understood.

He stepped around the corner, "I'll take it from here, Helen." He looked at Gwen, "It was Ianto, wasn't it?"

And to his horror he saw genuine fear in Gwen's eyes. "You stay away from me!" she yelled, backing away from him.

He tried to explain, but Gwen was beyond reasoning with. She demanded he unlock the door of Jonah’s room, and he relented. She's just going to have to see for herself.

Leaving her with Jonah, he walked outside. He needed air. He sat on the cliff overlooking the water, feeling retched. He found himself wishing for Ianto's comforting presence. He knew he should be furious with Ianto, and that will come later, he thought with a frown. But right now, I wish he was here…

He didn't know how long he sat there, staring out into the vastness of the ocean, thinking about the inhabitants of Flat Holm as his stomach churned with misery. He felt Gwen sit down beside him, and without even thinking about it, he began to explain. "When I took over Torchwood, there were two, just like Jonah, ravaged from falling through the Rift, being kept in the vaults, neglected. I wanted them looked after. I set this place up. Told the staff these were experiments that had gone wrong…"

"How many are there?" Gwen asked.

"Seventeen, last count. It's increased over the last year. Like the rift is trying to correct its mistakes," he said wearily.

"But not all the missing return," she stated.

"No," he affirmed. Not all the missing return… Some will never return. Some have suffered horrors you can't even conceive of…

He tried to explain it to her, but she only saw what she wanted to see. She doesn't realize the significance yet. She doesn't realize just how damaged they are. She can't possibly hope to understand. She thinks she can fix it, fix them, make it right. There's no making it right. All we can do is offer them a place to stay and whatever comfort we can bring them.

But Gwen was determined to try and fix things, at least for Jonah Bevin and his mother. And finally Jack realized that the only was she would ever understand is if he let her. He knew it would end in disaster. But she'll never believe me. She has to see for herself. Maybe that's what Ianto understood and I didn’t – that Gwen would only let this go when she saw for herself that there's nothing more we can do. There just aren't anymore options. Ianto understands that, and I understand it, but Gwen doesn't. And Nikki Bevin is going to be the one who suffers. But Ianto is right. Gwen will never let it go until she's seen for herself that this way is the only way…
So Jack did the only thing he could do in the situation. He gave Gwen permission to bring Nikki Bevin to Flat Holm. He sat on the cliff and waited as she went back to Cardiff to fetch her. He waited as Nikki was reunited with her son. He waited until he heard what he was expecting to hear – that terrible gut-wrenching feral scream that he knew would last for hours.

Then he couldn't take any more. He got up and walked slowly back to the Torchwood boat. He hardly knew what he was doing as he motored back to Cardiff. He docked the boat at the Hub and climbed into the SUV. He didn't want to face Tosh and Owen, and he especially didn't want to face Ianto.

He got onto the M4 motorway and drove east as his mind raced. He thought about Jonah Bevin and his mother, cringing as he imagined what was happening as she began to understand just how damaged her son was. He thought about the other inhabitants of Flat Holm and their families who would never get the answers they so desperately sought. And he thought about how he knew that they were better off not knowing what had happened to their children and loved ones – that some truths were just too horrible to bear. He thought about Gwen and what he hoped she was coming to understand. He thought about Owen and Tosh and wondered what he was going to tell them – or what Gwen would tell him.

And he thought about Ianto, who had betrayed him again. But he shook off the thought and pushed his foot down harder, forcing the SUV's engine to its limits. He wasn't ready to think about Ianto yet.

He thought about the Doctor and Rose and how much he missed them. Not only did he miss their company, but he missed having the Doctor to turn to when everything seemed hopeless. The Doctor always had a solution. He even thought about John Hart and his old life at the Time Agency. He caressed his wrist strap and thought again how easy it used to be to leave a planet in an instant. He longed to be able to go away, to leave the responsibility behind and to not look back.

Jack reached the outskirts of London as night fell. And he realized that he was experiencing something he hadn't suffered since his time aboard the Valiant. He felt utter despair.

He pulled off to the side of the road, gripping the steering wheel so tightly that the blood pounded in his hands, trying to make its way into his fingers that were clenched so hard that the circulation was cut off. *Ianto…*

Without thinking through his actions, he pulled the car into a U-turn and headed back towards Cardiff. He still didn't want to think about Ianto. He didn't know what to think. Ianto had betrayed him. Ianto had defied him. Somewhere in the back of Jack's mind, he knew that Ianto's intentions had been good, but his mind was far from rational.

He continued west with the SUV's speed pushed to its limit. His thoughts and emotions were in such disarray that he found himself outside Ianto's flat before he realized where he was. Some part of him knew that he must have been driving for hours, but it seemed like minutes. And suddenly he was furious.

He jumped out of the SUV and barely had the self control to use his key to enter Ianto's flat. He wanted to kick the door down. "Ianto!" he roared.


"You defied me!" he raged, so angry that he couldn't even see the man standing in front of him.

"Yes," Ianto replied calmly.
"I gave you a direct order and you ignored it," Jack spat.

"Yes," Ianto affirmed.

Jack took several steps towards Ianto. He didn't know what his intentions were. Up until the last moment he thought that he was going to take a swing at the other man. But he astonished himself as he flung himself into Ianto's arms. Then the pain that had been threatening to break free all day finally made its way to the surface.

Jack clung desperately to Ianto and sobbed.
Jack woke the next morning to the smell of coffee. His head was throbbing painfully, and it took him a moment to remember where he was. *I know that's Ianto's coffee, but this doesn't look like the Hub,* he thought to himself as he rubbed his eyes.

Then the memories came roaring back into focus – Flat Holm, Gwen and the fear in her eyes, Jonah Bevin and his mother, Ianto's betrayal, his drive almost all the way to London… And he remembered barging into Ianto's flat, then collapsing in his arms, sobbing inconsolably.

He sighed heavily and put his hand over his face. *I still don't know what to make of all of this…*

He felt the bed dip as Ianto sat down next to him. He kept his eyes closed, not quite ready to look into the face of his lover. "You're awake then?" Ianto said, his voice low and hesitant. "I made you some coffee."

Jack heard the sound of a mug being set down on the nightstand. He didn't move as he concentrated on his breathing and tried to decide what to say. "Jack?" Ianto asked, the concern evident in his voice.

"Ianto, I… I don't know what to say to you."

"It's okay, Jack. You have nothing to be ashamed of."

"I'm not embarrassed, Ianto," Jack broke in, hearing the anger rising in his own voice. "I just don't know how to react to your betrayal of my trust."

"I'm sorry, Jack. I just-"

"Don't," Jack interjected. "Just don't."

Jack finally looked into Ianto's eyes. He saw the regret there, but he also saw the obstinacy. "I understand your motives, Ianto. Or at least I think I do."

"I wanted-" Ianto began, but Jack held his hand up, and Ianto stopped speaking.

"But what you did was wrong, regardless of your motives. I gave you an order as your boss, not as my lover. I make decisions as the leader of Torchwood. You might not agree with them, but it's your duty to follow them. That's the way it works. There's a chain of command for a reason." Jack stood up and began to put his clothes back on. "You think that you can defy me with impunity because we're sleeping together, but you're wrong. If you can't keep us separate from your position at Torchwood, then we can't do this anymore."

"Jack!" Ianto exclaimed, and Jack could hear the shock in his voice.

"This is the third time you have defied me as the leader of Torchwood."
"Gwen defies you all the time! You don't threaten her!"

"I'm not sleeping with Gwen!" Jack roared. "You're taking liberties, Ianto. Ones that my other employees don't take."

"So the others defy you and it's just cheek, but if I do it, I'm taking liberties? I'm taking advantage of the fact that we're sleeping together? That's not fair, Jack! Sounds to me that you're the one who can't separate us from your role as the leader."

Jack looked at Ianto for a long time. Then he walked into the living room where he found his coat hanging over the sofa and his shoes by the door. Ianto followed him and stood watching as Jack put his shoes on. Then he straightened up and looked at Ianto again. "Maybe you're right. Maybe I can't separate them," Jack said as he donned his greatcoat. "Maybe I shouldn't have to."

He put his hand on the door to leave, but then decided that he wasn't finished yet. I still don't know how to react to this. And until I figure it out, I don't want to look at him. "Take the day off," he said aloud before he opened the front door and walked out of Ianto's flat.

Jack hopped into the SUV and tore off down the street. When he had driven several blocks, he pulled off the side of the road and dropped his head into his hands. What am I doing? He asked himself. What did I just do? He turned and looked back in the direction of Ianto's flat, considering turning the car around and going back. Then he thought about Gwen. And Owen and Tosh... what am I going to tell them? How am I going to explain it? He felt the anger that had subsided rise up again. Damn him, he thought as he put the SUV into gear and roared back onto the street. Damn him for forcing my hand.

Jack spent the short trip to the Hub and some time sitting in the garage trying to decide exactly what he was going to say to Owen and Tosh. He worded and reworded his explanation, but nothing he came up with seemed to be adequate. Finally he just decided to wing it. Get on with it, Harkness, he told himself as he climbed out of the SUV and headed into the Hub.

He found Tosh at work on her computer and Owen up to his elbows in alien guts. Gwen was nowhere to be seen. "Owen, Tosh," he called to them from his office doorway. "I need to speak to you."

Several minutes later, Tosh and Owen were sitting across the desk from him with worried looks on their faces. Jack leaned forward, preparing himself for his ordeal. "What is it, Jack?" Tosh asked nervously. "Where are Ianto and Gwen? What happened? Are they hurt?"

"No, no. They're fine," Jack said, realizing that he'd alarmed them unnecessarily. "I just have something difficult to tell you, and I need you to hear me out."

"Jack, if this is another one of your stories about how you shagged some alien life form, I'm out of here," Owen said, leaning back in his chair.

Jack wanted to laugh, but he didn't have it in him. "Tosh, you were right about the negative Rift spikes," he began.

He told them about the Rift victims he found when he took over Torchwood. He told them about setting up the facility on Flat Holm. He told them about the other victims that he found over the years. He described their injuries and sicknesses to the best of his ability. He told them about Jonah Bevin, about Ianto leading Gwen to Flat Holm, about Gwen wanting to bring Nikki Bevin to Flat Holm and about his certainty that it was a bad idea. And he tried to explain his reasoning for not telling them about the survivors of the Rift.
Owen and Tosh listened to Jack in silence. Neither one of them interrupted him until he finished speaking and a hush fell between the three of them. Finally Jack asked, "Do you want to see the facility?"

"Do you think we should?" asked Owen seriously.

"Honestly, Owen, no, I don't. You would drive yourself crazy trying to find a cure for them. And you, Tosh, would work yourself to death trying to find a way to predict the negative Rift spikes. I promise you that I've done all I can for those people. Besides," he said, looking at them with genuine fondness, "I don't want you to suffer the burden of their pain."

Tosh and Owen were both silent for a few minutes. Then they glanced at each other and looked back at Jack. "Right," said Owen.

"Okay, Jack," Tosh said, almost simultaneously.

Jack's jaw nearly dropped to the floor. He'd expected arguments and defiance. The last thing he'd expected from his two oldest Torchwood employees was immediate acceptance. "Really?" he asked, bewildered.

"If you say that you've done all you can…" Owen said.

"We trust you, Jack," Tosh added.

Jack felt a wave of affection rise up inside him for Tosh and Owen. He reached across his desk and clasped both of their hands. "Thank you," he said. "Thank you for trusting me."

Tosh smiled and patted his hand. "Alright, alright," Owen said, pulling his hand away. "No need to get all girly here. It's times like this when I really miss booze," he muttered.

Jack chuckled for the first time since his trip to Flat Holm. Owen scraped back his chair and got up. "Well, if we're finished with the emotional outpouring, I've got an alien to dissect."

And with that, he left Jack's office. Jack watched with fondness as Owen walked away. Then he turned to Tosh who was still sitting at his desk holding his hand. "Are you really angry with Ianto?" she asked, looking concerned.

Jack sighed heavily. "He betrayed me again, Tosh. That's three times."

"We're all guilty of betraying you, Jack," Tosh reasoned.

"Yeah, but the difference is, you and Owen never doubted me again after Abaddon. Gwen will always defy me. That's her way. But Ianto…" Jack stopped short, uncertain how to go on.

"He spoke to me about it, Jack. Or, technically I dragged it out of him because he was obviously upset. He wouldn't tell me what it was, but he said that he had done something that he thought might make you angry and he was distressed by his decision."

"That doesn't change the fact that he chose to betray my confidence," Jack said.

"No, it doesn't. But I'll tell you the same thing I told him. You know better than anyone that Ianto doesn't do anything without thinking it through and analyzing it from every angle. If he chose a course of action, it was for a good reason and the decision was not made hastily. I'm sure he thought that he was doing the right thing, and that he had no intention of hurting you," Tosh explained.
"Whatever his intentions were, the fact is that he defied a direct order from me… again. How can I trust him?" Jack threw up his hands dramatically.

"As your employee or as your lover?" Tosh asked perceptively.

"Either! Both! Does it matter? Isn't that the problem here? That I can't separate them? I don't know how to react to this."

"Maybe you need to deal with each aspect individually. Did he betray you as an employee or as your lover? I think maybe you're upset because you think he betrayed you as your lover. But this was a Torchwood thing, Jack, not a you and Ianto thing. I think you should deal with it on that level. Because I think he did what he thought was right as your employee, but he was distraught by his decision because he is your lover."

Jack considered Tosh's words. She may be right… It may make a difference… It may not mean what I fear it means… I need time to think about it. Oh, Tosh. Always so wise… He smiled warmly at her. "You may be right, Tosh. I'll think about what you said."

She patted his hand and stood up. "Good. Because you and Ianto need each other, more than either one of you are willing to admit."

Jack watched her walk out of his office. He was more than moved by Tosh and Owen's faith in him. It made Ianto and Gwen's behavior all the more insolent in comparison. He knew that Tosh was probably right. Ianto didn't betray me as my lover but as my employee. I'm not sure if that makes it better or worse, or even if it matters… But somewhere, deep down, he knew that it made all the difference in the world.

He wanted to have some time to think about what to say to Ianto, and to get a handle on how he felt about the whole thing, but now wasn't the time. He knew that he had one more unpleasant task to perform, because just then he heard the cogwheel door roll open. And he knew that he had to confront Gwen.

He pushed all thoughts of Ianto out of his mind and turned his attention to Gwen. He gave her enough time to take off her coat and settle in before he stepped into the doorway of his office. "Gwen," he called. "My office, now!"

He sat back down at his desk and sighed heavily. One more unpleasant task… he thought as Gwen entered his office, looking rebellious.

He stared hard at her as she sat down across from him. "Gwen, how many more times are we going to do this?" he asked, suddenly feeling extremely weary.
"How many more times are we going to do what, Jack?" Gwen asked defiantly.

"You know exactly what I mean, Gwen. How many more times am I going to tell you to leave something alone and you completely ignore me."

"I did the right thing, Jack," Gwen said, taking a step towards his desk.

"No, Gwen. You didn't," Jack said quietly.

"Nikki Bevin has a right to know what happened to her son!" Gwen's voice rose in pitch. "All those people have families, Jack! They have people out there who are desperate for news of their loved ones. How can you know where they are and have no feelings at all for those who are left behind?"

"I feel for them, Gwen. Believe me, I feel for them more than you realize. But it's not going to work-"

"But I was right Jack!" Gwen cut him off. "Nikki Bevin was shocked at first, but in the end she was just happy to see her son."

"And what happened when he started screaming?" Jack asked, raising an eyebrow.

For the first time, Gwen hesitated and some of the self-righteousness went out of her voice. "Well, she was upset, naturally. But when she gets used to the idea…"

But Jack just shook his head. "It's not over yet, Gwen. Believe me."

"Well, we'll see, won't we," Gwen said, lifting her chin up arrogantly.

"Yeah, I guess we will," Jack sighed and rubbed his eyes. "Those people can't handle the truth of what happened to their loved ones. They're better off not knowing."

"They're better off spending a lifetime searching for answers? Waiting and hoping in vain? How can you be so heartless?" Gwen shouted.

"Heartless?" Jack roared, slamming his fist down on his desk. "Is that really what you think of me, Gwen?" he felt his anger surge forward, then quickly fade away.

Again he felt the despair that had plagued him the day before. He looked up at Gwen who was still standing across from him. Her eyes shone with defiance. "Is that really how you see me?" he almost whispered.

"Jack, you can't just-"

Once again that day, Jack held up his hand for silence. "You know what, Gwen? I don't want to hear it. I can't do this anymore."
"Can't do what, Jack?"

"I can't do this dance that we always do. If you think I'm so heartless, and if you're going to continue to defy me, then maybe you shouldn't work for me anymore."

"Jack!" She took a step forward and pointed her finger in Jack's face. "You hired me to challenge you. You hired me because you became so removed from the people you protect that you needed someone to remind you of your humanity."

Jack shoved her hand away. "Well, maybe it was a bad idea."

Jack felt the rage burning within him, and he jumped out of his chair and strode across his office, turning his back on Gwen. He tried to calm himself before he said something he'd regret. After taking several deep breaths, he said, "Look, I can't run Torchwood if you're going to question every single order I give. There are more things at stake here than you could ever possibly understand."

"How can you-" Gwen started, but Jack wanted the conversation to be over.

He turned to face her. "I need you to take a couple of days off. You need some time to think. You have to decide whether or not you trust me. If you don't… then you can't work for me anymore."

"Jack!"

"That's enough, Gwen. Go home."

Gwen looked like she wanted to say more, but to Jack's relief, she decided better of it. She spun on her heel and stormed out of Jack's office, slamming the door behind her. Moments later, he heard the cogwheel door roll open and then closed.

Jack sat back down at his desk and rubbed his hands over his face with a groan.

He sat for a long time, thinking about Gwen. She doesn't see the whole picture… she just makes snap judgments and can't fathom the consequences. It's not going to work with Nikki Bevin. She won't be able to handle the knowledge of what happened to her son. And then what? Jack knew that he would be proven right in the end, but it would be a sour victory. What will I do if Gwen decides that she can't trust me? Will I retcon her? And Rhys? Did I do the right thing? But I can't have her constant insubordination. They almost destroyed the world the last time they defied me. It seems that I've earned Tosh and Owen's trust, but Gwen… Perhaps I've been too forgiving, too lenient…

I did hire her because she challenged me. But that doesn't give her license to constantly disobey me. I wanted her to question me, to dispute my decisions... and I always take her point of view into consideration. But in the end, I make the final decisions, not her. I've let this go on for too long. I've let her get away with too much… Her and Ianto…

He still wasn't quite ready to think about Ianto, but he knew that he couldn't keep putting it off. He was going to have to face him at some point.

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He tried to settle into the day's work, but he couldn't focus. When he began to feel too restless to sit still any longer, he stuck his head out of his office door. "Owen, Tosh?" he called. "Are there any Weevils to chase or something?"

"What, too quiet for you, Jack?" Owen shouted from the autopsy bay.

"Just asking…" Jack said, shrugging mildly.
"There's a minor Rift spike in Roath you could check out," Tosh said, typing furiously on her computer.

Jack bounded out of his office and peered over Tosh's shoulder. "Doesn't look like much…” he said, disappointed.

"Well, someone should probably check it out…” Tosh hedged. "You know, responsibilities and all…”

Jack grinned. "Well, I am the captain…”

Tosh smiled back at him. "That you are. Have fun!"

Jack grabbed his greatcoat and sauntered out of the Hub.

He hopped in the SUV and raced down the street. Tosh had sent the coordinates to his phone, and he quickly found the location of the Rift spike. He hoped it was something big and mean on which he could take out his aggression. A Weevil would be nice… or even a Blowfish would do – as long as it's wired on cocaine…

He was disappointed to find that the minor Rift spike was just some pieces of flotsam and jetsam. Great… space trash. Just what I needed…

He did a careful search of the area looking for other Rift refuge, but he came up empty handed. There's gotta be a Weevil around somewhere… or something… He tapped his ear piece. "Tosh?"

"Jack?" Tosh responded.

"Nothing out here but some rubbish from a space cruiser. Anything on your end?"

"Not a thing, Jack. Sorry. I know you're looking for a little excitement."

"What I wouldn't give for a nice Weevil chase," Jack said.

"Wish I could help, Jack. Why don't you try Splott?"

"Why, is there any Rift activity?"

"No…” Tosh hesitated. "But it's always Splott…”

Jack snickered. "Yeah… why is that, by the way?"

"No idea, Jack."

"Why don't you go stand on a roof somewhere," Owen piped in on the conversation.

"Why don't you go dissect an alien!" Jack retorted, and hit the end button on his earpiece.

He got back into the SUV and headed towards Splott. Well, there's usually something going on in Splott… he reasoned as he drove south. He pulled the SUV into Moorland Park and to his intense relief, he spotted two Weevils almost immediately. Thank the gods, he thought as he screeched to a halt and jumped out of the car.

He strode up to the two Weevils who were rummaging through a rubbish bin. "Fancy a game of rugby?" he asked glibly.
The Weevils looked up, growled at him, and then ran towards the street. "Come on," Jack called. "Two on one! What? Don't think you can take me?"

Jack felt the tension leave his body as he began to chase after them. He relished the feeling of his blood pumping hard through his veins and his calves and thighs growing warm from the exertion. He chased the smaller of the two Weevils into the street until it disappeared into the sewers. Cursing, he turned his attention to the bigger Weevil.

It had doubled back into the park, and once again, Jack was running. He felt the wind whistling past his ears and his breathing grew more labored. Pushing himself forward, he forced his muscles to their limit, taking pleasure in the burning in his legs. He finally cornered the enormous Weevil against the back of a building. "Not so tough now, are you?" he taunted. "Come on, put up a fight," he growled as he charged at the creature.

Jack finally managed to drive the second Weevil back into the sewers as well, but not without sustaining a bloody lip and a gash across his temple. His shirt was torn and he was covered in dirt. His heart was still pumping adrenaline through his body and he felt charged. There was one thing he wanted at that moment more than anything. Ianto…

Jack raced back to the SUV and drove recklessly to Ianto's flat, his heart pounding the entire way. He pulled up outside the flat, jumped out of the car and practically broke Ianto's door down. He could barely calm himself down enough to use his key.

He threw the door back and it crashed into the adjacent wall. Ianto, who had been sitting on his sofa, apparently reading a book, jumped to his feet. "Jack… what happened? You're hurt…"

"I'm fine," Jack said, slamming the door shut and kicking off his boots.

He strode into the living room and grabbed Ianto roughly. "You're bleeding," Ianto exclaimed, wiping the blood from Jack's face. "Did you die?"

"No. Just a couple of Weevils," Jack said before he kissed Ianto brutally and pulled at his t-shirt.

"Jack, I thought you-"

"Don't," Jack said, biting down on Ianto's neck. "Can we just not…"

"Not what?" Ianto asked, the confusion evident in his voice.

"Not talk," Jack said, finally succeeding in getting Ianto's shirt off.

Jack spun Ianto around and ran his hands up his bare chest, pinching Ianto's nipples until they became hard under his fingers. Ianto groaned, and Jack quickly stripped Ianto of the remainder of his clothing. He forcibly threw the younger man naked over the arm of the sofa, his arse in the air.

Jack could barely contain himself long enough to unzip his trousers and find the bottle of lube in his pocket. He quickly coated his painfully hard erection and without warning, he slid himself into Ianto.

Ianto yelped and scrabbled for purchase on the upholstery. Jack managed to reign himself in long enough to give Ianto time to adjust to his presence. Then he began thrusting into the younger man with abandon. He forced Ianto's head down with one hand as he lost himself in the feeling of his cock pounding into Ianto's arse.

Jack had lost control. He was taking it all out on the man underneath him – all of the anger and pain and despair he'd felt in the past two days was manifesting itself in his domination of Ianto. But Jack
was aware enough to notice that Ianto wasn't struggling. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knew that Ianto was letting him take out his aggression.

Jack felt the familiar sensation growing below his navel and he knew that he was going to cum. He gave a final few thrusts and exploded inside Ianto. Then he pulled back, suddenly ashamed of his actions. He dropped onto the floor, spent and exhausted.

He was uncertain how long he had been laying there when he became aware of the sensation of warmth on his face. Ianto was leaning over him, gently mopping up the blood.

Jack looked into the blue eyes staring back into his. He saw the affection in them, and he also saw the fear. "Ianto…" Jack said, dreading his next words. "We need to talk."
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my lovely beta riftintime.

After Jack had been asleep on the sofa for an hour or so, Ianto roused him and half carried, half dragged him to the bedroom. Jack barely regained consciousness as Ianto removed his trousers and shirt, leaving him in his underwear, and tucked him into bed. Then he down sat by his side, watching his lover.

"Jack," he whispered. "I didn't want to cause you any pain. I just wanted Gwen to stop challenging your orders. She'll get us all killed some day if she continues to defy you… And I wanted her to know that you're not heartless… Not even close…"

Jack stirred and rolled to his side, but he didn't wake up. "Jack," Ianto continued in a low voice. "I hope you can forgive me. I only meant to make things right between you and Gwen…"

He listened to Jack's rhythmic breathing for several more minutes, saying a silent prayer that he hadn't completely destroyed Jack's trust in him. Then he stripped down to his briefs and got into bed next to Jack. He put his arm around the older man and pressed his chest against Jack's warm back. Jack muttered something incomprehensible and shifted closer to Ianto. Then his breathing became slow and steady again.

"Please forgive me," Ianto whispered against Jack's skin before he, too, fell soundly asleep.

Ianto woke early the next morning, still clinging to Jack. The other man was still breathing deeply and steadily. Carefully and quietly, Ianto rose, showered, and dressed in one of his suits. Jack hadn't stirred when Ianto had finished his morning's ablutions, so he went into his kitchen to make coffee.

He had just finished preparing a mug for Jack and was bringing it into the bedroom when he noticed the older man was finally awake. Jack had his hand over his face, and Ianto could sense his distress. He sat down on the bed next to Jack. "You're awake then?" he said hesitantly, uncertain of what kind of reception to expect. "I made you some coffee."

Ianto set the mug down on the nightstand. When Jack didn't respond, Ianto became anxious. "Jack?"

"Ianto, I… I don't know what to say to you," Jack finally replied.

Ianto thought Jack was embarrassed by his emotional outpouring the night before, and that it explained the distress he sensed from Jack. "It's okay, Jack. You have nothing to be ashamed of," he reassured him.

"I'm not embarrassed, Ianto. I just don't know how to react to your betrayal of my trust."

Ianto was taken aback, and he fumbled over his words. "I'm sorry, Jack. I just."

"Don't," Jack interrupted him. "Just don't."

Jack looked into Ianto's eyes. Ianto saw the pain there, and even worse, he saw the disappointment.
Ianto felt his heart sinking down into his knees. *But I did the right thing, I had to do it… for all our sakes,* he reasoned to himself. *Gwen would have never let it go. She needs to learn that she can't continuously disregard Jack's orders… Or one day she's going endanger all our lives*…

"I understand your motives, Ianto. Or at least I think I do."

Ianto was desperate to cling to those words. "I wanted-" he began to explain, but Jack held his hand up, and Ianto stopped speaking.

"But what you did was wrong, regardless of your motives. I gave you an order as your boss, not as my lover. I make decisions as the leader of Torchwood. You might not agree with them, but it's your duty to follow them. That's the way it works. There's a chain of command for a reason."

Ianto felt his cheeks burn with shame from Jack's chastisement. He watched despondently as Jack stood up and began to put on his clothes. "You think that you can defy me with impunity because we're sleeping together, but you're wrong," Jack continued. "If you can't keep us separate from your position at Torchwood, then we can't do this anymore."

Ianto was so shocked that he exclaimed, "Jack!" before he could stop himself.

"This is the third time you have defied me as the leader of Torchwood," Jack said, looking straight into his eyes.

Ianto felt like Jack's eyes were boring into his soul. *But we've all betrayed him! Every single one of us! Why do I get singled out when Gwen gets away with bloody murder!*

"Gwen defies you all the time! You don't threaten her!" Ianto retorted.

"I'm not sleeping with Gwen!" Jack roared. "You're taking liberties, Ianto. Ones that my other employees don't take."

Ianto could feel resentment course through him. "So the others defy you and it's just cheek, but if I do it, I'm taking liberties?" he raged. "I'm taking advantage of the fact that we're sleeping together? That's not fair, Jack! Sounds to me that you're the one who can't separate us from your role as the leader," he spat out, incensed by the injustice of it all.

Jack stood staring into his eyes. Ianto's heart was pounding so loudly that he was sure the other man could hear it across the room. As they stood there, Ianto's ire faded and was replaced with compunction. *Maybe I shouldn't have…*

"Maybe you're right. Maybe I can't separate them," Jack said as he donned his greatcoat. "Maybe I shouldn't have to."

*What the sodding hell does that mean?* Ianto shouted in his mind, unable to force the words from his lips. "Take the day off," Jack added before he left the flat, slamming the door behind him.

Ianto stood gaping at the closed door for a long time, unable to force his body into action. Then trance-like, he turned and walked slowly to the sofa. He collapsed down onto it and stared blindly across the room. He replayed the scene between himself and Jack over and over again in his mind. His eidetic memory allowed him to remember every word, every gesture, and every expression in vivid detail. Again and again, he heard Jack's voice in his mind saying, 'If you can't keep us separate from your position at Torchwood, then we can't do this anymore.'

What was that supposed to mean? Is he firing me or breaking up with me? Would he really fire me? Would he retcon me? Would he really end things between us? Which one would be worse, Jones? he
asked himself. *Which outcome do you fear the most?* And at that moment, he didn't have an answer.

In a daze, he stood and walked back into his bedroom. *You were expecting this reaction,* he told himself as he carefully took off his suit and hung it neatly in the closet. *Or, if not expecting it, you at least considered the possibility. You knew that he might react this way, and you chose to defy him anyway. Now you have to live with the consequences, whatever they are.*

Ianto changed into jeans and a t-shirt. As he began to tidy his bedroom, he spotted the mug of coffee that Jack had left untouched. *He never drank his coffee,* he thought with a sinking heart. Feeling thoroughly rejected, he picked it up, walked to the kitchen and poured it slowly down the sink.

*I don't want to think about Jack right now,* he thought as he returned to his living room. He had just thoroughly cleaned his flat, and it had remained spotless. He put his hands on his hips and looked around for something to do to occupy his time. His gaze landed on his bookshelf. *That could probably do with some reorganization,* he thought as he scrutinized it with his discerning eye. *Yup. Some of these books are definitely out of order.*

He started to pull all of the books off the shelf. *Might as well start from scratch,* he told himself as the books fell in a heap around his ankles.

After having thoroughly dusted both the bookcase itself and each book individually, he began to put them back on the shelf in alphabetical order. He was able to lose himself in the monotony of his task and push all thoughts of Jack out of his mind for a few hours.

When he had placed the final book back onto the shelf, he showered again, put on another pair of jeans and a clean t-shirt. He padded barefoot into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. He hadn't eaten all day, but as he peered at its contents, he realized that the thought of food made his stomach churn uncomfortably. Instead, he poured himself a glass of water, and settled on the sofa to re-read *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.*

He was about two thirds of the way through the book when he heard his front door crash open. Startled, he jumped to his feet. Jack was standing in his doorway looking like he'd been in a fight. Blood was dripping down the side of his face and his lower lip was swollen and cracked. He was filthy and disheveled. Ianto felt panic grip his heart. "Jack, what happened? You're hurt…"

"I'm fine." Jack slammed the door shut and kicked off his boots.

Ianto's anxiety mounted as Jack grabbed him roughly. "You're bleeding," Ianto said, trying to wipe the blood from Jack's face so he could see how much damage there was. "Did you die?" He asked, dreading the answer. *I hate it when he dies.*


And before Ianto knew what was happening, Jack was kissing him harshly and pulling at his t-shirt. Ianto was completely dumbfounded. He'd expected Jack to rage at him. "Jack, I thought you-"

"Don't," Jack said, biting down on his neck. "Can we just not…"

Ianto winced slightly and shivered. "Not what?" he asked in confusion.

"Not talk." Jack had taken Ianto's t-shirt off and spun him roughly around.

Jack pinched his nipples hard and Ianto couldn't stop himself from groaning in response. And suddenly he understood. *Jack doesn't want to talk because he just wants to fuck. He's pumped up on*
adrenaline after his Weevil fight. And he probably went looking for a brawl... He's needs an outlet for everything that's happened in the last two days... And I can give him that...

Ianto was naked and hanging over the arm of the sofa as quickly as it took those thoughts to form in his mind. Then, with no warning and no preparation, Jack entered him. Ianto yelped at the sudden and unexpected pain. He grabbed at the sofa as he waited for the throbbing to subside.

He barely had time to adjust to Jack's presence when Jack began to pound into him, pushing his head down into the sofa. Ianto wasn't exactly in pain, but it wasn't entirely pleasurable either – he wasn't even aroused. However, Ianto let Jack take all of his anger and pain out on him. He wasn't afraid. He knew that if he really wanted to stop it, he could. *I've done it to him, he remembered, more than once... I owe him this much...*

Ianto felt Jack explode inside of him. He waited, frozen, uncertain of what would happen next. Then he felt Jack's weight lift off of him and heard Jack crumple to the floor. Ianto waited for Jack to say something, but he didn't hear a sound.

He gingerly lifted himself off the sofa and looked down at Jack. He was lying on the floor with his hands covering his eyes. Ianto felt an overwhelming sense of compassion for the older man. He wanted to go to him, to comfort him, but he restrained himself. Instead he grabbed his clothes and retreated to the bathroom.

He cleaned himself up and put his clothes back on. Then he soaked a cloth with warm water and returned to the living room. Jack was still lying on the floor where Ianto had left him. Ianto knelt down beside him and gently began to wash the blood from Jack's face. Jack's eyes opened and looked into Ianto's.

Ianto couldn't bring himself to say anything. *I'm sorry, Jack, he thought. I don't know what just happened between us, but I hope I haven't destroyed everything.*

"Ianto," Jack said, not taking his eyes from Ianto's. "We need to talk."

Ianto's stomach dropped like a lead weight and dread filled his heart.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my brilliant beta riftintime.

Jack got up, refastened his trousers, and strode into the bathroom. Ianto watched his retreating form with apprehension. His mind quickly played out the worst possible scenarios. *What if he ends this? How will we work together? What if he fires me? What will I do? What if he recons me? I'll refuse…*

Several minutes later, Jack returned and sat down heavily on the sofa. He had washed his face and taken off his torn button-down shirt. Ianto put the cloth he was still clutching down on the coffee table and carefully sat down next to Jack. He felt slightly ill. They sat in silence for several minutes. Ianto kept shifting uncomfortably, wanting to say something; however, he knew instinctively that he should wait for Jack to speak first. So he continued to wait.

Finally Jack broke the silence. "I'm sorry about what just happened. I lost control."

Ianto shook his head. "I knew I could stop it if I really wanted to."

"Still, it was wrong of me. I shouldn't have done that," Jack said through clenched teeth.

"I let you," Ianto said simply.

"Yeah, I guess you did," Jack acknowledged, rubbing his face.

Silence fell again between them and Ianto clasped his hands in his lap, squeezing them tightly together in an attempt to keep calm. Jack sighed heavily. "Ianto, I still don't know what to say to you."

"Jack… can I say something?" Ianto asked timidly. He wanted a chance to explain himself, even though Jack had said that he'd understood his motives.

Jack made a vague gesture with his hand, indicating that Ianto should continue.

"Gwen constantly challenges your authority," Ianto began. "She is belligerent and narrow-minded. And I hate that she thinks you're heartless. I wanted her to understand that she can't keep disobeying you. It's dangerous for all of us. One of us may get killed one day because of her insubordination… And I wanted her to see you in a different light… to know that you… that you do care," he finished uncertainly.

"You wanted to teach her a lesson," Jack affirmed.

Ianto was taken aback by the bluntness of Jack's statement, but he knew that what he'd said was the truth, simply put. "Yes," he finally admitted.

"And why do you think that it's your place to teach her?" Jack asked him pointedly.

"We all have something to teach each other," Ianto said without thinking about it. "And we all have something to learn from each other."
Jack looked at him with an expression Ianto didn't recognize. "That may be true," he said slowly. "But didn't you just do the exact same thing that Gwen did in order to accomplish your goal?"

"Yes," Ianto responded quickly. "I had thought of that, Jack. I didn't make this decision lightly."

"I know you didn't…" Jack broke eye contact with him. "But that doesn't change the facts."

"I know," Ianto said. "And I know you may not forgive me. I know you may not trust me again, and maybe you'll end this thing between us, or maybe you'll fire me or retool me…"

"You really thought you were doing the right thing, didn't you?" Jack asked, looking back into his eyes.

"Yes, Jack. I did."

Silence fell between them once more. And in that silence, Ianto began to have doubts. Maybe it was the wrong thing to do… Maybe I deserve whatever punishment is coming to me. Maybe I'm no better than Gwen… "And you were willing to risk all of that to do it?" Jack interrupted his thoughts.

"Yes," Ianto whispered, but he was no longer feeling so certain.

"Well, it's obviously something you feel strongly about, and I respect your conviction..." Jack paused, and the air around them felt heavy. "But you still betrayed my confidence, and I don't know if I can just let it go that easily."

Ianto nodded and looked down at his hands which were folded neatly in his lap. That was the reaction he'd expected from Jack. But what exactly it means for us… I have no idea.

"Ianto…"

Ianto looked up and into Jack's eyes. "I think I need some time and space to think about this," Jack said softly. "I need to be able to separate you as my employee from you as my lover, because right now, I just can't."

Ianto nodded again, his stomach clenched in a knot.

"I don't think you should stay overnight at the Hub for a while," Jack continued.

Ianto nodded for a third time. He had anticipated this reaction from Jack, but it didn't make it hurt any less.

"I expect you back at work tomorrow," Jack said as he rose to his feet.

Then without another word or a backward glance, Jack grabbed his coat and boots and left Ianto's flat.

Ianto sat immobile on the sofa for several long minutes after Jack's departure. It hadn't been as bad as he'd feared, but it hadn't been the forgiveness and understanding he'd hoped for either. With a feeling of resignation, he stood up, made his way into his bedroom, and got ready for bed. He was uncertain what the next day would bring and of what lay ahead for him and Jack.

Jack lay in his bunker in the Hub staring at the eerie hues of light seeping in from the opening to his office. It had been a while since he'd slept alone, and without feeling the comforting warmth of Ianto's body next to him, sleep eluded him. He tossed and turned fitfully, reached for his mobile to call Ianto, put it back down, and changed positions again. Damn him! He thought angrily. Damn
him for screwing things up!

He kicked the covers off and turned on his back once more, staring again at the opening above him. *I suppose there's always work to be done...* He wrinkled his nose and made a face at the thought of doing work. *I could always go out, pick someone up, have a meaningless shag... It's been a long time since I've done that...* He tossed one more time, closed his eyes, opened them again, and then jumped out of bed. He dressed quickly and left the Hub, walking to the nearest pub.

He sat at the bar and ordered a drink. Within minutes, he'd caught the eye of a handsome young man sitting at the opposite end of the bar. He looked nothing like Ianto. He was strawberry blond and husky. *That's what I need,* thought Jack, taking a sip of his scotch. *Variety. They do say it's the spice of life...*

He picked up his drink and sauntered over to the young man. "All alone?" Jack asked with his best Harkness grin, sitting down on the stool next to him.

"Why yes, I am," the young man replied, smiling in return.

"That's not a Welsh accent," Jack said, his interest piquing.

"Neither is yours," the man replied. "American?" he asked.

"Something like that," Jack said mysteriously. "You?"

"Dublin," said the man.

"Tourist?" Jack asked.

"Business," the man replied. "You?"

"Local." Jack finished his scotch and stuck out his hand. "Captain Jack Harkness," he said, using all his charm.

"Ewan Murphy," the man said, shaking hands.

"Very Irish, Ewan Murphy," Jack teased. "What line of work are you in, Ewan?"

"I'm a consultant," Ewan replied. "Can I buy you another?" he asked, indicating Jack's empty glass.

"Sure, as long as you join me," Jack said, tapping Ewan's glass.

"You're on," Ewan replied, grinning at Jack.

Several drinks later, Ewan leaned close to Jack's ear and whispered, "I have a room at the St. David's. Come back with me?"

"I thought you'd never ask," Jack said, jumping off his bar stool and grabbing his greatcoat.

"The St. David's, huh?" Jack said as they walked into the plush lobby. "I'm impressed. You must make good money."

"The company puts me up, but I do alright," Ewan said with a grin.

As soon as they'd stepped into the lift and the doors had closed, Ewan lunged at him, kissing him roughly and pushing his tongue into Jack's mouth. Jack didn't respond at first. It was strange to feel unfamiliar lips on his and to taste someone else on his tongue. Then he remembered why he was
there, and he began to kiss back enthusiastically.

"You're gorgeous, you know that?" Ewan said, pulling back and fingerling the buttons on Jack's shirt.

"I might have heard that once or twice before," Jack said confidently.

The lift dinged and the doors opened. Ewan grabbed Jack by his shirt and pulled him into the hallway. He kissed Jack again and backed them down the hall. Then Ewan fumbled in his pocket and fished out a room key. Still holding Jack's shirt, he slid the key into the door slot and the lock clicked open.

Ewan dragged Jack into the room, kissing him hungrily as he yanked off Jack's greatcoat. He paused long enough to take off his own coat and throw it on the floor. Then he tugged off his sweater and stood shirtless in front of Jack. Jack ran his hand down the bare chest in front of him. Ewan was hairless and very muscularly built with bulging biceps and a rock hard abdomen. Not bad, Jack thought with an inward smile.

Ewan was pulling at Jack's shirt. With one deft movement, he had torn the buttons and wrenched it off of him. Damn… Ianto's going to kill me for that, Jack thought as he watched the buttons scatter across the carpet.

And then Jack froze. Ianto's face rose up before him in his mind's eye, scolding him for losing all of the buttons on his shirt and grumbling that he'd have to sew them back on again. What am I doing? Jack thought, horrified.

By the time he'd come back to the present, he realized that Ewan had taken off his t-shirt and had begun to unzip his trousers. Jack grabbed his hands and pushed them away. "I'm sorry, Ewan. I can't."

"What?" Ewan exclaimed in confusion. "What happened? You were into it a minute ago!"

Jack quickly zipped his trousers and refastened his belt. "I know, I'm sorry," he replied as he quickly picked up his t-shirt from the floor and put it back on.

"Oh, I get it," Ewan said, the disappointment evident in his voice. "Boyfriend problems."

"Yeah, something like that," Jack said as he retrieved his shirt and greatcoat.

"Are you sure?" Ewan asked, stepping closer to Jack and putting a hand on his chest. "He'll never know."

"But I will," Jack replied. And Ianto would probably know too…

He turned and walked towards the door. With his hand on the door knob, he turned back. "Don't think I wasn't tempted," Jack said before he opened the door and swiftly left the hotel room.

Jack returned to the Hub, undressed, and got quickly back into bed. He was slightly ashamed of his behavior. That's what the old Jack would have done. That's not who I am anymore. I've worked hard to become the person I am today. That's the person I'm proud of. That's the person I want Ianto and the team to know. And if I had gone through with it, Ianto would have figured it out… And it might have done irreparable damage… But has Ianto done irreparable damage by betraying me for a third time? I don't know the answer to that yet… But it's so much worse to be the one who hurts someone than to be the one who was hurt. I've lived long enough to have figured at least that much out.
Jack finally fell asleep and slept for the few remaining hours of darkness. Once again, he woke to the smell of coffee. *Ianto's here...* He felt his stomach clench. He got up and rapidly showered and dressed. Then he climbed up to his office and sat down at his desk. Ianto came in a moment later carrying Jack's coffee. His face betrayed no emotions; it was set in his habitual impassive mask. He set the mug down on the desk in front of Jack.

Jack stood up and walked around his desk to where the younger man was standing. *I might have destroyed everything,* he thought as he studied Ianto's expressionless face. With an overwhelming sense of relief, he took a step towards Ianto and hugged him tightly to his chest. Ianto hugged him back. *Thank the gods I didn't do irreparable damage last night,* he though as he held Ianto close to him.

Then he broke away and sat down behind his desk again. "That doesn't mean I've forgiven you," Jack said sternly.

"Okay..." Ianto replied with a perplexed look on his face.

"Nor does it mean I'm ready to have you back in my bed," Jack added frostily.

"Er... right," Ianto said, looking curiously at Jack.

"Now, don't you have some work to do?" Jack said by way of a dismissal.

"Yes, Sir," Ianto said before turning and leaving his office.

Jack smiled in spite of himself.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my beta riftintime, who gracefully suffers my tantrums.

As though by unspoken consent, no one commented on Gwen's absence until a few days after the Flat Holm incident. Even Ianto remained silent on the issue. He had respected Jack's wishes and had neither stayed late at the Hub, nor tried to talk to Jack privately about anything that wasn't work related. Jack was grateful for the space, but simultaneously missed his company.

It was Tosh who finally asked, "Jack? Where's Gwen?" one afternoon when Jack had stepped out of his office to see what his team was up to.

Jack looked at his three employees who had all stopped what they were doing as they waited for his response. "Gwen's taking some personal time," Jack said in his most authoritative and dismissive manner.

"Bollocks Jack! Gwen gets more holidays than the rest of us put together!" Owen griped.

Jack shot him a look, and he threw up his hands defensively. "Alright, alright. Don't get your knickers in a twist. You're the boss."

Tosh and Ianto quickly turned their attention back to work, and Jack found himself feeling grateful to Owen. Now there's something that doesn't happen every day, he mused as he went back into his office.

The next evening, Ianto came to his office after the others had left for the day. He set a mug of coffee in front of Jack and sat down across from him. Jack felt himself tense. He wasn't sure he was ready to talk to Ianto yet. "What is it, Ianto?" he asked with a guarded expression.

Ianto shifted in his chair. "Gwen has been going out to Flat Holm every day," Ianto said, sounding almost apologetic.

"I know," Jack replied. "Helen called me."

"She's been spending time with Jonah and the others." Ianto added.

Jack nodded and silence fell between them. "Right, well... just thought you should know," Ianto hesitated and then began to rise from his chair.

"I told her that she needed to take some time off to think," Jack said before he could stop himself. He missed being able to confide in Ianto and realized that he'd been wanting to do so for days. "I told her that she needed to decide whether or not she trusted me, otherwise she can't work here anymore."

Ianto sat back down in the chair and looked at Jack. "You're worried she'll decide that she can't?" he asked.

Jack shrugged his shoulders. Then he looked Ianto straight in the eyes. "Do you trust me, Ianto?"
"Of course I trust you, Jack," Ianto answered without hesitation.

"Even though you don't trust my decisions?" Jack couldn't help adding.

He knew that he was beating a dead horse, but he couldn't help himself. *I'm not over it*, he realized with chagrin.

Ianto sighed heavily. "I do trust your decisions, Jack. That doesn't mean I'm always going to agree with them."

"But I'm the boss," Jack stated.

"Yes, Jack. I know that."

"That means when I give you an order, I expect you to follow it."

"You've never disobeyed an order because you thought it was wrong?" Ianto asked, looking searchingly into Jack's face.

Jack hesitated. He'd disobeyed many orders in his long life for many different reasons. Only some of the time it was because he didn't think it was the right thing. *I've disobeyed orders out of sheer cheek come to think of it. But Ianto is different... I thought I could always depend on him. I thought he'd always have my back... And yet, he hasn't always had my back... I was shocked that he turned on me with Abaddon. However, I was less shocked this time..."

"So how do I decide, Ianto?" he finally asked. "How do I decide when I can trust you and what I can trust you with?"

"That's up to you, Jack," Ianto replied calmly. "You have to decide if you believe that I have your best interests at heart – and the team's. You have to decide that you trust my motives. You have my loyalty, Jack, but I'm not an automaton. You know better than anyone what a tricky thing trust is. It's arduously gained and so easily lost. Nothing and no one is absolute. People are too complex for that."

Jack couldn't think of a response because he knew Ianto was right. *It still doesn't make it any easier... I wish it did, but it doesn't...* After a few minutes of silence, Ianto rose and walked out of his office.

Part of Jack desperately wanted to call him back. He wanted to break the tension between them. He wanted an end to the stalemate. But something held him back. He heard the cogwheel door open and close and knew that Ianto had left for the evening. He sighed heavily, knowing that he was going to spend another evening alone.

It was a week after Flat Holm that Gwen finally returned to Torchwood. She walked straight into Jack's office and sat down in the chair opposite him. Jack studied her silently, uncertain what this confrontation would bring. "So you want to say I told you so?" Gwen finally said with an iciness in her voice that made Jack wary.

"Not really," he replied calmly.

"Well, you were right," Gwen said coldly.

"I didn't want to be right, Gwen," Jack said steadily.

"I thought she wanted to know what happened to Jonah..." Gwen began defensively. "I thought she
would be more at peace if she knew…"

Tears formed in her eyes. "I've been going to Flat Holm every day to sit with Jonah. That scream..."
Gwen paused and shuddered. "It lasts for twenty hours..."

Jack nodded sadly. He knew all too well just how damaged Jonah Bevin was. "I've been going every day to see if anything changes, if he changes, if he has times where he's... better... I went every day to see if anything could be done, if I could do anything... if we could do anything, if there was some alternative solution... Anything..."

The tears were falling freely down her face. Jack watched one trickle to the edge of her jaw and drop onto her hand. "They said Nikki could come visit, whenever she likes... whenever he's in a good phase... but she won't."

Gwen wiped furiously at her face. "She said that before I came along, she had hope..."

Jack was silent. He had known how it would end, that he was right and Gwen was wrong, but it was a bitter victory. "I did that Jack," Gwen continued desolately. "I robbed her of her hope... of her memories of her son... I did that. It's my fault..."

"You did what you thought was right," Jack said quietly.

And Ianto did what he thought was right... and I did what I thought was right... and it still ended like this, Jack thought unhappily.

Gwen bit back a sob, looking as though she were trying desperately to regain control of her emotions. When she had mastered herself enough to speak, she whispered. "She made me promise not to do that to anyone else... Not to tell any of the others where their missing loved ones were... What happened to them... She made me promise not to ruin the memories of anyone else..."

"I'm sorry, Gwen," Jack said, and he meant it.

He, too, had agonized over the Rift victims. He was sorry that any of the team had to be burdened with that knowledge as well. But I chose to burden Ianto...

"I'm sorry, Jack. I should have trusted you," Gwen said in a small voice, looking down at her hands and twisting her wedding ring.

Jack sat back in his chair. "What do you say we just get on with our jobs?" he asked, suddenly desperate for this whole ordeal to be over with. "We've got work to do – people to save, aliens to capture." He tried to smile, but he knew that it was forced.

Gwen half-smiled in return. "If you'll have me back..." she hedged.

"Were you ever gone?" Jack responded with a cheeky grin.

Gwen nodded and stood up. She wiped her face and murmured, "Thank you," before she turned and headed out of the office.

Jack waited for about half an hour, and then went to search for Gwen. He found her pulling down the photos of the missing people from the wall. He stood in the shadows of the staircase, deciding not to announce his presence.

It was with a heavy heart that Jack watched Gwen put away all of her research on those people... the victims of the Rift. I didn't want to be right... Maybe there was a part of me that hoped she would...
find a better solution than the one I came up with. Maybe part of Ianto hoped for that too…

Finally, he turned away and left her to her work. He headed back to his office. On his way he spotted Ianto at his computer. "Ianto, come talk to me after the others have gone," he said quietly as he passed.

At the end of the work day, Jack sat at his desk with a bottle of scotch in front of him and two glasses poured out on his desk. Ianto arrived moments later and sat across from him. Jack shoved one of the glasses towards him. Ianto eyed the glass and then looked up at Jack. He raised an eyebrow, but he picked it up and took a sip.

"I wish I could say that I'm over it, but I'm not," Jack began after draining most of the scotch from his glass.

Ianto nodded but remained silent. "But I'm tired of this whole thing. I've made my peace with Gwen… I would like to try and make my peace with you as well."

Again Ianto nodded and sipped his drink. "Stay tonight?" Jack suggested.

Ianto set his glass down on the desk and looked into Jack's eyes. "You want me to stay, even though you haven't forgiven me?" he asked with wariness in his voice.

"Well, it's not like you can regain trust in a matter of days…" Jack replied.

"So, what then? You just want sex?" Ianto asked coolly.

Jack slammed his now empty glass down on the desk. "Pardon me?" he asked, his anger rising.

"You said yourself that you aren't over it. But you want me to stay here tonight? What are we going to do, play Canasta?" Ianto's voice oozed sarcasm.

"Well, I just thought we could…" Jack hesitated, because sex was exactly what he'd had in mind.

"Fuck?" Ianto finished for him, his features contorting with fury. "I'm not your part-time shag, Jack!" he roared.

"After everything we've been through, you're still harping on that?" Jack shouted back.

"Isn't that how you're treating me?" Ianto snarled.

Jack jumped out of his chair. His pulse was pounding in his ears and the rage was burning in his chest. Before he could stop himself, the words were out of his mouth. "You think it's just about sex? Sex is easy! I could get sex anywhere, anytime I want it! I went out last night and went home with a bloke I met in a bar!"

"You did what?" Ianto asked, the look of horror and pain evident on his face.

Jack curled his fingers into fists. "I was furious with you and I wanted to… to forget…"

Ianto stood up and started walking out the door. Jack lunged forward and grabbed him. "Let me go, you bastard!" Ianto yelled, trying to throw off Jack's hold.

Jack wrestled with him and shoved him against the wall. "Get off me!" Ianto growled.

Jack pinned him to the wall. "I couldn't do it!" Jack said through gritted teeth.
Ianto continued to struggle. "Are you listening to me, Ianto? I couldn't go through with it, because of you," he snarled.

And suddenly, they were kissing desperately.
Their desperate kissing quickly turned into frantically clawing at each other's clothing. Within moments they were both naked and half wrestling, half embracing as they fell clumsily to the floor. Ianto later found bruises on his right shoulder and thigh. He must have hit the ground hard, but at the time, he didn't notice.

For a while they both struggled for dominance, neither willing to cede control to the other. In their battle, they knocked into chairs and into the legs of Jack's desk. They kissed and bit at each other hungrily, pulling up bruises and marks on each other's skin.

Finally, nearing desperation, and realizing that neither of them was going to surrender, Ianto took hold of both their cocks in his hand. Jack wrapped his hand around the opposite side and entwined his fingers with Ianto's. They moved their hands together, frantically stroking until they both came, simultaneously moaning and gasping for air.

They lay in a tangle on the floor of Jack's office. Ianto's arm was aching and he felt disconcertingly sticky. He began to move, intending to sit up, but Jack grabbed him and held him close. "You were right, Ianto. You were wrong for what you did, but you were right in the end."

Ianto closed his eyes in relief. "But you're going to have to give me time to get over it," Jack added.

Ianto opened his eyes again. "So… what does that mean?" he asked hesitantly.

"I'm not sure," Jack said after a moment's pause. "I need some more time…"

"Does that mean you're going to go out on the pull again to get back at me?" Ianto asked, unable to keep the hostility from his voice.

"I mean… I know we've never actually talked about…" Ianto retorted.

"I already told you that I couldn't do it," Jack said, cutting him off. "Isn't that enough?"

"I suppose it will have to be," Ianto retorted. We've never discussed monogamy… and I guess we never will. It's not Jack's way... He might not have gone through with it last night, but the desire was still there. He must have wanted it on some level…"

"Ianto, I..."

"I need a shower," Ianto said quickly, deciding he didn't want to hear any more.

He got up and started gathering his clothing. I was right, but I was wrong for what I did? He wants to reconcile, but he doesn't forgive me and he doesn't trust me?… And we just did exactly what I swore I wouldn't do… It's just too much. I need to get out of here.

Ianto felt Jack's hand on his arm. "Stay..." Jack said, and there was an entreaty in his voice that Ianto
couldn't ignore.

He relented with an inward sigh. "Fine," he said. "But I need to wash."

And to Ianto's surprise, Jack started laughing. "What?" Ianto asked, slightly outraged.

"The world could be ending, but you would be concerned about stickiness," Jack chuckled.

"Well..." Ianto huffed. "If the world were ending, at least I'd be clean!"

Jack laughed even harder and Ianto couldn't help but smile.

"Come on, Jones, Ianto Jones. Let's get you cleaned up. I wouldn't want to upset your immaculate sensibilities!"

Jack rose and took Ianto into his arms. "I know you were just doing what you thought was right," Jack whispered into his ear. "And I admire you for it," he added, kissing Ianto's forehead.

He wrapped Ianto tightly against his chest. "Just don't disobey me again," he said sternly.

"Yes, Sir," Ianto whispered into his chest.

They showered quickly and climbed into Jack's bed. Jack wrapped himself around Ianto. *Octopus...* Ianto thought, and it was on the tip of his tongue to say it, but he held back. There was something still not quite right between them, and Ianto just couldn't shake the feeling, no matter how tightly Jack held him.

Ianto shifted and fidgeted throughout the night, unable to really settle. If Jack was awake, he didn't let on. Finally, in the early hours of the morning, Ianto rose and got ready for work. He looked at Jack, still ostensibly asleep in his bed. Ianto somehow knew instinctively that Jack was awake, but for his own reasons, didn't want a confrontation either. *Something is still wrong,* he thought. With a last look back at Jack, Ianto climbed the ladder and went to make the morning coffee.

For the next few weeks, Ianto and Jack engaged in a sort of wary dance around each other. Their relationship was tenuous at best. Ianto sometimes stayed at the Hub, but they would have sex and then fall into bed – not really speaking to each other. Then they began to have sex less frequently, and when they did, it seemed to lack the passion they once had. Many nights Ianto went home, not being able to bear the widening gulf between them.

It's like we no longer fit... Ianto thought one night, lying sleeplessly in his bed, staring at the ceiling. Like trying to force oneself into clothing that has shrunk in the wash... It used to fit, it should fit, but it no longer does. Does that just happen?... And it doesn't make sense. We made up for all intents and purposes. And yet... it just hasn't been the same.

But there were other little things that were different, and Ianto thrashed uncomfortably as he thought through their significance. We no longer spend time together after the others have left for the night, sitting in Jack's office and talking about whatever case we're working on or discussing the team. He no longer confides in me... And it's been ages since we went on a Weevil hunt. Come to think of it, he usually pairs me with Owen or Tosh in the field... never with him. He doesn't turn to me for advice anymore... or approval, or for my opinion... not like he used to. And I haven't been able to sense anything from him for weeks...

Ianto felt an ache in his heart that he'd never known before. It was different from the pain of losing Lisa. It was different from the pain of Jack leaving with the Doctor. It was, in some ways, much worse. It was the pain of being with someone who he should know, and feeling like he was with a
stranger. It's like we're together, but I'm totally alone… Is this what it's like? Falling out of love? Is this what it feels like? It's horrible… Like something is irreparably broken… Was I even in love? Or was it just something that passed for love? Is this thing between us finally drawing to a close?

Ianto finally fell into a fitful sleep full of nightmares that had him waking up twice drenched in sweat. After awakening for the third time, he gave up on sleep altogether. He got out of bed and readied himself for work.

It started out as a normal day. There was a Rift alert, signs of alien life forms in an abandoned warehouse, and Gwen was running late – just another day at Torchwood, Ianto thought as he left yet another message on Gwen's mobile. But Ianto couldn't have been more wrong.

And when he saw the explosive device not five meters in front of him with the countdown timer reading only three seconds remaining, he realized just how wrong he was. Jack… was his last thought before the whole world exploded.

The next thing he was aware of was an agonizing pain in his left shoulder and something heavy pressing down on his back. He reached forward with his right arm, trying to claw his way out of the rubble. A scream escaped from his lips as the effort sent pain searing across his body. He desperately tried to pull himself forward, but he couldn't move. He was trapped.

Moments of his life flashed before his eyes – starting work at Torchwood One, meeting Lisa, the Cybermen and Daleks, meeting Jack and conning his way into Torchwood Three, catching Myfanwy, rolling on the floor with Jack and laughing for the first time since Canary Wharf, that initial spark between them, falling in love with Jack… Jack… "Ianto! Ianto!"

Ianto could hear Jack desperately calling his name. He looked up as the sound brought him back to reality. Bombs… the others. It was a trap. Where are the others? Are they okay? He groaned as a fresh stab of pain tore through his upper body. Then Jack was lifting the cement block from his back and he and Gwen were helping him up. He groaned again, more loudly this time, as the pain in his shoulder intensified when he tried to move it. "My shoulder. I think it's dislocated," he gasped.

"Can you take this?" Jack asked.

Ianto was almost offended. "Yeah."

"Take a deep breath," Jack advised.

Ianto barely had time to roll his eyes before there was an excruciating pain as Jack jerked his shoulder back into its socket. Then the pain suddenly abated, and Ianto's only thoughts were for Tosh and Owen. "Where are the others?"

"We need your help to get Toshiko out," Jack replied.

She's alive then, thank God. "Owen?" he asked.

"No sign yet," Gwen told him.

Ianto felt his heart sinking. "If anything happens he can't repair himself."

"Of course. He can't heal, can he?" Gwen added.

Jack looked at Gwen. "Okay, we'll help Rhys with Toshiko. Let us know when you find Owen. And be careful, okay?"
Gwen took off running. "Okay?" Jack asked as he placed his hand over Ianto's heart. "You alright?"

Ianto nodded, still trying to get his bearings. Jack started to walk away, and then suddenly turning back, he grabbed Ianto's face in his hands and kissed him hard on the mouth. "Thank the gods you're alright," he whispered.

Then Jack turned away again and ran off to help Tosh. *That's the most affection he's shown me in weeks*, Ianto thought as he took another couple of seconds to recover. He wasn't sure he could walk yet, but a growing panic for Tosh and Owen's safety made him force his muscles into action. He followed slowly at first, and then he picked up the pace as his legs grew more stable underneath him.

They managed to get Tosh out from under the wreckage, and the three of them cautiously made their way out of the building. Ianto's heart didn't stop pounding until he saw Gwen and Owen come running up and felt Owen's reassuring hand rest on his shoulder. *We were all so very lucky…*

"Oh, no!" Ianto couldn't help exclaiming when Jack's wrist strap beeped and the holographic image of Captain John Hart appeared before them.

Ianto felt his heart ache for Jack when Hart revealed Gray's image. He could hear the fear and pain in Jack's voice. Then Hart's words sent a cold dread surging through his body. "Everything you love, everything you treasure will die. I'm going to tear your world apart, Captain Jack Harkness, piece by piece… Starting now."

And then the chaos began. As Jack started shouting orders, Ianto felt genuine terror grip his heart. He somehow knew that nothing would ever be the same again.
Jack and Ianto were on the floor in a tangle of limbs after they had both cum. Jack had wanted to reconnect with Ianto, but somehow their desperation made him feel farther away from the younger man than before. He tried again to bridge the gap by grabbing Ianto as he started to rise and holding him close. "You were right, Ianto. You were wrong for what you did, but you were right in the end."

Jack paused, hoping that his words were sufficient, but he couldn't help adding, "But you're going to have to give me time to get over it."

"So… what does that mean?" Ianto asked hesitantly.

"What does that mean? Why can't I just let it go? "I'm not sure," Jack finally said. "I need some more time…"

"Does that mean you're going to go out on the pull again to get back at me?" Ianto asked, pulling away from him.

Jack could hear the hostility in Ianto's voice and cringed inwardly as he started feeling defensive. This isn't how I wanted this to go…

"I mean… I know we've never actually talked about…" Ianto started, but Jack cut him off, his own anger rising.

"I already told you that I couldn't do it. Isn't that enough?" Jack interjected.

"I suppose it will have to be," Ianto replied.

The antagonism in Ianto's voice was apparent, and Jack tried to think of some way to stop the tide of ugliness that was threatening to engulf them. "Ianto, I…" he began, uncertain of what he was going to say next.

"I need a shower," Ianto said before Jack could finish figuring it out.

Ianto stood up and started gathering his clothing. I have to do something, thought Jack, before this gets out of hand… before we open a door that we can't close… I don't want to lose him. "Stay…" Jack said, and even he could hear the entreaty in his voice.

"Fine," Ianto agreed. "But I need to wash."

Ianto's response was so typical of his personality that Jack felt immensely relieved, and he started to laugh. "What?" Ianto asked with a tone of outrage.

"The world could be ending, but you would be concerned about stickiness," Jack replied.

"Well…” Ianto huffed. "If the world were ending, at least I'd be clean!"
Jack laughed even harder. This was his Ianto – punctilious and fastidious to the last. This was the man Jack desperately wanted to hold onto – the one that he teased about his fussiness, who was always smartly dressed in his neat suits, who he'd caught ironing his underwear, who wore gloves to clean, an apron to cook in, and tucked a napkin into his collar for meals. He didn't want to think about Ianto as the man who he had begun to truly trust, and who had betrayed him for a third time.

Jack saw the corners of Ianto's mouth twitch into a brief smile. Maybe we can get past this, he thought hopefully.

"Come on, Jones, Ianto Jones. Let's get you cleaned up. I wouldn't want to upset your immaculate sensibilities!"

Jack stood and took Ianto into his arms. If only I can find the right words to smooth this over… "I know you were just doing what you thought was right," Jack whispered into his ear. "And I admire you for it," he added, kissing Ianto's forehead.

He wrapped Ianto tightly against his chest. But he has to know that he can't do it again… There has to be some boundaries between our professional relationship and our personal one… And I just couldn't take one more betrayal from him… "Just don't disobey me again," he added.

"Yes, Sir," Ianto whispered into his chest.

After they’d showered and gotten into bed, Jack wrapped his arms around Ianto and held him close. He wanted to settle into the embrace, hoping that if he held on tightly enough, he could forget the recent betrayal and hold on to everything that they'd built together. Jack knew that he had a problem with trusting people, especially lovers. And what hurt him the most was that he had really begun to trust Ianto.

He remembered Tosh's explanation that Ianto had betrayed him as an employee, not as a lover. But I still can't separate them – Ianto my employee from Ianto my lover. How can I possibly separate them? This is why I don't do Torchwood relationships. Just too messy.

Jack knew Ianto was restless throughout the night. He could feel the younger man shifting and fidgeting uncomfortably. He can probably sense this growing rift between us… and I don't know how to stop it. I don't know how to make it better… I'm probably making it worse. He can probably tell that I can't let it go… Why can't I let this go?

Jack himself spent a sleepless night trying to sort through his muddle of emotions. Unfortunately, the more he thought about it, the more upset he became with the situation. He lay perfectly still as Ianto fidgeted, but his mind never rested. He'd hoped that if he reconnected with Ianto physically, they would reconnect emotionally as well. But as the night wore on, rather than soothing his feelings about Ianto's betrayal, he became more and more dismayed.

He heard Ianto when he rose early, he listened as Ianto showered and dressed for work, but he didn't move. I just can't talk to him right now, he thought as he lay in his bed with his eyes closed. When he finally heard Ianto climb the ladder out of the bunker, he couldn't deny that he felt immeasurable relief.

What's happened to us? He asked himself as he slowly got out of bed to shower and ready himself for work. What do we do now? Where do we go from here?

Over the next few weeks, Jack felt himself drifting farther and farther away from Ianto. He knew it was mostly his fault, but he couldn't seem to find a way to stop it. He just couldn't let go of his feelings of betrayal, and rather than abate, they seemed to grow stronger as the days progressed.
Jack found himself shutting Ianto out emotionally. He had closed and guarded his mind. He became wary of confiding in Ianto about anything – even the mundane. He began to spend less time with the younger man, often pairing him with one of the other team members on missions, and he would make himself scarce after the others had left to avoid opportunities for late night conversations.

If Ianto noticed, he didn't say anything. In fact, he started going home to sleep in his flat more often. They rarely had sex anymore, and to Jack's chagrin, it lacked the passion they once had. *We're just using each other for sex,* Jack thought one night after they'd had a frantic shag and were laying silently, recovering.  *Ironic, given that it's what he was always afraid of – being my part-time shag. And he never was, until now…*

Jack was immediately disgusted with himself for having that thought. He made an excuse so that he could get up and go do some work. *Is this really the end of me and Ianto?* he thought as he quickly donned his trousers and shirt. *I can't do this anymore… As much as it's going to destroy me, I have to start thinking about ending this relationship and dealing with the aftermath. I should talk to him tomorrow… the sooner the better. I can't let this keep dragging on…*

Jack was never able to have that conversation with Ianto, because the next day everything changed.

As Jack watched the timer on the bomb count down the last three seconds, his only thoughts were of his team. *Tosh, Owen... Ianto…*

Then his whole world exploded.

Jack came back to life with the usual gasp for breath and the terror that accompanied every resurrection. It was always excruciating to die and be pulled back, like being raked over hot coals, and Jack hated it. The last few times he had died, Ianto had been there to soothe his transition. And he felt hands on him this time, but they weren't Ianto's. It was Rhys and Gwen… *Rhys?* He could hear Rhys shouting something and his words finally registered. "I checked his pulse! He was dead!"

"Alright!" Gwen said to Rhys and shushed him. "Jack what just happened? Where are the others?" she asked.

"What is he doing here?" Jack asked, pointing in outrage at Rhys.

"Look, I was late, okay? He gave me a lift," Gwen explained. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," he said, starting to push the rubble off of his body. *Tosh... I was with Tosh... Toshiko, she went the other way.*

Rhys and Gwen managed to get him up. As Jack looked around at the destruction, he realized that he and Tosh weren't the only ones who were caught in the blast. *Owen, Ianto... oh my gods, Ianto...* "Owen," he said, his panic rising. "Ianto," he could barely get the word out as the panic threatened to overtake him.

"Go, Jack," Gwen said firmly. "Find Ianto and Owen. We'll find Tosh."

Jack took of in a desperate run. "Ianto!" he called out hysterically. "Ianto!"

To his intense relief, he found that Ianto was alive. He barely had a moment to register his reaction at the prospect of Ianto's death because Gwen ran up. "We can't get Tosh out," she gasped as she caught her breath.

Jack had begun to move the cement blocks off of Ianto and Gwen bent down to help him. Jack felt waves of relief wash over him as Ianto's body and mind seemed to be relatively intact.
"My shoulder. I think it's dislocated," Ianto panted.

"Can you take this?" Jack asked, knowing full well the pain of relocating a shoulder.

"Yeah," Ianto replied with so much cheek that Jack smiled to himself.

"Take a deep breath," he advised as he braced himself to yank the shoulder back into its socket.

Jack was impressed when Ianto only screamed out in pain once then quickly regained control of himself. "Where are the others?" he asked.

_{Ianto… always putting others before himself…}_

His heart momentarily swelled with affection. "We need your help to get Toshiko out," Jack replied.

"Owen?" Ianto asked.

"No sign yet," Gwen answered.

"If anything happens he can't repair himself," Ianto reminded them.

"Of course. He can't heal, can he?" Gwen added.

Jack tried to reign in his torrent of emotions. He needed to be the captain right now. "Okay," he said to Gwen in his commanding voice, "We'll help Rhys with Toshiko. Let us know when you find Owen. And be careful, okay?"

Gwen took off running. "Okay?" Jack asked as he placed his hand on Ianto's chest, allowing himself to take a moment's pleasure at the reassuring beat of the other man's heart. "You alright?"

Ianto nodded, and Jack started to walk away. _We have to find Owen… I have to stay in control… but I almost lost him. Oh gods, I almost lost him._ Before he could stop himself, he had turned back and grabbed Ianto's face with his hands. He kissed him hard on the mouth, feeling immeasurably comforted by the feeling of the warmth of Ianto's lips. "Thank the gods you're alright," he whispered.

Then Jack turned away again and ran off to help Tosh. _Not the time for reconciliations,_ he admonished himself. _We need to help the others._

He and Ianto, with Rhys' help, managed to get Tosh out from under the wreckage, and the three of them cautiously made their way out of the building. Jack saw Owen and Gwen appear from another exit and he took his first deep breath. _We're all here, we're all alive…_ Then his heart sank as his wrist strap beeped. _That can only mean one thing._ Jack thought with dread as he pressed a button and played Hart's message.

All thoughts of Torchwood, of John Hart, and even of Ianto fled his mind as he saw the holographic image of a young man appear next to John. _That can't be… it can't…It's not possible… "Gray?"

Images of that last horrible day with his brother on the Boeshane Peninsula, the day that he'd spent over a hundred and fifty years trying to forget, came flooding back in terrifying images. _I let go of his hand… it's my fault… it's all my fault…_

And then he began to register John's words. "Everything you love, everything you treasure will die. I'm going to tear your world apart, Captain Jack Harkness, piece by piece… Starting now."

Jack felt sick. He knew all too well what John was capable of. He knew that if John wanted to destroy his life, he was perfectly able to do it. _But I have to maintain control… I'm responsible for_
my team, for Cardiff... I'm responsible for John's presence here... I'm responsible for Gray...

But he couldn't let himself go there. Chaos broke out, and Jack had a role to play. He began to shout orders at his team.
Rhys had dropped Ianto and Tosh off at the Central Server Building, according to Jack's orders. Ianto's nerves were on edge as he and Tosh entered the building. *Everyone on top of each other to fit inside Rhys' car, and not one sexual innuendo from Jack... Just goes to show how dire the circumstances are! Hart, back to torment us. Doesn't he ever give up? I feel sick at the very sight of Captain John Hart... And Gray... Jack never really told me what happened to his brother, but I know there's a terrible story there. I remember the look of pain on Jack's face when I asked him who Gray was... What's happening back at the Hub? What's Hart doing to Jack? Is he okay?*

Ianto shuddered, but quickly controlled his emotions. *We have a job to do.* He and Tosh made their way inside and began a thorough search of the interior. "Just entering the Central Server," Tosh said into her earpiece. "This building houses servers for the military, police, NHS, even looks after the server systems for the nuclear station at Turnmill."

"What problem did they report?" Ianto asked.

"Ghosts in these server stacks," Tosh replied.

"How's the arm?" Ianto asked.

"Owen gave me industrial strength painkillers, seems to be doing the trick," Tosh said with a bravado that Ianto admired.

Ianto had his back to Tosh when she called his name. "Ianto."

He turned around to find three figures dressed like the Grim Reaper, and fully equipped with scythes. "Huh," was all he could think of to say.

"Devils! Blasphemers! Pray to your heathen God. While in the Lord's name, we cast you out!" the Reapers said in unison.

He and Tosh looked at each other, then back at the advancing Reapers. Simultaneously, they both pulled out their guns and fired several well aimed rounds. They watched as the three ghosts fell to the ground, dead. "There we are then," Ianto said anticlimactically.

"Sorted," Tosh agreed.

*All in a day's work,* Ianto thought as he and Tosh walked calmly away. *Not that long ago I would have been quaking in my boots at the sight of Death... Funny how working for Torchwood changes you... And that was very Indiana Jones of us, he added to himself with amusement. Sorry Jack wasn't here to see that... He would have had a chuckle over it... His stomach clenched uncomfortably when he suddenly remembered that Jack had gone to face Hart. His moment of diversion was replaced by nauseating anxiety. Jack... What kind of horrors is Hart exposing him too? What kind of torture is he suffering?*
Ianto wanted to reach out with his mind and try to sense Jack, but there wasn't time. *I need to focus…*

And then John Hart's voice came over their comms, "Attention… Torchwood employees! Evening all! Now, stop what you're doing."


"Jack can't come to the comms right now. But if you leave a message, I'll be sure and pass it along," Hart taunted.

"What've you done to him?" Gwen demanded.

"No, no, wrong question. You should be asking, 'what am I about to do to you?'" Hart sneered.

"Put Jack on right now!" Ianto challenged, before he could stop himself.

"Eye Candy! That was so masterful, so bossy, so basically powerless," Hart scoffed.

Ianto rolled his eyes in exasperation, knowing that Hart was right. His outburst had been pointless.

"Get up to the roofs of your buildings. Quickly now, spit spot," Hart continued.

"Why?" Ianto heard Owen ask.

"'Cause if you don't, you'll miss all the fun. Hold on a minute, do I mean fun or do I mean carnage? I get them confused. Are you running yet? No dawdling now!" Hart mocked.

Ianto was aware of a feeling of impending doom as he and Tosh raced up the staircase to the roof of the building, made all the more hideous by Hart's continuous taunting over their comms. "Now… Cardiff! Isn't it pretty? Doesn't it twinkle so? Take a good look. Remember this… because it all goes so quick."

And then one explosion after another devastated the Cardiff skyline. Ianto was knocked off his feet when a shockwave hit the Central Server Building. He was up again as quickly as he could manage, and he stood in paralyzing desolation as he surveyed the destruction of Cardiff… his city… his home. And for a brief moment, he allowed himself to give over to despair… but then he pulled himself back together, and oddly enough, it was Gwen's words that inspired confidence. "Okay, all of you, listen to me. We're going to fix this, we're going to put this city back together, we're going to find Jack and we're going to punish John."

*Torchwood needs me,* he thought to himself as he and Tosh made their way downstairs, back into the Server Building. *Cardiff needs me… Jack needs me… We have to find Jack.*

It was with perfect professional calm that he said, referencing Owen's words from the Abaddon incident, "Not wanting to be the harbinger of doom but the systems which serve the Turnmill nuclear plant have all gone off-line."

He didn't need Gwen to tell them that stabilizing the nuclear power station was a priority. He already knew that. And when he and Tosh realized that they may not be able to do it remotely, he didn't give it a second thought when he decided to go to Turnmill and keep the reactors from going into meltdown on site.

"That could be suicide," Tosh cried in dismay.

"Are we going to discuss it, or are we going to do it?" he asked, almost annoyed at being reminded of the danger of what he was proposing.
But Tosh rallied. "Okay, but we both go."

Ianto considered telling her to go back to Torchwood to find Jack, but he knew that arguing with her would be to no avail. Tosh was just as determined as he was. He felt a moment of overwhelming affection for his friend. *If I die doing this, I would be honored to die by her side, fighting to save Cardiff. I'm sorry to leave things with Jack unsettled… It will be my one regret.*

But he couldn't allow himself to waste precious moments on sentiment. They were running out of time.

They were outside, desperately searching for transportation so they could get to Turnmill when Hart's voice came over their comms again, saying something about tracing a signal. Ianto could hardly register what was going on, but he heard John say, "If not, we'll never find him. He'll be buried… forever."

_Buried forever? What's he talking about? Jack… Panic started to well up and threatened to overtake him. If we all die, Jack could be buried forever… I have to find him, whatever it takes!_ Then an unbearable noise erupted over the comms and Ianto couldn't think over the deafening sound. And then the Weevils came… hundreds of them. Ianto tapped his earpiece. "Owen, Gwen, can you hear me? The streets are flooded with Weevils, they came out of nowhere. There's no chance we'll get to the nuclear power station in time."

"Ianto, leave it to me. I can get there," Owen assured them.

"How?" Ianto asked as he watched another wave of Weevils run past their hiding place.

"King of the Weevils, remember?" Owen said ironically.

Ianto and Tosh looked at each other and almost smiled, but the situation was too desperate for them to find any real humor in the statement. "Back to Torchwood?" Ianto asked.

Tosh nodded.

They spotted a parked police car and ran towards it, quickly pushing the officer out while shouting Torchwood's name and their credentials. They ignored the protests from the woman as they climbed into the car. Ianto planted his foot, and with a screech of tires, they tore off in the direction of the Hub.

"How's your shoulder, Ianto," Tosh asked as Ianto violently turned the wheel to swerve around a pack of Weevils.

"It's fine, thanks," Ianto replied, reflexively moving the slightly tender joint. "How's the arm holding up?" he asked.

"I could use another shot of Owen's industrial strength pain killers," Tosh muttered.

Ianto smiled at her, and then quickly turned his eyes back to the road.

"You were ready to die back there, Ianto," Tosh said quietly after a moment's pause.

"So were you," Ianto reminded her.

"What about Jack?" Tosh asked. "It would destroy him if you died."

"I'm not so sure about that, Tosh. Jack and I aren't exactly getting along right now," Ianto replied
regretfully.

It was unusual for him to be so open about his problems with Jack, but in their current situation, diffidence on his part seemed inconsequential.

"Because of Flat Holm?" Tosh asked perceptively.

"Yes. I betrayed him again, and he's having a hard time forgiving me. We've been... well, estranged, for lack of a better word," Ianto admitted honestly.

"Ianto, you underestimate your relationship and significance to Jack. He needs you," Tosh said, and there was almost a weary note in her voice.

Ianto remained silent. He couldn't think of a reply, and with the city he loved at the brink of total destruction and Jack facing a tortuous fate, the issues between him and Jack seemed trivial. What if I never see him again? What if we never get a chance to sort things out between us? He banished those thoughts from his mind. He couldn't allow himself to think like that. We've survived worse than this, he reminded himself.

Ianto pulled the police car up next to the water tower and they jumped out, taking the invisible lift down into the Hub. As they descended, it became apparent that they'd arrived in the nick of time. They watched the Weevils surround Gwen and Hart. "You know you've got a real pest problem around here," Hart quipped.

Ianto and Tosh hopped off the lift and with several well aimed shots, took out all of the Weevils.

"Oh, God, I'm so pleased to see you," Gwen breathed heavily.

But Ianto wasn't listening. His eyes were on Hart and he aimed his gun to kill. At the last moment, Gwen pushed his arm away. "Don't start! I'll make things right, Eye Candy," Hart scowled.

Gwen was physically restraining him. I'll kill him, thought Ianto as he struggled against Gwen's grip, for whatever he did to Jack. I'll tear him limb from limb. Tosh calmly took control of the situation. "Then start by getting those Weevils down to the vaults before they recover. It takes more than a bullet to stop them."

Ianto finally conceded and begun to help Gwen and John drag the Weevils down into the cellars. "What have you done with Jack?" he demanded, grunting as he struggled with his load.

"I helped Gray bury him under Cardiff... in 27AD," John replied coolly.

"You did what?" Ianto shouted, horror-struck, almost dropping the Weevil he was dragging.

"Ianto!" Gwen called.

"I didn't have a choice!" Hart exclaimed.

"There's always a choice," Ianto retorted, anger and bile rising up in his throat.

"Okay, can we just get these Weevils into the cells please?" Gwen pleaded.

Ianto felt nothing but pure hatred for the former time agent. "If we don't find him, I'll kill you," he snarled as he settled the Weevil in the cell. "Very slowly," he added menacingly.

And then the cell doors slammed shut behind them and they were locked in. Each of them was trapped in a separate cell with an unconscious but deadly Weevil.
A young man appeared in the corridor, and the family resemblance was obvious. *He's like a much younger version of Jack, but there's nothing but hatred in his heart,* Ianto realized as coldness crept down his spine. *This must be Jack's brother… Gray… What happened to him that's made him so… abhorrent? *"There's no need for this. We can help you. Just tell us where Jack is," he heard Gwen say.

Gray's words intensified the chill down Ianto's spine. "His life's mine now."

"Where's Jack?" Ianto asked as Gray walked past his cell. "What've you done with him?" Ianto felt his panic rising. "What've you done with him?" he shouted at the top of his voice.

But Gray didn't answer. He didn't even look at Ianto. He just kept walking away from the cells. "Hart," Ianto called. "I want an explanation, now!"

Ianto listened with a growing knot in his chest as John explained how, where, and under what circumstances he found Gray. He couldn't help but feel pity and compassion for Jack's younger brother despite what he'd done to them. He knew intuitively that Jack blamed himself for the plight of his brother. *Jack let himself be buried. He didn't fight it. It was his penance…* He listened coolly to the details of how Gray used Hart to get to Jack. "I buried him with a ring that was supposed to emit a signal," John concluded. "I planned for a way to get Jack out. I don't know what went wrong. We should be able to track it!"

"We searched for it, Ianto. We couldn't find any signal," Gwen added.

"It must be there," John said. "When we get out, we'll find him. I promise."

"Like your promises are supposed to mean something to me," Ianto snarled.

"Well, well!" Hart jeered. "You must not just be eye candy after all! Leave it to Jack. Always after the pretty ones…"

"Fuck you!" Ianto spat out.

"I love him too, Ianto," John said calmly.

Ianto was momentarily taken aback, shocked, not only by the abrupt sincerity in John's voice, but by his words. His thoughts spun momentarily out of control. *Am I that transparent? Does he really love Jack?* He almost capitulated, but then he remembered… "You threw him off a roof!" Ianto exclaimed.

"He can't die!" Hart rejoined.

"You didn't know that at the time!" Ianto retorted.

"Yeah, well…" The mockery was back in John's voice. "I'm not perfect, well almost, but not quite!"

"What the hell did he ever see in you?" Ianto asked with distaste.

John snorted. "Oh please, Eye Candy. Do you really think you're anything to him? I've known him far longer than you have. You don't even know his real name! Captain Jack Harkness! What a joke! You're just a distraction, like all the others before you. He stayed with me the longest."

"You bastard. After we find Jack, I'm going to kill you," Ianto raged.

John laughed evilly, and Ianto threw himself against the glass wall of the cell, desperately wanting to
get his hands on Hart. "Oi, boys! Enough already! This isn't helping," Gwen cried.

Finally Ianto sat down and let his head fall into his hands. *Jack... will I ever see you again? Will you stay buried underneath Cardiff for all of eternity? How could you stand it? You'll go mad... I've lost you forever... oh God, I've lost you... And we left things so unresolved between us... I never even told you that I love you...*

Ianto was uncertain how much time passed, but he suddenly sensed a presence he knew well, and jumped to his feet, thinking the name as Gwen said it out loud. "Jack!"

His heart started thumping wildly. The doors opened and his eyes landed on Jack's face. *He's here... He's come back to us... I thought I'd never see him again...* Ianto was so overwhelmed with relief that it nearly brought him to tears. "I thought we'd lost you," was all he managed, his voice hoarse with emotion.

"Never," Jack said as he grabbed Ianto and pulled him close, holding both him and Gwen against his chest. "Never," he repeated.

"Quite a queue for the hugs," John said cheekily.

"Always has been, always will be." Jack looked at John. "Nice use of the ring. Thank you," he stated sincerely.

"Least I could do," John replied. "Listen, Gray's in the Hub."

"I know," Jack said wearily. "It's done."

And Ianto could hear the agony in Jack's voice.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my very talented beta riftintime.

Jack was struggling to stay in command of his rampant emotions, and struggling to stay in command of his team. As they squeezed into Rhys' car, Jack barely noticed that Ianto was practically in his lap. He was completely distracted by the prospect of what John had in store for Torchwood, and where Gray came into the picture. Jack knew that John could be ruthless, vicious, violent, and completely unscrupulous. Why is he back? What does he want with me? Is this solely because I rejected him? Did he really find Gray, or is this just another one of his tricks to torture me? Is John really determined to destroy what I love most? He looked around at his team packed tightly into Rhys' small car, realizing that almost everyone he loved most in the world was there with him. Is John going to try to take them from me?

His gaze lingered on Rhys and Gwen, riding in the front. Will they be okay? Will Gwen ever have a chance at the normal life I've so desperately wanted for her? His eyes moved to Tosh, sitting on Owen's lap. Owen, the walking dead. Robbed of his life in his prime. A shell of a man. Never having the opportunity to find love again... And Tosh, so wise, so kind, and so very brilliant. I was hoping that she and Owen would find solace in each other. Will they ever have the chance, or will John take that away too? What will this day bring for them? Will they be alright?

He finally turned his attention to Ianto, pressed up against him out of necessity. Will we never have a chance to put things right between us? I never even told him how much I... how much I love him... Will John take Ianto from me as well?

And now I have to order them all away, maybe to their deaths, to handle the chaos John's created. This is all my fault... I brought this down on them and on Cardiff... the city I've truly begun to think of as my home.

Before he realized where they were, Rhys had pulled up in front of the water tower, and Jack jumped out. He took the entrance through the tourist office, not sure he wanted to drop into the Hub from the invisible lift. As he stood in front of the cogwheel door, he took a deep breath, bracing himself for what he might find on the other side, steeling himself for dealing with John, and trying to remain calm amidst a storm of disquietude.

As the door rolled open, he was surprised to hear obnoxious music playing throughout the Hub. What the hell... He walked further into the Hub. John was on an upper level, waving a scarf over his head and dancing. "Come on! Sing along! It's our song!"

Jack felt irritated and disgusted, and he wasn't in the mood for cheek. "We don't have a song. And if we did have a song, it wouldn't be this song," he replied with annoyance.

"You're no fun!" John said with dejection, but he used his Vortex Manipulator to turn the music off anyway.

"Thank you," Jack said with relief.
"I've been here quite a while. What kept you?" John asked as he started down the staircase.

"We all survived," Jack informed him. "You know, if you're going to set an explosion, you need to be more efficient."

"Oh, them," John waved dismissively. "They were just prototypes, had to test out a theory." John came to a stop in front of him and looked into his eyes. "How are they all, the little team?"

Jack's hatred threatened to boil over. "What do you want?" he managed through clenched teeth.

"I want you to know that I love you," John replied candidly.

"Funny way of showing it," Jack retorted.

He knew John well, and he'd been down this road with him before. It was always right before John was about to do something really appalling that he'd get sentimental.

"No, seriously. You have to understand," John continued earnestly.

John turned away from him, and Jack felt fear grip his chest. This is it. What's he going to do? What does he have planned? "I really do love you," was the last thing he heard John say before the room was filled with machine gun fire, and Jack felt an explosion in his chest before the world went dark.

Jack came back to life with the usual desperate inhalation of breath and the fear that accompanied it. But there was another sensation, a strain on his arms and shoulders. And this was a chillingly familiar feeling. He was momentarily overcome with terror. He was back aboard the Valiant, hanging from shackles, being tortured endlessly by the Master – killed and brought back to life over and over again, for the pleasure of the demented Time Lord.

Just as panic threatened to defeat him, he remembered a night, not that long ago, when Ianto had calmly and tenderly forced him to face his fear. His eyes focused, and he realized that he was in the Hub. He remembered John, and then his terror abated. John he could handle. He regained his confidence and tuned into John's words. "Comms and weapons have been removed, in case you're wondering, so no chance of rescue."

"This is a little extreme, don't you think?" Jack asked facetiously.

"Oh, what? Suddenly you're anti bondage?" John asked, grabbing Jack's cock through his trousers and squeezing hard.

Jack snarled at him. He was tired of John's games. He wanted to know what John was planning, and he wanted to know about Gray. "Why are you here?"

"Well, see… Now you're interested in me." John turned and started walking away. "It's always the same. Nobody cares until you tie them up. A number of reasons, actually. First of all, you were very rude to me."

"What?" Jack blurted out in surprise.

"Very rude indeed. In front of people who barely knew me. You belittled me. Can't let that go."

Jack couldn't believe what he was hearing. "You're serious?"

"Second," John continued without replying. "You have all of time - eternity, essentially. And you still refused to spend time with me. After all we've been through together, after all I've done for you."
This was something that Jack had heard before from John, and he didn't need to hear it again. He cut to the chase. "Where's Gray? What have you done to my brother?"

John looked into his eyes, and Jack began to get the feeling that he was trying to silently communicate something, but then he started talking again and the impression was gone. "You don't realize – actions, ramifications, ripples in the pond. It's beyond my control."

"Beyond your control? Please!" Jack spat out.

"It is. You need to understand that," John said, looking hard at him again. "So, localize the Rift storms, a few short sharp shocks..." John continued more to himself than Jack.

Jack hadn't been paying much attention to John's movements until that point, but he suddenly realized what John was doing. *He's messing with the Rift manipulator!* "Don't touch those controls!" Jack yelled.

"Oi! I'm working here," John said, tapping his wrist strap.

Jack felt intense pain as an electrical shock entered his arms and coursed through his body. "If you don't want that again, keep quiet," John warned menacingly.

Jack groaned as his body throbbed with pain. "So, I think we're ready to find a vantage point," he heard John continue to mutter to himself. "Bit more power."

"Hey!" Jack called out desperately as John said, "And, we're all set."

"Whatever you're planning," Jack said through gritted teeth, "We're going to stop you," he snarled.

"Oh," John said, turning to look at him. "Okay."

He walked towards Jack. "Go on then. Stop me."

Jack struggled against his restraints, but it was futile. "I hope you can," John continued, and there was something in his voice that Jack didn't understand. "Really," John added.

Again Jack got the impression that he was missing something. "No?" John shrugged nonchalantly. "Alright," he continued, reverting back to his all too familiar facetious tone. "Let's go get ourselves a good view."

John picked up the machine gun and turned it on Jack. Once again he felt a tearing in his chest and the world went black.

When he came to again, John was dragging him up a flight of stairs. John kicked open a door and dragged him through it. Jack was still trying to get his bearings as he was being pulled along by John. They were on the roof of Cardiff Castle. "What the hell are we doing here?" he asked, struggling against John.

"Now this is a good view," John said, throwing him down on the ground.

Jack realized that he was free and made a move towards John. Pain surged through his body as electricity emanated from his wrist strap. "I told you, no struggling," John said calmly.

Jack howled in frustration. He looked at John. "I can make things right with you," he pleaded.

"You don't understand. You can't ever make this right," John stated.
Once more, Jack had the impression that John was silently sending a message, but he didn't understand what it was.

He listened as John spoke to his team. He felt relieved to hear all of their voices in turn. *They're all okay! Thanks the gods.* He didn't know what John had planned, and he had a feeling it wasn't good, but at least his team was still alive. *Still alive and still fighting. We're going to stop him!*

His momentary confidence faded and was replaced with apprehension as he watched John take out a mobile Rift manipulator. "What are you doing?"

"I'm sorry," John said to him before he spoke to the team again. "Now… Cardiff! Isn't it pretty? Doesn't it twinkle so? Take a good look."

Jack pulled himself up to standing position with some difficulty. "Remember this," John went on, "Because it all goes so quick."

Jack turned around and looked at John with dread. *What are you planning?* he asked silently. And then his question was answered as the city around him started to explode. Each explosion tore through Jack's soul as if it was his body that was suffering the damage. He felt his heart breaking.

"You've destroyed the city!" Jack raged, sickened by the devastation of Cardiff.

"Jack, hold me," John said, leaning against his chest.

Jack ignored him, too preoccupied with the scene around him to notice or care. "What have you done?" he yelled.

"It's okay. It's all going to be okay," John said.

Then Jack realized what was happening as he saw the familiar golden glow in front of them. John had created an opening in the Rift. "Stop!" Jack started struggling against John's grip. "Get off me."

But it was too late. He felt a familiar tug in his chest, and he knew that they had stepped through time.

Jack opened his eyes to find himself blinded by sunlight. He stood up and looked around. He was in a barren field, and he could feel the customary after effects of time travel. John approached. "We're safe," he said, "Now, before you do anything rash, you have to hear…"

But Jack wasn't listening. *I don't have time for this! I need to find my team! I need to be there with them!* He strode towards John and threw a punch. "Take us back now!"

"No way," John said, feeling his face for blood. "We have to be this far away to escape the trigger signal."

"What?" Jack asked in confusion.

"Look at it! Go on," John held up his arm with the Vortex Manipulator. Jack grabbed it and looked. "It's bonded to my skin. I can't get it off. Open it."

Jack pulled back the flap. "Whoa!"

"Ninth generation detonator," John explained.

Jack took a step backwards, "You're a walking bomb!" he exclaimed, pointing at John.
John laughed ironically. "Add to that a surveillance circuit, to monitor my every word and action, and he has me doing anything I'm told. 'Cause if I don't... boom! I'm not my own man. I thought you'd see that. But oh, no. You're so self-obsessed you thought I'd want to blow up your stupid city, when I could be experiencing seventeen simultaneous pleasures in the Lotus Nebula!"

Some of John's behavior was starting to make sense to Jack. *I knew he was trying to tell me something. What's going on here?* "Uh-oh," John said, peering behind Jack. "Just run."

Jack rolled his eyes, "Oh please! That is the oldest trick in the book."

"Jack?" A familiar and yet unfamiliar voice said from behind him.

Jack turned to see a young man striding towards them. *No, not just any man, that's... it can't be, can it? Is it possible? "Gray"?"
My apologies to everyone who wanted a different outcome here, but I can only fix so much without getting too far away from canon… and I'm saving it for the big one.

My endless gratitude to my beta riftintime, for putting up with me. It's a full time job and not for the faint of heart.

Jack watched with shocked fascination as his brother who he lost so many years ago, strode forward. All thoughts of John, of the chaos of Cardiff, and of his team fled his mind at the prospect of being reunited with Gray. "I never stopped believing," Gray said as he continued striding towards him. "I always knew we would find each other again."

And then Jack was holding his brother in his arms. Tears sprung immediately to his eyes as he held him tight. "I'm sorry," he whispered, remembering the worst moment of his long life – the moment he let go of Gray's hand.

"Sorry's not good enough," Jack heard before he felt a ripping pain in his chest.

As he began to fall, he reached out to touch Gray's face, knowing that it was his brother who had just fatally stabbed him. He tried to form words, but his mouth filled with blood. Then everything went black.

Jack came back to life with a desperate gasp for air. He reached out and felt someone there. Ianto? Gray? "Better if you don't struggle," he heard John's voice whisper to him. "Remember the Ceryneian assignment?" John continued as he hauled Jack to his feet.

Jack barely registered John's words as his situation came roaring back into focus. Gray... Here... Alive... He killed me... He had John bring me here... It was all Gray. He looked around at the desolate vista. Where are we?

He watched John bend down and pick up a pair of cuffs. He moved towards Jack. "Hold still now," John said, looking into his eyes.

The Ceryneian assignment... I remember that one. We chased the Ceryneian through time and space for almost a year. A slippery bastard, the Ceryneian, nearly impossible to capture with a talent for trickery and entrapment. But its salivary glands produce a potent anti-carcinogen. Problem is, you have to take it alive... We worked out a way of finding each other anywhere in case one of us was caught in one of its traps... Why bring that up now?

Shaking his head in an attempt to clear it, he turned his attention back to the young man... his brother, so broken and destroyed. His heart sank as his eyes took in Gray's scars and disfigurement, realizing that he'd overlooked them before in his excitement at seeing his brother again. What did he have to endure to survive? I'm to blame for his suffering... He felt John shackle his feet, but realized that it didn't matter. Nothing could tear him away at this moment. "I looked for you," he said to Gray as he docilely held up his hands to be cuffed. "I searched for you for years. You were my first thought, every day."
"What were you expecting?" Gray asked, whipping around to glare into his eyes. "Hmm? A loving reunion? Absolution? Me to say, 'It's okay, brother, I forgive you."

Again the images of that fateful day came back to haunt him. "Those creatures, they lived to torture," Gray continued. "They kept us just on the verge of life. I'd lie there, hemmed in by corpses, praying to become one. Because you… let go… of my hand, remember?"

As Gray spoke, the memories flashed so vividly in Jack's mind that the color drained from his face. He was my responsibility. It's my fault. I let him go and everything he suffered from that day forward is my fault… "If I could swap with you, I would," Jack was barely able to get those words out.

"Remember it again," Gray said, touching his chest as though willing him to relive those terrible moments. "I believed you'd come, but you never did. How long before you gave up, hmm? Months? Years? Decades?"

Jack was forced to live through his darkest fears. Everything that he was most afraid of had manifested into his reality. All the thoughts he'd tortured himself with for years were being confirmed by his brother's words. It was worse than he'd imagined, and Jack began to despair. It's my fault! I can't deny it's my fault. What can I do to make it right? Nothing can change the past, no matter how deep my regret or how much guilt I feel. I can't take back that moment in time. I can't take his pain away. I am completely helpless. "What do you want from me?" he managed to ask.

"I want you to suffer. I want your life." Gray practically spat the words at him. Then he took a step back. "This is Cardiff," he gestured around him. "27AD. The city will be built here, over the next two thousand years. Your grave will be the city's foundations. Your blessing of life becomes a curse. Each time you revive, with a throat full of earth, each time it Chokes you afresh, and you thrash on the edge of death, you think of me."

"All right, calling a halt now I can't let you do this," John interjected.

Jack let out a yell of surprise as he suddenly felt himself falling. He hit the ground with his back and looked up to see Gray and John staring down at him. "Fill the grave," Gray ordered John.

"No way," John replied.

"Then the detonator on your arm gets activated," Gray snapped.

Jack caught John's eyes and gave him a slight nod indicating for him to do as Gray had ordered. This is my punishment. It's no more than I deserve and I accept it, Jack thought calmly. He saw John flash him a half smile, kiss a ring on his finger and throw it down to him.

"What's that," Gray asked.

"It's, er… sentimental value," John replied.

The Ceryneian mission… Jack thought. We found each other by using etheric particle signals… And then he understood John's message. He took one last look at Gray's bitter, implacable, and revengeful expression. This is my penance for what I did to you, he told his brother silently. Then he closed his eyes. He, too, had spent some time in the Lotus Nebula. He let his body relax and focused on his breathing.

There was a part of him that wanted to panic. How long would he be buried there? What kind of condition would his body be in when he was finally found? But he refused to give into hysteria. He needed to make reparations for the part he played in Gray's fate. Everything that Gray had suffered and everything that his team and Cardiff were suffering was a direct result of him losing hold of
Gray's hand. *He was my responsibility. I was supposed to protect him.*

He wanted to atone for his sins. He wanted to pay restitution for the havoc Gray had wrought on Cardiff. He wanted to forgive Gray for what he'd done in his thirst for vengeance. But more than anything, Jack wanted to forgive himself. He wanted redemption. *When I wake again, I will have suffered the punishment and made my amends. Tabula rasa…* He focused on those two words as his breathing slowed. *Tabula rasa…*

He felt the cuffs unlock, and somewhere in the back of his mind, he realized that they must be time locked, but it didn't matter anymore. He couldn't move. As the minutes wore on, he forced his mind to acknowledge and release any lingering uneasiness as he had been taught to do. His mind started to fold in on itself. He was vaguely aware of the earth piling on top of him and a crushing weight on his chest, but the impression moved further and further away as he slipped into a deep trance.

The next thing Jack was aware of was Alice Guppy and Charles Gaskell from turn of the century Torchwood, staring down at him. Charles had a shovel in his hand. "What's the meaning of this, Jack?" Alice asked with her usual impudence.

Jack took several moments to fully awaken and come to his senses. He was shocked to realize that he had been buried in oblivion for one thousand, eight hundred and seventy-four years. He looked down at his body, surprised to see that his clothing remained intact after nearly two millennia. *What the hell did John do to that ring besides embed the signal?* He made an effort to clear his mind. *Doesn't matter. I need to get to the Hub before I run into myself. The Doctor always said…* When he finally felt strong enough, he slowly stood up and looking at Alice and Charles' incredulous expressions. "This is going to take some explaining," he thought with a sigh.

It took him several long and frustrating hours to convince Alice and Charles to freeze him in the Torchwood morgue, without having to reveal too much of the future, but he finally won the battle. Once again, Jack was suspended in time, but with the help of advanced alien technology, rather than the teachings of a Yogi from the Lotus Nebula.

Jack regained awareness amid a flurry of electronic beeping. He felt the cold steel walls around him. Panic threatened, but was quickly quelled as he recalled recent events. *Well, recent from my perspective anyway. Now where am I and when am I? He reached his hands out and felt the cold steel walls around him. Right…* He smiled a little as his surroundings gained familiarity.

Though Jack had spent almost two thousand years buried beneath Cardiff and another one hundred frozen in the Torchwood morgue, it only seemed like hours ago that Gray had buried him alive. *Gray… I have to get out of here… Now!* He began to pound on the roof of the containment unit.

He heard the door open and felt himself being pulled out. Then Gray's confused face was looking down at him. "I forgive you," Jack told him.

"How did you survive?" Gray demanded.

Jack laughed and sat up remembering how difficult it was to convince Alice and Charles to freeze him. He climbed out of the tomb and faced his brother. "I forgive you, Gray," was his only reply.

He turned away with purpose, intent on finding his team… *If they're still alive,* he thought as a wave of anxiety threatened to overwhelm him and he quickened his pace. *Please let them still be alive.*

"Don't you walk away from me," Gray called after him.

Jack bit back his tears, but he kept walking. He had done his penance. "Don't you walk away from
me!" Gray shouted.

Jack kept walking, knowing full well what he'd have to do if Gray continued to defy him. "Stop!"
Gray ordered from behind him. "Stop!"

Finally Jack turned around, pointing his finger at Gray. "I've forgiven you. I gave you absolution. Now do the same for me!"

"I prayed for death. Those creatures, the things they did to us, because of you, the favorite son, the one who lived, who'll always live. The only strength I have is my hatred for you."

Jack reached out trying to take hold of Gray's shoulders, but Gray pushed him away. "I didn't know," Jack tried to explain. "I didn't realize until it was too late."

"I begrudge you everything. I want to rip it all from you, to leave you screaming in the dark."

Jack's tears flowed freely down his face as Gray spoke. "I will never absolve you," Gray continued. "All of it, it's your fault."

Jack reached out towards Gray again and pulled him to his chest, knowing what had to be done but feeling his heart breaking at the prospect. He had made one last request to Alice and Charles before they had frozen him in the morgue. He reached into his pocket for the chloroformed cloth which had been carefully folded into a small, time-locked container. "I'm so sorry," he mouthed silently before he pressed the cloth over Gray's mouth.

Jack sobbed as Gray struggled, but Jack held on firmly. Gray finally fell into unconsciousness and Jack lowered them both to the ground. He held Gray close and rocked him. "I know. I know, Gray," he said aloud through his grief.

He finally stood, picked Gray up and carried him to one of the empty cells. He quickly grabbed one of Owen's more potent tranquilizers that were stocked nearby and injected Gray. He knew the chloroform wouldn't last very long, and he needed time to find his team. The last thing he wanted was for Gray to regain consciousness. He knew that what he needed to do would be agonizing, but he was unprepared for just how painful it was. He felt an ache inside that he couldn't suppress.

He knew that he was going to freeze Gray. His mind was damaged beyond repair – at least for this time period. Maybe some time in the future... he thought hopefully as he looked back on his unconscious brother before he closed the cell door again. But I have paid my price for the mistake I made all those years ago...

He turned away from Gray to search for his team. He was relieved to find Gwen still in one piece, and his heart leapt at the sight of Ianto. He pulled Ianto close and allowed himself one brief second to revel in the heat of Ianto's body against his, but there was no time for a proper reunion.

He wasn't surprised to find John there. Somehow, he knew that John would come back and try to undo some of the damage he'd done. "Nice use of the ring," he told him. "Thanks," he added sincerely.

"Least I could do," John replied. "Listen, Gray's in the Hub."

"I know," he replied. "It's done."

He and John looked into each other's eyes. John knows how long and hard I searched for Gray. I know he understands... "Let's find the others," he said to them.
Jack allowed himself to believe it was over. Gray was unconscious in a cell. He couldn't hurt them anymore. Ianto and Gwen were at his side. *We just need to find Tosh and Owen, and then this nightmare will be over…*

Jack couldn't have been more wrong. He could hardly register the news of Owen's death before he was watching the life ebb from Tosh's eyes. *No!* his mind screamed in anguish and outrage. *Please, no!*

Jack held Tosh's lifeless body and sobbed.
Ianto leaned against the cold stainless steel cart breathing heavily. His heart was in his throat. Tosh... Owen... He felt sick. His knees were weak. For a moment, he thought his legs would give way beneath him. He put more of his weight on the cart, afraid that he'd fall to the floor. Visions of the carnage at Canary Wharf – everything that he had witnessed and suffered – flashed through his memory and threatened to take hold of him. He swallowed hard at the lump forming in his throat as he struggled to push those memories away.

Tears formed in his eyes and the scene swam before him, then moved sharply into focus as he quickly wiped the tears away. *I have to be strong. Someone needs to be strong. We're not done here. The time for mourning will come later.* He watched in agony as Jack held Tosh's lifeless body in his arms and sobbed. Gwen sat on the floor next to them, holding tightly to Tosh's hand, her other hand on Tosh's leg as tears poured down her face.

*You have to be strong,* he told himself sternly. He closed his eyes and then opened them again. Neither Jack nor Gwen had moved. It was with immense force of will and self control that he was finally able to move his body. He pushed himself off of the cart, standing unsteadily on his feet for a moment. Then when he'd regained his balance, he took a tentative step forward, putting his hand on Gwen's shoulder, and bending down on one knee between her and Jack. He rested his other hand on Jack's shoulder. "Jack," he whispered gently.

Jack put his hand over Ianto's. "Ianto... This is all my fault," Jack cried.

The utter agony in Jack's voice was almost enough to break Ianto's determination and compel him to give way to his emotions. He closed his eyes again and took a deep breath, pushing his anguish deep down inside of him. "Jack," he said, a little more loudly, opening his eyes again. "There are still things to be done. Gray... John... Cardiff..."

Jack turned his face and looked into Ianto's eyes. Jack's face was wet with tears and his eyes were red-rimmed from crying. "Ianto... I can't," he whispered.

Ianto squeezed the hand that was covering his. "You can," Ianto replied, trying to will Jack the strength to carry on, focusing all of his attention and determination on Jack.

They stared into each other's eyes for what seemed like an eternity. Then Jack slowly nodded his head. He gently laid Tosh's body on the floor and tenderly brushed a strand of hair away from her face. Then he got unsteadily to his feet. He reached his hand out to Gwen who looked up at him with her eyes still full of tears. "Gwen," he said, leaning closer to her. "Come on."

Gwen didn't take her eyes off of Jack's, but she held out her hand and clutched his. He pulled her to her feet and she collapsed into his arms. He briefly hugged her back, then he grasped her shoulders and gently pushed her away. "Gwen, we have to finish this," he told her, looking into her face.

Gwen nodded and wiped at her eyes with the back of her hand. Jack put his hand on the small of her
back and led her out of the medical bay. Ianto caught sight of John trailing uncertainly behind them. He watched until the three of them had disappeared from view, then he turned slowly back to Tosh. He bent down next to her. "Tosh," he whispered. "I'm going to take care of you," he said as his tears threatened again to break free. "I promise," he added solemnly, brushing angrily at a tear that had escaped and made its way down his cheek.

He carefully put one of his arms around Tosh's shoulders and the other under her knees. He lifted her petite body easily and laid her down on the autopsy table. It pained him greatly to see her in the place where Owen performed some of his more sordid tasks. Owen… Ianto felt a squeezing in his chest, like a cold hand had taken grip of his heart. Owen… There isn't even a body for us to mourn over…

He felt his legs weaken again, and he leaned heavily on the autopsy table. Nausea welled up inside him and he swallowed down the bile, frantically trying to control his churning stomach. He took Tosh's limp hand in his and stroked her skin with this thumb. "Tosh," he said in a low voice. "What am I going to do without you and Owen?"

Once again, he felt himself teetering on the edge of control. He wanted desperately to give in to his anguish and break down. He wanted to cry, to scream, to rage, to throw and break things. He wanted to tear his hair out by the roots. He longed for the satisfaction and freedom of giving way to his emotions. The desire to let go was so close, he could feel himself start to give way. He began to shake uncontrollably. His teeth chattered. He was coming undone.

He looked at Tosh as the tears started to pour freely from his eyes. He could almost hear her voice remonstrating with him; "Ianto, there's work to do. Now pull yourself together and get it done."

He almost smiled through his tears and willed himself to pull it together. "I know Tosh. You're the consummate professional. I'm not being very professional right now, am I? You wouldn't approve."

He stroked her cheek, and wondered if he'd ever done that when she was alive. "You were my closest friend, after Jack," he said sadly. "I don't know if I ever told you that. I'm sorry I never said…"

He leaned down and kissed her cheek. "I just promised you that I'd take care of you," he told her. "And I wouldn't want it to be anyone but me."

He wiped his face with one of Owen's clean cloths and tossed it aside. Then he took another cloth and ran it under some water. He turned back to Tosh and began to gently wipe away the blood.

He deftly and skillfully washed the blood off of Tosh's body, and then changed her into the scrubs in which all Torchwood employees were preserved. He spoke softly to her the entire time, explaining to her each of his actions before he performed them. He did his best to maintain her dignity when he was changing her clothes. He treated her with the utmost respect and reverence, as though she were still alive to judge his professionalism.

When he was finished, he looked down at Tosh, lying still on the autopsy table. Tosh looked so youthful and small in the scrubs. "You were so young," Ianto whispered to her. "Owen was so young. Both of you were too young to die… Everyone dies young at Torchwood. I'll probably die young too. It's what you were always trying to tell me, Tosh. Live for the moment, because you never know when the moment will be gone."

He wiped away another tear. "I'll try to remember, Tosh. I hope I've done okay here," he said, indicating her body with a motion of his hand. "I'm sorry I couldn't do the same for Owen."

He placed her body in the plastic body bag and kissed her forehead before he zipped the bag closed.
"I promise I'll mourn you properly," he told her as he rolled her to the lift that they used to lower the bodies into the morgue. "But we still have to clean up this mess. I know you'd want us to focus on saving the city before we do anything else."

He pressed the button to lower her body into the morgue, and then he walked quickly downstairs. An irrational part of him didn't want to leave her alone in the morgue unattended to. He retrieved her from the lift and rolled her to the drawers. "I have a nice spot for you," he told her. "I want to put you down lower so I can sit here and talk to you," he said as he pulled open one of the bottom drawers. "I hope that's okay."

He placed her body delicately on the metal table of what was to become her tomb, but he couldn't bring himself to close the drawer yet. He sat down on the floor, drawing his knees up and leaning his head back against the wall. He unzipped the top of the bag again, so he could look at her face. "Tosh," he said softly. "I don't want to let you go."

His eyes filled with tears again and he let them slide freely down his face. "I could always talk to you, and that's often hard for me – to find someone I can talk to. I'm not much of a talker. You know that. But you were easy to talk to, and you always gave me good advice."

"I wish you were still here to talk to me… So much has happened… Like I told you earlier, things have been strained between me and Jack. And now… well, he was buried under Cardiff for… God knows how long. What does that do to a person, Tosh? What must he have suffered? How did he escape? How long was he down there? How did he get back to this time? How did he maintain his sanity?"

Ianto let his head fall into his hands. "And a selfish part of me wants to know what this means for us…"

"Ianto?" Jack's voice came over the comms that Ianto forgot he was still wearing and interrupted his thoughts.

Ianto quickly wiped his eyes. "Ianto? Are you there?" Jack asked into his ear.

Ianto swallowed and tried to pull himself together. Then he tapped his earpiece. "I'm here, Jack."

"We need you, Ianto. We've got a big clean-up job on our hands."

"I'll be right there," Ianto replied.

He looked back at Tosh's face, so peaceful and beautiful in death. "I've gotta go, Tosh. Work to do as usual. I'll come back and visit as often as I can."

Once again, Ianto kissed her cheek. Then he zipped the bag closed for the last time. With sheer force of will, he made himself close the drawer of Tosh's final resting place. "Goodbye, Tosh," he whispered.

Then he turned and walked out of the morgue. They still had a city to put back together.

Ianto, Jack, Gwen, John, with help from Rhys, Andy, and the police, fire and emergency services departments spent a grueling twenty hours dealing with the fallout of the bombs. The work seemed endless, but finally they had done enough to decide that Torchwood could step back and let the other city departments take over. Gwen went home to Rhys, and Jack, Ianto and John went back to the Hub.

"Give us a moment," Jack said to John as they walked into Jack's office.
John put up his hands. "Oh, okay. I see. You love birds need a minute to yourselves. Take your time, unless of course you two fancy an orgy?"

"Out!" Jack ordered pointing a finger at John.

"Can't blame a bloke for trying," John mumbled as he turned and walked out of Jack's office, slamming the door behind him.

Ianto leaned wearily against Jack's desk and crossed his arms. He wasn't sure what to expect. He and Jack hadn't exactly been on the best of terms before this, and they hadn't really had time to talk with everything that had happened. He looked at Jack who was pacing around his office. Finally Jack stopped in his tracks and looked at Ianto. "I need to take care of Gray," Jack began.

Ianto opened his mouth to offer to help, but Jack held up a hand, so he closed it again. "And I want John's help, not yours."

Ianto felt like Jack had kicked him. Something of his feelings must have shown on his face because Jack said, "It's not you, Ianto. It's just that… well, Gray is my past, and John is my past, and the three of us, we have a history together."

Ianto nodded his head, trying to bury his hurt. "I'll be going then," he said as he headed for the door.

"Ianto," Jack called after him.

Ianto turned around and looked at Jack. Jack took two steps forward and then he was holding Ianto in his arms. "I can't fall apart yet, and if you're there with me, I might," he said into his ear. "You know me too well."

Ianto nodded his understanding. He, too, felt that if he spent time with Jack now, he might also give way to despair. Jack was someone in whose company he could show his emotions with impunity. God knows I've fallen apart around him before… He gently pulled away from Jack. "We'll talk later," Jack said.

He kissed Ianto briefly but tenderly on the lips. "Give me a couple of hours to take care of Gray and see John off."

Ianto nodded again, and then he turned and left Jack's office. He headed towards the cogwheel door, not even glancing in John's direction. "No orgy then, Eye Candy?" John called after him.

Ianto rolled his eyes, but he didn't respond. He opened the door and walked out of the Hub. He took the lift up to the Tourist Office and walked out into the cool night air.
Chapter Notes

Thanks to the incredibly talented riftintime.

It was with mixed feelings that Jack watched Ianto walk out of his office. It was Ianto who had given him the strength to carry on after Tosh and Owen's deaths. He had been sobbing over Tosh's broken body, and he had felt completely desolated. Even now, thoughts of Tosh and Owen made his stomach start churning, and tears formed in his eyes. He quickly wiped them away.

"I didn't think I could go on," he reflected, remembering the utter anguish and hopelessness he'd felt in that moment. After everything that happened... John bombing Cardiff, being buried for... He shook his head to clear his thoughts. He wasn't ready to face that reality yet. Losing Owen and then Tosh... again the tears formed in his eyes and he roughly brushed them away. Holding her when she... he shook his head sharply again. But then Ianto looked into my eyes, and it felt like he was pouring his strength into me, willing me to go on... And suddenly I found that I did have the strength... There was work to do, and I know Tosh and Owen would have wanted me to carry on and to help put Cardiff back together.

But Gray... that's a different story. Gray is my past, and Ianto is my present, Jack thought as he quickly descended the ladder into his bunker. He'd managed a quick shower and change before he'd run out to lend a hand to the broken city, but that was over twenty hours ago, and he was feeling grimy again. Besides, he thought as he turned on the shower, I need some time alone. Haven't had any of that yet. He quickly undressed and stepped under the hot spray of water.

Trying to let his muscles relax under the heat of the shower, his thoughts turned back to Ianto. He had seen the look of pain cross the younger man's features when he had asked him to leave, and he felt terrible about it. But I'm not sure I'd be able to do what I need to do with Ianto there... I hope he understands... Besides, he thought as he lathered his body with soap, things haven't exactly been great between us... I was on the verge of ending it, after all, wasn't I? He did betray me again... But all of that seems so far away now... Two thousand years ago, to be exact... Jack trembled, and quickly repressed those unwelcome thoughts. Where does that leave us? Where do we go from here? And what will we do without Owen and Tosh.

Jack realized that he'd been standing totally still, completely lost in thought. He was furious to discover that he was crying again. Pull it together Harkness, he chastised himself. It's not over yet. With determination, he pushed all of the painful thoughts to the back of his mind. As horrible as it was to admit, he had a great deal of experience in losing loved ones. The curse of being immortal, he thought with derision. He clenched his fists. Don't go there, he told himself sternly. You need to focus on Gray. It's time to close that chapter of your life, and it's long overdue. He finished bathing, got out of the shower, shaved, and quickly dressed in black trousers and a dark blue shirt accompanied by his airplane cufflinks. As an afterthought, he added his black vest with the blue satin backing and clipped his watch fob into place, dropping the timepiece into the vest pocket.

Then with a brief glance in the mirror and a quick adjustment to his hair, he decided he was ready to face the world again. He climbed up the ladder and found John sitting in his chair with his feet propped up on his desk. "You know, if you needed someone to wash your back..."
Jack cut him off by violently swiping John's feet of his desk so that they fell heavily to the floor. He wasn't in the mood for John's repartee. "Get up. I need your help."

"I knew you couldn't live without me," John said as he stood up and sauntered towards Jack, a lascivious grin on his face.

Jack held his hand up against John's chest, stopping him in his tracks. "I need your help with Gray," Jack clarified.

John's expression quickly changed from leering to serious. "Right," he said with immediate comprehension. "Whatever you need."

For all of John's obnoxious bravado and selfish duplicity, Jack knew that he could depend on John in this situation. "What can I do?" John asked gravely.

"I need you to help me move him," Jack replied, turning from John and heading out of his office. He didn't turn around. He knew that John was following him. With a strong sense of purpose, Jack strode towards the cell where he'd left Gray. He knew that Gray couldn't be allowed his freedom. His mind was too broken and his soul too shattered for Jack to even hope that he could be rehabilitated. But Gray had spent most of his life in imprisonment, tortured beyond all endurance, and Jack couldn't let him spend one more waking moment of his life in captivity. Jack thought back to The Year that Never Was and shuddered. And that was only a year, he reminded to himself, remembering how shattered he had been after that experience. What would you be like if the torture had lasted longer? What if it had gone on interminably for years and years? What if you had witnessed and suffered the horrors that Gray did?

He suddenly felt so overwhelmed that he stopped in his tracks and leaned heavily against the wall. Blood pounded in his ears, and he broke out into a sweat. His vision clouded over, and for a moment, he thought he would lose consciousness. He fought back wave after wave of dizziness.

He felt a hand on his back and a familiar voice whispering his real name. It had been a long time since he'd heard that name said aloud. It snapped him back to reality. His vision cleared, and he took several deep breaths.

"Why don't you let me do this?" John asked softly.

The pounding blood in his head faded into the background, and Jack felt his heart rate slow to normal. The Hub came sharply into focus. His determination returned, and he stood up straight. "No. I need to do it."

He glanced at John, who was looking at him with concern. "Please," Jack added.

John nodded, and together they walked to Gray's cell. They carefully carried Gray up to the main level of the Hub. When they reached the top of the stairs leading down to the medical bay, Jack said, "I've got it from here."

John helped shift Gray's weight onto Jack and stood back as Jack made his way slowly down the steps. Jack gently placed Gray's unconscious body into the cryo-freezer. Then he knelt down next to him. "I wish you could have forgiven me," Jack whispered to his brother. "I'll find a way to help you... someday. I promise. And don't worry about the cryo-freezer. I've been frozen myself. You don't even know that any time has passed. It's like going to sleep and waking up the next morning. I'll find a way to fix this."

He stood up, intending to start the freezing process, but he couldn't take his eyes off his brother. /
searched for you for so long, he thought, bending down over Gray's unconscious form. I finally find you, and now this...

He continued to gaze at his brother's face, so peaceful in his oblivion. If only I could offer you that peace when you're awake... I wish there was something more I could do, but this is the only thing I can think of... Maybe someday... he tenderly stroked Gray's cheek.

He heard John's footsteps descending the stairs, and he was suddenly grateful for John's company. John knows how long and hard I looked for Gray... "My whole life I was looking for him," he said, "Now I have to lose him all over again."

"You cryo-freeze him, and then what? Wake him up in a hundred years and he's miraculously better? Because that's not going to happen," John said callously.

Jack recoiled at John's words. That wasn't what he wanted to hear. "Maybe killing him would be the release he needs," John blatantly continued.

Jack's head snapped around to face him, his anger surging forward. "There has been enough death," he stated with conviction.

He turned his attention back to his brother. "You didn't struggle," John said with less antagonism and more compassion. "When I buried you. Like..." he paused. "You were allowing it."

"It was my penance," Jack responded honestly.

John took two steps closer to Jack. "It's not your fault."

Jack looked into John's eyes, and he saw the frankness in his expression. He knew John was speaking honestly, and somehow, it eased Jack's conscience. John was rarely genuine, but when he was, it was sincere.

I can do this, Jack told himself. He leaned down and kissed Gray's forehead. Then, straightening up again, he used his wrist strap to begin the cryo-freezing process. He closed the door of the lift, kneeling down and leaning his weight against it for a moment, as he was momentarily overcome with sorrow. Goodbye Gray... for now at least... one day, I promise.

Then Jack decided that he was ready to get back to his life. He stood abruptly and turned to John. "Need help with those Rift predictions?" he asked, the insinuation obvious in his tone.

"A lot of this planet I haven't seen. You like it so much, I thought I might take a look. Maybe see you around," and there was a tiny smirk on John's face.

Jack began to walk past John dismissively, but John put his hand on Jack's chest, stopping him. He leaned in and kissed Jack on the cheek. "I'm sorry," John said, looking into his eyes, "For your losses."

Before Jack could think to respond, John had broken eye contact and was walking away. Jack watched him go, feeling that it wouldn't be the last time they ever saw each other. He turned back and contemplated the lift door he'd just closed on Gray's frozen body.

He needed to go down to the morgue and put Gray into a proper resting place, but he was going to wait until he was sure John had left the Hub.

Half an hour later, Jack was sitting on the floor of the morgue, having properly secured Gray's body. He sighed wearily, realizing that he was finally alone. He'd thought that he would relish some time to
himself, but instead, he felt empty and forlorn. *I wish Ianto was here...*

And almost as though he’d been summoned, Jack heard Ianto’s soft footsteps coming down the hallway. He looked up to see Ianto striding towards him. He’d evidently showered and changed as well. *You’re a sight for sore eyes,* Jack thought with relief.

Ianto paused uncertainly, several feet in front of Jack. "I, er..." Ianto started, but Jack patted the floor next to him with a faint smile.

Ianto stood for a moment looking at him, but then he walked forward and slowly lowered himself to the ground next to Jack, stretching his long legs out and crossing them at the ankles. Jack had imagined that once he was alone with Ianto, he would break down and let loose all of the emotions he’d bottled up in order to get through the day. Instead, he found himself speechless.

He leaned his head down on Ianto's shoulder, and Ianto put an arm around him, resting his chin on top of Jack's head. They sat there silently, both of them dry-eyed. Jack realized that he didn't need to talk – words were insufficient. He just needed Ianto's comforting presence.

Jack was unaware of the passing of time as he sat leaning against Ianto. He was too overwhelmed to even begin to sort through his feelings. He was emotionally exhausted. They were eventually interrupted by the beeping of Jack's phone. He pulled it out of his pocket. It was a text from Gwen that read: "On my way in."

Jack silently held up the message for Ianto to see. They looked into each other's eyes. "Work to do," Ianto whispered.

Jack nodded and smiled briefly. He got to his feet and held out his hand to Ianto. Ianto grasped it, and Jack pulled him up. Without letting go of Ianto's hand, Jack started walking back towards the main level of the Hub.

It was agony to clear away Owen and Tosh's things. All three of them felt wretched as they mutely sorted and packed away the belongings of their deceased colleagues and friends. They had all been crying off and on as they worked in silence. Jack took care of Owen's property, pausing to hug his white coat to his chest as he once again broke into tears. Gwen was organizing Tosh's desk, and Ianto was updating the Torchwood employee files to reflect their deceased status.

The atmosphere was heavy with grief, and the silence was deafening. So, when Tosh's voice erupted over the computer speakers, it shocked them all. "Okay. So... if you're seeing this, I guess, I'm... well, dead. Hope it was impressive! Not crossing the road or an incident with a toaster."

Jack couldn't help but laugh. It was so very Tosh.

"I just wanted to say... it's okay. It really is. Jack, you saved me. You showed me all the wonders of the universe and... all those possibilities. And I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Thank you."

Those words meant more to Jack then he could ever possibly describe. *Thank you, Tosh, for saying that.*

"And Owen, you never knew."

Jack felt like he'd been kicked in the gut.

"I love you. All of you. And... I hope I did good."

Tosh's final words gave Jack the reassurance he needed to move forward. "Now we carry on," he
said with determination.

"I don't think I can, not after this," Gwen whispered.

Jack put his arm around her. "You can," he said with conviction.

He put his other arm around Ianto and held them both close to his body. "We all can," he continued with even more certainty. "The end is where we start from."
Ianto remembered Jack's words over the long weeks that followed, whenever he felt things becoming too difficult to bear, or he felt he would break down from the strain of it all. At the time that Jack had said them, his words had rung out through the painfully empty Hub. They'd seemed to echo off the walls. In that moment, Jack had found the strength that neither Ianto nor Gwen had been able to find – the strength to carry on.

Ianto had hoped that they would find time to properly mourn Tosh and Owen, but as they began to pick up the pieces of the shattered Torchwood team, they realized just how much Tosh and Owen had contributed. There absence left gaping holes in the team, and although the three of them worked relentlessly to try and compensate for their loss, Torchwood was broken.

Ianto was clever himself with computers, so he tried his best to fill in for Tosh, but talented though he was, he just didn't have her innate genius. Gwen and Jack tried to share the work that had previously been Owen's responsibility, but although Jack had some medical knowledge from his service in various wars, he wasn't a doctor. But he taught both Gwen and Ianto a thing or two about autopsies, and they all did their best. Torchwood continued to limp along.

It took over a month for them to be able to cope with the volume of work that used to be handled by five people. But eventually they fell into a routine of sorts. It was a grueling time for all of them. Gwen barely saw Rhys unless he happened to be lending them a hand. Ianto spent so much time at the Hub that he finally decided to give up his flat altogether. He was never there and began to wonder if he would ever go back. He was needed at Torchwood. His moving into the Hub had nothing to do with his relationship with Jack. As a matter of fact, he and Jack had seemed to have drifted farther apart after the tragedy instead of being drawn closer together. It was simply a matter of convenience. Ianto's life was Torchwood. He had nothing else. He knew he would never have anything else, and it seemed absurd to keep up the pretense.

So he informed Jack one day that he was moving out of his flat and asked if he could have one of the abandoned rooms in the Hub's basement to claim as his own. Jack barely acknowledged the statement. He just nodded tiredly and said that it was probably for the best. Then he walked away to let Ianto make the necessary arrangements. "Chose any room you want," was Jack's parting words.

Ianto felt that there should have been more discussion between them, but he was too tired and too stressed to give the subject further attention. He was moving into the Hub because it was necessary, not because he and Jack's relationship had achieved a deeper level of intimacy. If anything, we've gone back to square one, he thought to himself as he watched Jack's retreating form. But that doesn't matter right now. What matters is that we carry on. Nothing that's happened before matters now. 'The end is where we start from.'

So Ianto made himself a place in the Hub basement where he could retreat to when necessary. However, he spent little time there. He usually fell asleep either at his desk or on the Hub's sofa. He
no longer went down into Jack's bunker, other than to replace his dry cleaning or collect the laundry. He had silently resumed his role as Jack's butler, and nothing more.

He and Jack had spent one night together – the night of Tosh and Owen's death – where they had practically ripped each other's clothes off and scratched and bit at each other, both of them desperate to feel something other than pain. But it had been the last time they had touched each other sexually. Almost by silent consent, they had ended their physical relationship.

They were all exhausted. The three of them barely had a moment to rest before something new threatened the breakdown of Torchwood or the extinction of the human race. It was endless. There was no time for Ianto to indulge in his feelings of loss for Jack. There was a greater burden on him. Any pain he felt about losing his lover and friend was overshadowed by his determination to keep Torchwood running.

Jack had retreated into himself after the tragedy. He became completely closed off. Ianto could no longer even sense his presence. He had become the consummate leader and role model, but he was no longer a friend to either of them. He had distanced himself, not only from Ianto, but from Gwen as well. He spent many nights away from the Hub, and neither Ianto nor Gwen knew where it was that he went, or who he was with. He had stopped confiding in Ianto, and Ianto had eventually stopped asking.

Ianto didn't know if Gwen had challenged Jack about his behavior. It seemed out of character for her not to say something to him, but Ianto never heard her mention it. If she had confronted Jack, it had been out of Ianto's earshot. Gwen had found comfort in her husband, and Ianto knew that she and Rhys had become closer since they'd lost Tosh and Owen, though the couple spent less time together. But Ianto was completely alone. He had even reverted to the impassive, emotionless, servant's demeanor he'd had when Lisa was hidden in the bowels of the Hub. He, too, had retreated into himself.

"What's going on between you and Jack," Gwen had asked him one day. "It seems that you and he… well, you don't seem to spend that much time together anymore," she had said softly. "Is everything okay?"

"I don't know, Gwen. I don't think there is a me and Jack anymore," Ianto had responded bitterly.

Gwen had looked at him for a long time. She looked like she had wanted to say more, but something in Ianto's expression seemed to stop her. She finally said, "Look, I don't want to force you to discuss something you're clearly uncomfortable with, but I'm here if you ever need to talk."

Ianto had thanked her and quickly changed the subject. He appreciated Gwen not pushing him. It was out of character for her not to pry, and Ianto realized that she must have grown up a bit. He felt greater affection towards her after that. And although he never confided in her about Jack, he did feel more at ease in her presence. After all, Jack had abandoned her too, at least emotionally. In that they could silently commiserate.

Ianto mourned the loss of Tosh and Owen in his silent and stoic way. He would sometimes go and sit by Tosh in the morgue and talk to her. It was the only time he would allow himself to give voice to his growing estrangement from Jack, and the only time he would give himself permission to feel anything at all. On the surface, he was the exemplary employee – hard working, tireless, dependable, and ever present. Privately, he was falling apart.

A little over three months had passed when Ianto, worn out and emotionally drained, slid down to the floor of the morgue next to Tosh. "I don't know how much more of this I can take, Tosh," he said wearily.
He leaned his head back against the cool steel of the drawers. "I don't think Jack has spoken to me other than to give me orders in over two weeks. And it's usually by phone or over the comms."

He sighed heavily. "I don't know what happened. It's like after you and Owen died… he just disappeared. Almost as though he's become less of a person and more just a shadow of a leader, a ghost of the man we once knew. You once told me that I make him more human, Tosh… I guess I'm not doing a great job of that right now. Not even I can reach him…"

Ianto paused and rubbed his face with his hands. "I'm so tired, Tosh. I keep thinking about leaving – about quitting Torchwood, letting Jack retcon me back to nappies, and going on with my life, oblivious to everything. But how could I leave now? We're barely managing as it is, and sometimes we don't manage at all and have to call in UNIT. You can imagine how Jack feels about that! And how could I allow myself to forget you and Owen and Lisa and everyone else that died at Canary Wharf. It's for all of you that I keep enduring this torture, because that's what this is – torture."

Ianto dropped his head into his hands. "I miss him, Tosh. But I can't even begin to figure out where to go from here. I don't even really know what happened to us…"

He paused again, reaching over to lightly touch the metal drawer housing Tosh's body. "I wonder what you would say if you were here," he continued in a low voice. "What kind of advice you would give me… You'd probably tell me to stop whining and go and talk to him… But what do I say? How do I even begin? Jack almost never sleeps at the Hub anymore. I don't know where he goes, or who he's with. I don't even know if he's found someone else or if he's just drowning his sorrows in whatever random warm body he can find each night…"

"I'm ashamed to admit that I followed him one night. It wasn't my finest hour. But he just went up to a rooftop and stood there for hours. I eventually gave in and left. If he found someone to spend the night with later, I don't know… I don't think I want to know. It's probably better that I don't. I don't think I could handle it right now…"

Ianto was silent as his last words stirred up the pent up rage he had held onto for so long. "And I hate him for it," he spat out. "I hate him for distancing himself from us when we need him the most. And I hate him for abandoning me without so much as a word or a backward glance."

Tears sprung into Ianto's eyes, and he angrily wiped them away. "I won't cry over him," he said through clenched teeth. "I refuse to shed tears over him. He's a selfish bastard. We're all hurting. We all miss both of you. And I know he blames himself for your death – yours and Owen's. But that's no excuse. We're still here. Gwen and I are still here. And I still care…" he broke off.

"But I have to let that go," he said after a pause. "I have to keep fighting for you and Owen and Lisa… 'The end is where we start from'… that's what Jack said after we saw your message to us. I guess I didn't realize that he meant it was the end of everything. and we're starting over as though the past never happened. Because I'm beginning to realize that that's exactly what he meant…"

"Ianto," Jack's voice broke into his monologue.

"Speak of the devil," Ianto muttered before he tapped his earpiece. "Jack?"

"Weevil sighting at the docks. We need you."

"Right," Ianto acknowledged before he tapped the earpiece again, switching it off.

"Well, Tosh," he said, getting to his feet. "Duty calls. Work to do and all that. Yet another Weevil chase. Just another day at Torchwood. I'll come and see you again soon."
He straightened out his suit and began to walk away, but he stopped and turned back toward the morgue drawers. "Thanks for listening, Tosh. I miss you."

Then he walked quickly back to the main area of the Hub to carry out Jack's orders.

The Weevil chase let them into a crowded nightclub and out again towards the docks. Jack's mobile rang, and he told Gwen and Ianto to take charge of the Weevil while he spoke to the caller.

Ianto and Gwen tried to corner the Weevil, who in its alacrity to escape from them, jumped into the bay. Jack sauntered up just as the Weevil's fingertips disappeared into the black water. "Where's the Weevil?" Jack demanded.

"It's, er… It went into the Bay," Gwen responded apologetically

"Oh… Can Weevils swim?" Jack asked with confusion, peering into the dark water at their feet.

"Apparently not," Ianto answered concisely. Then realizing he could desperately use a mug himself, asked, "Anyone for coffee?"

"Right, coffee. Good idea," Jack replied. "Then Torchwood's going to Switzerland."

Switzerland? Ianto thought with astonishment.
Jack stood on the rooftop ledge of Capital Tower staring out over the twinkling lights of Cardiff. His coat billowed out behind him like a cape as he stood with his toes edging into nothingness. It had been a month since Tosh and Owen had died, and it had been a long month for Jack. He had found one moment of strength to carry on after seeing Tosh's message, then he had buried his thoughts in work and focused on leading his remaining two team members to the best of his ability.

Without any long, emotional conversations or outbursts of anger, without any words at all, his relationship with Ianto had regressed into that of employer and employee. Gone was the intimacy they had shared, and even more regretful, gone was the friendship they had so carefully built. It was as though an invisible wall had sprung up between them, and Jack knew that it was his fault.

Owen and Tosh's death had been a wake up call for Jack. He had begun to put aside the feelings of isolation his immortality had caused him and let himself get involved again. He had allowed himself to forget that he would have to suffer the loss of everyone around him, and he had let himself love again. And now he was paying the price for his carelessness. He had lost them – Tosh and Owen. And he would lose Gwen… and Ianto. He knew that the pain he was feeling now would be nothing compared to the despair he would feel when he lost Ianto, and the thought was too much to bear. He wouldn't, he couldn't allow himself to feel… anything. Otherwise his pain would pull him under. He had lost so many people… so many lovers and friends. Losing Tosh and Owen just brought it all back home to him. It was a lesson he had learned over the course of his centuries of life, and a lesson that being with Ianto had made him momentarily forget. But with the death of his two friends, it all came roaring back into focus. He couldn't get involved. He had to retreat. So, he had distanced himself from the remainder of his team. He had put up that wall. Tosh always said that Ianto made me more human… and that's the problem. I'm not – not really… And I can't forget that again…

He hadn't done his best to avoid a confrontation with Ianto. He spent nights away from the Hub if Ianto was there. He would stand on a rooftop – sometimes all night. He would drive around the city for hours, and if he needed an hour or two of sleep, he would get it behind the wheel of the SUV. He didn't allow himself to take comfort by finding a warm and willing body. He didn't deserve that comfort. It's my fault they're dead. It's all my fault… I'm a dangerous person to be around, and Tosh and Owen paid the ultimate price. I can't let Gwen and Ianto pay as well.

He didn't want to face Ianto alone. Even the thought of it made him shift uncomfortably on the rooftop ledge. If he did, his resolve might waver. He had done his best to keep every subsequent interaction with Ianto strictly professional. I can't do it… I can't face losing him… not after Tosh and Owen. I can't lose someone else. This is why I don't get close… this is why I've avoided a relationship for so long… I allowed myself to forget… He had allowed himself to think that he could be with Ianto and come away unscathed. He was wrong.

And to make matters worse, Ianto had told him that he was giving up his flat and moving into one of the empty rooms in the Hub. Jack knew that it made sense from a logistical point of view. But he couldn't help feeling that it just made everything so much worse. Not only is he giving up the last...
vestiges of a normal life, but it also means he'll always be there. I can't get away… However, he was
too stunned at the moment to comment on Ianto's declaration. So he had agreed and decided to put
off dealing with the situation. Though he knew it wouldn't work. They couldn't both live at the Hub
with the growing estrangement between them. Something's gotta give…

If Jack were completely honest with himself, he would have to admit that Ianto's lack of fight for
their relationship hurt him deeply. Jack knew that he was the one to pull away, but Ianto hadn't put
up much of a fight. He hadn't put up any fight at all. He let me go… Jack thought with a heavy
feeling in his chest. I suppose I wasn't worth that much to him after all… but it's just as well…

For one night, Jack had allowed himself to lose himself in Ianto – to bury his pain in the arms of the
other man. But after that, he had pulled away, both emotionally and physically. He hadn't touched
Ianto again. It's better this way, he told himself for what must have been the hundredth time since the
death of his friends.

Jack had tried to create some semblance of closure for the loss of Owen and Tosh by holding a
memorial service for them. It had been a small affair with only the three of them in attendance, plus
Martha Jones who had driven down from London to pay her respects. However, their mourning was
cut short by the inevitable Rift alarm, and shortly afterwards, Martha had been called back by UNIT.
We aren't even allowed time to mourn them, Jack thought bitterly as he remembered the abbreviated
memorial service with regret. It's just not fair, to any of us…

There were times when his resolve to stay away from Ianto wavered. Sometimes Ianto would look
into his eyes, and his gaze seemed to penetrate so deeply that Jack felt himself weakening. He longed
to toss caution to the wind and to throw himself into Ianto's arms. He yearned for the comfort that he
knew Ianto would give him. But you don't deserve comfort, he scolded himself. And Ianto is much
better off – he's much safer without you. Besides, he reasoned with himself, you're just going to lose
him anyway. Might as well get used to it now.

Jack paused as he watched the tiny cars moving down the streets far below him. Everything seems so
small and insignificant from here. It's easier to set myself apart from the world from this vantage
point. And that's how I need to be from now on – set apart. I'm better off alone… But I miss him…

For a moment, tears threatened to fall from his eyes, but he quickly pulled it together. It's for the best,
his resolve reinforced. It's the right thing to do. I need to be their leader and their captain, and
nothing more. I need to keep them safe, and the less they have to do with me and my problems, the
better. Torchwood is dangerous enough without the added ghosts from my past. And there are so
many ghosts…

He had not only distanced himself from Ianto, but from Gwen as well, and while Ianto hadn't said
anything, he could hardly expect Gwen to remain silent. She had confronted him shortly after the
interrupted memorial service. Gwen had suggested that they finish the service, but Jack had refused.
He hadn't wanted to go through it again. Gwen had insisted, and he had angrily shut her down and
retreated to his office.

Gwen had stormed after him about an hour later. Thankfully, she had waited until Ianto was out
gathering supplies for the Hub before she had burst into his office with her features set in a mask of
fury. "What the hell is the matter with you, Jack?" she'd seethed.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Gwen?" he had replied calmly.

It had been a bold faced lie. He knew exactly what she was talking about, but he hadn't wanted to
have that conversation. "Don't think I haven't noticed the change in you," she'd said through
clenched teeth. "You barely speak to me except to give me orders. You practically ignore Ianto, and
he has no idea why. I thought you two were together, I thought he meant something to you, and I
thought you and I were friends. What's gotten into you, Jack?"

Jack had looked at her steadily. "Gwen, it's my job to keep you safe and to run Torchwood to the
best of my ability, and that's what I'm doing."

"And that entails you treating us like employees and nothing more, does it?" Gwen had retorted with
a moment of perception.

Jack had leaned back in his chair. "What do you want from me, Gwen?" he'd asked reluctantly.

"I want you to stop behaving like a complete arse!" she'd retorted. "We all lost Owen and Tosh,
Jack. Not just you!"

And with those final words, she had stormed out of his office and slammed the door behind her.

Jack winced as he remembered their confrontation. It was true that they were suffering too, but Jack
knew that his situation was different from theirs. He let out a heavy sigh. "What you don't realize
Gwen, is that I will have to mourn you as well… and Ianto," he whispered into the wind. "And I
can't… I just can't."

Jack stood on the roof with the same arguments playing over and over again in his mind until the sun
broke across the horizon and the city took on the hazy pink of morning. Then, with another sigh, he
slowly turned and stepped down from his perch. He reluctantly left the rooftop, took the elevator
down to the ground, got into the SUV and returned to the Hub.

Jack spent many more nights standing on the roof of one or another of Cardiff's various buildings
over the next month. He hadn't yet confronted Ianto about moving into the Hub, nor had he had any
further conversations with Gwen. He caught her constant disapproving glares, but he chose to ignore
them. He was certain that he was doing the right thing. But he knew it couldn't last forever, and he
could feel the tension in the Hub rising steadily.

Another month passed with little change in the situation. It was a constant and steady stream of alien
threats, and Jack used their increased workload as an excuse to avoid any confrontations with Gwen
and especially with Ianto. He found excuses to stay out of the Hub and away from the younger man.
He kept telling himself that he would have a talk with Ianto when things were less chaotic, but it
never happened. And things were reaching a breaking point.

So it was with immense relief that when his phone rang in the middle of a Weevil chase one night,
Martha Jones' voice was on the other end of the line asking for their help. Switzerland, Jack thought
as he flipped his phone closed. That will make a nice change. And we can all do with a change.

He hurried to find Gwen and Ianto, and tell them the news. "Right, coffee. Good idea," Jack said in
response to Ianto's suggestion. "Then Torchwood's going to Switzerland," he added with what
enthusiasm he could muster.
Ianto sat next to Gwen in the first class compartment on the plane from Cardiff to Geneva. He stared at the seat in front of him, where Jack sat alone, with a lugubrious smile on his face. It was so symbolic of the past two months – Jack separating himself from him and Gwen, taking on the role of leader, and treating them like subordinates.

His eyes bore into the back of the seat as though he were trying to look through it and into Jack's soul, as he thought back over the previous two months. His heart ached at the thought of his loss. He missed Jack. He missed their conversation, their banter and blarney, their intimacies and confidences. He missed the companionship and comfort and support. He missed his lover, but more poignantly, he missed his friend.

He hadn't known what to do, how to react, what to say to Jack. He had sunk into his own form of depression after the death of Tosh and Owen, but as time passed, he began to see the world again. He still missed them and felt their loss deeply, but he knew that neither of them would want him to go on mourning them. He had to move forward. The only problem was, he didn't know what forward was anymore. Everything around him seemed to be in shambles. And by the time he had sat up and took notice, Jack seemed so very far away. He was a ghost, a shadow of his former self. And even worse, Jack felt like a stranger. *He's no longer my Jack…*

Ianto had been of two minds. Part of him wanted to grab Jack and shake him, and demand to know what the hell was going through his head. The other part of him – the one that ended up winning – had been stunned into inertia. He no longer felt certain about his significance in Jack's life. Sometimes he wasn't even sure if Jack liked him very much anymore. It seemed that the things that used to amuse Jack, that made him smile affectionately and indulgently at the younger man no longer amused him. Even worse, those traits that Jack had claimed to find so endearing – Ianto's sharp humor and quick wit – seemed to only annoy Jack now. *Is this what it feels like when someone stops caring about you?* he asked himself with a devastating ache in his heart. *It's horrible…*

But what Ianto found even more painful was that it seemed like the light had gone out in Jack. *If Jack was happy, perhaps it would be more bearable, but it's like he's... empty inside.* Jack still made the occasional inappropriate comment or innuendo, but it didn't take someone of Ianto's empathic abilities to sense that it was contrived. Jack's bluster was thoroughly unconvincing. He had lost his sense of humor, his joie de vivre, and his exuberance. Jack was on autopilot.

And Ianto had tried, in his own way, to reach Jack. He had attempted to engage in Jack in their familiar banter, but his attempts were met with silence, or they were ignored altogether. He had tried coming to Jack's office after hours, offering to order take away for dinner, but Jack always made some excuse to leave the Hub. And then something had happened that made Ianto finally resign himself to their estrangement.

He had discovered, as he was going through the employee records, that it was nearing the anniversary of his second year of working for Jack. On the day in question, he went to Jack's office after Gwen had left for the evening. Jack had been sitting at his desk reading through files. He hadn't
acknowledged Ianto's presence, he'd just continued working in silence. Ianto had leaned against the doorframe watching Jack for a moment, feeling his heart swelling with unrequited affection. *I miss you,* he'd thought, reaching out with his mind as though trying to bridge the vast chasm between them.

"What is it, Ianto?" Jack had asked steadily, without looking up.

Ianto had shifted uncomfortably at the notion of having been caught staring. He'd suddenly felt tentative about his conversation topic. "I was just looking through the employee files the other day…" he'd hesitated uncertainly.

When Jack hadn't responded, he'd gone on hurriedly, "Today marks the beginning of my third year at Torchwood Cardiff."

Jack had finally looked up from his work. But his eyes had focused not on Ianto, but at some distant point across the room. His expression had been inscrutable. "Huh," Jack said.

Ianto had shifted uncomfortably again in the silence that followed. "Wow," Jack continued after a moment. "A lot has happened in the last two years."

Jack's eyes drifted back down to the file on his desk. He'd turned a paged and continued his reading. Ianto's lips had parted to respond, but no words were forthcoming. He had hoped for some recognition of his tenure at Torchwood, and some sign that his presence held meaning for Jack. Finally he'd managed, with a weak smile, "Still… no regrets."

"Good," Jack had replied tersely as he turned another page of the file.

Ianto had remained motionless as he felt the waves of disappointment crash over him. He had just wanted some word or acknowledgement of the past that they'd shared, of the intimacy they'd had, of the friendship they'd so carefully cultivated, of the fact that they had been lovers off and on for the better part of two years. He'd just wanted some hint that Jack held him in esteem. Even a 'glad you're still here' would have sufficed… anything…he had Jack had said nothing. Ianto had stared stupidly at him. He had been too stunned to rage or even to be sardonic.

Then suddenly, Jack had jumped up, grabbed his coat, and with a mumbled, "See ya later," he walked out of the Hub.

Ianto had watched Jack leave with his mouth hanging slightly open. He'd felt like Jack had stuck a knife in his chest. Part of him had wanted to run after Jack, knock him down and beat him senseless. Part of him had wanted to walk out of the Hub and never return. What he had ended up doing, when he could finally force his legs to work again, was to find a corner of the archives which were free of CCTV cameras, slide down onto the floor, and give way to the tears he'd held onto for so long. He'd felt ashamed of himself, but he couldn't stop once the flow had started. He'd cried for all of his losses – for Owen and Tosh, for Lisa, and finally for Jack. *All that we've been through… all that we've been to each other… and all he has to say is, 'a lot has happened in the last two years?*' Ianto's hands had clenched into fists as the fury welled up inside him.

But as quickly as the tide of anger had risen, it fell away again and left him feeling empty and resigned. *What can you do with someone who is determined to shut you out? You can't beat down their defenses. You can't beg them to let you in again. You can't demand their renewed confidences. And how hard do you try? How many times do you let someone push you away before you finally give up and move on?*

Eventually Ianto had dried his eyes, stood up, straightened out his suit, dusted his trousers, and
turned his attention back to work. He had been grateful for his skill at donning a professional façade. And thankfully, there was always work to be done at Torchwood.

Ianto was brought back to the present by the sound of Jack's voice. "Did I ever tell you about the time I flew from Venus to Mars? You should have seen that flight crew. All those hands. All those pincers…"

His eyes focused on Jack's face, which was peering at them from between the passenger seats. For the briefest moment their eyes locked, but Jack quickly averted his gaze. "Yes, thank you, Jack," Gwen commented. "Anyway, I found out a few things about this particle physics lab. Over ten thousand people work there from a hundred different countries."

Jack began to give them some background about the case. Damn, I should have come up with a witty reply to Jack's remark, but I was a million miles away. I should have at least given him an eye roll. I must be losing my touch, Ianto mused.

He tried to rejoin the conversation. "So what exactly are they trying to do with this Collider thing?"

"They're looking for the Higgs particle" Jack responded.

"The what?" Gwen asked.

"The fundamental particle of existence," Jack explained. "Look out the window. See those clouds?" "Yeah?" Gwen replied.

"Well, what do they look like?"

"Candy floss," Ianto said quickly.

But Jack went on as though he hadn't even spoken. "They look solid though, yeah? But they're not."

_Candy floss, Jones? That's the best you can come up with? No wonder Jack's no longer interested in you!_ Inwardly shaking his head with disgust, he tried to focus on Jack's explanation of the CERN research. "They've got a really big camera," he summarized.

"Not exactly," Jack replied, and he went on to explain about the particle collider.

At least he acknowledged that I spoke, Ianto thought bitterly as Jack and Gwen continued the conversation.

The plane had landed as they talked, and Martha Jones met them at the airport. Ianto had to admit it was good to see Martha again, and under less painful circumstances. But it also made him feel melancholy. "Nice to see you, Martha. How have you been? Since the… funeral?"

His statement was indelicate, and he knew it the moment the words left his lips, but Martha easily smoothed the waters, and Jack quickly asked her for details of the case. Martha told them about the patients with highly unusual symptoms who had subsequently disappeared, her friend Julia’s disappearance, and the patient in sickbay that she wanted them to examine. When she told them that she had a plan to get them into the infirmary unnoticed by UNIT, Ianto had no idea what to expect until a UNIT guard said, "Mr. Ianto Jones… Ah. The Ambassador for Wales?"

"Oh, hello. That's me," Ianto fumbled in confusion.

He couldn't help but be amused by Jack's incredulous, "What?" and even more amused by Jack's
reaction to Gwen being introduced as his wife, and Jack as their personal assistant. It took all of Ianto's stoicism and reserve not to laugh out loud. And he couldn't deny that some of it was spiteful. *You can be the subordinate for once, Jack. See how it feels,* he thought maliciously.

But Ianto's amusement was short lived as he stared at the patient named Leon with glowing, transparent skin. He'd seen a lot in his tenure at Torchwood, but this was a new one even for him. "That is disgusting," he commented with distaste.

When it became apparent that the tunnels under the compound were ground zero, Ianto and Gwen went to investigate. Ianto found the environment cold, dark, and damp. "This is no job for the Ambassador for Wales," he quipped.

Ignoring him, Gwen said into her comms, "Okay. Jack, we're in the tunnel."

"What can you see?" Jack asked through their earpieces.


"And cold," Ianto added with disapproval.

"Is Ianto moaning?" Jack asked.

"Oh yes," Gwen confirmed.

Ianto smiled, and he suddenly felt warmer. That little bit of banter was like a light in the darkness. For a bright, fleeting moment, it was as though the past two months hadn't happened. Ianto heard something of the old affection in Jack's voice, and the old teasing. It gave him something to hold onto, insignificant though it was. And there was no way he could have known how much he was going to need that tiny piece of reality to cling to.

The exchange elevated his mood, and he found himself being whimsical. *We are on bicycles riding around in dark tunnels underneath CERN, looking for an alien that steals neutrons from the human body… It doesn't get much more surreal that this.* He tapped his earpiece. "Gwen? Come in Gwen."

"What is it?" Gwen responded.

"My bike's got a bell," he said playfully as he rang the bell to demonstrate.

"I'm very pleased for you," Gwen replied with bemusement, but then she let out a sigh. "Oh, it's getting cold."

"Yeah, same here. You see anything?"

"Nope."

He was about to suggest that they abandon their search to rejoin Jack and Martha when he heard an unnerving voice calling, "Ianto."

He stopped his bike and tapped his earpiece. "Gwen?"

"What is it?" Gwen responded.

"I think I found something," he replied into the comms. Then he called into the darkness, "Who's there?"

Again an unworldly voice answered. "The dead. The dead. We're coming back."
"You hear that?" he asked Gwen, feeling his adrenaline level rising.

"I'm on my way," Gwen reassured him.

"Quick as you can, yeah?" he replied.

He tried to cover his growing disquietude with cheek. He addressed the voice. "Afternoon. So, you're the dead then? Not an alien creature?"

"I was always alien to you, coffee boy. You told me I was a good doctor," Owen's voice responded. Ianto felt his stomach knot. "Owen? Is that you?" his voice quavered.

He heard Tosh's voice calling to him, and he began to panic. "You're in my head. That's how you're doing this. You're just particles," he tried to reason.

Then he heard the voice that made his blood run cold. "Help me. Please, Ianto. It's Lisa. Hold me."

"You can't be Lisa. She's gone. They're all gone," Ianto wailed.

Jack's voice spoke into his ear. "Ianto, can you hear me?"

"Yes, Jack?" he replied uncertainly.

"Gwen's on her way. You okay?"

"Erm… yeah… no…" Ianto tried to find his courage. "Sort of."

"Well, that helps. What's going on?"

"It's in my head, Jack. The alien. Talking to me. Saying it's Owen and Tosh and Lisa."

"The dead stay dead, Ianto. They don't come back. It's just an alien, like the weevils. Trust me."

But Ianto no longer trusted Jack. "Ianto Jones, you only need to listen to me, to my voice. So it's just us," Lisa's voice cooed. "That's it. Just you and me. Ianto Jones and Lisa Hallett… Remember how we used to go…"

"Stop," Ianto pleaded.

"… to that Greek restaurant?"

"Stop it," Ianto yelled, pressing his hands to his ears in a feeble attempt to shut the voice out, but it continued.

"And that night you told me you loved me…"

"Stop it!" he repeated desperately. He was beginning to feel ill.

"Ianto, answer me. Where are you?" Gwen's voice was barely audible.

"Ignore her," Lisa's voice commanded. "I'm here for you. I've always been there for you. Come closer. Come to me."

"NO!" Ianto screamed, and his legs gave way underneath him.

He lay on the cold ground, shivering and clutching his head. He no longer wanted to move. He was
no longer afraid. He just wanted to stay there with those he had lost. He has already lost so much…

He wanted to be with those whom he loved and those who had loved him in return. There was nothing left for him with the living. His heart belonged to the dead.

He heard a voice say, "Ianto. Ianto, oh god, can you hear me, sweetheart?"

"Lisa?" he asked feebly.

He was ready to go now. He was ready to go with Lisa. He wouldn't resist anymore. Take me with you… I want to go with you… He realized that someone was pulling at his arm, and his vision cleared. Gwen was trying to take him away from Lisa, from Tosh and Owen. He struggled against her. "Gwen? Let me go."

"What? What are you talking about, Ianto? Come on," she said as she tightened her hold on his arm.

Ianto continued to struggle. "You don't understand," he cried. "They need our help. Let me go to Lisa. To Tosh."

"Come on! I am not leaving you here," Gwen stated resolutely as she tried to pull him up. "Come on."

"I want to be with them!" Ianto protested, trying to pull his arm out of her grip. "I just want them back again."

But Gwen would not let him go. She kept her hold and she pulled. Then he heard Jack's voice. He wasn't really paying attention to their exchange, but he heard Jack say, "Too much talk of death around here, Gwen. I'm not losing you. Now fight. Get out of there. You stay alive."

And then he heard Lisa's voice again. "Jack doesn't care about the dead."

'Jack doesn't care about the dead,' the words echoed through Ianto's mind. Jack doesn't care about the dead, and Jack doesn't care about the living either. Jack doesn't care about me… But then Ianto remembered a teasing voice saying, 'Is Ianto moaning?' And he remembered blue eyes looking into his and strong arms holding him close, and he rallied. That's something worth fighting for… But it might be too late. Too late for us, and too late for me. Jack had gone far away, and I'm dying…

He heard Gwen say, "Look, we're nearly there. Just a few more feet."

But Ianto despaired. "Everything we've seen. Torchwood. The wonders of the universe. And we're going to die in a tunnel in Switzerland."

Gwen scoffed. "What did you imagine? The Bahamas?"

His teeth were chattering and he was feeling sleepy. "So cold. So cold," he murmured.

"Ianto, listen to me. We are nearly out of here, right. Look. Look, according to the map, the exit's near the control room. That's where Jack is. And coffee. You love coffee. Coffee and Jack… Come on, please. Ianto, I can't carry you any further. Please."

Yes, he loved coffee… and he loved Jack. Problem is, Jack no longer cares…

Then there were other voices, and another set of arms were holding him, dragging him away from Lisa and Tosh and Owen. Dragging him back to Jack…

And then he was warm again. And Gwen was there. She was telling him that Oliver Harrington was
dead, that the creature was destroyed, and that he was safe. She told him that she rescued him from certain death. "I dragged you all that way and you don't remember?" Gwen insisted.

"Nope. Can't remember a thing," Ianto lied. It was coming back to him in bits and pieces. "But Gwen?" he continued.

"Yeah?"

"Thank you," he stated sincerely.

Gwen smiled her wide gap-toothed smile at him. "It's okay."

Jack and Martha subsequently joined them, but Ianto's thoughts were still with the dead. The words of Tennyson's 'All Things Will Die' came into his head. He quoted softly, "The stream will cease to flow. The wind will cease to blow. The clouds will cease to fleet. The heart will cease to beat." For all things must die, he finished in his head.

"For all things must die," Jack echoed his thoughts. "Never saw you as a Tennyson man, Ianto."

"We all have hidden depths," Ianto quipped.

He was in no mood for confidences, and it was just easier to banter than to admit how truly distraught he was. He wanted time alone to think. He wanted to get away from this terrible place where he had been haunted by the dead and had been tempted to join them.

He felt immensely relieved when Jack said, "Come on, let's go home."
Jack sat in a first class seat in front of Ianto and Gwen on a plane from Cardiff to Geneva. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back as the drone of the engine surrounded him, obscuring the sounds coming from the other passengers. He sighed heavily. It had been a long two months.

The death of Tosh and Owen had been a wake-up call for him. He had been letting himself get too close, too attached to the people around him. Their deaths had caused him more pain than he was willing to accept. *How could I have let myself care for anyone, when I'm just going to lose them eventually... If I go on like this, how will I live for another two hundred years? I'll go insane with grief...* So he had spent two months trying to shut Ianto out. Every time his mind would drift to thoughts of Ianto, he would force his mind to focus on something else.

He already had the deaths of Owen and Tosh on his conscience. *It's my fault that Tosh and Owen are dead. I killed them. I'm dangerous to everyone around me, and everyone I care about dies... But if they stick with me, they'll die a lot sooner... Ianto and Gwen... I'll have to watch them die too... if not now then soon... And I just can't bare it...*

But there was a little nagging voice in the back of his head, telling him that he had already lost Ianto, and he was already suffering the grief of that loss. He had tried to harden his heart against the younger man. He had willed himself to turn an indifferent eye to the things that had attracted him to Ianto in the first place – his rapier wit and acerbic comments, his fastidiousness, assiduousness, stubbornness, and pedantry. He felt his heart welling with emotion as he thought about those qualities, but he quickly repressed the tide.

*No!* he told himself harshly.

And it wasn't as though his and Ianto's relationship had been easy. They had certainly had their struggles, their arguments, and their misunderstandings. There were a few times where he had been on the brink of ending things. He imagined that there had been those moments for Ianto as well. **Maybe that means something... Perhaps it was never meant to be...**

But he was too old and too wise to accept that explanation. *Love is never easy... At least, not the ones that are worth experiencing anyway... The great loves are always a struggle... Love... the word made him cringe. I can't afford to love. My soul can't take the pain... At least I never told him...*

But instead of feeling relieved at the thought, it made him feel more despondent. *Because I did love him...* He winced and silenced the thought. There was a deep part of him that fought against the choices he was making. But Jack did his utmost to quash that instinct. *He betrayed me three times, he told himself over and over again, we fight, we misinterpret, we disagree... the same argument played again like a broken record. It's too hard. It's not worth it... I can't watch him die... I can't let myself depend on him so much and then lose him...*

He knew he was being unfair. Ianto deserved an explanation. He deserved something from Jack, but Jack knew that if he let himself go, even if it was only enough to have a conversation with the younger man, he would fold. He could barely stand to keep away as it was, but if he gave an inch,
he would find himself in Ianto's arms again. And the longer he avoided a confrontation, the more awkward and difficult it became.

Jack had struggled to carry on, because when Tosh and Owen had died, a part of him had died too. It was as though something inside of him broke that day. It was all he could do to get through each new alien threat. The part of his mind that he was always trying to silence whispered that Ianto might be able to soothe his broken soul, but the whisper was quickly hushed. No, he scolded himself again. It's better this way... He's better off without me. I've always known that...

He had wanted to give in the day that Ianto had announced his two-year anniversary with Torchwood Cardiff. Ianto had stood in the doorway of his office, and Jack felt as though his soul was being searched. It had felt like Ianto was calling to him in his mind, reaching out to him. He had put up all of his defenses and brushed him off. Then he had made a hurried excuse and left the Hub. If he had stayed for one more moment, all of his walls would have come crashing down.

He had found himself a rooftop and stood overlooking the city for hours, letting his tears fall unheeded into the wind. Two years, he repeated in his head. We've been lovers for two years... he wondered if he'd loved Ianto for all that time as well. I miss you, Ianto...

Jack came back to the present when he felt a slight lurch in his stomach and realized that the plane was beginning its descent. He quickly pulled himself together. Putting on a brave face, he turned to Ianto and Gwen. For a brief moment his eyes locked with Ianto's, and he could feel the familiar pain tugging in his chest. He quickly averted his gaze and said with as much cheek as he could muster, "Did I ever tell you about the time I flew from Venus to Mars? You should have seen that flight crew. All those hands. All those pincers..."

He was both disappointed and relieved when Ianto didn't make a snarky remark. "Yes, thank you, Jack," Gwen commented instead. "Anyway, I found out a few things about this particle physics lab. Over ten thousand people work there from a hundred different countries."

Jack began to give them some background about the case, and chose to ignore Ianto when he made a cheeky remark. He had been trying to make it a point to discourage any acknowledgement of intimacy between them by only responding to Ianto when he discussed business. It was difficult, as his heart always warmed to Ianto's banter. But I have to be strong...

The plane landed as they spoke, and Martha met them at the airport. Jack had experienced a moment of happiness when he set eyes on Martha Jones again. "Get ready for the biggest hug of your life, Dr. Jones," he said, embracing her warmly.

She greeted Gwen and Ianto. He inwardly cringed when Ianto mentioned the funeral. It was something he did not want to remember. "So. Tell us. What's going on?" he said quickly after Martha had politely replied to Ianto's question.

He listened to Martha's explanation of the unusual events and was dismayed to hear of UNIT's continued involvement. He wasn't in the mood for diplomatic relations with UNIT. "And you can get us in there? Without UNIT's security guys being alerted?" he asked Martha.

She didn't go into the details about her plan, but it became apparent when the UNIT guard, checking his clipboard, said, "Mr. Ianto Jones... Ah. The Ambassador for Wales?"

"Oh, hello. That's me." Ianto sounded surprised.

"What?" Jack asked incredulously.
He was used to being the boss. This was not at all the way he liked things. *And Gwen's his wife? And I'm just their personal assistant? "Huh?"* he asked with chagrin.

"Yeah, whatever," he said irritably, snatching the pass the guard had proffered.

He was annoyed at having to play the role of the underling. Martha had called for *his* help. He had wanted to fly in and save the day. He wanted to be the hero, just for a moment. His ego needed the boost after all that had happened. He did not want to be ignored, but he tried to remember that they were undercover. *I hate this,* he thought testily.

But Jack turned serious when he saw the state of the man named Leon who was translucent and glowing. *I feel like I've seen this before,* he mused, *I just can't place it…*

The moment Gwen and Ianto were out of earshot, Martha turned to him and asked, "How are you Jack? It's been a while since Owen and Tosh. Last time we talked about it."

"They're dead," Jack replied succinctly. "And I've got to stay strong for the others. I'm fine."

He hoped that would be the end of it, but Martha pressed him. "Fine? I know you, Jack. I know what they meant to you. I know what they meant to me."

"Yep, we're getting through it," he answered, and he meant to change the subject, but before he could stop himself, he started unburdening himself to Martha. "You know how death follows us. Follows me. All the times we try to cheat it, but no one escapes. Just me. Always me… I couldn't save them, Martha," his voice caught over the last few words.

"Jack, I'm so…" she put a hand on his arm. "I am so sorry."

"The best thing I can do is take care of Gwen… Ianto."

But he wasn't taking care of Ianto. He hadn't been. In his determination to separate himself emotionally from the younger man, he'd completely neglected him. *I've been ignoring him and I've left him to cope alone,* he realized. *I've abandoned him again…*

"Don't blame yourself," Martha's words cut into his thoughts. "You can't. What happened to Owen and Tosh – it's not your fault."

*But it is my fault, don't you see? It's all my fault.* Aloud he said, "I recruited them. Showed them a different sky and now…" his voice broke again and he knew that if he continued this conversation, he would fall apart. "Right," he said quickly. "Back to golden boy. Let's see if we can find out what happened to him."

As Martha explained about the neutrons being taken from Leon's body, the nagging feeling that this was all too familiar came to the forefront of his mind. "Oh God," he said aloud.

"You recognize this, don't you?" Martha asked.

"Years ago, well years ago for me, back when I was with the Time Agency, I saw a whole colony go the same way as golden boy. Trust me – it wasn't pretty. There was this creature…" he exhaled audibly. *Maybe it's better that I don't tell her,* he thought, remembering the horror from so long ago. Instead he said, "We'd better tell Gwen and Ianto."

Things began to fit together, and Jack had an idea. *Maybe I can be the hero after all…* He said, "Gwen, Ianto, I need to get to the control room. I know how we can neutralize the creature, but we've got to locate it first, which means you going into the tunnel."
As he made his way to the control room, he heard Gwen's voice through his earpiece reporting their position. "What can you see?" he asked.


"And cold," Ianto added with disapproval.

Jack smiled in spite of himself, and for a moment he forgot the last two months. He asked affectionately, "Is Ianto moaning?"

"Oh yes," Gwen confirmed.

Jack frowned at his momentary lapse. He shook his head sharply and became business-like. "Okay, get scanning. See if there's any trace of the creature. If you find it, call in immediately, and I'll tell you what to do. Don't engage it by yourselves."

He reached the control room. "Professor Johnson, shut it down. Shut it down now!" he ordered.

He had a difficult time explaining who he was and what Torchwood was. "Listen to me. When the Large Hadron Collider was tested back in May, something came through," he stated.

He was becoming exasperated. Too much talk, not enough action. "How long 'til activation, Tom?"

Professor Johnson asked her assistant.

"Twelve minutes and fifteen seconds," Tom replied.

"You're making a big mistake Professor," Jack warned.

Professor Johnson started arguing with him again when Gwen came over the comms, "Jack?"

"What is it, Gwen?" he asked.

"Ianto's found the creature. I'm on my way back to him now," she replied.

Jack barely had time to register her statement before Martha's voice was in his ear telling him that she had found the missing people, all of them glowing, like Leon.

Professor Johnson was still skeptical, and Jack was becoming irritated. "Your test last May let something through to our world, Professor, and far worse is on its way if you don't stop what you're doing right now," he told her.

"It's all pre-programmed. Nothing can stop it. There's nothing I can do," she replied.

Jack let it go for the moment. He needed to know if Ianto was okay. He tapped his earpiece. "Ianto, can you hear me?"

Jack was immeasurably relieved when he heard Ianto reply, "Yes, Jack?"

"Gwen's on her way. You okay?" he asked.

"Erm… yeah… no…" Ianto hedged. "Sort of."

Jack almost smiled. "Well, that helps. What's going on?"

"It's in my head, Jack. The alien. Talking to me. Saying it's Owen and Tosh and Lisa."
"The dead stay dead, Ianto. They don't come back. It's just an alien, like the weevils. Trust me."

But as soon as the words were out of his mouth, he knew they would have no effect. *How can he trust me now? I've broken that trust...* He tried again, "Ianto, listen it's not..." but he was cut off.

He shifted nervously, but he wouldn't allow himself time to panic. He turned his attention back to the professor. He had to convince her that his plan would work. "Right, you're firing two beams of protons at each other, yeah?" he began.

When he mentioned the anti-proton beam facility, Professor Johnson finally began to catch on. "Of course! If I can flip the polarity of the magnets and replace one of the proton beams with anti-protons..."

"They'll cancel each other out and the portal can't open, and we can all live happily ever after," Jack finished for her.

*Finally!* He breathed a sigh of relief. *I hate diplomacy!*

Moments later the door burst open and Dr. Oliver Harrington came in holding Martha at gunpoint, demanding that they back away from the controls. Simultaneously Gwen called him on the comms. "Not a good time, Gwen. I've got company," Jack told her.

"It attacked Ianto," Gwen exclaimed. "He's glowing, he's getting worse! It's coming back for me!"

Jack began to feel his heart pound. *Ianto... "Are you near an exit?" he asked.*

"Y-yes. I can see it. We're nearly there."

"Gwen, I'm gonna have to go. Get out of the tunnel," he told her sharply.

"What if we don't make it?" she asked.

An emotion that he refused to name started to build in the pit of his stomach. *Ianto, glowing...* He couldn't think about Ianto. Not now. He refused to think about it. *Gwen... Gwen had to get them out... "Too much talk of death around here, Gwen. I'm not losing you. Now fight. Get out of there. You stay alive," he practically shouted at her.*

He quickly tapped his earpiece again. He couldn't think about it. He wouldn't. *Not Ianto... I'm not losing him... him or Gwen... Not them too... I won't... I can't...*

Forcing the thoughts to the far reaches of his mind, Jack turned his attention back to Oliver. He and Martha tried in vain to convince him that the voice he was hearing was the alien playing tricks with his thoughts, and not his dead wife. But Oliver refused to believe them, and he ran out of the control room shouting that he wouldn't lose her again. "Martha go after him, don't let him near the Collider," Jack ordered.

"I'm on it!" Martha replied as she ran after him.

"Now, Professor," Jack continued, "We have to reverse the polarity or those creatures will be here for good. And the first thing they're going to find..." he paused for a moment as his stomach knotted. "Gwen and Ianto," he finished.

He pushed his fear away. He was explaining to the professor that they were going to create the Higgs particle as a side effect when Tom exclaimed that Oliver had locked down the tunnels.
He tapped his earpiece. "Gwen, tell me you're clear of the tunnel." And tell me Ianto's okay, he added silently.

Martha replied that she had both Gwen and Ianto, but that Oliver had locked himself in the tunnels. Jack knew it was too late for Oliver Harrington, but he almost didn't care. Ianto and Gwen are safe... It was the only thing he wanted to hear.

He and the professor neutralized the protons, closed the portal to the other dimension, and Jack was able to show her the Higgs particle. He smiled to himself. Not bad for a day's work. Then he went to find his team. He needed to lay his eyes on them and convince himself that they were okay.

He strode quickly to the tunnel entrance, and beamed when Martha said, "Here he is, hero of the hour."

Finally, I get to be the hero! Then, to his surprise, Ianto quoted Tennyson. "The stream will cease to flow. The wind will cease to blow. The clouds will cease to fleet. The heart will cease to beat."

"For all things must die," Jack finished the quote. "Never saw you as a Tennyson man, Ianto."

"We all have hidden depths," Ianto quipped.

Jack smiled indulgently. "You twenty-first century humans with your science, your beliefs and your poetry and... Oh yeah, you're pretty great."

"You say all these things. The human race has to be ready. What do you know Jack?" Gwen asked.

"I know you're worth fighting for," Jack replied sincerely.


"Because you're special. You never stop searching for answers. Sometimes I don't think you know what the questions are but you never stop searching," Jack replied, and he found himself remembering why he had allowed himself to love those around him, despite knowing he would inevitably have to suffer their loss.

"Questions of life and death," Gwen added.

"Yeah," Martha agreed.

"Somewhere out there in that chaos of darkness and light, of science and protons, of gods and stars and death. Somewhere there's an answer. And sometimes I think just asking the question is the answer. And sometimes I think I just..." Jack looked around at the three of them, looking earnestly back at him, and he no longer wanted to be profound and prophetic. He just wanted to enjoy their company.

"I need a coffee," he finished, smiling at them. "Come on, let's go home."
Chapter Notes

Thanks to my wonderful beta riftintime.

As soon as Jack had made the suggestion that they head back to Cardiff, Ianto flipped open his mobile and called the airline to inquire about flight times. After pushing a series of numbers, he was finally directed to the automated voice list of flights from Geneva to Cardiff. Closing his phone he announced, "There's a flight in four hours."

Jack turned to Martha. "Can I tempt you to come back to the Hub with us? We could use the help."

Martha smiled at him. "I'd love to, Jack, but I'd better stay and smooth things over with UNIT. They weren't very happy to discover Torchwood's involvement."

Jack huffed. "I don't know why they dislike me so much! I'm a friendly guy. That cute guard seemed to warm to me."

Gwen snorted. "The dark haired bloke who told you to sod off?"

"Yep, he was definitely flirting with me," Jack said, winking at her.

Ianto and Gwen both rolled their eyes, and Martha chuckled. "You do have a way with people, Jack," Martha said, patting his chest.

"It's my irresistible charm," Jack affirmed, puffing himself up.

Ianto opened his mouth to retort, but Jack continued before he could speak. "Well, how about a drink then? On me."

"I suppose UNIT can wait for an hour," Martha agreed, looping her arm through Jack's.

They hailed a passing taxi and piled in, directing the driver to take them to the Grand Duke Pub on the waterfront. The taxi pulled outside one of the oldest British pubs in Geneva. Jack paid the driver as Ianto, Gwen and Martha climbed out. As it was a warm afternoon, they opted for the seats outside. Ianto offered to go into the bar to get their drinks. As he began to take requests, Martha volunteered, "I'll go with you, Ianto."

"It's not necessary," Ianto remarked politely. "I can manage."

"Maybe I'd just like the pleasure of your company," she said looping her arm through his as she had with Jack's a short while earlier.

Jack handed Ianto his credit card, and he and Martha made their way inside the pub. He placed their order, then leaned against the bar waiting for their drinks to be prepared. "How are you doing, Ianto?" Martha asked, turning to look at him.

"I'm fine. Just a bit tired. You already gave me a thorough physical, doctor," he said with a weak smile.
"I didn't mean physically, Ianto. I meant, how are you doing with everything that's happened. Tosh… Owen… You're the only one I haven't gotten a chance to talk to alone."

Ianto shrugged noncommittally. He wasn't sure that he was in the mood for confidences. "If I know you at all," Martha continued, "You're probably worrying more about taking care of Jack and Gwen than taking care of yourself."

Ianto snorted derisively. "Jack doesn't need me to take care of him, and Gwen's got Rhys…"

He stopped himself. He didn't want to talk about this. He looked at Martha, intending to politely end the conversation, but she was looking at him with such concern that the words died on his lips. Martha squeezed his arm. "What's going on between you and Jack?" she asked carefully.

"Nothing," Ianto replied succinctly.

Martha raised an inquisitive eyebrow at him. "That's just it," he found himself saying. "There's nothing happening. I don't know what changed between us. Suddenly, we just stopped…"

He couldn't think of how to finish the sentence. We stopped what? Shagging? Talking? Being friends? "I wanted to stay there," he continued, more to himself than to Martha, "…with the dead. There's not much left for me here…"

He drifted off. He was becoming maudlin and it wasn't the time or the place. "Sorry," he smiled apologetically at her.

Martha put her hand on his arm and was silent for several moments. "Jack blames himself for Tosh and Owen," she said quietly.

"I know," Ianto replied. "But it doesn't matter anymore. He doesn't want my help, and he's shut me out. You know Jack. I'm sure he's already found someone else."

Ianto inwardly cringed. That was a fear that he hadn't wanted to admit aloud. But Martha shook her head. "I seriously doubt it. I know him, Ianto. He's punishing himself. He feels that he should suffer for their deaths."

"Maybe," Ianto said softly. "But why does he have to punish me too?"

"Ianto, can you imagine what Jack would be going through if it were you who were laying in the Torchwood morgue and not Tosh?"

Ianto looked at her. She was staring intently into his eyes. "He's probably torturing himself with that image."

Ianto didn't reply. He wasn't sure what to say. "He cares about you," Martha went on. "I know he does. He's just not like you and me… He's going to have to watch all of us die some day. The idea must break his heart. I can't even begin to imagine what that must be like."

Still Ianto didn't reply. Martha squeezed his arm reassuringly. "Just don't give up on him, yeah? You're good for him. You're good for each other. Just promise to give it some more time."

She gazed at Ianto, and he knew that she was waiting for him to agree. Finally he nodded. He wasn't sure if he had really promised, or if he was just agreeing for the sake of ending the conversation.

He was saved from any further discussion by the appearance of their drinks. Ianto paid with Jack's credit card as Martha carried off two of the four drinks. Ianto picked up the remaining two and joined
everyone at their table outside.

They spent an hour listening to Jack and Martha reminisced about their adventures with the Doctor. Gwen occasionally added to the conversation, but Ianto remained silent. He was physically and emotionally exhausted. He sipped his beer slowly as the others chatted, only partially taking notice of the conversation around him.

There was regret in Jack's voice when he checked his watch and announced that they'd better get to the airport. Martha added that she should get back to CERN to report to UNIT. They got up and hailed the first taxi that passed. As the car pulled up, Martha hugged Gwen and then turned to Ianto. She embraced him warmly and whispered in his ear, "Don't give up on him."

Ianto nodded solemnly. He knew it was a promise that he might not be able to keep. Then Martha turned to Jack. "Remember, if you ever get tired of working for UNIT…" Jack began.

"You'll be my first phone call," Martha assured him.

They embraced and Martha pulled away, looking up into his face. "What, no kiss this time?" Jack asked with a cheeky smirk.

"I think you get plenty of that, Jack," Martha said, patting his shoulder.

Ianto politely opened the car door for Martha, watching as she lifted up her chin and leaned close to Jack's ear. Ianto couldn't read the expression that crossed Jack's features, but it was obvious that her words had affected him. She and Jack looked into each other's eyes for a moment, and then she turned away and slid into the taxi.

Ianto frowned as he closed the door behind her. What was that all about? he wondered as he watched the taxi pull away from the curb. As another taxi approached, he hailed it and the three of them got in, directing the driver to the airport.

All three of them were silent on the flight back. Ianto was lost in thoughts of his conversation with Martha and his experiences in the tunnels of CERN. Martha may think she knows Jack, but I know him better. He's done with me… The same thoughts played over and over again in his mind. It's all well and good for me not to give up on him… but I think he's already given up on me, and there's nothing I can do about that…

A short flight later, they disembarked and headed through the Cardiff airport to the parking garage where they'd secured the SUV. Jack dropped Gwen off at home, and then turned the car towards the Hub. He and Jack didn't speak as they drove through the darkened streets of Cardiff, and Ianto began to find the silence uncomfortable. He almost longed for a Weevil sighting in order to break the tension, and he found himself scanning the streets looking for a stray.

However, their drive to the Hub was devoid of alien life forms. Ianto was surprised to find that he regretted the lack of action. At least it would be something we could do together… As the water tower came into view, Ianto thought, he's going to drop me off in front and then drive off into the night to do… whatever it is that he does all night… He sighed inwardly, setting his face into its impassive mask so that it didn't reflect his disappointment.

He was beginning to feel angry with Martha for giving him hope. Why couldn't she just leave it alone? Nothing has changed in two months. Why would it change now? As the SUV approached the Plass, Ianto steeld himself for Jack's dismissal, so he was completely taken aback when Jack drove past the water tower and into the Torchwood garage. Despite his confusion and surprise, Ianto managed to keep his face expressionless as he reached to open the door. "Ianto," Jack's voice halted
his movement.

Ianto turned his head to face Jack. "I'm glad you're alright." Jack said quietly, without looking at him.

Ianto nodded. He waited for Jack to say something else, but the silence hung in the air. He turned again towards the door when he remembered his promise to Martha. *I'll give him one more chance, he told her silently, and then it's finished.* Mentally preparing himself for rejection, he asked haltingly, "Are you hungry?"

"I am, actually," Jack replied with a brief smile.

Ianto managed to hide his astonishment. "I could order us some takeaway," he continued hurriedly. "Chinese? Pizza?"

Jack chuckled. "How about a pizza?"

Ianto returned the smile. He flipped open his mobile and ordered a meat feast pizza for the two of them from Jubilee. Then they climbed out of the SUV and walked silently into the main area of the Hub. "I'll just go upstairs and wait," Ianto said after he had put their luggage down.

As he sat in the tourist office waiting for the delivery, he started to get nervous. *Are we finally going to talk? What will he say? What am I going to say? Where do we begin? How did this all happen? Where do we go from here?*

His thoughts were interrupted by the delivery of the pizza. He paid for it and took it down into the Hub, realizing that his heart had begun to beat faster. "Jack?" he called out. "Where do you want to eat?"

"Office," Jack's voice replied.

Ianto walked into Jack's office and set the pizza down on his desk. Then he went about gathering plates and napkins. "I think there are some beers in the refrigerator," Jack said as Ianto set down the plates.

Ianto obediently went to the refrigerator and took out two beers. Then he pulled a chair up and sat across from Jack. They each ate their first piece in silence. Then Jack said, as he picked up another piece, "What happened down in the tunnels?"

"What do you mean?" Ianto asked.

"You said you saw Tosh and Owen… and Lisa?" Jack prompted.

"Yup," Ianto replied, taking another piece of pizza.

"And you almost died," Jack continued.

"Yup," Ianto said again. *Not like you were that concerned about me,* he thought resentfully. *Maybe Gwen should have just left me there…*

"Gwen told me that she couldn't get you to come with her. She said you wanted to stay there. She said that she had to drag you out," Jack pressed.

"I was under the influence of an alien," Ianto murmured looking down at the piece of pizza he'd just laid on his plate. Suddenly it didn't seem very appetizing.

"Ianto?"
Ianto looked up and into Jack's eyes. "Why?" Jack asked.

"Why what, Jack?" Ianto replied, not sure he wanted to have this conversation.

"Why did you want to stay?" Jack insisted.

Ianto shrugged, breaking eye contact. He thought about all of the things he could say. *Nothing's been the same since they died. We haven't been the same. You abandoned me without a word… but the only thing he managed to say was, "I miss them." And there's nothing left for me here,* he continued silently.

"I miss them too, Ianto." Jack stated.

Ianto jerked his head up in astonishment. It was the first time that Jack had spoken of his feelings about the loss of their colleagues. *At least, the first time he's spoken of them to me… "And I blame myself,"* Jack added bitterly.

"I know," Ianto said softly. "But you shouldn't. No one else does."

"It was my past that cost them their lives," Jack said, throwing down the piece of pizza he had been holding.

"It might have easily been the Rift," Ianto replied.

Jack snorted. "But it wasn't. It was John… and Grey…"

"We're all on borrowed time, Jack, and we've all been lucky. Their luck just happened to run out," Ianto reasoned.

"That's not acceptable," Jack roared, slamming his fist on the desk. "They were my responsibility. I recruited them, and I got them killed."

Instead of sympathizing with Jack, Ianto found himself growing angry. His heart started to pound, and he felt the blood rush to his face. He gripped the edge of the desk with both hands, leaned forward, and looked straight into Jack's eyes. "They chose to work for Torchwood, Jack. We all did. You didn't force any of us. And I know both Tosh and Owen were proud of the work they did. To sit here blaming yourself for their demise, sulking and feeling sorry for yourself, shutting out what's left of your team, and being a general arse… it's an insult to Tosh and Owen's memory. You're belittling their choices, their actions, and their valor, and I'm ashamed of you."

Jack stared at him open-mouthed, but Ianto didn't care. He was irate. All of the anguish, bitterness, disappointment, and hurt he'd been suppressing for so long had finally boiled to the surface.

He pushed back his chair, got to his feet, and stormed out of Jack's office, slamming the door behind him.
Jack sat on the plane back to Cardiff letting the white noise from the engines block out the sounds around him. He found it soothing, and it helped to ease his troubled mind. He reflected on their mission at CERN, about nearly losing Ianto, and about Martha's parting words to him. It had been fantastic to see Martha again, and to have a chance to reminisce about the Doctor. Remembering his various adventures with the Time Lord had eased some of his burden, and it had left him feeling nostalgic for a time when he wasn't in charge, and therefore not responsible for anyone else.

However, there was another part of the story that they hadn't discussed – the Year that Never Was. It had been a while since Jack had thought about that horrible time aboard the Valiant. It seemed so far away now. In Jack's unnaturally long lifetime, it was but a moment that had passed since he'd been held prisoner for an entire year. But somehow his mind had managed to suppress those memories, dissociating itself, protecting itself from the anguish. Talking with Martha had brought the vivid memories to the surface again. And what he'd remembered, despite all of the suffering, was that his thoughts of Ianto had helped him to maintain his sanity during unspeakable torture.

*It seems like I've forgotten that,* Jack thought to himself as he allowed his mind to briefly recall that terrible year. *So much has happened that I've lost sight of things.* Martha's parting words to him hadn't been astounding words of wisdom. *Not that Martha Jones isn't capable of astounding wisdom,* Jack chuckled to himself. But rather, they had been bold and direct. She had whispered, "Whatever it is that has gone wrong between you and Ianto, fix it. You need him, Jack. More than you know."

He had looked at her with a mixture of astonishment, outrage, and belligerence, but there was another emotion there as well, one he couldn't quite deny. He'd felt grateful to Martha. It was as though someone had finally granted him permission to accept a tiny bit of happiness, no matter how fleeting. And it was someone who knew enough about him to discern whether or not he deserved that happiness.

He sighed heavily as he leaned back against the worn leather of the airplane seat. *I don't even know where to begin with Ianto… I don't know if I can fix it… There's too much water under the bridge…* He shifted uncomfortably in his seat and gripped the armrest as he felt himself becoming angry again.

*What does she really know about Ianto and me? Does she know that he has betrayed me three times? Would she still think it was such a good idea for me to 'fix' things?*

Yes,* she would,* he argued with himself loosening his grip and letting his hands fall into his lap. *She would say that it didn't matter, that she was sure Ianto had good reasons, and that it probably wasn't personal… And I know that Ianto never does anything without a good reason…*

He sighed again. *I'll try and talk to him tonight,* he decided. *I'll give it one more chance, but then I'm through, Martha,* he silently told her.

After they'd landed and reclaimed the SUV, Jack dropped Gwen off at home and headed for the Hub. Ianto hadn't spoken a word, and Jack was nervously trying to figure out a way to begin the
conversation with the younger man. He thought of and rejected several opening statements. 'Ianto, we need to talk.' No, that's not good. Too aggressive. Too confrontational. 'So, what are you up to tonight?' No, sounds like I'm trying to pry into his life. 'What happened between us?' No, that's not going to work either… damn, this is harder than I thought.

Before he'd realized it, he was pulling into the Torchwood garage, and he still hadn't come up with a way to begin a conversation. Damn, he thought again, as he turned off the car and stared out through the windshield at the dirt smeared and water marked stone of the underground parking structure.

He hadn't yet decided what to say when Ianto leaned over to open the passenger door. "Ianto," Jack recalled him quickly before he could leave and the moment was lost.

Ianto turned to look at him. Feeling completely flustered, Jack said the first thing that came to mind. "I'm glad you're alright," he said quickly, not meeting Ianto's curious gaze.

"Say something," he told himself. Damn it, say something! But he just didn't know where to begin. "Are you hungry?" he heard Ianto ask him.

Jack felt immensely relieved. He smiled. "I am, actually," he replied gratefully.

"I could order us some takeaway," Ianto continued. "Chinese? Pizza?"

Jack felt so relieved that he laughed. "How about a pizza?" he suggested.

As Ianto went about the business of procuring their dinner, Jack went to his office and paced. He tried desperately to decide on the best way to broach the subject of their estrangement. Nothing he could come up with seemed appropriate. The last thing he wanted to do was start an argument between them. Not after Ianto has suffered so much in the tunnels at CERN. Of course, I don't really know what happened… He stopped pacing. That's a place I could start, he realized, with relief. I can ask him about what happened in the tunnels.

Feeling much more secure about the upcoming conversation, he sat down at his desk. "Jack? Where do you want to eat?" Ianto called out.

"Office," Jack replied as he cleared some of the clutter from his desk to make room for the food.

Ianto entered and set the pizza down in front of him. Then he began to collect napkins and plates. I could really use a drink for this, Jack thought. "I think there are some beers in the refrigerator," he said aloud as Ianto put down the plates.

Ianto returned moments later carrying two beers, which he placed on the desk. Then he pulled up a chair and sat across from Jack. Jack ate his first piece of pizza before he began the conversation. "What happened down in the tunnels?" he asked, trying to keep his voice casual.

"What do you mean?" Ianto queried.

Great, he's going to make this difficult, Jack groaned inwardly. "You said you saw Tosh and Owen… and Lisa?" he said aloud.

"Yup," Ianto replied as he reached for another piece of pizza.

Jack had to suppress the urge to roll his eyes. "And you almost died," he pressed.

"Yup," Ianto said again.
Jack's patience was wearing thin. He said pointedly, "Gwen told me that she couldn't get you to come with her. She said you wanted to stay there. She said that she had to drag you out."

"I was under the influence of an alien," Ianto murmured, not looking at him.

Well, at least it's better than a one-word response, Jack thought. "Ianto?"

He waited for Ianto to look at him, and when their eyes finally met, Jack asked, "Why?"

"Why what, Jack?"

Jack willed himself to remain patient with Ianto and to keep his temper in check. "Why did you want to stay?" he insisted.

Ianto shrugged, breaking eye contact. Jack sighed inwardly. You're going to have to give something to get something, he told himself. He has no reason to confide in you anymore. You're going to have to give him a reason.

Mentally steeling himself, he said, "I miss them too, Ianto. And I blame myself."

Jack couldn't keep the bitterness from his voice. Somehow saying it aloud to Ianto made it more real than admitting his feelings to Martha. "I know," Ianto acknowledged. "But you shouldn't. No one else does."

Jack felt the rage he'd been holding onto break free. He threw down the piece of pizza he was holding in disgust. "It was my past that cost them their lives," he yelled.

"It might have easily been the Rift," Ianto said calmly.

Jack snorted derisively. He knew the disgust he felt was with himself, not with Ianto. But he couldn't keep the anger from his voice. "But it wasn't. It was John… and Grey…"

"We're all on borrowed time, Jack, and we've all been lucky. Their luck just happened to run out," Ianto said, his voice still calm.

Somehow Ianto's rationality enraged Jack even more. "That's not acceptable," he roared, slamming his fist down on the desk. "They were my responsibility. I recruited them… and I got them killed."

Jack could feel the rage pulsing through him. He wanted to throw something, and he eyed the pizza as though it were an enemy alien. He had just decided to give into the impulse to hurl it across the room when he was started out of his outburst of temper by the quiet fury in Ianto's voice. "They chose to work for Torchwood, Jack. We all did. You didn't force any of us. And I know both Tosh and Owen were proud of the work they did. To sit here blaming yourself for their demise, sulking and feeling sorry for yourself, shutting out what's left of your team, and being a general arse… it's an insult to Tosh and Owen's memory. You're belittling their choices, their actions, and their valor, and I'm ashamed of you."

Jack stared at Ianto open-mouthed. Ianto pushed back his chair, got to his feet, and stormed out of Jack's office, slamming the door behind him.

Jack sat staring at the office door for several minutes, too astonished to respond. That wasn't at all how I wanted that conversation to go, was the first rational thought he had after he'd gotten over his initial shock.

He slowly stood, grabbed his coat, and headed out of the Hub. Suddenly, he needed fresh air. He got into the SUV and drove to one of his favorite rooftops where he stood from his towering purchase
until he could make some kind of sense of what had just happened. He was more than shocked by
Ianto's anger. He'd expected Ianto to try and soothe and comfort him. He had not expected the
outburst that he'd received. He almost smiled. *Leave it to Ianto to surprise the hell out of me...*

But as he stood with the wind whipping at his coat and the cold air seeping through the gaps in his
clothing, his initial surprise and anger faded, and he began to examine Ianto's words. *They chose to
work for Torchwood...* 'Well, that's true, but they would have never known about Torchwood if it
hadn't been for me... Tosh and Owen were proud of the work they did...' I'm proud of the work they
did. I wouldn't take that away from them for anything... Maybe I have been forgetting the meaning
of their sacrifice...

Then Jack remembered, with a sad smile, Tosh's parting words on the recording they discovered
after her death. *I just wanted to say... it's okay. It really is. Jack, you saved me. You showed me all
the wonders of the universe and... all those possibilities. And I wouldn't have missed it for the world.
Thank you.*

*How could I have forgotten Tosh's last words? How could I have let my own feelings of failure
disgrace her message? Ianto's right, it is an insult to their memory... And he's right that I've been an
arse... But the hardest thing to hear was that he's ashamed of me...*

Jack felt an overwhelming sadness fall like a weight in his stomach. He had not only lost Tosh and
Owen, but he was losing Ianto as well. *Perhaps I've already lost him...* He felt like he wanted to
burst into tears, but his eyes remained dry. Suddenly, he wanted Ianto's forgiveness more than he
wanted anything else. The desire drove him from his position overlooking the city. He raced back
down to the SUV as though if he ran fast enough, he could leave all of his pain on that rooftop.

He drove back at top speed and raced into the Hub calling out Ianto's name. The Hub was dark and
quiet. He realized that Ianto must have put the Hub into night mode while he'd been away. He made
his way down to the room near the archives where he knew that Ianto had been sleeping. He'd
known for a while where Ianto had set up his living quarters, though he'd never ventured into the
room before.

He opened the door and called Ianto's name into the darkness. Jack couldn't make out much of the
décor, but he could see Ianto lying in a bed across the room. The light from the hallway partially lit
the younger man as he raised his head and called out, "Jack?"

Jack was at the bedside in three broad steps. "Ianto?" he faltered, and suddenly the tears that
wouldn't come earlier began to trickle down his face.

"Jack? What is it? Did something happen to Gwen?" Ianto asked, bolting upright in the bed.

"No," Jack shook his head, trying to wipe the tears away.

But it seemed that the more tears he wiped away, the faster they came. "Jack," Ianto said gently.

Jack stopped rubbing his eyes long enough to realize that Ianto was holding out his hand. Without a
moment's hesitation, Jack clasped Ianto's outstretched hand.

He felt Ianto's gentle pull, and before he could register what had happened, he was sobbing in Ianto's
arms.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my amazing beta riftintime.

Ianto headed straight for the archives after losing his temper with Jack. He was breathing heavily, and blind anger coursed through his veins. Fury clouded his vision, and he cannoned into a bookshelf, sending a stack of books toppling to the floor. "Bloody hell," he exclaimed, rubbing his shoulder and looking down at the mess at his feet.

But rather than pick it up, he turned towards the shelf and started hurling all of the objects within reach across the underground space. "Sodding… Torchwood… and… sodding… Jack… bloody… Harkness!" he yelled, timing his throws to punctuate each word.

A sense of malevolent glee accompanied his childish act, and he started to revel in the destruction he was creating. After several minutes, the shelf was bare. There was an accumulated mess of files, books, alien devices, and various detritus at his feet, but Ianto had to admit that he felt better. He even chuckled a little. "Bugger, now I have to clean this up…" he muttered to himself.

He put his hands on his hips and surveyed the wreckage with a critical eye, as though it were the item's fault for being out of place. "You know what?" he asked the empty room, "I don't feel like cleaning this up."

He turned to the bookshelf, took hold of the back corner with both hands and pulled. The bookshelf teetered on an edge before tumbling over on top of the heap. "There," Ianto said wiping his hands with a satisfied expression. "I'll tell them Janet got loose," he added triumphantly.

And with a noise that sounded vaguely like a "Harrumph," he turned on his heel and headed towards the room where he'd set up his living quarters.

Ianto sat down on his bed with a sigh. His momentary delight from his rebellious act had worn off, and he was left with the memory of the scene between himself and Jack. He regretted losing his temper, but at the same time, he felt justified in his actions. None of this is my fault, he told himself, yet Jack is punishing me as well as himself… and he's being completely selfish. I'm still alive, and so is Gwen. We miss Tosh and Owen just as much as he does… maybe even more…

He eyed the closed door that led back into the archives. I wonder if he'll come after me… I wonder if he even knows where I'm sleeping, he thought, glancing around the small, dark room where he had made his home. Shaking his head with a rueful snort he said aloud, "I'm sure he's on some rooftop by now, brooding and feeling sorry for himself…"

He scowled, feeling the anger rise up again. "Bloody, selfish, sodding bastard," he growled, clenching his fists.

He had half a mind to go back into the archives and tear down another bookshelf, but he quelled the urge. I'll just end up having to clean up two messes tomorrow, he reasoned resignedly. "Damn it, Jack!" he uttered, dropping his head into his hands and clenching his hair tightly in his fists.
He stared at his black Italian leather shoes, as though if he looked hard enough, he would see a solution etched in the creases. He frowned as he spotted a small scuff on the left toe. Then he glared at it, narrowing his eyes. "You're in for a polish and shine," he scolded his shoe menacingly.

Then he rolled his eyes. "I'm talking to my shoe. I must be losing my mind. Wonder if I've got some sort of brain eating alien in my head…"

He threw himself back on the bed and stared at the ceiling, watching a trickle of water trail slowly along a rusted pipe and drip into the corner of the room. He rolled his eyes. What am I doing here, living in this cave? Why on Earth did I give up my flat for this?

Because Torchwood needs me, and we're two men down, he answered himself, and I spend all of my time here anyway. It was easier when Jack and I were sleeping together… Now it's going to be even more awkward than before… Damn…

Mustering his courage, he heaved himself off of the bed and straightened his suit. I supposed I'd better go and apologize to Jack for losing my temper… if he's even still here, that is…

He made his way out of his room and through the archives. He shook his head sadly as he stepped over the debris of his earlier tantrum. I suppose that was a bit childish of me, he admitted to himself as he continued up to the main area of the Hub. Something about cutting off your nose to spite your face comes to mind…

He stuck his head into Jack's office, but he found it empty. "Jack?" he called.

He waited for a response. When none was forthcoming, he walked over to the base of the water tower and called Jack's name again. Hearing no reply, he went to his desk and powered up his computer. He opened the CCTV footage and rewound it. Then he watched Jack leaving the Hub on his screen. "Damn," he mumbled, powering down the computer again.

He began picking up around the Hub and doing his nightly chores, taking comfort in the monotony of the routine. He washed and dried the dishes from their abandoned dinner, and stored the remainder of the pizza in the refrigerator. He collected and cleaned coffee mugs, and emptied rubbish bins. Then he went to feed Myfanwy, Janet, and the other few creatures inhabiting the Torchwood cells.

After he'd finished, he checked the Rift readings, and then set the Hub into night mode. With the Hub tidied to his satisfaction, he made his way back down to his quarters, pausing again at the mess he'd created in his earlier outburst. He had a silent argument with himself, and then he once again stepped over the clutter and headed into his room. Just can't bring myself to tidy that mess right now…

He slowly and methodically took off his suit, hung it neatly on the rack he was using for his clothing, and then padded barefoot in his underwear to the nearby washroom to perform his evening ablutions. Having finished his final ritual for the day, he returned to his room and climbed into bed.

He'd had a respite from the disquieting thoughts of his earlier confrontation with Jack while he'd cleaned and finished his work for the evening. Habitual routines were something that always had a soothing effect on him, and he'd often taken advantage of that to block out unpleasant thoughts. Now that he was alone, undressed, and in bed, staring into the darkened room, once again his mind began spinning through recent events.

His eidetic memory allowed him to replay his experience at CERN, his conversation with Martha, and the confrontation with Jack as though he were watching it on film. He tossed and turned in bed
for quite some time before his mind settled enough for him to fall into a fitful sleep.

"Ianto?"

Ianto was startled into wakefulness by the sound of Jack's voice. "Jack?" he asked in confusion, his sleep befuddled brain uncertain of the reality of Jack standing in his bedroom.

"Ianto?" Jack repeated.

Ianto could sense pain radiating off the older man and hear anguish in his voice. His heart started pounding, and a surge of adrenaline forced his body to move. He sat bolt upright in bed. "Jack? What is it? Did something happen to Gwen?" he asked, his heart constricting painfully in his chest with a wave of fear.

"No," Jack reassured him.

Then what on Earth? Why are you here? he wanted to ask, feeling some of his earlier anger resurfacing. But he could see that Jack was wiping tears from his face, and he could hear the tremble in his voice. All traces of his anger died away at the sight of Jack in pain. Almost instinctually, he held out his hand to Jack, however Jack was still trying to stem the flow of tears coursing down his cheeks, and he didn't notice the movement. "Jack," Ianto said gently.

Jack finally looked at him and reached out his arm, clasping Ianto's outstretched hand. Ianto pulled Jack towards him, and then Jack was sobbing in his arms.

He held Jack tightly, stroking his back and whispering soothing Welsh phrases in his ear until eventually Jack was silent. Then he sat them up and helped Jack to peel off his coat and removed his Webley and holster. Jack slid off his suspenders and sank back down on the bed. Ianto climbed over him and pulled off his shoes and socks. He unbuckled Jack's belt, unbuttoned and unzipped his trousers, and patted Jack on the hip, indicating that he needed help. Jack lifted his hips off the bed, and Ianto deftly removed his trousers, folded them, and placed them on a nearby chair.

He turned back to survey the man lying silently on his bed, staring back at him, an expression of grief contorting his handsome features. Ianto's heart ached at the sight of Jack's distress. He sat down and carefully began to unbutton Jack's dress shirt. Images from the past two months collided in his head with the sight of the anguish of the man before him. He helped Jack to remove his shirt, and then he stood and hung it neatly over the back of the chair.

He straightened the covers over Jack, and then slid into bed next to him, taking Jack in his arms once again. Jack buried his face into the crook of Ianto's neck. "Ianto… I'm sorry," Jack whispered into his skin, the heat from his breath making the fine hairs on Ianto's neck stand on end. "I was…"

But Ianto quickly shushed him. It was neither the time nor the place for another discussion. Both of them were emotionally overwrought and exhausted, and he had a feeling that any conversation at this point would be irrational and melodramatic. Ianto kissed Jack tenderly on the forehead, settled himself more comfortably, and held Jack tightly.

He ran his fingers through Jack's hair, trying not to let his mind run away with him. He just wanted to lose himself in the sensation of Jack's body pressed against his. There had been so much distance between them for so long, that Ianto wanted to enjoy being close to Jack again, even if it was only for one night. He didn't want to spend this captured moment reliving past grievances.

Jack tilted his head up so he was looking at him. Ianto kissed his forehead again. Then he kissed it once more and leaned his forehead against Jack's. Jack lifted his hand and stroked Ianto's cheek with
his thumb. Ianto could feel Jack's warm breath on his lips and he shuddered. His heart rate increased, and he closed his eyes.

He wasn't sure which one of them had closed the small distance between them, but suddenly they were kissing. Ianto savored the feeling of Jack's lips on his and the taste of his mouth after such a long period of absence. Their kisses were a mixture of longing and tenderness, and after several long moments, the hunger in both of them was awakened.

Jack pulled Ianto on top of him, tugging at Ianto's t-shirt, and Ianto sat up, straddling Jack, so that Jack could pull the shirt over his head. Jack ran his hands up Ianto's bare chest, teasing his nipples with the pads of his fingers. Ianto moaned and closed his eyes, rocking his hips to brush his erection against Jack's through the fabric of their underwear.

He pushed Jack's t-shirt up, and leaning down, kissed along his collar bone, down to his chest, pausing to suck on one nipple. Jack shivered and thrust with his hips, putting his hands on Ianto's arse and pressing Ianto against him.

Ianto moved to the other nipple and ran his tongue over the erect tissue. Jack groaned and thrust again. Then he lifted himself up and pulled off his t-shirt. He pulled Ianto down so their bare chests were pressed together, wrapping his arms around the younger man.

They moved in rhythm, pressing their cocks together. Their kissing grew more desperate, and they panted into each other's mouths. Jack slid his hands down Ianto's back and pushed his fingers past the waistband of Ianto's underwear, grasping the bare flesh of Ianto's arse. Ianto moaned again at the feeling of Jack's hands caressing his naked flesh.

With one deft movement, Jack had pulled down Ianto's underwear, and with another one, his own, freeing their erections for the confines of the fabric. Jack groaned again, and Ianto's breath hitched in his throat at the feeling of the sensitive skin of his cock rubbing against Jack's.

For several minutes, they pressed the entire length of their naked bodies together, alternately kissing and moaning into each other's mouths as their erections slid against each other.

Then, without a word, Jack pushed Ianto gently up into a sitting position, and leaned over to the little table next to Ianto's bed. He pulled open the top drawer and rummaged around. Ianto half grinned at Jack's assumption that he would still keep lube in his bedside drawer, which of course he did.

Jack found what he'd been seeking. Settling himself back on the bed, he flipped open the lid, squeezed some of the liquid into the palm of his hand, and wrapped his hand around Ianto's cock. Ianto let out a moan as Jack stroked his hand along his erection, coating it well in lubrication. Jack spread his legs underneath Ianto, and Ianto shifted his position so that he was kneeling between them.

Jack squeezed more lubrication onto his fingers, then bending his knees up, he reached down and pushed his fingers into his own arse. Ianto watched with hungry fascination as Jack's fingers moved quickly inside himself, stretching the ring of muscles.

Jack removed his fingers and looked up into Ianto's eyes, nodding his head slightly. Ianto repositioned himself, took his cock in his hand, and guided it to Jack's entrance. He sucked in his breath as the head of his cock slowly breached the opening into Jack's body. He leaned down and kissed Jack open-mouthed, delving in with his tongue as his cock penetrated deep into Jack.

Jack let out a distinct sound of pleasure when Ianto had pushed himself in as far in as he could go. He slowly withdrew half-way, and then pushed back in again. Jack writhed underneath him. He
wrapped his legs around Ianto and grasped Ianto's arse, pushing him deeper inside with his hands. They began to move together, kissing hungrily as they established their rhythm.

Ianto slid his hands underneath Jack's arms and grasped his shoulders, using them as leverage to thrust harder into Jack. Ianto's movements became more frantic and uncoordinated as he felt the familiar tingling sensation below his navel. He didn't want to cum before Jack, so he lifted his body slightly so he could grasp Jack's cock with his hand.

It only took a few strokes before Jack's cock erupted, shooting cum between their sweat soaked bodies. Jack cried out as he came, and the sound sent Ianto over the edge. With two more thrusts, he exploded inside Jack with a shout of ecstasy.

Ianto collapsed on top of Jack, both of them breathing heavily. After resting a moment, Ianto slid off Jack and onto his side, settling his head on Jack's chest. Jack reached his hand up and languidly caressed the back of Ianto's neck. Ianto's eyelids felt heavy, and he thought lazily about getting up to clean himself.

It was the last conscious thought he had before drifting into a deep sleep.
Ianto awoke the next morning to an empty bed. He blinked in confusion as he hazily remembered the encounter of the previous night. For a moment he wasn't sure if it had actually happened, but the unsettling stickiness of his body, and the damp and rumpled sheets were undeniable proof that it hadn't been a dream. "Oh hell," he murmured aloud.

Jack and I shagged last night, he told himself, lifting his head to survey his naked body twisted unceremoniously in the bedclothes of the morning after. I'm not sure that was the wisest decision I've ever made... I wonder what it means... and where that leaves us... Typical bloody Jack, making his escape while I'm still asleep and leaving me to wonder what the hell is going on between us...

He lay back for a moment, staring up at the ceiling, as he replayed the previous night's events. At the time, he had thought that he'd understood Jack's grief. He'd assumed that it had been a sign of contrition, and that Jack had come to him because he'd finally wanted to make amends. However, the empty bed forced him to question his conclusions. Perhaps I should have let him talk last night instead of shushing him... I wonder what he was going to say... Guess I'll never know now... And are we just right back to where we started? "Brilliant," he muttered sarcastically. "That's just brilliant."

With a heavy sigh, he disentangled himself from the covers, and sat up in bed, stretching out his long limbs. He grabbed his shirt and underwear from the floor where it had been carelessly cast off the night before. Donning it quickly, he headed for the nearby shower which he'd been using since he'd moved into the Hub. I am disconcertingly sticky, after all, he thought as he turned the knob to start the flow of water.

When he'd bathed and dressed for work, he made his way up to the main area of the Hub. Once again, he stepped over the chaos he'd made of the bookshelves the night before. He muttered to himself about having to tidy it later and kept walking.

He paused before he stepped out of the archives, wondering just what kind of reception he was going to receive from Jack. He hoped for the best, but feared the worst. It was entirely possible that Jack was going to act like nothing had happened between them the night before, and revert to his distant and professional demeanor. Mentally preparing himself for anything, he smoothed his features into his usual impassive mask.

As he crossed the main level, he could hear Jack banging around in his office. Deciding that he needed caffeine before facing his boss and itinerant lover, he headed straight for the coffee maker. When he started up the machine, Jack's head appeared around his office door. "Ianto? Is that you?"

"Yes, Jack," Ianto replied, "Unless you figure Janet is making the coffee this morning," he added facetiously.

Jack strolled towards him, chuckling. He wrapped his arms around Ianto and kissed him full on the
"Cheeky bastard," he teased. "Unless Janet makes better coffee than you do," he added pulling away with a thoughtful expression. "Maybe we should give her a go."

Ianto was overjoyed at the reception from Jack, however he didn't allow his emotions to show. Instead, he scowled playfully. "Over my dead body!"

A look of distress darkened Jack's features, and he grabbed Ianto's shoulders, shaking him roughly. "Don't even joke about it," he exclaimed fiercely.

Ianto was completely taken aback by Jack's outburst, and he immediately turned serious. "I'm sorry, Jack."

A variety of emotions clouded Jack's deep blue eyes. In that moment, Ianto realized just how right Martha had been in her explanation of Jack's behavior, and his reaction to the deaths of Owen and Tosh. He's afraid that I'm going to die as well... That he's going to lose me the way he lost Tosh and Owen... Ianto put his arms around Jack, holding the other man close. "I'm here now Jack, and I'll be here for as long as I can," he whispered into Jack's ear.

"Promise me you'll be careful," Jack replied, clinging desperately to Ianto.

"I promise, Jack," Ianto said, knowing full well that it was a promise Torchwood wouldn't let him keep.

Jack pulled back and they stared into each other's eyes. "Ianto… I…"

Ianto leaned his forehead against Jack's, giving the older man time to say what he needed to say. "I can't bear the thought of losing you," Jack finally managed.

"I know. But I'm here now, Jack," he repeated. It was the only comfort he could offer.

Jack nodded slightly, but he didn't say anything. "Okay?" Ianto asked stroking the back of Jack's head.

"Okay," Jack agreed, still looking pained.

The coffee machine beeped, startling them both. Ianto turned to look at it, and Jack pulled away. "Thank the gods! I was desperate for you to get up and make coffee," Jack said with an apparent attempt at joviality.

Ianto considered pressing the issue, but he decided to let it go. They'd had enough drama between them. If Jack was willing to try and push past his fears, then Ianto wasn't going to belabor the point. He just wanted his friend and lover back. He returned Jack's banter. "I know, I know. It's all I'm good for," he said, heaving an exaggerated sigh.

"Well, that... and other things," Jack said, squeezing Ianto's arse as he turned to pour out the coffee.

"Harassment in the workplace, Jack!" Ianto chastised.

Jack threw back his head and laughed, giving Ianto's arse one last squeeze before he headed into his office.

Ianto smiled to himself. Seems we're back to our usual persiflage... and all's right with the world. Any qualms he had about their unspoken and unresolved issues, he quickly suppressed. He grinned happily as he finished preparing the coffee. When it was ready, he carried their two mugs into Jack's office.
It took Gwen all of ten minutes to figure out that Jack and Ianto had reconciled when she arrived at work later that morning. "Thank God!" she exclaimed when Ianto had batted Jack's hand away for the third time after Jack had repeatedly reached across him to type something on Ianto's keyboard.

They both turned and looked at her curiously. "Obviously you two have made up," she stated.

Jack and Ianto looked at each other. Ianto turned back to Gwen and raised an eyebrow in question. "You two have been so polite around each other for the past two months that I thought I was going to go crazy with the strain of it all," Gwen explained. "Now Jack's pestering you continuously, and you're pretending to be annoyed by him, all the while secretly loving every minute of it."

Ianto opened his eyes wide, momentarily astonished by Gwen's words. However, he couldn't deny the truth in her statement, and in spite of himself, he started to laugh. Jack, who had already been chuckling, laughed harder. "Let's face it, Ianto," he said, putting his arm around Ianto's shoulder. "She's got our number."

Ianto sighed lugubriously. "Are we really that predictable?"

"Don't answer that, Gwen," Jack ordered, pointing a finger at her, and Gwen started to giggle. She jumped up and put her arms around both of them. "It's much more fun when you two are shagging," she said, hugging them both.

"Um… thanks?" Ianto mumbled at the same time Jack said gleefully, "Isn't it though?"

Ianto momentarily wondered if he should be affronted by Gwen's assessment of them as merely 'shagging,' however he shrugged it off. He felt that Gwen had already accepted his and Jack's relationship as serious, if unconventional, and he and Gwen had made their peace with each other a while ago. It was just Gwen being Gwen.

Gwen laughed and let them go. Ianto rolled his eyes, and Jack, smiling, kissed him on the lips. Then he turned to Gwen. "Gwen, I've been an arse," he announced apologetically.

"Yeah, Jack. You have," Gwen replied sternly.

"I'm sorry," Jack told her, putting his arm around her and kissing her on the top of the head.

"Apology accepted." She smiled her gap toothed grin at him.

Still with his arm around Gwen, he put his other arm around Ianto and pulled them close. "We have to stick together, and we have to keep fighting, for Tosh and Owen."

Ianto caught Gwen's eye, both of them tucked neatly under each of Jack's arms. She winked at him and smiled. Ianto smiled at her in return. They knew that their friend had returned to them.

The atmosphere at Torchwood changed that day. There remained the gaping hole left by Tosh and Owen, and their absence still caused an ache of sadness in Ianto's heart, but the three of them started to have some fun again. Torchwood no longer felt like an oppressive place of mourning. Jack had regained his sense of joie de vivre, which no longer seemed forced or false. He teased both Gwen and Ianto mercilessly, he told tall tales of alien encounters, and he flirted with Ianto relentlessly. In short, he was the old Jack again.

They never spoke again about their two-month long estrangement. By mutual, silent assent, they picked up right where they had left off. But there remained an undercurrent of strain that really never dissipated. And in the days that followed, there were moments when that strain threatened to break.
It had been two weeks since Ianto and Jack had rekindled their relationship, and Ianto was happier than he’d been in months. He had abandoned his small room in the archives, moving back into Jack’s bunker, and back into Jack’s bed. Ianto still had misgivings about things not really being satisfactorily settled between the two of them. But for the most part, they were pushed aside by the joy of being with the man he loved. Ianto no longer denied his feelings to himself, and he no longer fought it. He knew for certain that he was in love with Jack Harkness. His previous struggles, and his refusal to accept his feelings had caused him nothing but confusion, uncertainty, and unhappiness, and life was just too short for further denial. Tosh and Owen's death had taught him that much.

He and Jack had begun their day by shagging in the shower. Then Jack had begged to be allowed to choose Ianto's suit, shirt and tie for the day. Ianto had skeptically submitted, and shook his head with amusement when Jack excitedly pulled his pink shirt out of the closet.

Ianto, in turn, chose a dark blue shirt and grey suspenders for Jack. After he and Jack had dressed, they had time for breakfast and coffee together before Gwen arrived at the Hub. There were no alarming Rift readings, no unusual deaths, and no Weevil sightings. *Looks like it's going to be a quiet day in Cardiff,* Ianto thought as he cheerfully begun brewing their second pot of coffee.

He couldn't have been more wrong.
Ianto had delivered Gwen's first cup of coffee and was just returning from delivering Jack's second when the whole world seemed to shake off its axis. Ianto, who had been holding a coffee tray, fell unceremoniously to the floor in a heap, instinctually clutching the tray instead of breaking his fall with his hands. Something hit him hard on the back of the head. Well, at least I hung onto the tray, he thought sarcastically. The sky is falling, the ground is caving in, but you've got your coffee tray! He inwardly rolled his eyes at himself. He carefully felt the back of his head for any lacerations. There wasn't any blood, but an impressive goose egg was forming on his skull.

"Gwen? Ianto? You okay?" Jack called, rushing out of his office, the concern evident in his voice.

"No broken bones. Slight loss of dignity. No change there then," Ianto quipped, rubbing the bump on his head.

"The whole city must've felt that," Gwen exclaimed. "The whole of South Wales!"

"I'm gonna take a look outside," Jack called as he headed out of the cogwheel door.

Ianto got to his feet and walked to the nearest computer terminal. Gwen came up behind him, peering over his shoulder. He pushed several keys, bringing up a survey of the event. He was shocked by what he saw. "Little bit bigger than South Wales," he commented.

Gwen leaned over his shoulder. "What the hell?" she asked, peering at the screen.

The mobile in Ianto's pocket rang. Ianto took it out and looked at the screen. It was Jack. He flipped open the phone. "Jack, it's much bigger than…"

"You two need to get up here, right now," Jack cut him off.

"What's happened?" Ianto asked, looking at Gwen.

"Just get up here. Take the lift," Jack replied before he ended the call.

"Come on," Ianto said to Gwen, putting the phone back in his pocket. "Jack wants us topside."

He headed towards the invisible lift with Gwen at his heels. "What is it, Ianto?"

"Dunno. He didn't say."

The lift started its ascent, and they looked up as the trap door above them slid open. "Ianto… it's dark outside! What happened to the sun? It's eight o'clock in the morning!"

Ianto shook his head slowly, unable to come up with an explanation. As they reached the surface, they saw that Jack was standing in the middle of the street by the water tower looking up into the sky. "Jack? What's happened to the sun?" Gwen asked, stepping off the lift and walking towards
him. "Why has it gone dark?"

Ianto followed behind her, looking around the now darkened Plass. Jack pointed into the air. "Look."

Both Ianto and Gwen stopped and looked up. Ianto's mouth fell open in surprise as he saw that several planets had appeared and seemed to be hanging in their atmosphere. "Oh my God! What is it?" Gwen exclaimed.

"I think the Earth has moved," Jack replied, awestruck.

"Moved?" both Ianto and Gwen said simultaneously. "How is that possible, Jack." Gwen asked.

"I don't know. It's not possible."

Ianto moved next to Jack, and Jack reached back and clasped his hand. "It's impossible," he repeated.

The three of them stood there, staring up at the incomprehensible vista above them. Jack squeezed Ianto's hand before he dropped it and said, "Come on, you two. Work to do."

They turned and ran back to the lift, huddling close together as it descended back into the Hub.

Ianto and Jack both immediately ran to a computer terminal, while Gwen mumbled something about phoning Rhys. "Yep, that's confirmation of Earth's new location," Jack said as he typed furiously.

Ianto put his hands on Jack's shoulders and leaned against him as he looked at the computer screen. "What does this mean, Jack? Who's done this?"

"I don't know. But we need to find out, and fast," Jack said, glancing up at him and patting his hand quickly before turning back to the screen.

"Turn on CNN," Jack said. "See what they have to say."

Ianto squeezed Jack's shoulders. Then he pulled up a chair at the next computer. "I wonder how the world's reacting to this," Ianto commented as he started flipping through television channels.

"The United Nations has issued an edict, asking the citizens of the world not to panic. So far, there has been no explanation of the twenty-six planets which have appeared in the sky..."

Ianto switched to another channel, starting to feel a surge of nervous energy building inside him. "...But it's an empirical fact! The planets didn't come to us, we came to them! Just look at the stars. We're in a completely different region of space, we've travelled..."

His anxiety rapidly increased as he flipped the channel again. He paused on Paul O'Grady, deciding he desperately needed a laugh to break the tension. "Do you know what? I look up, and there's all these moons and things! Have you seen them? Did you see them? I thought, what was I drinking last night? Furniture polish?"

Ianto burst out laughing with more enthusiasm than he'd intended. I must be getting hysterical, he thought to himself. "Ianto!" Jack scolded. "Time and a place!" he added, looking at Ianto disapprovingly.

"He is funny, though," he commented, trying to suppress his chuckles and feeling sufficiently chastised. Pull yourself together Jones, he admonished himself. There's work to do!
"Gwen, come and see!" Jack called.

Ianto jumped up and moved over to Jack's computer. "Someone's established an artificial atmospheric shell. Keeping the air and holding in the heat," he explained.

"Whoever's done this wants the human race alive. That's a plus," Ianto commented as Gwen joined them. "Twenty-seven planets, including the Earth," he said as he hit a couple of keys.

A red blinking dot appeared on the screen in the middle of the planets. "No, but what's that? That's not a planet," Gwen said, pointing at the anomaly.

Jack hit a few keys. "It's a space station, sitting at the heart of the planet."


"Two hundred space ships headed our way!" Jack hit another series of keys. "Geneva has called a code red. UNIT is preparing for battle!"

"The Pentagon has issued an emergency report," Ianto added. "They're advising everyone to stay indoors."

"Three thousand miles and closing… But who are they?" Gwen asked anxiously.

Jack looked like he was about to reply when his mobile rang. He looked at it and glanced quickly at Ianto. Flipping it open, he held it to his ear. "Martha Jones! Voice of a nightingale! Tell me you put something in my drink."

Ianto listened to the one sided conversation. "Not a word. Where are you?… Oh, nice for some… Did you get that thing working?… I… met a soldier in a bar."

Ianto, who had been watching the imminent approach on the computer screen, turned to look at Jack in surprise. *Has there been someone else?* Ianto felt his stomach knot uncomfortably. "Long story," Jack added to Martha.

"When was that?" Ianto asked before he could stop himself. They had been estranged for two months after all. *Who knows what Jack got up to in the interim… He is Jack, after all… But I need to know…"


Ianto didn't have time to contemplate Jack's statement. "Fifteen hundred miles boys, and accelerating," Gwen interjected, still looking at the screen. "They're almost here."

"There's a message coming through," Ianto said, putting it on speaker.

An inhuman and distinctly robotic voice filled the Hub. "*Exterminate! Exterminate!*"

"No!" Jack said.

Ianto looked at him as the voice continued its menacing chant. "*Exterminate! Exterminate!*"

An expression of terror had contorted Jack's features. "Oh, no!" he cried.

Ianto stared at him, dumbstruck. He'd heard that menacing chant once before… at Canary Wharf. Images of the carnage and devastation of Torchwood One danced before his eyes, and he felt his knees weaken. *It can't be…* "What is it? Who are they? Do you know them Jack?" Gwen asked, her
voice rising in fear.

Jack put a protective arm around Ianto, pulling him close to his chest. He put his other arm around Gwen and kissed them both on the forehead. "There's nothing I can do. I'm sorry. We're dead."

Ianto was too stunned to speak. He had never seen Jack accept defeat so easily. Ianto had faced them before, along with the Cybermen at Canary Wharf, and he'd survived.

"Jack?" Gwen asked, her voice pitched to a hysterical tone. "What do you mean we're dead? Who are they?"

"Daleks," Jack breathed.

Daleks… Hearing Jack say the name aloud confirmed Ianto's fears. He closed his eyes. "Daleks? That sounds vaguely familiar… Who are the Daleks?" Gwen insisted.

"The worse thing you can imagine," Jack replied.

He kissed both of them on the head again, squeezing them close before he removed his arms and turned his attention to the computer screen once again.

The three of them watched in horror as the Daleks descended on the Earth, and one by one the planet's defenses fell. When Jack told them that Martha was down, he seemed to lose all hope, and his surrender had the same effect on Ianto and Gwen. Jack slid to the floor mumbling, "It's over. It's just a matter of time before they find us here. There's nothing I can do."

"I need to phone Rhys," Gwen said, turning from them and running up the stairs.

Ianto sat down next to Jack and took his hand, entwining their fingers. "Jack," he said softly.

"Ianto…" Jack murmured. "I just want you to know… there was no one else. You don't need to worry about that."

"I'm sorry?" Ianto asked, momentarily confused.

Jack leaned his head on Ianto's shoulder and whispered, "There's been no one but you, even when we were… apart."

"Jack, I…"

But Jack kissed him, effectively cutting him off. Ianto kissed him in return, and for a moment, the rest of the world faded away as they kissed passionately. Then Jack broke the kiss and pulled back. "I can't… I can't save you." He pushed Ianto away. "Please, just leave me alone."

Ianto was about to argue, but he was hit by a wave of fear and pain radiating off the older man. And suddenly he understood. This is what Jack's been afraid of. This is why he distanced himself in the first place. He's just let me back in… and now he think's I'm going to die.

Ianto didn't know what to say and could think of no words of comfort to offer. He slowly got to his feet and sat down in a chair, watching Jack carefully. "There's nothing I can do," Jack repeated over and over again.

Eventually Gwen returned, trying to hide the fact that she had been crying. She sat down on the Hub's sofa looking forlorn.

The three of them sat there, listening to the world outside the Hub fall apart and cede to Dalek
control. Several times Ianto started to get up and go to Jack, but something held him back. This was not the Jack he knew. He'd never seen Jack defeated before he'd even begun to fight. He didn't know how to handle the situation.

A voice called out to them over the speakers. "Someone's trying to get in touch," he heard Gwen say.


A strangely familiar female voice said, "Captain Jack Harkness, shame on you! Now stand to attention, sir!"

Ianto watched in bewilderment as Harriet Jones, former Prime Minister, appeared on one quadrant of the screen, along with a former Doctor's companion, Sarah Jane Smith, with her son in another quadrant. Torchwood materialized in the third quadrant. And in the forth quadrant, Martha Jones appeared, alive and well, along with her mother Francine. Ianto breathed a sigh of relief. The sight of Martha gave him hope. He even chuckled a little when Jack flirted with Sarah Jane.

He silently listened to the plan for reaching the Doctor using the Subwave Network, with Torchwood boosting the signal, until he felt compelled to speak. Pushing Jack aside, he faced the computer screen. "Excuse me, sorry, sorry. Hello, Ianto Jones. Um, if we start transmitting, then this Subwave Network is going to become visible. I mean, to the Daleks," he reasoned.

"Yes," Harriet replied, "And they'll trace it back to me. But my life doesn't matter. Not if it saves the Earth."

Jack stood to attention and saluted. "Ma'am!"

"Thank you, Captain. But there are people out there dying, on the streets. Now enough of words. Let's begin!"

The three of them sprang into action, setting up the Rift manipulator to boost the signal to the Doctor. Sparks flew as the signal beamed out from the base of the water tower. The walls of the Hub shook with the strain. Finally Jack exclaimed, "I think we've got a fix!"

"Harriet!" Gwen shouted, "A saucer's locked on to your location! They've found you!"

"I know. I'm using the Network to mask your transmission. Keep going! Captain, I'm transferring the Subwave Network to Torchwood. You're in charge now. And tell the Doctor from me... he chose his companions well. It's been an honor."

Ianto could hear the Daleks shouting their war cry of "Exterminate! Exterminate!" in the background, and he felt sick as the connection to Harriet Jones abruptly terminated.

But moments later a man had appeared on the screen. "Is that him? Am I finally laying my eyes on the famous Doctor? "Where the hell have you been?" Jack shouted at the man. "Doctor, it's the Daleks!"

"He's a bit nice," Gwen commented. "I thought he'd be older."

Ianto felt a twinge of jealousy. "He's not that young," he replied gruffly.


The red headed woman with the Doctor said, "That's Martha. And who's he?"
"Captain Jack," the Doctor replied. "Don't. Just… don't."

Ianto rolled his eyes. "It's like an outer space Facebook," the red headed woman said.

Ianto decided that he liked her. "Everyone except Rose," the Doctor said.

The screen faded out, and a new and horrible face appeared. Ianto listened to the exchange between the Doctor and the thing calling itself Davros. He didn't understand half of it, but Jack sprang into action as soon as he heard the Doctor say, "After all this time. Everything we saw… everything we lost… I have only one thing to say to you… Bye!"

"What was that all about?" Gwen asked Jack's retreating form.

Jack paused on the balcony. "He's coming here. The Doctor. I need to get to him."

Then he took off running. Ianto and Gwen looked at each other. He knew that they both understood what it meant for them, and that they were both of the same mind. Gwen half smiled at him, and Ianto nodded slightly. Then they turned back to the computers.

Ianto had known, as soon as Harriet had said she was transferring the Subwave Network to Torchwood, that the Daleks would come for them next. He knew what it meant, and he was mentally preparing himself for it. "Gwen," he said in a low tone so that Jack wouldn't hear. "Dalek saucer heading for the Bay. They've found us."

He had also known, as soon as the Doctor appeared, that Jack was going to leave them. And he knew that he probably only had a few minutes left to live. He took his courage in his hands. If he could die saving the human race, he was willing to make the sacrifice.

Without another word, he went to get Jack's coat. Jack came running down the stairs with his mobile clasped to his ear. "Martha, open that Indigo device. Now listen to me. Lift the central panel, there's a string of numbers that keep changing. But the fourth number keeps oscillating between two different digits, tell me what they are."

As he talked to her, he removed an enormous gun from its glass storage case in the armory. He set it down when he saw Ianto holding out his greatcoat. He let Ianto help him into the coat as he continued his conversation with Martha. "Yeah, that's the teleport base code. And that's all I need, to get this thing working again!" Jack flipped open his wrist strap and pressed some buttons. "Oscillating four… and nine. Thank you, Martha Jones!"

He flipped the phone closed. Gwen handed him the gun. "I've gotta go, I've gotta find the Doctor. I'll come back. I'm coming back!"

"Don't worry about us," Gwen said. "Just go."

"We'll be fine," Ianto stated, his voice rough with restrained emotion. There's so much I wanted to say… So much left unspoken between us. I hope you know what you meant to me, Ianto silently told Jack.

"You'd better be!" Jack said, then he teleported out of the Hub.

Ianto knew that it would probably be the last time he ever saw Jack Harkness. He was glad that it was an image of Jack, smiling and excited to be reunited with the Doctor once again. Jack was off on an adventure, and nothing made him happier.

He and Gwen looked at each other, but there was no time for conversation as the Hub shook, and
rubble and debris showered down on them. Then the horrible voice filled the air. "Exterminate! Exterminate!"

"They're here," Gwen warned.

Gwen ran off, returning moments later with two large machine guns. "But, they don't work against Daleks," Ianto reminded her.

"Yeah?" She asked, tossing one of the guns at Ianto, who caught it instinctually. "Well, I'm going out fighting. Like Owen. Like Tosh." She loaded her gun. "How about you?" she asked, holding out a magazine clip.

Ianto had never had more respect for Gwen than he did at that moment. He took the clip from her. "Yes, ma'am!" he said, deftly loading the magazine into the gun.

The door's lock exploded and the cogwheel rolled open. A Dalek stood in the entrance to the Hub. "Exterminate! Exterminate!"

Ianto took aim and fired, his face set in a mask of determination, and his mind focused on making his last stand. Gwen was shouting and firing beside him. But something strange had happened. They both stopped firing when they realized that their bullets were suspended in the air, as though they had hit an invisible wall. Gwen reached out to touch one, and her finger made a rippling effect in the air. "What the hell?" she asked, and turned back to look at Ianto.

He shook his head in response. He had no idea what had just happened. They dropped their weapons and raced to their computer terminals, eager to analyze the newest turn of events. Ianto's fingers danced gracefully over the keys as he tried to solve the mystery. "It's a Time Lock!" he exclaimed when he'd found the answer. "The ultimate defense program. Tosh was working on it. Never thought she finished it, but she did! The Hub's sealed in a time bubble. Nothing can get in!" "We're safe, at least for the moment, he added to himself.

"But that means we can't get out," Gwen realized.

"Nope. Not without unlocking that Dalek. We're trapped inside. It's all up to Jack now."

And Ianto had faith in Jack.
Jack awoke early the following morning in a tangle of limbs. Feeling momentarily disoriented and alarmed, he quickly surveyed his surroundings. It was several moments before he realized that he was in the Hub and in Ianto’s bed. The events of the previous evening came rushing back to him. He remembered standing on the rooftop, and he remembered his overwhelming despair. And then I went to Ianto for comfort… and for forgiveness. And one thing led to another… Maybe that wasn’t the wisest decision I could have made… But it’s too late now.

He looked at Ianto, sleeping peacefully, wrapped around him, and his heart filled with affection. It’s nice to be close to him again… I missed you, Jack silently told him, brushing his thumb tenderly across Ianto’s cheek. He considered relaxing again and holding Ianto tightly until the younger man awoke, but then he thought better of it. I’m not sure what kind of reception I'll get from him… He might regret what happened. I should give him some space… I’m not sure where we stand with each other, and I don’t want to make things worse than they already are…

He carefully extricated himself from Ianto’s sleeping form, and slowly got out of the bed. Quietly retrieving his clothing from where Ianto had neatly hung them the night before, he dressed and left the room.

He made his way back to his bunker, and discarding his clothes again, he stepped into the shower. He turned the knob, shivering as the icy spray hit his body. He forced himself to stand under the cold water as the insult awoke his senses. He wanted to be levelheaded. He’d felt like he’d wallowed in his self-pity for too long.

After several minutes, he began to feel more alert. He washed, dried off, and dressed for the day. Then he sat down at his desk to think.

He’d been in a lot of relationships in his long life, and he’d lost many lovers. The pain was always agonizing, and it never got any easier. But Ianto had touched a part of him that had been buried for a long, long time. Ianto knew him – really knew him. He knew many of his secrets, although not all of them, Jack added to himself with a cringe. There are some things I hope he never finds out… But he knows more than anyone ever has… Yet he still respects me, and he still cares about me, in spite of my faults… He gives me strength, and courage… but he's never afraid to disagree with me, or to call me on my bad decisions… He's everything I ever wanted… He makes me happy… more human… except that his lifetime is finite… It's a blink of the eye compared to mine…

Jack sighed wearily. Everyone I know and love is mortal… except me… Even the Doctor won’t live forever… There’s never going to be a solution to that problem. I have to continue to live with it… And I have to resign myself to eventually losing everyone I love… But is having Ianto now worth the pain of inevitably losing him? Jack shook his head. He knew the answer to that question and was rather disgusted with himself for even posing it. Of course he's worth it! He admonished himself. I just need to stop being such a coward.
He got up from his desk and started pacing the floor. *How do I make it right with him? Should I go back down to his room to be there when he wakes up? Should I insist we talk about things? Should I pretend nothing happened last night? Should I just pick up from where we left off as though the past two months never happened?*

In his perturbation, he started picking up various items around his office and haphazardly putting them back down again. He was beginning to feel antsy, and the anticipation of Ianto's eventual appearance was making him anxious. *How do I fix this? What do I say? What should I do?*

He knocked over a stack of files and swore profusely. He was in the middle of picking them up and slamming them back on his desk when he heard the familiar sounds of the coffee machine. He quickly threw the remaining files back on his desk and poked his head around his office door. "Ianto? Is that you?" he called out.

"Yes, Jack. Unless you figure Janet is making the coffee this morning."

Jack chuckled at Ianto's glibness. He still hadn't decided on how best to handle the situation between them, but he suddenly didn't care. He just wanted to hold his lover. He strode out of the office and wrapped his arms around Ianto, kissing him affectionately on the lips. "Cheeky bastard," he teased. "Unless Janet makes better coffee than you do," he added, pulling away thoughtfully. "Maybe we should give her a go."

"Over my dead body!" Ianto retorted.

A sick feeling descended on Jack, and he involuntarily grabbed Ianto's shoulders, shaking him roughly. "Don't even joke about it," he exclaimed fiercely.

Ianto's expression turned serious. "I'm sorry, Jack."

A multitude of emotions caused a visceral response in Jack, and his stomach knotted painfully. Everything that he'd been struggling to overcome momentarily resurfaced. He fought down a rising sense of panic, and an almost overwhelming urge to flee.

Ianto's arms wrapped around him, and he leaned forward and whispered into Jack's ear. "I'm here now Jack, and I'll be here for as long as I can."

Jack clung to him, a desperate desire to hold him close battling with the deep-rooted instinct to protect himself from heartache. "Promise me you'll be careful," was all he could force himself to say.

"I promise, Jack."

Jack pulled back, and they stared into each other's eyes. "Ianto… I…" he began, but he didn't know how to continue.

Ianto leaned his forehead against Jack's but remained silent. "I can't bear the thought of losing you," Jack finally managed.

"I know. But I'm here now, Jack."

Jack nodded slightly. The silent war was still raging in his head, but he knew that he wanted to be with Ianto, regardless of the inevitable grief. "Okay?" Ianto asked, stroking the back of Jack's head.

"Okay," Jack agreed, still shaken, but determined.

The coffee machine beeped, startling them both. Jack used the opportunity to ease out of the embrace.
and pull himself together. He didn't want to continue the discussion. He'd made his decision, and there was nothing to do but to accept it and move on. He attempted to regain some joviality. "Thank the gods! I was desperate for you to get up and make coffee."

A fleeting look of indecision crossed Ianto's handsome features before he heaved an exaggerated sigh. "I know, I know. It's all I'm good for."

Jack inwardly thanked Ianto for silently agreeing to let it go for the moment. When Ianto turned to see to the coffee, Jack squeezed his arse playfully. "Well, that… and other things," he commented impishly.

"Harassment in the workplace, Jack!"

Jack threw back his head and laughed, both relieved at the reestablishment of their banter, and in affection for the younger man. He gave Ianto's arse another fond squeeze before he headed back into his office.

Jack sat down at his desk again. Ianto's right, he told himself. He's here now, and I should appreciate every moment I have with him. If I don't… I'll regret it some day…

Ianto arrived carrying their morning coffees, and with stubborn determination, Jack banished all misgivings from his thoughts. He grinned his best Harkness grin at Ianto. "What took you so long?"

Ianto rolled his eyes, but a smile tugged at the corner of his lips. He set the coffees down on Jack's desk and pulled up a chair. It had been two months since they'd enjoyed their morning coffee together, and Jack wanted to relish every minute of it.

Gwen's quick realization that they'd reconciled delighted Jack, and he couldn't help but be extremely amused when she exclaimed, hugging both of them, "It's much more fun when you two are shagging."

"Isn't it though?" Jack replied gleefully.

He apologized to Gwen for his behavior over the past two months, and felt relieved when she promptly forgave him. Both Gwen and Ianto had shown him a great deal more forgiveness than he thought deserved. He felt a renewed sense of purpose, and a renewed determination. He put his arms around both of them and pulled them tightly to his chest. "We have to stick together, and we have to keep fighting, for Tosh and Owen."

And for two idyllic weeks, Jack thought that maybe things could work out for him and Ianto. He committed himself to their relationship whole-heartedly. Jack had his closest friend and lover back, and he wanted to appreciate every minute of him. He asked Ianto to move back into his bunker, and they picked up right where they had left off – as though the past two months had never happened. They flirted and bantered, they had mind-blowing sex, and they fought aliens to protect the planet. It was Jack's idea of a perfect world. For those two weeks, Jack was genuinely happy.

But his utopian dream was shattered on the day that he heard an all too familiar, inhuman voice filling the Hub. "Exterminate! Exterminate!"

"No!" It can't be... Please no!

"Exterminate! Exterminate!"

"Oh, no!" he cried, a horrible sensation clawing at the pit of his stomach.
"What is it? Who are they? Do you know them, Jack?" Gwen asked, her voice rising in fear.

Jack had always had a particular hatred of the Daleks, not only because of their merciless annihilation of everything in their path, but because it was by the hand of the Daleks that Jack had originally lost his life and been reborn with the curse of immortality. *We're doomed. Ianto... Gwen... I can't save them... And I just got them back...*

Jack put a protective arm around Ianto, pulling him close to his chest. He put his other arm around Gwen and kissed them both on the forehead. "There's nothing I can do. I'm sorry. We're dead," he stated, unable to keep the defeat from his voice.

"Jack?" Gwen asked, her voice pitched to a hysterical tone. "What do you mean we're dead? Who are they?"

"Daleks," Jack breathed, the mere mention of the name making his knees go weak with fear.

"Daleks? That sounds vaguely familiar... Who are the Daleks?" Gwen insisted.

"The worse thing you can imagine," Jack replied, kissing them both on the head again and squeezing them close once more before turning back to the computer screen.

For some time, he was able to maintain a semblance of concentration as the Daleks descended on Earth, and one by one the planet's defenses fell. But with the loss of Martha, Jack abandoned all pretense of composure. He had forsaken all hope. He slid to the floor mumbling, "It's over. It's just a matter of time before they find us here. There's nothing I can do."

"I need to phone Rhys," Gwen said, turning from them and running up the stairs.

Ianto sat down next to Jack and took his hand, entwining their fingers. "Jack," he said softly.

"Ianto..." Jack murmured knowing that this might be the last conversation he ever had with Ianto Jones, and he wanted Ianto to understand how much he meant to him. "I just want you to know... there was no one else. You don't need to worry about that."

"I'm sorry?" Ianto asked, confused.

Jack leaned his head on Ianto's shoulder and whispered, "There's been no one but you, even when we were... apart. There's been no one but you since we met... not anyone that mattered... And now I'm going to lose you too... After everything that we've been through, I'm just going to lose you like I lose everyone..."

"Jack, I..." Ianto started, but Jack kissed him, not wanting to hear the end of Ianto's sentence.

Jack allowed himself a moment to be lost in the kiss. He let the obliteration of the world fade away as he lost himself in Ianto. But he knew it couldn't last, and that this would be their final kiss. Pain overtook him, and he broke away. "I can't... I can't save you." He pushed Ianto roughly away. "Please, just leave me alone."

He couldn't bear to look at Ianto again. He couldn't bear to look at either of them. "There's nothing I can do," he repeated over and over again.

Time lost all meaning for Jack. He was waiting for the inevitable blow to strike, and it was one of the worst moments of his unnaturally long life.

"Someone's trying to get in touch," Gwen eventually said.

A strangely familiar female voice said, "Captain Jack Harkness, shame on you! Now stand to attention, sir!"

*What?* Jack jumped to his feet as Harriet Jones, former Prime Minister appeared on one quadrant of the screen along with Sarah Jane Smith in another… and Martha Jones. *She made it! I should never have doubted her!* Jack felt a glimmer of hope as he listened to the plan to contact the Doctor. He started to regain his confidence, and he found himself flirting with Sarah Jane in his exuberance.

He was mildly diverted when Ianto pushed him aside and faced the computer. "Excuse me, sorry, sorry. Hello, Ianto Jones. Um, if we start transmitting, then this Subwave Network is going to become visible. I mean, to the Daleks," he reasoned.

"Yes," Harriet replied, "And they'll trace it back to me. But my life doesn't matter. Not if it saves the Earth."

Jack expressed his admiration and respect for Harriet Jones in true military fashion. He stood to attention and saluted. "Ma'am!"

"Thank you, Captain. But there are people out there dying, on the streets. Now enough of words. Let's begin!"

The three of them sprang into action, setting up the Rift manipulator to boost the signal to the Doctor. Sparks flew as the signal beamed out from the base of the water tower. The walls of the Hub shook with the strain. Finally Jack exclaimed, "I think we've got a fix!"

"Harriet!" Gwen shouted, "A saucer's locked on to your location! They've found you!"

"I know. I'm using the Network to mask your transmission. Keep going! Captain, I'm transferring the Subwave Network to Torchwood. You're in charge now. And tell the Doctor from me… he chose his companions well. It's been an honor."

Jack felt a pang of regret when they lost the signal from Harriet. But moments later, the Doctor appeared on their computer screen. Jack was immeasurably relieved.

"He's a bit nice," Gwen commented. "I thought he'd be older."

"He's not that young," Ianto replied gruffly.

Jack wanted to roll his eyes at Ianto, but both Sarah Jane and Martha started shouting at once, and he turned his attention back to the Doctor. They barely had time to explain before Davros appeared on their screen. As surprised as Jack was to see him alive, he couldn't help feeling exhilarated. *The Doctor's coming! There's hope for us, yet!*

When Jack heard the Doctor say, "After all this time. Everything we saw… everything we lost… I have only one thing to say to you… Bye," he knew that was his cue.

He raced upstairs to gather everything that he needed.

"What was that all about?" Gwen called after him.

Jack paused on the balcony and looked down at Ianto and Gwen. "He's coming here. The Doctor. I need to get to him."
And there isn't a moment to lose. As he gathered various items, his mind was racing ahead, quickly taking inventory of what he needed. He pulled out his mobile and dialed Martha. "Martha, open that Indigo device. Now listen to me. Lift the central panel, there's a string of numbers that keep changing. But the fourth number keeps oscillating between two different digits, tell me what they are."

As he talked to her, he retrieved the only weapon in the armory that was useful against the Daleks. He set it down when he saw Ianto holding out his greatcoat. He let Ianto help him into the coat as he continued his conversation with Martha. "Yeah, that's the teleport base code. And that's all I need, to get this thing working again!" Jack flipped open his wrist strap and pressed some buttons. "Oscillating four… and nine. Thank you, Martha Jones!"

He flipped his phone closed. Gwen handed him the gun. "I've gotta go, I've gotta find the Doctor. I'll come back. I'm coming back!" he reassured them.

"Don't worry about us," Gwen said. "Just go."

"We'll be fine," Ianto added.

He caught Ianto's eye, and for a brief moment, he felt a twinge of apprehension, but it was quickly suppressed. He'll be alright, he reassured himself, not allowing his doubts to resurface. They'll both be alright. I'm doing this for them, so that they'll be safe. "You'd better be!" Jack said before he teleported out of the Hub.

He was going to find the Doctor, and the Doctor would save them all.
Ianto and Gwen stood staring at the Dalek frozen in time in the Torchwood Hub entrance. "What do you think's going to happen?" Gwen asked in a hushed voice.

"Don't know," Ianto replied.

"Do you think we'll get out of this… alive?" Gwen added.

"Yeah… yeah, I do. The Doctor's here. He's fought the Daleks before… and won," Ianto said, turning to look at Gwen.

"At what price?" Gwen asked, reaching out again to touch the invisible time lock.

Ianto didn’t respond immediately. He’d seen the destruction at Canary Wharf, he’d witnessed the downfall of Torchwood One, and Jack had told him about Rose Tyler. "There's always a price," he eventually said, almost in a whisper.

Gwen turned to look at him, and for a long moment, they stared into each other's eyes. She finally broke the silence, putting her hand on his arm. "Can't focus on that now, can we?"

"Might as well see if we can monitor what's happening," Ianto agreed.

Gwen squeezed his arm, and then they walked together back to their workstations. Ianto began to pull up CCTV camera feeds from around Cardiff. The streets were deserted – devoid of both humans and Daleks. Gwen must have been doing the same thing because she asked, "Where have they all gone? I don't see Daleks anywhere. It's like the invasion has just stopped."

"They must be fighting. They must have gotten there." Ianto pointed at the red dot blinking in the middle of the twenty-seven planets.

"I wonder what's happening," Gwen mused.

They looked at each other again. Ianto felt a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. "Still, at least we know that Jack will be okay," he said, trying to reassure himself.

"What are we going to do about that?" Gwen asked, indicating the frozen Dalek.

"Not sure yet, but we'll figure something out. We always do."

Gwen smiled at him. "Yeah, we do, don't we?"

For several hours they stood at their computers, watching and waiting, looking for any sign that something was happening. Finally Gwen let out a growl of frustration and sat down heavily in her chair. "I can't stand this – this waiting! This… not being able to do anything! Just standing here, useless… and helpless."
Ianto was reminded of his first year at Torchwood Three – all the hours he spent waiting at the Hub while the others went out into the field. *Being left behind...* "I know the feeling," he admitted, sitting down next to her.

"Ianto, do you think he's coming back?"

"He said he was," Ianto replied, knowing she was talking about Jack.

"Yeah, but Jack says a lot of things, most of which are total rubbish."

Ianto half smiled. "You'd be surprised by how much of what he says is actually true," he commented.

"Really?" Gwen asked, looking shocked.

"It *is* Jack we're talking about. Would you really put any of the things he says past him?"

Gwen appeared to think about that for a second. "I see your point."

They smiled at each other, and Gwen giggled.

An alarm sounded on the computers and they both jumped up. Ianto typed quickly on his keyboard. His mouth dropped open in surprise at what he saw. Daleks were simultaneously blowing up all over the country. "Gwen, do you see?" he exclaimed.

The Dalek in the doorway suddenly exploded. "There goes the time lock!" Gwen exclaimed. "They're exploding all over the planet. They must have won," she added.

"I knew they would," Ianto said, feeling a wave of relief.

They spent several minutes trying to determine what was happening outside of the Hub. Ianto felt his frustration mounting as he failed to find elucidation. Then a voice came over their speakers. "Torchwood Hub! This is the Doctor! Are you receiving me?"

"Loud and clear! Is Jack there?" Gwen asked.

"Can't get rid of him!" The Doctor replied. "Jack, what's her name?"

"Gwen Cooper."

Ianto breathed a sigh of relief when he heard Jack's voice.

"Tell me, Gwen Cooper, are you from an old Cardiff family?" the Doctor asked.

"Yes, all the way back to the eighteen-hundreds," Gwen answered, sounding confused.

"Yeah, thought so. Spatial genetic multiplicity," the Doctor said with a grin.

"Oh yeah." Rose Tyler agreed.

Both of them were on the screen, looking at Gwen with huge smiles on their faces. *Wonder what that's all about,* Ianto thought curiously. "Yeah, yeah, funny old world," the Doctor continued. "Now, Torchwood, I want you to open up that Rift Manipulator. Send all the power to me."

"Doing it now, sir," Ianto said, peering into the screen.
"What's that for?" Gwen asked.

"It's a tow-rope," replied the Doctor.

Ianto and Gwen listened as the Doctor contacted Sarah Jane's son Luke and their computer Mr. Smith, and explained what he had in mind. Then they heard the Doctor say, "We've got the Torchwood Rift looped around the TARDIS by Mr. Smith, and we're gonna fly Planet Earth back home! Right then! Off we go!"

Ianto and Gwen held on tight, shouting and cheering, as the TARDIS pulled the Earth back to its proper place in the galaxy. It was one of the strangest sensations that Ianto had ever experienced. They clung to the metal framework around their workstations, and he couldn't help laughing uproariously in his elation.

Once they were home, Gwen and Ianto threw their arms around each other, still laughing.

"I've got to phone Rhys," Gwen finally said, pulling away from Ianto.

And I should phone Jack, Ianto thought. But he didn't. Instead, he pulled his mobile out of his pocket and dialed his sister's number. He was relieved to hear that everyone was safe. Rhiannon wanted to talk, to exclaim and speculate over recent events, but he didn't have time for her. He knew she could go on for ages, and he wasn't in the mood. He promptly cut her off. "I have to work, Rhiannon. I'll call you later."

He quickly hung up as she started to protest with a hurried, "Sorry. Have to go. Bye."

He loved his sister and her children, and he was relieved that they were unharmed. But they'd never had anything in common, and he found talking to her exhausting. He turned back to the computer and started to assess the damage to Cardiff. It's going to be a massive cleanup, he thought wryly. At least Torchwood won't have to do it alone... and by Torchwood, I mean me. Guess we can't hide the existence of aliens anymore...

Gwen returned several minutes later. "Rhys is alright, as are my family and his."

"That's great news," Ianto said, smiling at her.

"Did you talk to your sister?"

"Yup. They're all fine."

"Good. Have you talked to Jack?" she asked.

"No. I figured he was still with the Doctor."

"Do you think he's coming back?" Gwen asked again.

Ianto felt a moment of uncertainty, but he quickly suppressed the emotion. "I know he is," he said with more confidence than he felt. They looked at each other. "We should try to clean up this place," he added. "I don't want him to know."

"Know what?"

"How close we were to dying."

"Why not? We should tell him about the time lock. It's a brilliant piece of tech," Gwen argued.
"No, Gwen," he grabbed her arm. "We can't tell him. He'll just disappear on us again… And we just got him back."

Gwen looked at him for a long time. "You love him, don't you?"

"Yes," he replied simply. He'd briefly considered deflecting, but he was done denying his feelings for Jack.

"So do I. Just in a different way."

"I know…" he smiled at her. "Let's clean up this mess, yeah?"

They set to work trying to repair what damage they could. The biggest problem was the cogwheel door and the Dalek remains, but on inspection, they realized that the Dalek had only blown the lock. Luckily the door was still in place and working. They pushed the Dalek remnants onto the invisible lift and rode with it to the surface. Once there, they shoved it out into the street and wheeled it several hundred yards away from the water tower.

Ianto did some elaborate editing of the CCTV camera footage while Gwen picked up the remaining pieces of the Dalek strewn around the Hub entrance. Ianto did his best to make it look like the Daleks hadn't come close to touching them, trying to make it look like they'd always been safe, locked away in the Hub. He was determined that Jack should remain ignorant of their peril.

After they'd worked for a while, Gwen asked, "Do you think we should phone him?"

"If you want," he replied.

"Don't you want to phone him?" she asked, sounding incredulous.

"Jack will come back when he's ready. He always does," Ianto replied simply.

"Well, I'm going to phone him." Gwen took out her mobile.

"Alright then, Gwen," Ianto said, chuckling a little.

She dialed and held the phone to her ear. "Jack?"

Ianto could hear Jack's voice loud and clear. "Gwen Cooper. Good to hear your voice. Is Ianto there?"

"He's right here, Jack. We're both fine."

"I knew you would be."

"What happened Jack?"

"We saved the world and destroyed the Daleks, once and for all!"

"Oh, well, only that? Why don't you talk to me when you've done something really impressive," she said with mock indifference.

Jack laughed. "I'm coming home. I got dropped off in London. I'm going to get someone from UNIT to drive me back. I'll be there in a few hours."

"We'll be waiting," Gwen said, smiling at Ianto.
"Gwen, go home. Go be with Rhys. You deserve it."

"Thanks, Jack. I think I will. But I'm sure Ianto will be here… waiting for you," she said, looking at Ianto.

Jack chuckled.

"See you, Jack." Gwen hung up and looked at Ianto. "You heard?"

Ianto smiled. "It was impossible not to hear. He's rather… loud."

Gwen snickered. "He is that. You'll be okay on your own?"

"Yeah, go on. Go home."

"You sure?"

"I'm positive," he assured her.

A short time later, and after more prompting from Ianto, Gwen gathered her belongings and left for home. "Quite a day," he said aloud into the empty Hub. "Glad that's over."

Breathing a sigh of relief, he put his hands on his hips and surveyed the Hub. That's what I love about Torchwood, he thought ironically. No matter how many times we save the planet, in the end, I always have a mess to tidy up.

Gwen had helped him with some of the major damage, but after the Earth had been pulled across galaxies, things were in a state of chaos. He sighed heavily and set to work. After a couple of hours, he began to feel hungry. Jack will probably be starving when he gets back… I should get us some food. I wonder if Jubilee is open… Is it possible?

He took his mobile out of his pocket and dialed. To his astonishment, the phone was answered by what sounded like a teenage girl. "You're open?" he inquired incredulously.

"Yeah, we're open," the girl replied, sounding bored. "Why wouldn't we be?"

Oh, because the world almost ended! Concealing his shock, he said aloud, "I'll take two meat feasts then."

"Pickup or delivery?"

They're even delivering? He couldn't believe it. "Delivery," he replied quickly.

He gave the girl the delivery information and disconnected. He shook his head in disbelief. Then he started laughing.

Fifteen minutes later, he was paying the delivery girl for the pizzas in the Tourist Office with an amused grin. He gave her an extra tip.

A short time later, the cogwheel door rolled open. "Ianto?" Jack called.

"I'm here, Jack," Ianto replied from the other side of the main level of the Hub where he was putting scattered items back on the various desks.

Jack ran across the Hub and pulled Ianto into a fierce embrace. They kissed for a long time. "You're safe," Jack said when he finally pulled away.
"I'm fine, Jack," Ianto reassured him with a smile.

"What happened here?"


Ianto helped Jack off with his greatcoat. "So?" he asked, holding out his hand as Jack removed his Webley and holster.

Jack placed the gun and holster in Ianto's hand. "Have a good day, did you? Save the world again?"

Ianto quipped.

Jack laughed. "Yeah, something like that."

"You going to tell me about it?" Ianto asked as he hung Jack's coat on the coat stand and placed his gun and holster in the desk drawer.

When Jack didn't respond, Ianto looked back up at him.

"Yeah, yeah I am. I'm just famished. There isn't any food around by any chance, is there?"

"I took the liberty of ordering a couple of pizzas," Ianto replied smiling.

"Jubilee is open?" Jack asked, looking shocked.

"Don't think a little thing like a Dalek invasion would keep them closed, do you?" Ianto said with feigned indignation.

Jack laughed again. He put his arms around Ianto. "You think of everything, don't you, Ianto Jones?"

"I do, don't I?" Ianto grinned.

Jack leaned in and kissed him again. "It's good to be home," Jack said pulling back.

"Not tempted to stay with the Doctor?" Ianto asked cautiously.

"I told you I was coming back!" Jack said, sounding slightly annoyed.

"I just know how much you enjoy being with him," Ianto explained.

"My place is here," Jack said tersely. "Now where are those pizzas you promised me?"

Ianto decided to let the matter drop. He'd had his doubts, but Jack had returned. *Besides, he sounds a bit irritated by my asking...*

They settled down in Jack's office and ate the pizzas. Ianto listened as Jack told him about finding the Doctor, of the Doctor regenerating back into the same man, of the events on the Crucible, and of the new Doctor and the DoctorDonna. "There were three of them?" Ianto exclaimed. "I can't imagine what you were thinking!"

"That's what I said!" Jack said, laughing. "So the entire Dalek army was destroyed," he continued.

"Did you die?" Ianto asked, looking hard at him.

"Only once," Jack shrugged, "But I let them kill me."
Ianto inwardly cringed, but he didn't let his emotions show.

"Anyway," Jack continued hurriedly, obviously not wanting to belabor the point, "The Doctor dropped Sarah Jane, Martha, Mickey and myself in London. Sarah Jane ran home to her son, Martha wanted to get home to see her mother, Mickey was keen to find a new life for himself, and that left me stranded in London. I called UNIT. Made one of their soldiers drive me home. Worked out well because his family lives in Cardiff, so he wanted to come home. Cute guy named Paul. Looks good in a uniform. Gave me his phone number."

Ianto rolled his eyes. "Of course he did," he muttered.

Jack grinned and pulled Ianto to him, kissing him. "I gave it back to him. Told him I had a gorgeous Welshman waiting for me at home."

"You did, did you?" Ianto asked skeptically.


Ianto grinned and started to take off his tie.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to riftintime for being brilliant and patient.

Jack was lying on his side, propped up on one elbow, watching Ianto sleep. After some very satisfactory reunion sex that started in Jack's office, made its way into the hot house, and ended in Jack's bunker, Ianto had fallen into an exhausted sleep. Jack, on the other hand, was wide-awake. So much had happened over the last twelve hours that his brain was unable to cope with the multitude of emotions he was currently experiencing.

He had believed – really believed – for about an hour that Ianto and Gwen were going to die. He'd believed that everyone on the Earth was going to perish, and that he would be the only one left alive. He'd had nightmares like that before – where he was literally the last person left on the entire planet. It was truly his greatest fear – being utterly alone. He shuddered at the thought and reached his hand out, resting it lightly on Ianto's chest. He took comfort in the rhythmic rise and fall of Ianto's breathing and the tangible beating of the heart beneath the younger man's skin.

I forgot… in the past couple of weeks I let myself forget my immortality… I fooled myself into thinking that Ianto and I could have a normal relationship… I wanted to believe it. I wanted that for us – that chance for a normal life… But the Dalek invasion brought the reality of my situation back with a vengeance. How could I let myself believe that I could give myself to someone like that? It's something I'll never be able to do. I just can't...

He lifted his hand off of Ianto's chest and caressed the side of his face with his fingertips. He knew that some part of him was going to withdraw emotionally from Ianto again. He knew it was his only choice. Because I know how much I love you… He just hoped that Ianto wouldn't notice. I have to, he silently told himself. If I let myself go on loving you like this… If I give myself to you entirely, I'll have to mourn your loss for eons… not just for one lifetime. You can't understand what that's like. No mortal person can understand. How could I go on after… He couldn't even finish the thought in his head. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Ianto shifted in bed and a slight frown creased his brow. Jack was startled, and he quickly removed his hand from Ianto's face. Did he hear me? He held perfectly still, holding his breath until he heard Ianto's breathing return to its steady, rhythmic nature. Then he gently let out his breath.

Jack quietly and carefully extricated himself from the sleeping Welshman and quickly dressed. Then he left the Hub and headed for his favorite rooftop.

As he stood overlooking the city with the wind whipping at his greatcoat, he realized that this would be his last Torchwood team. He had worked for Torchwood for over a century, and it was long enough. He had seen the death of countless Torchwood employees, but they'd never been his employees – his team. They had always been his teammates. It's different when you're in charge… You feel more responsible. He was familiar with the sensation. He'd lead troops into battle in the various wars he'd fought. But somehow Torchwood was special. He'd let himself grow closer to his Torchwood team than he had with any of the other people he'd led. He'd struggled to overcome the death of Tosh and Owen. And now he was grappling with the prospect of losing Gwen… and Ianto.
He pulled himself up to his full height. "After this… ends," he forced himself to say aloud. "After Gwen and Ianto are gone… I'm leaving. I'm done with Torchwood."

He'd come here looking for the Doctor. He'd stayed because he had been stranded. He had come back because he'd found his place, and the closest thing he'd known to a home in a long time. Without them, I have nothing here. He thought about the line he'd used so many times to justify his association with Torchwood. "The twenty-first century is where everything changes." But I didn't learn anything in history class about a Dalek invasion in 2009… There's no mention of the Earth being stolen from its location in the galaxy… That didn't happen in my original timeline… He wondered if he himself was responsible for changing the course of history. What else have I screwed up?

"You're wrong... You're an impossible thing, Jack."

Those words of the Doctor, which he'd managed to push from his memory, unexpectedly came back to him. He knew the rules of time travel all too well. He'd bent them before. But so has the Doctor, for all his preaching about interference. But he hasn't left traces of himself in the past – at least not like I have. I've left children, scattered across the century. Forced to abandon them because of my 'affliction.' He still had a living descendant with a child of her own. My daughter… my grandson… He forced the thoughts from his mind. It was a place he didn't allow himself to go. It was one of his darkest secrets and one of which he was deeply ashamed. I should have been more careful… Did I cause the Dalek invasion somehow? Is this my fault? Did I change the course of history? What would the Doctor say about my interference?

Ianto had been right about one thing. Being with the Doctor again had reminded him of how much he enjoyed the Time Lord's company. There was always adventure. There was always danger. And there was always resolution. And I'm not in charge. It's not my responsibility… Not my fault. Maybe after all this, I can travel with the Doctor again for a while. The Doctor wasn't immortal like Jack, but he was certainly a lot closer than the rest of mankind. Maybe losing Ianto will hurt less, being with him… Because I'm so afraid… I'm so very afraid that whatever happens to Ianto, it will be my fault...

Jack suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of despair and sadness. I can't believe I'm standing here planning my future after Gwen and Ianto are gone. Part of him realized that it was survival instinct talking, but another part of him – the major part – was appalled. How could I even think about it? A pain so intense took hold that he couldn't bear the sensation for one more moment. He didn't want to suffer the endless torment any longer. He leaned forward and allowed himself to fall into oblivion.

He came back to life with a gasp as agonizing pain tore through his body. Strong arms were holding him, and he reached out and clung to them instinctually. "What have you done?" a familiar voice asked.

"Ianto?"

"I woke up and you were gone. I came to find you. Knew you'd be on a rooftop… Knew this one is your favorite. And I find you splattered across the pavement!" Ianto cried.

"I… I must have slipped… fell off the roof," Jack said, trying to regain hold of his senses.

"Bollocks!" Ianto retorted angrily.

"You know how I like to stand close to the edge," Jack said, attempting to make his voice sound light-hearted.
Ianto didn't respond, and Jack looked up into furious blue eyes. "I'm sorry, Ianto," he whispered.

The silence stretched out as Ianto continued to stare angrily at him, his mouth pressed into an inimical frown. The last thing Jack wanted was a row with Ianto. He began to struggle to his feet. "Come on," he said, forcing his aching body into the upright position. "Let's go home."

Wordlessly Ianto stood and wrapped Jack's arm around his shoulder. Jack leaned heavily against Ianto, and he limped his way to the SUV.

Ianto drove the SUV back to the Hub and parked in the Torchwood garage without speaking a word. The tension hung heavily in the air, and Jack wondered how he could avoid Ianto's imminent outburst. He was exhausted and emotionally drained, and he just didn't have the energy to try and explain his actions, not even to Ianto.

He got out of the car and walked through the Hub, descending quickly into his bunker. Ianto followed closely on his heels. Jack finally broke the silence. "I think I need a shower." He watched Ianto's eyes narrow forbiddingly, and he added slyly, "Care to join me?" attempting to deflect Ianto's anger.

"Jack," Ianto said with obvious outrage in his voice. "You just threw yourself off a building. And now you just want to pretend nothing happened and have sex?"


Ianto stared at him for a long time. Jack started to feel uncomfortable under the piercing blue scrutiny, but he didn't allow himself to look away. "Fine," Ianto finally agreed tersely. "You fell."

"Yup," Jack said with relief. "Stupid of me. Now how about that shower?"

Jack watched a myriad of emotions pass across Ianto's handsome features. Then the younger man sprung forward and grabbed Jack, kissing him with a ferocity that surprised him. There was so much force and emotion in the embrace that Jack was taken aback. Though Ianto could be an exciting and tender lover, his natural taciturnity was always evident. This was one of the rare moments when Ianto completely let go of his reserve, and Jack found it exceedingly erotic. He was instantly hard. "Just don't do it again, yeah?" Ianto asked, pausing for breath.

"Okay," Jack agreed easily before kissing Ianto again and pulling him into the bathroom.

There was some initial coolness between them the next morning. Though the sex they'd had in the shower was incredibly intense, Ianto was obviously still disturbed by the previous night's events. But Jack was determined to carry on as though nothing had happened. He flirted with and teased Ianto until the younger man began to roll his eyes in exasperation. And when the first smirk of amusement tugged at the corner's of Ianto's mouth, Jack knew that he had won.

He and Ianto fell back into their usual pattern. But Jack was somewhat more emotionally withdrawn from Ianto. He hoped it was not enough that Ianto would notice, but enough to protect himself from the terrible prospect of eventually losing the younger man. If Ianto had noticed, he hadn't said anything. However, there wasn't much opportunity, because the next few weeks at Torchwood were exceptionally busy.

First a young girl named Frieda from 2069 fell through the Rift. They eventually discovered that she wasn't a girl at all, but an alien. Her family had come to Earth as refugees when their planet had become uninhabitable. So Jack agreed to set up a Torchwood Asylum policy to help her and others of her kind. He was against the idea at first, but he finally gave in when both Ianto and Gwen
insisted. Besides, it seemed that she had been sent by Torchwood of the future. And who was he to ignore a message from the future? *It might be from me… And it might be important…*

They were busy setting up the details of the Asylum when they started detecting unusual energy spikes. They discovered that the spikes tracked to Delhi, India, and that people had been disappearing from the area for months. So Torchwood went to India.

Jack was astonished to find that Torchwood India, which he'd shut down in February of 1924, was still in existence and still being run by Eleanor, the Duchess of Melrose. She hadn't aged a day. It seemed that they were stuck in some sort of time lock.

It was one of the many regrettable instances in Jack's long life. He had been ordered to shut down the operation and bring all of the alien artifacts back to the United Kingdom when British rule was withdrawing from India. Of course, he'd seduced the Duchess in order to carry out his mission. He had been a different person back then. And he regretted the way he'd used and betrayed Eleanor.

He tried to make it up to her. He tried to apologize, but the time lock had turned her into a monster. She wanted to drag the entire world back into 1924, and Jack had to stop her. He couldn't allow his guilt and regret to cloud his judgment. Once again he almost lost Ianto and Gwen when they became trapped in the energy field. Seeing them become transparent, appearing like ghosts made his heart ache painfully, and it just furthered his resolve to emotionally distance himself from his lover.

After returning from India, they started working on a case of strange 'coma' patients who went into trance-like states after answering a phone call. Jack was intrigued, and when they traced the calls back to a number – Cardiff 2059 – he dialed it with confidence, despite Ianto and Gwen's protests. It was a dead line. But then all of the disconnected phones started ringing at once. "I guess they want to talk to us after all," he said with amusement. He picked one up, ignoring Gwen's admonishment. "This is Jack Harkness."

It was the last thing he remembered.
Ianto awoke to an empty bed. It wasn't an unusual occurrence. Jack was often restless, and he commonly got up before Ianto did, if he even slept at all. But somehow, Ianto felt different about it this time. Although their reunion sex had taken on a marathon-like quality, there had been something unfocused about Jack's behavior. Ianto had sensed a restlessness and unease.

Ianto sat up and glanced at the clock. It was 3:45am. He lay back on the pillows and closed his eyes again, but it was no use. He couldn't stop his racing thoughts. Something was nagging at the back of his mind. He sat up again and rubbed his eyes. Then he leaned over and grabbed his clothes. He knew that he wouldn't be able to relax until he found Jack.

A quick scan of the Hub showed no trace of the older man. Ianto pulled up the CCTV feed of the Hub's garage and watched the recording as the SUV pulled out of its parking spot. The time stamp read 3:27am. Presuming that Jack had gone to brood on a rooftop, Ianto pulled on a jacket and headed out of the Hub to follow him.

He quickly hailed a passing taxi and directed the driver to the Capital Tower. He was experiencing a sense of urgency that he couldn't quite understand. Nothing could have happened to Jack. He's immortal, after all. He's just helped the Doctor to defeat the Daleks and save the planet. We should be celebrating. But Ianto couldn't dispel his impending sense of panic, and he knew it was because Jack had seemed unusually preoccupied.

You're being absurd, he told himself harshly. You need to pull yourself together. He leaned forward and ordered the taxi driver to stop. He was only a couple of blocks away, and he needed a few minutes to gather his thoughts before confronting Jack.

He paid the driver and stepped out of the car. The cool breeze felt good against his face, and he took a moment to breathe deeply. Then he started walking. As he neared the building, something on the pavement ahead caught his eye. It looked at first like a pile of discarded clothing, but as he approached, the grey-blue of Jack's greatcoat came into focus. His heart started pounding, and he began to run.

Jack was sprawled on the pavement. A large, dark stain seeped out from underneath his body and was slowly spreading over the grey concrete. Ianto froze in his tracks, staring in horror at Jack's broken body. Then he looked up at the rooftop, and he instinctually knew that Jack had jumped.

Time seemed to ground to a halt. For a moment Ianto was unable to force his body into action. He felt like it was one of those dreams where he was trying to run for his life and his legs were moving, but he wasn't going anywhere. Then all at once, time sped up again, and he was on his knees, pulling Jack into his arms.

His horror had turned into despair, and then quickly into anger. "Why, Jack? Why?" he asked the older man's lifeless body, shaking him slightly.
He spent the usual tense few minutes waiting, hoping, and praying that this time wouldn't be the last. He held his breath as he cradled Jack's body against his chest. *Wake up. Please wake up.*

Finally he felt Jack's body go rigid and heard the desperate intake of breath. Jack shuddered, and then reached out, clinging to him. All of the emotions that had been battling in Ianto's mind converged into one tangible force. Fury. "What have you done?" Ianto cried.

Jack blinked his eyes and cringed in obvious pain. "Ianto?" he breathed.

Ianto started talking, filling the air with words, trying to reign in his emotions. "I woke up and you were gone. I came to find you. Knew you'd be on a rooftop… Knew this one is your favorite. And I find you splattered across the pavement!"

"I… I must have slipped… fell off the roof," Jack explained.

Outrage made Ianto clench his fists. "Bollocks!" he challenged.

"You know how I like to stand close to the edge," Jack said in a lighthearted and dismissive tone.

Ianto didn't respond. His rage had rendered him speechless. He glared irately at Jack. Jack looked up and into his eyes. "I'm sorry, Ianto," he whispered.

The silence stretched out as Ianto continued to stare furiously at him. He abhorred the fact that Jack was so cavalier about his life, even though he was supposedly immortal. *He knows that I hate when he dies, that it terrifies me that he won't come back one day. How could he, knowing how I feel about it? How often does he do this? Kill himself… without me ever knowing…*

Jack started to struggle to his feet. "Come on. Let's go home."

Wordlessly Ianto stood and wrapped Jack's arm around his shoulder. Jack leaned heavily against Ianto, as they walked to the SUV parked nearby. Ianto wanted to shout and rage at Jack, but no words came to his lips. He couldn't think of anything to say. He didn't even know where to begin.

He silently helped Jack into the passenger seat of the SUV and climbed into the driver's seat. Neither of them spoke a word as they drove back to the Hub, parked, and made their way through the Hub and down the ladder into Jack's bunker. Ianto's thoughts bounced from anger to sadness and defeat. *Why, Jack? He kept asking silently. Why do you do it? What is causing you so much pain that you repeatedly try to end your life? Why won't you tell me? Why don't you talk to me anymore?*

Jack finally broke the silence. "I think I need a shower."

"That's all he has to say?" Ianto narrowed his eyes. "Care to join me?" Jack added slyly.

Ianto's anger finally broke through the surface. "Jack, you just threw yourself off a building. And now you just want to pretend nothing happened and have sex?"


Ianto stared at him for a long time, torn between wanting to push the subject and respecting Jack's obvious desire for concealment. *What's happened to us? You used to confide in me. Now it feels like you're a million miles away… What is so unendurable that you want to die? You once told me that I make you happy… Is that no longer true?... But I know you, and forcing you to talk about something you obviously don't want to discuss isn't going to help… He resigned himself. I just hope you change your mind someday. "Fine," Ianto finally said, giving in. "You fell."

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"Yup," Jack said with evident relief in his voice. "Stupid of me. Now how about that shower?"

Ianto considered refusing. Sex was about the last thing on his mind. But the thought of losing Jack again, after he'd just gotten him back made him hesitate. If I fight him on this, I'll just push him farther away... And that's the last thing I want to do... And I can't stand to see him in pain. I can't stand feeling helpless – unable to ease his burden. His pain has become mine... That's what love is... Emotion compelled him into motion, and he instinctually sprang forward, grabbing Jack and kissing him with a desperation that even he, himself, found surprising. I don't want to lose you again, he thought as he embraced Jack ferociously.

He finally pulled back to catch his breath murmuring, "Just don't do it again, yeah?"

"Okay," Jack agreed easily before kissing Ianto again and pulling him into the bathroom.

The sex that followed was intense. Ianto felt himself letting go, allowing himself to get lost in Jack. There was something desperate in every kiss and caress. Ianto let Jack take him, reveling in the feeling of Jack possessing him, both physically and emotionally.

Afterwards, Ianto lay once again in an empty bed, staring up at the ceiling, ostensibly trying to catch a couple more hours of sleep. He watched the dimly flickering lights seeping through the opening leading up to Jack's office and listened to the muted sounds of Jack working at his desk. He tried to make sense of the chaos in his mind.

Although they'd grown close over the course of their time together, both of them had always held back some part of themselves, maintaining a certain distance, and hiding behind emotional barriers. Some of those barriers had come down over time, but not all of them. After Tosh and Owen's deaths, Ianto had decided that he was no longer going to repress his feelings. He was in love with Jack. There was no longer any sense in denying it. He had let go of all of his reserve. But it seemed like Jack had had the opposite reaction to the tragedy. If anything, he's grown more distant. The balance of power has shifted... I no longer have any control... The realization shocked him, made him feel frustrated and despondent, but most of all, it terrified him.

Ianto was disconcerted by his revelations, and it made the following morning awkward. Suddenly, he felt like he didn't know how to behave around Jack. He felt self-conscious and tongue-tied. Jack, too, seemed uncomfortable, and conversation between them was clumsy and stilted. But as the morning wore on, Jack apparently decided to ignore any awkwardness. He began to flirt with Ianto, and he teased him mercilessly until Ianto finally gave in, silently agreeing to the truce. Whatever issues existed between them, it was obvious that for the time being, they would remain unspoken.

Over the next few weeks, although Ianto and Jack were getting along well, there was something different between them. It was subtle, but Ianto felt it all the same. Jack was affectionate and attentive. Their sex life was just as intense as ever, but there was a nuance of change. It's like we're only lovers and no longer friends, Ianto finally realized. We don't talk anymore. Part of him wanted to discuss it with Jack, but another part of him shied away from confrontation. It's not like I have something to complain about per se... What can I say? 'You never tell me anything anymore? You never confide in me?' I'll just sound like a neurotic lover, and it will push him away.

He initially decided that he loved Jack enough to accept whatever the older man was willing to offer. If this is the most he can give me... I'll just have to learn to live with it. And for a while, he actually believed that he could.

He kept telling himself that it was enough, that it was who Jack was, that he would take whatever Jack would give. I'm in love with an immortal man who has lived countless lifetimes... And will live countless more when I'm gone. I can't possibly expect to hold as much significance in his life as he
holds in mine... I should be happy with what we have. But a little voice inside his head knew he couldn't perpetually suppress the heartache. It's terrible to feel like you love someone more than they love you... if he even loves me at all...

He knew that ultimately he would have to have a serious discussion with Jack. He couldn't continue to maintain a stoic silence, though it was his natural instinct to do so. He was certainly not much of a talker. But if I do keep silent... if this goes on... I will eventually reach a breaking point.

Even if he could finally convince himself to talk to Jack and muster up the courage, it never seemed to be the right time. There was always another case to work, and Torchwood was unusually busy. First there was the young girl, Frieda, from the year 2069, who fell through the Rift. And because of her, Torchwood set up an Asylum policy to help her and others of her kind. It was Ianto who did most of the organizing of the Asylum, with some occasional help from Gwen. However, he didn't mind. It kept him busy and occupied.

Then Torchwood went to India, chasing unusual energy spikes. After another near-death experience, they managed to stop Eleanor, the Duchess of Melrose from sucking the entire world back into 1924. Jack obviously had a history with Eleanor, but he didn't elucidate. Ianto was tempted to ask, but he'd never had to in the past. Jack had always confided in him of his own accord. That was always the kind of thing that Jack would tell me about. And now... He's back to his secrets and deflections.

Maybe I should just talk to him, Ianto finally decided one day. Ask him why. Ask him what's changed... But he never got the chance. They started working on a strange case of people falling into comas after answering the telephone, and Jack became the next victim.

Only Ianto seemed to understand how much Jack was suffering. He knew Jack well enough to know that he had recently thrown himself from the roof of a building because he found the pain of his life unendurable. Jack being in a coma-like state, left to his thoughts for all of eternity, was the worst kind of torture that Ianto could imagine Jack suffering. It was worse than death. It was Jack's hell. It's Jack's 'No Exit.' Ianto remembered when Jack was stuck in the hell dimension and shuddered in horror. I have to bring him back. I can't leave him there.

He was frantic with worry. He called Professor Stella Courtney to help. Jack had recently mentioned her as a leading neuroscientist and an old friend. Ianto would have tried anything. He let Gwen and Rhys do all of the investigating, feeling torn between his commitment to Torchwood, and his love for Jack. In the end, he couldn't bring himself to leave Jack alone in his current state. Putting aside his work ethic, he stood vigil by Jack’s bedside, waiting for the smallest hint of change. Gwen, Rhys, and Professor Courtney can find the answers. I need to stay with Jack.

Finding himself alone with Jack, he pulled up a chair and sat down, taking Jack's hand and entwining their fingers. "They say you're supposed to talk to people when they're in a coma, don't they?" he began, looking at Jack's still, lifeless form.

"I have absolutely no idea whether you can hear me, Jack. I never heard of anybody coming out of one and carrying on the conversation," he half laughed at his feeble attempt at humor. "So I suspect it's probably something the doctors tell us to do – to make us feel better rather than help you. We don't feel quite so useless and helpless. We get the feeling there's still some sort of purpose in our lives. We're not just waiting; waiting for the science to work... or the miracle to happen... or the nightmare to end."

Ianto paused as his eyes filled with tears and his voice broke. He quickly pulled himself together. This isn't about me, it's about Jack. He used his free hand to wipe roughly at his eyes.

"I'm not much of a talker, Jack. You know that... but I'll talk to you now on the off chance that it
helps."

He paused again, suddenly feeling insecure. Given the recent events, he wasn't exactly sure he understood where he stood with Jack. "Just promise me – if you're hearing this – that when you come round… And you're going to, Jack. You're going to come out of this. Just… promise me you'll never bring up anything I say to you now. How's that? We got a deal?"

He paused once more. Regardless of the status of their relationship, he was looking at the man he loved, suffering. He steeled his nerves and began to talk.

"This must be the longest I've ever looked at you and not seen you smile. I've watched you in your sleep. Did you know that? So many times. Just waking up beside you in the middle of the night and watched you. Watched your eyes moving behind your eyelids as you dreamed. I tried to imagine what a man like you could possibly dream about. The things you've seen… The lives you've lived… The people you've loved…"

A twinge of jealousy whispered at his heart, but the whisper was quickly silenced. "I wondered if you were dreaming about me – I hoped you were dreaming about me. But let's be honest Jack; I'm nothing more than a blip in time for you. Every day, I grow a little older. But you're immortal. You've already lived a thousand lifetimes. How could you watch me grow old and die? How can I watch you live and never age a day?"

Is this really it? Is this the heart of the matter? Is this what truly lies at the bottom of our complicated relationship? Ianto forced himself to continue.

"I suppose we both know that will never be problem. Not in this job. No one in Torchwood ever lives to draw their pension, do they?" he laughed ruefully. "And even if, by some miracle I survive to see my hair turn grey, or god forbid fall out, I don't kid myself you'd still be around to see it. One day you'll go again. Just like you did before. And this time you won't be back."

His voice broke again. He'd finally admitted aloud the thing he feared the most. Pulling himself together, he forced himself to focus on Jack. "Maybe that's what you're dreaming about those nights when I watch you sleeping. Maybe that's why, even when you sleep, I see you smile. But you haven't gone yet Jack. I know that. I know you're coming back to me."

It was the closest Ianto had ever come to telling Jack that he loved him.
Thanks as always to my superbly talented beta riftintime. The beginning of this chapter was greatly inspired by chapter 24 of riftintime's "Falling Into Place," though the language there is much more eloquent than mine.

Jack was aware, but not lucid. His mind had slipped sideways. One moment he was drifting… floating… unencumbered by his body, moving through time and space. The next, he felt trapped and immobile, like being frozen inside a block of stone. Light and sound mingled with darkness and silence, fluctuating in and out of focus, like turning the lens of a camera.

He would hear a flicker of voices, see flashes of light, feel the sensation of touch ghosting his body. Then he would fade away again. He was on the threshold of consciousness and at the edge of a dream. His rational mind had collided with his unconscious mind and were mingled in a nonsensical dance. He was paralyzed in a perpetual hypnagogic state, never achieving true lucidity, and never falling into the tranquility of genuine sleep.

There were moments when his focus turned sharp, unexpectedly tuned in to the world around him, like a radio dial that has suddenly locked onto a station, and the static becomes intelligible. It was in those moments that he knew true fear. He couldn't grasp hold of reality. He would try desperately to reach out, wanting to cling to the world outside of his tortured mind, only to be dragged violently back into insensibility.

This wasn't death. He knew death. He knew the darkness, the nothingness. He was in that place for a few moments every single time he died, catching a glimpse of what was After. There was nothing in that place. There was nothing After. This wasn't nothing. This was something. But there was no peace here either, only terror and despair.

Time was a vague and incongruous thing. It could have been mere minutes that he'd been trapped here. It could have been a thousand years. Time had always been his enemy, and now it was taking its perverse revenge, taunting him with its futility.

Fragments of his unnaturally long life wavered in his mind's eye, like channels flipping on a television set. The images horrified him. His mind had drudged up long suppressed memories, displaying themselves flagrantly, maliciously, forcing him to relive his worst and most deeply regretted moments. But the sensation was fleeting, flowing in and out of existence. He had no control over what his mind forced him to experience, no will of his own, no choice. When the lucid moments arrived, he was overcome with terror, because he knew that he was in his own personal Hell.

He was momentarily aware of a sensation of heat, but it slipped away and he felt cold again. Then the heat seemed to concentrate, originating from one place but slowly spreading throughout him, infusing his body with warmth.

"… supposed to talk to people when they're in a coma…"

Initially unintelligible, scrambled sounds converged into words, and the sequence of words became
comprehensible, then disassembled into white noise again.

"… waiting for the science to work… or the miracle to happen… or the nightmare to end."

He reached out with his mind, trying frantically to grab hold of the familiar sounds.

"I'm not much of a talker, Jack. You know that…"

He experienced a sensation of falling, then regaining awareness with a start, then drifting again. Falling off a building… He'd jumped from the building… Was he there again? Had he died for real this time? Permanently? Is that why this was different from when he'd died before?

"… promise me you'll never bring up anything I say to you now. How's that? We got a deal?"

His mind showed him an image of a dark suit and a red shirt.

"… I've watched you in your sleep. Did you know that? So many times. Just waking up beside you in the middle of the night and watched you…"

His thoughts conjured up images of an ironical grin, the sardonic raise of an eyebrow, a mordant eye roll. The voice was growing stronger, coalescing into coherence. He struggled with his aberrant thoughts, battling to regain control of his mind, exerting all of his effort on clinging to the fluency of that voice. *Ianto…*

"… But let's be honest Jack; I'm nothing more than a blip in time for you. Every day, I grow a little older. But you're immortal…"

*My Ianto…* He waged a war with his consciousness. He willed himself to hold on to Ianto's voice.

"… and even if, by some miracle I survive to see my hair turn grey, or god forbid fall out, I don't kid myself you'd still be around to see it. One day you'll go again. Just like you did before. And this time you won't be back."

He realized that the sensation of heat was coming from his hand. *Ianto… Ianto's holding my hand…*

"Maybe that's what you're dreaming about those nights when I watch you sleeping. Maybe that's why, even when you sleep, I see you smile. But you haven't gone yet Jack. I know that. I know you're coming back to me."

*I'm coming back to you, Ianto…* He faded away again into oblivion, unable to maintain his grasp on reality.

He was falling… gathering momentum, moving faster and faster, traveling at warp speed, the stars blurred into vivid streaks of light, and then he impacted. Intense pain tore through his body, tearing into his skull. He opened his eyes and blinked as the overhead fluorescent lights blinded him.

"Jack!"

Jack moaned and worked his jaw. He struggled to focus on Ianto's handsome features, twisted into a mask of concern. "Ianto?" he asked hesitantly, surprised when sound escaped his lips.

Another spasm of pain crashed like a lighting strike through his brain. "Oh, wow… my head!"

Jack looked past Ianto, catching sight of Gwen, smiling her gap-toothed grin, and he saw another face. One he hadn't seen in years. She was older now, but still beautiful, the fine bone structure remaining evident under the aged skin. "Stella? Stella Courtney? Is that really you?"
Stella beamed down at him. "Hello, Jack. Long time, no see."

Jack half-laughed. Then he became aware of the sterile surroundings, the white walls, the computer monitors beeping their monotonous tune, the wires attached to his head and chest, his own body, covered in an unattractive, faded green gown, and the bed he was lying in. What the hell? Why am I in a hospital? "Uh… so is someone around here going to tell me what's going on?" he asked the three faces peering anxiously at him.

Both Ianto and Gwen started talking at once. Jack was unable to follow their words, and his head throbbed painfully. He raised a hand to his face and rubbed his temples. "Both of you, out!" Stella ordered. "I need to examine my patient," she continued in the commanding voice of a doctor.

Gwen and Ianto quickly left the room with their shoulders hunched. Jack smiled at their chastised expressions. As Stella begun to examine him, she told him calmly and succinctly about everything that had transpired while he'd been in his trance-like state. As she spoke, his memory started to return. It wasn't a linear timeline that he recalled, rather it consisted of fragments and disconnected images. He remembered a ringing telephone. He remembered drifting in and out of rational thought. He remembered the fear and panic. He remembered the torment of the images from his contemptible past.

And he remembered Ianto's voice, pulling him back into reality, giving him an anchor. "Promise me you'll never bring up anything I say to you now… I've watched you in your sleep. Did you know that? So many times… But let's be honest Jack; I'm nothing more than a blip in time for you… One day you'll go again. Just like you did before. And this time you won't be back."

Jack's heart constricted painfully as he recalled Ianto's words. Is that really what he thinks? That he's just a fleeting distraction for me? I can't let him go on feeling like that… He forced his mind back to the present. Stella was giving him a clean bill of health, and he flirted with her in his usual way.

Gwen and Ianto re-entered the room, reassuring them that everything was being taken care of, and that all of the people who had been affected were going to make a full recovery. The electromagnetic pulse that they'd set off had destroyed the virus and reset the victim's brains.

"Then I should be getting back," Stella announced. "It's been good to see you again, Jack."

"What, now?" Jack protested. "I thought we could tell Ianto and Gwen about the seventies."

"Oh please God, no," Ianto muttered.

Jack winked at him.

"I don't think so," Stella laughed. "You'd only start dancing again, and you never were John Travolta."

"Hey!" Jack exclaimed. "I was the Saturday Night Fever."

Jack saw Ianto roll his eyes, and he smiled affectionately at the younger man.

"I know!" Stella agreed readily. "And for that there is absolutely no cure!"

They all smiled, except for Ianto who had merely raised an eyebrow.

"Bye Jack," Stella said, reaching up and kissing him on the cheek.

"Goodbye, Stella. And thanks," Jack said sincerely.
"Come on. I'll find you a cab," Gwen said, putting her arm around Stella and leading her out of the room.

Jack turned to Ianto and smiled. Ianto broke eye contact and looked down at his shoes. "So you don't… remember anything about the trance?" Ianto asked awkwardly.

"No," Jack lied. He remembered that Ianto didn't want him to bring up anything that was said, but Jack couldn't help himself. He needed Ianto to know. "Did you talk to me while I was out of it? They say that's what you should do."

"I talked… a little," Ianto admitted ruefully, glancing back up at him with a look of relief on his face. "But I'm not really much of a talker," he added quickly.

Jack reached out his hand, and Ianto took it. Jack pulled the younger man close to him and put his arms around Ianto's neck. "I know," Jack said gently.

"That's just me." Ianto shrugged his shoulders mildly.

"Yeah," Jack replied, stroking Ianto's face with his fingertips.

He looked into Ianto's eyes. *I know that I push you away,* he silently told Ianto. *And I know that I can be a total bastard… But you must know, have some idea of how I feel about you… You can't possibly think that you mean so little to me…* But he remembered that Ianto had spoken of things he thought Jack would never hear or certainly not remember.

His heart constricted in his chest as he stared into the eyes of the man he loved, looking back at him with his quiet devotion and understanding. There was something else hidden in the stormy blue depths that looked back at him. Jack couldn't deny he saw it there. He saw sadness. The constriction of his heart turned into a painful ache. He held Ianto's face in his hands and forced himself to speak.

"But you never will just be a blip in time, Ianto Jones. Not for me."

Several emotions passed rapidly in succession across Ianto's features. He put his hands around the back of Jack's neck and pulled him forward, kissing him fervently.

Jack returned the kiss, pressing his tongue into Ianto's mouth, pouring all of his emotion into the embrace, trying to say with actions what he was never able to say in words. They finally broke apart, leaning their foreheads together, their rapid breaths intermingling between their barely parted lips.

"Let's go home," Jack murmured, stroking the back of Ianto's neck.
Ianto and Jack walked through the cogwheel door after leaving the hospital and saying their goodbyes to Dr. Stella Courtney. Gwen had gone home with Rhys, and they had the Hub to themselves. Jack had seemed to make a full recovery from his trance-like state with no residual ill effects. He was his usual boisterous self. During the entire car ride back, Jack had regaled the younger man with stories about his and Stella's adventures during the seventies.

Ianto had maintained a placid silence. He was amused by Jack's stories, but his mind was distracted. He was still reeling from the knowledge that Jack had heard some, if not all, of what he'd said while in the coma. It was something he hadn't anticipated. He had dropped his guard in his desire to comfort Jack, and admittedly, himself. He hadn't expected that he might have to account for his heart-felt words. He had let go of some of his usual reserve and said things that he thought Jack would never hear or recollect. He had been, perhaps, more honest and open than he would have been, had he known Jack would remember.

Ianto felt a moment of nervous anticipation once he realized that they would be alone together for the rest of the night. Is Jack going to mention it again? Is he going to want to talk further about what I said? Will I have to explain? But Jack continued to chatter on with no hint of seriousness in his comportment.

He tried to push away his discomfort and show an interest in Jack's latest yarn as they made their way into Jack's office. It was something to do with a disco, Ianto thought and remembered Stella teasing him earlier about his dancing. "So, John Travolta..." he offered by way of demonstrating attentiveness.

"Oh yeah, you should have seen me dance!" Jack exclaimed.

Jack suddenly struck a pose reminiscent of Mr. Travolta's famous Saturday Night Fever stance. Ianto quickly shielded his eyes, crying out, "Good God! I could have happily lived the rest of my life never having seen that! Now I'll never get that image out of my head."

Jack grinned unrepentantly. "I think I still have my white zoot suit packed away somewhere," he added impishly.

Ianto took his hand away from his eyes in order to retort, but the words were arrested on his lips when he saw Jack punching a series of buttons on his wrist strap and the Bee Gees' 'Stayin' Alive' filled the air. Jack began pointing his finger alternately to the ceiling and floor to the beat and gyrating his hips in time.

Ianto put his hands to his ears and shut his eyes tightly. "Oh, dear God, please make it stop!" he wailed.

"Oh you can tell by the way I use my walk," Jack begun singing in a falsetto voice.
Ianto looked up to see Jack pull off his greatcoat and spin it around his head several times in rhythm with the music before letting it fly out of his hands. It hit Ianto in the face, and he instinctively caught it. He didn't know whether to laugh at Jack or run out of the Hub screaming. Jack continued to disco as he unbuttoned his shirt, pulling it and his undershirt over his head, and spinning those around before letting them sail at Ianto. *I'm standing here watching my lover do a strip tease to the Bee Gees while discoing a la John Travolta, Ianto thought in bewilderment. I just don't know how to feel about that.*

Jack sashayed up to Ianto and began to thrust his hips into Ianto's with the beat. "Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive," Jack sang.

Ianto felt a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth, but he just managed to keep his mask of neutrality in place. He knew that Jack was trying to lighten things up, and he appreciated it. There had been quite a lot of solemnity of late. Besides, it was nice to see Jack having fun for a change.

Jack took the bundle of clothes that Ianto was holding and tossed them onto his desk. "Come on, Ianto," Jack said, peeling off Ianto's suit jacket and tossing it on top of the growing pile. "Get into the spirit of the thing! It was the seventies!"

"Thank God I missed them," Ianto muttered, starting to grin at Jack's antics.

Jack slipped off Ianto's tie and unbuttoned the top few buttons of Ianto's shirt, exposing the dark, curling hair adorning his chest. "There," Jack said, "Now we just need to get you a gold chain and some platforms."

"And that's where I put my foot down," Ianto said sternly. "I'm all for sex games, Jack, but we all have our limits."

'Mmm hmm," Jack murmured, making quick work of the rest of Ianto's buttons and sliding his shirt off his shoulders.

"Seriously, Jack?" Ianto asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh, fine."

Jack stepped back, and hitting another series of buttons on his wrist strap, the Bee Gees abruptly stopped.

"Thank God." Ianto breathed a sigh of relief.

Jack continued to manipulate the buttons on his wrist strap. The lights dimmed, and Norah Jones' dulcet tones filled the room. "Come away with me in the night…"

"Better?" Jack asked as he took Ianto into a dance embrace and pulled him close, their bare chests pressed together.

"Yeah," Ianto replied bemused.

As Jack began to sway them to the music, Ianto was in two minds. *What has gotten into Jack? He was just in a coma, I poured my heart out to him, thinking that he would never hear my words, yet he did hear them… and now he's alternating between King of Disco and Mr. Romantic.* Part of Ianto wanted to pull away from Jack and make up some explanation for what he'd confessed to him earlier. Part of him wanted to pretend that nothing had happened and just enjoy the moment, regardless of what had brought it on.
In the end, the latter sentiment won, and Ianto found himself leaning his cheek on Jack's shoulder as the music continued.

Jack began to run his fingers slowly and lightly along Ianto's spine causing a shiver to emerge from the younger man. Jack pressed his lips to Ianto's neck, placing soft kisses from his ear down to his collarbone. Ianto shuddered as he felt a stirring between his legs. Jack took his face in his hands and gently kissed his lips. The kiss lingered as they pressed their tongues softly together.

Jack quickly and deftly unfastened Ianto's belt, unbuttoned his trousers and lowered the zipper. He slid his hands down Ianto's back and pushed his fingers underneath the fabric. Ianto's trousers and briefs fell to the floor around his feet.

Moments later, and without breaking their dance, Jack had removed his trousers and underwear as well. They both kicked off their shoes and peeled off their socks. Jack quickly pulled Ianto back into the dance, and they continued to move together, their naked bodies pressed closely as the music went on. "Come away with me, and we'll kiss on a mountain top. Come away with me, and I'll never stop loving you."

Ianto felt himself grow hard as Jack's warm skin heated his own flesh. Jack's hands had dropped lower, and he was caressing Ianto's buttocks. Ianto let out a soft moan in response, pulling Jack's body tightly against his own. He could feel Jack's erect cock against his, the contact on his sensitive skin making the organ throb with yearning. Jack kissed him again, and Ianto lowered his hands to Jack's arse, massaging the flesh beneath his fingers.

Ianto moved to drop to his knees and take Jack into his mouth, but Jack caught him under his arms and pulled him back up, shaking his head. "I want to feel you inside me," he said, looking into Ianto's eyes.

Ianto was mildly surprised, but he couldn't say that he was disappointed. Jack stooped to pick up his trousers and rummaged in the pocket. Extracting a small bottle of lube, he pressed it into Ianto's hand. Then he backed Ianto up around the desk and sat him down in the chair. Jack straddled Ianto and sat on his thighs.

Ianto flipped open the bottle of lube and spread some on his cock. Then he poured some on his fingers. Jack put a hand on Ianto's shoulder and leaned back, giving Ianto access to his opening. Ianto skillfully stretched out Jack's entrance as Jack moaned softly in his lap. When Jack was ready, he picked himself up and positioned himself over Ianto's erect cock. Then he slowly lowered himself onto the younger man.

Ianto groaned as he penetrated into Jack's warmth. Jack paused for the briefest moment before he sank his entire weight onto Ianto's erect shaft with a gasp. Then he repositioned himself and began to move. He pulled Ianto close and kissed him tenderly. Ianto returned the kiss, placing his hands on the small of the other man's back. Jack's cock slid against his abdomen as they moved together. Ianto wrapped one hand around Jack's cock, adding to Jack's pleasure.

They moved slowly and gracefully together, sharing lingering, soft kisses. Ianto realized that Jack must have programmed the entire Norah Jones album to play as the sweet music continued to fill the space.

Even as they both drew close to orgasm, their pace barely increased. It was as though both of them wanted to stretch out the moment and make it last as long as possible.

Ianto felt the familiar sensation building below his navel. "Jack," he whispered, letting the other man know he was close.
Jack nodded slightly, indicating that he, too, was ready. Ianto wrapped a hand around Jack's neck and kissed him with all of the emotion he felt for the older man. He continued to stroke Jack's cock with his other hand as he pushed deep inside Jack, and with a discreet cry, reached his climax. Almost simultaneously, Jack let out a low groan as his cock erupted onto Ianto's stomach.

They continued to kiss through the waves of their aftershock, their movements becoming slower and slower as the sensation abated, until finally they were still. Ianto reached his hand up and stroked Jack's face, looking into his eyes, blue into blue. He could see the deep affection there. He could feel it radiating off the older man. It had been a while since Jack had lowered his defenses enough for Ianto to truly sense any feelings from him.

Ianto suddenly felt overwhelmed with emotion. *I love you, Jack…* He wanted to say it. The time felt right. He wasn't holding back any longer. *Just say it, Ianto,* he told himself. *Just tell him.* The words were forming on the tip of his tongue. And then one of the computers beeped an alert.

Jack groaned and pulled himself up. "I suppose I should check that," he grumbled.

He padded over to the nearest computer and punched several buttons on the keyboard. "Huh," Jack said.

Ianto stood and walked over to Jack, leaning close to him as he peered over Jack's shoulder at the monitor. "What is it?" he asked, running his hand lightly down Jack's spine and letting it settle on the small of his back.

"I'm not sure," Jack replied. "I saw this signal a couple of nights ago, but didn't know what to make of it, so I didn't think much about it. Thought it must have been a glitch in the system. It's not something we've picked up before, and no alarm bells are going off, so…" He pushed himself away from the desk and turned around, pulling Ianto into his arms. "What say we let Gwen look into it in the morning?"

"Shirking your responsibilities, Captain Harkness?" Ianto teased.


Ianto chuckled as he caressed Jack's chest with his fingertips. "Besides," Jack continued, "Being in a coma takes a lot out of you. I'm tired. How about we shower and go to bed?"

Ianto nodded in agreement. It had been a long day for him as well. He was emotionally drained from sitting vigil at Jack's bedside, worrying himself sick that Jack would never wake up, and from his emotional outpouring.

They collected their discarded clothing and descended the ladder into Jack's bunker. Jack turned on the shower and let it heat up as Ianto neatly hung up his suit and put their dirty clothing into the hamper. Then he joined Jack in the shower where they kissed and touched each other until they were both hard again. They intertwined their fingers around their cocks and stroked together until they both came.

After they'd rinsed off and dried themselves, they climbed into bed. Jack wrapped himself around Ianto's body and pulled him close. "Octopus," Ianto murmured fondly.

"Been a long time since you've called me that," Jack said softly.

Ianto didn't know how to respond. So much had happened between them. So many things they had left unsaid, so much tension and misunderstanding between them. So much estrangement. It seemed ages since he had felt this close to Jack. He didn't want to ruin the moment by reopening old wounds.
He chose to remain silent.

"You do know that I want to be with you, Ianto, right?"

Ianto felt his stomach knot. Are we going to have this conversation? Now?

"I know things haven't been exactly right between us for a while, but I want you to know that," Jack continued in a low voice.

Ianto simply nodded his head. A myriad of emotions were cascading through him. He knew that he and Jack should talk. But not now. Not after tonight. Not when I finally feel connected to you again. A saner part of him recognized the irony. He'd been looking for an opening to talk to Jack for weeks, and here it was, presented to him. And he was being a coward. I can't… I just want to enjoy this moment.

His body went completely still, and he wondered what Jack would say next, simultaneously hoping and fearing what his subsequent words would be. As the seconds ticked by, Ianto felt himself become more and more tense with anticipation.

Then he heard a soft snore from the other man. Jack had fallen asleep. Ianto felt a mixture of relief and disappointment, and it was while trying to decide which emotion was stronger that he, too, drifted into unconsciousness.

The lightheartedness of Jack's mood from the previous evening carried through into the next morning. Jack was silly, outrageous, and inherently charming, and Ianto found himself chuckling fondly more than once as the morning wore on. It seemed as though something had shifted once more between them. They were having fun again, and Ianto realized how much he had truly missed their repartee. It had been a long time since they'd laughed together, and Ianto decided that he was content to let go of their issues, at least for the time being.

When Gwen arrived, she casually mentioned that she'd chanced upon an unusual signal while Jack was in the coma. Jack confirmed that he and Ianto had also noticed it the previous night and, with a sly wink at Ianto, asked her to look into it.

Gwen became obsessed with discovering the meaning of the anomaly, and that was how, a week later, Ianto found himself fearing for his life in the SUV as they frantically chased the source. Jack was at the wheel and Gwen in back, fingers dancing across the keyboard as she desperately tried to keep hold of the signal that had returned night after night for the past week. "I said go left!" Ianto scolded Jack.

"And I did," Jack insisted.

"I'm sitting on the left of the car," Ianto shouted, starting to enjoy the banter. "You turned right."

"Oi! Shut up the pair of you," Gwen cut in. "We've got to get to the other side of the hill. We've only got two minutes."

After a hair-raising chase across the sands of Monknash, they discovered the body of a man, dressed in a uniform from the 1940's, with hundreds and hundreds of tiny cuts covering every inch of his flesh. Ianto couldn't help wondering what dangers this next adventure would bring.
Ianto stood staring down at the dead man on the beach only half listening to Gwen, who was voicing her disappointment that the corpse wasn't the source of the signal she'd been following. Jack cut off her prattle. "Those clothes. It's a uniform. An old uniform. This man is from the 1940s."

He briefly glanced up at Jack, wondering if by some small miracle, this was someone Jack had known… or slept with… With Jack, nothing surprises me anymore… But Jack showed no signs of recognition, nor did he start telling one of his outlandish tales, so Ianto turned his attention back to the body.

_He looks like he's been covered in barnacles… Barnacle Bill? Hmm… I'll have to work on the name a bit before suggesting it to the rest of the team._

"So what's he doing on a beach?" Ianto asked.

"More importantly, Ianto, what's he doing in 2009?" Jack swung into full commander mode. "Right, everyone, let's get this back to the Hub."

"Hey," Ianto said, "Do I get to do the autopsy this time?"

Since Owen and Tosh's deaths, they had taken turns trying to fill the void created by their fallen teammates, but Jack had other ideas. "We need someone to analyze these clothes – where they're from, what they've picked up along the way. A job for a tailor's son."

Ianto went quiet. Why had he told Jack that? Now he was condemned to haberdashery. He had confessed to Jack about the white lie he'd told and had given his explanation, but every once in a while, Jack brought it up again. To tease me? To rub it in? Did he forget? With Jack, it could be anything… He stowed away the fact for a later discussion.

He and Gwen lifted the heavy body into the SUV, and the three of them returned to the Hub. After arranging the body on the autopsy table, Ianto retreated to his desk to begin a computer search for the dead sailor's identity while Gwen began the autopsy. When his search results were unsuccessful, he returned to the autopsy suite, just as Gwen was cutting off a strip of the sailor's waxed coat revealing layers of thick soggy wool. "Hey, Ianto." She handed him the sodden bundle.

"What am I meant to do with this?" he asked, wrinkling his nose at the putrid odor emanating off the dripping mass of fabric.

"I don't know. Analyze it. Find out where it's from. You know. Analyze the weave, trace the buttons, that kind of thing."

"Ha-Ha." Ianto wasn't laughing. He inwardly cursed Jack. _I'll get him for this…_ He smiled mischievously as the myriad possibilities sprung into his agile imagination.

Gwen peeled back the remains of the clothes. "Whoa! That is minging!"
"That a medical term, Dr. Cooper?" Jack had chosen that moment to swagger down into the autopsy room. Jack leant forwards and peered at the corpse. "Fair enough. That is minging. Let me see the inside of the jumper."

It was matted with blood. Jack was grim-faced. "Those cuts were made when he was still alive."

"I don't think we're talking about liposuction accidents here," Ianto said. "Unless he's terribly vain for a sailor."

"You'd be surprised, Ianto. The nights I've had in Cardiff docks…"

Ianto cut him off, not wanting to hear about Jack's nights with various sailors. He'd heard enough of Jack's sex stories. "Right! Anyway, we need to look inside him."

Gwen incised and lifted a flap of skin, revealing a silky cocoon nestled in the flesh. Jack used an alien scalpel designed to only cut through dead, organic matter, but he was having problems getting through the tough, outer layer and was applying a significant amount of force. Gwen instinctively stepped back a few paces. Ianto was intrigued and stayed close to Jack's shoulder. "Maybe it's alive."

"Not this bit. It'll give. Just hold here for me."

Ianto moved his body up against Jack's. He felt uncomfortable being so close to Jack with Gwen in the room, but Jack was oblivious. Either that, or he didn't care. But Ianto was still aware of all that lay between them, and he was still uncertain of their status. It had taken him a long time to be comfortable showing Jack affection in public, and after their estrangement and tenuous reconciliation, open displays of intimacy suddenly felt awkward again. Pushing aside his thoughts, he focused again on the task at hand.

Jack put his full weight on the scalpel blade. "And one big push."

The knife went through, and the silky ball fell in two, revealing a tiny, almost translucent, wiggling shrimp-like creature. Just as Jack was speculating on where all of the other creatures had gone, they were interrupted by the sound of a mobile phone. "Sorry boys, that's mine," Gwen said as she walked away to talk on her phone.

As soon as Gwen was out of earshot, Jack turned to Ianto. "Uncomfortable being so close to me with Gwen in the room?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Ianto opened his mouth in surprise. It was as though Jack had read his mind. He hadn't thought Jack had even noticed. "I… er…" Ianto stumbled over his words.

He looked into Jack's eyes, and something passed between them. The tension in the air became thick and oppressive. Ianto's mind scrambled for an explanation, but none was forthcoming. And it's not the time or the place, Ianto thought to himself.

Jack finally broke the silence. "Right. Forget it. How about a bioscan on our new friend here," he said, waving the scalpel in the direction of the writhing creature.

"Right," Ianto agreed quickly, snapping his mind back into work mode.

He retrieved the alien bioscanner from the nearby cabinet and returned to the autopsy table. "Should we wait for Gwen?" he asked, checking that the scanner was working properly.

"Nah, It's probably Rhys telling her all about the stag do last night. She'll want to make sure he behaved himself."
Ianto chuckled as he began to run the scanner over the creature. "It's some kind of insect," Jack said, looking over Ianto's shoulder at the screen. "Well, if it's an insect, looks like we're going bug hunting. Gear up, Ianto," Jack said with a grin. "We're heading back to the beach."

Ianto and Jack began to round up all of the equipment they could find in the Hub for capturing insect-like creatures. Gwen returned, and Ianto filled her in as he assembled his gear. When Gwen scoffed at both their plan and their equipment, Jack became defensive. "This is our plan," Jack said with a stern look in Gwen's direction, "Which we created without your input as you were busy worrying whether Rhys had snogged anyone last night. And I dare say he had plenty of offers."

Ianto smiled, quickly joining in the banter. "He's quite a catch, isn't he?"

"Must have caused quite a stir to have him back out on the town," Jack agreed.

"I don't know why I put up with you two," Gwen said. "Maybe it's cause I don't take you seriously. Now get out of here!"

Jack headed towards the door of the Hub, and Ianto followed behind him. As he passed Gwen, she whispered, "Paws off, Jones. You've got a man."

Ianto raised an eyebrow but said nothing. He wasn't sure if Gwen was trying to be funny or if she seriously considered him a threat. Either way, he wasn't very amused. It was reminiscent of the old issues between them, and Ianto was glad to be past all of that.

Jack paused by the cogwheel door to give Gwen some final instructions, and then they were off.

Ianto loved discovering Torchwood's secrets. He'd spent hours in the archives digging up all that was to be found on the history of Torchwood, the available kit, the alien artifacts in possession, and of course, everything on record about Captain Jack Harkness. Ianto was one of the few people who knew the secrets of the SUV's unique design. Digging deep into the Hub records, he'd found the additions Jack had personally requested and asked to be kept off the official spec. He knew its bodywork concealed enough armor to withstand a major explosion, and that it could survive a fall of over one hundred meters. He knew it was commissioned to be capable of driving under water, and that a seven-seated version had been rejected in favor of one with heated leather seats. But more excitingly, he knew it had emergency rocket boosters fitted with a special access code known only to Jack... and now him.

The SUV secrets were a recent discovery, and he was eager to test his newfound knowledge. And now seems like the perfect time... He smiled impishly to himself. As they reached the track leading to the beach, Ianto casually tapped the right-hand side of the rear view mirror three times. Jack was gazing at the coastline and didn't notice the new display flash up on the windscreen. "Well, just look at that, Jack," Ianto remarked casually.

A 3-D display showed a map of the location and the SUV's position. A banner flashed, 'Air-Con Live.'

Jack looked panicked. "Ianto, there are animals in those fields."

"Oh, they're used to airplanes around here," Ianto said dismissively.

"It's never been used. Well, maybe once, but only by me!"

Ianto's impish grin turned into a gleeful smile. "I think we're ready to put our Air-Con on full, aren't we?" Ianto turned the fans up to full blast and was pinned into his seat as the SUV flew forward.
"Whoa!" they both yelled simultaneously.

Behind him he could see a cloud of exhaust fumes and a rush of after-burner flames. "We're running out of road," Jack yelled, "Again!"

Ianto was enjoying himself enormously and couldn't miss the opportunity to tease Jack. "Jack, how come you don't hold onto my arm when you're scared?"

Jack wasn't having any of it. "Me? Scared?"

"I heard you yelp," Ianto commented.

"That was more of a manly expression of enjoying high speed," Jack insisted. "Jackie Stewart did it all the time."

As the SUV came to a shrieking halt, Jack moved his hand onto Ianto's leg. "You know, there's only you, me, and the smell of aviation diesel around."

Ianto felt a stirring between his legs, and he smiled slyly at Jack. "So that's why you joined the RAF, Captain Harkness?" he asked, sliding his hand over Jack's crotch and raising an eyebrow as he felt the bulge beneath the fabric.

Jack's hand touched his face, only to spring back when the air was filled with a terrible screeching. "What's that?"

"It's the close-range monitor," Ianto told him, and assuming it was an animal, he continued fondling Jack through his trousers.

"Ah, I see Farmer Giles at twelve o'clock." Jack grinned. "An angry Farmer Giles."

"Did he see us?" Ianto asked, snatching his hand away and sitting back against the seat, heat flaming into his cheeks.

"Who cares?" Jack asked nonchalantly.

Ianto didn't share Jack's calm. He hadn't been doing this for years, and he knew what farmers thought about two men alone in a car on a quiet lane. He struggled to regain his composure as Jack wound down the window and addressed the farmer. "Sorry about the noise. My friend here is just learning to drive. Can't quite handle the acceleration."

"Never mind that. Are you two here to look at my bees?" the farmer demanded.

"Yes, uh… That's right," Jack told him, quickly adapting to the unexpected question. "Yes. We are here to look at your bees."

Ianto leapt into the conversation, if not quite convincingly, then at least with such a degree of passion that the farmer felt obliged to believe him. "This is Dr. Harkness from the… uh… Department of Insectology at Cardiff University, and I'm his post-doctoral assistant."

Ianto worried that this was a diversion, but he'd learnt from Jack that anything unusual that happened was likely to be linked. If alien maggots were arriving on the shore, maybe they were heading to the beehives. As they followed the farmer, Ianto noticed with dismay that the dry ice machine Jack was carrying was obviously meant for a disco, rather than the scientific study of insects. "You could have taken the stickers off it," Ianto whispered to Jack. One sticker in particular showed an enthusiastic graphic designer's idea of a good time.
"Oh well," Jack said. "He'll have seen worse in the stud pen."

Trying to hide his embarrassment – Jack was often a source of embarrassment – Ianto began inquiring about the farmer's bees. They discovered that not only had the farmer's bees disappeared, but all insect life within a thousand meters had completely vanished.

Once they were back in the SUV, having dismissed the farmer, Jack was expostulating on the theme. "They say animals have a sixth sense. Like when the tsunami hit Southeast Asia, all the animals had gone. But that was the elephants, the monkeys, the birds – the clever animals. They never say worms have a mystical sense. Name a nation that hasn't developed a cult about rooks or ravens or snakes or tigers."

Ianto was quick to butt in with, "Iceland. It's all about the volcanoes there."

"Yes, I suppose so. Funny race, the Icelandic. I'm surprised they survived the crash-landing really, but they've been doing okay. I've lost track of them a bit. Must remind them to keep their heads down."

Ianto's mind was reeling. "They're aliens?"

"Now, that's not polite. Norwegian, Scottish, Irish, Danish… and a little bit of alien in there. They were looking for the volcanoes when they crashed. Probably from somewhere near Pyrovillia. But, back to the point," Jack went on. "We are dealing with ants. Not giant ants, not robot ants, but an absence of ants… and of worms. And if they are running scared, it must be something pretty bad indeed. And with one hell of a signal."

They went back to the site where they'd found the sailor's body in order to broaden their search. Ianto turned the scanner onto the water, but only got interference. "Jack, it's no use. We need to be nearer to get a reading." He had an idea. He leapt into the driver's seat and turned the SUV around so it was facing the ocean. "Can't let this place lose its green flag rating," he muttered. "Let's see what's in the water."

Ianto flicked a switch, and Jack looked at him worriedly. "Ianto, that was never tested."

"So, isn't this a good time?" Ianto replied with excitement. This was the perfect occasion to test all of the SUV secrets he'd uncovered recently, and he wasn't about to let the opportunity go to waste.

"It was only ever a concept," Jack said.

"Watching too many James Bond films, were you?" Ianto asked teasingly.

As Ianto spoke, the SUV began a complex set of alterations. First, a black, plastic cover slid down over the windows. Then small fins popped out of the side of the car, and the grills on the bonnet snapped ninety degrees, sealing the engine. A plastic panel came down behind Ianto and Jack, and the large, back bumper flipped up revealing four, small power jet engines. "Ianto, don't do it."

But, with a scream of joy, Ianto drove the SUV straight into the sea. He knew as soon as they hit the water that it had been a terrible mistake. He had been carried away by the sense of adventure. And okay, if I'm being honest with myself, maybe I'm the one who has watched too many James Bond movies, he thought ruefully. He tried to keep up the pretense for a while longer, but he couldn't argue when Jack announced that they were sinking. He watched in dismay as Jack wrenched the window down manually and hauled himself up onto the roof of the car. He knew that he would be spending countless hours cleaning out the SUV… and Jack will never let me live this one down. Silently fuming over the extra chore his impulsive actions had created, he noticed that Jack was waving
ostentatiously at the farmer on the shore.

"Is that necessary, Jack?" Ianto asked irritably.

"Why not?" Jack asked with a grin. "I think we've already caused a scene. Might as well enjoy the moment! Besides, he probably has a tractor we can use to haul us out."

"And how will we explain it to him?" Ianto asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Well, I already told him you were just learning how to drive," Jack said triumphantly.

Muttering to himself, Ianto retrieved his mobile, which, thankfully, was still dry, and phoned Gwen. He quickly and succinctly filled Gwen in on the details of their misadventure and listened as she told him about Rhys finding his mate Matt's mum dead – with thousands of tiny cuts, just like their sailor.

Ianto updated Jack as they waited for help to arrive. Gwen and Rhys drove up just as the seaweed strewn SUV was being towed to safety by the farmer's ancient tractor. Ianto watched with amusement as Jack made for the driver's door of Rhys' new Vectra, only to be pulled short by a cough from Rhys and a heavy hand on his shoulder. "If you don't mind, I'll take it from here. Like to keep this dry, you know. New car and all that."

"It was Ianto!" Jack protested.

Rhys raised a skeptical eyebrow.

Jack went on, "Still, Ianto, at least this means we get to cuddle up in the back seat."

"Oi!" Rhys protested. "None of that in my car!"

Jack exchanged glances with Ianto. Well, that's us told, Ianto thought to himself. He wasn't quite sure if he was offended or amused.

Gwen and Rhys dropped Jack and Ianto off at the Hub so they could continue the research on the alien they'd captured, which was tightly enclosed in a glass tank. "Intergalactic Shrimp?" Ianto offered by way of a name as he stared at the extraterrestrial organism.

Jack had some sort of plan for experimenting on the creature, which apparently involved a stray cat that had recently begun lurking around the water tower. He'd asked Ianto to collect her, and Ianto was trying to oblige. Jack walked over to Ianto's workstation and watched him calling up the CCTV of Cardiff Bay. "Ianto, you're not doing anything to hurt my little Pusska, are you?"

"You called her Pusska?" Ianto asked incredulously.

"It's on her collar," Jack replied. "Suits her. She looks kind of haughty."

Ianto rolled his eyes and idly wondered when Jack had gotten the opportunity to glance at a stray cat's collar. He was alternating the flow of water on the tower, trying to startle the cat into stepping onto the invisible lift. "And if the cat just walks a few paces to the left," Ianto murmured.

Jack was peering over his shoulder. "I didn't know you could control that," Jack said in surprise.

"Oh, yeah. Nice little man in the Counsel linked us up," Ianto replied proudly. He loved surprising Jack.

"Where are you trying to get her to go? You don't think you can chase her all the way down the steps, do you?"
Ianto didn't reply.

When Ianto's plan became apparent, Jack dissented. "Ianto, no."

Ianto grinned. "They say cats always land on their feet."

"Someone might fall down as well," Jack protested. They both looked at the screen. A gorgeous man walked into view. "Then again," Jack said, "I'd catch him if he fell."

"We'd catch him together." Ianto looked pointedly at Jack. Although many things between them were left unsaid, Ianto wanted it to be clear that it wasn't okay for Jack to sleep around.

Jack put a reassuring hand on his shoulder and smiled at him. Ianto took the gesture as silent acknowledgment and returned to his cat trap.

They succeeded in luring the cat into the Hub. When the alien was presented with the hissing feline, it split from head to tail, shedding its exoskeleton. A new creature stepped out of the old skin. The head was the same, but everything else had changed. It had eyes that were fully formed, and four beautiful wings that glinted in the office light. Ianto could see a rainbow of colors as the delicate fronds unfurled. The creature looked finally complete, noiseless and delicate, but pristine and new.

"Emergency transmutation," Jack noted admiringly. "A proper fight or flight response, and with this alien, its clearly flight all the way."

"Uh, Jack," Ianto said, "Best put the lid back on now."

"Oh yeah, sorry. Of course."

Jack put the cat down, and she dashed off into the nearest hiding place she could find, which in the Hub wasn't difficult. "Jack, that flipping cat is on the loose!"

"Never mind that," Jack told him. "It will give the Weevils some company in the vaults. More importantly, we have an alien parasite, capable of breeding in vast numbers inside human bodies, which we've just discovered is simply a stage before being able to fly."

Ianto was busy grumbling to himself that he'd be the one to have to look after their new pet, so he didn't immediately notice that Jack was a moment too late in securing the lid of the tank. The creature had moved quickly and unexpectedly towards him, and a mandible had wrapped itself around his finger.

Ianto watched in horror as Jack crumpled to the ground.
Thanks as always to my fantastic beta riftintime.

For a brief moment, Jack's senses gave way to a blur of nerve-scraping emotions. *Death after death after death. Faces in the night. The look in their eyes when they realized it was the end. Names he'd forgotten, names he'd never known. Years of trying and trying and sometimes succeeding, but never enough. Never final enough. Only a pause. Only a moment. Lovers and loved, sometimes the same, growing old, growing tired, growing angry. Always angry. Being himself. Being hated. Being lonely. No one good enough. Not able to mend. Not able to stop the pain..."

"Jack!" Ianto was holding his hand. He kissed him. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Come here, you."

He pulled Ianto into a tight embrace. *I need him*, he admitted to himself, *sometimes more than I'd like to admit...* Ianto kept talking, "Couldn't we have made it do that? Why the cat?"

As he started to answer, Jack realized that the sinking feeling had passed when the creature's touch had left him, but it had been replaced with a horrible clarity. "The alien isn't scared of humans. It can make us calm in an instant, but not a wild creature. Because, however fluffy little Miss Pusska looks, she's still a beast. We, however, are creatures of our minds. And right now, that's a great pity, Ianto, because I know what this little pest is and where it's from."

Ianto sat down beside him, sensing Jack's serious tone. Jack felt flattened by what the creature had done to him and hollow at the thought of what had arrived in Cardiff, but he carried on. "They live in the Shadow Dimension where drifting souls and broken dreams fall for an eternity. There's nothing there except for the sorrow and guilt of those that are lost. And in a place like that, new species are born – animals that feed on the only thing they have: the sins of the past. They drain the emotional energy from those who are lost. They're drawn to the strongest, more pure feelings – anger, hatred, revenge, guilt. They drain them all of their anger and pain and use it to grow and multiply, like cockroaches breeding amongst the stinking and corrupt. That's why that mouthless thing could survive, and that's why it wanted to be near us. They're the ultimate survivors, because they always find new ways to live. And right now, they feed on guilt. When it touched me, I could feel all these things I've never thought about, rushing to the surface. They empty your subconscious, and they consume it."

As he spoke, Jack felt a cold sinking in his heart. Everyone around him thought the best fix was a quick fix. And now these creatures were on earth, offering a solution to every part of the conscience that made people feel bad. How was he going to stop them spreading?

Ianto was on a different train of thought. "Every time we saw a signal on the beach, more must have arrived and been collected. That's ten, twelve nights, and everyone who touches them feels, well, happier than they have done in years." Then Jack sprang to his feet as he came to a decision. "Are we going to find out where the other larvae are?" Ianto asked.

"Quite the opposite," Jack told him. "One last conclusion from the experiment: it never once changed
its technique of trying to touch us through the glass, even when it was completely sealed. Only the most basic of instincts. No evidence of learned behavior at all. This from a creature that can digest human sins. Very odd."

"You mean he was kind of stupid," suggested Ianto.

"Yeah. And I'm wondering what its parents look like." Jack smiled for the first time in a while. "Get your gear on, Ianto. We're going fishing."

Jack had one last Hub secret up his sleeve. One he thought he'd managed to keep from Ianto's ingenious sleuthing. It was with barely restrained triumph that he led Ianto through an unknown door in the vaults and trudged through half a mile of winding corridor until they reached a damp wooden door. With as much nonchalance as Jack could muster, he casually flung open the door to the Torchwood boathouse. The Torchwood III, Sea Queen came into full view.

Ianto stood gaping at eleven and a half meters of gleaming, black fiberglass and chrome. Jack silently cheered at having succeeded in shocking the often imperturbable Ianto Jones. It was a game he loved to play… and win. "Achem." Ianto cleared his throat and gave Jack a vexed look. "And how long has this been, um, bobbing in the back of the family garage?" he asked sardonically.

"We're on the coast, Ianto," Jack answered smoothly. "Always gotta have a boat. I'm surprised you haven't asked before, to be honest," Jack said, blatantly rubbing it in. "Besides, all that worry about global warming, it would be irresponsible not to have one."

Ianto reeled off a list of specifications. "Triple four-eighty horsepower engines, four times two twenty-gallons fuel tanks, a torque that Lewis Hamilton would have trouble controlling."

"Well, it makes the journey out to Flatholm a bit more fun," said Jack.

A pained look crossed Ianto's features. It had been a while since they'd discussed Flatholm. They had both taken on the responsibility of looking after the facility housing the victims of the Rift, but they rarely mentioned it. It was too painful for both of them. The look passed, and Ianto's features relaxed into part amusement and part annoyance. "And why isn't this in the records?" Ianto queried.

Jack put on his best mock outrage. "Something like this? Owen would have been out in it all the time. God knows what Tosh would have done to the engines. You surprise me sometimes, Ianto. Anyway, it didn't cost much. I helped someone out with an oil problem in the early days of the Emirates. You don't want to know what they disturbed down there. I call in my favor every now and then, so," Jack smiled playfully at Ianto, "Do you want to see how it handles?"

With a roar of engines and spray, the Sea Queen burst out from a tunnel in the mouth of a cave in the cliffs overlooking Cardiff Bay Barrage. Jack saw Ianto looking back at the entrance. Only the horizontal layers of the Penarth Cliffs were visible. "Perception filter," Jack cheerfully confided in him as he waved to a bemused fisherman.

Jack opened up the throttle and the Sea Queen surged forward, slicing through the roll of the sea with casual ease. Jack left Ianto to steer the boat as he went down below to sync the navigation computer with the Hub. Gwen had calculated the likely tidal flows of the previous evening, and the computer would guide the boat along that course. If the sensors picked up any activity, it would adjust their bearings accordingly.

Smiling at the thought of him and Ianto alone in a powerful speedboat, cruising at top speed across the Irish Sea, he ascended the stairs, eager to explain to Ianto that he no longer needed to steer. He was indulgently amused, however, when Ianto expressed a desire to continue driving the boat for a
while. He stood gazing at Ianto in frank admiration as the younger man slipped on a pair of shades and drove the Sea Queen on. His admiration quickly turned into desire, and he took a step forward, placing a hand on Ianto's arse, giving it a playful squeeze. "Down below, sailor. That's an order," he commanded in a lust-filled voice.

"Aye, aye, Captain," Ianto grinned slyly at him.

He took Ianto's hand and pulled him down the ladder into the ship's berth for a little game of Master and Servant.

Following the tidal paths had lead Jack and Ianto a merry dance around the Bristol Channel, and had given them some time alone. But then the boat's sensor had picked up readings entirely new to the Torchwood computer; the same frequency as those Gwen had seen on the coastline, but massive. Unwieldy bursts of alien energy were coming through every few seconds, enough to send every sentient sea creature scurrying miles away. Jack and Ianto left off their game and got to work.

They lowered a remote control camera probe and closely watched the surveillance screens. Soon a strange shape in the sand came into view. In the corner of a frame, a shoal of tiny, silvery shrimp creatures shot into view, jinked and turned as one before disappearing back into a hole in the sandy mound. "I think we found our base," Jack said. "But the probe can't get inside that thing. Looks like we're going diving."

Jack stared lasciviously at Ianto as he donned the Torchwood issue wetsuit, the neoprene clinging appealingly in all the right places. "Hey Ianto," he called. "We could put these on at home, rig something up and play hole-in-the-wall in the Hub."

"Not heard it called that before," Ianto responded with amusement.

"Ianto Jones, I am serious." He took a step forward and groped Ianto's crotch. "I bet I could get through any shape you send my way."

Ianto rolled his eyes, and Jack laughed. Then he checked Ianto's equipment over, put his mouthpiece on, and not so gently, shoved Ianto into the sea. He followed, and taking hold of Ianto's hand, they descended into the gloom together, drifting down to the bottom of the Irish Sea.

When their feet touched the sea bed, Jack realized that the strange shape they'd seen on the monitors was actually an immense sunken ship. Jack located a porthole and yanked at the side. A panel came away in his hand. A dead corpse rolled out of the ship's hull, eyes wide open and face frozen in a moment of ancient, preserved horror. Jack caught the body in a gruesome embrace, pushing it back towards the hull, but already streaming around them were hundreds of silver aliens, circling like curious piranhas.

Jack grabbed Ianto's hand and pulled him into the ghostly ship's hull. Inside, it was dark, but the water was ominously active. They cracked open light sticks and let them float into the crevices. All around the edges of the tank were bodies, dressed like the man they'd found on the beach. Trapped inside air bubbles, the bodies hadn't decayed and were being used as breeding grounds for the larvae, but far worse than that was just below them. As the light stick sank, they revealed an expanse far larger than the hull indicated. And from bow to stern, a single, white alien body filled every inch of the upturned ship, its long mandibles floating in the water.

It turned massive opaque eyes to look at Ianto and Jack. Jack watched in fascination as he saw that the creature's body was being serviced by hundreds of small creatures, tending it like a queen bee. And as the light sticks hit the body, these smaller creatures acted like they were wounded, zooming out of their way, so the sticks left little circles on the alien's flesh. They can't tolerate the light, Jack
realized. *We can use that to our advantage.*

Then, ominously, the creatures began to rise. Ianto signaled, 'up,' and Jack nodded in approval. Turning around as they swam out, Jack pressed a button on his wrist strap, lighting up the whole hull. The swarm darted out of the shafts of light, buying them vital seconds as they ascended to the surface.

Breaking into the open, they hauled themselves along the boat and scuttled up the ladder as fast as they could. As they were discarding their wetsuits, Gwen's voice came in over his comms. "Gwen to Jack. I need you at the Church of St. Francis,"

Jack explained they were just finishing their diving trip adding, "We've got a new friend for you to meet. Haven't worked out a name yet."

"Jabba the Slug?" Ianto offered up.

Jack gave Ianto a brief smile, amused as always by the younger man's wit. "Anyway, Gwen," he continued, "If we can contain this underwater thing, we can stop any more of them getting out."

"Problem is, there's a lot more of them than we thought, and … I think they're ready to start flying."

Jack thought quickly, trying to figure out the best course of action. He told Gwen about their aversion to light, and Gwen acerbically suggested stopping the sun setting over Cardiff. Jack knew it was actually possible, but he didn't think they needed to go that far.

"You stay at that church and stop any of those aliens getting out. We're coming for you."

Gwen was cut off abruptly mid-sentence as she was explaining how she'd knocked the Reverend Hayward unconscious. Jack's sense of urgency increased. "Gwen's in trouble, Ianto," he called over his shoulder. "Let's get this boat back to land."

The sun was sinking on the horizon as Jack and Ianto turned the Sea Queen around and headed back towards Cardiff Bay. "Why don't we just blow the creature up?" Ianto asked.

"Unfortunately we can't risk leaving a trace of it. If they learned to survive in the Shadow Dimension, we don't know what it might be able to do. It's been weak, hidden down in the sea. But for all we know, it's able to replicate itself from the tiniest cell. The pupae could grow again. We've got to capture it."

They tried Gwen again, but her comms were still down. Jack's anxiety increased as he pushed the Sea Queen's speed to the maximum. Jack and Ianto pulled straight up to the marina and were surprised to see Gwen at the quayside. Gwen pointed above Jack's head and called out, "The swarm!"

Jack stared back across the bay. A giant cloud was rising above Penarth, like locusts above a heavy crop. The sky thickened around them, and the noise of thousands of tiny wings drowned the sounds of Friday night. "Hit the deck!" Jack yelled.

The cloud passed overhead. The swarm was heading for juicier pickings on the city streets.

Then the creatures struck. It was an attack without violence and without fear. Every single alien landed for a few seconds on someone in the city center and fed. Pubs were briefly filled with the craziest of swarms, touching faces, hair, arms, legs, then disappearing out again into the night. In minutes, it was over. The swarm circled together, gathering its forces together, now bloated and woozy with feeding. They moved over the city as one until all the insects were together. The cloud,
bigger than before, dived and swarmed out towards the sea.

Ianto's eyes followed their movements. "Where are they going?"

Jack was grim. "They're going back to mommy."

All around them, the city was descending into chaos. Fistfights tumbled out into the street, guilt-free fury unleashed, no one caring for anyone else's pain. It was like a safety switch had been turned off. Nobody could remember ever feeling bad, and they were doing everything they'd been told they couldn't do.

Jack's mind was in overdrive. He was back at the helm of the Sea Queen, and they were moving at speed through the dark waters. Ahead of them the swarm ducked and swooped along the Bristol Channel, heading for their queen. Pushing the boat to its limit, Jack kept pace with the living cloud of insects until they reached their destination. "They've come home," Jack told them. "And if I were you, I'd keep an eye on the sonar."

The display showed a vast disturbance in the deep. The creature was awake and heading for the surface. Tense, Jack, Ianto, and Gwen armed the guns on the speedboat and waited.

The waves swelled, a mass of white spray and steam erupted, and the creature broke the surface, emerging like a Kraken from the deep. All around it, its children buzzed, swooping down and settling on its back until it was completely covered in tiny, chittering dragonfly creatures. As all they had absorbed from the people of Cardiff fed into the beast, the creatures died, and the beast grew bigger. It dwarfed their boat and made the waves around it look like ripples.

Ianto quickly turned on every light on the boat. Soon the enormous alien was lit up like a shrimp catcher, the sea around it bathed in a neon glow. The creature barely noticed. Like its children before it, the skin on its back was splitting, and a new stage of its life was beginning. It would emerge winged and armed.

Jack knew what he had to do. "Ianto, I'm going to need you to kill the engines and open the locks on the reserve fuel tanks. Oh, and keep a hold on me."

Jack moved to the side of the boat, scanning the side of the hull. Seeing what he wanted, he wrapped a rope around his waist and tied the other end to the ship's railings. Without a word, he dropped off the side of the boat. Gwen yelled out after him, "Jack! Where are you going?"

Ignoring her, Jack called out, "Ianto! Keep the fuel pressure high!"

With mighty blows, Jack pounded the hull with a claw hammer, first denting, then splitting the tough fiberglass side. Holding the hammer between his teeth, he leant in and tore a fuel line out through the jagged hole. "Jack, it's getting nearer," Gwen warned him.

"That's good," he called back. The creature needed to be as close as possible for his plan to work.

Heavy diesel sprayed out, making the creature hesitate. He saw with approval that Ianto had switched off all the lights on the boat. Jack swung freely off the boat, aiming the high-pressure jet directly at the beast as gallons and gallons of fuel sprayed over its massive body. Its new wings were still encased, and it struggled to break free and fly, sending waves of oily water cascading around it as it thrashed and strained.

The fuel line slowed to a drizzle. The tanks were empty. They were in the middle of the sea with an alien, an unpowered speedboat, and six hundred gallons of diesel.

But Gwen and Ianto weren't going anywhere. "We need to make sure," Gwen said, and Ianto nodded solemnly beside her.

Ianto handed out flare guns from the emergency box by the steering wheel, and as one, they fired the burning lights into the oil slick.

The explosion threw them backwards onto the deck, heat scorching their faces. The stern was entirely destroyed in the blast, and they could see nothing beyond but thick, black smoke. The first to his feet, Jack hauled Gwen and Ianto along the burning deck. Reaching the bow, Jack unbuckled the life craft. They dived inside as it inflated and slid off the boat, driven away by the heat into the dark night.

Through the fog, they heard an unearthly noise. As its flesh met the light and heat of the fire, the creature perished and burned, a hideous smell of fat mixing with burning diesel on the night air. Jack handed out oars. "Let's go back," he told them.

The Sea Queen was taking on water, its stern low in the sea. And skirting around the flames, Jack, Gwen, and Ianto could see the burning flesh of the alien floating dead in the water. "Was it the heat or the light?" Gwen asked.

"I'm not sure," said Jack. "Never did like the smell of calamari though. We should get out of here."

"Jack," said Ianto, "Did you notice how Gwen fired her flare just like a girl?"

"What?" Gwen was outraged.

"At least it actually hit," laughed Jack.

They bantered happily as they rowed back to Cardiff Bay, the adrenaline rush of a successful mission giving them strength to power the lifeboat. Another disaster averted. Now there's only the cleanup, Jack thought ruefully to himself.

Jack dropped Ianto and Gwen off at the Hub. They needed to take care of Matt, still acting as a host to the alien parasites. "Try UV light," he called after their retreating forms.

He drove away, bracing himself for the ordeal of handling bureaucratic red tape. A swarm of flying aliens wasn't something that Torchwood could neatly brush under the carpet.

Several hours later, he returned to the Hub and threw a file of paperwork into the bin. "Just seen the chief of police. Lovely man. Wears those butt-lifting pants though. Very undignified. Cardiff seems to have recovered. Blamed it all on the bank holiday. Fiddled a few figures to keep the bigwigs happy. The bodies in the church are a bit harder to explain. Lots of upset families, etc. Now they found the Reverend Hayward's body, they can pin it all on him. Serial killing vicar."

"Well, it's not far off the truth," Gwen added.

Jack smiled at her. "Go home to Rhys, Gwen. It's been a long day."

Gwen murmured her thanks to Jack as she wearily walked out of the Hub.

Alone at last, Jack turned to Ianto. "Ianto Jones, have we done enough work for today?"
After some celebratory sex, Ianto was getting dressed, and trying to explain to Jack that he wouldn't mind if they spent the nights somewhere a bit nicer for once. Somewhere with a view, without the constant beep of Rift monitors, and Weevils only a few meters from them.

"Doesn't that make it all the more exciting though?" Jack asked.

Ianto thought for a second. "No, quite sure it doesn't. A view might though."

"What, you mean a nice sea view from a little place overlooking the ocean? Captain Jack there to save you from the sea monsters that come out at night?"

Ianto nodded. "Yes, that's absolutely right. Now, are you going to pretend to fall asleep this time, or just pace around annoying me like most nights?"

Jack didn't answer. He was going to pay a visit to St. Francis later that night and burn it to the ground.
Jack stood watching as the flames leapt and danced around the Church of St. Francis. He casually flipped the lighter in his hand open and closed with his thumb as the heat from the blazing furnace warmed his face. He felt an arm slip through his and a familiar voice say, "I thought I'd find you here."

"Ianto," he whispered without turning his head. He tightened his arm against his side, pulling Ianto closer so that the younger man was pressed against him. "I thought you were sleeping. Didn't want to annoy you with my pacing," he teased.

"I would have come with you. You didn't have to do it alone."

There was a long pause as both men watched the fire rage through the stone and mortar of the church. "You don't ever have to be alone," Ianto whispered. "I'll always come with you… I'd follow you into hell."

Jack smiled and found Ianto's hand, squeezing it tightly. "You already have," he replied, remembering the creepy taxi driver with his treacherous box of Lucifer's matches.

Jack’s smile faded as he considered Ianto's words. *I wish you could always be with me… But you're mortal… One day you'll be gone, and I'll be alone again…*

He mentally shook himself. It wasn’t a time to become maudlin. Making a conscious effort at joviality, he turned to Ianto. "Well, you said you wanted a view," he said, grinning slyly.

"Not quite what I meant, Jack."

Jack wondered if there was a deeper meaning to Ianto's banter about a place with a view. He knew there were still many issues they had left unacknowledged and unresolved. *And I know someday those issues are going to rear their ugly heads… But hopefully not tonight…* He took Ianto's face in his hands and kissed him. "Will it do?" he asked with the faintest hint of pleading in his voice as he pulled away.

"For now," Ianto replied with a look of martyred resignation.

Jack laughed and kissed him again, reaching down and fondling Ianto through his trousers.

"Jack! We're in front of a church," Ianto protested.

"A burning church," Jack corrected, pulling down the zipper. "Besides, fires make me horny."

"Everything makes you horny," Ianto retorted.

"True," Jack conceded as he slipped his hand under the elastic waistband of Ianto's underwear.
"Still, sacred ground and all that," Ianto breathed, but he wasn't really making an effort to push Jack away.

Jack's fingertips grazed along the sensitive skin. He grinned as Ianto's cock became hard in moments. "I like how you spring to attention at my command," Jack said, pulling back and looking down admiringly at Ianto's erection.

Ianto rolled his eyes, but his heavy breathing made the gesture less effectual than usual. "It's nice to be obeyed," Jack continued wickedly.

"Jack, shut up," Ianto said, grabbing the back of his head and kissing him fiercely.

Jack enjoyed getting Ianto worked up and was trying to come up with another smart retort when Ianto deftly unzipped his trousers, his nimble fingers quickly freeing Jack from the confines of the fabric.

All thoughts of banter quickly faded as Ianto pressed their erections together.

Soon all other coherent thought faded and was replaced by sensation as they kissed and stroked each other. Ianto was coming undone in his arms. It was a feeling that never ceased to amaze and fascinate him. *I'll never get tired of seeing him like this,* he thought as Ianto's moans competed with the crackling of the blaze.

Ianto shuddered as he erupted over Jack's hand. Only a second later Jack also reached his climax. Ianto sagged against him as his breathing returned to normal. Jack kissed his neck affectionately. Ianto raised his face up and looked into Jack's eyes. "That's a new one," he remarked dryly. "Never had a wank in a churchyard as the church burns to the ground."

"Exciting, isn't it?" Jack said with bravado. "I'm all about showing you new things."

Ianto snorted and reached into his coat pocket with his clean hand, producing the ever-present handkerchief. After they'd cleaned up and straightened their clothing, Jack turned his attention back to the burning church. "Fire's almost out. Let's go home. We're done here."

Jack looped his arm through Ianto's, and they turned their backs on St. Francis for the last time.

Early the next morning, Jack was reviewing the Rift readings while Ianto made coffee. Gwen came through the cogwheel door just as Ianto was setting a cup down next to Jack's elbow. "Good, you're both here," Jack said, reaching for his coffee. "Looks like our little flying friends stirred up the Rift. Aberdare's got something unusual in their morgue, and it looks like we've got another shapeshifter on the loose."

"God, I hate those things," Gwen said, peering over Jack's shoulder. "Still haven't forgiven them for ruining my wedding."

"Well, you take the morgue case then. Get onto your friends in the force. See what information you can squeeze out of them. Ianto, you look into the shapeshifter. See if you can track its movements."

Jack stood up, and Ianto, anticipating his movements, had his greatcoat ready and waiting for him to slip his arms into. Jack had stopped wondering a long time ago how Ianto always knew when he was planning on going out. *Must be an empath thing,* he'd finally decided, *or just the perfect servant persona that he's so fond of portraying.*

"What are you going to do, Jack?" Gwen asked.
"Gonna go ask around, see what I can find out. I've got connections." He winked at her and then turned and headed for the door.

He actually just wanted some fresh air and a newspaper, but he liked to maintain his air of mystery. *And I love a good exit*, he added wryly to himself.

Jack emerged from the tourist office and took a deep breath of the crisp, seaside air. He frowned slightly as it recalled memories of the roasting giant alien shrimp in the middle of the Irish Sea. "Yuck," he said with disgust. "It'll be a while before I can appreciate the smell of the ocean again."

He walked quickly to a nearby newspaper stand and bought the daily paper, exchanging a few words with the vender. Then he casually strolled along the docks for a while before settling down on a bench to read the morning news. As he opened the paper and begun flipping through it, the headline from the business section caught his attention. *"Cardiff's Oldest Department Store Closing its Doors."*

"Can't be," he murmured as he began to read.

He was interrupted by the ringing of his mobile phone. He took it from his pocket and glanced at the screen. Smiling a little to himself, he put the phone to his ear. "Can't live without me, huh?" he asked Ianto.

"I've tracked the shapeshifter to Swansea, but no further movements as far as I can tell." Ianto was all business. "Want me to go check it out?"

"No, hold off for a bit. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Jack ended the call and stood. He continued to read the article as he walked swiftly back to the Hub. He headed straight for his office, ignoring the inquisitive looks from Ianto and Gwen. He closed the door and opened his safe. He took out a file marked 'G.R. Owen' and sat down to read it. When he'd finished with the file he read the newspaper article again. Then he burst out of his office waving the paper in the air. "Forget the alien autopsy in Aberdare. Forget the Swansea shapeshifter. Important mission for you both."

Gwen and Ianto had looked at each other, alarmed. "You're going undercover. Observing without being observed. I need you to solve one of Torchwood's oldest cases."

He slapped the paper down on the desk and grinned at them expectantly. Ianto looked at the picture. "G.R. Owens? The shop?"

"Yes." Jack was grim. "Somewhere in that place is the key to a mystery that I've never managed to crack. According to the business news, the store's got a few weeks left before its doors close for good. So we're gonna give it one last try."

"Undercover?" Gwen asked dubiously.

"Yup. Not really my scene, but you two will do it brilliantly. Don't worry, I'll look after the aliens while you're gone."

He sat down and laid out his plans.

Two nights later, Ianto came back to the Hub after his first day of work undercover at G.R. Owens, tired and irritable. "Anything?" Jack asked.

"Nothing out of the ordinary for a failing business," Ianto replied, "Unless you call some of the
clothing there unusual. Could be alien in nature. Only someone not of this earth would purchase an argyle suit," he added, wrinkling his nose.

Jack chuckled. "Not everyone has your exquisite taste," he said as he ran his fingers over the fine tailoring of Ianto's suit jacket.

"How much more of this, Jack?" Ianto asked testily. "I'm not sure my senses can stand it much longer."

"It's only been one day," Jack exclaimed.

"And it was one day too many," Ianto muttered. "And what are we doing there? What are we looking for?"

Jack looked at him earnestly. "It's important, Ianto," he said softly, imploring Ianto to understand without words.

Ianto looked at him. He must have seen the seriousness in Jack's eyes, because he nodded in assent, his expression softening. Jack took him by the hand. "Come on. I'll make it up to you," he said, pulling Ianto down into his bunker.

Several nights later, Ianto had come home and informed Jack that he'd discovered bloodstains on the carpet of the department store. Jack decided that it was time for him to make his appearance. They were running out of time. After Ianto left for work the next morning, he abandoned his customary World War II uniform for a vintage suit he'd stowed in the back of his closet. He laughed to himself as he put it on. Ianto's going to have a field day with this one...

The bronze doors of G.R. Owens swung open, and Jack walked in. He observed the mild air of chaos on the shop floor, the music tinkling down the stairs, and the overwhelming scent coming from the cosmetics area.

"It's like the jaws of hell," Jack muttered to himself as he strolled forward.

He'd taken just three steps when he found himself confronted by a woman smiling glacially behind two ruby-red lips, and far too much foundation. She was holding out a bottle. Jack blinked in surprise.

"Tempt you to some Heavenly Bliss, sir?"

Jack shuddered. "No, thank you, and what's with all the makeup? You look like a sex doll. Kind of suits you, Gwen."

Gwen sprayed the scent over Jack. He spluttered. "I thought we were undercover," she hissed.

"I am undercover," Jack protested. "I'm wearing a suit."

Gwen stared at the suit. It was double-breasted, pin-striped, and came with a fedora hat, battered into a smirk. "That has got to be your demob suit," Gwen said incredulously. "You look like you're selling black-market nylons."

Jack grinned. "I'll take that as a compliment." He sniffed. "Curious perfume you're flogging. It smells of bergamot and old lady."

Gwen wrinkled her nose. "Yeah, fairly rank isn't it? You'd think a store like this would stock better stuff. Whole place is past its sell-by date if you ask me."
"Is that all you've discovered after a week?"

Gwen raised her voice slightly. "If you'd care to come this way, Sir, I've some wonderful stuff for an oily complexion." She led Jack to an elaborate area full of faintly medical cabinets. She brought out a sachet of moisturizer and tapped it. "Apparently, Sir, this contains the secret of eternal life."

"Does it now?" Jack grinned, and then his smile faded. Eternal life was the last thing he needed. "What else have you found out?"

Gwen shrugged. "Well, there aren't many customers. The staff are worried, and this morning some sinister suits turned up. Apparently, we've been bought out. Nothing's been said, but I think G.R. Owens is on its last legs. Come on, Jack… Ianto and me have been here for days. Why have you left us here? This isn't really our style. You know… there's nothing alien. This is just a sad, old department store."

Jack didn't answer for a moment. "Anything else?"

"Rhys is wondering why I come home smelling of lavender and cat's piss."

"Ha. Good old Rhys." Jack smiled and pocketed the sachet. "You never know," he explained. "Listen, I'm sorry I've left you to it, but I've tried to avoid this place. Let's just say this building and I have history." He shrugged. "It doesn't like me."

"What?"

"Your colleagues are coming," he whispered, and raised his voice. "Thank you for your assistance, ma'am."

Jack strolled off. He smiled as he heard Gwen's young colleague breathe, "Oh, my God, oh, my God, who was that? Lush!"

The third floor was as empty as the ground floor. The newest employee of men's formal wear was busy folding Polo shirts when he saw Jack bearing down on him. "Oh, no," Jack heard him murmur.

Jack wielded an ID with a grin. "Jack Harkness. Health and safety. Apparently there are some dangerously tight trousers that need looking into."

Ianto coughed and smoothly picked up a tape measure. "Would you care to come to one of our fitting rooms, Sir? Perhaps we can take down your… particulars?"

Jack winked. "I'm free, Mr. Jones."

Ianto swished the faded blue curtain of the changing room shut and stared at Jack. "What are you doing here, Jack? You're as plain clothes as Lady Gaga at a bar mitzvah. What the hell is that suit?"

Jack's grin broadened, pleased with Ianto's reaction to his suit. "Hey, this is an antique. Got me through VE-Day with only light scuffing on the knees." Jack patted his lapels defensively and looked around the changing room appraisingly. "Why? Do you fancy measuring me up for a new one?"


Jack winked at Ianto as he remembered a flustered sales clerk walking in on them in the dressing room of that other department store. He wasn't sure who was more embarrassed, Ianto or the sales clerk. Good times, Jack thought, warmly recalling Ianto's impressive shade of crimson at being
caught in flagrante delicto. *If I remember correctly, we were in a startling position as well...*

"Why are you here?" Ianto continued, interrupting Jack's reminiscences. "You said you'd leave us alone until something solid happened."

Jack draped the tape measure fondly around Ianto's shoulders. "You said you found some blood on the carpet. That's solid enough. It's time to act."

"Yes." Ianto pulled his PDA out of his pocket and showed it to Jack. "Human blood. Fourth floor carpet. Head to sports-wear and turn left. It's been cleaned up with bleach and pine disinfectant."

"Amateurs," Jack tutted. "Noticed anything else?"

"We've been taken over by some kind of bank. They're here, and they're creepy."

"Anything else?"

"Gwen looks like Barbara Cartland?"

Jack laughed. He leaned forward and kissed Ianto before walking out of the changing room. "Now back to work, Mr. Jones," he said over his shoulder. "We can play with the tape measure later."

"Been there, done that," Ianto called after him.

Upstairs on the fourth floor, Jack pocketed the scanner and straightened up. The patch of nylon carpet had been scrubbed efficiently. But there were still traces there, enough to tell him that a fairly large amount of human blood had been spilt.

He looked around at the empty sports department. The entire section of the store had an air of abandonment. *There are no staff here, none on the higher floors. They must be sticking together, probably for comfort. Without customers, G.R.Owens is a lonely place.* He looked back at the carpet. *But someone in the store has tried to cover this up. Someone knows what's going on. It's time for me to announce my presence.*

He pushed the button for the lift, listening to the creaking of ancient machinery. He heard the ping as the doors slid open, and took a wary look around the empty department. *Did something move? Am I being watched?* He glanced around again, but saw nothing. Smiling at his own paranoia, he shook his head and stepped into the lift... Only the lift wasn't there.

With a startled cry, Jack plunged down the shaft.
Ianto folded yet another Polo shirt in a hideous shade of lime green. *Seriously,* he thought to himself, *who would wear this? Someone should talk to Mr. Price about the stock purchases.*

He'd spent the last several days undercover at G.R. Owens looking for anything out of the ordinary at Jack's insistence. So far, the only thing he'd found, besides a shocking taste in merchandise, were traces of blood on the upstairs carpet. *Could be from anything,* he reasoned. *Probably just a customer with a nosebleed.* But he had dutifully reported it to Jack the previous evening. Jack had insisted that he and Gwen remain where they were and keep their eyes open for anything unusual. He hadn't explained what they were looking for, but he'd made it clear that it was important. Ianto hadn't questioned him further.

He shouldn't have been surprised when Jack had sauntered in that morning wearing an outlandish suit from a bygone era. He couldn't help grinning to himself at the memory. *One thing about being with Jack. It's never boring. Wonder if he'll find anything upstairs...*  

He turned his attention to an alteration on a pair of trousers belonging to an elderly gentleman who'd come into the shop the previous day. Just as he was getting to a tricky part of the inside seam with his mouth full of pins, his mobile phone rang. *Damn,* he thought. It was Gwen asking if he'd noticed anything odd about the staff.

"Er, not really," he replied. "Don't see many people on this floor. I'll let you know in a minute. Gotta get this finished. And then I'm off to have my assessment interview."

Ianto hung up. He had learned that the name of the company taking over the department store was called Firestone Finance. Its two administrators had ordered all of the employees of G.R. Owens to undergo assessment interviews, and the hour for Ianto's interview was quickly approaching. He quickly and deftly finished the inside seam, and then he headed to Mr. Price's office.

Ianto straightened his tie as he opened the door. Sitting behind the desk were the two administrators, both smiling. Seen up close, they were strikingly attractive, smartly dressed, and naturally arrogant. Even though they weren't wearing their sunglasses, they exuded the glamorous air of smoking cigars and sipping cocktails on a terrace in Capri, instead of sitting on battered chairs in front of a table cluttered with piles of paperwork.

The man clasped Ianto's hand, shaking it slightly too firmly. The woman just smiled and gestured to a chair.

"Ianto, isn't it?" the man said. "Mr. Absalom. As I'm sure you know, Miss Valentine and I represent the new owners. I think you've not been with us long, but I feel you have some valid insights on working at G.R. Owens. I need to know what you've picked up with that fresh pair of eyes. I'd really appreciate that, Ianto."

"Please do speak freely," purred Miss Valentine, and smiled at Ianto really widely.
Ianto felt his mind slip sideways. He had an inkling of what Miss Valentine was doing – he'd had enough training in mind manipulation during his tenure at Torchwood One to know when someone was intruding on his thoughts. But the impression was distant and nebulous. She had such beautiful eyes, and she was staring at him so intently that Ianto found it impossible to resist, despite his training. He used the only other defense he knew. He started to tell them everything.

"There's something very wrong with this store," Ianto said.

"Really?" Miss Valentine stared at Ianto, her eyes very wide. "Do go on." Her voice was thick and sweet.

"Of course," he continued. "The real problem is with whoever is doing the buyer for menswear. There's racks of double-breasted suits and a lot of jumpers only a weather man would wear."

"Right," Mr. Absalom said, clearly bored. "I think you said there was something wrong. I feel you've not told us what that is yet. I need you to say it, Ianto. Trust us."

"Oh, yes." Ianto smiled. "The really important thing is…"

There was a knock at the door. Mr. Absalom stared at it in annoyance. "Enter," he snapped.

The door swung open, and Jack bounded in. "Hey." He beamed. "Harkness from health and safety. Routine inspection. Just sticking my head around the door to say hello. Ignore me, I'm not here. I understand you're the new managers?"

Mr. Absalom and Miss Valentine gazed at him like he'd fallen out of the sky.

"What?" Jack asked.

"You're covered in blood," Miss Valentine stated.

"Oh!" Jack looked down at his tattered clothes. "Yeah. Tripped. I'm kind of accident prone." He shrugged. "Ironic given that I'm from health and safety. But hey, proves you can't be too careful."

"Are you sure you're all right?" Mr. Absalom asked. "I think you could be injured. I feel we have a duty of care. I need you to go see our first-aiders." There was a trace of irritation in his tone. "We're busy conducting some very sensitive interviews. It's a difficult time for the store, and we have a lot of minds to put at rest."

"Oh, I understand." Jack waved his hand around, noticing a dislocated thumb. Idly he popped it back in. "I'll be fine. What I really need," he grinned, "is a tailor."

"Ah," Ianto said as he stood up. "Er, perhaps if you're finished with me, I could show Mr. Harkness around menswear? Ah, we've got some great offers, Sir."

Mr. Absalom opened his mouth to protest, but Jack clapped Ianto on the shoulder. "What a great idea. Take me to your leisurewear." He swept Ianto towards the door and then turned back to them. "Catch you later," he said.

Jack and Ianto climbed the stairs to menswear.

"Thank you," Ianto said, shaking his head. "They were running some kind of… hypnosis or mind-control. I just couldn't lie to them. So, I was telling them anything and everything. I was running out of nonsense. I nearly told them about Torchwood."
"Yeah," Jack nodded. "Gwen said there was something odd about the interviews. Apparently the cosmetics department is now entirely staffed by empty-headed zombies. Insert joke here."

Ianto turned in the stairwell and looked at Jack with concern. He knew Jack, and the blood on his clothes was a dead giveaway. "What about you? You all right?"

"Suit's ruined," sighed Jack.

"What happened to it?" Ianto asked, not sure he wanted to know the answer.

"Told ya. This building doesn't like me. It's recognized me as a threat. It's what I thought would happen. That's why I tried doing this undercover and subtly. I've only been here an hour, and already died once. Maybe I just shouldn't do subtle."

He momentarily considered addressing the fact that Jack had just died again, but decided against it. "Then I'll show you our surprisingly extensive range of golf knits," Ianto quipped as he opened the door of the stairwell and stepped through into the menswear department. It seemed that Jack wanted to brush the incident aside, but he couldn't help his concern. "You are okay? Aren't you?" he added, turning around and looking hard at Jack.

Jack smiled. "Always."

"Good, then," Ianto kissed him briefly before turning away.

Ianto wandered away from Jack, looking around for something decent for the older man to wear. He collected a pair of jeans and a black jumper and returned to where Jack was standing. Ianto was inspecting the clothes he'd selected as he walked. "Jack, why are we here?" he asked without looking up.

Jack didn't answer immediately, so Ianto looked up. To his horror, Jack had traded his bloody suit for one of the ugliest yellow jumpers in the shop and was standing in front of a mirror. Ianto's first instinct was to shield his eyes from the onslaught. He opened his mouth to comment, but Jack chose that moment to begin to explain. "We're looking for the department of curiosities." Jack turned to the side, admiring the jumper in profile. "It's good to know I can utterly rock yellow."

"But even better not to try," Ianto said, hastily handing him the black jumper. "So, what is the department of curiosities?"

"As I said, Torchwood Cardiff's oldest unsolved case. A department in this store which was last seen in 1910, along with the owner."

"G.R. Owen?"

"Went missing," Jack said. "As did a whole chunk of the shop. On and off, we've been looking for them. The Torchwood version of the Bermuda Triangle. Every few years, someone would try and solve it without success. There'd be the odd sighting of the department of curiosities. Normally some old love would stumble across it while shopping. We'd send someone along to investigate, and they wouldn't come back. Now times running out for this mystery. This whole shop could be flats in a few months. Or a car park."

"So, you're giving it one final go?" Ianto passed Jack the pair of black jeans.

"Yeah. And so far, there are mysterious new owners who are trying out mind control on the staff, and something's trying to kill me. Getting warm aren't we?"
Jack put on the jeans. "Hey, snug fit. Got anything else you'd like me to try on?" He grinned.

"Well, now that you mention it..." Ianto said eyeing Jack's crotch in the tight jeans.

Jack dropped to his knees and pushed his face against Ianto's crotch. "Jack, we're on a case," Ianto admonished half-heartedly.

"Gwen will let us know if anything comes up," Jack said cheekily as he unzipped Ianto's trousers and pulled down his briefs. "Now where did you leave that tape measure?"

"Very funny," Ianto murmured as Jack took his cock into his mouth.

Ianto weakly considered protesting. The last time they'd gotten frisky in a changing room hadn't ended well. Ianto still blushed when he remembered the look on the face of the sales clerk at T. K. Maxx. But Jack was doing something elaborate with his tongue that quickly terminated all rational thought.

Jack's talented mouth had Ianto cumming within minutes. He moaned loudly, and Jack reached his hand up to stifle the sound. Ianto started giggling as he began to do up his trousers. "Fine, let's see how quiet you can be," Ianto said falling to his knees and unzipping the jeans that had become even tighter as they encased Jack's erection.

"I can be completely silent... oh..." Jack groaned loudly as Ianto took him into his mouth.

"Silent, huh?" Ianto said, pausing in his ministrations.

"Weren't you doing something else with your mouth besides talking?" Jack panted.

Chuckling to himself, Ianto again took Jack's cock into his mouth, letting it slide deep into his throat. He knew Jack's body well and he knew just how to make him moan with pleasure. Within moments, Jack was making all sorts of obscene noises. Ianto reached up and covered Jack's mouth with his hand as Jack came hard down his throat.

He swallowed and stood up, licking his lips appreciatively. "You were louder than me," he said, leaning against Jack as he fixed his jeans.

"Was not!" Jack argued. "You were definitely louder!"

"You think so, huh?" Ianto kissed him, his tongue finding Jack's.

Ianto and Jack fell laughing out of the changing rooms, making half-hearted attempts to silence each other. Ianto straightened his tie, and then looked around, guilt shifting to alarm.

Jack nodded back at him silently. Something was wrong. Something in the air. They cautiously stepped out into menswear. Ahead of them were piles of neatly folded jumpers and racks of amusing ties. But it was all abandoned.

Ianto checked his watch. Officially, G.R. Owens was still open, and yet the shop floor was deserted. "Phone Gwen," whispered Ianto.

Jack nodded and reached for his phone. He put it on speaker so Ianto could hear. "You okay?" Jack asked when Gwen answered.

"I'm a bit freaked," admitted Gwen. "Everyone's gone. I just popped into the stock room. When I came out, it's like the gift shop on the Mary Celeste. Same for you?"
"Yeah," Jack replied. "Ianto and I, uh… we were, ah…"

He glanced at Ianto with a smirk. Ianto rolled his eyes.

"Please, spare me," Gwen said.

"We're coming down to you," Jack told her.

"Sure, I'm by the escalator."

Jack disconnected the call and pulled out his gun. He and Ianto looked at each other. The atmosphere in the shop had changed, as electric as a thunderstorm. They heard footsteps behind them, and Jack whirled around, gun aimed and ready to fire. And then they heard a scream.

Standing in front of them were an old man and woman, holding a shopping basket.


*Grandson?* Ianto wondered to himself. *Why did he say grandson? He looks like he's in his mid-thirties. Too young to be a grandfather… Why didn't he say son or nephew? Odd…* Ianto stored away that piece of information to question Jack about later.

"We were…" started the woman and then stopped, staring at Jack some more. "We were looking for a shop assistant."

"Ah, that would be me," Ianto said smoothly. "How can I help?"

Jack gave him a look that he understood to mean, 'Get rid of them. I'll wait for you.' With a slight nod of acknowledgement in Jack's direction, he politely and skillfully assisted the couple and then gently lead them towards the escalator where Jack was standing impatiently.

The elderly couple stepped on, and Ianto and Jack followed. As they rode down, Ianto watched Jack phone Gwen again and frown when he didn't get an answer. Once on the ground floor, Ianto escorted the shoppers out of the building, the doors banging shut after them with an echo. Ianto turned back to Jack, who met him with a despairing shrug. "Gwen's gone."

Jack's phone beeped, and he glanced down at it. "Text from Gwen," he whispered, and started to run.

Ianto followed close behind him, they swung around a corner and ground to a halt as Gwen came into view. She gestured like a big game hunter, directing them round a corner. They found themselves in an area between some shelving units, and standing there, in neat rows, mouths open, eyes blank, were the staff of G.R. Owens.

"The entire floor," Gwen said. "Lily, Mavis, Ted and the boys. It's like they've been switched off."

Jack sneaked up to a rather obviously attractive blonde girl and waved his hand in front of her eyes. "Trance."

He waved his wrist computer around. "There's some kind of low-level psychic field. It's… no, it's very faint. But something's talking to them." He frowned in frustration and shook his wrist. "Used to be so much easier when we had proper mind readers at Torchwood, but they all left. Went into banking, apparently." He shrugged. "Guess they didn't see that coming."
He shook his computer again. "Fields dying. I'm going off around the store. You two try and fit in. Find out what's going on."

He and Gwen watched Jack head back up the escalator. "I suppose I should head back to my post," Ianto said to Gwen. "Keep in touch, yeah? And keep an eye on them," Ianto nodded towards the zombified staff.

Ianto found Mr. Price standing by the till in menswear. He did not look happy. In fact, the old man looked miserable. "Ah, Mr. Jones," he said. "You've left your till unattended." He sounded angry, but also really tired. He looked like he needed ironing.

"Ah, sorry, Mr. Price. There was a staff meeting downstairs."

"Oh." Mr. Price's face clouded over. "Oh, I see. They've moved on quickly, haven't they?" He laughed bitterly to himself. "No need of me now, you know. Want me out the door sharpish." He pulled a crumpled letter from his pocket. "Didn't take them long."

"I'm sorry," Ianto said. Absently, he started tidying the area around the till.

"Thirty years I gave this place." Mr. Price rocked back on his feet and straightened the wilting carnation in his buttonhole. "They've no idea what I've done here, none at all. Just dismissed. Not the right kind of person. Didn't even tell me to my face. Just dropped the letter in my pigeonhole. The payoff's fine, but that's not the point. I loved this place."

"Yes," Ianto said gently, desperately hoping someone else would turn up. This was a bit awkward.

"Apparently," Mr. Price continued, bitterly waving the letter around, "I would find it difficult adjusting to the changes. Bloody cheek. You should see the changes I've had to get used to around here. The things I could tell you." He winked. "But perhaps, I should tell them." He chuckled. "Not a clue, have they?"

He clapped Ianto on the shoulder, and Ianto caught a surprising whiff of spirits. "Yeah, that's what I'll do. I'll tell the buggers what's in the basement. Or maybe I won't. Leave them to clear up the mess. Ah, yes, it's their problem now, and they're welcome to it."

He chuckled again and wandered away.

Almost mechanically, Ianto waved at the retreating figure. Then he rang Jack.

"What's up, Ianto?"

"Jack, I think we should look in the basement."

"Really?"

"Yes. Mr. Price, the old manager, just let slip that there's something hidden down there."

"Right," Jack said. "Any hints?"

"No. Just that the new owners wouldn't like what they found."

"Sounds like our kind of trouble," Jack breathed.

"Definitely. But you should know…" Ianto broke off. He'd heard Jack give a cry. "Jack?"

"It's okay." Jack's voice was ragged. "All the lights flickered. I'm in the lighting department, so…"
that's a lot of lights. Creepy."

"Right," Ianto said, carefully noncommittal. "Be brave, Captain."

"Hey," Jack said. "I jumped. I can get scared you know."

"Sure," Ianto said facetiously.

"You mocking me, Ianto Jones?"

"Tiny bit."

There was a sound like a gunshot. "Jack, what was that?"

"A bulb popped. Something's…"

Ianto heard more popping sounds in the background and then a sound like an explosion. He felt his heart start to race. "Jack!" Ianto shouted into phone.

"Not now."

Ianto heard a loud crashing sound, and then the phone went dead. With his heart beating hard in his chest, he took the phone slowly away from his ear. He knew Jack never stayed dead, but it didn't change the fact that every time Jack died, Ianto feared it would be absolute. He always waited in a barely suppressed panic for Jack to revive. He'd learned to hide his fear from Jack, but it never went away.

Ianto stared at the phone for a moment as he willed himself to be calm before texting Gwen. "Jack in trouble. Off to rescue. Search basement for me. Ta."

Ianto vaulted up the stairs three at a time, lurching into the lighting department. It was dark. He tried to see his way by the glow of his phone.

"Jack?" he called.

He could hear a sparking noise and could see small fires flickering across the floor. He thought he could make something out in the corner of the room near a fallen chandelier. He edged forward, calling out Jack's name. There was no response. Ianto edged closer to the shadow in the corner. "Jack?" he asked.

The shadow moved slowly and sluggishly. Jack was obviously coming back to the life after one of his many little adventures. Crushed under a chandelier this time. Ianto had seen worse. The many little deaths of Captain Jack. This won't be so extraordinary. He relaxed his features into an impassive mask. He didn't want Jack to see that he was worried. Ianto made it his business to not look alarmed or surprised at whatever happened to Jack. All normal, business as usual.

Ianto had even developed a carefully manly hug and a special tone of voice. Reassuring. Calming. He didn't want Jack to think that at any level, Ianto Jones was horrified, alarmed, or worried that his best friend came back from the dead on a regular basis. Fine by him. The terror he always felt was shrewdly concealed from his lover.

Only, as Ianto took another step forward, he realized that the shadow lifting itself off the ground to tower over him wasn't Jack Harkness at all. Ianto stared at the shifting shape, a mess of tentacles and claws, all snapping and writhing like a shadow puppet. That's all this is… a monster made of shadows.
When it reached out and sliced Ianto's arm, the pain was sharp. Ianto staggered back from the advancing darkness in horror. *What the bloody hell is it?*

And then the world went dark.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my amazingly talented beta riftintime.

Ianto woke up, staring at a banjo. He blinked. What the... "Good evening," a voice said.

It was the kind of warm and fruity voice that used to advertise cakes. The voice's owner shuffled steadily into view and fitted the voice perfectly. He was one of those rotund, jolly faced, beaming men. Ianto had grown up around a lot of them. They'd haunted the pubs and worked in men's clubs.

"Hello," he said uncertainly.

"Oh, take your time," the man said, his accent pure thick Swansea marmalade. "Been through the wars, haven't you? That's right."

"Ianto Jones," he said extending his hand.

"Ianto, is it?" The man pumped his hand. "I'm Gareth." He beamed.

Ianto took in the room, which at first glance, looked like part of the store, full of dusty musical instruments, gramophones, and stuffed animals. Only there was something wrong. Gareth hovered near him. "May I can congratulate you on your escape."

"Er, yes," Ianto said with confusion. "And how did I manage that exactly?"

The man shrugged as though it was a great mystery of no real importance. "You were lucky, that's all. Most people who fall through the walls are."

"Fall through the walls?" Ianto stared at him.

He suddenly realized what was wrong with the room. It was full of clutter – teddy bears and lampshades – but there were no walls. Instead the windows hung in a glittering blue void that stretched away to infinity. Have I fallen through the Rift? Ianto wondered as he stared around at his bizarre surroundings.

The man nodded and patted at his jumper, which was distinctly old-fashioned. "Oh, yes. Falling in is the only way people get here." He gestured around him. "This is the department of curiosities."

"Right," Ianto said with more confidence than he felt, as though falling through walls into another dimension was something that happened to him every day.

"I don't often get a chance to show this place off, you know," Gareth said, puffing out his chest. "Originally this was where all the stuff that wasn't selling anymore went. All the odds and sods." He patted a stuffed trout with something like affection. "But look at all this." He spread his arms out proudly to encompass the tottering piles of dusty furniture and tea chests, which appeared to reach up for miles into twinkling stars.

Ianto stared up at the impossibly high towers of debris. It all looks very much like junk. And for an
infinite space, it still smells like a charity shop. Stale, dirty, and slightly dead. Ianto wrinkled his nose in distaste. It was untidy, cluttered, and lacking in order – everything that Ianto objected to.

He looked at Gareth again, his rotund, ageless, smiling face with his hands stretched outwards as though trying to hug his whole kingdom of shreds and tatters. The poor man has been trapped in here so long, he's gone crazy with loneliness, Ianto decided sympathetically.

Gareth looked at him, a little desperately, expecting some sort of reply. So Ianto humored him. "Unique," he said kindly.

He picked up an object at random. It was a moth eaten record sleeve for a 78 shellac disc by Dame Nellie Melba. He smiled thinly. "Interesting."

Gareth nodded enthusiastically. "Oh, you're barely even scratching the surface. A regular Aladdin's cave. Be careful of that pile on the right, it's none too stable. Keeps rearranging itself. You'll get used to it, especially when you've been here so long."

"Ah, how long is 'so long'?"

"Since 1910."

"You've been here all this time?" Ianto asked incredulously, suddenly realizing who he was talking to. "I mean… how?"

"To be honest, you get used to it." Gareth waved vaguely around the chamber. "Time doesn't really pass here."

"And you've been alone?"

Gareth shook his head. "The odd visitor. Like you, Ianto. I'm glad of the company."

"And what happens to them?" Ianto asked warily.

"Oh, they don't stay long. They find their way out."

Ianto stood up, feeling imminently relieved. "Is there a way out?"

"I suppose there's always a way out," Gareth admitted. "I've never taken it." He suddenly looked old and sad.

"I'm getting us out of here," Ianto said firmly, taking out his mobile phone. "All I have to do is call my friends, and we can sort something out."

Ianto became aware that Gareth was staring at him, a sad smile on his lips. "Oh, it's not that easy, I'm afraid." Gareth sighed.

Ianto checked his phone. No signal. He stared at Gareth helplessly.

"I don't understand these portable telegraphs, but they don't work here, you know. It's very careful about that sort of thing," Gareth said ruefully.

"It?" Ianto asked worriedly. "You mean the shadow creature? All claws and tentacles?"

Gareth looked up, his geniality fading slightly. "Was that what you saw? I don't remember." He shuddered. "So long ago, I had no idea."
"I wasn't just searching for this room," Ianto said carefully. "I'm also looking for the store's original owner, G. R. Owen." He looked at Gareth and coughed expectantly.

"That's my cue isn't it?" Gareth bowed. "Gareth Robert Owen at your service."

Several popping sounds exploded from somewhere to his left. Ianto looked up sharply. "Can you hear gunfire?"

Gareth turned to him, puzzled. "Oh, you hear all sorts of things in here… echoes, long dead mice scurrying through the ceilings, prices being called out in pounds, shillings, and pence. Nothing surprises me anymore."

Ianto shook his head. "No," he smiled with relief. "I rather think that's the cavalry."

They waited for several minutes as Gareth expostulated about the evils of shopping malls, which, to his reckoning, had been the downfall of G.R. Owens. As Gareth talked, Ianto became more and more disheartened. The gunfire had stopped, and neither Jack nor Gwen had appeared to save them. "Well," Ianto sighed. He was sat carefully on a broken rocking chair. "I don't think anyone's coming to rescue us. Surely, there's another way out? What about the other visitors?"

Gareth turned around slowly. He was walking up and down the room, lighting old-fashioned gas lamps with a taper. "I don't know, I… really, I don't. This room just… happens. I used to have a cat when I was a boy. It was a big old house and sometimes you just wouldn't see the cat for days on end, and then suddenly it would be there. That's what this room is like. It just…"

"Prowls?" Ianto asked skeptically.

Gareth blinked, his genial face suddenly weary. "Yes… well, yes… I guess you could say that. Hmph… prowls." He chuckled. "What a strange expression. Indeed."

"I'm wondering if this is a pocket universe of some sort," Ianto remarked with some curiosity.

"You're very well informed for someone who works in menswear."

"Oh, that's just a cover. I thought I'd explained?"

Gareth looked alarmed. "No, you didn't. Who are you?" he snapped.

"I work for Torchwood," Ianto said. "There's no reason why you should have heard of…"

Ianto stopped dead when he heard Jack's voice shout, "Gwen, don't move. Ianto, get back."

"What?" Ianto was baffled. He gestured to Gareth. "This is…"

Jack's voice was cold. "I know, we've met. Keep away."

"Sorry," Gwen said to the baffled old man. "He gets like this." She turned back to Jack. "What?"

"Gwen, it's not… things aren't what they appear to be. Trust me." Jack's voice was cold. "Hello, Gareth. Could you keep back from Ianto please?"

Gareth's voice was quiet. "You haven't changed, Jack."

"I wish I could say the same about you," Jack sounded genuinely sad. "What's happened to you?"

Gareth looked puzzled. "I don't understand."
"Jack," Ianto said gently. "What's the problem?"

"Okay," Jack said. "I want you both to look very, very carefully at that nice old man. There's a perception filter. Sorry, Gareth."

Ianto gasped and backed away in horror as his eyes adjusted, and Gareth's true form came into focus. An oily black cloud poured out of his head and arms, twisting and coiling around him, growing bigger by the second.

"What is it?" Gareth asked, looking around himself in alarm, which only made it worse.

"Your shadows," Ianto cried. "They're pouring out of you."

"I… I don't understand." Gareth sounded genuinely puzzled, holding out a hand imploringly.

Still mumbling in confusion, Gareth's face split, as more shadows leaked out. Shapes were forming in the cloud, silhouettes of pincers and claws and spikes.

"Gareth," Jack's voice was sad. "You're the creature. It's been hiding in you."

"I don't understand," Gareth exclaimed as tentacles started to force their way out of his eye sockets.

"We found the monster, then," Gwen said sadly.

"Yes," Ianto cried as the oily black smoke floated towards him. "Keep back, I think I'm holding it at bay."

"Right," Jack said calmly. "Thing is, I think I'm a bit tastier."

"Must you turn everything into a pissing contest?" Ianto shouted. "This really isn't the time."

"No, seriously," Jack said, moving closer to the creature that was once G.R. Owens. "This thing has hated me for a very long time. Hello!" He waved. "I'm back!"

A tower of ruptured flesh and twisting claws whipped around, seeking out the noise. It seemed to be sensing the air.

"My name is Captain Jack Harkness," Jack boomed. "And you've been trying to kill me all day. Now, I need a word with Gareth. Is that possible?"

The monstrosity reared back, every tendril, claw, knife, and pincer poised dangerously, menacingly. Then with a sudden snap, the monster, the cloud, and the whirling terror, all poured in on itself, folding itself away into the neat little figure of Gareth, who blinked unsteadily. "Oh," he said, as though seeing Jack and Gwen and Ianto for the first time. "Hello. G. R. Owen, owner, founder, and proprietor of the shop."

"Gareth and I go way back, don't we?" Jack said.

The little man nodded miserably.

"We were both freelancers… well… that's the phrase that Torchwood liked to use. People that were on the payroll occasionally."

"Jack was very popular," Gareth said. "In his own way."

"And Gareth was brilliant. He understood aliens like nobody else. But I don't think he really liked
"I liked the money," Gareth said.

"Really?" Jack said.

"Well, that and the aliens," Gareth said. "I wanted to belong, but I didn't really fit in. I wasn't in the right class. I was just a very talented son of a shopkeeper."

"With an amazing affinity for aliens."

"Thank you."

"No, really," Jack insisted. "They trusted you. I've seen Weevils eat out of your hand." To Ianto he muttered, "Seconds later, he'd shoot them in the head, but they didn't seem to care."

Gareth grinned demurely. "Well, we all had our skills back in the day."

Jack marched across the room and seized Ianto, pulling him into a quick embrace. "It's good to see you," he said.

Ianto was surprised by Jack's public display of affection in the middle of an investigation. "Likewise," he said. "But what is going on?"

"One of yours, eh, Jack?" Gareth asked with a trace of weary amusement in his voice.

"Oh, yeah," Jack said with one arm draped protectively around Ianto's shoulders. "Ianto Jones is one of a kind. And I don't take kindly to you trying to kill him."

Ianto was so shocked by Jack's words that he had to make a concerted effort to keep his mask of implacability firmly in place. It was neither the time nor the place. His nimble mind stored away the fact for later rumination, and he forced his attention back to the present situation.

"I'm sorry," Gareth said, sounding genuinely bewildered. "I think you'll find I did no such thing."

Jack's eyes narrowed. "You took something with you when you left Torchwood, didn't you? That's why I'm here."

Gareth nodded sadly and addressed himself to Gwen. "You see what Torchwood is like, my dear? Utterly self-interested. They don't care about people."

Ianto thought about this. _Gareth has a point. Torchwood… lots of excitement, great salary, no pension plan._

"What did you steal?" Gwen asked.

"Stealing is it?" Gareth asked defensively. "Hardly that. Merely… um… Protective custody. A space vessel that had crashed through the Rift. I was little more than a beach comber. I found a tiny thing, neither animal, vegetable, or mineral, but perhaps a little of all three. A force field, a defense system, a co-pilot. It needed protection. I knew that it was a gentle creature, but capable of great power. Torchwood were readying themselves for World War I, and I could see what that would mean. That poor, wounded survivor would be sent into battle, and I could not let that happen."

Ianto and Gwen both looked at Jack. Jack didn't look back at them. He didn't need to say anything. Ianto knew Jack's views on the subject. If it was alien, it was the property of Torchwood, to be used as they saw fit. Jack's superior knowledge of the future gave him a broader perspective, but he
sometimes lost sight of the present. He'd seen Jack do ruthless things, all in the name of the greater
good.

"We thought this was a missing persons case," Gwen said haltingly. She stared at Jack accusingly.

"Never said it was the whole story," Jack shrugged. "Gareth, I've come for the creature."

Ianto's emotions were a complicated tangle - not disappointment or betrayal, just a strange sense of
weariness. "Jack told us that Torchwood's oldest case was your disappearance," he offered.

"In my own shop?" Gareth laughed and winked at Jack. "A bit of misdirection. Classic Jack. I'd a
thriving business, I'd everything to live for. But I looked into that device, and it looked into me, and
we agreed on a merger. I would offer it sanctuary, and it would protect me. We would keep each
other safe." He smiled.

Jack protested. "You didn't know what you were doing, Gareth."

Gareth shrugged. "Didn't have to. I just did the best I could, Jack." He gestured around himself.
"When I held that creature, I knew I could protect myself, the shop, and the creature. In a strange
way, we all became one." Gareth narrowed his eyes. "And that's how we've existed all these years.
Truth to tell, I don't know where I end and the creature begins, and where the creature ends and the
building begins. We're all G. R. Owen." He spread his arms. It wasn't a gesture of modesty.

There was a discrete cough. "I'm afraid it's not that simple," the voice of Mr. Absalom said. He and
Miss Valentine, battle weary and tired, had entered quietly. "Meet the gang," Mr. Absalom said
wearily, bringing up his machine gun.

"My apologies for our late arrival," Miss Valentine said dryly. "You wouldn't believe the trouble we
had getting here."

Gareth winked at them. "Almost as if you weren't wanted." He turned away, dismissing them.

Mr. Absalom strolled forward. "I represent Firestone Finance. We have a proposition for G. R.
Owen."

"An offer I can't refuse?" Gareth smiled. "So, is it to be an auction? Am I to decide between
Torchwood and Firestone?"

Mr. Absalom coughed again. "Not exactly. It's simpler than that. You see, Mr. Owen, I own you. As
of nine a.m. this morning, Firestone has a controlling interest in the firm of G. R. Owens. The
contract is very carefully worded. We now possess the building and its contents."

Gareth looked at him, barely acknowledging him. "I see," he said. "And what does this mean?"

Miss Valentine stepped forward. "Mr. Absalom would never be so crude as to describe Firestone as
an asset stripping firm, but we exist to profit from aliens. This means you."

"Me?" G. R. Owen asked.

Miss Valentine nodded. "Indeed. We are aware of your unique nature," She consulted her notepad.
"There is a bullion facility in the Euro mountains who are offering quite a substantial sum for you as
a defense system."

Gareth blinked. "I beg your pardon?"
Miss Valentine brushed some plaster from her shoulder. "You'll be removed from the premises and
reinstalled. We've worked out the technology quite neatly."

"What?" Gareth took an awkward step towards her, his face darkening.

"After that, we'll auction off the contents of the shop, build a block of flats… flats, or maybe just a
car park for that nice shopping center across the street."

Gareth's face burst into shadows, something fighting to escape from him. His voice was thick with
anger, and something else. "I will fight you."

"I think not." Mr. Absalom pointed to Miss Valentine. "She's a powerful enough telepath to
neutralize you quite effectively. Sadly, she'll have to stand quite close to you. Do be careful." Mr.
Absalom smiled cruelly. "I hope you'll come quietly, and quickly."

Gareth swung around, his eyes black. "Do something," he snapped at Jack, almost pleadingly.
"Please."

Mr. Absalom barely even glanced at Jack. "Don't count on Harkness. We're going after him next.
There are at least three African dictators who would love to find out how his immortality works."

If Absalom had looked at Jack, he'd have seen an expression Ianto knew only too well. The look so
cold, it was beyond ruthless. It was the look that terrified him.

Jack turned to Gareth. "I'm sorry, but the thing inside you has turned nasty."

Moving with difficulty, Gareth stared at him. "What do you mean?"

Jack frowned. "I know you were trying your best, but there's a cellar full of bodies. Your parasite has
quite an appetite."

Gareth sagged. "What?"

"It's true," Jack said gently. "You've no idea have you?"

Gareth stared at him, appalled.

Mr. Absalom nodded. "It's a great defense system. You thought you were preserving the shop, Mr.
Owen. But it's driven the last customers away, allowing us to make a killing. You brought this upon
yourself." He smirked.

"No," Gareth said quietly, looking about him in some confusion.

Then his face darkened, and a cloud started to form around him. Hurriedly, Miss Valentine stepped
forward, and threw up a hand. The cloud froze in midair. Gareth stared at the creature forming
around him in horror.

"See? Miss Valentine is very adept," Absalom said smoothly. "She's strong enough to hold you in
place, Gareth. May I call you, Gareth? I think we're going to get along great. I think we hold all the
cards. I feel everyone will do as I say, or I'll need to start shooting."

Jack rolled his eyes. "We're against you. Gareth's against you. In fact, the whole building's against
you. How long do you think Miss Valentine can contain that?"

"Oh, she's very good," Mr. Absalom said with a wink.
Then suddenly, the cloud tore apart like an elastic band, rearing away from Gareth. Miss Valentine fell back, clutching her head. "I can't control it," she cried out, staggering against the table. "It's so strong."

Gareth stared in amazement at the creature. "Is that it?" he asked incredulously. "I've never seen it like this. A hundred years ago, it was a tiny butterfly."

"Hasn't it grown?" Jack said. "It's very hungry, and it's prepared to attack any threat to the shop." He waved at the cowering Mr. Absalom. "Hiya."

Mr. Absalom stared in horror as the cloud of knives and claws drifted towards him. Like the hand of God, it clenched around him, muffling his screams as it flowed into his mouth.

"Uh oh," Jack murmured casually.

"Do something!" Miss Valentine cried.


A disoriented Gareth fell weakly against Ianto. "What's happened?" he asked.

Jack jerked a hand to Mr. Absalom. "He's found a new host. One with a bit more to offer."

Mr. Absalom gave a loud scream as the last of the cloud vanished inside him. His body turned uncertainly, and his eyes snapped open. Smoke leaked slightly out of him. "This is... amazing," he croaked. "I think like a God. I feel hunger. I need to devour."

Everyone took a step back.

"Size of a butterfly, it was," repeated Gareth weakly. "It just wanted a friend."

"Yeah, right," Jack said.

"How do we get out of here?" Ianto asked. "Quickly would be good."

Jack held up the dimension gate control. "Emergency exit." He clicked it. "Ladies and gentleman, it's the late night opening at G. R. Owens." A hole appeared in the void, showing an exit back into the store. "Third floor. Soft furnishings, sportswear, and lighting. One time offer. Go!"

Mr. Absalom shuffled towards the opening, the cloud pouring out of his mouth. "Run," Jack whispered to Gwen and Ianto.

Ianto ran through the dimension gate with Gwen at his heels. Miss Valentine was already through, having made her escape as soon as the void had opened. He turned to see Jack pulling Gareth through, and he watched in horror as Mr. Absalom's sharp tentacles closed around Jack's neck. "You'll be first, Jack," Mr. Absalom screamed.

Jack grabbed one of Firestone's tripods and tossed it casually back into the void. With a terrible sound of screaming air, the department of curiosities vanished as though it had never been, only an echo of Mr. Absalom's cries drifting through the air.

For a second, Torchwood stood there in the shattered ruins of the lighting department. Then Gareth started to cry. "Am I... am I free of it?" Gareth asked mournfully.

"You're free." Jack smiled. "The parasite has diverted all it's attention on to the new owner. And I've just sealed the dimension gate for good. It can't get out. And I rather imagine Firestone won't come
looking for Mr. Absalom. Case closed. I'm sorry Gareth, it must be a bit of a wrench."

G. R. Owen glanced nervously around himself at the ruined shop floor and then back at Jack. "What do I do now?" he said. He looked very old and scared.

Jack shrugged. "I don't know. But your staff are waiting for you downstairs. There's a lot of clearing up to do."

Ianto sincerely hoped that Gareth would find a new purpose in trying to salvage the last remnants of G. R. Owens, or if he decides to sell, at least it will be his decision and not because some alien parasite has killed off all the customers.

Ianto and Jack drove back to the Hub in silence after dropping a weary Gwen off at home. Ianto had let his mind wander back to Jack's words to Gareth. "Ianto Jones is one of a kind."

Ianto glanced surreptitiously at Jack across the SUV. He couldn't quite make sense of his own emotions. His relationship with Jack had been so full of confusion, misunderstanding, disagreements, estrangements, and unspoken words. It was so at odds with his fastidious nature. He liked to have a clear understanding of anything he undertook. But with Jack, nothing was simple or straightforward. It didn't fit into any of the neat categories of which Ianto was so fond. Their entire relationship was nebulous and indefinable. But he couldn't deny that he loved Jack, and he wondered ruefully if Jack loved him back.

He suddenly felt tremendously weary. He decided that he could no longer exist in his current state of confusion about their relationship. He had to know where he stood. He and Jack needed to talk.
Jack surreptitiously glanced across at Ianto, who had been silent since they’d departed from G. R. Owens. They'd just dropped Gwen off at her home, and they were heading back to the Hub. Ianto looked pensive, and that often worried Jack. He never knew what was running through the enigmatic younger man's mind. He wondered how long they could dance around the myriad issues of their complex and unconventional relationship. He had a feeling that it would be an unpleasant and possibly explosive conversation and he hoped he could stave off a discussion for as long as possible. He wasn't sure if he had any answers to their problems.

Besides, there was a less solemn topic he'd been meaning to broach with Ianto for several days. He pulled into the Hub's garage, parked the SUV, turned the engine off, and turned to Ianto. "So," he said, breaking the long silence. "Isn't it your birthday in a couple of days?"

Ianto was startled out of his reverie, and he looked at Jack with an expression of surprise. "Um… yup," he affirmed. "Hadn't really thought about it. I guess working at Torchwood tends to make one forget about the mundane."

"It's not mundane," Jack said cheerfully. "It only happens once a year. We should celebrate."

"Why? We never celebrate your birthday. Do you even have a birthday, Jack?" Ianto asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Everyone has a birthday," Jack retorted. "Mine just doesn't really correspond with your calendar."

"But you must know when it is?" Ianto asked skeptically.

Jack shrugged. "I figured it out once, a long time ago, but I've forgotten already. Ianto, when you're as old as I am, birthdays cease to have meaning. But you, on the other hand, are turning twenty-six."

An odd look of pain crossed Ianto's handsome features, and Jack eyed him curiously. "What is it, Ianto?"

Ianto was silent, his brows creased. Jack reached across the SUV and took his hand, giving it a gentle, encouraging squeeze. "It's just that… well, it seems that lots of Torchwood employees died at the age of twenty-six. Doesn't seem like a good age to reach," Ianto finally explained.

"A lot of Torchwood employees have died at a lot of different ages. I don't see your point," Jack said, taking his hand away. Fallen Torchwood heroes weren't a subject on which he liked to dwell. Besides, he hated when Ianto talked about the possibility of his demise.

"Lisa died when she was twenty-six," Ianto said in barely a whisper.

"Oh… I see," Jack said carefully.
It had been a long time since Ianto had mentioned Lisa, and he wasn't sure how to react. Part of him felt a pang of sorrow for Ianto's loss, but another part of him experienced an unwelcome twinge of jealousy. *Is it possible that he's still in love with Lisa after all this time?*

"It's really not worth celebrating, Jack. We can just let it go."

Momentarily at a loss for words, Jack opened the driver's side door of the SUV and climbed out. Ianto followed him, and they walked in silence into the Hub. Jack had already chosen a present for Ianto, and he'd planned to have a small celebration, but it seemed that Ianto was less than enthusiastic about the approaching day. Ianto was in a peculiar mood, and Jack didn't understand where it was coming from. He wanted to offer words of comfort, but as he didn't know what was causing Ianto's distress, he had no idea what to say.

As the cogwheel door rolled open, Ianto stepped into the Hub in front of him. Jack reached out his hand and grabbed his arm, stopping him. "Ianto." Ianto turned around and faced him. "Let's at least take the day off... spend it together?" Jack asked cautiously.

"Do we get days off?" Ianto asked cynically.

"Well, we can at least try." Ianto raised an eyebrow, and his mouth turned downwards in a frown. "I don't understand," Jack said putting his hands on Ianto's shoulders. "What's the matter with you?"

Ianto looked searchingly into Jack's eyes. *What is he hoping to see?* Jack asked himself as he stared back at the younger man, unwilling to break eye contact. After a long moment, Ianto sighed heavily. "It's nothing. I'm sorry, Jack. Just tired. I suppose traveling through dimensions will do that to you. Well, that and working in the menswear department of G. R. Owens every day for a week. Yes, it would be nice to take the day off, Rift permitting, and spend some time together. But no big to-do, okay? No gifts or cake or anything like that."

"No cake?" Jack asked, feigning outrage. "Do you know how many alternative uses there are for frosting?"

Jack could see Ianto struggling to maintain his dour expression, but the corners of his lips were twitching. "And I'm sure you're dying to show me," Ianto murmured.

"Well, now that you mention it..." Jack gave Ianto his best lascivious leer.

Ianto rolled his eyes, but he was smiling. Jack gave an inward cheer, knowing he'd won a small victory in successfully breaking Ianto out of his melancholia. "Come on, Mr. Jones. I'll massage your feet," he said happily, taking Ianto's hand and leading him towards the Hub's sofa. "Among other things," he added mischievously.

The team spent the next day tying up loose ends from the G. R. Owens case, adding data to the Torchwood mainframe, completing endless paperwork, and filing reports. Jack was relieved to finally close the file on Gareth R. Owens and the creature he'd discovered all those years ago.

At the end of the day, Ianto leaned against the wall, hands in his pockets, watching as Jack closed the filing cabinet drawer on Torchwood's oldest case. Jack smiled at the younger man. "Glad that's done," he said happily, taking Ianto's hand and leading him towards the Hub's sofa. "Among other things," he added mischievously.

Gwen's head popped around the door. "Oh, right. It's Ianto's birthday tomorrow. Big plans?" she asked with a knowing smile.

"Nope," Ianto said quickly. "I don't want a fuss. Just a lie in maybe."
"Hold that thought," Gwen said as her head disappeared from the doorway.

Jack lifted his eyebrows questioningly, and Ianto shrugged his shoulders in response. Gwen returned a moment later with a box elegantly wrapped in silver paper. "I meant to give this to you tomorrow, but if we're having the day off, I'd better give it to you now," Gwen said with a grin, handing Ianto the box.

"You didn't have to get me anything," Ianto said, accepting the proffered package.

"I would never forget your birthday, sweetheart," Gwen replied warmly. "Go on. Open it now while I'm here."

"Wait," Jack said. "You two have a seat on the sofa. I'll be right back."

He hurried away to the kitchen area where he quickly found the bottle of champagne he'd hidden the week before. It wasn't the celebration he'd planned, but an impromptu celebration was better than no celebration at all. For once, he silently thanked Gwen for interfering. He grabbed three glasses and headed back to the sofa where Ianto and Gwen had settled themselves.

"I said no fuss," Ianto exclaimed as Jack set the glasses down and began to unwrap the foil on the champagne bottle.

"What, the three of us can't drink a glass of champagne together?" Jack asked ruefully.

"Come on, Ianto. That's a really nice bottle of bubbly. I'm longing for a glass. Besides, it's your birthday tomorrow. You have to let us indulge you just a bit. We're selfish like that," Gwen said, grinning.

"Oh, fine," Ianto said petulantly, but Jack could see the smile in his eyes.

Jack popped the cork dramatically and filled the three glasses. Then he set the bottle down and ran into his office to retrieve an envelope from his coat pocket. He walked back and placed the envelope in Ianto's lap. "I said no gifts, Jack," Ianto said, eyeing him austerely.

"Yeah, well, I'd already gotten that before you said anything," Jack replied unrepentantly. "So I guess you'll just have to live with it."

He squeezed onto the sofa between Ianto and Gwen and picked up a glass. "To Ianto Jones. One of a kind," he said, repeating his earlier words to Gareth.

"To Ianto," Gwen said raising her glass. "Happy Birthday, sweetheart."

The three of them clinked their glasses together before taking a sip of champagne. Jack let the bubbly liquid roll around in his mouth before swallowing. The nutty flavor burst spectacularly across his tongue. He closed his eyes in appreciation.

"Wow, that's lovely," Gwen said.

"It's fantastic. Thanks, Jack," Ianto said.


Sighing with resignation, Ianto picked up Gwen's gift from where it was sitting on the table in front of them. Jack grinned to himself as he watched Ianto unwrap the present. He would have just torn the paper away, but not Ianto, who carefully removed the wrapping by sliding his finger under the
taped edge and neatly slitting the adhesive so as not to rip anything. The silver paper fell tidily away revealing a silver box beneath. Ianto gingerly removed the lid. Then he exclaimed, "Oh my God, Gwen!"

Jack peered curiously over his shoulder. The box held a pristine, white, canvas bag with a picture of what looked like a chipmunk. "Kopi Luwak Coffee," Jack carefully sounded out the name.

"Kopi Loo-ahh," Ianto corrected pedantically. "Gwen, this is too much! You shouldn't have!"

"Oh, I know people who know people," Gwen said with a wink. "Don't worry. I got a good deal."

"I don't get it," Jack said, confused. "Is it some sort of alien, magic coffee?"

"It's only the rarest, most expensive coffee in the world," Ianto said with a huff. "It's from the islands of the Indonesian Archipelago – Java, Sumatra, Bali, and Sulawesi," he continued academically. "It's made from coffee berries that have passed through the digestive system of the Asian Palm civit or Paradoxurus hermaphrodites. Also called a toddy cat."

"Para-what?" Jack asked. "Never heard of a civit. Looks more like a chipmunk to me."

"Yeah, and don't ask him how they get the coffee berries out of those civits," Gwen said with a snort.

"They cut them open?" Jack asked uncertainly.

"The berries are expelled naturally," Ianto sniffed superiorly.

Gwen started giggling when Jack's mouth dropped open. "They poop them out? You bought him poop coffee?" he exclaimed, wrinkling up his face in disgust.

"The proteolytic enzymes of the civit's digestive tract shorten the peptides and produce free amino acids, which have a favorable effect on the coffee's flavor," Ianto continued arrogantly, however he'd clearly lost his audience.

Gwen was laughing hysterically, and Jack kept repeating, "Poop coffee?"

"Just wait until you've tried it!" Ianto said defensively.

"Alright, alright," Jack said, grinning. "I've definitely eaten stranger things in my lifetime. There was this one time…"

"I don't want to hear another one of your bizarre, alien, oral sex stories, Jack," Ianto interrupted him.

"Yeah, spare me the details," Gwen said, finally getting a hold of herself.

"How come you two never want to hear my stories anymore?" Jack pouted.

Much to his chagrin, both Ianto and Gwen ignored him. "Seriously, thanks Gwen. This is really amazing," Ianto said, reaching around Jack to hug Gwen.

Sighing with disappointment – he'd had a really good story in mind, Jack topped off their glasses and gestured at the envelope sitting in Ianto's lap. "Open it," he said.

"Do I want to be here for this?" Gwen asked dubiously. "It's not some alien sex toy, is it? Or dirty photos?"
"No, but now that you mention it…” Jack started, but again Ianto cut him off.

"I'm opening it, Jack," Ianto said, making a grand display of slitting open the envelope.

He took out a business card, which he read aloud. "Higgins and Brown. Bespoke Tailors."

He looked up questioningly at Jack. "We have an appointment for tomorrow at ten a.m.,” Jack explained, "To fit you for a custom-made suit."

"Jack, it's too expensive," Ianto protested, but Jack waved a hand dismissively.

"I have plenty of money. Been saving for over a hundred years. You should know. You look after my accounts," he said, smiling. "Besides, it's kind of a present for me as well. You know how much I love you in a good suit," he added with a suggestive leer.

Gwen giggled, and Ianto looked like he was dying to roll his eyes. "Thanks, Jack," he murmured instead.

Ianto glanced hastily in Gwen's direction and then leaned forward, pressing a quick, chaste kiss against Jack's lips. "That's all I get?" Jack asked, feigning outrage.

Jack could see the color rising in Ianto's cheeks and laughed. "You can thank me properly later," he said stroking Ianto's thigh suggestively.

"That must be my cue to leave," Gwen said as she started to stand up.

Both Jack and Ianto protested simultaneously. "Sorry, Gwen. Don't go yet," Ianto said, as Jack said, "At least finish the bottle with us!"

"Alright you two, but no funny business until after I'm gone."

Jack clasped his hands primly in his lap and nodded as Ianto turned an impressive shade of crimson. Then they all laughed. Jack poured out the rest of the champagne, and they drank companionably, discussing Gareth Owen and speculating on what he was going to do with his failing business.

After Gwen had departed, Jack received his proper thanks from Ianto, right there on the Hub sofa; Ianto riding him with wanton abandon, his head thrown back, and the sweat glistening on his naked body under the muted Hub lights.

The next morning, they spent some leisurely time in bed before showering and dressing for the day. They went to the appointment for the suit fitting, and Jack watched with affection as Ianto chose the fabric for his new suit – a black pinstripe – and discussed styles and cuts knowledgeably with the master tailor. Then they decided to walk past G. R. Owens, both of them curious to see if the store had opened its doors for the day. They strolled leisurely across Cardiff city center towards the old, quiet shop front. Two of the shop's employees were arranging a window display, and a sign hung on the doors that read, "Under New Management."

"I guess against all odds, G. R. Owens is still open for business," Ianto said.

"Looks that way," Jack agreed. "Want to go in?" he asked as an afterthought.

"Not really," Ianto replied.

They smiled at each other. "Look's like we weren't the only ones wondering if G. R. Owens would open its doors today," Ianto said, nodding across the street.
Jack looked in the direction Ianto had indicated and caught sight of Gwen and Rhys. They waved to each other and watched as Gwen and Rhys walked away arm in arm. "Want to take a drive along the coast?" Jack asked. "We could pick up some food for a picnic."

"Okay," Ianto agreed. "As long as you let me chose the food."

Jack laughed. "What's wrong with my food choices?"

"I don't even know how to begin to answer that," Ianto muttered.

They continued to banter happily as they entered a nearby gourmet market.

They spent the rest of the day driving around the Cardiff coastline, stopping to eat lunch at a particularly lovely spot in Munknash. Ianto seemed wistful and pensive, and Jack had the distinct impression that there was something he wanted to discuss, but that he kept changing his mind. It's his birthday, he reasoned. If he wants to have a serious discussion, I suppose now's as good of a time as any. But Ianto never broached any weighty topics. They chatted about recent cases and bantered in their usual way, but whatever Ianto had on his mind, he'd apparently decided to keep it to himself. Although Jack was tempted to press him, he resolved to let Ianto take the lead.

They returned to the Hub and spent several hours working up an appetite. Then they showered and dressed again, and Jack took Ianto to a new French restaurant near the Memorial for a romantic dinner. Luckily, the Rift had remained quiet, and they were able to finish their dinner and spend the rest of the evening in bed without interruption.

The next morning, however, they weren't so lucky. When several power losses affecting the entire city registered on the system with no identifiable origin, Jack had a feeling it was yet another alien threat. "Where's Gwen? Why isn't she here yet?" he asked.

Ianto shrugged in response. Jack took out his mobile phone and opened a text message to Gwen. He typed "TORCHWOOD" and hit send.
Ianto lay in bed staring up at the opening to Jack's office. The older man, who always insisted that he never slept, was snoring soundly next to him. It was true that Jack slept a lot less than most people, however Ianto knew from experience that he did actually sleep. He had been touched by Jack and Gwen's celebration of his birthday the day before, and he'd enjoyed spending the day with Jack, although part of him wished that the significance of the day had gone unmentioned. He'd been serious when he'd told Jack that he wanted to let it go. He hadn't been feeling very celebratory, and he'd had a difficult time maintaining a gracious demeanor.

He loved Jack, more than he'd loved anyone, more than he'd loved Lisa. But with Lisa, he'd always known where he stood. He'd understood their relationship. It had made sense. Not for it's conventionality as a relationship between a man and a woman, but for it's conventionality in expectations. He'd known what their relationship had meant to Lisa and where it had been going. He'd wanted to marry Lisa and have children with her. He'd wanted to grow old with her and watch their grandchildren playing in the garden. He'd known for certain that Lisa had wanted the same things.

With Jack, with Torchwood, there was no expectations, no promises, no future. He had no idea what their relationship meant to Jack. There had been times when he thought he knew, but recent events, miscommunications, and unresolved issues had shaken his confidence. Besides, there was the undeniable fact that Jack would never grow old, but Ianto would. Every day he grew a little older, while Jack stayed exactly the same. If he managed to live to old age, he would do it alone. Jack would probably have long since abandoned him. Having a normal life together – a proper home, children, even a pet – was out of the question. Jack was immortal, and more than that, he was restless in nature. He was a man of action, a hero, a defender of the planet, a former time traveler. He would never be the type of person who would settle down with one person in one place for very long.

Ianto used to fantasize about what his and Lisa's life together would be like. He couldn't do that with Jack. They didn't have a future. They only had the present. And he didn't know how much longer this moment would last. Jack had already pulled away from him twice – once when he left with the Doctor, then again when Owen and Tosh died. They'd never really talked about it. They never really talked about anything anymore. It seemed that the intimate friendship they had once shared had dissolved into a companionable, but reserved relationship. There was always an enormous elephant in the room, and lately it seemed like the elephant was growing bigger and bigger, sucking the oxygen out of the atmosphere.

He'd used to be able to sense Jack's emotions. Jack had opened himself up, at least a little bit, and Ianto had been able to feel what Jack felt. He didn't have to take Jack's affection for him on faith, and he'd felt more confident about their relationship then. But since Tosh and Owen's deaths, and their subsequent estrangement, Jack's emotions had been closed to him, as though a wall had sprung up between them. There were occasional moments when Jack had let him in, but it was infrequent. For the most part, Jack was, once again, a closed book.
Several times during the day he’d considered talking to Jack, but since it had been his birthday, he didn’t want all of his future birthdays to remind him of what might be a catastrophic conversation. There were so many things left unsaid between them, and Ianto was afraid of the consequences of speaking them aloud. So he’d held his tongue and tried to enjoy the day. He’d thought that remaining silent and just enjoying whatever Jack was willing to give him would be enough, but it wasn’t anymore. Ianto was unhappy. He was more than unhappy. He was miserable. It was one of the reasons why he hadn’t wanted to celebrate his birthday. The other reason was the fact that he’d turned twenty-six... the age that Lisa was when she died. He still missed her and the life they could have had together.

He turned his head and looked at Jack, who was still sleeping soundly. He still felt a thrill of excitement every time he saw the older man. He still experienced the fluttering in his chest from Jack’s touch. But he realized that it was different from the way he’d felt about Lisa. With her, he’d felt those things, but with a level of safety and comfort. Lisa had made him feel warm and loved and safe. With Jack, there was affection and respect, but there was also fear and anxiety and uncertainty. And the demon of insecurity that lived inside Ianto was slowly eating him alive.

Ianto closed his eyes and tried to push away the unwelcome thoughts. He eventually fell into a fitful slumber. When he awoke the next morning, it was without the satisfaction of a restful night’s sleep. He felt weary and run down, so it was with consternation that he informed Jack about the unusual power outages all over Cardiff. When Jack announced that it was probably due to alien involvement, and therefore a Torchwood case, he had to stop himself from groaning out loud.

Gwen entered the Hub looking hurried and harassed. "Sorry I'm late, boys. Rhys' great uncle Bryn died and we had to go by the nursing home this morning to take care of things."

"Sounds like you've had a fun morning," Jack said sympathetically.

"Why is there always that weird smell in old peoples' homes?" Gwen asked.

"That, I suspect, is the old people," Ianto replied.

"No, it's like, I don't know, oh, steak and kidney pudding gone off," Gwen explained.

"I keep well clear of those kinds of places," Jack said with a frown.

"Worried they're going to guess your age and drag you in?" Gwen teased.

"He doesn't want to run into yet another old flame," Ianto added.

Gwen started laughing. "Um, can you two stop ganging up on me?" Jack huffed. "I do the sarcasm around here."

Ianto was about to argue that on the contrary, it was his job to do the sarcasm, when the computer monitor beeped an alert, "Ah, there it is again, Jack," he announced. "The power loss. Only for a split second, but it's enough to register."

Jack peered over Ianto's shoulder and typed on the keyboard. "Look, it's getting fractionally longer each time."

"Right," Gwen agreed. "Explains why my internet's been a nightmare recently. Well, you know, more of a nightmare than usual."

"I guess because we're all so used to technology letting us down from time to time, no one's picked up on it yet," Ianto added.
"But why is this happening?" Jack asked.

The Hub lights began to flicker, and Jack announced that the Hub had to be running properly to handle alien interference, and that he was going to install a new backup power source. He marched purposefully towards the archives.

"I hate it when he gets all technological," Ianto murmured to Gwen. "It's like putting a five year old in charge of Jodrell Bank."

Gwen asked Ianto to hack into the system of Ivy Day nursing home in Penarth, looking for information on a Miss Carew. When they discovered that eighty year old Miss Joanna Carew, who three months ago had been diagnosed with terminal heart disease, was now back at work as managing director of First Valley Computing, they began to suspect that the power outages and Miss Carew's extraordinary recovery might be related. Gwen left to question Miss Carew, and Ianto began reinforcing the mainframe's firewalls to protect it from the power failures.

Jack emerged from the archives a short while later carrying a piece of equipment with which Ianto was unfamiliar. "Our backup generators aren't going to be enough to protect us," he announced. "But I think a little fifty-first century tech should do the trick."

Ianto decided that it was best if he left Jack to tinker with the system alone. He was going to stay out of it. He focused instead on following the course of the power failures.

After several minutes of loud clattering, grating metal on metal, and murmured expletives from Jack, he stood up and wiped his hands. "That ought to fix it. Now even if the entire western world comes to a technological standstill, the Hub should still be up and running."

"Jack, it looks like that just might happen," Ianto informed him solemnly.

"Whoa, why? What have I missed?"

"There are now power blackouts all around the country, and it's not just the U.K. Looks like it's spreading into Europe too. And the electricity companies are just as baffled as we are," Ianto explained.

He went on to describe the negative spikes he'd noticed in the energy readings during each power outage. Jack suspected that something was feeding off the negative spikes and suggested that they isolate the source of the surges to discover what that something was. They needed to stop it, before it went global. Without power, there might be nuclear meltdowns, warheads detonating, hospitals left unable to function, and financial collapse. It would be catastrophic.

Ianto finally isolated the source of the power failures. It was coming from the open countryside of the Black Mountains. "Call Gwen. We may need her help," Jack ordered.

Ianto took his mobile phone out of his pocket and dialed. Gwen answered, but the connection was poor. The only thing he could understand was, "Look, there's something I need to tell you. I've been to see Miss Carew, and something's not right about her."

Gwen went on to explain, but her words were interrupted by static. He couldn't make sense of them. Then he lost the connection completely.

"Jack, the signal went, but Gwen was trying to…"

"Tell me in the SUV," Jack interrupted him. "You're driving. Catch." He tossed the keys, which Ianto deftly caught in one hand. "Now let's go. We've got some serious scouting to do."
They walked quickly to the garage. Ianto opened the driver's side door and climbed in while Jack leapt into the passenger's seat. Ianto explained about Miss Carew and what he'd understood of his conversation with Gwen as they pulled out of the garage and headed north towards the Brecon Beacons. "I think she was trying to say that she was going to Miss Carew's office to try and talk to her again," Ianto added as an afterthought.

As they reached the outskirts of the Beacons, Jack lost the signal on his phone, so he was unable to link to the Hub's mainframe, which had been guiding them to the location Ianto had pinpointed. "As far as I can remember, it's kind of in a northeasterly direction," Jack said hopefully.

"It's open countryside," Ianto said, "So fasten your seatbelt. You're in for a bumpy ride."

Jack chuckled. "I love it when you talk dirty, Ianto."

Ianto rolled his eyes. "Here we go," he said as he turned the SUV off the road.

After several minutes of bumping over the grassy countryside, Jack told Ianto to pull over. "We'll never find what we're looking for unless we go on foot."

"And what are we looking for?" Ianto asked as he slowed the SUV to a halt.

"I have no idea," Jack replied. "Park up behind those bushes, and don't get any funny ideas."

Ianto rolled his eyes again, and Jack laughed, reaching across and squeezing Ianto's thigh.

They climbed out of the SUV and glanced around the silent, darkened countryside. Ianto shivered as he remembered their experience with the cannibals. "It's pitch black out here," Jack said in a hushed voice.

"Lucky I brought the torch then, isn't it. Well done, Ianto. No worries, Jack," Ianto said, speaking Jack's assumed lines as well as his own. He didn't like to admit that he was afraid, so he was using sarcasm to mask his fear. Pulling himself together, he asked, "Which way now, then?"

"Don't know… Let's try… that way," Jack said, pointing randomly, and they began walking.

Eventually they discovered a metal door concealed in a large rock. "As far as I know, doors aren't usually featured in the Welsh countryside," Ianto said glibly.

"I love secret doors," Jack exclaimed excitedly. "Makes me feel all Famous Five."

They had some trouble opening the door. Jack made a noise of exasperation. "In times like this, I wish I had nabbed that old sonic screwdriver."

Ianto reached into his pocket and took out his Swiss Army knife. After some fiddling, the door swung open with an ear-splitting creak. "There's a lot you can do with a Swiss Army knife," he said triumphantly.

"Oh, neat-o. A lift," Jack said as they entered.

"Bit old fashion looking, isn't it?" Ianto asked skeptically.

"This just gets more and more intriguing," Jack said as he opened the metal gate of the lift. "After you, Ianto. Age before beauty."

"I'll go first. I know you're scared," Ianto retorted.
Jack laughed and followed Ianto into the lift. "Only one button," Ianto commented. "At least it saves us having to choose." As the lift began its descent, he asked hesitantly "Ah… you don't think this might be a trap, do you?"

"Of course not. When has it ever been a trap? Oh, yeah… it's always a trap," Jack replied sarcastically. "Well, maybe not this time," he added optimistically. "Keep your fingers crossed."

The lift let them out in an underground room, dimly lit, and filled with dusty antiques. "An antique collector's dream," Jack said.

They began examining the contents. Ianto ran his finger over a stuffed toucan and was examining an old weather vane when Jack announced, "I found some particularly naughty ornaments."

"Trust you," Ianto muttered.

Jack seized an old bicycle and rang the bell on the handlebars. "Now that is an antique," Ianto said.

"Hey, don't laugh. I used to ride one of those. Penny-Farthing. Not particularly comfortable, but great for peering over garden walls."

Ianto shook his head in exasperation. "Ooh, look at this," Jack said, ignoring him and grabbing another object. "Loving the forties radiogram. That brings back memories…"

For a moment, a look of pain crossed Jack's face. Ianto noticed, but let it go, because there was something unusual about the radio. There was sound coming from the dusty speaker. It sounds like the shipping forecast… "But… why is it on?" he asked. "There's no one here."

"Yeah, let me see," Jack said, examining it closely. "There must have been someone here recently."

"What makes you think that, Captain Harkness?"

Ianto and Jack looked at each other in surprise. The voice had come from the radio. "Either I'm going crazy, or that radio knows my name," Jack said.

"Though I cannot see you, I sense your presence," the radio voice continued.

"Is this some kind of trick?" Ianto asked cautiously.

"They all say that at first, Mr. Jones, but this is not a trick," the voice replied.

Jack laughed nervously. "Who the hell are you?" he demanded.

"I do not have a name as you do here. Those who assist me have named me Fitzroy."


"I do not live here, but I will soon. Those who assist me have built this chamber… for my arrival," Fitzroy said.

"Oh… Come on, Fitzroy, who are you really? What's going on?" Jack asked.

"And what are you doing to the power supply?" Ianto added.
"You have noticed. Good. Then it will not be long before this planet is ready to receive me." Ianto and Jack looked at each other, and Ianto knew they were thinking the same thing. "All my life," Fitzroy continued, "I have wandered among the stars. I am a single entity. Born of nothing, of no one. And endlessly I travel. I have never had a home, as you understand it."

"Yeah, but you're thinking of settling down now, right?" Jack asked.

"Who would begrudge me that? I have watched you from afar, and now I wish to live as you do."

"Yeah, but at what price?" Ianto asked.

"One or two adjustments have been made to this planet, and for that, I have had assistants."

"Have these assistants of yours been switching off the electricity supply? Because, we've noticed," Jack said.

"Those who listen to my broadcasts are special. They were the ones who once advanced Earth's technology. Now, they will reverse it. There were of course those who did not accept. They were unfortunate casualties."

Ianto felt his blood run cold. He suddenly understood why Miss Carew was important. Her company was one of the leading software developers in the nation. She must be the one interfering with the power. Maybe some sort of computer virus, Ianto reasoned. "Okay," Jack said. "But why have you been doing all this?"

"I cannot arrive if my path is blocked by so much electrical interference."

"So you're going to send the planet back to the dark ages?" Ianto asked in horror.

"What, hundreds of years of industrial and technological development gone?" Jack added. He narrowed his eyes, and his face became stony. Ianto recognized the look and almost felt sorry for Fitzroy. "You listen to me, Fitzroy, and listen very carefully. No one is adjusting this or any other planet. Your visa application has just been declined."

"But it's too late, Captain Harkness. There is only one more broadcast. Then Earth will be accessible to me."

"If you do this," Jack said, his voice as cold as ice, "I'll make it my mission to hunt you down and destroy you. You'll never be safe. You'll never find peace. You'll wish you'd never found this planet. But you can reverse this Fitzroy. There's still time."

"It's too late. It's happening already. This planet is opening up to me, and it feels so good to finally find a home."

"You do not have the right to undo everything this planet has achieved over the centuries," Ianto argued.

"The people here will still be able to live. I am not destroying their habitat. I am improving it."

"But the technology is part of that habitat now," Ianto explained.

"Look," Jack reasoned. "I can help you find somewhere you can settle. Someplace where there's no electricity, no technology, nothing blocking you."

Ianto had heard enough. Obviously Fitzroy wouldn't listen to reason. "Jack, if he's not going to stop
Miss Carew, then we'll have to."

"Can we make it there in time?" Jack asked skeptically.

"I don't know, but we've gotta try," Ianto said, grabbing him by the arm.

"You're staying right where you are, Fitzroy. I'll see to that," Jack called as they ran from the chamber.

They ascended in the lift and ran for the SUV. Panting, Ianto climbed in behind the wheel and started the engine. As soon as Jack's door was closed, Ianto hit the accelerator. With a roar, the SUV took off, jolting across the countryside. As they skidded onto the highway, Jack hit the sirens. Ianto drove south as Jack took out his mobile phone. Ianto listened to the one sided conversation. "Rhys? Why are you... I see. Right, well, it's alien all right. Calls himself Fitzroy. You need to stop her."

Jack hung up. "It's Miss Carew. She's written a virus to destroy the planet's electrical resources. She's attempting to tap into the satellite system to spread it globally. Gwen and Rhys are trying to stop her. We need to get there."

Ianto pushed the SUV to its limits as they raced back to Cardiff and to Miss Carew's office building. As they screeched to a halt, Ianto could see Gwen and Rhys bending over a crumpled figure on the ground. He jumped out of the SUV and ran up to them with Jack close on his heels. "What's going on?" Ianto asked as he reached them.

"It's Miss Carew," Rhys explained. "She's dead."

"She fell before she had time to adjust the satellite and spread the virus," Gwen added.

"That should be enough to keep Fitzroy at bay... for now," Ianto said. "He'll hopefully have been driven back into deep space."

"Let's hope he stays there," Jack said. "Still, we'd better get back to the Hub and make sure."

"You okay, Gwen?" Ianto asked, looking down at his colleague, who was still holding Miss Carew's dead hand.

"Yeah, I'm fine," she assured him. "You get going."

"We'll talk tomorrow," Jack said, turning and walking towards the SUV. "Come on, Ianto," he called over his shoulder.

Rhys had a reassuring hand on Gwen's back and was murmuring in her ear. Ianto knew that Rhys would take care of Gwen, comfort and console her. He envied them... envied what they had. *I wish me and Jack... But we'll never be like that...* With an inward sigh, he turned slowly and followed Jack to the SUV.
Two days after Fitzroy, with the help of Miss Carew, nearly destroyed all technology and sent the Earth back into the dark ages, Ianto found himself once again bumping along in the SUV pursuing aliens. He was in the back seat typing frantically on the computer, and Jack was in the passenger seat shouting orders. Gwen was driving, and she was pissed off.

"Aw, come on grandma, move it!" she yelled at the old lady driving the car in front of them.

"Gwen, I believe grandma is going the speed limit," Jack reproached her.

"We're hurtling down the M4 chasing aliens bent on destroying our little planet because of you, Jack!" she seethed. "Ianto, back me up here."

Ianto knew that the wisest course of action would be to stay out of their quarrel, but he couldn't help needling Jack. The day before, one of Jack's informants had told him about an alien gambling ring working in Cardiff. Ianto and Gwen had offered to help Jack dismantle it, but Jack had refused, insisting that he could take care of it on his own. Jack's idea of 'taking care of it' apparently meant swindling the aliens out of all their money. The infuriated aliens retaliated by threatening to blow the planet out of the galaxy, which had lead to their current predicament. Gwen was irate, and Ianto was rather irritated as well. He decided that Jack needed taking down a notch or two. "You were only supposed to infiltrate the alien casino and then get out," he scolded.

"Not take them for all their money!" Gwen added angrily.

"No excuses for yelling at grandma!" Jack retorted, without any apparent remorse.

Typical Jack, Ianto thought. No apologies. No shame. Aloud he said, "Says the oldest man on the planet."

"Hey!" Jack glared at him.

"Will someone please shoot out the tires on that alien minivan before we reach the Severn Bridge?" Gwen roared.

"Give me the plasma cannon," Jack ordered Ianto. "I'm going to blow them into England. Then it's their problem."

"Jack, be careful," Gwen warned. "And by that, I mean don't drop the plasma cannon. We've only got one of them."

Gwen screeched to a halt, and they jumped out of the SUV. Jack took careful aim and fired. There was a massive boom as the minivan carrying the aliens exploded, taking half of the Severn Bridge with them.

Chaos ensued on the bridge entrance as cars screeched, swerved, and crashed. Rather than end up
underneath a massive pile up, the three of them took the only retreat available. They hurled themselves into the water below.

Ianto struggled to regain his senses as the shock of cold water hit him. As he twisted underwater, trying to decide which way was up, his ears were assaulted by a horrible, inhuman cry. It seemed to be coming from everywhere. It was all around him. The entire ocean was filled with the sound. It was intoxicating, and for a moment, Ianto floated motionless in the water, rendered inert by the unearthly voice. His lungs started to burn, and his survival instinct returned. *I need to get out of here,* he thought as he kicked his legs and headed for the light.

He finally broke the surface with a gasp for air. As he filled his lungs with relief, he heard Gwen's voice. "Ianto!"

He turned in the water to see Gwen bobbing on the surface. He waved a hand over his head. Gwen waved back. Moments later, Jack's head appeared above the waves. "Gwen? Ianto?" he shouted.

"We're all right," Gwen called. "What was that?" she added.

"You heard it too?" Ianto asked.

"There's something in the water," Jack agreed.

They swam to the shore and scrambled out of the water as quickly as possible. The SUV was miraculously unharmed, but Ianto bemoaned the impending cleaning job as the three of them sat drenched and shivering on the seats. "I'll never get the salt water out of the leather," Ianto moaned as they drove back to the Hub.

"I always loved the smell of the sea," Jack said cheerfully, glancing back at him in the rear view mirror.

Ianto made a face at him, and Jack winked. "Leave the SUV detailing for another time, Ianto. I need both of you on this for now. I want to know what the hell's in the water."

They returned to the Hub. After the three of them had showered and changed – Ianto and Jack in Jack's bathroom, Gwen in the employee showers – Ianto busied himself with brewing coffees. As he passed the cups around, Jack said, "Battle stations, people. I want to know how big this is."

Ianto set his cup down by his workstation and began to type on his keyboard. They discovered that the sound was heard, not only all across the country, but all around the world. Ianto hacked into the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Indonesia and found a recording of the voice. He ran it through the language translation program, but it didn't register as any known alien language. Then he used the network of microphones to trace the sound back to its source, using an algorithm to account for the variations of speed of sound through water, temperature, and depth. He pointed on the screen. "There."

"What are you pointing out? Papua New Guinea?" Gwen asked, peering over his shoulder.

"No, the bit of ocean south of Tokyo and east of Manila," he replied.

"That's not any bit of ocean," Jack said with a trace of awe in his voice. "That's the Mariana Trench."

"As in the bottom of the sea?" Gwen asked.

"Oh, yeah," Jack said with a grin.
"Lovely," Gwen sighed.

"You don't have to be a fifty-first century, time traveling immortal to know this is alien," Jack added.

But Ianto had an idea. "Maybe the alien isn't used to talking in this atmosphere. If I slow the whole thing down," he typed furiously on his keyboard, "Put it through a bison field filter… Listen."

A muffled voice played over the speakers. "Help us. Help us."

"It's human!" Gwen exclaimed.

"What human voice can travel the globe?" Jack argued. "Some part of this equation is alien."

"And there's no way to communicate with it. The signal has gone completely quiet," Ianto added.

"Well, looks like a working vacation then," Jack said.

"But that's the deepest place on earth, Jack," Gwen reasoned. "It goes down, what, six miles? Maybe even further. No one knows what's down there."

"It's an alien signal. We can't turn our backs on it. It's got Torchwood written all over it," Jack responded.

"Um, isn't this a case for UNIT?" Ianto suggested carefully.

"Yeah," Gwen agreed.

"Yeah… but come on," Jack pleaded. "You heard that voice. Aren't you dying to get there first?"

Ianto recognized the gleam in Jack's eye, and he knew that there was no way Jack was going to let UNIT take charge. He was starting to formulate a plan. Carly… Haven't thought about her in ages. She's just the person for the job… Hope she's forgiven me…

Gwen was still arguing. "But how are we going to get there? Got a submarine in your pocket?"

"As a matter of fact, actually…"

Ianto quickly cut Jack off, "Gwen, Gwen, you can't set him up like that. Right, I'm calling Carly Roberts. She's a marine geologist stationed in Tokyo. She worked with me at Torchwood One… You know, before the Cybermen destroyed the place."

He didn't know why he'd added that last part. It was an insensitive and tactless thing to say. But he was nervous about calling Carly, and it was manifesting as cheek. Before he could lose his nerve, he took out his phone and dialed a number he hadn't used in years, although he'd always kept it stored in his contact list. He put the phone on speaker, hoping to avoid a personal conversation.

Carly answered with a characteristic, "Yo!"

Carly was American, and she had a direct, no-nonsense way about her. Ianto always admired her for it. He felt a small knot in his stomach form at the sound of her voice. "Carly, this is Ianto Jones."

The surprise in her voice was obvious. "Ianto… It's been ages. Where are you?"

"Torchwood Cardiff," he replied, hoping she realized that others were listening in and that this was a professional call. "Uh… I never moved that far away, unlike you."
Carly seemed to get the hint. "Yeah, well, I know why you're calling. I was in the water."

"You heard it, didn't you? The sound."

"Like nothing I've ever heard before," Carly said. "The U.S. government has a UNIT ship heading out of Tokyo to the Trench first thing tomorrow to investigate."

At the mention of UNIT, Jack stiffened. "Carly, this is Jack Harkness. We translated the cry. It's a distress signal. Whatever is down there needs our help. How extensive is your knowledge of the Trench?"

"Studied it my whole life, but it's still a mystery," Carly said. "We know more about Mars than the bottom of our own ocean."

Jack grinned. "Uh, what do you say? One last mission?" he asked her.

"You do not have to do this, Carly," Ianto quickly interjected.

"No, I'll go," she said. "It'll be… good to see you again," she added carefully.

"You too," Ianto said quickly, hoping no one would notice the tension between them.

"Carly, we're on the next flight to Tokyo," Jack told her. "Meet us at the port at dawn tomorrow."

"Send me the details," Carly said. "See you soon."

Ianto disconnected the call. "Ianto?" Jack asked, looking at him curiously. "Old flame of yours?"

Ianto shrugged. He really didn't want to discuss it at the moment. "Right, well, better get onto the airlines," he murmured, turning back to his computer.

Four hours later, Jack, Ianto, and Gwen were sitting in the first class cabin of a flight from Cardiff to Tokyo. Ianto and Jack were sitting on one side of the plane, and Gwen was across the aisle from them. After takeoff, Gwen promptly fell asleep. Ianto closed his eyes, hoping to join her in slumber, when Jack said in his ear. "So, tell me about Carly Roberts."

Ianto's eyes flew open. He had hoped to avoid the discussion completely, but he should have known Jack wouldn't let it go. He sighed heavily. "As I said before, she's a marine geologist. American, but worked for Torchwood London."

"She survived the Battle of Canary Wharf?" Jack asked.

"She wasn't there," Ianto told him. "She'd left for her job in Tokyo before the invasion. I think she never got over the guilt of not being there…” he added thoughtfully.

"So you two dated?" Jack pressed.

Ianto sighed again. He realized that it was probably best to just confess and be done with it. "I'm not particularly proud of the way I treated Carly… Yes, we dated. And while we were dating… well, that's when I fell for Lisa. I didn't mean for it to happen… it just did. And I started things with Lisa before I ended them with Carly. It was a cruel and cowardly thing to do, and I deeply regret it. Because she found out, of course. Torchwood London was a lot bigger that Torchwood Cardiff, but the rumor mill was just as active. She found out, and she was… well, she was understandably quite upset. She asked me to choose between her and Lisa, and I chose Lisa. I had already fallen in love with Lisa…”
Ianto let the sentence drift as he remembered the painful conversation between them. Carly had been devastated. The shattered, heartbroken look on Carly's face when he'd told her that he was in love with Lisa had haunted him for a long, long time. It was the first time he'd ever really hurt someone, and he'd been shocked and dumbfounded by the amount of pain he'd caused another living person. Even thinking about it all this time later filled him with shame and remorse.

"She took the job in Tokyo because of you and Lisa?" Jack interrupted his thoughts.

Ianto nodded, not able to meet his eyes. "Ianto Jones, you heartbreaker!" Jack exclaimed.

"Don't, Jack!" Ianto snapped. "It's not a joke, and it's not meant to be lauded like some sort of conquest. I really hurt her, and I felt awful about it. I still feel awful about it."

Jack put his hand on Ianto's knee. "You saved her life, Ianto. Because of that, she wasn't at Torchwood One when the Cybermen came. She might be dead now."

Ianto nodded. It was an empty sort of comfort, but it was true, nonetheless.

Jack took his hand and squeezed it. "We've all done things we regret… made mistakes, hurt people… It's having the courage to admit you were wrong that matters. You're a good person, Ianto. You're kind, generous, brave, and tenaciously loyal."

Ianto laid his head on Jack's shoulder, and Jack wrapped an arm around him. It had been a long time since Jack had paid him that sort of complement. "Besides, you're fantastic in bed," Jack whispered into his ear.

Ianto rolled his eyes, but he couldn't help smiling. Jack hadn't completely assuaged his guilt, but his words had given Ianto comfort. He hoped he would have a chance to apologize to Carly again for the way he'd treated her.

His eyes drifted closed. When they opened again, the plane was starting its descent into Tokyo. Ianto braced himself for the reunion with Carly.
As they approached the docks, Ianto immediately caught sight of Carly's honey blonde hair fanning out behind her as it picked up the wind. She was as beautiful as ever. He barely had time to form a reaction before Carly threw her arms around him and pulled him into a tight embrace. "Ianto! God, it's so good to see you. Welcome to Tokyo."

Ianto hugged her back briefly, then catching sight of Jack's raised eyebrow over Carly's shoulder, he let her go and backed away a few inches. "Hello, Carly," he said politely.

"Look at you!" she exclaimed. "You haven't changed a lick."

"Nor you," Ianto said as he surveyed her trim figure, stylishly outfitted in tight jeans, knee-high, brown suede boots, and a black jumper with a thick leather belt cinched around her small waist. She looked gorgeous.

They stared at each other for several moments before Gwen stepped forward and broke the awkward silence. "I'm Gwen. Gwen Cooper."

Carly turned a dazzling smile on her, "Good to meet you," she said, shaking hands with Gwen. Then she turned to Jack expectantly.

"Jack Harkness," Jack introduced himself. "Ianto said you were smart, but nothing about you being the sexiest marine biologist ever."

Carly turned to Ianto with a questioning look. Ianto shrugged mildly in response and shook his head. "Oh, this is going to be fun," she said to Ianto. "He dresses like the nineteen-forties, and his chat-up lines are from the same decade." Ianto stifled a laugh as Carly turned again to Jack, "Nice to meet you, soldier boy. Now what's the plan?"

Jack had commandeered an Arleigh Burke class destroyer equipped with a state of the art submarine to take them to the Mariana Trench. They boarded the U.S.S. Calvin and headed out to sea. When they had reached the source of the voice they'd heard, the ship's loud-speaker announced, "All hands to the Octopus Rock submarine to prepare for launch."

"Octopus Rock?" Jack asked. "Strange name for a sub."

"Octopus Rock... I know that..." Gwen murmured. "Octopus... Sex Pistols!" she exclaimed, finally getting the reference. "Fits the occasion," she added.

Jack opened his mouth to comment, and Ianto was about to cut him off, but Carly beat him to it. "Jack, if you make a joke about your sex pistol, the mission ends here." Jack pouted, and both Carly and Ianto rolled their eyes. "Let's get inside," Carly said quickly.

They boarded the Octopus Rock, severed the umbilical to the U.S.S. Calvin, and started their descent. The Octopus Rock was UNIT's finest, most technologically advanced submarine, but they
were entering the most inhospitable place on Earth, and Ianto couldn't help feeling a bit nervous. Especially when Carly started talking about previous dives to the Mariana Trench. "We sent two men down there in the sixties aboard an Italian sub called the Trieste. They were the first and last people ever to go this deep. And we'll be the first to return in over fifty years. If there are any secrets left in this world, they're down there."

There was a loud sound of metal clanging, and Gwen jumped. "Oh, what's that?"

"It's just the hull shifting, settling into the pressure." Carly explained.

"It's making a lot of noise," Ianto commented. "Is that normal?"

Carly waved her hand dismissively. "Yeah. She can take it. By the time we reach the bottom, the pressure on us will be a thousand times that of the surface. Imagine a column of water eleven kilometers high stacked on your head." She made an impressive popping sound. "Like stepping on a grape."

"I forgot how much fun you can be," Ianto said dryly.

"Come on, Ianto." Carly put her hand on his shoulder and shook him gently. "Where's your sense of adventure?"

"On the ground, with your popped grape," he mumbled.

They leveled out at seventeen thousand feet, deeper than any other humans had ever gone. They were in the vicinity of an underground volcano, which Carly called a 'black smoker.' "They're hydrothermal chimneys," she explained. "Water seeps into the Earth's crust, is heated to four hundred, fifty degrees Celsius, and comes spewing out as a soup of sulfite compounds. Incredibly toxic stuff. But the radius around the smoker is teeming with life. Some people think that's where it all started."

"You mean the start of life on Earth was down here?" Gwen asked with fascination.

"Could be," Carly replied. "And by the looks of our sonar map, we're heading right into the smoker itself."

They all watched in reverence as the nearied the black smoker, which appeared to be about thirty meters high. "I never thought I'd see one in the flesh," Carly whispered. "More beautiful than I ever imagined. Like a lighthouse in the middle of the ocean. Last refuge of ancient, forgotten creatures. The world has moved on, but here…"

"This is the most alien place I've ever been," Jack stated with obvious admiration. "Right inside the planet's crust."

A loud banging interrupted their musings. At first, Carly tried to dismiss it as the hull settling, but when the banging became louder and more distinct, she could no longer deny that it sounded like someone was knocking on the submarine's door. The four of them peered frantically out of various view ports, trying to find the source of the strange sound. Carly mentioned something about cephalopods being known to attack ships, and Ianto had a horrible image of a giant squid wrapping its tentacles around the submarine a la Jules Verne.

He wasn't certain if he was relieved or more horrified to discover that it wasn't a sea creature at all, but a man. An ordinary, elderly man, without a diving suit, wearing overalls that said 'Doyle' was standing in the middle of the ocean floor, trying to communicate with them, and getting angry. As he opened his mouth to speak, the terrible, unearthly cry filled their ears. There was a flash of light and
an explosion, and the submarine was pitched into darkness. "No one move," Carly yelled. "The emergency lighting should pop on… Ah! There we go. Well then. That's our source. It's him."

"Old man at the bottom of the sea," Jack said. "And his voice fried our power. Maybe it's our proximity to him."

"Great. What are our defenses?" Ianto asked.

"Defenses? This isn't the Red October!" Jack exclaimed. "But the hull is seven inches of steel. Nothing can get through that."

There was louder, more persistent knocking, and the submarine rocked ominously. "Uh, well, he's denting the ship," Ianto stated. "With his fists," he added.

"And I stand corrected," Jack said. "I think we should leave now."

He began shouting orders, and they managed to get the Octopus Rock to move several meters away, but they crashed into something on the ocean floor, and all the systems went down. "How bad is it, Jack?" Gwen asked grimly.

"I don't know, Gwen. It's bad." Jack sighed. "She's probably scuttled."

"As in, irreparable?" Ianto asked.

"We have air. We have hull integrity… which means we have time," Jack said reassuringly.

"Time to do what, exactly?" Gwen barked. "Time to die slowly, painfully?"

Ianto began to feel a rising sense of panic, but he wasn't going to let it get the best of him. "We need to mayday for help," he announced calmly.

"We're the only sub in the world that can go this deep. We're never going to surface. We're right at the bottom of the world, and we're going to die here," Carly wailed.

Ianto was dismayed by Carly's reaction. They were in a tight spot, but it was no time to give way to fear. He'd expected better of her. "Carly, please!" he admonished.

Carly turned on him with fury in her eyes. "I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you! You finally call me up after all these years, drag my ass down here to die? I wish you'd never called me! Why did you call me?"

Ianto knew she was panicking, but her words cut deeply nonetheless. "You were the best person for the job," he said somberly.

"I'm an idiot. I'm going to die a big, hopeless idiot!" she cried.

Ianto didn't know what to say, and he worried that anything he did say would be the wrong thing. But Gwen stepped in. She put her hands on Carly's shoulders. "Okay, Carly, look at me. Look at me. Okay. Everyone in Torchwood One died, and I'm very sorry about that, but this is Torchwood Three. Okay? And we're going to get out of here. I promise you. Jack?"

"I've crashed a lot of ships in my time," Jack told her. "And that didn't sound like rock. It sounded like we hit metal. Ianto, tilt the exterior lights down and… what can you see?"

"Oh my God!" Carly seemed to have recovered control. "It's the Guernica."

"Uh… what's the Guernica?" Jack asked.

"The Trieste. That first sub down here? Had a twin ship built in Spain called the Guernica. It disappeared in fifty-nine, lost at sea. Then a year later, the Trieste descended into the Trench and took its place in history. But it turns out, the Guernica must have been sent down here first," Carly explained.

"That man's overalls said Doyle," Ianto commented.

"That was one of the names. The crew of the Guernica: Captain Samuel Doyle, age fifty, and Henry Goddard, age forty-four."

Their conversation ended when Ianto noticed that Captain Samuel Doyle – or whatever creature that was inhabiting his body – was heading towards them again. When he stopped several meters away and began pacing back and forth, Jack guessed that the creature was tethered to the black smoker, and they were too far away from the volcano for it to come any further. Carly supposed that the creature must breathe hydrogen sulfide, hence its reliance on the vicinity of the volcano. And Jack speculated that it might be an alien parasite, protecting Doyle's body from the pressure of the water. "But what's it getting in return?" Jack asked curiously.

"Wait, hang on," Ianto interjected. His agile brain had been working out a way to get them to the surface, while the others conjectured over the nature of the alien. "I think I can see atmosphere inside the Guernica. I think that's ice on the inside."

"Ianto, you're a genius!" Carly hugged him. "The Guernica, it's a bathyscaphe. That's a very simple sub – a few moving parts, valves to control buoyancy, that's it. Theoretically, it could have lasted all this time unharmed. If the hull is intact, we can surface in the Guernica. We're saved!"

Ianto and Carly stayed aboard the Octopus Rock while Gwen and Jack donned the Dwarf star derived UNIT diving suits, designed to withstand the immense pressure of that depth, and went out to explore the Guernica. They were able to speak with Jack and Gwen through the comms in the diving suits. As soon as Jack and Gwen had left the sub and were in the open water, Gwen decided that she was going to try and make contact with the alien and reason with it.

Ianto and Carly listened as Gwen spoke to the creature, who insisted he be called Sam. He and his mate had fallen through the stars a long time ago, and this was the only place on Earth suitable to sustain them. When Gwen asked why he'd attacked them, Sam told her that his mate was dying, and he needed a body to live. He wanted to take Gwen's body, or anyone else's whom he could get his hands on. Gwen, who was obviously playing for time, promised to try and help him.

After listening to the conversation, Carly hit the comms so that Gwen and Jack couldn't hear them. "She can't be serious. I mean, you don't negotiate with aliens, right?" Carly asked skeptically.

"Gwen would never give someone up," Ianto said confidently. "Besides," he added, smiling at Carly, "I think she's starting to like you."

"And Jack…" Carly asked.

"Oh, he's smitten with you too," Ianto assured her.

"You two are…" Carly paused and looked away. "Together, aren't you?" she finished.

Ianto sighed heavily. "Is it that obvious?"
"Well… it's… kind of a small space in here. You notice things – little looks, little glances… And where he put his hand at thirty-thousand feet…"

Ianto felt his face flush. He knew exactly what Carly was referring to. Jack had grabbed his arse when Ianto had moved past him during their descent. It was typical Jack, and Ianto barely noticed anymore, but Carly must have been watching them. "Uh, okay. I'm embarrassed now," he murmured.

"No, don't be. It's fine," Carly said.

"I should have told you, though." Ianto paused. This was the moment he had both hoped for and dreaded. He took a deep breath. "I should have done a lot of things differently with you," he continued. "I'm sorry I put you through all this."

"My fault. I…" Carly hesitated. "Fell for you, way back when. If it hadn't been for Lisa…"

Ianto felt the need to explain his relationship with Jack. "This… thing with Jack. It's different," he began.

"Well, yeah. He's a man."

"Uh, no. It's not that." Ianto frowned thoughtfully. "I love him, but… he'll never be mine. Life will always move on for him. One day he'll leave me. He's got no choice. He's become an expert at… letting people go."

Ianto stopped abruptly. He was astounded by his own words. He'd hoped to have a chance to talk to Carly about things that had happened in the past – to apologize for the way he treated her. Instead, he found himself confessing the thoughts that had been plaguing him for months – the ones he could barely admit to himself. He shifted uncomfortably and looked away.

"Trust me." Carly put her hand on his arm. "You're not an easy person to let go of."

Ianto looked up at her. She was staring back at him with open admiration. He knew that she still had feelings for him. He could sense it, and he could see it in her eyes. "And, you know, you weren't the only person for this job," he said. "Could have called a million other people."

Carly laughed ironically. "Right."

Ianto could feel her desire, but he could also sense her melancholy. If only things had been different. If I hadn't met Lisa… If I hadn't met Jack… "What could have been," he said aloud.

"What could have been," Carly echoed.

They stared at each other. For a brief moment, Ianto thought about kissing her. They were so close, looking into each other's eyes. He could feel her breath on his lips. She wants me to, he thought. She still cares for me, after everything. What would happen if…

Jack's voice came over their comms. "Gwen's back with me. We're inside. Suit says that pressure and mixture's sustainable. Look, we're taking off our helmets."

Ianto was quickly recalled to the reality of their dire circumstances, and the moment between him and Carly passed. "What's it like in there?" he asked.

"Air's stale, damp, cold, but breathable, if you couldn't tell already," Jack replied.
It was good news, and both he and Carly breathed a sigh of relief. If the Guernica was holding together, there was a chance they could make it back to the surface.

Jack and Gwen returned to the Octopus Rock, and they managed to maneuver it over the Guernica. Gwen was still thinking about the alien. "Sam wants to be rescued, but why now? The alien found Sam fifty years ago, but why has he waited another fifty years for help?"

"They waited fifty years, and Captain Samuel Doyle was fifty years old. Connection?" Ianto asked.

"That's it! Hand me the communicator. I need to talk to him. Sam? This is Jack Harkness. One captain to another, if your mate needs a body, why did you wait fifty years to call for help?"

"Sam's life was so short. Fifty small years. Fifty years of love and loss and heartache and bile and joy and pain… and then… nothing. So small. So tiny."

"But it's never been about our bodies," Jack realized. "This whole time, you've wanted our minds. You had fifty years of Sam's memories to dig through. You relieved every moment of his existence. You need someone new. You're not lost. You're hungry."

"I need memories to replace my own, to rewrite one hundred and fifty million years of guilt. That's how long I've been down here," Sam said.

"You didn't cry out for your mate," Jack said. "You cried out for yourself. You've been alone down here this whole time. What the hell happened to you?"

"You're… different than the others," Sam said.

"Yeah, well I've lived a very long life, just like you, but I've lived it in the light," Jack said.

When Sam begun laughing maniacally, Jack decided that they'd been there long enough. They secured the docking feet and climbed into the Guernica. But Sam hadn't given up yet. He started banging on the Guernica until the hull cracked. The leak was irreparable, but Carly assured them that they could still surface with water in the chamber. Just as they were ready to release the ballast lever, Gwen screamed. Ianto spun around to see Carly with her hands around Gwen's throat. But it wasn't Carly. The alien had left Sam's body and entered Carly's.

"Let her go," Jack yelled. "Take me. It will take you thousands of years to go through my memories."

"You're too full of regret," the alien said. "I can smell it. If these friends of yours could see the things you've done, they could never love you. But Gwen's memories are fresh and sweet."

"It's in my head. I can feel it," Gwen yelled.

"Oh, Jack. You're everywhere inside the cupcake's mind. Left quite a mark," it said.

"Leave her alone!" Ianto pulled at Carly's hands, which were still wrapped around Gwen's neck.

"Aren't you scared, Ianto?" the alien asked. "That Jack might care more for Gwen than he does for you?"

"Don't listen to it!" Jack ordered.

"You're a pathetic creature. You know, if this is the loneliest place in the world, then you deserve it," Ianto seethed.
"I wasn't always alone. I did have a mate… once. A very long time ago. Our sun was collapsing, just as yours will one day. I said I'd wait for him, and we'd escape together. But the world started to burn, and I was scared. So scared. I flew into the sky to save myself, and when I looked down, he… he was screaming at me. Screaming as he died. The last thing I saw was his face – the ruin in it. I'm still trapped there, like I never left. I need new memories… to escape that one…” Its voice faded and it moaned in agony.

"It's weakening," Gwen struggled to free herself. "Too far away from the smoker. Get… off me!"

"Gwen's free. Hold it down!" Ianto yelled.

"I've flipped the ballast lever. We're going up fast!" Gwen announced.

"We're getting further and further away from the black smoker. Your lifeline. I'm sorry, but you're gonna die," Jack said to the creature.

"Turn us around, or this body dies! This woman, Carly? She dies!" it bellowed.

"Jack! We can't kill her!" Ianto shouted.

"Sorry, but this whole system's barely holding together. We can only go in one direction and nothing's going to stop us," Jack told him.

"But Carly will die," Ianto pleaded.

"Stick to the plan!" Jack commanded.

"You and I, we're the last of our kind, Jack," the alien whispered. "Who's going to forgive us for what we've done?"

"Maybe we never get forgiven, and we have to spend all these long years getting used to that fact. 'Cause I realized a long time ago, that's the price of immortality. No final act. No redemption. No absolution. You are the lucky one! You get to die!" Jack said.

There was the sound of labored breathing, then the breathing stopped altogether. "Carly? Carly? She's not breathing," Ianto said with alarm.

"There's nothing we can do, Ianto. The alien was bound up with her life force," Jack said.

"You don't know that, Jack. She could be alive. Help me. Hold her." He frantically began doing CPR. "One, two, three, four. That's Torchwood, isn't it? Kills us in the end," he said angrily.


"She's gone," Jack said blandly.

Ianto looked up at Jack, shocked at his indifference. "Don't you dare give up!" Gwen shouted.

Ianto continued pounding on Carly's chest. "One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four."

There was a cough and a splutter from Carly as she revived. "She's alive!" Ianto nearly cried with relief.

Gwen laughed victoriously. "Oh, you did it! Oh my God, you did it!"

"Is he gone? Is he dead?" Carly whispered in a hoarse voice.
"He's gone." Ianto took her hand and held it tightly. "It's okay. He's gone."

Ianto looked up furiously at Jack, his eyes narrowed in disgust. How could you? he thought. How could you just dismiss her like that? How could you be so cold? At that moment, he hated Jack.

Jack looked away, not able to meet his gaze.

They were on the surface again, and there was a collective sigh of relief at the smell of the sea air and the warmth of the sun on their faces.

"All the same," Carly said. "I can't help thinking, maybe I gave up Torchwood too soon. 'Cause the Mariana Trench is still unexplored. Who knows what else is down there! If I could get UNIT to fund more missions…"

Ianto smiled indulgently at her. "That's Torchwood. It's in your blood."

Carly looked at him. "I'd ask you to join me, but I think your life's taking a path less traveled."

"Yeah," Ianto agreed. "And I'm glad it is. Though God knows where it's going to end. At least you won't be alone… like that thing."

"The guilty heart needs confession. At least we gave him that. Final act," Jack said.

"Is that what you're looking for, Jack?" Gwen asked.

Jack laughed uncomfortably. "Well… I suppose. But to get that, I'd have to become mortal. And that's never going to happen. So I'm never going to know."

"Bye Carly, and thanks for everything. We'll leave you two to say your goodbyes," Gwen said, taking Jack by the arm and leading him away.

Ianto could hear Jack protesting loudly, but he ignored him. He was too angry to care about Jack's feelings at the moment. "Nice guy you've got there," Carly said sarcastically.

"He's…" Ianto began, feeling torn between his anger and the need to defend his lover.

"I know," Carly cut in. "He's immortal. I've read the file. Must make for interesting dinner conversations."

"You have no idea," Ianto said with a smirk.

"But are you happy with him, Ianto? Sometimes love isn't enough…" she drifted off.

"I…" He thought about lying, but couldn't see the point. "Lately, no," he finally admitted.

"Well, whatever it is, you should work it out or walk away. Life's too short, Ianto. You and I have both lost enough people to know that. And we almost died today. Is this how you want to go out? Giving up your life for someone who, according to you, can never love you back? You have other options, Ianto. There are other ways to save the world. You could always come here, work with me. We could explore the Trench together. I know you speak Japanese…"

Ianto smiled sadly at her. He could sense her hope, but he had to disappoint her once again. "Thanks, Carly. I appreciate it. I really do. But I have to play the hand I was dealt. And for whatever reason, my path is with Jack and Torchwood Cardiff, for better or worse."

"At least promise me you'll talk to him. I know how stoic you can be, but if he's making you
unhappy…"

"I promise," he said and hugged her goodbye.

He'd already decided to finally have it out with Jack. The rage was burning inside him. It had been a long time coming, and he was just furious enough to damn the consequences.
Thanks as ever to my extraordinary beta riftintime.

Jack knew that Ianto was angry. The younger man was barely trying to conceal his displeasure as they drove to the airport in Tokyo. He only spoke to Jack out of necessity, and he refused to look him in the eye. When they boarded the plane, Jack realized that Ianto had reserved his seat next to Gwen, leaving Jack to sit alone on the opposite side of the aisle.

Jack saw Gwen's look of confusion, and her whispered conversation with Ianto as the plane took off. Jack caught Gwen's eye, and she shrugged her shoulders. He resignedly leaned back in the airplane seat and closed his eyes as he cast his mind back to the events of the day. He felt somewhat chastened by Ianto's anger, and he wanted to try and examine his actions dispassionately. It had the appearance of a successful mission with no casualties. They'd defeated the alien calling itself Sam and returned to the surface, alive and well. Well, it was a close call, but Carly survived...

Meeting Carly had been a novel turn of events. Ianto had become acquainted with several of Jack's past lovers, but Jack had never been confronted by an ex lover of Ianto's. He'd met Lisa, of course, but he'd met Lisa the Cyberman, not Lisa the woman. At the time, she had merely been an alien threat. He never saw her as a person.

At first he was intrigued by the prospect of seeing one of Ianto's old flames. But when he saw the fire still lingering in Carly's eyes, he'd become at bit territorial. When he saw Ianto blush under her attention, he'd become jealous. He hadn't felt jealousy in years, and he knew his behavior had been childish. He had fondled Ianto's arse when he was certain that Carly was looking. He'd wanted her to know that Ianto wasn't available. But she'd still tried to tempt him away from Torchwood – and from him – by suggesting that Ianto come and work for her. Ianto had refused of course, but Jack thought he had detected an inkling of regret in the younger man's voice.

Carly was a beautiful, intelligent woman with a boisterous personality. At first Jack had liked her and had flirted in his usual manner, but Carly had been immune to his charms, with eyes only for Ianto. Not that Ianto doesn't deserve it, he mused, but Jack was used to being the center of attention. It was unusual for him to have been shown up by a lover. And he certainly wasn't used to having to fight for Ianto's affections. But Jack hadn't really minded. It was her obvious pursuit of Ianto that had turned his initial admiration for her into animosity.

Did my jealousy play any part in this? He tried to separate his personal feelings towards Carly from his decisions as the Captain. Perhaps I was premature in assuming she was dead... he finally admitted to himself. But I really thought her life force was irrevocably attached to the alien's... I've seen that kind of thing before... too many times... I didn't want Ianto to try in vain to save her. It would have made her death all the more difficult for him to accept... Though I have to admit I was surprised when she revived... Maybe I was too hasty...

He tried to see it from Ianto's perspective, and he couldn't help noticing the parallels with Lisa. This is the second time I've been responsible for taking the life of someone that Ianto cared about...

Jack shifted uncomfortably in his seat. There were so many times in his unnaturally long life that he'd
regretted the decisions he made as an employee of Torchwood, as the leader of Torchwood, at the Time Agency, and in the various wars and battles he'd fought. He'd made so many mistakes, he'd lost people unnecessarily, he'd made sacrifices, he'd been forced to make horrible, gut-wrenching decisions that constantly plagued his soul… But this wasn't one of those times, he reassured himself. Even if I was callous by assuming Carly couldn't be saved, we all survived, the alien was defeated, the world is safe for now, and the only casualty was the Octopus Rock. Not a bad day's work.

There was another incident that troubled Jack's mind. It was Ianto's words while trying to resuscitate Carly. But it was more than the words… it was the look in his eyes, it was the anger of his expression and resentment in his voice… he'd said, "That's Torchwood, isn't it? Kills us in the end." It hurt, more than Jack was willing to admit, perhaps because he knew it was true. Torchwood had taken so many lives. And one day it will take Ianto from me… A cold hand gripped his heart, and he felt the air go out of his lungs. All of his earlier instincts to let Ianto go while he still had the chance, to let him have a better life outside of Torchwood, came roaring back to the surface. Jack drifted in and out of a fitful sleep as the plane flew across Asia and Europe.

They landed in Cardiff, retrieved the SUV from the place they'd left it in the airport garage, and headed home. They dropped Gwen off at her flat and drove silently back to the Hub. As the cogwheel door rolled opened, Jack made straight for his office and the bottle of scotch in his desk drawer. He poured out two glasses, set one on the desk, and quickly downed the other. Ianto walked in as he was refilling his glass. Jack pushed the other glass in Ianto's direction. He watched as the younger man eyed it with contempt. Then he looked up at Jack with such fury in his blue eyes that Jack was taken aback.

He knew that an unbridled passion lay beneath Ianto's cool and impeccably groomed exterior, and that passion was currently forming into the shape of rage. It had been a long time coming. Things between them hadn't been right for a while. They had tenuously rekindled their relationship with so much left unsaid, so many emotions suppressed, so many grievances overlooked. They couldn't go on with so much tension building, and he felt instinctually that the dam was about to break. He'd been dreading this day for a long time, because he feared the consequences. He didn't know if their relationship could survive the scrutiny of an uninhibited conversation. He dropped wearily in his office chair with a heavy sigh and set his glass down on the desk. He knew that the time had finally come and the blow was about to fall.

Ianto stood glowering over him, refusing to sit and refusing the drink before him. The moments ticked by as Jack waited silently for the storm to break. He focused on his breathing while he braced himself for the inevitable heartache. That's the problem with trusting someone with your secrets. They know exactly how to hurt you the most. Jack felt more vulnerable than he'd felt in years. No one knew him as well as Ianto. And if Ianto chose, he could easily break Jack's heart. Jack shifted uncomfortably as the silence wore on.

"You bastard," Ianto finally said through clenched teeth. And here we go, Jack thought apprehensively. He looked up at Ianto, trying to keep his face expressionless.

"How could you?" Ianto continued. "How could you be so callous with Carly's life, giving her up for dead without a moment's hesitation. With such aloofness in your voice."

"I did what I had to do to protect the planet," Jack said calmly. "I believed her life was bound up with the creature's, and I couldn't let it live."

"You didn't even want me to try and save her! You told me she was dead. You wanted me to give
"I thought she was gone," Jack repeated. "I've seen that kind of thing before, and I thought your efforts were in vain. We had killed the alien and saved the planet. I thought she was an unfortunate casualty."

Jack knew at once that he'd said the wrong thing. He wanted to cringe, but he managed to keep his features expressionless. "An unfortunate casualty?" Ianto roared. "That's your modus operandi, isn't it? Achieve results by any means necessary, regardless of anyone who gets in your way?"

"That's my job," Jack replied coolly. "To protect planet Earth from alien threats at all costs. You used to admire that. You once told me that's why I'm the captain and you're my employees – because I make the decisions that you all can't and won't make."

"This bloody place, your bloody missions." Ianto made a sudden movement and swept everything off Jack's desk. Papers scattered, objects crashed to the floor, and Jack's glass shattered on impact. "Bloody Torchwood!" he shouted. "It will kill us all in the end! And that's the sacrifice you're willing to make, isn't it, Jack? We're all just casualties of war, led like pigs to the slaughter. Sometimes I think there isn't a soul on this Earth that you give a damn about."

Jack flinched as though he'd been struck. Ianto, of all people, knew how deeply he cared, how much of a burden he carried, how many deaths haunted him. "How could you say that?" he asked sadly. "You surround yourself with people who devote themselves to you. Who fight for you. Who die for you. But you give them nothing in return, turn your back on them when you've had enough, leave them for dead without a moment's hesitation. We're all expendable to you, aren't we, Jack? Our lives are meaningless to you because you'll live forever. But we only have this one lifetime to give. You have thousands."

In spite of himself, Jack's anger was breaking through the surface. Ianto's words were unexpectedly harsh, and all the more painful because Ianto knew how much Jack struggled with his immortality. "Nobody asked you to waste your life on me!" he snarled.

Ianto picked up his glass, which had managed to survive his earlier outburst, and threw it at Jack. Jack instinctively ducked, and it shattered against the wall behind his head. Jack jumped to his feet, hurtled himself around the desk, and pointed a finger at Ianto's chest. "Did you forget that you conned your way in here, Ianto? I didn't want to hire you. I told you to go and find a life outside of Torchwood, but you wanted in. You had to save your precious Lisa."

"Don't you dare bring her into this!" Ianto yelled, slapping Jack's hand away. "This is about you and me!"

"Is it?" Jack crossed his arms over his chest defensively. "I thought it was about how I'm a heartless bastard, incapable of love, and I callously sacrifice everyone around me."

"It's true, isn't it?" Ianto spat.

Ianto's words cut deeply, more deeply than Jack was willing to admit. The anger abruptly left him and was replaced with a profound sadness. Gwen had once called him heartless, and Ianto knew how profoundly that had wounded him. Jack dropped back into his chair. "How could you of all people ask me that?" he asked in a low voice. "With all you know about me? After everything we've been through?"

"Oh, right," Ianto sneered. "Because this…” He waved his hand in the direction of Jack's bunker.
"This… thing between us, it's been so bloody brilliant," he finished, his voice oozing with sarcasm.

Jack looked up in shock. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You just tossed me aside after Tosh and Owen died, without a word or a backward glance. Like I was nothing to you."

Jack's mind was reeling. Ianto was jumping from one topic to the next, with no logical common thread to hold them together. It was like he was reciting a litany of grievances, finally giving voice to all the things he'd held onto for so long. "Didn't see you putting up much of a fight for me," Jack murmured. "Seemed like you wanted to let me go."

"What am I supposed to do?" Ianto asked. "Force you to be with me? I can't make you want me. I thought you were done with me. You abandoned me without a word."

"Like you abandoned me after we ran into your old school chum? What was his name? Alun? He called you gay, and you couldn't handle it. So you fled. Just dismissed me because of a stupid label."

Jack had surprised himself. He hadn't realized that he still resented the incident with Alun and Ianto's subsequent rejection. It seemed that all of their old wounds were being reopened.

"Right." Ianto's eyes narrowed dangerously. "And you turned to Gwen. Like you always do. Gwen always comes first. I'm just the consolation prize."

Jack's mouth hung open in surprise. How much has he been holding onto? How deep does this resentment run? Aloud he asked, "Haven't we been through this already? I thought we were past this."

"Are we? Because it seems like it keeps coming up. Even an alien who'd been living at the bottom of the ocean for a millennia could sense your struggle." He repeated the alien's words. "Aren't you scared, Ianto, that Jack might care more for Gwen than he does for you?"

"I told you not to listen to it," Jack said sternly. "Those were Gwen's thoughts, not mine. It was inside Gwen's head. You can't blame me for Gwen's feelings."

"Don't insult my intelligence!"

Ianto leaned across the desk and looked straight into Jack's eyes, their faces inches apart. Jack could feel the other man's breath against his lips. "It's always Gwen," Ianto growled. "She always comes first with you. Whenever anything threatens us, you always call out for her before me."

He stood back and did what Jack had to admit was a startlingly good impression of Jack's voice calling, "Gwen? Ianto?"

He leaned back across the desk. "Like I'm an afterthought. That's what I am to you, isn't it? An afterthought. Second best. The consolation prize," he repeated with disgust. "I'm expendable, but not Gwen. Oh no, Gwen has to make it out! Gwen has to survive!" He mimicked Jack's voice again. "Don't you die on me, Gwen Cooper!"

He leaned even closer to Jack. "You think I don't notice?" he snarled.

Jack leaned away from Ianto. The depth of Ianto's rage shocked him. He was completely astounded by Ianto's words. For so long, he'd rejoiced in the idea that there was a tacit understanding between them. Ianto needed no explanations. Ianto instinctually knew what he was feeling. Every day he risked their lives. It was the nature of the job. And every day Jack fought against his emotional
attachments in order to get the job done. He was terrified of losing Ianto and was constantly tormented by the thought. He loved Ianto more than he was willing to admit, but he also had a responsibility to Gwen. He’d already lost so many people under his command – Owen, Tosh, Suzie... He didn’t want to lose any more. He thought Ianto had understood all of that, but it seemed he was mistaken, and his disappointment manifested as rage. "Not everything is only about you, Ianto," he said angrily.

"Yes, but the fact that you don’t even consider me speaks volumes," Ianto retorted.

Jack stared at him, dumbfounded. A myriad of emotions shifted through his mind. Anger, regret, sadness, disappointment, frustration, dejection, and hurt all stumbled across his consciousness in a tangled dance. "You think I don't consider you?"

"Are you really going to tell me that I'm any different from the countless other lovers you’ve had? Some day you'll leave me, just like you've left everyone else. Owen always warned me about you, what you were really like." Ianto laughed humorlessly. "Jack's part-time shag. Even Tosh told me that you never cared about anyone you fucked."

Jack jumped out of his chair again and begun pacing around the office. Ianto had gone too far. He was viciously striking at every single chink in Jack's armor. And he knows exactly how to hurt me the most... because I told him how. I confided in him. I told him about the things that plague my heart and torture my soul... It's beyond cruelty... Fury and indignation welled up inside of him. I trusted him... How could he? He stopped dead. This isn't the first time he's betrayed me. This is a pattern. First Lisa, then Abaddon, then Flat Holm... and now this...

He reeled around and faced Ianto, his body shaking with rage and sorrow. "You betrayed me, Ianto. Three times. And now you're using everything I've told you in confidence to hurt me out of anger and spite. I thought you were a better person than that. I was wrong. I made a mistake in trusting you."

Ianto visibly recoiled, and Jack instantly regretted his words. He knew that they were saying all of the things that they’d kept silent about for so many months. All of those hidden slights, the uncertainties, the insecurities and resentments that had been suppressed were boiling to the surface. It was all coming out. And it was all coming out wrong. Now they had both gone too far, and Jack wasn’t sure if there was any going back. He made an instinctual move towards Ianto. He wasn’t sure if he was going to hit him or kiss him, but Ianto stepped back, evading his reach.

"Well why don't you just fire me then?" Ianto yelled. "Get it over with. Then it will just be you and Gwen. Just how you always wanted it!"

Jack stared at the younger man, standing before him with rage-filled eyes. He's always admired Ianto's passion. He remembered enviously watching Ianto's fierce and fervent love for Lisa, and partly wishing that devotion could be directed towards him. Now that it was, he regretted the form of that emotion. He'd wanted Ianto's reckless love, not his uncontrolled wrath. He thought again about letting Ianto go, releasing him from the perils of Torchwood and from this life. "If you love someone, set them free," he thought regretfully. "What am I supposed to do, Ianto? Wipe your memory? Retcon you back to before you ever met me, and set you free of Torchwood? Because don't think I haven't considered it."

"Fine, I'll know what to expect then," Ianto said coldly.

Jack watched Ianto storm out of his office, and he heard the cogwheel door roll open and closed as Ianto left the Hub. He sat down at his desk once more as tears filled his eyes and a heaviness weighed on his heart. He slowly reached across his desk and picked up the small, wooden box containing his supply of retcon. He set down gingerly in front of him and opened the lid.
Staring into the box, he had to think back and calculate. Ianto had been with Torchwood Three for two years and five months. They had begun their physical relationship about a month into his tenure in Cardiff. *Two and a half years,* he mused sorrowfully, *Has it been that long?* He carefully extracted five pills and let them roll around in his hand. *That should be enough,* he thought sadly.

He stared for a long time at the retcon, sitting portentously in his palm. He considered the significance of those innocuous looking white tablets as tears flowed freely from his eyes. *So small, so innocent looking, but representing so much, able to take so much from me… My Ianto…* It had been a long time since Jack had called him that. He felt his stomach lurch violently, and bile rose in his throat.

He closed his eyes and swallowed hard as more tears trailed unheeded down his face and dripped from his chin. Then he slid the pills carefully into an envelope, sealed it, and laid it on the desk in front of him.

This wasn't a decision to be made out of anger and pain. They both needed some time to let their emotions settle and to reflect calmly and rationally on their situation. Then he would decide if he was going to use those pills on Ianto.
Ianto stormed out of Jack's office and hurled himself through the cogwheel door. As it rolled shut behind him, he slammed his fist against it with a guttural howl of rage. Fury had taken over him, and he had completely lost control. He banged the lift door shut and rode it to the surface with clenched fists. He stumbled blindly out of the tourist office and onto the pier. The still raging tempest of emotions compelled his legs to move, and he frantically ran from Torchwood and all of the agony it represented. As his breath gave out, he slowed to a walk, but he was unable to stop moving. For hours he wandered aimlessly as his thoughts shattered into a million pieces.

Daylight drifted into dusk, and then night fell heavily over Cardiff. Ianto's fury had slowly abated and awareness started to return. The enormity of what he'd just done began to dawn on him. He'd said horrible things to Jack. Unforgivable things. He wasn't even sure if he'd meant all of them. So much had been weighing on his mind. He'd held back so many emotions, sheltering them behind his professional, cool exterior. They had built up like a loaded spring, coiling and tensing as the pressure increased. Carly's near death experience had been the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. He had exploded in a fit of rage. He knew that he was prone to losing control when his emotions got the better of him. It was one of the reasons why he maintained his carefully restrained and impassive persona. He was hiding the fire that blazed beneath the surface.

He began to take stock of his surroundings, and he realized that he was miles from the Millennium Centre. The rational part of him, which was quickly returning, realized that he couldn't stay away for long. If Jack was going to retcon him, he refused to run and hide like a coward. He would walk back into Torchwood with his head held high and accept the consequences. If Jack wanted him to forget everything, he wasn't sure he would want to remember anyway. The pain might very well kill him. He turned resolutely and headed back to the Hub.

It was over an hour later that he found himself again on the pier by the entrance to the tourist office, but as he approached his fate, his courage failed him. He slumped onto a nearby bench and dropped his head into his hands. My God, what have I done?

His eidetic memory allowed him to replay the fight over and over again. They had both said terrible things. He cringed as he remembered each and every one of them. His anger, frustration, and hurt had been genuine, but his words had been spiteful. He knew Jack tortured himself over the people he'd lost under his command. He'd spent over a century inuring himself to the guilt, but Ianto knew that it never went away. And there was a part of him that knew why Jack had withdrawn from him after Tosh and Owen's deaths. It broke my heart, but I should have been more understanding. Jack's right, I didn't try to reach him... maybe I could have... But I truly thought that he couldn't have cared for me that much if he was willing to toss me aside so easily... like I meant nothing to him...

He'd surprised himself when he'd brought up Gwen. He'd thought that he'd made his peace with Jack and Gwen's relationship. Obviously there's still some resentment there... and some jealousy. But maybe if he hadn't abandoned me, I wouldn't feel so uncertain...

Ianto felt thoroughly ashamed of himself. He and Jack had things they needed to discuss – things that
needed to be clarified between them. Instead of taking the wisest course of action and talking to Jack honestly and openly, he'd held his tongue and let the anger, resentment, and misunderstanding grow. And it had culminated in catastrophe and possibly irreparable damage. *I should have known better…*

He was unaware of how long he sat on the bench, staring at the ground beneath his feet, but a sudden awareness caused him to look up. Jack was walking towards him with determination in his stride, his greatcoat billowing out behind him.

Ianto watched his approach with growing apprehension. With each of Jack's steps, Ianto felt his heart grow heavier and the knot in his stomach twisted painfully. He felt like a condemned man watching his executioner arrive to escort him to his death. Jack stopped a few feet away, and Ianto held his breath. *Is this the last time I'll every see Jack and remember who he is… what he means to me?* He forced himself to look at the older man, determined to try to etch Jack's face into his memory.

When he was no longer able to stand the anticipation, he asked, "Have you come to retcon me?"

Jack sat down on the bench next to him, but several feet separated their bodies. "You look like hell, Ianto," Jack murmured, looking out across the ocean.

Ianto was ignorant of his appearance, and for once he didn't care. He had raged and cried in the hours since he'd left Jack, and his appearance probably reflected the turmoil. But it no longer mattered. "That doesn't answer my question, Jack," he said, trying desperately to keep his voice steady.

"Is that what you want?" Jack asked still looking away from him.

Ianto felt a stirring of the anger that had previously subsided. "Of course that's not what I want," he snapped.

Jack sighed heavily. "So many of those things you said, Ianto… I thought we were past them."

"Why, because we started shagging again?" Ianto asked, his anger growing to dangerous proportions. He looked hard at Jack, who was still looking away. "And that's supposed to fix everything?" he added scornfully.

Jack shrugged his shoulders, but he remained silent.

All at once, Ianto's anger collapsed and was replaced by an overwhelming sadness. For the first time, Ianto's words were spoken from the heart. "So much has changed between us, Jack. You used to confide in me. You used to let me in, and I could sense your feelings. But you've been closed to me since Tosh and Owen died. You put up a wall between us. You once told me you wouldn't do that anymore… And I feel like I've lost my best friend…" Ianto's words faded as tears welled up in his eyes.

Jack voice showed no trace of emotion as he said, "You betrayed me, Ianto. Again. How could I trust you?"

Ianto was silent. He didn't know what to say. Explanations had already been given, and apologies had already been made. Jack was right. It was the simple truth.

Jack finally looked at him. "What was it that Einstein said about the definition of insanity?" he asked.

"Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results," Ianto replied and winced as he said it.

Ianto let out a chuckle in spite of himself. He started to roll his eyes and say, 'here we go again,' when he remembered the severity of the situation. The laughter died in his throat. "I'm sorry for the things I said to you, Jack," Ianto whispered, knowing his apology wasn't nearly enough. "Some of them were unforgivable."

"Yes," Jack agreed. "Some of them were. But some of the things I said to you were unforgivable as well, and I'm sorry too. We both went too far. The tension's been building up between us for too long. It's partly my fault. I should have known better. I should have insisted that we have a discussion instead of putting it off. It was a cowardly way to behave. I'm ashamed to say that I was afraid."

"What were you afraid of?" Ianto asked, more than a little surprised by Jack's words.

"I was afraid of losing you," Jack replied simply.

Ianto stared at Jack, completely dumbfounded. That Jack would worry about losing him seemed unbelievable. He knew Jack worried about him dying in the line of duty, but not that he worried about losing him as a lover. It seemed absurd to think that Captain Jack Harkness could be afraid of losing anyone.

Jack seemed to read his expression. "Is it so astonishing that I would be worried about losing you?"

"Yes," Ianto answered quickly.

"So you really thing me as heartless as you accused me of being?"

Ianto flinched. "No, Jack. I don't think you're heartless. But you have to admit that your track record with lovers is rather a sordid one. And you did stop speaking to me for two months with no explanation."

"True," Jack acknowledged.

They were both silent, staring out into the vast ocean. It seemed to Ianto that they had come to an impasse, and he wasn't sure if there was a conceivable resolution. "What happens now?" Ianto finally asked with a heavy heart.

"The way I see it, we have four options," Jack responded in a business-like manner.

"And those are?" Ianto asked warily.

Jack listed the options coolly and succinctly. "One: I could give you the reton that's sitting in my pocket and send you away from this life. Two: I could fire you, but leave your memories intact. Three: we could end this thing between us and go back to being employer and employee only. Four: we can try to work out our issues and attempt to put the pieces back together again."

Ianto remained silent. He didn't want the reton. He had never wanted it. What he'd said was said out of anger and pain. He now realized that he'd used Torchwood as a scapegoat for his bitterness over his relationship with Jack. To him, Torchwood was irrevocably intertwined with Jack. But he knew that Torchwood was his life, and he knew that Jack was his life. He didn't want to forget them, and he didn't want to leave them, even if it killed him in the end.

Being at Torchwood without being with Jack sounded like a slow and painful death. He remembered how he'd felt for those two months of estrangement between them. It had been horrible. But working
out their issues? Attempting to put the pieces back together again? It seemed an impossible feat. "The options are so… extreme," Ianto finally said.

"That's the nature of our work," Jack sighed heavily. "Unfortunately," he added as an afterthought.

"Which option do you prefer?" Ianto asked curiously.

"I don't want to retcon you," Jack said, "Even though I can't help but feel like it would be the kindest thing I could do for you."

"Why?" Ianto asked.

"Because you're right. Torchwood is a dangerous job, and many don't get out alive. I wish I could say it wasn't true… but…"

"Are there no exceptions?" Ianto asked.

"Of course there are exceptions," Jack said firmly. "There are many Torchwood employees who have gotten out alive. Carly, for one. Some have even grown old and died of natural causes."

Ianto nodded his head. "I could survive Torchwood and live to a ripe old age," he suggested.

"You will survive Torchwood and live to a ripe old age," Jack said with a fierce certainty, looking into Ianto's eyes.

Ianto broke eye contact and hung his head. "It was unfair of me," he began, "To say what I did. I knew what I was signing up for."

"I know," Jack replied.

"I'm just tired of losing people to Torchwood."

"How the hell do you think I feel?" The anger had returned to Jack's voice.

Ianto winced again. "I'm sorry, Jack."

"Stop apologizing. We're both sorry," Jack murmured.

Ianto mustered his courage and sat up straight. "I don't want the retcon, and I don't want to leave Torchwood."

Jack nodded in response.

"So we've ruled options one and two. That leaves options three and four," Ianto continued.

Jack nodded again, but he remained silent.

"Which do you prefer, Jack?" Ianto pressed.

"Which do you prefer?" Jack countered.

"Well, I'm not very well going to say let's pick up the pieces if you don't think that's possible," Ianto shot out defensively.

"Would I have even suggested it if I didn't think it was possible?" Jack asked looking at him curiously.
"No, I suppose not," Ianto conceded.

"Is that what you want?" Jack asked.

"Of course that's what I want!" Ianto snapped.

Jack held up his hands defensively. "Okay, why didn't you just say so?"

"Is that what you want?" Ianto pressed again. He needed to know.

Jack reached across the bench and took Ianto's hand, entwining their fingers together. Ianto felt a wave of relief sweep over him, and he gripped Jack's hand as though his life depended on it. "Of course that's what I want," Jack replied with a softening of his tone, "But we need to start talking to each other, which is going to be difficult, because neither of us is any good at it. We can't let things build up like this. There's too much fire in both of us..." Jack's voice faded, and he looked into Ianto's eyes.

As Ianto returned Jack's gaze, he thought about how much had occurred between them. The road back seemed long and treacherous. But if we're both willing to take it... Maybe there's hope after all... Ianto suddenly felt the need to move around. He wanted to get off the bench, and he was shivering. "Can we walk? I'm getting cold," he said.

Jack nodded and stood up, still holding Ianto's hand. Ianto stood too and they began walking towards the entrance to the tourist office hand in hand. As they took the lift down to the main level of the Hub, Ianto felt his composure beginning to fracture. He had almost lost Jack. He had almost lost his job and his memories. I almost lost everything I care about...

As they stepped through the cogwheel door, Ianto lost all vestiges of his self-control. He threw himself into Jack's arms and began to sob unrestrainedly.

Jack held him tightly, caressing his neck and running his finger through his hair until Ianto's weeping subsided. When Ianto finally lifted his head from Jack's shoulder, he was surprised to see that Jack's face was also wet with tears. He reached a hand up and tenderly wiped the moisture from Jack's cheek. Jack caught Ianto's hand and kissed the palm. "Let's go to bed," he whispered. "I think we're both emotionally drained. We're not going to figure everything out today. We'll talk more tomorrow, okay?"

Ianto nodded and allowed Jack to lead him into his office and down to the bunker below. They quickly stripped down to their underwear and climbed into bed.

They wrapped themselves tightly around each other and lay silently for a time. "By the way," Jack said, breaking the silence. "Your suit is ready."

"My suit?" Ianto asked with confusion.

"The custom-made suit I got you for your birthday," Jack explained. "It's finished. I got a message today. We should go and pick it up tomorrow. I can't wait to see you in it."

Ianto smiled at the ordinariness of the topic. He pressed his lips softly against Jack's. They kissed gently and slowly with closed mouths. Ianto carefully pulled away. There was one thing he desperately needed to know. "Jack," he began hesitantly. "What am I to you? What is this between us?"

In the dim lighting, Ianto could see the surprise register on Jack's face. "After all this time... After everything. Now you ask me?"
"Nothing is certain with you. And this is the most unconventional situation I've ever been in," Ianto explained calmly.

Jack sighed heavily and looked at the ceiling. "What do you think this is? What have you been telling yourself? Still holding onto the part-time shag idea? Because I don't think it's going to fly anymore, Ianto. Too much has happened between us."

Ianto wavered. He wanted Jack to define it and give it a name. It was Jack who was nontraditional and unconventional. Ianto liked things to be neatly categorized. It was difficult for him to conform to Jack's eccentricities. He thought that if he could give it a label, he would feel more confident about his significance to Jack. I just want him to say that we're together... or a couple... or boyfriends... or something. He didn't know the word to describe it. He'd never known. Although their sexual liaison, for better or worse, had spanned almost his entire tenure at Torchwood Three, defining it somehow felt like a completely new stage in their relationship. "I... I don't know," he finally managed.

"Well, maybe that's one of the problems, Ianto. Maybe you need to figure that out," Jack replied impassively.

They didn't speak again. Ianto wanted to consider Jack's words, but he was beyond exhausted. He fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.
Ianto woke the following morning feeling like he'd been drugged. His limbs were heavy, and his head swam uncomfortably. He rubbed wearily at his eyes as they began to move across his surroundings. He was in Jack's bed beneath his office in the Hub. His head cleared suddenly, and the memory of the fight with Jack came sharply into focus. So he didn't retcon me after all… Ianto surprised himself with the thought. There must have been a part of me that worried he would do it anyway… His stomach roiled unpleasantly as his mind once again replayed the events of the day before. My God… Where do we go from here? Have we passed the point of no return?

He wanted desperately to pull the covers over his head and hide away from the world, but he could hear Jack moving around his office overhead. He glanced at the clock, which read 7:13am. He groaned and stretched his aching limbs. He needed to get up. He had to face Jack sooner or later, and more than anything, he needed a cup of coffee. It took all of his willpower and courage to climb out of bed.

He showered and meticulously attended to his grooming, uncertain if his painstaking attention to his appearance was designed to impress Jack or if he was merely playing for time. He dressed carefully in a dark suit with a subtle pinstripe, a plum colored shirt, and a dark red tie. Then with one final glance in the mirror, he steeled himself and climbed out of the bunker.

Jack was sitting at his desk reading a file. He looked up when Ianto stepped off the ladder. "Hey," Jack said.

"Hey," Ianto replied, shoving his hands into his pockets uncertainly. "Um… how are you?" he asked hesitantly.

"Me too," Ianto said sadly.

Jack didn't reply. The silence hung uncomfortably between them. Ianto didn't know what to say. He didn't even know where to begin. The fact that Jack also remained silent was equally disconcerting. His nimble mind replayed the last conversation they'd had before he'd fallen asleep. "What am I to you, Jack? What is this between us?" Jack hadn't answered. He'd seemed almost annoyed at being asked. He said that perhaps that was the problem – that I didn't know. He said that I need to decide what this is between us… But how can I? Why can't he just tell me?

Finally, Jack sighed heavily and said, with what sounded to Ianto like a trace of annoyance, "We've got some work to do."

Is he frustrated that we have to work, or is he frustrated with me? Ianto wondered uneasily. Outwardly, he assumed work mode. "Right, what's happened then?"

"Just a hitchhiker," Jack responded. "Old guy in hospital. He's had one for years, but he's dying, and
we can't let them find the alien inside him if they decide to do an autopsy."

"Right," Ianto said again. "Used to see a lot of those at Torchwood One. Haven't seen one in a while."

"Owen set up a tracking program years ago. Alerts us when a carrier's body is dying so we can intervene."

Ianto nodded. "Is there time for coffee?" he asked hopefully.

Jack chuckled unexpectedly, and Ianto's heart leapt at the familiar sound. *Maybe things aren't so bad between us after all,* he thought hopefully. "There's always time for coffee," Jack said with a smile, but the smile didn't reach his eyes.

Ianto wanted to take three steps forward and pull Jack into his arms, but something rendered him inert. *He seems distant... and perhaps he's still angry... I'm not sure how I would be received... He might push me away...* Ianto wished desperately that he could sense something from Jack, but he could feel nothing from the older man. Jack defenses were firmly in place.

He continued to stand uncomfortably until he was unable to bear the tension any longer. He gave Jack a brief nod and then hurried away to make coffee.

Half an hour later, they were in the SUV and heading for St. Helen's hospital. The atmosphere between them was still thick with tension. Ianto glanced surreptitiously at Jack, whose eyes were fixed determinedly on the road. *I wish you'd just tell me what I am to you,* Ianto thought again as he gazed at the older man. *It would make things so much easier...*

Jack pulled the SUV into the hospital's car park, and they climbed out. As they neared the hospital doors, Ianto asked, "How do you want to play it?" He glanced at Jack. "Should we be Mr. Williams' sons? Or nephews?"

Jack shrugged, but he didn't reply. The hospital doors slid open, and Jack smiled his best Harkness grin at the receptionist. "We're here to see Mr. Williams. We're his neighbors," Jack said with a mischievous wink at Ianto.

*Neighbors?* Ianto thought with confusion. *That's a new one... What's Jack playing at? They don't usually let non-family members see critical patients...*

"He doesn't have any family, so we look after him," Jack continued with his smile fixed in place.

The receptionist nodded. "I'll let the doctor know you're here," she replied. "You can have a seat over there," she pointed them to the waiting area.

"Neighbors?" Ianto asked as they walked away. "That's a new one."

"Just play along," Jack whispered as a young, handsome, Indian man wearing scrubs approached.

"You're here for Mr. Williams?" he asked.

Jack nodded offering his hand. "Jack Harkness. This is Ianto Jones. How's he doing?"

The doctor shook Jack's hand and then Ianto's. "I'm Dr..." He was interrupted by a series of earsplitting alarms and a voice over the loudspeaker announcing, "Code blue, bed three. Code blue, bed three."
"That's Mr. Williams," the doctor said apologetically and quickly ran off.

Jack and Ianto watched the bustle of the A&E staff as they attended to Mr. Williams behind a closed curtain. Jack checked his wrist strap. "And… he's gone," he announced. "Game face on, Ianto."

They waited patiently until they heard the doctor's voice behind them. "I'm sorry." They turned simultaneously. Ianto assumed an anxious expression. "We did everything we could," the doctor continued, "But he didn't make it."

"Oh, that's a shame," Jack said.

"Very sad," Ianto added.

"Poor old Mr. Williams," Jack said, looking at Ianto.

"Very sad indeed," Ianto affirmed.

"There'll have to be an autopsy, but I'd say his heart gave out," the doctor explained.

"Brave old heart," Ianto murmured.

Jack shot him a glance. Was that too much? Ianto thought. The doctor looked at him oddly. "You were neighbors, is that right?" he asked.

Jack placed his hand on Ianto's shoulder and caressed it with an obvious display of intimacy. "We live next door," Jack explained.

Ianto was confused, but he didn't show it. They'd talked their way into situations like this before without using the Torchwood name, but they usually posed as relatives of some sort. He wasn't sure what Jack's angle was, but he maintained his role with professional aplomb. "He's got no family to speak of," Ianto told the doctor. "All on his own. We'd just keep an eye on him, you know."

"Well, I'm sure he appreciated it," the doctor said kindly. "If only there were more like," he paused and looked at both of them, "You two in the world," he finished awkwardly.

Ianto's mind was reeling. It finally dawned on him that Jack had presented them as the friendly gay couple that lived next door to the dead man. He glanced at Jack, who was talking their way into seeing the body. Is this because of our conversation last night? Ianto wondered. Is he being ironic? Is he being spiteful?

They stood looking at the body of Mr. Williams. "Bless him," Jack said.

"God rest his soul," Ianto added, maintaining his role.

Jack got rid of the doctor and they sprang into action, but Ianto couldn't help commenting, "He thought we were together. Like a couple. He said, 'You two.' The way he said it…" He mimicked the doctor's awkwardness, "You two."

"Well, we are," Jack responded coolly and looked hard at him. "Does it matter?" he asked austerely.

Ianto was taken aback by Jack's statement. It was what he'd wanted to hear – confirmation from Jack as to what they were to each other, but it wasn't how he'd wanted to hear it. He seems irritated… almost defensive… "I dunno," Ianto said aloud, feeling again like this was a new stage in their relationship. "It's all a bit new to me, that's all." He quickly returned to work. "Laser saw," he said handing it to Jack.
"Thank you," Jack replied, taking it from him.

They'd almost removed the hitchhiker without event, but the doctor unexpectedly returned before they'd finished. Jack waved the alien parasite in the air. "Now, look at it, that's not human, is it? Does that look human? No, it does not. It's just a hitchhiker he picked up. It didn't kill him."

"Some say they're positively beneficial," Ianto added, reaching into his briefcase. "They release endorphins into the bloodstream. He died a happy man." He held out a container. "And I've got Tupperware."

Jack placed the hitchhiker into the container, and Ianto quickly closed the lid. "And we're very considerate. We don't leave any mess," Jack explained as he used the laser saw to close the wound.

They made a hasty retreat, but the doctor followed them to the SUV, yelling something about reporting them. When Jack dismissed him, he began shouting about bodies going missing. Jack rolled down the window. "How many?" he asked.

"This whole city talks about you," the doctor said.

Jack looked at Ianto, and Ianto rolled his eyes. Jack listened to a few more of the details about the missing bodies, and asked the doctor's name. He turned to Ianto. "What do you think?"

"NHS," Ianto responded succinctly.

"Yeah. Too much red tape. Sorry. But good luck with it!"

They drove away.

"So, what do you think about Dr. Rupesh Patanjali?" Jack queried.

"In what way?" Ianto asked suspiciously. With Jack, that could mean anything.

"We need a doctor," Jack said with some sadness in his voice.

"Well, you just told him to sod off," Ianto said.

"I think he'll come looking for us," Jack declared. "Well, if he's worth having he will."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Later today would be my guess."

He was about to make Jack a wager on how long it would take Dr. Patanjali to come looking for Torchwood when Jack made a sudden turn that threw Ianto against the passenger door. Jack's driving tended to be reckless at the best of times, but when he was in a temper, it was downright dangerous. Currently Jack was breaking all sorts of speed records as the SUV tore through the streets of Cardiff, headless of every known traffic law. Ianto gripped the door handle and rechecked his seatbelt. He wondered again if Jack's anger was directed towards him. He wanted to bring up their earlier conversation, but he didn't know how.

It's probably best to let him focus on driving, Ianto decided, shutting his eyes and tightening his hold on the door handle. Not a good time to rile him.

Jack pulled into the garage with a screech of the wheels and turned off the engine. He hopped out of the SUV, and Ianto followed after him. "Nice driving," he commented.

"Scared?" Jack taunted.
Ianto forced himself to laugh. "You are going to get us killed!" he said as they entered the Hub.

"No, you get killed, not me. You'd die like a dog, like an ugly dog!" Jack retorted.

Ianto was shocked by Jack's words. It was so out of character for Jack to even joke about any of them dying, not to mention much cruder and more acerbic than their usual banter. He must really be furious, Ianto thought uncomfortably. Gwen interrupted his thoughts. "Oi, Chuckle Brothers. I found something," she announced.

"Yeah well I want a check on St Helen's Hospital, specifically the morgue," Jack ordered.

"Well, there's a computer, do it yourself," Gwen said dismissively.

Ianto chuckled. He had half a mind to stick his tongue out at Jack, but Jack obviously wasn't amused. He took his coat off and handed it to Ianto. Some things never change, Ianto thought ruefully as he accepted the coat. I guess I'm still Jack's butler. I used to be proud to take care of him, but after everything that's happened... it seems demeaning somehow...

Gwen began to tell them about the strange events that had taken place that morning. Children all over the world had stopped moving simultaneously, causing accidents and widespread panic. Ianto went to his computer, and they all turned their attention to the newest threat.

The more they discovered about the incident with the children, the stranger it became. Jack went into his office to make some phone calls, while Gwen liaised with the police, and Ianto read reports from across the globe. At one point, Gwen asked Ianto about St. Helen's hospital, and Ianto explained that a doctor had told them about missing bodies.

"Missing bodies are going to have to wait," Gwen stated firmly.

"Agreed." Ianto nodded.

Gwen went into Jack's office while Ianto began to scan CCTV footage. He noticed someone walking back and forth in front of the water tower. He zoomed in and smiled as he recognized Dr. Patanjali. He watched the doctor for a few more minutes, then he walked into Jack's office. "You were right. He's back," he announced.

Jack laughed victoriously. "I said so!" he exclaimed, jumping up from his chair and walking into the main area of the Hub.

"Who's back?" Gwen asked, following them.

"What's he doing?" Jack looked at the computer monitor.

"Waiting," Ianto replied. "Just like you said. He's been there twenty minutes."

"Persistent," Jack offered.

"Good sign," Ianto commented.

"Dogmatic," Jack said.

"Always a plus," Ianto agreed.

"Oh, Christ, never work with a couple. You two talk like twins!" Gwen exclaimed.

Ianto and Jack looked at Gwen and then at each other. Jack's expression was inscrutable. Gwen's
never called us a couple before, Ianto thought. Why is it that once you start thinking about something, suddenly it seems that everyone's talking about it… "Now tell me who he is," Gwen went on.

"Rupesh Patanjali," Ianto explained. "He saw the hitchhiker. He's the bodies-going-missing man."

"Dr. Patanjali," Jack corrected. "We need a doctor," he added apologetically.

"What, you let just him follow you?" Gwen asked.

"Ask about Torchwood, and most people point towards the Bay," Ianto clarified.

Oh," Gwen laughed. "You bastards, that's exactly what you did to me the first time we met!"

Ianto glanced at Jack again. Jack was smiling, but Ianto could see the sadness in his eyes. "Well, sod that. I'm promoting myself to recruitment officer," Gwen declared as she turned and left the Hub.

Ianto stood uncomfortably for a moment. Then he said, "She's calling us a couple now."

"What's your problem?" Jack asked angrily.

"Just saying," Ianto replied defensively.

"I hate the word couple," Jack said scornfully as he walked into his office and closed the door.

"Me too," Ianto called after him.

He turned back to the computer monitor with a heavy heart. This isn't going at all well… Am I being childish? We've been sleeping together for over two years… Off and on, he silently amended. But he's never said… I mean, earlier he said we were together, but now he hates the word 'couple'? What the hell does that mean? He's an immortal, over two thousand of years old, he's had countless lovers… Why can't he just tell me what I am to him? Why is it supposed to be my decision to define what we are? As if things weren't already ambiguous between us, but we've just had a shocking fight… Why does this have to be so difficult? I'm left trying to wheedle information out of him, and doing a clumsy job of it… and I feel like a fool…

Ianto sighed and shook his head in frustration as he watched Gwen approach Dr. Patanjali. Maybe things between us are irreparable after all…
Ianto continued to stare glumly at the computer monitor. He watched as Gwen and Dr. Patanjali sat down at a table on the Plass with cups of coffee. He knew that Gwen was telling the young doctor about Torchwood, and he wondered how the doctor was reacting to confirmation that aliens existed. He wondered if they would be adding Dr. Rupesh Patanjali to their team.

He glanced at Jack's office. The door was still firmly closed. *Maybe I should go and talk to him,* he though morosely. *But I don't know what to say…* He turned his attention once again to the reports coming from across the globe.

A short while later, Jack came running out of his office yelling, "They're doing it again!"

Ianto followed behind as they raced out of the Hub and onto the Plass. He stared in awe as every child stood motionless, chanting in unison, "We are coming."

Then, as though a switch had been flipped, the children returned to normal, apparently completely unaware of anything out of the ordinary.

The Torchwood team raced back to the Hub, dismissing Dr. Patanjali along the way. After getting the run-around from the Home Office, Jack and Ianto started theorizing. "So I think it's a transmission, a pulse, a broadcast," Jack said.

"Like the Mosquito alarm – the one that only kids can hear," Ianto suggested.

"Something unique to prepubescents," Jack added.

"Maybe testosterone interferes with the signal, and estrogen…" Ianto wracked his brain, but Gwen interrupted.

"Oh, no, no, no, hold on. We're being dumbos. We're missing the bleeding obvious here. Look."

They looked at the computer, which depicted an Asian girl chanting, "We are coming."

"Recorded in Taiwan. The point being, anyone?" Gwen asked.

Both Ianto and Jack realized simultaneously that the girl was speaking English.

"Exactly!" Gwen exclaimed. "And all the footage is the same. So every single child in the whole wide world is speaking English. So why's that?"

"I guess if you scanned the Earth from the outside, you'd register English as the dominant language," Jack reasoned.

"Actually, that would be Chinese - well, Mandarin," Ianto amended pedantically. "There's about a billion people speaking Mandarin. That's three times more than English."
"Oh my God," Gwen exclaimed.

She showed them the footage of the only adult male who was also affected, and she left for the Duke of York Hospital in East Grinstead to question him.

As soon as the cogwheel door closed, Jack looked at Ianto. "Mandarin?" he asked. "You really do know everything, don't you?" But the tone of Jack's voice didn't sound complimentary. It sounded more like exasperation.

Ianto shrugged modestly. "Not everything," he replied, thinking how little he understood what was happening between him and Jack. He decided that he needed to say something. *We can't go on like this.* He mustered his courage and asked, "You're still angry?"

Jack sighed heavily and crossed his arms over his chest. "What do you want me to say, Ianto?"

"I thought we were going to try to fix things," Ianto hedged. "But… I seem to be getting mixed signals from you."

A scowl darkened Jack's handsome features, and his expression hardened with obvious anger. "I can't believe that after all this time… After everything, you can't even admit that we're together," he blazed.

"Is that why you did that thing at the hospital this morning?" Ianto asked.

"Is it still the gay thing, Ianto? Are you still ashamed of being seen with me? Having people think we're together?"

"It's not that, Jack. It's just… it's all very new to me," Ianto repeated.

"New to you?" Jack roared, throwing up his hands with a look of disgust. "How can it be new to you? It's been over two years!"

Ianto had to admit that Jack had a point. It did seem late in the game to be having this conversation. *But things with Jack have been so bloody complicated and unclear,* he thought angrily. *And not that long ago, he wasn't even speaking to me… "We haven't exactly had the most conventional relationship,"* Ianto retorted, trying to keep his temper in check. *"We certainly haven't had the most consistent one. And you're not exactly the most conventional of men."*

"Oh, so you finally admit that it's a relationship!" Jack's voice oozed with sarcasm.

Ianto was stunned by Jack's outburst, and his anger fell away. "I don't understand where this is coming from," he said, taking a step forward and putting his hand on Jack's arm. "Please, Jack," he said quietly. "I don't want to fight with you anymore. I just want to understand why you're so angry. I thought you agreed that we both said hurtful things last night, and that we needed to let it go."

Jack looked like he was about to push Ianto away, but then apparently thought better of it. He put his hand over Ianto's and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes, then opened them again. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "I guess you're right. I guess I'm still angry."

Ianto felt his heart constrict painfully, but he had to know. "So you don't want to try and fix things then?" he asked, bracing himself for the answer.

"That's not what I'm saying," Jack said quickly. He drew a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Just… give me some time."
Ianto nodded in response. Jack squeezed his hand and then let it go. "Let's go topside and see what's happening," he suggested.

They grabbed their coats and silently made their way outside. Jack headed for the large steps near the Plass and sat down. Ianto sat beside him. "You've never seen anything like this before?" he asked.

Jack shook his head. "Nothing comes to mind."

"What do you think we're dealing with?"

"I just don't know, Ianto." Jack looked around them. "Lunch time. This place should be buzzing with kids," he said.

"Everyone's taken them home," Ianto observed.

"We need a child, because we need to test those frequencies. Find the right frequency, and we can find out who's transmitting," Jack reasoned.

"Where do you get a child, though? I could find you lasers and weevils and hitchhikers. But kids…"

Jack patted Ianto's knee and stood up. "See you later."

"Where are you going?" Ianto asked with surprise.

"Now who's a couple?" Jack asked with bitterness in his voice, before turning and walking away.

Ianto watched his retreating form with a resurgence of his own anger. He's not making things any easier, he thought with exasperation. In fact, he's making it worse. And he's being a total bastard! He clenched his fists in frustration. I suppose he's angry because I asked him what we were to each other, but I just don't understand why that's making him so angry. Ironic that he's the one who said we need to start talking to each other...

He shook his head and unclenched his fists. His problems with Jack would have to wait. Jack needs a child... And whatever Jack needs, I get for him. But where can I find him a child? I don't even know any children... except of course... His stomach churned uncomfortably. He knew what he needed to do, but he didn't want to do it. He stood and headed back to the Hub, wondering if Jack had taken the SUV.

When he reached the garage, he saw the SUV sitting in its usual spot. He'd given himself the brief walk back to the Hub to try and come up with an alternate solution besides the one that had presented itself. When no other ideas were forthcoming, he resigned himself to the unpleasant task. With a heavy sigh, he climbed into the SUV and drove to his sister's.

He parked outside Rhiannon's house, steeled himself, and walked in the front door. "Only me," he announced.

"Oh, bloody hell. We must be in trouble. Or is it Christmas?" Rhiannon asked sarcastically.

He chose to ignore his sister's guilt trip. He indicated his niece Mica, who was sitting on the sofa playing video games. He assumed his nephew David was also nearby. "How are they?"

"Yeah, it was a bit of a scare. I brought them home, just in case," Rhiannon told him.

He handed out his customary ten-pound note each to his niece and nephew, who barely noticed he was there and took the money without a word. He'd never known how to relate to his sister's
children, although he was fond of them. Money was the only common ground he could find. *Hand out ten quid and you don't have to do any talking,* he'd reasoned long ago.

He tried to convince his sister to let him take Mica out for food or to the cinema, but Rhiannon refused. When he realized that he was going to be unsuccessful, he tried to make a quick getaway, but she stopped him. "Oh, that's it, is it? You're just going to go now? Oh, sit down, you daft sod. I've got some of that spinach dip." She stood and went to the stove to put the kettle on. "And you and me…well," she cleared her throat, "We've got things to talk about."

"What things?" he asked.

"You've been seen," Rhiannon replied.

Ianto was instantly wary. *Oh God, has someone she knows seen me chasing a Weevil or something? That's the last thing I need today. How am I going to explain that? She thinks I'm a civil servant.*

"Sit down," she said again.

Ianto sat obediently at the kitchen table and waited as the kettle boiled and Rhiannon made them both a cup of tea. His mind was busy working through various cover stories Torchwood used for such an eventuality. He felt ready to explain away any bizarre circumstances when she started talking.

"Susan on the corner was in town, and it was her anniversary, so they went to that posh French place in town by the memorial, and there was you."

Ianto's mind whirled. *French restaurant in town? I don't remember a case there recently… "So…?"* he hedged.

"There was you, having dinner with a man."

Ianto let out a chuckle of relief. He remembered having dinner with Jack at the new French restaurant on his birthday. No aliens involved. "So?" he asked again, with more confidence.

"Having dinner, with a man, in a restaurant," Rhiannon repeated with significance.

All at once, he knew what she was insinuating, and his heart sank. He wasn't ready to have this conversation with his sister, especially since things between him and Jack were so tenuous. "So? You have dinner with Tina," he pointed out.

"Not in town. Susan said he was gorgeous. Like a film star. Like an escort."

Ianto wanted to snicker at the description of Jack. *Jack would love being described as an escort… But he didn't want to have this discussion. "He's my boss," he explained succinctly, hoping that would dismiss the subject.*

Unfortunately, Rhiannon wasn't buying it. "She said it was intimate. I said, 'Well, he's had girlfriends,' and she said, 'Well, no girl was getting her feet round that table, no chance.' Have you gone bender?"

Ianto glanced at his niece, then looked back at his sister. "Mica's hearing this," he scolded.

"She's not bothered. Her friend Sian's got two mothers."

Ianto didn't respond. He was torn between persisting in his denial and telling the truth.

"Go on," Rhiannon pressed.
Ianto was still deciding what to say when his sister continued, "You never tell me anything these days. Dad died, that was it. You were off. You couldn't wait. Like I did something wrong. I didn't, did I?"

He could feel the hurt radiating off her in waves. She was always so easy for him to read. "It's not that," he began. "It's my job, it's difficult, it's..." He was dissembling, and he knew it. He closed his eyes. I'm doing exactly what Jack accused me of doing – being ashamed to admit we're together. He's right. I am a coward. I think I understand now why he's so angry. I can't deny it any longer to the outside world. He opened his eyes and looked at her. "He is very handsome," he finally admitted.

"No!" she exclaimed.

"Now stop it," he said, hoping to put an end to the conversation.

"You're kidding me! Really, though? Really?"

He was having a hard time maintaining eye contact with her, and his desire to end the discussion was being thoroughly ignored. What's she going to think? What's she going to say? Is she going to be disgusted? Will she disown me? Will she accept me?

"Christ almighty! He's nice, though? Is he?"

Ianto bit his lip. 'Nice' wasn't exactly a word he would choose to describe Jack, but he was touched that Rhiannon, despite her obvious astonishment, was still concerned that he was with someone who treated him well.

"Is he?" she asked again. "Oh, my God. I mean, since when?"

"It's weird. It's just different," Ianto began to explain. "It's not... men. It's... it's just him. It's only him." It was the most honest and sincere statement he'd ever made about his feelings for Jack. But then he remembered that things between them were strained. "And I don't even know what it is, really. So... So I'm not broadcasting it," he added.

"Oh, no, honest, I won't say. If you want it kept quiet, I swear, I won't say a word, I promise."

At that moment, his brother-in-law Johnny walked in. When he saw Ianto, he said, "Aye aye, gay boy! She says you're taking it up the arse." He turned to his daughter. "Mica, will you get off that thing."

Ianto stared at his sister, who was trying desperately to hide a smile. "Thanks," he said sarcastically before he rose to greet Johnny.

The theft of the SUV drove all other thoughts from his mind. He hailed a taxi to take him back to the Hub.

As he relaxed against the leather seat, he thought, I've just come out to my sister... I suppose that's what it's called... Odd... And somehow, a relief. I should have told her ages ago... Maybe introduced her to Jack? He grinned at the idea of Rhiannon and Jack sitting down to dinner. No one else would get a word in edgewise, he laughed to himself. I don't know who enjoys the sound of their own voice more – Rhiannon or Jack.

His smile faded as he thought again about their conversation. She seemed to take it well... After the initial shock wore off, she only seemed to care that I was with someone who was good to me... If only things with Jack weren't such a bloody mess... And now the SUV's been stolen. Bullocks! Just what I need. He sighed heavily. He could run a trace on the SUV, but he knew he'd have to tell Jack
it was stolen, and he was dreading it.

He'd just walked into the Hub when his mobile rang. It was Gwen, asking him to run a trace on one Clement MacDonald. He told her that he'd lost the car, but she didn't seem to be paying any attention. That went well, he thought with satisfaction. Now if only Jack takes the news as mildly...

He collected information on Clement MacDonald until Gwen returned. He started telling her what he'd found, but she walked straight past him into the autopsy bay. Okay, I guess she doesn't want to talk now, he thought as he turned back to his research.

A minute later, Jack also returned. "We need damage control at St. Helen's," he announced. "One body. Dr. Rupesh Patanjali. Shot in the back."

Ianto was shocked. "What happened?" he asked.

"I don't know. He was just left there right beside me. Like someone's gloating," Jack told him.

"Did they kill you?" Ianto asked.

"Yeah," Jack admitted.

Ianto reached forward and hugged him, trying to be supportive. Jack was tense in his arms and patted his back stiffly. It was an awkward embrace, lacking their usual warmth and tenderness. There's so much still unresolved between us, Ianto thought sadly.

"Maybe we're being targeted," Jack said when he pulled away. "Whether it was him or me, we should be careful. Better tell Gwen."

"She's back. She's in the lab."

"Gwen!" Jack called, walking towards the autopsy bay. "Boy, have I had a day!"

Ianto couldn't hear what else passed between them, but a few moments later, Jack called out, "Ianto! We're having a baby!"

Ianto ran towards the autopsy bay and leaned over the railing. He saw Gwen with her hand on the alien medical scanner and the baby appearing as a bright red dot inside the projection of her body on the wall. Ianto smiled with delight.

"Have you told Rhys?" Jack asked.

"I've only just found out myself," Gwen responded.

"Oh, you told me before you told him? He is gonna love that!"

They all chuckled. "Congratulations!" Ianto said, then quickly decided to take advantage of the distraction. "Would now be a good time to tell you I lost the car?"

Jack whipped around to look at him. "You did what?"

Gwen hadn't noticed. "That is just bloody spectacular!" she said in awe. "But what about this place, and my job?"

Jack put a comforting hand on Gwen's, which was still on the scanner. "We'll manage. We always do," he assured her.
An alarm rang out through the Hub. "What the hell is that?" Gwen asked.

They all looked at the wall projection. Ianto felt a twisting inside his stomach. "Oh my God," Jack said.

"There's a bomb! There's a bomb inside your stomach!" Ianto cried.

Ianto immediately ran for the computer. He had to verify the blast radius and find a way to fix this. His heart pounded in his chest as he pulled up the information. Jack was shouting for them to get out. "It has a blast radius of one mile!" Ianto announced as he typed frantically.

"Look there must be something we can do. We can stop it. We can fix this okay? We can rip it out of you," Gwen protested.

"I'm telling you. Get out!" Jack yelled.

"It's active. Two minutes!" Ianto told them. He continued to type. *I'll find a solution! I'm going to fix this!* Jack was still shouting for them to get out.

"I can't just run, Jack," Gwen exclaimed.

"You're pregnant," Jack said.

Gwen made a dash for the door. Ianto realized that he had to contain the explosion. He hit a series of commands. The computerized voice began its repetitive announcement, "Torchwood lockdown. Torchwood lockdown."

"Ianto, you're going to get locked inside!" Jack shouted.

Ianto ignored him. He wasn't going anywhere. He wouldn't leave Jack. He continued his frenzied typing, trying desperately to find a way to deactivate the bomb. Jack grabbed him yelling, "Ianto! And you!"

Ianto struggled against him. "There must be a way to override the mechanism!" he shouted.

Jack was wrestling him towards the lift. "For God's sake, get out!" Jack yelled.

Ianto tried to resist. He couldn't leave Jack. He wouldn't leave him. "There'll be nothing left of you!" he wailed, fighting to break free.

"I can survive anything!" Jack shouted.

Ianto continued to struggle as Jack pushed him onto the invisible lift. Jack grabbed him and kissed him fiercely. All at once, Ianto could sense Jack all around him. Jack's emotions broke over him like waves. He could feel Jack's desperation to get Ianto to safety. He could feel Jack's fear. He could feel Jack's passion and ardor. He knew in that moment that everything that had gone wrong between them no longer mattered. In that brief instant, Jack had let down his defenses, and Ianto understood the true depth of Jack's feelings for him.

Jack broke the kiss and hit a button on his wrist strap. The lift started to rise. Ianto shook his head sadly at Jack, thinking *why didn't you tell me before?* They stared into each other's eyes as the lift moved Ianto further and further away from Jack.

"I'll come back. I always do," Jack said.

Ianto felt, more than heard Jack's words. He reached his hand down toward Jack, wishing he didn't
have to leave Jack to his fate, wishing he could stand by the man he loved, wishing Jack knew how much he loved him and wondering if he'd ever see him again.

Just as he reached the surface and stepped off the lift, the world exploded around him.
"Four… Three… Two… One…"

Jack felt his body being torn apart before the darkness came. The moment of pain was indescribable. The sensation was beyond human expression. When he took his first breath back into life, he was only conscious of continuing agony. The intensity of the physical torment was sending him into shock. His mind shielded itself by retreating into his recent memories, and the focus of those memories invariably drifted to the man he loved. To Ianto. But his latest memories of Ianto were unsettling ones…

After their argument, Jack sat at his desk for hours staring at the retcon sealed in the envelope in front of him. Ianto's words played over and over again in his mind. "Bloody Torchwood! It will kill us all in the end! And that's the sacrifice you're willing to make, isn't it, Jack? We're all just casualties of war, led like pigs to the slaughter. Sometimes I think there isn't a soul on this Earth that you give a damn about… You surround yourself with people who devote themselves to you. Who fight for you. Who die for you. But you give them nothing in return, turn your back on them when you've had enough, leave them for dead without a moment's hesitation. We're all expendable to you, aren't we, Jack? Our lives are meaningless to you because you'll live forever. But we only have this one lifetime to give. You have thousands."

The worst part was that there was a measure of truth to Ianto's accusations. Jack had suffered so many losses that he'd hardened his heart. He had forsaken love and abandoned commitment. It was the only way he could survive eternity without going insane. It was the nature of his curse. For him, there was no peace to look forward to, no end in sight. All that passed would be engrained forever in his memory. All the pain he suffered would be suffered interminably.

He had hardened his heart, but he hadn't completely destroyed it. As much as he would have liked to completely dissociate himself from all forms of emotion and attachment, he was still human. It didn't stop him from caring, no matter how much he tried to distance himself. With Ianto, he had been completely powerless. I never wanted to fall in love again, but I did… and I've been struggling with it ever since… Every instinct I have tells me to run away and never look back, but my heart won't let me. Can he really think that he's just like every other lover I've had? Everything about this, about him, is unique. He is the exception, not the rule…

But for him to think that he's expendable to me… or Gwen or Owen or Tosh… How could he? I thought he was the only one who really understood how much I agonize over everyone I've lost… It breaks my heart to think that maybe he doesn't understand me as well as I thought he did… But he still knows me better than anyone… and maybe I haven't been fair to him… Maybe I've asked too much of him. Maybe I've expected too much…

We've hurt each other so badly, and we've both been holding onto our past grievances… holding back… Maybe it's time to let go of that hurt… I don't want to lose him… I can't lose him…

With that last thought, he knew that he could never retcon Ianto. They needed to put this behind
them and move on. He spotted Ianto on the CCTV sitting outside the Tourist Office, and he strode out of the Hub with determination. He was still angry, and he was still deeply hurt, but the truth was, Ianto was worth it. Jack knew in his heart that he would fight to the end to keep his lover by his side.

"Have you come to retcon me?" Ianto asked as Jack approached.

Jack sat down on the bench next to him. The younger man's appearance alarmed him. He was unusually disheveled, and his face was red and blotched with tears. "You look like hell, Ianto."

"That doesn't answer my question, Jack," Ianto replied.

"Is that what you want?" Jack asked, suddenly feeling uncertain.

"Of course that's not what I want," Ianto snapped.

Jack sighed heavily. There was a part of him that was immensely relieved, but he knew it would be a difficult road back for them. "So many of those things you said, Ianto… I thought we were past them."

"Why, because we started shagging again? And that's supposed to fix everything?" Ianto's tone was scornful.

Jack shrugged his shoulders, but he remained silent. He'd known that it wouldn't fix everything, but he had hoped that it would help to smooth things over between them. *Obviously I was wrong…*

"So much has changed between us, Jack. You used to confide in me. You used to let me in, and I could sense your feelings. But you've been closed to me since Tosh and Owen died. You put up a wall between us. You once told me you wouldn't do that anymore… And I feel like I've lost my best friend…"

Jack was deeply moved by Ianto's words, but he felt the need to defend his actions. *It's not like I callously dismissed him. There was provocation.* Aloud he said, "You betrayed me, Ianto. Again. How could I trust you?" He'd trusted Ianto again and again, and Ianto had betrayed that trust repeatedly. "What was it that Einstein said about the definition of insanity?" he questioned ruefully.

"Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results," Ianto replied quietly.

But Jack knew in his heart that it wasn't that simple. It never was. Life wasn't all black and white. There were myriad shades of grey. He'd known that Ianto hadn't betrayed him out of spite or malice. At that moment, he realized that he'd held onto that betrayal for far too long. They'd both made serious transgressions during the course of their relationship, but it was time to let them go. His time with Ianto was far too fleeting to waste by dwelling on their mistakes.

He attempted some humor to alleviate the tension. "Funny guy, Einstein. Had some crazy ideas. Brilliant, really. But a lousy kisser."

He was relieved when Ianto let out a chuckle, but the younger man almost immediately became serious again. "I'm sorry for the things I said to you, Jack. Some of them were unforgivable."

"Yes," Jack agreed sadly. "Some of them were. But some of the things I said to you were unforgivable as well, and I'm sorry too. We both went too far. The tension's been building up between us for too long. It's partly my fault. I should have known better. I should have insisted that we have a discussion instead of putting it off. It was a cowardly way to behave. I'm ashamed to say that I was afraid."
He was dismayed by the surprise in Ianto's expression. "So you really thing me as heartless as you accused me of being?" he asked despondently.

"No, Jack. I don't think you're heartless. But you have to admit that your track record with lovers is rather a sordid one. And you did stop speaking to me for two months with no explanation."

"True," Jack had acknowledged. How can I protest? I do have a long and sordid history with lovers… But Ianto's different. I just wish he understood that…

"What happens now?" Ianto finally asked.

"The way I see it, we have four options," Jack responded in a business-like manner. He quickly and succinctly listed their options, and was relieved when they agreed to try and work through their issues. In fact, he thought, maybe this fight between us was a good thing after all. It cleared the air. It released the tension. All of the things we've been holding on to for so long are finally out in the open, instead of hiding in the dark recesses of our hearts. Maybe we can truly move forward from here…

They returned to the Hub, and Ianto collapsed, sobbing in his arms. Jack wasn't able to stop the tears falling from his own eyes as he held Ianto tightly in his arms. They'd been so close to destroying what they had together because both of them were extremely stubborn, proud, and vulnerable. Jack hoped that the tides were finally shifting.

He decided they'd talked enough for the day. They both needed a break. There would be plenty of time to discuss things in the future. But when they climbed into bed, Ianto asked him the question that kept plaguing Jack's soul. "Jack, what am I to you? What is this between us?"

"After all this time… After everything. Now you ask me?" Jack asked incredulously.

"Nothing is certain with you. And this is the most unconventional situation I've ever been in."

Jack let out a heavy sigh. He felt his anger returning, and he was struggling to keep his emotions in check. "What do you think this is? What have you been telling yourself? Still holding onto the part-time shag idea? Because I don't think it's going to fly anymore, Ianto. Too much has happened between us."

"I… I don't know," Ianto responded.

Jack felt completely exasperated. "Well, maybe that's one of the problems, Ianto. Maybe you need to figure that out."

Ianto fell asleep a few minutes later, but Jack lay awake, his thoughts racing mercilessly. As the hours ticked by, his anger and resentment grew. I've told him in so many ways what he means to me. I've shared so much with him. How could he ask me that? Is it because I'm a man? Somehow all the rules are different because we're two men? How long is this going to go on? It's been over two years now, and he still can't accept it? Is he going to abandon me again the next time someone calls him gay? How can we begin to put the pieces back together if he doesn't even know what I am to him? These people and their labels… How can they let something so insignificant have such a profound effect on their lives?

He finally climbed out of bed, knowing that sleep would elude him. He showered, dressed, and sat down at his desk, forcing his mind to focus on work. The discovery of the Hitchhiker was a welcome distraction. He wasn't in the mood for another confrontation, and they needed something to do.
He purposely presented them to the doctor at St. Helen's as a gay couple. He wanted to gauge Ianto's reaction. If Ianto still couldn't handle the fact that he was with another man, Jack decided it was better to find out sooner rather than later. Part of him knew he was being spiteful, but he couldn't help himself.

It was with disappointment that he remembered Ianto's comment. "He thought we were together. Like a couple. He said, 'You two.' The way he said it... You two."

"Well, we are," Jack snapped. "Does it matter?"

"I dunno. It's all a bit new to me, that's all."

Jack didn't let himself react or consider Ianto's words because they had a job to do, but as they drove back to the Hub, he was furious. He lashed out at Ianto when the younger man commented about his driving. The words he used made him cringe with regret. "No, you get killed, not me. You'd die like a dog, like an ugly dog!"

He was distracted by Torchwood business – the unusual behavior of the children and the return of Dr. Patanjali. As they watched the doctor pacing outside the water tower, commenting on his tenacity, Gwen exclaimed, "Oh, Christ, never work with a couple. You two talk like twins!"

Jack looked at Gwen and then glanced at Ianto, wondering how the younger man would react, but Ianto's expression was inscrutable. When Gwen left, Ianto's discomfort with her comment became obvious to Jack. "She's calling us a couple now."

"What's your problem?" Jack snapped, unable to keep his anger in check.

"Just saying," Ianto replied defensively.

"I hate the word couple," Jack said spitefully as he walked away.

He stormed into his office, barely catching Ianto's, "Me too," as he slammed his door closed.

He sat down at his desk, fuming with rage. Obviously it's still an issue with him, he thought furiously. We're wasting our time.

He wanted to throw things. He wanted to rant and rave. He wanted to storm out of the Hub, but he couldn't. The unaccountable behavior of the children was too serious for him to spend time dwelling on personal matters. He tried to push aside all thoughts of Ianto.

Jack came back to the present with a start, but he couldn't feel his limbs. Unspeakable agony tore through his very soul. He felt like he was being burned alive. His mind quickly shielded itself again from the physical anguish. He delved back into his memories.
Chapter Notes

Special thanks to my most esteemed beta riftintime.

Jack’s mind continued to drift back over the day's events, his thoughts lingering on the significant moments. He had witnessed for himself the bizarre behavior of the children. He and Ianto had speculated over possible explanations. Gwen realized that children all around the world were speaking in English. He had surmised that English was the dominant language, and Ianto had corrected him, much to his chagrin. Gwen discovered that there was one adult male also affected, and she had traveled to East Grinstead to interview him. Jack's mind, protecting itself from the agony of his re-growing body, replayed the scene between him and Ianto after Gwen's departure.

"Mandarin?" he asked with exasperation. He was offended and hurt by Ianto's attitude towards their relationship, and suddenly everything about the other man irritated him. "You really do know everything, don't you?" he continued with some malice.

Ianto shrugged. "Not everything," he replied evenly. He looked into Jack's eyes, and Jack could see the pain reflected there. "You're still angry?"

Jack sighed heavily and crossed his arms defensively over his chest. Yes, I'm still angry, he thought. Actually, it's more like I'm angry all over again. "What do you want me to say, Ianto?"

"I thought we were going to try and fix things," Ianto replied. "But… I seem to be getting mixed signals from you."

Jack felt his anger boiling over. "I can't believe that after all this time… After everything, you can't even admit that we're together," he blazed.

"Is that why you did that thing at the hospital this morning?" Ianto asked.

Jack ignored him. "Is it still the gay thing, Ianto?" he pressed. "Are you still ashamed of being seen with me? Having people think we're together?"

Of all the problems, obstacles, and complications in their relationship, this issue seemed to Jack to be the most ridiculous and trite. Maybe that's why I'm so angry, Jack thought bitterly. Because we have so many more important things to worry about... I have to face the possibility of losing him every single day... and he chooses to make a fuss about something so... so stupid and insignificant.

"It's not that, Jack. It's just... all very new to me!"

Ianto had said the same thing at the hospital that morning, and Jack had dismissed it as preposterous. Having the younger man repeat it infuriated him. You've got to be fucking kidding me! Jack's temper flared. "New to you?" he roared, throwing up his hands in disgust. "How could it be new to you? It's been over two years!"

"We haven't exactly had the most conventional relationship," Ianto retorted angrily. "We certainly haven't had the most consistent one. And you're not exactly the most conventional of men."
Jack narrowed his eyes. "Oh, so you finally admit that it's a relationship!" he sneered.

"I don't understand where this is coming from," Ianto said, taking a step forward and putting his hand on Jack's arm.

Jack's instinct was to pull away, but he could see the anxiety and confusion in Ianto's expression, and it gave him pause. "Please, Jack. I don't want to fight with you anymore. I just want to understand why you're so angry. I thought you agreed that we both said hurtful things last night, and we needed to let it go."

Jack resisted the urge to withdraw his arm from Ianto's grasp. Ianto's voice held such a pleading tone that he felt his anger receding. He hated to see Ianto in pain, and although he knew that he was at least partially to blame, he couldn't seem to stop himself from lashing out.

He put his hand over Ianto's and took a deep, steadying breath. He closed his eyes, then opened them again. His heart was still pounding from his earlier outburst. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "I guess you're right. I guess I'm still angry," he said honestly.

"So you don't want to try and fix things then?" Ianto asked, and Jack could hear the hesitation and uncertainty in his voice.

"That's not what I'm saying," Jack replied quickly. It wasn't what he wanted. He didn't want to lose Ianto. *I'm just so damn angry that I'm making a bigger mess of things. I need time to calm down... to figure out why this fills me with such rage.* He took another deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to push the rest of his anger aside. "Just... give me some time," he finally added.

Ianto nodded in response. Jack squeezed his hand and then let it go. "Let's go topside and see what's happening," he suggested, suddenly feeling claustrophobic in the oppressive gloominess of the Hub.

They grabbed their coats and silently made their way outside. Jack willed his anger to subside. *You're being irrational,* he told himself. *Maybe that argument, the things he said, hurt me more than I was willing to admit at the time... Maybe I resent him for saying those things far more than I realize...*

Jack headed for the large steps near the Plass and sat down heavily, feeling extremely weary. Ianto sat beside him. "You've never seen anything like this before?" he asked.

Jack shook his head, forcing his thoughts back to their current predicament. "Nothing comes to mind."

"What do you think we're dealing with?"

"I just don't know, Ianto." Jack surveyed the empty area around them. "Lunch time. This place should be buzzing with kids," he commented.

"Everyone's taken them home."

Jack's mind began to work rapidly, running over the evidence they had collected, testing various theories, weighing possible options. "We need a child, because we need to test those frequencies. Find the right frequency, and we can find out who's transmitting," he reasoned.

"Where do you get a child, though? I could find you lasers and weevils and hitchhikers. But kids..." Ianto murmured.

*A child... We need a child... It's imperative.... The lives of everyone on Earth could be at stake.*
Where can I get a child?... Well, there's always... Jack inwardly cringed. He'd hoped to never have to bring his family into Torchwood business. It was one of his most carefully guarded secrets. If anyone or anything found out that he had descendants, they would be a perpetual liability and always be in danger. He'd never even told Ianto. He'd decided that it wasn't worth the risk or the heartache. Ianto managed his bank accounts, but he had several that the younger man didn't know about. He sent his daughter money regularly out of one of those accounts – one with numbers on the account in place of a name.

Jack dreaded seeing his daughter Alice and grandson Steven. Alice's mother, Lucia, a former Torchwood operative, had placed Alice undercover in the late '70s, and Jack had had limited access to both his daughter and her mother. Alice, like Lucia, mistrusted Jack, and had kept her distance. Jack's grandson Steven believed him to be an uncle, and Jack rarely saw either of them.

Family was tricky at the best of times, but Jack's had so many added complications. His immortality was a constant source of adversity. For his offspring, it was beyond endurance, and they resented him for it. For him, it was with them that his curse was the most blatantly evident, and it made him feel wretched. It's a burden that no person should have to bear, he thought bitterly, watching my children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow old and die, while I stay exactly the same... A fixed point in time and space...

He inwardly shuddered. Mentally steeling himself for a confrontation with Alice, he patted Ianto's knee distractedly, stood up, and said, "See you later."

"Where are you going?" Ianto asked.

Ianto's question was inoffensive, but it was enough to bring Jack's suppressed anger surging back to the surface. He was going to face one of his worst inner demons, and Ianto's pettiness over the status of their relationship suddenly irritated him beyond measure. He can never begin to understand what I have to endure... This argument is so... inconsequential. "Now who's a couple?" he asked bitterly before abruptly turning and walking away.

Jack's mind passed rapidly over his confrontation with Alice. It was painful and difficult. It was as he had expected it to be. It was as it always was, and he didn't want to dwell on the subject. He'd been unsuccessful anyway. He'd known the instance he'd laid his eyes on his daughter that she would never let him take Steven away, but he'd had to try.

He could feel his body healing itself, and the pain was gradually decreasing, but it was still acute and unendurable. In his mind, he replayed the next chain of events in rapid succession.

He'd still needed a child in order to discover the frequency of the transmissions, so he had called Dr. Rupesh Patanjali. Gwen had conveniently obtained the young doctor's phone number. Rupesh had readily agreed, and Jack had driven to the hospital. He'd left the SUV at the Hub and had instead driven a neat little sports car that had been an erstwhile trophy from a recent case. It needed to be returned to its owner, but he'd decided to enjoy it while it was still in their possession. I'd hoped to take Ianto out for a spin in it, he thought regretfully.

Rupesh had informed him that there was another body and had taken Jack to see it. Then he'd been shot. It was Rupesh who shot me. Why? Who was he working for?

He pushed aside that conundrum for the time being. He could feel his bones and skin knitting back together. The sensation was repulsive, and he quickly refocused his thoughts.

He'd woken up to find Dr. Patanjali, lying dead next to him. He hadn't stayed around to solve the mystery. He had returned to the Hub.
"We need damage control at St Helen's," he told Ianto when he walked in. "One body. Dr. Rupesh Patanjali. Shot in the back."

"What happened?" Ianto asked, the shock evident in his voice.

"I don't know. He was just left there right beside me. Like someone's gloating." Jack was extremely disconcerted by the event.

"Did they kill you?" Ianto asked.

"Yeah," Jack admitted.

Ianto hugged him awkwardly. Jack knew the younger man was trying to be supportive, and he knew how much Ianto hated it when he died, but there was still so much tension between them. The embrace felt timid and clumsy. Jack usually found great comfort when he held Ianto in his arms, but this time it only served to remind him of how unsettled things were between them. He tried to pull away gracefully. "Maybe we're being targeted," he said. "Whether it was him or me, we should be careful. Better tell Gwen."

"She's back. She's in the lab," Ianto informed him.

"Gwen!" Jack called, walking towards the autopsy bay. "Boy, have I had a day!"

*That's right! Gwen's pregnant!* Jack could feel his body growing stronger. He tentatively tried wiggling his toes. He realized that it was the first attempt he'd made to move his muscles. He was relieved when his toes responded to the command from his brain, but the motion caused a searing pain to shoot up his legs and into his spine. *Not yet,* he told himself.

His mind wandered back to earlier that day, Gwen's shock and awe at the discovery of her pregnancy, and his own excitement for her. "Ianto! We're having a baby!" he announced, wanting to share the news with the younger man. "Have you told Rhys?" he asked Gwen.

"I've only just found out myself," Gwen responded.

Jack was amused. "Oh, you told me before you told him? He is gonna love that!"

They all laughed. "Congratulations!" he heard Ianto say. "Would now be a good time to tell you I lost the car?"

Ianto's words almost didn't register with all of the excitement of the moment, but Jack wasn't *that* distracted. "You did what?" he roared, whipping around to face the younger man.

"That is just bloody spectacular!" Gwen murmured, completely oblivious to Ianto's admission. "But what about this place, and my job?"

Jack momentarily dismissed the news about the SUV. *I'll get back to that later.* He laid his hand reassuringly on top of Gwen's, which was still on the alien scanner. "We'll manage. We always do."

An alarm rang out through the Hub. "What the hell is that?" Gwen asked.

When he'd put his hand on Gwen's, the scanner had detected another presence and assessed the new information. Jack stared in horror at the projection on the wall as the magnitude of what he was seeing began to dawn on him. "Oh my God!" he exclaimed.

"There's a bomb! There's a bomb inside your stomach!" Ianto cried.
Jack's heart began racing as he recalled the succeeding events – his desperation to save Ianto and Gwen, his terror, his realization that the Hub would be completely destroyed and that they would lose everything. Jack’s breathing became increasingly more rapid as he remembered.

He frantically ordered them out of the Hub, but they both protested. He finally succeeded in convincing Gwen to run by reminding her that she was pregnant, but Ianto refused to leave. He panicked when he heard the computerized voice announcing, "Torchwood lockdown. Torchwood lockdown."

"Ianto, you're going to get locked inside!" Jack shouted, but Ianto ignored him. Gwen had escaped, and he needed to know that Ianto was safe as well. "Ianto! And you!"

Jack physically dragged him away from the computer, while Ianto struggled desperately against him. "There must be a way to override the mechanism!" the younger man shouted.

Jack was wrestling him towards the lift, and Ianto was fighting him every step of the way. "For God's sake, get out!" Jack yelled.

"There'll be nothing left of you!" Ianto wailed.

"I can survive anything!" Jack shouted. "But you can't! You're mortal! I need to know you're safe! You have to survive! I need you... I love you."

Jack realized in that moment that nothing else mattered. All of their arguments and misunderstandings were meaningless. He couldn't lose Ianto. He pulled Ianto close and kissed him desperately, letting all of his defenses fall away. He knew Ianto would sense the emotions radiating off him. He knew Ianto would understand.

He broke the kiss, pushed Ianto onto the invisible lift, and used his wrist strap to start its ascent.

He maintained eye contact with Ianto as the lift rose to the surface, drawing courage from the younger man. Be safe. Survive. You have to survive. I need you to be there when this is over. "I'll come back," Jack said aloud, but he couldn't deny a trace of uncertainty. As if to reassure himself, he added. "I always do."

He saw Ianto reach the surface, and he glanced at the countdown timer. Four... three... two... one...

Jack closed his eyes the moment before he felt his body being torn apart.

Jack's body jerked and his eyes flew open. He was whole again. His body had knitted itself back together. He was lying naked, strapped helplessly to a metal table, and he was filled with rage. Whoever these people were, they had tried to kill all of them. They had destroyed the Hub. They had tried to destroy Torchwood. "You bastards!" he roared, struggling against his restraints. "You fucking bastards! Where the hell are you? Come out and face me like a man!"

Light descended over him, and he looked up to see a hatch in the ceiling opened to the outside world. "I'm not a man," a woman's voice announced.

"Who are you? What's all this about?" Jack demanded.

"Apparently you can't die," the woman responded calmly. "So it would be foolish to tell you anything. But I will say this. If I can't kill you... I can contain you."

Jack watched in horror as a hose was lowered into the hatch above him. Thick grey liquid poured from the hose. As the odor of the substance reached his nostrils, he knew immediately what it was. Oh my gods, it's concrete! They're going to encase me in concrete.
He screamed in terror as the wet concrete poured continuously over his body. Panic rose in him as it filled his nose and mouth. He struggled desperately against his restraints, choking, unable to breathe. Then the darkness came.
Ianto's eyes flew open, and he involuntarily started coughing. Dust and smoke filled the air, and his lungs worked hard to expel it. Something heavy was lying across his legs, his face was throbbing and wet with blood, and he could hear nothing but an intense ringing sound in his ears. *Temporary hearing loss from the blast,* he told himself. *Don't lose your head. You need to focus.*

He moved each of his limbs in turn, checking himself for injury. He sat up and continued coughing until he was finally able to take a deep breath. He freed his legs from the debris and palpated them tenderly. *No broken bones,* he thought with relief. *Miraculously, I seem to be in one piece.*

He began to climb out of the wreckage. *Jack. My God, what's happened to Jack? I need to find him.* The thought of his lover at the heart of the explosion drove him on, and he continued to push his way through the debris until he reached the top of the wreckage. He was scanning the destruction, wondering where he should begin his search for Jack when he noticed a red beam of light wavering through the smoke filled air. He knew instantly what it was. *Sniper!*

Ianto felt a surge of adrenaline as he began to run. One bullet whizzed past his shoulder, and another hit the ground near his left foot. He continued running in a zig-zag pattern, knowing it would make him a more challenging target. He made for the cover of a nearby alley to momentarily catch his breath. When another bullet nearly grazed his ear, he began to run again. He ran until he couldn't run anymore, then he slowed to a walk, but he kept on moving. His hearing was starting to return, and the familiar din of the Cardiff streets was buzzing in his ears.

He spotted a phone box and looked around carefully before pushing the door open. He knew better than to use his mobile phone. He called Gwen's landline, certain she would head to her flat to collect Rhys. As the phone rang, he whispered, "Come on, come on, come on."

Rhys answered the phone. "It's Ianto. Is she there? Is she okay?"

Ianto breathed a sigh of relief when he heard Gwen's voice. "Ianto, are you okay?"

"Yeah. Have you heard from Jack?" he asked anxiously.

"No. No I haven't. Sorry, hang on." Ianto heard a rustling sound coming from Gwen's end of the line. "Do you think he survived?" she asked after a moment.

"He usually does," he said, more to reassure himself than Gwen. "Who was it? Any idea?"

"Yeah, I had a run-in with one of them. Said he was working for the government."

*The government? Why would the government want to destroy Torchwood?* "That doesn't make sense," he said into the phone.

"How did they get close enough to plant it inside him, Ianto?" she asked.
Ianto had already figured that one out. "It was him – that Dr. Rupesh guy. He was shot and killed in the hospital earlier tonight. It must've been then."

Ianto heard her giving Rhys directions. She must be on the run… "Er, where shall we meet, Ianto?"

"Your phone… Your phone could be bugged," he warned her.

"Erm, right… Uh… Remember the last time we had ice cream together?"

Ianto was drawing a complete blank. "No."

"Yeah, you do. After the Grand Slam?"

_What the hell is she on about? _"I don't like ice cream. It gives me a headache."

He heard a car horn sounding from Gwen's end of the line. "I've got to go," she said, and the line went dead.

" Damn!" he exclaimed as he slammed the phone down.

He exited the booth and started to walk, trying to put the pieces together. _But it doesn't make sense. The government is trying to kill us? Why? We're on the same side! Especially with everything happening with the children, they need us! Why would they want to destroy Torchwood? We're the experts on aliens!_

For several hours he walked the side streets of Cardiff, staying off the main roads, keeping to the shadows, and trying to come up with a plan. He was constantly looking over his shoulder. Every car looked sinister, every pedestrian was a possible assassin. He was desperate to go back to the destroyed Hub and dig Jack out of the rubble, but first he had to make sure he wasn't being followed.

_Who can I turn to for help? If the government is involved, then everyone we know could be compromised… If they went to Gwen's flat… Lucky thing that I live at the Hub and don't have a flat anymore… But I have family in the area… _His heart started racing, as he feared for the safety of his sister and her family. _Please God, let them be okay…_

It was just after 3:00am, and Ianto was uncertain whether or not he'd successfully evaded his pursuers. A van pulled up behind him, and he was convinced that he'd been caught. He stopped dead in his tracks, preparing himself to run or to fight, his heart thudding loudly against his chest. The van door opened and a man stepped out, a stack of newspapers in his arms. Ianto breathed a sigh of relief, cursing himself for losing his nerve. He waited until the man got back into the van, then he jogged over to the stack of newspapers. The headline was full of the message from the children. _I need to find Jack, and I need to find him now!_

He doubled back to the Hub, taking a long and circuitous route. Under the last vestiges of darkness, he crept onto the roof of a nearby building to watch and wait. The wreckage of the Hub was swarming with search and rescue teams. He watched as they loaded several black body bags into a van, knowing they contained the remains of the man he loved.

He swallowed down the bile that had risen in his throat and forced himself to concentrate. When the last bag had been loaded into the van and the doors were closed, he noted the plate number. Knowing he was too traumatized to depend on his memory, he wrote the number down on his hand.

He left the roof and exited the building, but he had to stop as the nausea he'd been fighting finally won the battle. He leaned over and vomited, his gut twisting violently as he retched. The thought of Jack's body in pieces was too horrendous to comprehend. For the first time ever, Ianto prayed that
Jack would stay dead, at least for the time being. Please God, don't let him be conscious of what's happening to him.

He leaned his head against the cool brick of the building, trying to still his roiling stomach. Pull yourself together, Jones, he reproved himself. You need to save Jack. He took several deep breaths and swallowed hard. The nausea seemed to have subsided for the moment. I need a computer, I need a car, and I can't think of anyone to ask except for Rhiannon. Steeling himself, he stood up straight. His legs felt wobbly beneath him, but he forced them to move forward.

He nipped into a café to buy a cup of coffee. It probably wasn't the best choice for his upset stomach, but he needed the caffeine. As he was paying for the coffee, he noticed a display of greeting cards. He picked one up and added it to his purchase. I can use it to write a note to Rhiannon, he reasoned, pocketing the card and taking a sip of the coffee. It was only passable, but the warmth of the liquid soothed his raw throat.

He hailed a passing taxi and directed the driver to his sister's neighborhood. As he sat in the back of the taxi, he opened the card, trying to come up with a message that only she would understand. He finally wrote, "Where dad broke my leg at noon. Bring laptop. I."

When he was several blocks away from Rhiannon's house, he had the driver stop. He paid and exited the car, waiting until the taxi had driven away before taking a back route to his sisters, cutting through a neighbor's garden. His original idea had been to put the greeting card in her letterbox, but as he approached the house, he spotted a surveillance car.

He cursed silently and turned back the way he'd come. The newspaper delivery boy was walking up the steps of a neighbor's house. He quickly intercepted the boy and paid him ten quid to deliver a paper to his sister's with the greeting card enclosed.

Then he walked the several miles to the park where he'd asked Rhiannon to meet him. He stood watching the area from afar, remembering the day that his father had broken his leg, all those years ago. He had been twelve years old when it happened. It had been one month after his mother's suicide. His father, in one of his ugly, drunken moments, had decided that they were going to go on a family outing to the playground. Both he and his sister had protested, complaining that they were too old for the playground, but their father had become enraged when they objected, so they had silently acquiesced.

It had been a horribly uncomfortable outing. Neither he nor Rhiannon had known what to do when they got there. Rhiannon had sat uneasily on a bench beside their father, and Ianto had wandered over to the swing set, desperate to get away from him. He had begun to swing slowly, watching the younger children playing, when his father had come up behind him and began pushing him roughly. Ianto had cried out and begged him to stop, but his father had laughed cruelly and accused him of being a 'nancy-boy.'

He'd finally pushed so hard that Ianto had lost his grip and fallen off the swing. His father had laughed derisively and demanded that he get up and stop crying like a baby, but Ianto's leg wouldn't support his weight and the pain had been exquisite. It had finally taken one of the other mothers in the park to convince their father that Ianto was truly injured and that he needed to go to the hospital.

He grimaced as he remembered the scene. His father had humiliated him, ridiculed him, and broken his leg. But Rhiannon had taken their father's side and defended his actions. She always took his side, he thought bitterly.

He watched as his sister approached the playground and sat down on a bench. He scanned the area again, then walked towards her, looking carefully around as he neared. "Hey," he greeted her.
"Oh my God! What happened to you?" Rhiannon exclaimed when she saw him.

"I'm not sure yet," Ianto answered honestly.

He kept on looking around, half-expecting a sniper bullet to end his life at any moment. "I wasn't followed," Rhiannon assured him. "Sit down."

Ianto sat on the bench beside her, his eyes continuing to scan the area. "You worked out my little code, then?" he asked with a trace of irony in his voice.

"Dad didn't break your leg on purpose, you know," she said.

Inwardly he rolled his eyes. It was the same old argument, and they'd had it dozens of times. She always took his side... And she wonders why we're not close... "He pushed me too hard. He always did."

"Well, you should've held on tighter."

Ianto wanted to protest, but they'd had this conversation so many times. She would never see any point of view but her own. She had never admitted that he had been mistreated by both of their parents, and Ianto had never forgiven her for it. It was the main reason why the estrangement between them existed. But now wasn't the time to quarrel with his sister. He needed her help.

"Seriously. How did you get in that state?" she continued.

"That bomb. It was meant for me and the people I work with," he said succinctly.

"My God! Why?" she cried.

"I don't know," he replied. But I'm going to find out...

"What sort of civil servants are you?" she asked with indignation.

Ianto half-laughed. "Unappreciated ones."

"Are they okay? The people you work with?"

"I don't know. Gwen's alive, but there's no way of contacting her. I'm not sure about Jack." It was difficult for him to say the words aloud.

"Is he your boss? The one Susan saw you with?" she asked hesitantly.

You mean, is he my lover? he thought. She can't say it yet. Perhaps now that she's had some time to think about it, she's less willing to accept it... "He'll be okay." He wasn't sure if he was trying to convince his sister or himself. "They won't get rid of him that easy. I just need to find him."

His train of thought was abruptly cut short when he noticed that all of the children on the playground had stopped moving. It's happening again! Every child in sight began chanting in unison, "We are coming tomorrow. We are coming tomorrow."

Ianto jumped up. "This has something to do with it. It must do. When they tried to blow us up, this is what we were working on."

Then as suddenly as it had started, it stopped, and the children returned to normal. He ran to the nearest child and tried to question her, but her mother became alarmed and ordered him away. "It happened to David and Mica," Rhiannon told him, hanging up her phone. "What is it? What is it?"
"I don't know. But this is what we do. We deal with things like this." Ianto felt relieved at being able to tell his sister the truth about his job. He'd kept it a secret for so long.

"So deal with it. Stop it," Rhiannon beseeched him.

"I need to find Jack. Give me that," he took the laptop computer from her hands.

"How will this help?" she asked, relinquishing the laptop.

"I took the number of the van they put him in. You can track any vehicle with the right computer programs."

"Really?" she asked.

"Yeah. Give me the car keys."

"Oh, Johnny'll do his nut!" she wailed, rummaging in her purse.

"Please! We don't have time to spare," he pleaded.

She handed him the keys, and he began to run towards her car.

"A thank you would be nice!" she called after him.

He turned around briefly. Rhiannon was running after him. "Look, I'm sorry. I've got to go. Thanks for all this," he called over his shoulder as he got into the car.

"Be careful!" he heard Rhiannon say as he drove away.

Ianto spent an hour on the computer, tracking the van that took Jack's body away from the Hub. He traced it to a military facility outside of town. He bought a pair of binoculars from a pawnshop, drove to the location, and found a secluded vantage point to do some recognizance.

He wasn't certain where they were holding Jack until he saw the cement truck pull up. As he watched the liquid concrete being poured into one of the holding cells, he knew it was Jack they were encasing in concrete. His heart ached for Jack's suffering, and his eyes filled with tears, but he had to remain focused. He came up with a plan.

He left Rhiannon's car parked at the edge of a nearby quarry, and stole the forklift. Disguised as a construction worker, he drove as near to Jack's holding cell as he dared and waited for his chance. When he saw Gwen and Rhys drive up through his binoculars, he knew that the time had come. He drove the forklift up to Jack's cell and broke through the brick wall, then reversed the forklift as he removed Jack's concrete cell from the building.

Gwen and Rhys came running through the dust of the newly created cavity. "Come on, get on!" Ianto shouted.

"Ah, Ianto. You took your time," Gwen said as she and Rhys jumped onto the back of the forklift.

Ianto drove away as gunfire filled the air. He let Gwen and Rhys off long enough to use a nearby truck to set up a roadblock. When they jumped back on, he drove as fast as the forklift would go towards the quarry. His mind was fixated on saving Jack.

"Where are you taking us, Ianto?" Rhys asked.

Ianto didn't reply as Rhiannon's car came into view. He turned the forklift around and stopped it at
the edge of the quarry.

"What are we doing?" Gwen asked.

"You'll see in a moment. Get the car started! We've only got a few minutes. Come on!"

Gwen and Rhys jumped off, and Ianto expertly maneuvered the forklift controls to extend the concrete block over the edge of the quarry. "Come on, come on, come on," he mumbled as the forklift arm slowly extended to its full length.

When he had cleared the edge, he released the block, listening as it fell and smashed on the ground far below. He jumped out of the forklift and scrambled into the car. "Drive down to the bottom," he ordered Gwen.

Ianto was overwhelmed with relief on seeing Jack alive and well, and he felt his entire body relax for the first time since the Hub's destruction. He realized just how terrified he'd been that Jack wouldn't survive the explosion. Thank God! He couldn't help grinning at the sight of Jack standing naked and in chains. "Told you I'd be back," Jack announced victoriously.

"With a little help from us," Ianto said, beaming at him.

"What the hell is going on?" Jack asked.

Gwen held her hand out to Rhys, who took his coat off and passed it to her. "Dunno yet, but the latest from the kids is that it's happening tomorrow."

"I'm just in time, then," Jack said, walking towards them.

"Get in the car. Come on, we've got work to do," Gwen said, holding the coat out to him and averting her gaze.

Jack took it from her and threw it casually over his shoulder, shamelessly hiding nothing. He winked at Ianto as he passed by and got into the back seat of the car. Ianto climbed in next to him. He put his hand over Jack's as Gwen drove the car away at breakneck speed. Jack squeezed his hand reassuringly. "You okay?" Ianto whispered, looking at Jack with concern.

"I'm fine, Ianto." Jack raised his manacled hands and touched Ianto's cheek, running his fingers gingerly over the wound on the younger man's face. "You're hurt," Jack said, and his voice held a note of anxiety.

"Just a scratch," Ianto assured him. "No broken bones," he added with a smile. Then indicating the handcuffs, he said, "Let me get those things off you."

"I thought you liked me in bondage," Jack quipped.

Unable to control himself any longer, Ianto grabbed Jack around the neck and kissed him hard on the lips. "Hey, none of that in my car! Especially with him naked!" Rhys scolded.

They broke the kiss. Ianto rolled his eyes, and Jack chuckled. "It's my sister's car," Ianto corrected him. "So bugger off."

Ianto still had his hand on Jack's face. Jack placed his hand on top of Ianto's. "I'm fine," he said again, looking steadily into Ianto's eyes.

"Where are we going?" Gwen asked, interrupting their moment.
Ianto gave them the location of the safe house he'd chosen – an old Torchwood holding facility abandoned in the '90s. He worked deftly on Jack's handcuffs, finally managing to manipulate the lock open. Jack rubbed his wrists as the shackles fell away. The he took Ianto's hand again and held it tightly in his.

Gwen and Ianto began filling Jack in as they drove. Jack was strangely silent as he listened. He held Ianto's hand firmly, but he said almost nothing. When both Ianto and Gwen had told him everything they knew, Jack said, "So, the Hub has been destroyed, aliens are invading tomorrow, and the government is trying to kill us."

"That about sums it up," Ianto said.

"But we're still Torchwood," Jack said in his best captain's voice. "And we can still beat this thing."

"Bloody hell!" Rhys exclaimed. "I can't look at you like that anymore, Jack, and I certainly can't take you seriously. We need to find you something to wear. Gwen, pull the car over. Ianto, is there anything in the boot?"

Ianto shrugged. He hadn't bothered to look. "Might be," he replied.

Gwen obediently pulled the car over. "Does my nudity make you uncomfortable, Rhys?" Jack asked cheekily. "Most people enjoy it."

"Aye, well not me, mate," Rhys said, opening the car door and getting out.

"Ianto likes it anyway," Jack commented.


Jack turned to look at him, feigning outrage. "Not bad? That's all I get?"

"You're rather dirty," Ianto said, casting his eyes appraisingly over Jack's body.

"I thought you liked me dirty," Jack said with a lascivious grin.

"Well..." Ianto smiled, rubbing at some dirt on Jack's chest. "Since you put it like that..."

"Oi!" Gwen interjected. She rolled down the window. "Rhys, any luck with those clothes? You'd better hurry or those two will get us arrested for indecency."

Jack and Ianto grinned at each other. Rhys returned to the car with a bundle of clothes and threw them at Jack. Jack unfolded the bundle to reveal an old pair of tracksuit bottoms, a t-shirt, and a well-worn pair of work boots. Ianto wondered briefly who they belonged to. "Really?" Jack said as he looked at the garments scornfully.

"Just put them on, Jack," Rhys said as he got back into the car. "Then you can do your authoritative voice thing."

Jack winked at Ianto and grinned. He lazily pulled on the clothing, as the car started moving again. Ianto leaned his head back and yawned. He hadn't slept in two days, and now that Jack was safe, and the rush of adrenaline had passed, he was suddenly exhausted.

Jack put his arm around him, and he immediately fell asleep against Jack's chest.
Ianto opened his eyes and blinked in confusion, momentarily uncertain where he was. His head was resting on something warm and firm, which he eventually realized were Jack's legs. He rubbed his eyes. They were still in his sister's car, which was pulled over to the side of the road, under the cover of a low-slung tree. The sun was just beginning to peer over the horizon, a sliver of the red-orange light casing an eerie hue over the surroundings. Gwen and Rhys were asleep in the front seats, and Jack was staring out the back seat window. He turned and looked at Ianto when the younger man sat up. "Hey," he said in a soft voice.

"Hey," Ianto answered, stifling a yawn. "Where are we?" he murmured.

"Not really sure," Jack replied. "Somewhere between Cardiff and London. Gwen was falling asleep at the wheel, so I told her to pull over and get some rest. I guess you all haven't had much sleep in the past couple of days."

"How could we sleep with you…" Ianto's voice faded. He was uncertain of how to finish the sentence. *How could we sleep with you in pieces?* He couldn't say it aloud.

"Thanks for coming to get me," Jack said, rubbing Ianto's thigh.


Jack tried to smile, but it faltered on his lips, as though the muscles couldn't quite finish the action. "What is it, Jack?" Ianto asked, frowning.

"Everything's gone, Ianto. The Hub, our equipment, our resources… All the bodies in the morgue…" Jack closed his eyes tightly and shook his head, as though willing the thought out of his mind.

*My God, the bodies in the Morgue… Tosh, Susie… and Grey! His brother was in hibernation. Is he dead now?* Ianto swallowed hard at the lump forming in his throat. He didn't know what to say. He took Jack's hand, squeezing it reassuringly, hoping the gesture would say what words could not.

Jack opened his eyes and looked down at himself, snorting derisively. "Even my clothes are gone. It's like everything – everything that I've ever had has been taken away from me."

"You don't need the Hub to be the leader of Torchwood. You still have the people around you who believe in you."

"Oh, you mean the ones I use and then toss aside?" Jack asked contemptuously, pulling his hand out of Ianto's grasp.

"Jack!" Ianto hissed reprovingly. He couldn't believe that Jack was throwing their argument back in his face. *Not now, of all times!*
Jack held up his hand defensively. "I'm sorry. I'm just… I just feel so lost."


Jack looked at him. He opened his mouth to reply, but whatever he was going to say was interrupted by a stirring from the front seat. Gwen was awake. "How ya doing, Gwen?"  Jack asked cheerfully. "Feel better after some sleep?"

Ianto eyed Jack curiously at his sudden shift in mood. Jack caught his gaze and gave him a look, which Ianto immediately understood to mean that he didn't want Gwen to see that he was distraught. *Has he begun to confide in me again?* Ianto thought hopefully. *Have we finally turned a corner?*

"Much better," Gwen replied, stretching her arms over her head. "Let's get moving, yeah? Don't want to stay in one place for too long. Besides, not much further now."

She started the car and began to drive. Ianto eyed Jack surreptitiously, but no sign of his momentary dismay was apparent. He looked cool and confident. *What has Jack endured these past twenty-four hours, Ianto wondered. He was blown apart, then encased in concrete. What does that kind of suffering do to a man's soul? Was he conscious of what was happening to him?* Ianto inwardly shuddered, hoping Jack was blissfully unaware of the torture his body had suffered.

Within an hour, they had arrived at the location that Ianto had given them, which was on the outskirts of London, on the road towards Cardiff. She pulled up in front of a large, dilapidated building. Gwen shook Rhys' arm. "Wake up, Rhys. We're here."

"Oh, brilliant. Where's here then?" Rhys asked flippantly, his voice stifled by a yawn.

Ianto, determined to make the best of the situation, jumped out of the car and opened the boot. He rummaged around until he found a crowbar. When he emerged from his search, he saw that the others had gotten out of the car too and were staring at the enormous warehouse with various looks of disappointment. He marched determinedly to the door and cut the padlock. Then he slid the door open. They walked in, and he tossed the padlock aside dramatically. "This is us," he announced proudly. "This is Torchwood." He turned, smiling, to look at his team. "This is home."

No one looked impressed. Gwen tried to smile, but it didn't reach her eyes. The warehouse was dark, wet, musty, and disconcertingly barren, but it would do. "Let's see if we can get some heat," he said in a business-like manner. "Rhys, see what you can do. I'll find us somewhere to sit."

He began to search their new headquarters. There wasn't much in the vastly empty space, but the upstairs had working plumbing, with bathrooms and showers, and dilapidated sleeping quarters, where several bed frames with dusty mattresses remained. Towards the rear of the warehouse, on the main level, he found an old, battered sofa. "Over here," he called to the others, who were milling around looking useless.

Jack walked over and slunk down on the sofa. "There's an industrial rubbish bin here," Rhys called. "We can light a fire in it for some warmth."

"Brilliant. We're like homeless people," Gwen quipped.

Ianto sat down on the opposite side of the sofa, suddenly feeling extremely weary. He'd gotten them there. Now they needed Jack to act like their leader and take charge. Rhys rolled the metal barrel closer and set to work. They all watched him as though spellbound by the procedure. There was a whoosh of flames as he got the fire started. "Whoa!" he exclaimed. "Almost lost my eyebrows! Still, I'm good for something, see? Old boy scout!"
"I'm freezing," Gwen announced with vexation.

"Is anyone going to see us in here? You know, with all this fire-lighting stuff?" Rhys asked.

"It was abandoned in the '90s," Ianto explained. "Used to be a Torchwood holding facility. Torchwood One."

"Been rusting away for years," Jack added.

"So what do we do? Just sit here?" Gwen asked.

"Worse than that, do I have to stay in these clothes?" Jack wailed. "I mean, come on. Tracksuit bottoms? Not a good look!"

Ianto eyed him critically. *He has a point,* he thought, trying not to laugh. *We all look like hell. We've all been through hell.*

"Jack, they're arriving today," Gwen told him. "That alien voice-thing said today, and we're stuck in the back end of beyond."

Jack slapped the sofa between him and Ianto, indicating for Gwen to sit down. "Yeah. But we're together. The old team. We're down, but not out, yeah?" Gwen sat down between them. "We've survived worse than this," Jack reminded her.

"Yeah," Gwen agreed.

"Besides, I don't know how much fighting you should do, in your condition," Jack added.

*Uh oh,* Ianto thought, looking sideways at Rhys. *That's torn it. Did he do that on purpose?* 

"What does that mean?" Rhys demanded.

"Christ, Jack!" Gwen hissed.

"He knows you're pregnant? You told him before me, didn't you?" Rhys accused her.

"Rhys, he happened to be there, and it happened really, really fast."

"Last to know!" Rhys yelled. "Last to bloody know! Well, thank you very much!"

He stomped off, and Gwen got up to follow him saying, "Don't be stupid, man. Hey, don't be so…" She turned to Jack, "Couldn't you just keep it shut?" she seethed before following Rhys, calling after him.

"All together," Ianto jibed. "The old team."

Jack smirked, and Ianto caught the look. "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

Jack grinned slyly at him. "They needed a distraction. Getting too maudlin."

"And you?" Ianto asked. "How are you holding up, track suit bottoms and all?"

Jack grinned and patted the seat next to him. Ianto slid over, and Jack put an arm around him. "I've got you," he whispered, pulling him close and pressing his forehead against Ianto's.

"Yeah, you do," Ianto replied. He closed the space between them and kissed Jack's lips, cupping the
back of Jack's neck in his hand.

Ianto allowed himself a moment to lose himself in the kiss. He opened his mouth, letting his tongue graze gently against Jack's. A hunger woke in Ianto. *It's been days,* he reminded himself, shifting uncomfortably as his trousers became uncomfortably tight. He put his hand underneath Jack's t-shirt and caressed the warm skin of Jack's abdomen, reveling in Jack's wholeness.

Jack broke the kiss suddenly, looking uncomfortable. "What is it, Jack?" Ianto asked. "Gwen and Rhys will be fighting for at least half an hour," he added with a grin.

"I just feel… uncomfortable in these clothes," Jack explained. Ianto looked at him curiously. "I don't feel like myself," Jack added.

"Well, I do miss the coat," Ianto teased. "But you're still my Jack."

Jack started and looked surprised. Ianto realized that it had been a long time since he'd called him 'his' Jack. He suddenly felt embarrassed and pulled away awkwardly. *A few days ago we were screaming at each other, saying terrible things, and talking about ending our relationship. Just because we both nearly died doesn't change the fact that there's still all this unresolved tension between us. Damn, Ianto reprimanded himself. It was too soon. I shouldn't have said that.*

He was about to try and change the subject, suggesting that they get to work, but to his amazement, Jack took him into his arms again and held him tightly. "Thanks," he whispered.

Ianto was uncertain what he was being thanked for, but he wasn't about to ask questions. Jack started kissing him again, and Ianto responded with enthusiasm.

"Bloody hell!"

At the sound of Rhys' outburst, they broke apart. "Can't leave you two alone for ten bloody minutes without shenanigans."

Jack winked at Ianto. "Come on, Rhys," Jack said, standing up. "Let's take a look around, see what we can find."

He put an arm around Rhys and led him away. Ianto sat for a few minutes thinking seriously. He had no idea what had just happened between them. *Things with Jack are always so bloody confusing,* he thought with exasperation. *But I guess it keeps things interesting…*

"Come on, team. Let's get this place in working order," Jack called.

They began to search the area, looking for any usable furniture and equipment. Ianto walked away from the others and sat down on the metal staircase. He took out his mobile phone and powered it on. He called Rhiannon's neighbor, Mac, whom he'd known for many years. He felt he should let Rhiannon know he was alive. "Yeah, it's me. Listen, I can't talk. Just give her the thumbs up. She'll know what it means," he said before quickly hanging up and turning the phone off again. He knew it hadn't been on long enough to be traced.

He stared at the phone, hoping his sister and her family were safe. Jack called out, "Gwen, Ianto, Rhys, it's time to pool our resources."

They gathered together and emptied their pockets onto a table. Jack took charge, pointing out each item as he listed it. "So, we've got… Guns, okay, and a pen knife. Laptop, now dead. Credit cards and a phone, which they can trace. Lemsip, book of stamps, pair of contact lenses, and fifteen quid."
"Plus twenty-five pence," Gwen added. "And some bloody alien thing turning up today."

"We've still got some of the Torchwood software though," Ianto explained. "We've lost the Hub, but the software still exists on the server. Trouble is we're going to need some more equipment, not to mention electricity."

"And how are we going to manage that, hidden away like criminals?" Rhys asked.

That was when Gwen had her brilliant idea. She spent an hour teaching them some of the tricks she'd witnessed during her time as a policewoman. Then they drove Rhiannon's car into London. It was still early in the morning, and there were plenty of unsuspecting people on their way to work. They used their newfound skills to steal everything they needed.

Once Ianto had stolen a credit card and helped Gwen to lift a laptop computer by staging a fight with Rhys, he pulled Gwen aside. "Is it alright if I take the car?" he asked. "I have some things I need to do, and it might take me a few hours."

"Ianto, we still have lots of equipment we need to get," Gwen said, looking anxious.

"I'm sure the rest of you can handle it," he replied confidently. "And I think Jack was planning on procuring us another car."

"You sure?" Gwen hedged, not sounding convinced.

"It's important," Ianto told her.

"Okay… See you back at the warehouse," Gwen said. "Be safe," she added as he started to walk away. "Don't get arrested!"

"You too," he called over his shoulder.

He got into the car and set about gathering essentials. He knew that the others would be focused on technology, and it would take them several hours to get all that they needed. It was up to him to make them as comfortable as possible. Besides, I know Jack. He'll never feel like the leader of Torchwood unless he has his uniform… and I won't feel like myself until I have something decent to wear. We could all use some fresh clothing.

He headed back to Cardiff. It was a long drive, even though he broke every speeding law, and he knew it was a huge risk, but it was one he was willing to take. Somehow, he felt it was important. Besides, he reasoned, it's been a while since I've lived in London. I'm more familiar with the shops in Cardiff. I can do in half an hour what it would take me hours to do in London.

He pulled up in front of Higgins and Brown, the bespoke tailors where Jack had taken him for his birthday. They hadn't collected his new suit, and he wanted it desperately. He explained his disheveled appearance to the surprised staff by saying he'd been mugged. He emerged from the tailors with his new suit carefully sealed in a suit bag. Luckily, Jack had insisted on buying a shirt and tie to match. He then made his way to the nearest army surplus store. He knew exactly what he needed, and the entire purchase only took him a few minutes. Feeling rather pleased with himself, he headed into the nearby shops to buy clothes for Rhys and Gwen, and to collect some other necessities.

He checked his watch as he walked back to his sister's car. It was just past one o'clock. He drove as fast as Rhiannon's car would go back to the new Hub.

He chuckled to himself when he saw the fancy, dark blue sports car parked outside the warehouse.
That must have been Jack, he thought with amusement. He does have a soft spot for sports cars. He opened the warehouse door, calling, "I see we've got a new car outside." He approached the others with his bags of purchases in hand. "Nice. Very smart," he added.

"Where have you been? We thought you'd got arrested," Jack said angrily.

"Just buying essentials," he explained calmly, setting his purchases down on a table with an audible exhalation. "Technology's one thing, but let's not forget the creature comforts." He reached into the nearest bag. "Coffee, obviously," he brandished the package before putting it down. Then he reached into another bag. "Got some do-da," he added, holding up a packet of toilet paper.

"Thank God!" Gwen exclaimed and Rhys laughed.

"And more importantly..." He collected the various other bags, setting his new suit on the sofa. "I didn't know your exact sizes, but I reckon I've got a good eye." He threw Gwen and Rhys their bags of clothing.

"Oh, brilliant, I am stinking!" Gwen said peering inside her bag, which not only held new clothing, but toiletry items as well.

"Nice one!" Rhys added as he examined the contents of his bag.

"And for you, Sir," he walked up to Jack and proffered the package. "Army surplus special."

"Oh, you are kidding me!" Jack exclaimed with a light of excitement in his eyes.

Ianto held his hands up, thinking with satisfaction, my work here is done!

They each took turns in the shower room, washing and dressing in their new clothes. When Ianto was dressed, he took a moment to admire the elegant fit and cut of his new suit in the cracked and rusted mirror. The luxurious fabric felt wonderful against his skin. Totally worth the drive, he thought happily.

Jack took the last turn in the shower. When he returned in full 1940's military regalia, including the authentic R.A.F. greatcoat, and looking like himself again, Ianto couldn't help but admire the drama of the scene. I'm back, Jack announced proudly.

Everyone applauded and cheered. Ianto couldn't help feeling proud of himself for giving each of them what they needed to regain their confidence. "Now, let's get to work," Jack said with undeniable authority back in his voice.

As they began to set up their workstations, Jack came up behind Ianto and put his arms around the younger man, pulling him against his chest for a brief moment. "Thank you," he whispered into Ianto's ear before releasing him again.

Ianto turned around to respond, but Jack was already instructing Gwen and Rhys on the arrangement of tables and computers.

Ianto smiled and turned back to work. He's back, he told himself.

As they began to unravel the mystery behind the children and the government's involvement, they quickly realized that they needed to get inside Whitehall if they were going to get any answers. Gwen took Rhiannon's car, determined to try and convince Lois Habiba to use the Torchwood contact lenses.
As they waited for word from Gwen, Rhys busied himself in their makeshift kitchen, and Ianto and Jack worked side-by-side on the computers. "Is that the suit I bought you?" Jack asked.

"I didn't think you'd noticed," Ianto said, smiling.

"Of course I noticed," Jack scolded. "You drove all the way back to Cardiff for it?"

"Seemed important," Ianto replied mildly.

"Well, it was really dangerous, Ianto," Jack said sternly. "And a stupid risk. You could have been captured, or worse..." Jack's voice softened when he added, "But you look gorgeous."


"Makes you look tough," Jack said, smiling at him. "It's kind of a turn on."

Ianto looked at Jack, who was focused on the computer in front of him. He had been waiting for an opportunity to talk to Jack about what he'd experienced, and now seemed like as good a time as any. Jack interrupted his thoughts. "Frobisher's the key to this. He's just a civil servant. He's nothing. What makes him start authorizing executions?"

Ianto considered whether or not to broach the subject, but he remembered Jack's saying that they needing to start talking to each other, though neither of them were very good at it. He mustered his courage. "What did it feel like? I mean, getting blown up," he asked carefully.

"It wasn't the best of days," Jack replied casually.

"No... but... did you feel it?" Jack responded with a sigh and turned to face him. "Or did everything just go black?" Ianto pressed.

"I felt it," Jack admitted.

"Shit!" Ianto exclaimed turning away.

"Yeah," Jack agreed.

Ianto's mind reeled, trying to comprehend the magnitude of what Jack had just told him. It was too horrible to imagine. But there was more he wanted to ask Jack. With determination, he turned to face Jack again and pressed on. "Do you ever think that, one day, your luck will run out? That you won't come back?"

Jack looked at him. "I'm a fixed point in time and space. That's what the Doctor says. I think that means it's forever."

Ianto had a hard time looking into Jack's eyes, but he was resolute. It's the elephant in the room between us. It always has been. We need to acknowledge it if we're ever going to get past it. "So... one day, you'll see me die..." He remembered Jack insisting that he'd live through Torchwood. "Of old age," he added pointedly. "And just keep going."

"Yeah," Jack acknowledged, and Ianto could hear the sadness in his voice.

"We'd better make the most of it then," Ianto said with a half-smile, hoping Jack would understand what he was trying to say. I accept the situation. I always have. It's okay, Jack.

Jack smiled affectionately. "I suppose." He turned back to his computer.
Ianto looked at his lover. *It's been days since we were together... Seems like ages.* "Like right now?"
he asked hopefully.

Jack grinned. "Ianto, the world could be ending."

"World's always ending, and I have missed that coat," Ianto replied suggestively.

Jack laughed, his smile brightening his face. He turned around to address Rhys. Ianto smirked
victoriously. "Rhys, do you want to take the car and go to those shops down by the wharf? We need
some disks for these things. Should take about... twenty minutes?"

"Thirty minutes," Ianto quickly amended.

"Thirty," Jack agreed, correcting himself.

"I'll go later," Rhys said. "The beans are almost done."

"The beans are almost done," Jack repeated.

"Bloody beans," Ianto said with disappointment, turning back to his computer.

He tried to hide his frustration, shifting uncomfortably in his chair. *I'd hoped to have a bit of time
alone with Jack... It's been too long...* He growled inwardly, and tried to focus on work.

He ran a search on Clement MacDonald and immediately got a hit. "Whoa, that's nice," he
exclaimed. "Look at that. Face recognition software. And... arrested two hours ago in London. He
wouldn't give his name, but that is Clement MacDonald."

"That's the man from the hospital," Jack said.

"Could be useful," Ianto agreed.

He was interrupted by the ringing of his phone. He spoke to Gwen, telling her about Clement
MacDonald being held in Camden police station. He asked her to get him out. "How am I supposed
do that?" she asked.

"You were a policewoman," Ianto reminded her.

"Oh, okay. Bloody hell, anything else while I'm at it?" she asked sarcastically.

"Fillet steak would be nice," Ianto suggested.

"Yeah, don't push it. See you later," she said before she rang off.

Jack asked Ianto to run through Clement MacDonald's history again. As he spoke, he realized that
Jack had a stricken expression on his face. Before he could comment, Jack got up and looked over
Ianto's shoulder. "Show me those people," he said with urgency in his tone.

"What people?" Ianto asked, confused.

"Andrew Staines, Ellen Hunt, Michael Sanders. The ones that were killed the same day as me," Jack
explained.

"Why?" Ianto asked. "Do you think there's a connection?"

"Show me!" Jack insisted heatedly.
Ianto, confused and a bit startled, acquiesced. He pulled the images up on the computer. "No, no, give me their history," Jack urged impatiently. "Show me them forty years ago."

"What for?" Ianto asked.

"Just do it!" Jack commanded angrily.

Ianto was alarmed by Jack's tone of voice, but he obeyed, pulling up the photos. He could see the shocked expression on Jack's face. His heart started pounding. "Who are they, Jack? Did you know them?"

"I never knew their names," Jack murmured.

"Who were they? Jack, tell me," Ianto insisted. "Did you know them?"

Jack didn't respond. He grabbed his coat and ran out the door. "Jack!" Ianto called after him.

"Oi! The beans are ready!" Rhys said anticlimactically.

_Damn you, Jack!_ Ianto thought angrily. _He's doing it again. Shutting me out. And it's not as though it's something personal and irrelevant to the case! The world could be ending! Just when I think we're making some progress…_

He turned back to his computer with an unhappy sigh.
Ianto sat staring blankly at his computer after Jack's rapid and unexplained departure. Jack recognized the photos of those people who were assassinated the same day the Hub was destroyed. It must have something to do with why the government is trying to kill us, and Jack must have realized the answer to the mystery... He must know something... Be involved somehow... But why wouldn't he share it with us... with me? Why all the secrecy? He's not the only one they're trying to kill... I deserve to know! He clenched his fists angrily.

"Where's Jack off to?" Rhys asked from the kitchen area, breaking the silence. "Has he got onto something?"

"Dunno," Ianto mumbled, trying to control his anger. "He didn't say."

"He didn't tell you?" Rhys pressed.


"Well, I know the feeling, mate. Gwen's always rushing off on Torchwood business. Never a word about where she's going or what she's doing. Nothing about when she'll be back... If she'll be back."

Ianto looked at Rhys, realizing for perhaps the first time what it must be like for him being married to a Torchwood employee. He must worry all the time, constantly living with ignorance and uncertainty. But it should be different with me and Jack. I'm Torchwood too. Jack should at least keep me informed of his actions, especially in the middle of a situation...

As if reading his mind, Rhys commented, "Still, I'd think Jack would keep you informed of his movements. What if you need him?"

Ianto didn't respond. He couldn't think of anything to say. Rhys had echoed his thoughts precisely. "He's a deep one, isn't he, that Captain Jack Harkness? Gwen told me that's not even his real name. She said that you all had barely begun to scratch the surface of all of his secrets."

Ianto remained silent. He was finding it difficult to keep his emotions in check and was focusing all of his energy into holding his face in a mask of indifference. Jack has confided in me, but how much more is buried beneath the surface? How many more things do I still not know about the man I love?

"Still..." Rhys continued thoughtfully. "I suppose if you've lived for as long as he has, you're bound to have more than a skeleton or two in your closet."

Ianto let out a heavy sigh. "I suppose," he finally said.

As though Rhys suddenly realized that his words were having a profound effect on Ianto, he said kindly, "Gwen also told me that you're the only one he ever really confides in."
"I used to think so," Ianto couldn’t help saying.

Rhys put his tea towel down and walked over, sitting down in the chair recently vacated by Jack. "It seems from where I'm sitting that you two are getting along just fine," he said with a grin.

"Things aren't always as they seem," Ianto admitted.

"No… but he certainly cares about you, mate. It's obvious."

Ianto shrugged his shoulders indifferently. It seemed odd to be discussing his and Jack's relationship with Rhys of all people, and he wasn't sure if he wanted the conversation to continue.

"Did something happen between you two?" Rhys asked.

Ianto looked at Rhys in surprise. **Why is Rhys suddenly taking an interest in my relationship with Jack? It seems out of character. If Rhys had ever had any comment to make about us, it was usually a derisive one.**

"What?" Rhys asked defensively, apparently seeing the astonishment in Ianto's features. "I can't take an interest? I may give you both a hard time, but I like Jack, the handsome bastard. And I like you. You're both a couple of handsome bastards. You make blokes like me look bad. It works out much better for me if the two of you only have eyes for each other. Then I don't have to worry about Gwen working all hours of the day and night with a couple of gorgeous men."

Ianto laughed aloud, and Rhys laughed with him. It felt good to laugh. **When was the last time I laughed? Seems like ages ago.** Every once in a while he understood Gwen's devotion to her husband. He's a decent bloke, he thought, looking at Rhys. He felt his resolve softening. "We had a bit of a row the other day." Ianto explained. "Okay, I guess more that a bit of a row," he amended with a self-deprecating smirk. "I think it was just relief that we were both okay."

"But that's when it counts, mate," Rhys said. "If you can put aside all the petty quarrels straightaway when the chips are down… well, that's love, isn't it?"

Before Ianto could reply, Rhys stood up and patted him on the shoulder. "Gwen doesn't tell me everything either, you know. But I know she loves me, and I know Jack loves you."

With that, Rhys walked to the stove and began to pour the beans into paper bowels. Ianto stared open mouthed at Rhys' back. He was astounded by the other man's words and by his matter-of-fact assurances of Jack's affection. He wasn't sure if he believed Rhys, but he was strangely comforted all the same. **Wonders never cease,** he thought with amusement, turning back to the computer.

It wasn't a moment too soon. As soon as he pulled up the news station, he called out to Rhys, who came hurrying over. "It's them," he said. "It's all of them, the kids."

"What are they saying?" Rhys asked.

"I don't know, just pointing."

Ianto began to pull up various news sites. "It says all the children in America are pointing east, and all the children in Europe are pointing west."
"It's us. They're pointing at us," Rhys said.

"They're pointing at Thames House. Come on!"

He and Rhys ran up the wrought iron staircase to the roof of the warehouse. In the far distance they could barely make out what looked like a beam of fire erupting from the heavens and descending into the middle of London. "My God. What is it?" Rhys shouted.

"No idea," Ianto replied. "But definitely alien."

After watching for several minutes without any further events, they ran back down to the computers, just in time to hear the news announcer stating that the area around Themes House was being cordoned off. "It is all kicking off now," Ianto said. "Just when we need Jack."

They watched the UNIT and American Armed Forces representatives arrive at Downing Street. Ianto's mobile phone rang. His heart leapt, hoping it would be Jack checking in, but he was disappointed when he found that it was Gwen. "Where are you?" he asked into the phone.

"Stuck in traffic. I've got Clem MacDonald. I've been listening to the news. What does Jack say?"

Ianto quickly and succinctly told Gwen about Jack's recognition of the other people assassinated and then running off without explanation. "Oh, that is so bloody Jack! You should have stopped him!" she chastised.

"You know Jack," Ianto said, glancing at Rhys. "When are you going to be back?"

"Well, I don't know. We're going to be ages. It's gridlocked. Bloody London!" she yelled, obviously losing her temper. "Half the people are panicking and trying to get out, the other half are trying to get in."

Ianto was about to comment, when Gwen said abruptly, "Look, I'm going to have to go, okay? Bye."

Ianto relayed the conversation to Rhys, and they spent the remainder of the afternoon watching news footage and feeling completely useless. The media was no help, except to tell the world that the British Government was maintaining a policy of absolute silence. Everyone was waiting for something to happen, and Torchwood was no exception.

Ianto had tried calling Jack several times, but he wasn't answering his phone. With each unanswered call, Ianto became more and more frustrated. Where the hell is he? What's he doing? Why isn't he here, and why is he ignoring my calls? We need him!

He tried calling Jack's mobile once more, and again got no answer. In a moment of temper, he threw his mobile down on the table with a frustrated, "Bollocks!"

"Still no answer from Jack?" Rhys asked.

Ianto shook his head in reply.

"I'm sure he'll come back soon. Make a grand entrance like he always does, coat billowing and all that. Be the big hero and save the day," Rhys said with a grin.

Ianto smiled politely, but underneath he was feeling a mixture of concern and anger. What if he was captured? What if they've encased him in concrete again… Or something much, much worse… He shuddered, trying to push aside his overactive imagination. I'm sure he's fine. He's just being Jack…
Night had fallen by the time Gwen returned with Clem MacDonald in tow. Ianto only half-listened to the conversation between Clem, Rhys, and Gwen. He was trying his best to ignore the unpleasant gnawing in his stomach. Having dined on unappetizing beans and hotdogs, he was uncertain whether the discomfort was from the food or from worrying about Jack. He focused his attention on his computer again. He'd spent hours trying to hack into the mainframe of Thames House, but so far he hadn't had any luck.

He heard Clem ask, "He's your husband?"

"Yes," Gwen answered. "Yes. My beloved."

"Nice house, isn't it?" Clem continued.

Ianto wanted to snort contemptuously, but he was unwilling to join the conversation.

"Well, we do our best," Gwen said.

"It's got shower facilities. Just stand under the skylight," Rhys joked.

"I've stayed in worse," Clem commented, and then with obvious derision in his voice, he asked, "And who's the queer?"

Ianto felt a surge of anger. As much as he wanted to stay out of the exchange, he couldn't ignore a jibe like that. He whipped around, yelling. "Oi!"

He glared at the three of them. Both Gwen and Rhys looked like they were trying not to laugh, and Clem looked back at him with a defiant expression on his face. Ianto wanted to deny the accusation. He wanted to yell, *I'm not a queer!* But his recent fight with Jack gave him pause. Jack's right. I'm always denying that we're together. I can't do that anymore. I won't. I have to take what comes with being in relationship with a man, however insulting. I'm not ashamed of being with Jack, and I refuse to be a coward for one more moment. He controlled his voice and said calmly, "It's not 1965 anymore."

He turned his attention back to the computer.

"He's queer. I can smell it," Clem said flatly.

Ianto chose to ignore him, and he found to his surprise that it was empowering. *Why do I care what a crazy old man says anyway? And so what if he calls me a queer?*

Ianto's thoughts were interrupted by a buzz of excitement from the news station. Something was happening at Downing Street. The media was reporting several more arrivals at Thames House. Torchwood eagerly waited to see if Lois Habiba would come through for them. When the computer registered that the contact lenses were active, Ianto exclaimed with relief, "Online! She's doing it!"

"Oh, good girl!" Gwen cheered.

"I knew she would," Rhys commented.

They spent a few minutes helping Lois accustom herself to the lenses. Then they waited as Lois rejoined her employers.

"Took me a while to get used to those things," Rhys murmured.
"What?" Ianto asked in confusion, looking at Rhys. "You've used the lenses?"

"Yeah. That's why Gwen had them," Rhys explained.

"I just took them home for a bit of fun," Gwen said nonchalantly.

"Fun?" Ianto asked, having a feeling he knew where this was going.

"Yeah," Gwen said with a bit of embarrassment.

"You know. Fun." Rhys was unabashed.

"Yeah, well, been there, done that," Ianto said, remembering a very pleasant night he'd spent with Jack, each of them taking a turn at wearing the lenses. "It is fun," he added.

"Yeah," both Gwen and Rhys said at once.

They all looked at each other and then quickly turned away again. There was a moment of awkward silence, and Ianto wanted to laugh, but Lois was entering a lift with Frobisher and another woman, and the situation was too dire for humor.

They watched in awe through the Torchwood lenses in Lois' eyes as it became apparent that there was a tank filled with smoke, that the tank was occupied by an alien called the 456, and that Frobisher was working with the alien to hide something that had happened in the past. It had something to do with Clem MacDonald. The 456 had been to Earth before. They had tried to take Clem when he was a child, but he had escaped. The 456 were demanding a gift. It wanted to take their children.

Ianto kept his eyes focused on the computer screen as events unfolded, but he couldn't help the occasional surreptitious glance at his wristwatch. *It's nearly midnight, and not a word from Jack,* he thought anxiously.

Suddenly Clem became distressed. "They want to take them, like they did before. Like the man did." He inhaled deeply through his nostrils, smelling the air. "He's coming back. He's coming back!"


Clem wouldn't be silenced. He began chanting over and over again, "He's coming, He's coming. He's coming."

Gwen stood and walked to Clem, who was still chanting and pointing at the door. Ianto dismissed Clem in his mind. His eyes were fixed on the computer screen, a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach when he read what Lois had just written in shorthand. "We want ten percent of the children of this world."

He turned to look at Gwen. He opened his mouth to tell her what he'd just seen, when the words stuck in his throat. Jack was standing there, tall and proud, an inscrutable expression on his face, and Clem was raving, "He hasn't changed. He's the same. He's the same. All those years. How can he be the same?"

*Clem knows Jack?* Ianto stared at Jack, trying to read the answer in Jack's expression, but Jack didn't look at him. His eyes were fixed on Clem.

"What's he talking about, Jack?" Gwen asked.
"Clement MacDonald. Just another name," Jack said slowly. "It was easier, if you didn't know the names," he whispered.

Ianto gaped at Jack. Jack was involved with the 456. He knows what happened! He was there! He felt his legs go weak underneath him as bile rose in his throat. He realized that there must have always been a part of him that suspected Jack's involvement. Ever since he'd ran out earlier today…

"You were there? In 1965?" Gwen asked.

"He was the man!" Clem whispered.

"No, no. This is what he does. You see? He fights them. He fights aliens," Gwen said soothingly. "Isn't that right, Jack?" she asked confidently.

"No," Jack admitted.

"Then what were you doing there?" Gwen asked leaving Clem and walking towards Jack.

"I gave them the kids," Jack confessed, his voice as cold as stone. "1965. I gave them twelve children."

Ianto stared in horror at his lover. He'd accepted Jack's involvement, but he hadn't expected this. His mind reeled. He was immovably shocked. He couldn't think. He couldn't feel anything. He just stared dumbly at Jack.

"What for?" Gwen barely managed to ask.

"As a gift," Jack replied evenly.

No one said anything. They all stared at Jack, stunned speechless. Minutes ticked by, then Clem moaned, breaking the silence.


"You just… handed them over and hoped for the best?" Gwen asked carefully.

"You are in every nightmare I've ever had," Clem said angrily.

Suddenly Ianto could sense Jack's remorse, and it was so very profound that Ianto began to feel for Jack. There has to be more to the story, he thought. There has to be a reason.

"I'm sorry." Jack's voice broke, and he took a step towards Clem. "I'm really sorry. I…"

Before Ianto knew what was happening, Clem had grabbed Gwen's gun and shot Jack in the chest. Ianto instinctually ran to Jack's lifeless body and pulled him into his arms.

Clem had become panic-stricken. He was brandishing the weapon and threatening them all. Ianto was still too shocked to respond. All he could do was hold Jack in his lap, and wait for him to revive while watching the scene unfold. He's going to wake up and explain everything, Ianto told himself over and over again.

Gwen was able to calm the old man, and he relinquished the gun. Come on, Jack. Wake up. You have to explain this. "There is something up there. They want children," Clem said. He looked at Jack, still lifeless in Ianto's lap. "That man held my hand and took me to them."

At that moment, Jack took a gasping breath as life returned to his immortal body. He clung to Ianto,
and Ianto held onto him comfortingly, knowing that Jack was always disoriented when he revived. Clem, looking shocked and appalled, ran off. Gwen followed Clem, and Rhys followed Gwen. Ianto and Jack were alone.

Jack was still lying in Ianto's lap, clinging tightly to his shoulders. Ianto looked down at his lover. He needed answers, and he refused to pass judgment on Jack until he'd heard the older man's explanation. "I know there's more to the story, Jack. What is it? Tell me. I need to know."

Jack closed his eyes. Then he opened them again and looked up into Ianto's eyes. "Even if you know the whole story, Ianto, you might still be appalled."

"I need to know," Ianto repeated.

His heart was beating rapidly. He was terrified of what he might hear, but he knew that he needed to hear it.

Jack sighed heavily. Then he began to speak.
"1965," Jack said again. He was still clinging to Ianto's shoulders, as though trying to anchor himself to the present.

Ianto was silent as he waited for Jack to continue, his heart thumping so loudly that he felt certain that Jack could hear it.

Jack took a deep breath. "They called themselves the 456," he began. "I don't know where they're from, and I'd never encountered them before. I'd never even heard of them. But they're obviously technologically advanced. I think they're some kind of scientists… virologists maybe, because they threatened us with a virus – a new strain of the Indonesian flu. They'd already infected several people… claimed the virus would spread like the Spanish flu of 1918 and could kill up to twenty-five million. But the Spanish flu killed five percent of the human race. The population in 1965 was three point three billion people. Five percent would be…"

"One hundred and sixty-five million," Ianto whispered, automatically doing the calculation.

"Yeah," Jack agreed. "A lot more than twenty-five million. All of the Torchwood research backed up their threat. Then they offered us a cure, but there was a price…"

Jack stopped and looked up into Ianto's eyes. "I lived through the Spanish flu in 1918. I can't tell you the atrocities I saw, the people I lost… the stench of death and disease in the streets…" Jack shuddered and looked away.

Ianto remained silent, waiting for Jack to continue. Eventually Jack said in almost a whisper, "The 456 wanted twelve children in exchange for the anti-virus. Twelve children… for one hundred and sixty-five million souls…"

He stopped again. Ianto stared down at Jack, still lying in his lap, still clinging to him. Jack didn't meet Ianto's eyes. "And Torchwood needed someone to deliver the children to the 456."

"So they chose you," Ianto said, already knowing the answer, but needing to hear confirmation from Jack all the same.

"Yeah," Jack acknowledged.

"And you accepted the mission?" he asked, feeling nauseous.

Jack nodded.

"You didn't argue with them? You didn't see if there was another way? You didn't try and negotiate?" Ianto asked quickly.

"I had nothing to do with Torchwood negotiations at the time. I was just a hired gun. I did what I
"When have you ever done what you were told, Jack?" Ianto interjected angrily. "Without question? Without argument?"

"I was a soldier for a long time, Ianto. I lived by my orders. Besides, Torchwood had already done all of the negotiating. I was ordered to deliver twelve children to the 456 for the anti-virus. That was the deal."

"So you were just following orders then?" Ianto asked coldly.

"There was no choice, Ianto!" Jack exclaimed. "I gave them twelve children from a local orphanage, and the 456 delivered the anti-virus as promised."

Ianto didn't respond. Thoughts ricocheted through his mind, pulling his emotions in a multitude of directions. _How could Jack have done something so atrocious? What choice did he have? Children! But one hundred and sixty-five million people... Why did he just blindly accept orders from Torchwood? Why didn't he try to negotiate himself? How could he not tell me about this? He's the one who said we need to start talking to each other! How could he keep this to himself? How could he be so callous? But I've never had any allusions about him. I've always known he can be dark and ruthless... That's what I accused him of when we fought the other day. Was that just the other day? It seems like a lifetime ago. In fact, that's what started the fight between us... the fight that nearly ended our relationship. I accused him of being heartless. I accused him of leading us to our deaths like pigs to a slaughter, and that's what he did to those twelve children... But one hundred and sixty-five million people? Sometimes being a leader means making horrible decisions... But he wasn't the leader! Just a hired gun! How could he not try to negotiate before taking on such a heinous mission? My God... How can he live with what he did?"

Ianto's head began to ache, and he suddenly needed to be away from Jack. He needed space. He needed to think. He moved underneath Jack, and the older man sat up.

Ianto rose to his feet, dusting off his trousers. He couldn't meet Jack's eyes. _Not yet. I need to think! _"You owe the others an explanation," he said, "And you owe Clem an explanation."

"Ianto," Jack reached out to him, but Ianto avoided his touch, taking a step backwards.

"Please, Jack. Just give me some time," Ianto muttered.

"Ianto..." Jack began again.

"Please, Jack," Ianto repeated before turning and hurrying away.

Ianto slumped down on the chair in front of the computer and stared at the swirling colors of the screen saver. His mind reeled, and he felt torn in different directions. He tried to think things through and make some sense of the chaos of his emotions.

Part of him was shocked by the heinousness of Jack's actions, but part of him understood the impossibility of the situation. Ianto had seen Jack make horrible decisions before as the leader of Torchwood. He'd sacrificed Jasmine to the fairies in order to stop the world's destruction. And Ianto hadn't condemned him for it. In fact, he'd acknowledged that Jack, as their leader, had to make the decisions that the rest of them couldn't and wouldn't make. _Is this any different? _He asked himself. _But Jasmine wanted to go with the fairies, and Jack tried everything to save her first. He didn't rely on other's judgment before ultimately making an impossible choice. There might have been another way with the 456. Jack didn't know. He just followed orders..._
Jack always said he was ashamed of his past, that he’d done terrible things, that he didn’t want to remember the person he was… But I’m not sure I ever truly realized… How could I imagine this? What would I have done? Would I have stood up to Torchwood and to the 456 instead of blindly accepting their terms? Would I have risked the lives of countless millions of people in order to save twelve children? How can I pass judgment on him?

But Jack can be so ruthless. I know what he’s capable of… Just the other day I witnessed his callous disregard of Carly’s life… Of all our lives… How could I forget what I said to him? ’Sometimes I think there isn’t a soul on this Earth that you give a damn about.’… But I was furious… and I lashed out at him. I know that’s not true… I know he agonizes over the things he’s done… He’s had to make impossible decisions… If that really was the only way… How can I possibly judge him?

He must have been torturing himself ever since… Why didn't he tell me? I know that I can never know everything about him, but something this monumental… Why didn't he say anything? He tells me that he confides in me. He’s always encouraging me to confide in him… I told him about my childhood… about my mother… about the psychiatric hospital… I’ve shared so much with him, more than I’ve shared with anyone else. This just seems to underline how fractured our relationship truly is…

Jack sat down beside him, interrupting his thoughts. Ianto hadn’t heard him approach, and he wasn’t sure he was ready to talk, but words came tumbling out. "I can't believe you didn't mention this before."

"They didn't speak through kids back then. I didn't recognize the signs at first," Jack replied.

Ianto finally turned to face him. "That's not what I meant," he said sadly. He knew Jack wouldn't have held back the information if he'd recognized the current threat. Or would he?

Jack looked into his eyes, but he didn't have time to reply. Rhys appeared with a warning. "They're coming back."

Jack rose to his feet and stood to attention next to Ianto, as if willing to accept his fate, as Gwen and Clem entered the room. Gwen had her arm around Clem, supporting him. Clem looked straight at Jack. "The man who sent me and my friends to die, can't die himself!"

All of them stared at Jack. Ianto could see the pain in his eyes, and he felt his loyalty divided. He was shocked, but he was also capable of pragmatism. He could see the bigger picture, for all the horrors of the choices that Jack had made. There's no simple answer... There's no right or wrong... Poor Jack...

Jack looked down at his feet. Then he lifted his head up, stood up straighter, and threw his shoulders back in the proper military stance. He began to tell his story over again. It didn't vary much from the story he'd told Ianto. When he'd finished, no one spoke.

Ianto could no longer stand the silence, the tension, or the condemnation he could sense from the others. He rose from his seat and went to fetch a clean shirt and undershirt for Jack. It didn't help matters that Jack was still spattered with the blood from Clem’s fatal gunshot wound. He’d been wise enough to buy Jack several sets of shirts, knowing his propensity for destroying them.

As he walked back to the group, they were all exactly as he’d left them. It seemed that the silence had not yet been broken. He held out the clean shirts to Jack, somehow taking solace in the routine gesture.

Jack thanked him with a nod and took off his coat, handing it to Ianto, who laid it over his arm in
proper butler fashion. They all watched silently as Jack pulled his ruined shirt and undershirt over his head and handed them to Ianto, who exchanged them for the new ones. He hung Jack's coat on a nearby hook and tossed the ruined garments into the nearest rubbish bin, where a fire still burned. The fabric caught ablaze, momentarily throwing all of their faces into bright illumination. No one had spoken a word.

Jack was just buttoning up his new shirt when Gwen finally broke the silence. "It was a protection, right? You knew they'd be back."

"I knew it was a possibility," Jack admitted.

"But you still gave them the payoff," Gwen stated coldly.

"We had no choice," Jack maintained.

"Why us?" Clem asked.

Everyone stared at Jack. "You wouldn't be missed," Jack answered honestly.

Ianto felt the discomfort in the atmosphere, but he couldn't deny the truth of Jack's statement. Orphans… no one to miss them… no one to care…

He felt his stomach twist uncomfortably. "I can see that," Clem acknowledged, surprising them all.

"All of this time, the one consolation I had was that…the deal seemed to work," Jack confessed.

Gwen shook her head with obvious disgust.

"It worked for forty-four years," Rhys conceded. "That's not bad for breathing space."

"Why was I left behind? What's wrong with me?" Clem asked.

"We know they only want pre-pubescent kids. Maybe it's got something to do with that. Maybe you were just on the cusp of puberty, not quite adult, not quite child…" Gwen said.

"Saved by your hormones," Rhys added.

They were interrupted by a commotion emanating from the computer speakers. Something was happening at Downing Street. "Is this still recording, Ianto? I need every second of this," Gwen said.

It was with a concerted effort that Ianto turned his attention back to work. "Yeah," he replied.

The confrontation with the 456 lasted most of the night. They watched as a cameraman was allowed into the glass cage with the 456. What they saw there shocked Ianto to his very core. The children from 1965 were still alive, still children, yet at the same time appeared ancient and wizened. They were tethered somehow to the creatures, but the air was too cloudy to discern much detail. My God, are they conscious of what's happened to them?

Ianto's emotions threatened to overpower him, and he had to blink back his tears. Jack walked away, apparently unable to watch any longer, but Ianto forced himself to keep his eyes on the screen. It was too important to miss. Lois was writing something in shorthand. Ianto translated, "We do not harm the children. They feel no pain. They live long beyond their years."

"Well, that's okay then," Gwen said ironically.

"But we still don't know," Jack said. "What does it do with them? What does it want them for?"
"Bit late to ask now," Rhys murmured sardonically.

Ianto said, reading Lois' shorthand, "We have answered your question. You have one day to select and deliver the ten percent."

"And if we refuse?" Frobisher asked.

"We will wipe out your entire species," Ianto translated aloud, his heart dropping like a stone weight.

They listened as Mr. Green and Frobisher's subterfuge was exposed, and the history with the 456 was admitted. "They destroyed the Hub, tried to kill us… for nothing," Ianto said. "Their secrets came out anyway."

"They always do," Jack said ruefully.

Ianto walked away from the group and sat down on the metal steps, dropping his head into his hands. What he had witnessed of the fate of the children made Jack's actions all the more atrocious, but at the same time he empathized with Jack's pain. What must he be feeling? How could he not know they would come back wanting more? Why didn't he do more to try and defeat them? His gut churned as he thought about his own niece and nephew. What if it had been David or Mica… He felt a wave of nausea as he thought of the fate of those children. And they want ten percent of the children of the world? We can't… we can't let them take the children… We have to fight! Surely Jack will see that now…

With determination, he stood up and went to look for Jack. He found him standing alone, staring out of the warehouse windows. Day had broken, and sunlight streamed in through the tempered glass.

Ianto watched his lover, and he once again felt for Jack's suffering. "This must have been eating away at you," Ianto said as he approached.

Jack didn't reply. He didn't even look at him.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Ianto asked. "I could've helped."

Jack shook his head. "No, you couldn't."

Ianto thought about everything they had been through together, the struggles, the arguments, the misunderstandings, the passion, the intimacy, the confidences, how much they'd shared with each other, how much they'd forgiven each other. He remembered the day he told Jack about his childhood. My deepest, darkest secret… The thing I've never shared with anyone… Not even Lisa… "I tell you everything," he murmured aloud.

Jack finally turned around and looked at him. "Ianto, tell me, what should I have done?" Jack sounded exasperated.

"Stood up to them," Ianto replied automatically. He wasn't certain if he meant Torchwood in 1965 or the 456. Jack looked away again. "The Jack I know would've stood up to them." The Jack I know would have done everything he could before sacrificing children… But what could he have done differently?

Ianto wasn't certain if he meant what he'd said. His emotions were stretched so tightly that he felt like he was going to snap. He was having a difficult time wrapping his head around everything that had unfolded, and Jack's cold reception was just making matters worse. He no longer knew if he even understood the man who had been his lover for over two years. "I've only just scraped the surface, haven't I?" he asked sadly.
"Ianto, that's all there is," Jack said dispassionately.

Ianto knew that was rubbish. He knew Jack at least that well. "No," he argued. "You pretend that's all there is."

"I have lived a long time. I have done a lot of things."

They looked into each other's eyes. Jack's were cold and angry, and Ianto felt like his heart was breaking. "I've got to go, I won't be long," Jack said, breaking eye contact and turning away.

Ianto turned to his retreating form. "You're doing it again," he exclaimed with frustration. "Speak to me, Jack. Where are you going?"

Jack turned around to face him, his posture defensive. "To call Frobisher. I can't call him from here, because they'd be able to trace it. Is that okay?" he asked sarcastically.

*So that's how it's going to be between us, is it?* Ianto thought. *Very well...* "You're the boss," he replied calmly.

"And just so you know, I have a daughter called Alice and a grandson called Steven, and Frobisher took them hostage yesterday," Jack said, his voice breaking.

Ianto stared dumbstruck at Jack, who eventually turned and walked away. Ianto stood frozen in place, unable to even begin to comprehend this latest revelation. "I've only just scraped the surface," he repeated in a whisper.  

*A daughter... and a grandson. Jack a father... and a grandfather! Are there any other descendants out there? What other secrets is he hiding? I was foolish to think that I knew him, even a little. I was foolish to think I could ever understand him... In the grand scheme of things, I mean nothing to him... Just a blip in time...*

He wanted to leave the warehouse. He wanted to run away and never return. He wanted to be retconned back to nappies. *I never want to see Jack Harkness again!* He angrily wiped away the tears that had trickled down his chin. *Pull yourself together, Jones,* he scolded himself. *The world could be ending!*

He dried his eyes, straightened his suit, and walked slowly back to the others. He was nothing, if not the consummate professional, and there wasn't time for personal matters.

In a dull, unemotional voice, he told Gwen and Rhys that Jack had a daughter and a grandson that were kidnapped by Frobisher, and that Jack had gone to try and negotiate their freedom.

To his amazement, no one seemed surprised. "Well, he has lived a long time," Rhys said. "It figures that he'd have some descendants somewhere."

"You know Jack," Gwen said with an eye roll.

"Do I?" Ianto asked seriously.

Gwen looked hard at him. "Do any of us really?"

Ianto shook his head sadly. He felt utterly defeated. Not only was the fate of the Earth threatened, but his own personal world was crashing down around his feet.

Gwen stepped towards him and took his hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. She smiled at him, and he
knew she was offering her comfort and support. He smiled tightly at her in silent acknowledgment. Then he turned his attention back to work.

Jack returned several minutes later. "Ianto?" he called.

Ianto looked up, and Jack gestured for him to follow. He exchanged a look with Gwen before warily following Jack, as the older man lead him away from the others.

They ascended the metal staircase to the second floor of the warehouse. Ianto's mind raced, wondering what new revelations this conversation would bring and how much more pain it would cause him. But his family's been kidnapped! What must he be feeling?

Jack stopped and turned around. Before he could say anything, Ianto asked with concern, "Any word about your family?"

"They're being held captive. Frobisher wants me to turn myself in for their release, but I don't trust him."

"Anything I can do to help, Jack," Ianto offered sincerely.

"I know," Jack said, smiling sadly at him. Then he suddenly moved closer and pulled Ianto into a fierce embrace. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm sorry I never told you about my family. I'm sorry I never told you about the 456 and the children. I'm sorry about everything. About the fight we had… about the state of things between us… about all the secrets…"

Ianto stood rigidly for a moment, but then he relaxed. Despite all of their arguments, the confusion, and the agony of the past few days, the truth was, he loved Jack. More than that, he respected and trusted him. He would stand by Jack, no matter what.

He returned Jack's embrace, putting his arms tightly around the older man and pulling him closer. "I was angry, and I was hurt," Jack continued. "I wanted you to understand about the children and the 456."

"I do understand, Jack. It was just the shock of everything. I know you did what you thought was right at the time," Ianto said. "You always do. I shouldn't have doubted you. I'm sorry too."

"I needed your forgiveness, Ianto, but you didn't give it."

"Why did you need my forgiveness?"

"You're the only one who could give it to me," Jack said, his voice breaking.

"Why?" Ianto asked in surprise.

Jack pulled back. He cupped Ianto's face in his hands, leaned his forehead against Ianto's, and looked into his eyes. "You know why," he said fiercely.

Ianto's heart began to pound again, but this time it was because of a very different emotion than fear. He could feel Jack's breath ghosting over his lips. "Jack…" he whispered.

"You've always stood by me, even when you disagreed with me," Jack said, stroking his cheek tenderly. "You've always been there for me, since the day we met. You've always supported me, given me strength… forgiven me."

"Yes," Ianto agreed. "And I always will, Jack."
Their lips met, and Ianto felt a shock of electricity at the touch. He and Jack kissed with utter abandonment. The warehouse, the 456, the whole world fell away as they poured themselves into each other. He had kissed Jack thousands of times, but he'd never felt anything so intense. He couldn't separate which were his emotions and which were Jack's. His knees began to quiver underneath him, and he might have fallen to the ground if Jack hadn't been holding onto him so tightly.

They clung to each other, as though it were going to be the last time. "I'm sorry I've kept so many secrets," Jack said, his voice rough and broken. Tears were trailing down his face.

"It's okay, Jack," Ianto soothed, wiping the moisture from his cheeks. "Like you said, you've lived a long time. It doesn't matter what you've done in the past. I only want the Jack here and now."

"I'll do better," Jack promised.

"So will I," Ianto promised in return.

They kissed again, unwilling to break apart. Finally Jack pulled back, leaning his forehead against Ianto's again. "And now I have to face what I've done."

Ianto remembered what he'd said to Jack when he'd had to sacrifice Jasmine. He said the same words again. "When you look into an abyss…"

"The abyss also looks into you," Jack finished.

"I'm here for you, Jack. I'm by your side." Ianto stood back and lovingly straightened out the collar of Jack's greatcoat. Then he held out his hand. "Now let's go and face this," he said with a reassuring smile.

"Together?" Jack asked.

"Always," Ianto affirmed.

Jack took his outstretched hand, and holding it tightly in his, they returned to the workroom together.
Jack sat down on the metal staircase, whispering to Ianto, "Give me a few minutes."

Ianto nodded and squeezed Jack's hand reassuringly before releasing it. He went back to his computer to see what he'd missed in his brief time away. For several more minutes, nothing happened. Then Gwen announced, "They're on the move."

They all waited as Gwen continued to watch the monitor connected to the Torchwood lenses in Lois' eyes. Ianto was becoming anxious. What is the government going to do? Surely they're not going to give into their demands! Are they going to fight? Is the world going to war with an alien species? The anticipation was excruciating, and he began to feel hot. He took his suit jacket off and hung it over a chair. Wiping the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief, he tried to concentrate on the computer in front of him. "Cabinet office briefing, room A: Cobra. Where all the emergency planning takes place," Gwen said.

"Gold Command meeting's about to start!" Ianto called to Jack as he took up a position behind Gwen.

"They'll sell us out, just like they did last time," Clem said.

As Jack moved to stand beside Ianto, Gwen turned to him. "I'm sorry to hear about your family, by the way. We'll get them out."

Ianto turned to Jack to explain, but Jack wasn't looking at him. "I know we will," Jack said.

Then he glanced briefly at Ianto, but there was no anger or accusation in his eyes. Ianto understood that Jack didn't blame him for sharing the knowledge of Alice and Steven with the rest of the team. Ianto gave him a slight nod, then they both turned their attention to the Gold Command meeting.

They watched as the British government decided to offer the 456 six-thousand, seven-hundred failed asylum seekers – an offer which the 456 refused. Then all the children of the world began chanting the numbers that equaled ten percent of their country's populations.

Then with silent horror and revulsion, they watched the British government discussing selection criteria for ten percent of the British population's children to offer the 456. It fell to Ianto to translate some of what was said at the meeting, as he was the only one who could read Lois' shorthand notes, and he forced himself to remain composed as he spoke the despicable words aloud. But every once in a while, his voice cracked under the strain.

After some debate, and exempting their own children and grandchildren, the members of Gold Command decided to sacrifice what they deemed the "less socially useful." They were going to turn over the country's lowest achieving ten percent of the children to suffer unspeakable and endless torment as the prisoners of a malevolent alien species.
For several minutes, the Torchwood team was rendered speechless. Ianto's blood pounded in his ears, and he felt like his stomach was full of rats. Mica… David… Are they considered the 'less socially useful'? Will they be among the children sacrificed to the 456? He was no longer able to keep silent. "My God… That could mean my niece and nephew. Jack, we can't let them do this!"


"What do we do?" Gwen asked, her voice hoarse.

"I think I have an idea," Jack said, and he began to outline a plan.

It was late morning by the time Jack had finished speaking. All of them agreed that Jack's plan was the best option given the circumstances. Ianto looked around, noting the fatigue and worry etched in all of their faces. Jack seemed to read his thoughts. "Gwen, you talk to Lois. Convince her that this is the right thing to do. Then I want everyone to try and sleep for an hour. We've been up all night, and I need you all to be sharp. Ianto, with me. We need to work out our strategy."

He took Ianto's arm and led him away from the others. Ianto followed Jack up the metal staircase to a room at the back of the warehouse, which had been sleeping quarters in the days of Torchwood One. Jack shut the door behind them and locked it. Then he pulled Ianto to him and kissed him frantically. Ianto returned the kiss, but when Jack started unbuttoning his shirt, Ianto pulled away with a frown. "Jack, the world could be ending."

"The world's always ending," Jack said with a sly grin. "And I thought you missed the coat."

A smile twitched at the corners of Ianto's mouth. "Well, yes, I have missed the coat," he said, fingerling the lapels.

Jack kissed him again. "Besides," he whispered against Ianto's lips. "We have a little time to kill. We're working out a strategy."

"Oh, are we?" Ianto teased, assuming a serious expression. "And what kind of strategy would that be?"

"The best kind," Jack replied, grasping Ianto's tie and tugging it so that Ianto moved towards him.

They kissed again, letting their tongues slide together. Then Jack broke the kiss and held Ianto tightly, their bodies pressed close. They stood like that for several moments, wrapped in each other's arms. Ianto clung to Jack, remembering the last few days and the heartache he'd suffered over their fight. Circumstances had not allowed for them to have a proper conversation about everything that had passed between them, but Ianto decided that he needed Jack to understand that he was no longer afraid.

"I told my sister about you," Ianto said quietly into Jack's ear.

Jack pulled back and looked into Ianto's eyes. The surprise was evident on the older man's face. "You did?" he asked.

Ianto nodded. He traced a finger across Jack's lips. "I don't want you to go on thinking I'm ashamed to be with you." Ianto hesitated. Jack was right. He was rubbish at expressing his emotions, but he was going to try. Jack was worth it. "I'm proud… to be with you," he continued, forcing himself to look directly into Jack's eyes. "I'm proud to have you as my Captain, my friend, my lover… my partner." He fumbled over the words a bit. They still felt awkward.

Tears sprang into Jack's eyes, and he made no attempt to hide them. "So you've decided what I am to
you?” he asked, and there was almost a shyness in his voice.

Ianto caressed Jack's cheek. "It was never a matter of deciding," he assured him. "It was just finding the courage to say it aloud. I was always yours, Jack, and I always will be, come what may."

*I love you.* The words were on the tip of his tongue. He was going to say them. It finally felt like the right time, but then Jack kissed him, and he was struck by a wave of intense emotions emanating from the older man. Jack had lowered his defenses, and Ianto could feel what he felt. All coherent thought faded from his mind.

Jack deftly unbuttoned Ianto's waistcoat and shirt, pushing them aside as he rubbed his cheek against the bare flesh of Ianto's chest. Ianto was instantly hard. It had been days since they'd been together, and his body ached for Jack's.

Jack pulled them over to one of the beds. He took his greatcoat off and laid it down on the bare mattress. They undressed each other quickly, but tenderly, conscious of the precious few moments they had together, but wanting to appreciate each new inch of exposed flesh.

When the last article of clothing fell away, Ianto lay down on the coat and pulled Jack on top of him. Their naked bodies slid together, both of them achingly hard. As the sensitive skin of Ianto's cock touched Jack's, he moaned with pleasure. For several minutes, they moved together, reveling in the feel of bare flesh against bare flesh. Ianto's hands caressed every inch of Jack's skin he could reach. "Jack," he finally whispered. "I want you inside me."

Jack pulled away, holding himself up on his arms above Ianto. He frowned. "I don't have anything…"

Ianto smiled. "Check your coat pocket. Do you really think I would buy you new clothes without adding your usual essentials?"

Jack threw back his head and laughed. Ianto's heart leapt at the sound. He loved to hear Jack laugh genuinely. Jack leaned down and kissed his lips softly. "You know me so well."

"Yeah," Ianto realized, perhaps for the first time. *He still surprises me… and he'll always have his secrets… but I do truly understand him. I guess I do."

"Better than anyone else ever has," Jack said seriously, looking down at him. "You always saw through my façade… saw the man underneath… saw me for who I was, not who I pretended to be… It's what makes this… us… so special."

Ianto remembered words from a book he'd loved as a child. *'It's only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.'*

At a loss for words, he pulled Jack down and kissed him again. Jack's emotions permeated the air around them like a thick fog. Their bodies and their emotions were so tightly interwoven that, when Jack entered him, he felt that he and Jack had become one.

The physical sensations were intrinsically intertwined with the emotional ones. Ianto felt that he and Jack had been transported to another place and time, where only the two of them existed. He wasn't certain where his body ended and Jack's began. They rolled over, switching positions, and Ianto entered Jack, moaning as Jack's heat surrounded him.

Ianto could feel Jack reaching his climax simultaneously as Ianto was reaching his. Together, they exploded in waves of pleasure. Ianto could feel Jack's euphoria as well as his own. The sensation was so powerful that Ianto thought he would lose consciousness. It was more intense and profound
than anything he'd ever experienced. The world around him wavered and blurred. There was only him and Jack, wrapped around each other. Nothing else existed.

It took several minutes for the world to come back into focus. He and Jack were panting, covered in sweat, and still clinging desperately to each other.

Their lips met softly, and lingered together as their breathing slowed. They looked into each other's eyes, holding each other's faces, their foreheads pressed together. No words were necessary. In that moment, they were beyond words.

Finally the mood shifted as Jack grinned cheekily. "Well, we had to break in the new coat."

Ianto laughed. "Glad that's done then."

They smiled at each other. "Back to reality?" Jack asked.

"I suppose." Ianto couldn't help the disappointment seeping into his voice. "World ending and all," he added.

"When this is over," Jack began.

"Yeah," Ianto agreed. "When this is over."

They kissed once again, then reluctantly pulled apart and climbed off the bed. Ianto's legs felt wobbly underneath him, and Jack took his hand to steady him.

They held hands as they ran into the shower room to quickly rinse off. It was with a concerted effort that they kept their showering strictly business. Both of them were yearning to touch each other again. "You and your 51st century pheromones," Ianto murmured, pushing Jack away with chagrin. But they both knew that there was work to be done.

"When this is over," Jack said again, pulling Ianto close to him as they stepped out of the shower.

"When this is over," Ianto agreed, holding Jack briefly before regretfully letting him go.

They spent a few minutes discussing their strategy as they redressed. Then with one last kiss, Jack and Ianto rejoined the group.

Ianto began to gather their weapons as Jack checked in with the others. He had a feeling that everyone knew what they had been doing, but he didn't care. His elation overwhelmed him.

"Did Lois agree?" Jack asked Gwen.

"She's thinking about it," Gwen answered, "But she was resistant."

"Do you think this will work?" Rhys asked.

"We've got enough evidence recorded here to destroy every person in that room," Gwen replied.

"And we can use it to force our way into Thames House, finally get face-to-face with this thing," Jack said.

"And get your family released," Gwen added.

Jack took a deep breath. "Right, everyone know what they're doing?"
"What if I can't get Lois to agree to this, Jack?" Gwen asked.

"She hasn't let us down yet. Rhys, you ready?" Jack asked.

Ianto rushed forward and handed Jack his weapon. They both loaded their guns. Jack looked into Ianto's eyes. "Let's go stand up to them," he said.

"Yes, Sir," Ianto said, using the honorific.

They jumped into the stolen sports car and headed into London. Once they'd entered the city proper, the traffic forced them to a standstill. Simultaneously, they jumped out of the car and began jogging towards Thames House. Ianto pulled out his mobile and phoned his sister, as they'd planned. Rhiannon answered the phone. Ianto could hear the din of children in the background and Rhiannon scolding them. "Quiet, you lot, now, shut up! Hello?"

"It's me," Ianto said.

"Oh, I… I thought you couldn't call here. Is it all over?" Rhiannon asked.

"It's only just beginning," Ianto said.

He heard her saying, "It's Ianto," presumably to Johnny, and Johnny mumbling something about his car.

"Listen," Ianto continued. "That column of fire over London, did you see it on the telly?"

"No, I was watching The Other Side," Rhiannon said sarcastically. "Of course I did, you dumbo. What's happening? The kids said 'we are coming,' but who's they? Who is it?"

"Just stop a minute and listen," Ianto said, trying to interrupt her flow of conversation. He and Jack were getting closer to Thames House, and they didn't have much time.

"Ianto, just tell me, who are they?" she insisted.

"They're from another planet. They want children, that's why they're here."

"They what?" Rhiannon exclaimed.

"They want kids, millions of them," Ianto told her.

"Why?"

"I'm not sure," Ianto answered honestly. "But for the next few days, don't let anyone take David or Mica away from you, for whatever reason. This goes for you people listening in on the wire too. Forget the Official Secrets Act. If you've got children or grandchildren, you need to hear this, and you need to tell every parent you know." Ianto chose his next words carefully, knowing that there was a possibility they could be the last ones he spoke to his sister. "Look, I've got to go. I love you. Don't let the kids out of your sight. I love them, too. I'm even warming to Johnny a bit."

"We love you too," Rhiannon said.

Ianto disconnected the call. Jack placed a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it. "Well done. I'm proud of you," he said before removing his hand and picking up speed.

*I'm proud of you too, Jack*, Ianto thought as he, too, picked up his pace.
As Thames House came into view, Ianto dialed Gwen's number. "Okay, Gwen, we're here."

"Take care," Gwen said.

Ianto disconnected the call. Jack hadn't raised his mental barriers again, and Ianto could feel Jack's emotions all around him. Ianto remembered long ago that Jack had suggested Ianto might be able to emote his feelings as well as read the feelings of other people. He hoped Jack could feel what he was feeling – the pride he felt in working next to him, the respect he had for Jack, and how deeply in love he was with the older man. They were so much in sync, that they didn't even need to speak. Side-by-side, they marched into the building. Moving almost as one, they drew their weapons and raised them above their heads. Jack announced, "Jack Harkness, Ianto Jones. We're Torchwood."

They slammed their guns onto the security desk in unison.

After various phone calls and threats, Ianto and Jack were escorted to a lift. As they rode it to the thirteenth floor, Ianto's heart began pounding in his chest. Jack looked at him, as though sensing his anxiety. Ianto reassured him with a look. He was resolved. They would not yield to the 456.

Jack addressed the man who met them as the lift door opened. Ianto had seen him through the Torchwood lenses and recalled that his name was Dekker. "I want to feed the live TV pictures directly to this number, can you do that?"

"I can do that," Mr. Dekker said, taking the paper from Jack's hand.

They strode confidently down the hall to the room holding the 456. The room was dimly lit, but an eerie, hazy, blue light emanated from the enormous glass cage in the center of the floor. They had seen the room through the Torchwood lenses in Lois' eyes, but standing in front of the 456 was more daunting that Ianto had imagined.

Ianto and Jack stood shoulder to shoulder, facing their enemy. "I'm Captain Jack Harkness. I've dealt with you lot before. I'm here to explain why, this time, you're not getting what you want."

"You yielded in the past," said the voice from the 456.

"And don't I know it. I was there. In 1965, I was part of that trade, and that's why I'm never going to let it happen again," Jack said.

"Explain," the 456 ordered.

"There's a saying here on Earth, a very old, very wise friend of mine taught me it: an injury to one is an injury to all. And when people act according to that philosophy, the human race is the finest species in the Universe."

Ianto knew Jack was quoting the Doctor, but he was becoming impatient. "Never mind the philosophy. What he's saying is you're not getting one solitary, single child. The deal is off."

Jack turned to him. "Uh, I like the philosophy."

Ianto suppressed a smile, not taking his eyes off his enemy. "I gathered."

"You yielded in the past. You will do so again," the 456 repeated.

"In the past, the numbers were so small they could be kept secret, but this time, that is not going to happen," Jack said. "Because we've recorded everything. All the negotiations. Everything the politicians said. Everything that happened in this room. And those tapes will be released to the
"public. Unless you leave this planet for good."

"You yielded in the past. You will do so again," the 456 repeated once more.

"When people find out the truth, you will have over six billion angry human beings taking up arms to fight you. That might be a fight you think you can win, but at the end of it, the human race in defense of its children will fight to the death. And if I have to lead them into battle, I will."

It was with immense pride that Ianto said, "You've got enough information on this planet. Check your records. His name is Captain Jack Harkness. Go back a hundred and fifty years and see what you're facing."

"This is fascinating, isn't it?" the 456 asked. "The human infant mortality rate is twenty-nine thousand, one hundred and fifty-eight deaths per day. Every three seconds, a child dies. The human response is to accept and adapt."

"We're adapting right now, and we're making this a war," Jack proclaimed.

"Then the fight begins," the 456 announced unemotionally.

Ianto and Jack looked at each other, both wondering what the statement meant. They turned back to the glass cage. "We're waiting for your reply," Jack said.

"Action has been taken," the 456 stated.

Ianto and Jack looked at each other again. An alarm began to sound and the doors started closing. Thames House was going into lockdown. "What have you done?" Jack demanded.

"You wanted a demonstration of war. A virus has been released. It will kill everyone in the building," the alien said impassively.

Jack gripped Ianto's shoulders before running out of the room. Ianto knew that Jack was going to raise the alarm. Ianto stood staring at the 456. He felt completely calm. I should be afraid… but I'm not. We can't yield to their demands, no matter what. He cocked his gun and aimed it at the glass tank. He said evenly, "If there's a virus, then there must be an anti-virus. Release it now, or I'll blow a hole in that tank, and we'll all die together."

Then Jack was at his side again, pointing his gun at the 456 as well. "You made your point, now stop this and we can talk." Ianto could hear the panic in Jack's voice and felt the intense waves of fear coming from the older man.

"You are dying, even now," the 456 said.

Ianto and Jack simultaneously opened fire, but their bullets merely ricocheted off the glass. Suddenly the 456 let out a piercing screech and the dial on the tank fluctuated wildly. "What's that noise? What's it doing?" Jack asked.

Ianto didn't answer. He could feel his body weakening. I've been poisoned, he thought, and he was surprised by his detachment. So this is it… today's the day I'm going to die. I always knew Torchwood would kill me in the end. Dead at twenty-six, like so many of my predecessors… Like Lisa… But Jack's here with me, and I know he'll stay until the end… I just wish we'd had more time together…

Green slime splattered against the glass and the alien threw itself against its cage. Jack grabbed Ianto by the shoulders. "We've got to get you out of here," he said frantically. "I can survive anything, but
"You can't!"

"Too late," Ianto told him calmly, looking into his eyes. "I've breathed the air."

"There's got to be something! There's got to be an antidote!" Tears sprung into Jack's eyes.

"You said you would fight," said the 456.

Jack turned towards the tank. "Then I take it back, alright? I take it all back, but not him!" he shouted desperately.

Ianto fell to his knees, no longer able to sustain his own weight. Jack caught him, yelling, "No! No no no no no no no! No, Ianto. No, no, no!"

Ianto's consciousness was wavering, but he knew Jack was cradling him. He could feel Jack's anguish, and he wanted to comfort his lover. He looked up into Jack's face. "It's all my fault," Jack said.

"No it's not," Ianto told him. He couldn't let Jack blame himself.

"Don't speak, save your breath," Jack said. He caressed Ianto's cheek.

Ianto thought about all the time they'd wasted by arguing and misunderstanding each other. So many precious moments lost because we were too scared and too proud to admit how we really felt. It seems so foolish now... when it's too late... I should have said it ages ago. We lost so much time being cowards... I was afraid of rejection... but I knew how he felt. I could sense it when he let me in. Why was I so afraid to say it? I'm just sorry it has to be like this. It isn't how I wanted to tell him, but it's the last chance I'll have. He couldn't help the tears of regret that filled his eyes. "I love you." Finally, he'd found the courage to say the words aloud.

Jack shook his head. "Don't!"

Ianto understood that Jack didn't want this to be the way he said the words that they'd both avoided for so long. But he also understood that Jack didn't feel worthy of his love. Ianto struggled to remain conscious, but he was rapidly losing the battle. His eyes slipped shut.


Ianto used his last vestiges of energy to open his eyes and look up at the man he loved. He could see the tears falling down Jack's face and feel his anguish. It was so powerful that it almost overwhelmed him. *I'm sorry I can't stay with you longer... Don't forget how much you were loved, Jack... Be strong..."* "Hey," he murmured, trying to be strong for both of them. "It was... good, yeah?"

"Yeah," Jack agreed.

Ianto wanted Jack to remember. He wanted Jack to remember that he was worthy, that he deserved love and acceptance, that he deserved forgiveness. "Don't forget me," he whispered.

Jack tried to smile. "Never could."

"A thousand years' time... you won't remember me," Ianto said sadly. There was so much more he wanted to say, but the words wouldn't come. He didn't have the strength.

"Yes, I will. I promise, I will."
Those were the last words Ianto heard. Jack… he thought. Then the darkness fell in on him.
Jack stood on the edge of a cliff, overlooking a small, nameless town in Colorado. The wind whipped his hair, and his greatcoat billowed out behind him. He pulled the coat tightly around his body, buttoned it closed, and fastened the belt around his waist. The thin, frigid air made it difficult to breathe, and he inhaled deeply, trying to fill his lungs.

One hundred and eighty-three deaths, he thought mournfully. One death for every day Ianto's been gone, and I sacrificed my grandson, Steven...

Each time he'd hoped that it would be the last. He no longer feared the darkness of the void between life and death. He welcomed it. He yearned for it. But the void continued to reject him, and he'd come back to life, gasping and struggling, expecting familiar, comforting arms holding him close, guiding him back into the world. Each time he revived alone, an indescribable sense of complete and utter hopelessness overwhelmed him once again.

Why can’t I stay dead? How do I bear this curse? It hasn’t yet been two hundred years, and I feel like I’ve already endured the pain of a thousand lifetimes… I already feel my sanity slipping… How will I endure all of eternity?

Tears dripped unheeded from the tip of his nose and blew into the breeze, disappearing into the mist. His fist tightened around a crumpled piece of paper in his hand. He lifted it up and relaxed his grasp, unfolding the torn page from a book.

He’d read it over and over again. He knew the words by heart, but somehow they were more comforting on the printed page. It was a sonnet by the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay. He had met her once in the 1940’s. He’d had cocktails with her one night at a raucous party. Under the influence of copious glasses of bourbon, she had recited the first few lines of the poem she’d been writing, obviously lamenting some lost love affair. The words had come back to him after Ianto’s death, and he had gone into a library in search of it. He read the words for what seemed like the thousandth time:

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountainside,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide!
There are a hundred places where I fear
To go, – so with his memory they brim!
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, “There is no memory of him here!”
He crumpled the page again as a fresh flood of tears blinded him. It had been almost six months since the 456 had taken Ianto and Seven from him. Jack had endlessly replayed those last few days, but he felt his mind drifting over the events once more.

He'd revived to find himself lying in a damp quarry, naked, covered in concrete, dust, and mud, with his hands shackled. For a brief moment, he thought he'd had some kind of wild night with Ianto, but then the memories of the previous few days came trickling back, and he knew that they were all still in grave danger.

He got to his feet just as a car was approaching. At first he thought it was his captors, and he braced himself for more torture. Then he saw familiar faces behind the wheel, and his body relaxed. It was with overwhelming relief that he saw that Rhys, Gwen, and especially Ianto were alive and unharmed. "Told you I'd be back," he announced proudly, looking at Ianto.

"With a little help from us," Ianto replied, beaming at him.

There was little time for reconciliations between him and Ianto, but Jack had managed to steal a few moments with him in the car. It seemed that all of the discord between them was forgotten in light of recent events. Thank the gods he's alive, he thought as he kissed Ianto with a mixture of enthusiasm and relief.

It wasn't until Gwen had pulled the car over, and she, Rhys, and Ianto were asleep, that the magnitude of what had occurred began to sink in. The Hub is gone... Torchwood is gone... There's nothing left... Gray. What's happened to Gray? Is he dead? Is he still in cryo-freeze? His chest constricted painfully when he thought about his brother. He tried to push the thoughts away.

What about Tosh's body... and Suzie... and all of the other deceased Torchwood employees... All of our tech, weapons, alien artifacts. What about Myfanwy? Did she survive? Jack felt a wave of affectionate concern for the pterodactyl that he and Ianto had captured together on the night that Jack had hired him. I hope she wasn't in the Hub when it was destroyed... And Janet? And the other prisoners in the cells... Are they all dead? Did they escape? What are we going to do?

He was sick at heart as he mentally recited the seemingly endless list of losses. How do we even begin to fight this latest threat? Everything is gone!

At that moment, Ianto, who was asleep in his lap, began to stir. "Hey," Jack said quietly, so as not to wake the others.

"Hey," Ianto answered. "Where are we?"

"Not really sure," Jack replied. "Somewhere between Cardiff and London. Gwen was falling asleep at the wheel, so I told her to pull over and get some rest. I guess you all haven't had much sleep in the past couple of days."

"How could we sleep with you..." Ianto didn't complete the sentence.

"Thanks for coming to get me," Jack said, understanding the younger man's discomfort. He rubbed Ianto's thigh affectionately.


Jack tried to smile, but his heart was so heavy with their losses that the smile faltered. Ianto must have read the expression on his face. "What is it, Jack?" he asked, frowning.
"Everything's gone, Ianto. The Hub, our equipment, our resources… All the bodies in the morgue…"

Jack closed his eyes tightly and shook his head, feeling too overwhelmed to continue. He felt Ianto take his hand and squeeze it reassuringly. Jack opened his eyes and looked down at himself with derision. "Even my clothes are gone. It's like everything – everything that I've ever had has been taken away from me."

"You don't need the Hub to be the leader of Torchwood. You still have the people around you who believe in you," Ianto said soothingly.

"Oh, you mean the ones I use and then toss aside?" Jack asked contemptuously, pulling his hand out of Ianto's grasp.

"Jack!" Ianto whispered harshly.

Jack instantly regretted his words. He was lashing out at Ianto, and it was uncalled for. He held up his hand apologetically. "I'm sorry. I'm just… I just feel so lost."

"You've still got us, Jack. You've still got me," Ianto said with apparent conviction.

Jack looked at him. It seems like it's been a long time since I've talked to Ianto like this… so openly and unguarded… He wanted to say something, to tell Ianto that he appreciated his confidence. He opened his mouth to speak, but a stirring from the front seat interrupted him. Gwen was awake. Carefully concealing his emotions behind a mask of cheerfulness, he asked, "How ya doing, Gwen? Feel better after some sleep?"

Jack caught Ianto watching him curiously, and he gave the younger man a look, hoping Ianto would understand that he didn't want the others to know about his despondency. He was gratified to see that Ianto apparently understood. It made him feel close to Ianto again.

They arrived at the new Hub feeling dejected and defeated. Jack had done his best to bolster their confidence, and when that failed, he distracted them by 'accidentally' letting slip the fact that he knew about Gwen's pregnancy. He hadn't fooled Ianto though. "You did that on purpose, didn't you?" Ianto challenged.

Jack grinned, reveling in the fact that the other man seemed to know him so well. "They needed a distraction. Getting too maudlin."

"And you?" Ianto asked. "How are you holding up, track suit bottoms and all?"

Jack's smile widened, and he patted the seat next to him. Ianto slid over, and Jack put an arm around him. "I've got you," he whispered, pulling him close and pressing his forehead against Ianto's.

"Yeah, you do," Ianto replied.

They kissed, but Jack couldn't shake his discomfort. I don't feel like myself, he though unhappily. When Ianto's hand wandered underneath his t-shirt, it was all Jack could do not to recoil. The last thing I feel is sexy… He broke the kiss.

"What is it, Jack?" Ianto asked. "Gwen and Rhys will be fighting for at least half an hour."

"I just feel… uncomfortable in these clothes," Jack tried to explain, knowing he wasn't doing it justice. "I don't feel like myself," he added.
"Well, I do miss the coat," Ianto teased. "But you're still my Jack."

Jack was startled by Ianto's words. *It's been so long since he's called me that…* Jack's heart flooded with warmth and affection. He could feel tears burning in the back of his eyes, and he blinked several times, trying to push them away. *And you're still my Ianto,* he thought, with more passion than he could put into words.

Ianto pulled away awkwardly, looking uncomfortable, but Jack quickly pulled him back into his arms. "Thanks," Jack whispered. It was all he was able to say. He was overwhelmed.

He kissed Ianto again, and all of his earlier discomfort fell away. Much to his chagrin, Rhys interrupted them, yelling something about shenanigans, but Jack did his best to disguise his disappointment. What he really wanted to do was find a private spot and spend some time alone with Ianto, but there was too much to do. *I'll just have to wait,* he thought regretfully.

They explored the warehouse, pooled their resources, and decided they needed more equipment. Gwen taught them a few tricks of the trade, and they spent, what Jack had to admit, was an enjoyable morning stealing everything they needed. *It reminds me of the old days with the Time Agency,* he thought nostalgically. He'd been a con man for a long time, and it still came naturally to him. *Just like riding a bicycle,* he thought with dry amusement.

It was early afternoon by the time they'd acquired everything they needed. Jack's last theft, and the one of which he was most proud, was a neat little sports car. He met up with Gwen and Rhys as arranged, but Ianto was nowhere in sight. "Where's Ianto?" he asked with concern.

"He said he had something to do," Gwen replied. "He took the car. Said he'd meet us back at the warehouse."

"Something to do?" Jack asked. "What the hell could he have to do?"

"Don't know, Jack," Gwen said. "But he's a big boy. He can take care of himself. Let's get back to our new Hub and get online. We've been out of the loop for too long!"

Jack was worried, but he tried not to let it show. They drove back to the warehouse and began setting up their new equipment. As the afternoon wore on, and Ianto still hadn't appeared, Jack became highly agitated. "Damn him," he shouted. "What the hell are we going to do if he got arrested?"

"I'm sure he's fine, Jack," Gwen said in a reassuring tone.

A short time later, he heard a familiar voice calling, "I see we've got a new car outside." Ianto appeared laden with shopping bags. "Nice. Very smart," he added.

Jack breathed a sigh of relief, unable to decide if he was delighted or furious. "Where have you been? We thought you'd got arrested," he said angrily.

"Just buying essentials," Ianto explained calmly, setting his purchases down on a table with an audible exhalation. "Technology's one thing, but let's not forget the creature comforts." He reached into the nearest bag. "Coffee, obviously," he brandished the package before putting it down.

Jack couldn't help smiling with affection, and his anger quickly dissipated. Ianto reached into another bag. "Got some do-da." He held up a packet of toilet paper.

"Thank God!" Gwen exclaimed, and Rhys laughed.
"And more importantly…" He collected the various other purchases, setting what was obviously a suit bag on the sofa. "I didn't know your exact sizes, but I reckon I've got a good eye." He threw bags at Gwen and Rhys.

"Oh, brilliant, I am stinking!" Gwen said peering inside her bag.

"Nice one!" Rhys added as he examined the contents of his bag.

"And for you, Sir." Ianto walked up to Jack holding out a package. "Army surplus special."

"Oh, you are kidding me!" Jack exclaimed when he understood what Ianto had done.

It was with a renewed sense of self-possession that Jack dressed in the R.A.F. uniform Ianto had purchased. He felt like himself again. I'm Captain Jack Harkness, leader of Torchwood Three, he thought proudly, admiring himself in an old, cracked and rusted mirror. We can fight this thing!

Jack strode back towards the others with his head held high. "I'm back," he announced confidently.

He beamed as he listened to the resounding cheers and applauds from his team.

Jack was deeply moved by what Ianto had done for him. He knew that I would never feel like myself if I didn't have my uniform. He knows me so well... better than anyone ever has. But it's more than that... He understands me...

He took the first opportunity he could find to put his arms around the younger man and whisper, "Thank you," into his ear. There wasn't time for anything more. They were too busy trying to unravel the mystery behind the strange behavior of the children of the world.

Jack and Ianto were working side-by-side at their computers. Gwen had left to talk to Lois Habiba, and Rhys was in their makeshift kitchen preparing food. It was the first real opportunity Jack had to talk with Ianto, and there was something he'd wanted to ask the other man. "Is that the suit I bought you?"

"I didn't think you'd noticed," Ianto said, smiling.

"Of course I noticed! You drove all the way back to Cardiff for it?" Jack asked incredulously.

"Seemed important," Ianto replied without a hint of remorse.

"Well, it was really dangerous, Ianto," Jack scolded. "And a stupid risk. You could have been captured, or worse..." Jack broke off. He couldn't be angry with Ianto. Not after what he did for me... " But you look gorgeous," he added aloud.

"Thanks... Except for the slash across my face."

"Makes you look tough." Jack smiled at him. "It's kind of a turn on."

Jack turned his attention back to his computer. There was more he wanted to say, but he was distracted by a reoccurring name. "Frobisher's the key to this," he said. "He's just a civil servant. He's nothing. What makes him start authorizing executions?"

"What did it feel like? I mean, getting blown up," Ianto suddenly asked.

Jack was taken aback at the abrupt change of subject. "It wasn't the best of days," he replied casually.
"No… but… did you feel it?"

Jack sighed. It wasn't really an experience he wanted to relive, but he'd told Ianto that they needed to start talking to each other, and he wanted to keep that promise. He turned to face the younger man. "Or did everything just go black?" Ianto pressed.

"I felt it," Jack admitted.

"Shit!" Ianto exclaimed.

"Yeah," Jack agreed.

"Do you ever think that, one day, your luck will run out? That you won't come back?"

Jack looked at him sadly. "I'm a fixed point in time and space. That's what the Doctor says. I think that means it's forever."

"So… one day, you'll see me die… Of old age… And just keep going."

Jack hated thinking about it, but it was always there, lingering beneath the surface of their relationship. It was something that both of them had to accept if they were going to move forward. "Yeah," he acknowledged sorrowfully.

"We'd better make the most of it then," Ianto said with a half-smile.

No! Jack's very soul protested. I don't want things to be this way! He didn't want to accept his immortality. He wanted to find a way to fight it. He wanted desperately for things to be different. He couldn't stand the thought of outliving Ianto the way he'd outlived everyone else he'd loved, but there was no other way. "I suppose," he murmured. He turned back to his computer feeling hopelessly sick at heart.

"Like right now?" Ianto asked.

It took Jack a moment to understand what Ianto was insinuating. When it dawned on him, he couldn't help smiling. "Ianto, the world could be ending."

"World's always ending, and I have missed that coat," Ianto replied suggestively.

Jack laughed, and he felt the heartache fading into the background. "Rhys," he called. "Do you want to take the car and go to those shops down by the wharf? We need some disks for these things. Should take about… twenty minutes?"

"Thirty minutes," Ianto quickly amended.

"Thirty," Jack agreed readily.

"I'll go later," Rhys said. "The beans are almost done."

"The beans are almost done," Jack repeated, trying to hide his disappointment.

"Bloody beans," Ianto murmured.

Jack forced himself to concentrate on the computer screen in front of him and not to think about touching Ianto's naked body. Luckily Ianto distracted him with work. "Whoa, that's nice," the younger man exclaimed. "Look at that. Face recognition software. And… arrested two hours ago in London. He wouldn't give his name, but that is Clement MacDonald."
"That's the man from the hospital," Jack said.

"Could be useful," Ianto agreed.

Ianto's mobile phone rang. As he spoke to Gwen, Jack was only half listening. He was thinking about Clement MacDonald. Something was stirring in the back of his memory, something he couldn't quite grasp. When Ianto ended the call, Jack asked him to run through MacDonald's history again.

As Ianto spoke, the memories came sharply into focus. It can't be, Jack thought with a violent twisting in his gut. No! It can't be… He leapt out of his chair and looked over Ianto's shoulder. "Show me those people," he urged.

"What people?" Ianto asked.

"Andrew Staines, Ellen Hunt, Michael Sanders. The ones that were killed the same day as me," Jack explained.

"Why?" Ianto asked. "Do you think there's a connection?"

"Show me!" Jack insisted. He couldn't stand the suspense. He had to know.

Ianto pulled up the images, but it wasn't what Jack wanted to see. "No, no, give me their history." Jack's dread was making him impatient. "Show me them forty years ago."

"What for?" Ianto asked.

"Just do it!" Jack ordered, his temper flaring under the strain.

Ianto obeyed, and the people Jack dreaded seeing were staring at him from Ianto's computer screen. He felt bile rising in is throat. "Who are they, Jack? Did you know them?"

"I never knew their names," Jack murmured.

"Who were they? Jack, tell me," Ianto insisted. "Did you know them?"

Jack didn't respond. He couldn't think. He felt like the walls were closing in on him. He grabbed his coat and ran out the door, desperately needing to breathe fresh air. "Jack!" Ianto called after him, but Jack couldn't face the younger man.

Jack pulled out of his memories abruptly as he felt an overwhelming sense of guilt and remorse. He took another deep breath of the thin mountain air, and wiped the tears from his face. His skin felt raw and cracked from the constant moisture, but he welcomed the discomfort. I deserve it. I deserve worse than this… I shut Ianto out again, after I promised him that I wouldn't… I yelled at him, was impatient with him, took him for granted… If only I could take it all back...

His mind drifted again through the proceeding events. He had gone to Frobisher's house, stolen his wife's mobile phone, and called Frobisher from it. Jack wanted Frobisher to know that he could get to him, and to his wife and children. He demanded answers from Frobisher, who finally admitted that this latest threat was connected to the events in 1965. Jack threatened to expose the secrets from 1965 unless Frobisher let him speak to the 456 himself. But Frobisher was unmoved. It was then that he told Jack that they had taken Alice and Steven. "You what?" Jack exclaimed, his heart thumping in his chest. He'd thought that no one knew about Alice and Steven.

"I promise, nothing will happen to them," Frobisher said calmly. "My absolute promise. So long as..."
you agree to say nothing."

Jack was desperate. "Well, how about I go back into that house, right now, and get your wife? And your children?"

"Except you won't, because you're a better man than me. I'm sorry, Jack."

Frobisher disconnected the call, leaving Jack feeling utterly powerless.

Jack spent several hours sitting in the stolen sports car, thinking about 1965, about the 456, and about Alice and Steven. He tortured himself with the guilt. As tempted as he was to kidnap Frobisher's wife and children in retaliation, he couldn't bring himself to do it. I'm not that man anymore… And Ianto would never forgive me…

It was nearing midnight, and Jack knew that he would have to face his past sooner or later. What are they going to think about me? What's Ianto going to think? Will he ever forgive me? Will he still look at me the same way?

It was with a sense of despair that Jack drove back to the warehouse to confront his actions and admit his culpability. He marched in, standing to attention as he saw the accusation in all of their faces. He tried to explain. He tried to apologize. Then Clement MacDonald shot him.

Jack broke out of his memories again. The sun was beginning to set over the peaked horizon, casting brilliant shades of orange and purple over the Rocky Mountains, but Jack was immune to the beauty before him. How could I blame Clem for wanting to kill me? he thought mournfully. I deserve that and so much more…
I can't say enough about the brilliance and wisdom of my beta, riftintime. My eternal gratitude as always.

The colors over the mountains faded into a deep purple, as the stars began to break through the haze of the sunset. "Ianto…" Jack whispered into the wind.

His thoughts returned to the past once more.

Jack came back to life with his usual desperate gasp, but he felt warm, familiar arms around him, and he clung desperately to the comfort Ianto's embrace offered. Clem, apparently appalled by what he'd done, ran off, followed closely by Gwen and Rhys. As soon as they were gone, Ianto said, "I know there's more to the story, Jack. What is it? Tell me. I need to know."

Jack closed his eyes. This was the moment he'd been dreading. He opened his eyes and looked up at Ianto. "Even if you know the whole story, Ianto, you might still be appalled," he hedged.

"I need to know," Ianto repeated.

Jack sighed heavily. He was still clinging to the other man, trying to anchor himself in the present. He knew the truth had to come out, and he preferred to confess to Ianto first, before confronting the others. "1965," he began. "They called themselves the 456."

He told Ianto the story, trying to be as honest and as concise as possible. "The 456 wanted twelve children in exchange for the anti-virus," he concluded. "Twelve children… for one hundred and sixty-five million souls…" He stopped again, unable to meet Ianto's eyes, because he hadn't yet revealed the most damning part. Mentally steeling himself, he added, "And Torchwood needed someone to deliver the children to the 456."

"So they chose you," Ianto said.

"Yeah," Jack acknowledged.

"And you accepted the mission?" Ianto asked.

Jack nodded.

"You didn't argue with them? You didn't see if there was another way? You didn't try and negotiate?" Ianto asked quickly.

"I had nothing to do with Torchwood negotiations at the time," Jack clarified. "I was just a hired gun. I did what I was told."

"When have you ever done what you were told, Jack?" Ianto interjected. "Without question? Without argument?"

Jack could hear the anger in Ianto's voice, and he had to make a concerted effort not to flinch. "I was
a soldier for a long time, Ianto. I lived by my orders. Besides, Torchwood had already done all of the 
negotiating," he explained desperately. "I was ordered to deliver twelve children to the 456 for the 
anti-virus. That was the deal."

"So you were just following orders then?" Ianto asked coldly.

Jack had hoped that Ianto would understand, and he couldn't help the bitter disappointment from 
creeping into is voice. "There was no choice, Ianto! I gave them twelve children from a local 
orphanage, and the 456 delivered the anti-virus as promised."

Jack felt Ianto move underneath him, and he sat up. Ianto rose to his feet, dusting off his trousers. 
Jack tried to catch the younger man's eyes, but Ianto refused to meet his gaze. "You owe the others 
an explanation," he said. "And you owe Clem an explanation."

"Ianto." Jack reached out to him, but Ianto avoided his touch by taking a step backwards.

"Please, Jack. Just give me some time," Ianto murmured.

"Ianto…" Jack begged.

"Please, Jack," Ianto repeated, before turning and hurrying away.

Jack felt his heart sinking as he watched Ianto's retreating form. He'd desperately wanted Ianto's 
forgiveness. He'd hoped that rather than censure him, Ianto would have understood the impossibility 
of the situation and the guilt Jack had suffered as a consequence. But it seems like he's condemned 
me anyway… If he can't forgive me, then there's no hope that the others will understand…

He sat on the floor for several minutes, fighting down the utter despair that was welling up inside 
him. Maybe he just needed a bit of time to take it all in… He got to his feet and looked down at his 
ruined shirt, torn and covered in blood. Deciding there was nothing to be done about it, he went in 
search of Ianto. He knew that he should give the other man more time, but there wasn't any. He was 
going to have to face the others, and he wanted one more opportunity to have Ianto on his side 
before he told his story again.

He found Ianto sitting in front of his computer, staring at the screen saver. Jack sat down beside him. 
Before he could say anything, Ianto said. "I can't believe you didn't mention this before."

"They didn't speak through kids back then. I didn't recognize the signs at first," Jack told him.

Ianto turned to face him, and Jack could see the sadness in his eyes. "That's not what I meant," he 
said.

Jack returned his gaze, trying to find the right words to say, but he didn't have time to reply. Rhys 
appeared, warning them that Gwen and Clem were returning.

Jack rose to his feet and stood to attention next to Ianto. He knew that he was on his own, and he had 
to accept his fate alone. Gwen entered with her arm around Clem, supporting him. Clem looked at 
Jack, and there was clear accusation in his eyes. "The man who sent me and my friends to die, can't 
die himself!" he said.

Jack could feel three pairs of eyes boring into him, accusing him. The guilt threatened to overwhelm 
him. He looked down at his feet, giving himself a moment as his stomach churned uncomfortably. 
You're alone, he told himself. Just like you always have been. You have to face them on your own. 
None of them will understand the position you were in, and you're going to have to accept their 
condemnation. Steeling himself, he lifted his head up, stood up straighter, and threw his shoulders
back in the proper military stance. He began to tell his story over again. When he'd finished, no one spoke.

Ianto rose from his seat and walked away. Jack refused to allow his eyes to follow the younger man. *He's probably disgusted with me*, he thought despondently.

No one spoke in Ianto's absence, and no one met Jack's eyes. He stood silently, holding his military posture and waiting for them to pass judgment.

Jack was surprised when Ianto returned several moments later proffering a new shirt and undershirt, but he didn't let it show. He acknowledged the gesture with a nod, taking off his greatcoat and handing it to the younger man, who hung it neatly over his arm. Jack's heart warmed at the familiar gesture, but he maintained his features in a stoic mask. He quickly pulled off his ruined shirts and passed them to Ianto, who exchanged them for the new garments.

It wasn't until he was buttoning up his clean shirt that Gwen finally broke the silence. "It was a protection, right? You knew they'd be back."

"I knew it was a possibility," Jack admitted, relieved that they were finally speaking again.

He tried to answer their questions, and offer further explanations, but their attention was diverted by commotion from Whitehall.

When Jack saw a child he'd handed over in 1965 in the glass cage with the 456, his resolved failed. His guilt was overpowering, and he had to turn away from the images. He moved away and sat down on a chair, swallowing down the bile that had risen in this throat. He was almost numb with shock as he listened to the 456's threats of total annihilation, unless they turned over ten percent of the children of the world. He listened long enough to hear the secrets of 1965 exposed to the rest of the government officials, then he'd heard enough.

He stood and walked away from the others, feeling like his legs could hardly sustain his weight. He stopped in front of the large warehouse windows, where early morning sunlight flooded through the glass. The confrontation with the 456 had lasted all night.

He stared out of the windows. *Maybe now they'll understand the impossibility of the situation we faced in 1965*, he thought ruefully. *How could I think Ianto would forgive me? He's the one who said I sacrifice everyone around me, that there isn't a soul on this planet that I give a damn about... He called me a monster once... I guess that's how he still thinks of me... Maybe he's right. If that's how he sees me, then that's all I'll be. A cold-hearted and ruthless monster.*

He heard the younger man approaching, but he didn't acknowledge him. He was determined to be the man Ianto had accused him of being. "This must have been eating away at you," Ianto said.

Jack didn't reply, and he didn't turn around.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Ianto asked. "I could've helped."

Jack shook his head. "No, you couldn't."

"I tell you everything."

*Do you really, Ianto?* he thought irritably. *I find that difficult to believe... You, too, have had your share of secrets. You're just as skilled at lies and deception as I am...* Jack finally turned around and looked at him. "Ianto, tell me, what should I have done?" he asked with frustration.
"Stood up to them," Ianto replied. "The Jack I know would've stood up to them."

_Then obviously you don't know me, Jack thought angrily. I'm just a cold-hearted bastard._

"I've only just scraped the surface, haven't I?" Ianto asked.

"Ianto, that's all there is," Jack said dispassionately.

"No. You pretend that's all there is."

Jack wanted to believe the conviction in Ianto's statement, but he wasn't sure that he could. Ever since his first encounter with the Doctor, he'd tried be a better man, to be worthy of his immortality. _Perhaps I've been fooling myself... perhaps I haven't really changed at all._ "I have lived a long time," he said aloud. "I have done a lot of things."

They looked into each other's eyes, and Jack saw the disappointment and confusion reflected in Ianto's gaze. _This conversation is pointless. He's already decided what I am._ "I've got to go, I won't be long," Jack said, turning away.

"You're doing it again," Ianto called after him. "Speak to me, Jack. Where are you going?"

Jack turned around to face him. "To call Frobisher. I can't call him from here, because they'd be able to trace it. Is that okay?" he asked sarcastically.

"You're the boss," Ianto replied calmly.

Before Jack could stop himself, he added, "And just so you know, I have a daughter called Alice and a grandson called Steven, and Frobisher took them hostage yesterday." His voice broke.

He hadn't meant to tell Ianto. He hadn't meant to tell anyone. The words had just come tumbling out. He couldn't read the expression on Ianto's face, and he decided that he didn't want to stay around to see his reaction. He turned abruptly and walked away.

Jack's call to Frobisher was futile. Frobisher refused to release his family unless Jack turned himself in. Jack threatened to tell the world what was really going on with the 456 and ended the call.

He leaned against the stolen sports car, his heart pounding in his chest. _What have I done? My family's been kidnapped, my team thinks I'm despicable, the Hub is gone, and the 456 are going to wipe out the human race..._ He sighed heavily and ran his fingers distractedly through his hair. _I don't remember this from the history books... Nothing about an alien species obliterating the human race or the disappearance of ten percent of the Earth's children in this century... And where the hell is the Doctor? Why isn't he here? How could he have left us alone to fight this? I don't know what I'm supposed to do..._

He found himself wishing Ianto was there to comfort him. _Why am I pushing Ianto away? I need him. I didn't even give him a chance. I just decided that he would condemn me like everyone else. I can't do this alone,_ he finally realized.

With determination, he strode back into the warehouse. "Ianto?" he called, gesturing for the younger man to follow him.

He led the other man up the metal staircase, away from the others, before stopping and turning to face his lover. Before he could speak, Ianto asked, "Any word about your family?"

"They're being held captive," Jack replied. "Frobisher wants me to turn myself in for their release,
but I don’t trust him."

"Anything I can do to help, Jack," Ianto offered, and he sounded sincere.

"I know," Jack said, smiling sadly at him. *We can't go on like this... I need him...* He moved forward and pulled Ianto into a fierce embrace. Words rushed out of him. He was too overcome to remain silent. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm sorry I never told you about my family. I'm sorry I never told you about the 456 and the children. I'm sorry about everything. About the fight we had... about the state of things between us... about all the secrets..."

At first Ianto was tense in his embrace, but then Jack felt the younger man relax, put his arms around him, and pull him closer. "I was angry, and I was hurt," Jack continued. "I wanted you to understand about the children and the 456."

"I do understand, Jack. It was just the shock of everything. I know you did what you thought was right at the time. You always do. I shouldn't have doubted you. I'm sorry too."

Jack wanted to explain his aloofness. "I needed your forgiveness, Ianto, but you didn't give it."

"Why did you need my forgiveness?"

"You're the only one who could give it to me," Jack said. His voice broke. He was holding back so many emotions that they threatened to all come tumbling out at once.

"Why?" Ianto asked with evident surprise in his voice.

Jack pulled back. He cupped Ianto's face in his hands, leaned his forehead against Ianto's, and looked into his eyes. "You know why," he said fiercely, willing Ianto to understand without having to say the words.

"Jack..." Ianto whispered.

Jack struggled to find the right words. "You've always stood by me, even when you disagreed with me." He stroked Ianto's cheek. "You've always been there for me, since the day we met. You've always supported me, given me strength... forgiven me."

"Yes. And I always will, Jack."

Their lips met, and Jack felt his defenses falling away. He was tired of shutting Ianto out. He was tired of the misunderstandings and insecurities. He loved Ianto, and he needed him by his side. *I can't do this without him,* Jack realized.

Jack allowed himself to be lost in the kiss, holding desperately to the man he loved. Tears sprung into his eyes, but he did nothing to stop their flow. They clung to each other, both reluctant to let go. "I'm sorry I've kept so many secrets," Jack managed to say through his tears.

"It's okay, Jack." Ianto wiped Jack's tears away with his thumbs. "Like you said, you've lived a long time. It doesn't matter what you've done in the past. I only want the Jack here and now."

"I'll do better," Jack promised sincerely.

"So will I," Ianto said.

They kissed again, and Jack wished he could take Ianto away from all of the ugliness. He wished they could go away together and have a proper reunion. *But the world is at war with an alien*
species, and we're Torchwood. With forced resolve, Jack pulled away gently, leaning his forehead against Ianto's again. "And now I have to face what I've done," he said.

"When you look into an abyss…"

"The abyss also looks into you," Jack finished, smiling to himself. He knew it was Ianto's way of forgiving him and telling him he understood the terrible choice he'd had to make in 1965.

"I'm here for you, Jack. I'm by your side." Ianto stood back and straightened out the collar of Jack's greatcoat. Then he held out his hand. "Now let's go and face this," he said with a reassuring smile.

"Together?" Jack asked, hopefully.

"Always."

Jack felt a surge of relief and grateful affection as he took Ianto's outstretched hand. Ianto squeezed his hand supportively, and drawing strength from the younger man, Jack walked with Ianto back into the main area of the warehouse.

As they neared the others, Jack started to feel overwhelmed. He decided that he needed a minute to collect himself before facing the others. He sat down on the metal staircase, whispering to Ianto, "Give me a few minutes."

Ianto nodded and squeezed Jack's hand reassuringly again before releasing it and walking away. Jack sat on the steps as the myriad of emotions played through his soul. He was still overwrought with guilt, but somehow, it seemed more bearable. Ianto will stand by me, no matter what. He felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude and love for the younger man. My Ianto…

"Gold Command meeting's about to start!" Ianto called out, interrupting his thoughts.

Jack took up his position beside Ianto. Gwen turned to him. "I'm sorry to hear about your family, by the way. We'll get them out."

"I know we will," Jack said.

He glanced briefly at Ianto, letting the younger man know that it was okay that he told the others. Ianto gave him a slight nod, then they both turned their attention to the meeting.

Jack was disgusted by conversation at Gold Command, but he wasn't surprised. He's seen way too many situations like this to be surprised by anything anymore. They were all silent as they took in the news. Ianto was the first to break the silence that followed the conclusion of the meeting. "My God… That could mean my niece and nephew. Jack, we can't let them do this!"


"What do we do?" Gwen asked, her voice hoarse.

"I think I have an idea," Jack said, and he began to outline his plan.

Jack broke away from his memories again. Night had descended in Colorado. There was no moon, and the darkness was only broken by the gleaming stars in the sky and the flickering lights coming from the nameless town in the valley below. There was so much he regretted, but the next memory was the one for which he was the most grateful.

After Jack had revealed his plan, he'd told the others to try and get some rest, then he'd lead Ianto up
to the old sleeping quarters. As soon as he'd shut and locked the door, he pulled Ianto to him, kissing him frantically and fumbling at the buttons on his shirt.

Ianto pulled away. "Jack, the world could be ending."

"The world's always ending," Jack said with a sly grin, amused at the role reversal. "And I thought you missed the coat."

A smile twitched at the corners of Ianto's mouth. "Well, yes, I have missed the coat," he said, fingering the lapels.

Jack kissed him again. He was not to be dissuaded. He wanted Ianto. It had been too long. "Besides," he whispered against Ianto's lips. "We have a little time to kill. We're working out a strategy."

"Oh, are we?" Ianto teased, assuming a serious expression. "And what kind of strategy would that be?"

"The best kind," Jack replied, grasping Ianto's tie and tugging it so that Ianto moved towards him.

They kissed again, their tongues sliding together. Then Jack broke the kiss and held Ianto tightly, their bodies pressed close. They stood like that for several moments, wrapped in each other's arms. "I told my sister about you," Ianto said quietly into Jack's ear.

Surprised by Ianto's words, Jack pulled back and looked into his eyes. "You did?" he asked.

Ianto nodded. He traced a finger across Jack's lips. "I don't want you to go on thinking I'm ashamed to be with you… I'm proud… to be with you." Ianto looked into his eyes. "I'm proud to have you as my Captain, my friend, my lover… my partner."

Tears sprang into Jack's eyes again, and again he made no attempt to hide them. "So you've decided what I am to you?" he asked, feeling strangely shy. It was a feeling Jack hadn't experienced in decades.

Ianto caressed Jack's cheek. "It was never a matter of deciding," he said. "It was just finding the courage to say it aloud. I was always yours, Jack, and I always will be, come what may."

I love you. Jack wanted to finally say it, but he couldn't get the words out. Instead he did the next best thing. He completely lowered his mental barriers, allowing Ianto to feel what he was feeling as he kissed him, undressed him, and laid him down on top of his greatcoat, spread out over the bare mattress. Their bodies moved together, hands caressing bare flesh, mouths colliding hungrily. "Jack," Ianto whispered. "I want you inside me."

Jack pulled away with a disappointed frown. "I don't have anything…"

Ianto smiled. "Check your coat pocket. Do you really think I would buy you new clothes without adding your usual essentials?"

Jack threw back his head and laughed. Then he leaned down and kissed Ianto's lips softly. "You know me so well."

"Yeah, I guess I do."

"Better than anyone else ever has," Jack said seriously, realizing the truth of his words as he looked down at Ianto. "You always saw through my façade… saw the man underneath… saw me for who I
was, not who I pretended to be… It's what makes this… us… so special."

Ianto pulled Jack down and kissed him again. Jack knew in the depths of his soul that he belonged to Ianto. He let himself go, and he made love to Ianto with everything that he was. He knew Ianto could feel what he was feeling, but for the first time, Jack could sense Ianto's emotions as well. He realized that in the passion of the moment, Ianto must have been unconsciously projecting his feelings. Jack felt what Ianto felt, and the sensation was completely intoxicating. It was unlike anything he'd experienced before. In all of Jack's myriad encounters, this was the most erotic, the most sensual, the most passionate, and the most profound. He'd never before felt so in love or so loved.

When their bodies simultaneously climaxed, it was as though they were one, both able to share in the physical pleasure of the other as well as their own. Their lips met softly, and lingered together as their breathing slowed. They looked into each other's eyes, holding each other's faces, their foreheads pressed together. No words were necessary. In that moment, they were beyond words.

Jack wished he could spend the rest of his eternal life in that perfect moment, but his sense of duty was too strong to allow himself to linger for long. He needed to face the 456 and atone for his past sins. He forced himself to shift the atmosphere. He grinned cheekily. "Well, we had to break in the new coat."

Ianto laughed. "Glad that's done then."

They smiled at each other. "Back to reality?" Jack asked.

"I suppose. World ending and all," Ianto said.

"When this is over," Jack began. *When this is over, everything between us will be different… No more fear… No more holding back… I'm yours, Jones, Ianto Jones.*

"Yeah," Ianto agreed. "When this is over."

They kissed once again, then reluctantly pulled apart and climbed off the bed. Jack took Ianto's hand, and they ran into the shower room to rinse off. Both of them made a concerted effort to keep the shower strictly business. Jack longed to touch Ianto again, but there wasn't time. Jack knew that Ianto felt the same way. "You and your 51st century pheromones," Ianto murmured, pushing Jack away.

"When this is over," Jack said again, pulling Ianto close to him as they stepped out of the shower.

"When this is over," Ianto agreed, holding Jack briefly before letting him go with obvious regret.

Jack stood in the darkness on the edge of a cliff in the Colorado Rockies, playing the scene over and over in his mind. In all of his hundreds of years, he didn't think he'd ever experienced a more perfect moment. *I should have said the words. I should have told him. Three little words. Why didn't I say it then when I had the chance? Why was I such a coward?* "I love you, Ianto," Jack told the mountains, but the mountains didn't reply.

He knew that of his countless regrets, not telling Ianto that he loved him was the most bitter of them all.
Chapter Notes

Thanks to my fantastically talented beta riftintime.

The temperature had dropped precipitously since the sun set over the mountains. The frigid air found every opening in Jack’s clothing, and the cold crept its long fingers through every gap in the fabric. He held his body rigid, refusing to give into the impulse to shiver. He welcomed the pain of the frost against his skin. "I deserve to suffer," he whispered aloud, as the memories of the subsequent events unfolded in his mind.

He and Ianto spent a few minutes discussing strategy as they redressed. Jack allowed himself one last kiss with Ianto before they rejoined the group.

Jack checked in with the others as Ianto gathered their weapons. He took a deep breath, trying to calm the vague sense of unease clawing at the back of his mind. Then he steeled himself. "Right, everyone know what they're doing?" he asked.

"What if I can't get Lois to agree to this, Jack?" Gwen asked.

"She hasn't let us down yet. Rhys, you ready?" Jack asked.

Rhys nodded, looking nervous, as Ianto rushed forward and handed Jack his weapon. They both loaded their guns. Jack looked directly into Ianto's eyes. "Let's go stand up to them," he said.

"Yes, Sir," Ianto replied.

Together they jumped into the stolen sports car and headed into London. Jack made a deliberate decision to leave his mental barriers down. He and Ianto were in this together, and they would face the 456 as one. A united front. This is how it's going to be from now on, he promised himself. I won't shut him out again. I won't be a coward any longer. Not with Ianto.

Once they'd entered the city proper, the traffic forced them to a standstill. Simultaneously, they jumped out of the car and began jogging towards Thames House. Ianto pulled out his mobile phone and called his sister, as they'd planned. Jack only half listened to the conversation. He knew what Ianto was going to say. He was focused on facing the 456. He wondered vaguely if the Doctor would arrive to help. Surely this can't mean the end of the human race, and unless history is about to change, the world doesn't lose millions of children in the twenty-first century. But he couldn't quite suppress the nagging doubt in the back of his mind.

Jack heard Ianto telling his sister that he loved her and the children, and he smiled inwardly. He knew that Ianto’s relationship with his sister was strained at best, and he was glad that Ianto was making an effort to mend things between them. I wonder if I'll get to meet her, he thought distractedly. Now that she knows… I'd be interested to see what she's like.

When Ianto ended the call, Jack placed a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it. "Well done. I'm proud of you," he said before removing his hand and picking up speed.

As Thames House came into view, Ianto called Gwen, again as they'd planned. "Okay, Gwen, we're
Ianto disconnected the call, and side-by-side, they marched into the building. Moving almost as one, they drew their weapons and raised them above their heads. Jack announced, "Jack Harkness, Ianto Jones. We're Torchwood."

They slammed their guns onto the security desk in unison.

After various phone calls and threats, they were escorted to a lift. As they rode it to the thirteenth floor, Jack could sense Ianto's anxiety. He looked at the younger man with concern, but Ianto reassured him with a glance. They had agreed that they would not yield to the 456's demands, and Jack knew that Ianto was resolved.

Jack addressed Dekker, who met them as the lift door opened. Jack held out a piece of paper. "I want to feed the live TV pictures directly to this number, can you do that?"

"I can do that." Dekker took the paper from Jack's hand.

Jack and Ianto strode purposefully down the hall to the room holding the 456 and stood in front of the glass chamber. The room was dimly lit, and the greenish light emanating from the alien inside cast an ominous hue to their surroundings, but Jack wasn't impressed. He'd lived too long and seen too many things to be mesmerized by simple parlor tricks.

Ianto and Jack stood shoulder to shoulder, facing their enemy. "I'm Captain Jack Harkness. I've dealt with you lot before. I'm here to explain why, this time, you're not getting what you want."

"You yielded in the past," said the voice of the 456.

Jack wanted to flinch at the reminder of his past deeds, but he kept his features well controlled. "And don't I know it. I was there. In 1965, I was part of that trade, and that's why I'm never going to let it happen again," he said.

"Explain," the 456 ordered.

"There's a saying here on Earth, a very old, very wise friend of mine taught me it." Jack then quoted the Doctor, half expecting the Time Lord to appear as though summoned: "An injury to one is an injury to all. And when people act according to that philosophy, the human race is the finest species in the universe."

Ianto interrupted him. "Never mind the philosophy. What he's saying is you're not getting one solitary, single child. The deal is off."

Jack turned to him with mild amusement. "Uh, I like the philosophy."

"I gathered," Ianto replied, not taking his eyes off the alien.

"You yielded in the past. You will do so again," the 456 repeated.

"It's beginning to sound like a broken record," Jack thought with frustration. Aloud he said, "In the past, the numbers were so small they could be kept secret, but this time, that is not going to happen. Because we've recorded everything. All the negotiations. Everything the politicians said. Everything that happened in this room. And those tapes will be released to the public. Unless you leave this planet for good."

"You yielded in the past. You will do so again," the 456 repeated once more.
Jack was beginning to tire of the conversation. "When people find out the truth, you will have over six billion angry human beings taking up arms to fight you. That might be a fight you think you can win, but at the end of it, the human race in defense of its children will fight to the death. And if I have to lead them into battle, I will."

Ianto said, "You've got enough information on this planet. Check your records. His name is Captain Jack Harkness. Go back a hundred and fifty years and see what you're facing."

Jack could hear the pride in Ianto's voice, and it gave him strength, but he still couldn't assuage the gnawing sensation in his gut. Something's not right here…

"This is fascinating, isn't it?" the 456 asked. "The human infant mortality rate is twenty-nine thousand, one hundred and fifty-eight deaths per day. Every three seconds, a child dies. The human response is to accept and adapt."

"We're adapting right now, and we're making this a war," Jack proclaimed.

"Then the fight begins," the 456 announced unemotionally.

Ianto and Jack looked at each other, wondering what the alien meant. The churning in Jack's gut intensified, but they'd agreed that they would not yield to the 456. They turned back to the glass cage. "We're waiting for your reply," Jack said.

"Action has been taken," the 456 stated.

Ianto and Jack looked at each other again. Jack could no longer ignore his instincts. They screamed, "Danger!" An alarm began to sound and the doors started closing. Thames House was going into lockdown. Jack felt his heart rate increasing. "What have you done?" he demanded, sweat breaking out on his brow.

"You wanted a demonstration of war. A virus has been released. It will kill everyone in the building," the alien said impassively.

Jack fought back terror as he gripped Ianto's shoulders before running out of the room to convey a warning. "The air's poison," he called to the guards standing outside the doors. "Call someone. Shut down the air conditioning. Block every air vent. Get gas masks, hazard suits, oxygen cylinders."

He returned in time to hear Ianto saying, "If there's a virus, then there must be an anti-virus. Release it now, or I'll blow a hole in that tank, and we'll all die together."

Ianto was pointing his gun at the tank, and Jack took up his position next to him, brandishing his own weapon. "You made your point, now stop this and we can talk." He couldn't help the panic from creeping into his voice.

"You are dying, even now," the 456 said.

Ianto and Jack simultaneously opened fire, but their bullets ricocheted uselessly off the glass. Suddenly the 456 let out a piercing screech and the dial on the tank fluctuated wildly. "What's that noise? What's it doing?" Jack asked.

Green slime splattered against the glass and the alien threw itself against its cage. Jack could feel Ianto weakening, and his panic increased. He grabbed Ianto by the shoulders. "We've got to get you out of here," he said frantically. "I can survive anything, but you can't!"

"Too late," Ianto said calmly, looking into Jack's eyes. "I've breathed the air."
"There's got to be something! There's got to be an antidote!" Tears sprang into Jack's eyes.

"You said you would fight," the 456 said.

Jack turned towards the tank with wild desperation. "Then I take it back, alright? I take it all back, but not him!" he pleaded. *Not him! Don't take him from me! Please, I'll do anything!*

Ianto fell to his knees, and Jack caught him, yelling, "No! No no no no no no no no! No, Ianto. No, no, no!" *I won't let this happen! Not now... not after everything we've been through.*

"The remnant will be disconnected," the 456 said.

Jack had no idea what it was talking about, and he didn't care. His only concern was for Ianto. He cradled his lover. *This isn't happening!* But Jack could feel Ianto fading, and his guilt, remorse, and agony threatened to overwhelm him. *I should have let you go. I should have sent you away from Torchwood and all the dangers it holds, but I was too selfish. I wanted you with me.*

Ianto looked up at Jack. "It's all my fault," Jack said aloud.

"No it's not," Ianto told him.

"Don't speak, save your breath," Jack said. He caressed Ianto's cheek lovingly.

Ianto's eyes filled with tears. "I love you." His voice broke.

Jack shook his head. "Don't!" *Not now! Not like this! Don't tell me like this! I don't deserve your love. I'm not worthy of it.*

Ianto's eyes slipped shut. Jack shook him gently. "Ianto? Ianto? Ianto, stay with me. Ianto, stay with me, please." He began to sob. "Stay with me, stay with me, please, please!" *Please God, no! Don't take him from me. I can't lose him. Not now... not when we finally know what we mean to each other. I need more time with him. We wasted so much time...*

Ianto opened his eyes again. "Hey," he murmured. "It was... good, yeah?"

"Yeah," Jack agreed, almost smiling at the absurdity of the understatement.

"Don't forget me," Ianto whispered.

Jack tried to smile. "Never could."

"A thousand years' time... you won't remember me," Ianto said sadly.

"Yes, I will. I promise, I will." *I could never forget you, Jones, Ianto Jones. Never!*


He couldn't admit that Ianto was gone. He wouldn't admit it. *Ianto...*

"You will die. And tomorrow, your people will deliver the children," the 456 said.

Jack looked up at the creature who had killed his lover. He wanted to feel anger. He wanted to feel rage and hatred, but he felt empty and helpless. Nothing mattered anymore. Ianto was gone, and nothing else in the world mattered. He placed one final kiss on Ianto's dead lips. *My Ianto...*
Jack fell to his knees with a howl of despair. His anguished wail echoed off the mountains, as though the very air was responding to his suffering. "No!" he screamed into the cold night air. "No… No… No…" the mountains responded, as though mocking his agony.

Each time he'd replayed the scene in his mind was just as excruciating as the day it happened. "Time does not bring relief. You all have lied who told me time would ease me of my pain…"

Kneeling on the snow-covered ground, sobbing uncontrollably, he forced himself to play out the rest of the memory.

He came back to life, for once without the usual desperate gasp. He had wanted to remain in that dark void. He hadn't clawed his way out, fighting his way back to life. Instead, he had tried to stay in the darkness. But the force of the time vortex that flowed through him was more powerful than his will.

He opened his eyes, hoping it had been a horrible dream, but Gwen was there, crying over Ianto's body. The room was filled with bodies. I killed them all, Jack thought. I killed Ianto. My Ianto… Gone. Now I have nothing left. Jack draped himself over Gwen, unable to keep himself upright. His heart had turned to stone.

Jack rapidly played through the proceeding events. He told Gwen to call Rhys and tell him that they'd failed. Frobisher promised to release Alice and Steven, and Jack convinced him to let Gwen and Rhys go, in order to deliver the news of Ianto's death to his sister. It was one of the most difficult conversations he'd ever had. Even saying Ianto's name aloud felt like daggers plunging through his chest.

As Gwen and Rhys boarded the helicopter, Jack hugged her, for the sole purpose of whispering in her ear. "They've got kids. Ianto's niece and nephew. Save them."

It was his last act of grace.

He sat in the prison cell next to Lois Habiba, ignoring her pleas for his attention. Nothing mattered to him anymore. The world was going to hell, Ianto was gone, and the Doctor wasn't coming. Jack had failed everyone. His fate no longer mattered to him. The fate of the world no longer mattered. He felt dead inside.

Soldiers infiltrated the holding cell and took Jack away. He realized that it was Johnson's men, the very people who had destroyed the Hub and had tried to kill them. But he no longer cared.

They flew him by helicopter to Aston Down, where he was reunited with Alice and Steven. He was relieved to see they were safe and unharmed, but he could feel no joy at the sight of his family. Dekker appeared in handcuffs beside him. Jack had no idea what was going on, but he was indifferent to his fate.

They walked Jack and Dekker into a large, open warehouse, with a circle of computer equipment illuminated by portable lighting on tripods. Their shackles were removed. "This should be everything you need. And if it's not, we'll find it," Johnson said.

"For what?" Jack asked.

"Wavelengths. The 456 are named after a wavelength, and that's got to be the key to fighting back," Johnson replied.

"You're wasting your time," Dekker interjected. "There's nothing you can do. I've analyzed those transmissions for forty years and never broke them."
Johnson turned, drew her weapon and shot Dekker in the thigh. He collapsed to the floor, crying out in pain. She re-holstered her gun and turned to Jack. "What do you think, Captain?" she asked. "She told me you were good." Johnson nodded towards Alice who was standing behind Jack. "Was she right?"

Jack turned to look at his daughter. She was smiling at him. *It's what Ianto would have wanted*, he thought. *He would have wanted me to try and save the children.* He smiled at his daughter. "Let's get to work," he said, taking off his greatcoat.

He quickly realized that there must have been a reason the 456 killed Clem, that his connection to them must have been a threat to the creatures. He had them play the wavelength that killed the old man. "We don't have to analyze the wavelength, just copy it. Turn it into a constructive wave. But we've got no way of transmitting," Jack said.

"Of course you have," Dekker said.

"Shut up," Jack growled, not wanting to even consider what Dekker was insinuating.

"Same way as them," Dekker continued brazenly.

"I'll find something else," Jack said.

"What does he mean?" Johnson asked.

"Don't listen to him," Jack told her.

"Dekker, tell me," Johnson ordered.

"The 456 used children… To establish the resonance," Dekker said.

"Meaning what?" Johnson asked.

"We need a child," Dekker told her.

"What do you mean?" Alice asked sounding alarmed.

"Center of the resonance," Dekker replied, chuckling cruelly. "That child's gonna fry."

Jack knew the choice that was facing him, maliciously mocking him. *This is my penance,* he thought. *This is the consequence of my actions. Losing Ianto wasn't enough… I haven't paid enough…* 

"No, Dad. No, tell them no," Alice said, the shock evident in her voice.

"One child or millions," Johnson said.

"Dad, no. Dad, tell them no!" Alice repeated.

Jack couldn't look at her. *Ianto, what do I do? Would you forgive me this as well? But you're not here… You're dead. I killed you. And now I have to suffer…* 

"We're running out of time," Johnson said urgently.

"Dad, no! No, Dad!" Alice cried desperately.

"Captain!" Johnson shouted.
Jack heard Ianto's voice in his head. "*When you look into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.*" Never had those words seemed so poignant to him. He remembered the line before that in Nietzsche's essay. "*He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster.*" He had made horrible decisions before in the name of saving lives, but this was the most unspeakable of them all. *When you look into the face of evil, even if you mean to fight it, you take a piece of that evil with you. It becomes a part of you. It changes you forever... I will never be the same... I am not the same. With Ianto gone, I have nothing left...*

He remembered Ianto's words, all those years ago when he tried to kill Lisa, the Cyberwoman. He remembered the loathing in Ianto's expressive blue eyes when he'd sneered hatefully, "You like to think you're a hero, but you're the biggest monster of all." *You were right about me, Ianto. I am a monster.*

Jack nodded, giving his assent to sacrifice his grandson, relinquishing his last traces of humanity.

Alice ran out of the room, screaming, "Steven!"

Jack kept his eyes fixed on the computer screen. Darkness had taken hold of his soul.

The soldiers brought Steven in and placed him in the center of the equipment. "What are we doing, Uncle Jack?" Steven asked.

Jack didn't respond. He didn't look at his grandson. He couldn't meet his eyes.

"What's happening? What do you want me to do?" Steven asked.

Jack ignored him. He ignored the screams from his daughter, locked out of the room. He kept working. *I am a monster, he repeated to himself. I am a monster.*

Finally he looked up at his grandson. Tears filled his eyes. *Only a monster could sacrifice his own flesh and blood.* He suddenly felt relieved that Ianto wasn't there to bear witness. *I never deserved his love, and I never will.*

He hit the button on the keyboard to start the program.

Steven opened his mouth, and a high-pitched wailing filled the room. Steven's body began to jerk uncontrollably and blood poured from his nostrils. Jack forced himself to watch, tears streaming down his face.

Steven collapsed, and Jack knew that he was dead. Alice was finally allowed in, and Jack forced himself to watch as his daughter screamed and cried over Steven's lifeless body.

*I am a monster.*

"It worked," Johnson said. "Reports coming in. The 456 are destroyed."

Jack grabbed his greatcoat and walked out of the room.

He thrust his arms into the coat and sank down on a bench outside. He had gone completely numb. His mind couldn't even form a single coherent thought. *Steven... Ianto... gone... My fault... All my fault. I am the abyss...*

The warehouse door opened, and his daughter walked out. He looked at her, prepared to accept her wrath, her blame, her hatred. Instead she said nothing. She turned and walked away from him. He knew that it was forever. He knew that he was dead to his daughter.
He rose and walked out of the building, leaving everything he'd known of his life for the past two centuries behind.

Jack came back to the present with a start. He was kneeling in the snow, and he could no longer feel his legs beneath him. The tears on his face had formed a mask of icicles. His lips were raw and cracked.

He had sacrificed Steven to save the lives of millions of children, but it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Jack's only existence now was one of constant torment, guilt, and agony. *Could I have done that if Ianto had lived? Would he have tried to stop me? Would he have forgiven me?* Jack had asked himself the same questions over and over, but he still didn't have any answers. There were no answers, no forgiveness, no redemption.

The man Ianto had been proud to call his friend and partner was gone. When Ianto died, part of Jack's soul had died with him. His heart had turned to darkness, and any semblance of humanity had faded away. All of his subsequent actions had been a result of the blackness in his soul. It was only because of Ianto that Jack had been able to let himself love again, and Ianto's death had taken any love in his heart and irrevocably destroyed it.

He couldn't really remember the days following Steven and Ianto's deaths. They were a blur of tortured images. He hadn't slept. He hadn't eaten. He had left the country and hadn't looked back.

Jack had traveled to many places on Earth in the time since the 456, desperately trying to assuage the overwhelming despair. There was no escape for him, no peace to be found, no end to his torment. Everywhere he went, he was haunted by Ianto's face, by Steven's face, by the faces of all those he'd lost, and the faces of everyone he'd failed or betrayed. He'd never felt more lost or alone. He had never been so wretched.

The only consolation he could find was that Gwen, Rhys and their unborn baby had survived, Ianto's family had survived, and Martha Jones had been able to retrieve Ianto's body and store it in the UNIT cryo-freeze facility.

"No autopsy," Jack had ordered. "No tests, no experiments, nothing! No one's to touch him!"

Martha had promised him that Ianto would remain frozen in time, preserved exactly as he'd been when he'd taken his final breath.

Jack wiped roughly at his face, tearing skin as the frozen tears cracked beneath his fingers. He looked at the warm, red fluid covering his fingertips. *How much blood is on my hands?*

He surveyed the magnificent landscape around him, but the view held no peace for him. "And entering with relief some quiet place, where never fell his foot or shown his face, I say, 'there is no memory of him here.' And so stand, stricken. So remembering him." His whispered words disappeared into the wind.

He took another deep breath. *This planet is too small… the memories it holds are too profound and inescapable. There's nothing left for me here. It's time for me to leave… to lose myself in another galaxy… I'm done with the human race.*

There were just two things that he needed to do first.

Jack got unsteadily to his feet and shuffled to the edge of the cliff, his toes hanging over the precipice. He spread his arms wide, leaned forward, and fell into oblivion.
Jack stood under a dim street lamp, watching the doorway of a decrepit old pub across the street, his heart thudding vigorously against his chest. For the past hour, he'd witnessed several patrons arrive, and he knew it was time to make his move. He was sweating, and his stomach was fluttering uncomfortably. He took a deep breath, trying to steady his nerves. "You can do this," he told himself. "You have to."

He had taken a flight from the U.S. to Cardiff the day before, giving himself enough time to gather everything he needed for his last mission on Earth. He'd barely slept over the last six months. Fatigue weighed heavily on his limbs, and his temples throbbed painfully. He rubbed his hands over his face and stood up straight. "You can do this," he told himself again.

With one last deep breath, he crossed the street and strode purposefully towards the pub. He threw the wooden door open. "Captain Jack Harkness," he announced as he stepped across the threshold. "You're all in terrible danger."

He looked around. The lights were out, but he could make out the dim shapes of several people milling about. A male voice said, "Can someone light the candles, please?"

Several candles lit up the shadowy interior of a traditional looking British pub, as an elderly woman approached him. "Captain Harkness, my name is Evadne Wintergreen. Do not be afraid, friendly spirit. You have come to us from the other side."

"From Cardiff, actually," Jack corrected her.

"I beg your pardon?" Mrs. Wintergreen asked.

"I've come to warn you," Jack insisted.

There was movement as someone pushed their way through the crowd gathered around the door. A heartbreakingly familiar voice said, "Jack! You're late!"

Jack's heart beat even faster, as the owner of the voice emerged from the throng. Jack made a concerted effort to remain on his feet as the intensity of his emotions rolled over him like waves against the sand. It was all he could do to keep his countenance in check. He swallowed hard against the lump in his throat, his mouth feeling unpleasantly dry. "Ianto! Oh, good to see you," he managed to say.

"I'm sorry, Jack," Ianto said. "I couldn't stop it."

Jack gazed at the other man. He's beautiful, Jack thought. He's perfect. His heart constricted painfully in his chest. "Hey! Wait. You're saying you're not a ghost?" a man asked.

"Flesh and blood, I assure you," Jack replied, tearing his eyes away from Ianto. "Now, listen to me…"
Mrs. Wintergreen interrupted him. "How disappointing! I knew I felt a presence in this room."

"Please! I've come to warn you," Jack said, trying again. "You're in a lot of danger."

"Otherwise, we wouldn't be here, would we?" Ianto added.

Jack cast a sideways glance at Ianto. What's his angle? Is he going to work with me? Aloud he said, "The séance has got to stop."

"We can't just stop! We've broken through to the other side!" Mrs. Wintergreen exclaimed.

"It was scary, I grant you. But all just a harmless bit of fun," an elderly gentleman said.

"Uh, what's going on here is not fun. Are you the landlord?" Jack asked.

"You're right, I am. And you are?" the gentleman inquired, looking askance at Jack.

"Listen. I need to have a word with you," Jack said, taking the elderly man's elbow and leading him away from the crowd.

Ianto began to follow, but Jack stayed him with a look. Ianto nodded his understanding and turned back to the others.

"Come with me. I've got a fuse to mend," the man said. "The name's Barry, by the way."

Barry led him down to the cellar and opened a fuse box. "Now then. Hold that torch, will you, while I sort this out," he said, holding out the black metal instrument.

"I realize this sounds odd, but you have to listen to me…" Jack tried again, but Barry cut him off.

"You're from the brewery, aren't you?" Barry asked.

He indicated the torch in Jack's hand. Jack turned it on and aimed the beam at the box. "No, I'm from…"

"How much did they pay you, son? Huh? Fifty? A hundred? Unbelievable! They can't even let us enjoy our last night!" Barry fingered the various fuses. "Here you go. Let there be light." The cellar lights came on, throwing the dusty and cobwebbed space into bright illumination. "Ah! Much better."

"I'm not from the brewery," Jack said, trying to maintain his temper. He switched off the torch.

"Oh. You just happened to turn up to ruin our closing party. You know how long this place has been open?"

"Six hundred years," Jack replied evenly.

"Right. The most haunted pub in Wales. The House of the Dead." Barry closed the fuse box and turned to look at Jack. "Imagine the history in this building."

"Believe me, I am," Jack said earnestly.

"The brewery changes hands and suddenly, this building is worth more as flats. Flats!" Barry threw up his hands in disgust. "All we're doing is giving the building a send-off. A… a leaving party for the ghosts." He leaned against the wall and crossed his arms over his chest. "Mrs. Wintergreen's the best in the business."
"She's not working alone," Jack told him.

"Team of helpers, is it, huh? You're one of them, huh? All part of the spectacle, eh? Say no more. Won't let on." Barry smiled at him.

Jack was beginning to lose his patience. "I'm not working with her. Mrs. Wintergreen is a very gifted psychic, and she has made contact with something very dangerous. If this séance goes ahead, everyone here will die. I can't save you."

Barry shook his head. "Just go home. You may not believe in it, but the people out there do." He pointed his liver-spotted hand at the ceiling for emphasis.

"I do believe in it!" Jack exclaimed. "That's why I can't let it go ahead!"

"Just go home! I'm asking nicely." Barry glared at him.

"Stop the séance. I'm asking nicely!" Jack countered.

"Fair enough." Barry shrugged, standing up straight. "Can I have my torch back?" He held out his hand.

"Sure," Jack said, handing over the torch.

"Thanks very much, mate." Barry raised it over his head.

Jack felt a blow to his temple and everything went black.

He came to as the same heartrendingly familiar voice called his name. "Jack!"

Jack opened his eyes. He was on the floor of the cellar. Ianto... He blinked, remembering where he was. "Uh... Ianto." He stared hard at the other man, his insides churning.

"Jack! What happened to you?" Ianto asked with obvious concern.

"Oh, the landlord knocked me out cold," Jack said matter-of-factly, sitting up.

The hint of a smirk edged at the corner of Ianto's mouth. "He is very large," he stated.

"Mmm. Should of seen it coming. Then again, tonight is full of surprises," he said, looking again at Ianto.

Ianto was wearing his black, three-piece suit with the subtle pin-stripe, accompanied by a red shirt and diagonally striped red and black tie. It was Jack's favorite outfit. He looked gorgeous.

"Let me clear you up. Here." Ianto produced a handkerchief from his breast pocket and bent over Jack, wiping at the blood trickling down the side of Jack's face.

Jack inhaled sharply at the stinging sensation. "Don't be a sis," Ianto scolded, dabbing tenderly at his wound. When he finished, he straightened up and replaced the handkerchief in his pocket. "Could you not have pulled your gun out on him?"

"Left it at home," Jack said. "Tonight's the night for magic, not guns."

"Really? Jack, what's happening here? I mean, that was no ordinary séance out there, was it? I'm worried."
"You're worried? Oh, Ianto…" But he didn't know how to finish the sentence.

"What's going on?" Ianto asked again.

Jack sighed heavily. *I'm not sure I understand any of this… But I suppose I'll play along… For now, anyway.* He told Ianto what he knew. "There is a secret, hidden underneath the Rift. A shadow from the oldest universe of all. Syriath: The Death-Feeder. She's been trapped since before there was such a thing as time."

"And she's found a way to escape."

"Yeah," Jack nodded. "Everything’s in alignment. At the right place, at the right time, comes the right woman."

"Mrs. Wintergreen," Ianto said.

"She's the bridge between worlds. A powerful psychic holding a séance in the most haunted pub in Wales."

"The House of the Dead. Built on ley lines, inside an old stone circle, and smack on top of the Rift. Right. If anything would work, that would do it," Ianto said.

"The pub is on a crack in the Rift. A point weak enough for Syriath to escape, if someone strong enough reaches out to her. And the ghosts are tempting Mrs. Wintergreen to do just that."

"Wait, the ghosts here are real?" Ianto asked incredulously.

"Syriath comes before time, so she can bend it. She's sending people visions to trap them. All these people have come here, wanting to see their loved ones just one more time. And Syriath is feeding off that need. She'll ensnare them, and then she'll devour them. If she reaches this world, she'll rip it apart using the dead as her weapon."

"How can we defeat her?" Ianto asked.

Jack couldn't help an ironic laugh. "If we can prevent them from making contact with Syriath, we may be able to save everyone here. If we can't, then they'll be her first victims."

"We've got to stop that séance," Ianto said determinedly.

"There's one more thing, Ianto." Jack rose to his feet and stared into Ianto's eyes, wondering how the other man would respond. "Syriath knows I'm here. She will use the ghosts of the dead against us."

Ianto didn't have a chance to reply as they were interrupted by a blood-curdling scream. "That came from the bar!" Ianto exclaimed, looking up.

They raced upstairs. Mrs. Wintergreen was once again holding her séance. "Everyone, stop!" Ianto called out, opening the door.

"Stop this! Listen to me!" Jack added.

"They're coming through!" Mrs. Wintergreen cried.

There was a gust of wind and the sound of shattering glass, as every window in the bar burst simultaneously. The room was filled with the sound of startled exclamations and screams from the gathered crowd.
"The dead are with us!" Mrs. Wintergreen announced, her eyes closed and her head thrown back in a trance-like state.

She then began giving messages from the ghosts to various people in the room. Jack listened with dismay as the crowd became enthralled. "This is real, isn't it?" Ianto whispered to him.

"Yes, it is," Jack replied seriously.

"Is there a Ianto Jones among us?" Mrs. Wintergreen asked, and Jack felt his blood run cold. *What the hell is going on here?*

"That's me," Ianto said with obvious surprise.

"I have a message from his father," Mrs. Wintergreen said.

"What?" Ianto asked, looking shocked.

"It's a word. Betrayal," she went on.

Jack felt his anger flare. *This has got to be one of Syriath's tricks! "That's enough!" Panic quickened his pulse. "You've gone too far, Mrs. Wintergreen! You don't know what you're doing! You have to stop." He shook her. "Wake up, Mrs. Wintergreen!"

"Wake up, Mrs. Wintergreen," Ianto added.

Mrs. Wintergreen gasped and panted. "The trance is broken," she said, opening her eyes.

The others began calling out to their dead loved ones and blaming Jack for sending them away. "It was going too far," Jack told them. "You cannot complete the ceremony."

"What gave you the right, eh? They were here!" Barry shouted.

"They were real!" another woman added.

"Yeah. Yes they were. The dead were in this room. Doesn't that tell you this is wrong?" Jack demanded.

Everyone started yelling at him again, but Mrs. Wintergreen interrupted. "Everyone, don't worry. Leave this to me. Come along, Mr. Harkness. Let's have a little chat."

They walked to the back of the pub. Jack tried to warn the older woman that she was dredging up an ancient evil, toying with forces that were far beyond her control, but Mrs. Wintergreen refused to believe him, and Jack quickly realized that it was too late. Syriath had taken hold of the medium.

Jack returned to the main area, but Ianto was nowhere in sight. He ascended the staircase and walked down the hallway, opening every door, until he found the younger man. Ianto was standing alone in one of the empty bedrooms. "Ianto," Jack breathed with a mixture of anxiety and relief.


"Oh, Ianto Jones." He took a tentative step closer. *What do I say? Where do I even begin? My God... His legs felt unstable underneath him, and he wished he had something to lean on. "I came looking for you," he finally managed.*

"Here I am," Ianto said.
"Hey, what happened?" Jack asked, suddenly noticing the tears in Ianto's eyes.

"Seen… I've seen my father. That was my dad. It really was him. Oh God…" Ianto broke down.

"Hey, hey! It's okay." Jack took another step closer. "It's okay. Look, I'm here. Ianto." He made a move to take Ianto in his arms, but at the last moment, he stopped himself. His arms dropped heavily to his sides, and he clenched his fists, digging his nails into the palms of his hand. He was fighting hard to suppress his emotions and maintain his sanity. "I'm sorry. I warned you Syriath would use the dead against us. Mrs. Wintergreen… What has she done?"

Ianto shook his head, but he didn't reply. "We have to stop this," Jack told him. "Come on."

He and Ianto left the room and headed back down the creaking staircase. They arrived in time to see Mrs. Wintergreen calling Syriath forth. "Stop!" Jack yelled.

"Please! Stop!" Ianto added.

"She is coming. Syriath is coming! The last gateway opens," Mrs. Wintergreen announced.

"No," Jack cried.

"It's my fault," Ianto said to him. "I'm sorry. If you hadn't come looking for me, this never would've happened."

"Tell me about it," Jack murmured distractedly.

Jack continued to plead with Mrs. Wintergreen, but she was gone, and Syriath was speaking through her. Syriath told the people gathered in the pub that Jack was there to kill them. "What Syriath says is correct," Jack admitted.

"Jack?" Ianto asked with what sounded like alarm.

"See?" Syriath said gleefully.

"I came here to stop you, Syriath, and I will," Jack told the creature speaking through Mrs. Wintergreen's body.

"And how will you stop me, Jack?" Syriath asked wryly.

Jack reached inside his coat pocket and extracted a small iron box. "What's inside this box will destroy you," he said, holding it up.

"Oh, my God," Ianto exclaimed.

"I told you. He wants to kill you all," Syriath announced.

"Now, Jack, you don't want to do this." Ianto put his hands up and took a cautious step towards Jack.

Jack looked at him. "I have to, Ianto," he said sadly.

"Please. Let everybody go," Ianto pleaded.

"Sure." He looked around the room. "Everyone, you go free," he announced. "See me, standing here, with my box. Not blowing anyone up. Off you go!"
Everyone rose hastily from their chairs and ran out of the bar, leaving only himself, Ianto, and Syriath in Mrs. Wintergreen's body. "I'll stay," Syriath said. "I still have work to do. It's just us, now."

"Jack. Give that box to me, please," Ianto insisted. "What is it, exactly?"

"Ianto. Do you trust me?" Jack asked.

"Not so much right now, no," Ianto replied succinctly.

Jack looked into his eyes, his heart filled with acute longing and sorrow. "I've always trusted you." *I'm not sure what's going on here, but I want so desperately to believe in him… "Here. Catch."

Jack tossed the box over to Ianto, who caught it in both of his hands. "Oh, my God. Gwen, I'm holding the bomb. I'm holding the bomb. What do I do now? Gwen?" Ianto asked.

"You're talking to Gwen?" Jack asked with bewilderment.

"Yeah," Ianto indicated the comms unit in his ear. "She's held up in traffic. God knows what she's going to say when she gets here," he added.

Jack gaped at him. "Ianto, look at your headset." He pointed at the device clipped to the younger man's ear. "Ianto, your headset isn't switched on. So whose voice are you hearing?"

Ianto pulled off the comms unit and stared at it. "You're not Gwen. What are you?" he demanded.

A voice filled the room. "I am Syriath! I feed on death!"

"It never was Gwen," Jack explained.

"But she's been talking to me the whole time, telling me what to do!" Ianto exclaimed.

"Manipulating us both," Jack said, more to himself than to Ianto.

"She told me not to trust you. And I believed her. I'm sorry," Ianto said.

Jack smiled at him, and Ianto returned the smile. Jack felt an unbearable aching in his soul at the sight of that beautiful smile.

"You are in the House of the Dead," Syriath said. "Nothing is what it appears to be. I am so hungry. This woman can provide me with one more service."

Mrs. Wintergreen's body jerked and shuddered, and she stumbled backwards. Jack caught her elbow so she wouldn't fall. "Oh, oh goodness me. I'm free! I'm free of it!" Mrs. Wintergreen exclaimed. "Oh, but… Jack. Jack, I understand what you were warning me about. The gateway is open, isn't it?"

"Yes," Jack acknowledged.

Mrs. Wintergreen heard her long, dead baby crying, and despite Jack's protestations, she went to him and became another of Syriath's victims.

"She's gone. Why did she go?" Ianto asked.

"It was too late to save her. She couldn't help herself. Syriath uses the dead against us. We can't say no to them," Jack said looking at Ianto, uncertain what to do next.
"I can," Ianto said with conviction. "We've got to stop this."

"The House of the Dead is falling into the Rift. Not long now," Jack told him, waiting uneasily for his reply.

"Uh, I'm still holding… what is this box, exactly? Is it a bomb?" Ianto asked.

"Ianto, open it."

Ianto opened the box that Jack had brought with him to the House of the Dead, knowing what it would do. "It's just pebbles… coal," Ianto said, looking up at Jack with a curious expression on his face.

"Rocks from the hills, coal from the cellar, and a tiny detonator. Just enough to make a lot of dust," Jack said.

"Dust?"

"All of Wales is a giant battery of stored Rift energy," Jack explained. "Cardiff Council thinks it's radon, but something far richer is held in these stones. It's harmless, unless you release it as one world falls into another."

"That's how you're going to destroy Syriath," Ianto stated.

Jack nodded. "The moment she reaches this world, I'm going to detonate the energy stored in that package. It'll wipe out Syriath and seal the Rift forever. 'In these stones horizons sing,'" he quoted.

"Seal the Rift?" Ianto asked, his eyes wide.

"Its time has come," Jack said with certainty.

And elderly gentleman appeared behind Ianto, and Jack could see a striking resemblance between the two men. Jack raised an eyebrow. Now what? he thought, chagrined. "Oh, hello. Hope I'm not interrupting," the older man said.

Ianto whipped around, then averted his eyes. "Not now, Dad," he said.

Dad? Jack thought. So this is Ianto's father… This just keeps getting better and better. "I've only popped in for a word," Mr. Jones told his son. He turned to Jack, casting an appraising eye over him. "You must be Jack. I've heard so much about you. But not from Ianto. He was always too busy."

This is some kind of trick… Ianto's father died long before he had even started working at Torchwood One. "From Syriath?" he asked aloud. "I wouldn't trust her."

"No, I've heard about you from those people you've sent to the land of the dead. All the people you've killed," Mr. Jones said.

"That's enough," Jack said, turning away.

"There's a lot of people there can't wait to see you again, Captain. But I'm here for my son." Mr. Jones turned to Ianto again.

"Really?" Ianto said bitterly.

"Ianto, listen to me. Just this once, eh? Consider what you hold in your hands," Mr. Jones said.
"The world's last chance," Ianto said.

"No, no, no! You've got it all wrong! It's the key to the land of the dead! You'll seal us all away forever. Do you want that, son?" Mr. Jones asked. "If not for me, for your mum."

Another one of Syriath's tricks, Jack thought warily.

"Don't. I'm sorry. We can't let that creature escape," Ianto said.

"Whatever the price," Jack added.

"Really, Jack? What if I told you that you can take Ianto and leave? Turn around and go," Mr. Jones said.

"He won't, Dad," Ianto said.

Mr. Jones rounded on Ianto. "Ah, you know what your problem is, son? You always think you know best. I'm not asking you. I'm asking Jack. What do you think?"

"Turn around and walk out of here?" Jack asked, not able to stop himself from considering the possibility.

"Jack, we can't," Ianto pleaded with him.

"Never gave me a chance while I was living and breathing, and you won't now that I'm dead," Mr. Jones said.

"Dad, I'm sorry. You're not real. You're just a ghost. Why should I believe a word you say?" Ianto asked.

"I never could give you what you wanted. But I can give Jack something very special, indeed. Can't I, Jack?" Mr. Jones had a smirk on his face that was reminiscent of his son's.

"My boy's quite special to you, isn't he?" Mr. Jones asked, the smirk deepening. "I won't take up any more of your precious time. She will win. Jack, you knew who you'd find if you came to the House of the Dead, didn't you?"

Jack's stomach started churning again. He knew the truth was about to come out. "Yes," he said sadly. "Just go."

"I can't believe that you're going to let him die… again. Goodbye, Ianto." Mr. Jones disappeared.

"Jack." Ianto looked at him in confusion. "Who's dead? Who does he mean?"

Inwardly, Jack steeled himself. He'd known that he couldn't keep up the charade for long. But I let myself get lost in the moment… I wanted it so badly... He looked at Ianto, and tears sprang into his eyes. "The person I knew I'd find if I came here, to the last night of the House of the Dead… Ianto Jones."

"Jack? What?" Ianto looked astounded and horrified.
Jack forced himself to continue, compelling himself to say the words aloud. "Ianto, six months ago you died in my arms. You're a ghost."
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my most esteemed and invaluable beta riftintime.

Jack stood looking at the perfect replica of the man he loved so deeply. Every detail was flawless. The voice, the mannerisms, the look in his eyes, all so painfully reminiscent of what Jack had lost. Ianto was staring back at him, shock and despair etched plainly on the younger man's face. Jack's heart ached with regret at having to end the charade. How could you not know that you're a ghost? Aren't you just another one of Syriath's tricks?

"No," Ianto cried, shaking his head in disbelief.

Jack tried to offer some sort of explanation. "I came looking for you. I couldn't resist it," he admitted.

"I'm dead," Ianto said, as though trying out the words for sound.

"You were here waiting for me when I walked in," Jack continued, attempting a smile through his tears. "Ianto Jones, never late."

"But I feel… real. I'm not a ghost." Ianto shook his head defiantly. "I had porridge this morning. Didn't I?" An expression of bewilderment crossed his handsome features, and Jack felt a wrenching in his gut. "Jack? I can't remember!"

"I didn't think you'd be so real," Jack said, more to himself than to Ianto. "I… I'd hoped for less."

"Thanks," Ianto said bitterly.

"No, you don't understand. I thought it would just look like you," Jack insisted.

"It?" Ianto interjected.

But Jack had opened Pandora's box, and all of the emotions he'd been holding onto since he first set eyes on Ianto that evening came pouring out. "I… I could've coped with that. I didn't dream it would actually be you. Syriath used my grief, and she reached into time. She recreated you, Ianto, and I… oh, I can't bear to look at you."

Jack turned away, wiping at the tears that had clouded his vision. This was a mistake, he thought. I shouldn't have come here. I can't bear it…

"You can't… Jack!"

Ianto was sobbing, and the sound of his anguish tore at Jack's very soul. He could never bear to see Ianto in pain. Mustering his courage, Jack turned to face Ianto again. "Sorry, Ianto. I'm sorry…” He reached out his hand, but Ianto took a step backwards.

"Don't touch me. Don't," Ianto cried, cringing away from him.

Jack held his hands up defensively. "Okay."
"So, how did I die?" Ianto asked.

Jack felt like a hand had reached into his chest and brutally gripped his heart. He had relived that day so many times. Now he had to relive it once again for Ianto. "It was all over so quickly…"

"Not an answer," Ianto hissed. "Was it your fault?"

Jack flinched. Yes, it was all my fault. He looked down at his feet, unable to meet the accusation in Ianto's eyes. "You were one of the first victims of an alien plague." An image of Ianto unwaveringly facing the 456 rose in Jack's mind. I was so proud of you. He smiled fondly at the memory and looked up. "You were so brave. You died saving the world."

"Well, you'd think I remember that. But I… don't."

There was anger and despair in Ianto's voice, and Jack looked away again, unable to face his guilt. "Did I get a funeral?" Ianto asked calmly.

Jack shut his eyes tightly, knowing his next admission would only fuel the fire. "I don't know. I wasn't there."

"What?" Ianto asked, sounding outraged.

"I had to leave. I am sorry," Jack's voice broke. You have no idea what I've done… You would never forgive me if you did… Steven…"

"You couldn't leave me rest in peace?"

How could I, when I had the chance to see you again? Jack finally opened is eyes and looked at Ianto, but the fury he saw in the younger man's expression shocked him to the core. Once again Jack's stomach lurched uncomfortably.

"You've done this to me!" Ianto seethed, pointing a finger at Jack's chest. "Dragged me back just to say goodbye! This… this was never about closing the Rift, destroying that creature, or even your bloody stones. It's not even about me." He glared into Jack's eyes, and Jack was stunned to see what looked like hatred staring back at him. "This… this is all about you, Jack."

Jack recoiled. He took a step backwards, reaching his hand out for something to hold onto. His fingers brushed the edge of a barstool, and he sank down onto it, his legs no longer able to sustain his weight. What have I done? I just wanted to see him one last time before I closed the Rift forever… I didn't expect this… He remembered Ianto's harsh admonishments when he'd used the resurrection glove on Owen. Ianto had been furious. He'd accused Jack then of selfish motives. And he was right. I tried to assuage my guilt by bringing Owen back. Is this any different? "Ianto, this isn't how I planned it," he said aloud.

Ianto took a step towards him. "What were you hoping for? That'd I'd say a few nice words? That I'd be grateful?" Ianto practically spat the words in his face.

"I just wanted to see you one more time. That's all. It… it's why I came here!" Jack protested.

"Well that's lovely." Ianto's voice oozed with sarcasm.

"Ianto!" Jack exclaimed. He was utterly shattered. This wasn't what he'd hoped for. I'd only wanted a chance to explain… to tell him all the things I never got to say… to at least properly say goodbye. This was my last chance… He looked up into the face he loved so dearly, but only anger and accusation looked back at him. This is my only chance to make it right, and I have to take it, no
"matter how it's received. "All the people I've lost... Don't you understand? The only one I wanted to see was you!"

"Thanks. At least you didn't forget me," Ianto said coldly.

"How could I?" Jack stared at him in bewilderment. *How could he not understand?* "I may be immortal, but I don't forget. I lose everyone, but I don't forget any of you. I work so hard to remember."

"You make it sound like charity work," Ianto said with contempt.

"Don't say that! Never say that!" Jack insisted.

"Jack, I didn't think the last thing I would ever say to you would be this." Ianto's voice was calm again. He turned away from Jack. "Just... just go away. Please. This is horrible." He began to walk away.

Jack leapt off the stool. He made as though to grasp Ianto's arm, but he stopped himself, uncertain what would happen if he tried to touch the other man. Instead he ran around to the other side of Ianto, stopping him in his tracks. "I had to see you again. You had no idea what it felt like coming back to life and knowing the world was empty... because you'd gone. No matter how many times I die, I always wake up alone."

"I didn't ask to come back," Ianto said, not looking at him.

"Neither did I!"

Ianto looked up at him, and there was profound sadness in the younger man's eyes. Jack knew what he had to do, what had been at the back of his mind ever since he'd resolved to come to the House of the Dead. *My time has come. I'm ready to go. I've had enough of this world... of all the worlds. I can no longer endure the heartache. If I can't be with Ianto, I no longer want to exist.* An undeniable sense of relief swept over him as he made his final decision, like a colossal burden had been lifted off his shoulders. *It's time... And I feel... free.*

He smiled grimly at his profound sense of deliverance. He even let out a stifled laugh. "You and me, Ianto Jones, together again at the end. How it should be. In a few seconds, Syriath will rise. I'll trigger this device, destroying her and sealing the Rift forever."

"You're not planning on coming back, are you?" Ianto asked.

Jack shook his head, chuckling again. "No. It'll be a pretty big bang."

"You can't die," Ianto stated.

"Next best thing... eternal oblivion. Lost in the space between worlds forever. And come on! It's quite a way to go." He was almost giddy with his sense of liberation. "Huh," he laughed, surprised by his own reaction. "I think I've lived long enough. I've seen you once more. What else is there?"

"Well." Ianto stared hard at him. "We could just go," he said.

"What?" Jack asked, completely taken aback.

"My dad said we could both leave together," Ianto insisted.

Jack's laugh bordered on hysteria. "Never. You're kidding, right?" *I'm losing my grip,* he thought,
making a concerted effort to pull himself together. Driven insane by my grief and guilt. What if my plan doesn't work, and I'm trapped forever between worlds, but instead of eternal oblivion, I'm conscious the entire time... That would be a true hell... Trapped forever between worlds without a body... My soul tormented by memories for all eternity... My 'No Exit.' He shuddered involuntarily at the thought. Is there another way? "You mean leave here?" he asked Ianto.

"Why not try it? The Rift, ancient evil, magic pebbles... just for once, let someone else deal with it."

"Can we do that?" Jack asked, his mind a confused mess of disconnected thoughts.

"I'm real, aren't I?" Ianto asked.

Jack shook his head, trying to maintain his grip on sanity. "It'll never work! We cross that door, we will be back in the real world. What if you vanish, what'll happen?"

"That's no reason for not trying. Seems a shame, you know, to get me back only to lose me again. A touch careless."

"True." Jack grinned. Would it work? Could it be? Is it possible that I could have him back? "Syriath, the last remnant of a dead universe. Ah, she's not so special. But there's only one Ianto Jones."

"And there's only ever been one Captain Jack Harkness."

As Jack looked into Ianto's eyes, he felt his last vestiges of rationality slipping away. He wanted it to work more than he'd ever wanted anything in his long life. I need him. I'm nothing without him...

"Ah, screw it. Worth a try. Let's leave the device here for Syriath," Jack said, taking the box from Ianto's hands and setting the timer.

There was the sound of glass shattering and wooden beams crashing to the floor. "This whole place is falling into the Rift," Ianto exclaimed.

Jack laughed uncontrollably, giving into the madness as easily as falling asleep. Thunder crashed overhead and the lights flickered. "We'd better go now."

"Cross that doorway and there's no coming back," Ianto warned.


"Always." Ianto smiled at him.

Jack turned the handle and threw open the solid, wooden door, stepping across the threshold into the rain. His heart was banging against his chest, and he was breathing hard. "Welcome back to the land of the living, Ianto Jones," he announced. "Has it worked? Are you real again? Ianto? Ianto?" Jack turned around. Ianto was standing motionless in the doorway of the House of the Dead.

"I'm not coming," he said calmly.

"Ianto, no!" Jack called, panic-stricken. No! Don't leave me again... "Come on," he said desperately. "There's no time."

"No, Jack. You know I can't. My place is here, in the House of the Dead, with your device. Saving the world."
"Don't do this!" Jack begged, tears spilling once more from his eyes.

Ianto shook his head determinedly. "Sorry, Jack. Someone's got to destroy the Rift." Thunder crashed again, and the building began to collapse around Ianto. "Quite a way to go!" he declared with a grin.

"No! Not like this! Don't leave me like this!" Jack sobbed.

"I've got to go!" Ianto said determinedly.

"Ianto, no!" This is your last chance, he told himself. Don't screw it up again. "I never said it properly before."

"It doesn't need saying," Ianto said.

"Yes, it does," Jack insisted. He took a deep breath and looked straight into Ianto's eyes. "Ianto Jones, I love you."

"And I love you, too, Jack," Ianto replied tenderly. He straightened his shoulders and looked around. "Right then. Best get a move on," he said nonchalantly, turning and walking back into the pub. "Goodbye, Jack!" he shouted before disappearing from view as the building buckled and collapsed in on itself with a deafening crash.

There was a powerful gust of wind, and the rain ceased abruptly. A massive swirl of blackness formed over the demolished building as the tear through the Rift began to expand. Instantly, a white beam shot up through the wreckage and illuminated the coiling black vortex before surrounding and devouring it in a blinding flash of light.

Darkness settled again with a resounding crack of thunder and the recommencement of heavy rainfall. The Rift was closed forever.

Jack stood watching the dust mixing with the rain and settling around the destruction, as tears poured down his face. He was too insensible to appreciate what had happened to the Rift and Syriath, and he could only think of Ianto. I've lost him again, and lost my one chance at oblivion. What am I going to do now?

A middle-aged woman under a bright red umbrella accosted Jack, interrupting his thoughts. He could barely register what she was saying, but finally realized that she was inquiring about the House of the Dead. He wiped at his eyes, trying to focus on her words. "It's closed," he told her.

"Closed?" she asked.

"You missed the ghosts. The House of the Dead is gone." He turned away from the woman, ignoring her mumblings about her sat-nav. "Goodbye, Ianto," he whispered, walking slowly down the road out of town.

By the time Jack reached the wooded area where he'd hidden his gun and mobile phone, he was soaking wet. The rain had continued to pelt relentlessly over his hunched shoulders. The thunder was deafening, and the sky was erratically illuminated with electricity. He was shivering, but he was uncertain whether it was from cold or from shock.

He touched the trunk of the tree, under which he'd stowed his belongings. Then he sank to his knees and wailed in despair.

Jack was uncertain how long he'd remained curled under the dripping branches, sobbing
uncontrollably, as though his very soul had been irrevocably torn apart all over again. Time seemed to have stopped, so lost was he in his own misery and desolation. When his breathing finally slowed, he realized that it had stopped raining. He was shivering violently and covered in mud.

He looked down at himself, thinking sadly about how Ianto would have scolded his appearance and fussled over getting the mud stains out of his greatcoat. He fingered the fabric, remembering how Ianto, in all of his acumen and empathy, had bought it for him after the destruction of the Hub. "Ianto," he whispered. "How can I go on without you?"

His thoughts wandered over the events at the House of the Dead. He'd been stunned by Ianto's reaction, his anger, his accusations. He turned me away, Jack thought remorsefully. He told me to go away... He blamed me for his death...

The image of Ianto dying in his arms flashed across his mind. Jack had blamed himself then, but Ianto had contradicted him, insisting it wasn't his fault. Why does he blame me now?

Jack wasn't exactly sure what had occurred in the haunted pub. His mind was too tumultuous and grief-stricken to function rationally, but he remembered his words to Ianto earlier in the evening. 'Syriath used my grief, and she reached into time. She recreated you' "She used my grief," Jack repeated aloud. "She recreated him from my grief and remorse."

Jack leaned over and pushed aside a moss-covered rock, removing his gun and mobile phone. "That wasn't Ianto," he murmured. "Ianto would never blame me. It was a recreation of him based on my despair. I don't know if I fully understand what just happened, but I know Ianto. That wasn't him."

He rose unsteadily to his feet and holstered his gun. I was the one who closed the Rift, he thought, beginning to feel more like himself. It wasn't Ianto. I left the bomb inside the building on a timed detonator. Ianto's ghost was just another one of Syriath's tricks, using my anguish and remorse to fool me into believing I could have him back... Perhaps she was hoping that in my insane desire to save Ianto, I would forget about the Rift...

He took a deep breath and straightened out his shoulders. Somehow I had enough sense not to tell Ianto that I had set the timer before running out of the pub. He took another deep breath and pulled his sodden coat around his body, buttoning it closed. I was crazy and grief-stricken enough to let myself to believe that Ianto could come with me... but at least I set that timer! I may have lost my chance at oblivion, but the Rift is gone for good, and so is Syriath.

Wiping the mud from his hands on the fabric of his coat, he turned the mobile phone on and dialed a number he hadn't used in six months.

"Jack?" a familiar voice said. "Where the bloody hell have you been? Are you okay?"

"Gwen." Jack almost smiled at the sound of her voice.

"Where are you, Jack?"

"Aberdaron," Jack replied succinctly. "I've closed the Rift once and for all."

"You what?" Gwen asked after a momentary pause.

"Long story. Look, I need you to do something for me. There's something I need you to find. Something from the Hub wreckage."

Jack listened to the stunned silence on the other end of the line.
"What do you mean the Rift is closed? And why the hell are you in Aberdare?" The indignation in Gwen's voice carried amply through the tiny mobile phone speaker, and Jack smiled wistfully.

"The Rift is gone, Gwen. Sealed forever. Cardiff is safe once more… Well, at least as far as the Rift is concerned. You're free to live your life, start your family away from Torchwood and out of danger."

"But the Rift… How? When?"

"It was destined to close here and now… It's how it was meant to be," Jack told her, not really wanting to go into details.

There was silence on the other end of the line. Jack waited for Gwen to take in the news. "Where the hell have you been, Jack?" Gwen asked again when she finally spoke.

"Oh, here and there," Jack replied blithely.

"That's not an answer," Gwen scolded.

Jack sighed. Her words mirrored Ianto's accusation in the House of the Dead, and his mind momentarily wandered back to their confrontation. "Jack?" Gwen asked again, breaking his reverie.

Jack realized that he must have been silent for several seconds. "I've traveled the world, Gwen. China, Australia, Africa, South America, the United States…” he broke off, unwilling to end the sentence with what came next in his mind. Trying to find some semblance of peace…

"Well, you said you needed to get away… You must have racked up a ton of frequent flier miles," she commented after a pause.

Jack chuckled. "You can have them. Right now, I need your help with something."

"Jack… Are you okay?"

"I'm always okay, Gwen. Can't die, remember?"

"That's not what I meant, Jack."

Jack sighed again. He'd been dreading this call for days, reluctant to talk about the past. He knew Gwen would press him, and he just couldn't bear it. "I'm hanging in there," he finally answered. "No choice really," he added bitterly.

"Jack… I…"

"Look, Gwen," Jack cut her off, not wanting her sympathy. "I really need my Vortex Manipulator.
Any way you can find it? I'm sure UNIT's been all over the Hub's wreckage. Maybe you could call Martha…"

"I have it, Jack," Gwen interjected.

"You do?" Jack asked incredulously.

"I would have told you sooner, but you haven't been returning my calls."

"Let's meet somewhere," Jack replied, deliberately ignoring her chastisement. "I'll text you where and when. I have a few things I need to take care of first."

"Okay, but Jack…"

"See you soon," he said quickly before ending the call and slipping the mobile phone into his pocket.

Jack walked the several miles to the nearest train station, lost in thought. Gwen was the last emotional hurdle he had to overcome. He knew seeing her would bring all of the pain raging back to the surface, and he still felt raw and broken from seeing Ianto again in the House of the Dead. No, he told himself firmly. Not Ianto… Not really anyway. A recreation of Ianto… a version of him… but not completely him. Not my Ianto… He's gone, and he's never coming back…

The now familiar emptiness and desolation weighed heavily on him as he boarded the train for Cardiff and sank down onto the upholstered seat. The sooner I can get off this planet, the better, he told himself as the train sped south.

It was only about an hour-long train ride to Cardiff Central. He exited the station and emerged into the bustling city nightlife. He looked around at the familiar surroundings with heart wrenching pangs of nostalgia. Cardiff had been his home for over a century, and now he was leaving for good. Too many memories here… This is where the real ghosts live…

He began walking. The bitter air assaulted his skin, as his not quite dry clothing clung unpleasantly to his body. Ignoring the twinges of physical discomfort, he strode purposefully towards his destination. He still had plenty of connections to the alien community in Cardiff, and he intended to call in some favors.

He turned down a dark and apparently vacant alley, and knocked at an unremarkable and unadorned black door. A peephole slid open, revealing an inhumanly large eye. "Evening, Jimmy," he greeted the owner of the eye.

"Captain," a deep, gravely voice replied. "What do you want? We're not in any violation of your laws."

"Let me in, Jimmy," Jack insisted, adding a touch of menace to his voice.

"We don't want any trouble," Jimmy croaked. "Last time you were here, it took us weeks to clean the place up."

"Jimmy," Jack warned. "You don't want to go getting on my bad side now, do you?"

The peephole slid shut and there was the sound of metal scraping against metal. Jack knew that the iron bar that barricaded the door was being lifted. The black door opened with a groan, and Jack slid inside before it closed behind him.

He nodded at the creature standing before him. Its single eye dangled from a tentacle, which
blossomed from an elongated forehead. The creature had no nose, and its lips were thick and puckered like a fish. The alien was incongruously clad in a flannel shirt and jeans, hiding the rest of his inhuman form. "What do you want, Captain?" Jimmy repeated, his overly large eye blinking several times in the dim light.

"Take me to your leader," Jack quipped.

With a grunt, Jimmy turned and led Jack down a dank passageway and threw open another black door. Jack stepped into a very different style of pub from the one he'd patronized earlier that evening. The interior, though furnished with the requisite bar, barstools, tables, and chairs, was illuminated with disconcerting red-filtered lighting, and the diverse beverage concoctions glowed in unearthly hues. The most unique feature of the pub, however, was the clientele. Of the various patrons sitting on barstool and at scattered tables, not a single one of them was human.

A hush fell over the room, and all heads turned to look at Jack as he approached the bar, but he ignored the stares of inhuman eyes. He perched on a barstool and leaned over the bar. The reptilian-humanoid behind the bar approached, with what Jack perceived to be a frown on his scaled features. "Mike," he addressed the bartender.

"Not again, Harkness," Mike hissed, his forked tongue flicking in and out of his mouth between words. "The last time you were here, you cost me a fortune in broken furniture and liquor bottles."

Jack shrugged. "That was ten years ago."

"Eight and a half years," Mike corrected, drawing out the 'ess' of years.

"Whatever," Jack said, rolling his eyes. "You shouldn't have given that blowfish sanctuary. I warned you that he was wanted for questioning by Torchwood."

Mike hissed severely. "I told you before, he…"

But Jack held up his hand, cutting him off. "I'm not here about that," he said. "It's old news. I need a favor, and after that, you'll never see me again."

Mike's tongue flicked in and out several times as he eyed Jack with what seemed like skepticism. "You owe me, Mike." Jack leaned closer and glared into the alien's yellow eyes. "I got you out of trouble with Torchwood, helped you set this place up. Even loaned you the money to get things started."

"That was a long time ago, Harkness, and I paid you back with interest. Besides," Mike placed his webbed hands on the bar and leaned toward Jack. "It was convenient for you to know exactly where to come for information."

"Let's just say that it's been a mutually beneficial arrangement," Jack stated calmly.

For several moments they looked at each other, their faces inches apart, locked in a staring contest. Mike finally blinked before Jack did and let out an angry hiss. "Fine. But then we're even, Harkness." He pointed a green, scaled finger with a pointed black nail at Jack's chest.

Jack nodded and sat back. "I need the coordinates of the next ship with teleportation capabilities passing through Earth's solar system and the time when it will be in range."

Mike nodded, and turned his back, but Jack reached across the bar and grabbed his arm, causing the creature to stop in his tracks. "A friendly one this time, Mike," he warned. "Last time you sent me up to a ship full of Slitheens. It took me weeks to get back to Earth."
An odd sound escaped the throat of the alien, and Jack realized that he was chuckling. "You deserved it after trashing my establishment," he hissed.

Jack reached into his pocket and withdrew his wallet. He slapped several hundred quid on the bar. "We’ll call it even, okay? Now about that ship."

Mike nodded again and reached under the bar, removing a computer tablet device that was obviously alien in design. "I'll take a glass of scotch too, Mike. Neat."

Mike poured him the drink with what looked like a scowl, and after several minutes, he gave Jack the coordinates and time of a suitable ship as he'd requested. Jack sipped his scotch at a leisurely pace, grinning smugly at the wary looks from the other aliens. When he'd downed the last of his drink, he thanked Mike, adding a final admonition to keep his customers in order and to stay under the radar. Then he exited the bar, nodding again to Jimmy, who was sitting at his post by the street door.

Once again on the streets of Cardiff, he made his way to an unassuming, but reasonably decent hotel, where he showered and cleaned his clothing to the best of his ability. He lay down in the bed as he waited for his garments to dry. He stretched his aching body, sinking deeper into the mattress. Another twenty-four hours, and I'll leave this planet for good, he thought as his eyes slid shut. He felt an overwhelming sense of relief.

The next thing he was aware of was opening his eyes to unfamiliar surroundings. He blinked several times as the room came into focus. He'd spent the past six months in unfamiliar surroundings, so the sensation wasn't unusual, but it took him a moment to remember that he was in a hotel in Cardiff.

He turned his head and glanced at the digital clock on the nightstand. The glowing, green digits read 11:48am. He blinked again, unsure if he was reading the time correctly, however the numbers didn't change. He sat up in the bed and rubbed his eyes. It had been months since he'd slept that long.

He quickly climbed out of bed and showered again, uncertain of when he'd have another opportunity. He finished his grooming, donned his nearly dry clothing, and left the hotel.

He spent the rest of the afternoon closing all his various bank accounts save one, which he left intact. You never know, he thought to himself. Besides, he reasoned, there are ways to withdraw money in an Earth bank account from other planets…

He considered heading up to the roof of one of his favorite buildings for a final look over Cardiff, or returning to the site of the now destroyed Hub, but he decided against it. Being back in Cardiff was already painful enough, and he needed his wits about him for space travel. No long goodbyes, he thought sadly. I already have enough memories, and this no longer feels like home… Not without Ianto… Not without Torchwood and the Hub… Everything's changed. I no longer belong here.

He procured some food, and ate it quickly, sitting on a park bench. He sipped at a cup of hot tea, wrinkling his nose in distaste. He craved caffeine, but he hadn't touched a cup of coffee since Ianto's death. Even the aroma of the beverage overwhelmed him with grief and filled his eyes with tears. Tea was a poor substitute, but a necessary one, and he'd tried his best to acquire a taste for the drink.

As he ate, he sent a text message to Gwen, telling her to meet him that evening at 8pm sharp. He added the coordinates of a location outside the city limits. He had thought he'd have more time to settle his affairs, but the next passing ship happened to be within range that evening, and he was determined to be on it. He would be in teleportation range at precisely 8:13pm, and he wanted to avoid any emotional farewells.
When he'd finished eating, he tossed his rubbish into the nearest bin, and hailed a passing taxi, directing the driver to drop him on the northwest outskirts of the city. As the taxi drove through familiar surroundings, Jack wondered briefly what had become of the Torchwood SUV. Probably in UNIT's hands, he thought ruefully. *I wonder what else UNIT recovered from the Hub's wreckage... Tosh... Gray... Susie... Were their bodies destroyed too or are they now resting forever in a UNIT morgue... And Ianto...* He shuddered and pushed the thought firmly out of his mind. He couldn't bring himself to think of Ianto's dead body, lying perpetually in the UNIT cryo-freeze facility.

He forced himself to think of other things. *I wonder if there's been any sightings of a pterodactyl flying over the bay... Or if Janet is once again on the loose...* He shook his head determinedly. *No longer my problem.*

He closed his eyes firmly to the passing city, no longer able to stomach the well-known sights. *This is not my home... Not anymore... I no longer belong here,* he told himself again. *I no longer belong anywhere...*

The taxi drew to a halt. Jack paid the driver, and slid out of the car, shutting the door firmly behind him. He watched as the taxi pulled away. Then he began to walk.

It was a hike of several miles, but finally Jack reached his destination, atop a hill overlooking the twinkling city lights of Cardiff. As he gazed down at the place that held so many memories, he was once again overwhelmed with grief, regret, and the unbearable burden of guilt. He shivered involuntarily, and buttoned his coat closed, buckling the belt around his waist. *All my ties here are broken. All that once was, is now gone forever. There's no going back...*

The hollow ache of emptiness weighed heavily on his soul as he waited for Gwen to arrive.

Jack saw Gwen and Rhys approach before they caught sight of him. They were holding hands and laughing. Gwen's other hand was on her pregnant belly, which was leading the way by several inches. *They look happy,* he thought with deepening melancholy. *I hope they are. They deserve it.*

"Couldn't have just chosen a pub, could you?" Gwen asked, stopping several feet away from him.

Jack tried to smile, but the gesture was strained. "It's bloody freezing," Rhys added. "My feet," he moaned.

"Oh, I missed that, the Welsh complaining," Jack said ironically. He looked at Gwen. "You look good."

"I look huge," Gwen corrected.

"She's bloody gorgeous," Rhys said proudly.

Gwen laughed, and Jack managed to smile. Gwen walked towards him. "You okay?" she asked.

"Yeah," Jack lied.

She touched his collar affectionately. "Did it work?"

Jack considered deflecting, but in the end he said, "Travelled all sorts of places. This planet is too small. The whole world is like a graveyard."

"Come back with us," she said.

Jack shook his head. "Haven't travelled far enough yet. Got a lot of dirt to shake off my shoes." He
looked up at the night sky. "And right now, there's a cold-fusion cruiser surfing the ion reefs just at the edge of the solar system, just waiting to open its transport dock." He looked back at Gwen, feeling once again on the verge of tears, willing her to understand. "I just need to send a signal," he added.

Gwen held up a finger, then unzipped her coat pocket and withdrew his Vortex Manipulator. "They found it in the wreckage. Indestructible." She handed it to him. "Like its owner," she added.

Jack fastened it around his wrist. Gwen reached out and touched the leather. "I, eh, put on a new strap for you."

"Cost me fifty quid, that," Rhys called.

"Bill me," Jack retorted.

"Are you ever coming back, Jack?" Gwen asked.

"What for?" Jack asked, trying not to break down. *This is harder than I thought it was going to be,* he thought sadly.

"Me," Gwen replied, tears filling her eyes.

Jack looked at her, his heart breaking all over again. "It wasn't your fault," she said.

"I think it was," Jack said firmly.

Gwen shook her head. "No."

"Steven and Ianto and Owen and Tosh and Suzie and… All of them. Because of me." He looked away from her, unwilling to meet her eyes.

Gwen fingered his lapels. "But you... you saved us. Didn't you?"

"I began to like it," he told her. Once again he heard Ianto's angry words in his head. *You like to think you're a hero, but you're the biggest monster of all. I'm not a hero, Ianto. I am a monster.* Aloud he said, "And look what I became." Gwen tightened her hold on his coat. "Still, I have lived so many lives. It's time to find another one."

He took a determined step backwards, out of her grasp, and lifted his Vortex Manipulator. Without a moment's hesitation, he pushed a button, sending a signal to the passing ship. *Time to go… Finally…"

"They died, and I am sorry, Jack, but you cannot just run away." Gwen's voice broke. "You cannot run away," she repeated beseechingly.

The teleportation field began to appear around Jack, and there were only moments left. He knew that he should feel a sense of obligation to Gwen and to planet Earth, but he didn't. He only felt relief at being able to leave all of the painful memories behind. "Oh, yes, I can," he said as the light became brighter around him. "Just watch me."

He felt a familiar sensation - like a hand had reached inside him and gripped his navel, pulling him upwards, whisking him into the atmosphere at near light-speed.

Jack had left planet Earth for good.
Jack sat at the bar of a spaceport nightclub in the outer reaches of the galaxy, abstractedly sipping a glass of hypervodka. He’d spent a week aboard the cold-fusion cruiser as they’d surfed the ion reefs at the edge of Earth's solar system, before journeying to the outer rim of the Milky Way. He had spent much of that time standing on the ship's observation deck, staring out into space. All of the glory and majesty of the universe lay before him, but he couldn't drag his mind away from planet Earth, now over twenty thousand light-years away. His body had left, but his thoughts and his heart had remained behind.

He’d interacted little with his co-travelers. They were a serious and taciturn race of beings, focused solely on their mission of mining useful minerals for their home planet. They were not hostile, but neither were they a sociable bunch. Jack found their company peaceful, as they neither expected nor wanted anything from him, but had been agreeable in providing him with transport and modest accommodations.

After seven days of travel, they’d docked in the spaceport to refuel. Jack had said his thanks and farewells, and parted company from the miners. He didn’t know where he was going next, but a port on the edge of the galaxy held a multitude of possibilities.

He’d sunk onto a barstool, ordered his drink, and sipped it slowly, uninterested in the diversity of life around him. For what seemed like the millionth time, he recited the line of poetry to himself. "There are a hundred places where I fear to go, so with his memory they brim. And entering with relief some quiet place, where never fell his foot or shone his face, I say, there is no memory of him here. And so stand, stricken. So remembering him.” Jack sighed resignedly and rubbed his finger around the rim of his glass. No matter where I go, or how far away I am from Earth, I think about Ianto… And I miss him more each day…

Leaving Earth hadn't given him the sense of relief or liberation he'd imagined. Regardless of his physical location, he always took his memories, his guilt, and his pain with him. Those were things he couldn't escape from, no matter how far away he ran.

His practiced eye wandered indifferently around the nightclub, taking in the various alien species. There were very few places in the universe where one could see so many life forms gathered together in one location. He spotted a Raxicoricofallipatorian, two Haths, a Judoon, a Graske, a Sycorax, and one or two other species he’d either never encountered before or didn't know the name of. There were also humans and humanoid species, but Jack had no interest in making anyone's acquaintance. At some point, he would have to interact with other creatures. He'd have to find somewhere to go or something to do. But at the moment, he couldn't bear the thought of making meaningless small talk.

He took another sip of his drink, feeling utterly forlorn. So many different life forms. So much variety and mystery in this endless universe… all that time I spent longing to be out here again while I waited on Earth for the Doctor, and I can't tear my thoughts away from one man…
The bartender approached, and Jack shook himself out of his musings, expecting the man to inquire about a refill. Instead he passed a slip of paper across the bar to Jack. "From the man over there," he said, thumbing behind his shoulder.

The bartender moved aside. Across the room, Jack saw an all too familiar figure staring back at him. Doctor! Jack's heart beat faster, and his stomach knotted uncomfortably. A myriad of thoughts played through his mind and tangled his emotions. Where have you been? It's so good to see you... Why didn't you help us? Why didn't you save them?... Ianto... Steven... Where were you when we needed you?

The Doctor nodded at the note sitting in front of Jack. Perplexed, Jack unfolded the note and read, "His name is Alonso."

Jack looked up, confusion wrinkling his brow. The Doctor nodded at the seat next to him, where a young man in a ship uniform was sliding onto the adjacent stool. He was cute, rather than handsome, with closely cropped brown hair and noticeably protruding ears. Jack looked back at the Doctor with a question in his eyes. The Doctor gave him a two-fingered salute, and Jack returned the gesture automatically, in proper military fashion, still completely in the dark.

The Doctor turned his back and moved away, disappearing from Jack's view. That's it? Jack thought with a mixture of irritation and disappointment. No explanations, no excuses, just Alonso? What the hell is this about? Is there something I'm supposed to help this guy with? Is there some information he has for me? Is this my ride out of here? Is he setting me up on a date? Knowing the Doctor, it could be anything.

But Jack had enough respect for the Doctor to follow his lead, however angry, hurt, or disappointed he was. He turned to his new neighbor. "So, Alonso," he began. Alonso stared back at him with obvious amazement. "Going my way?" Jack continued cheekily, not certain what role he was supposed to play.

"How do you know my name?" Alonso asked warily.

Jack's mind spun, and he was uncertain how to continue. "I'm kind of psychic," he replied drolly.

"Really?" Alonso eyed him dubiously. "Know what I'm thinking right now?"

-No idea, thought Jack, but I'll play along. There must be a reason why the Doctor wants me to talk to him. "Oh, yeah!" Jack said with a grin.

Alonso nodded, a smile forming on his face. Jack laughed nervously and drained his glass. Is he flirting with me, or is there something I'm supposed to know?

Alonso stood up, and Jack followed suit. The younger man led him out of the nightclub and down a corridor towards the docking bays. Jack tried to ignore his confused thoughts and remain open-minded as Alonso opened one of the magnetically sealed doors and they entered an empty docking bay. As soon as the door had sealed behind them, Alonso shoved him against the wall, forcing his body against Jack's. Jack felt something hard pressing against his chest. "Alonso," he quipped. "You certainly move fast."

"Now who the hell are you, and how do you know my name?" Alonso demanded, pushing the gun harder against Jack's sternum.

"This is no way to make friends, Alonso," Jack continued, unperturbed.

"Look, I've had a hell of a year. I'm not in the mood for games. Now, how do you know my name?"
"It seems we have a mutual friend," Jack said carefully. "Tall, skinny guy in a suit and trench coat with a sonic screwdriver."

"You know the Doctor?" Alonso asked, slightly relaxing his grip.

Jack knew he could take the younger man down. He could have the gun out of his hands in a moment and turn the tables, but he wasn't sure if he should be the aggressor in the situation. *Best let him think he has the upper hand.* Instead, Jack just nodded.

"How do you know him?" Alonso asked, once again pressing the barrel firmly against Jack's chest.


"I'm the one holding the gun," Alonso argued.

*Screw letting him think he has the upper hand,* Jack thought. With a deft movement, he knocked the gun out of Alonso's hand, wrenched his arm behind his back, spun him around, and pinioned him face first against the wall. Jack withdrew his gun, cocked it, and held it to Alonso's temple.

"Okay…" Alonso murmured, struggling uselessly against Jack's grip. "I guess you're the one holding the gun."

"Look, I don't know you from Adam. But when the Doctor tells me to do something, I do it. And he told me your name was Alonso. That's it. Now how do you know him?"

"We met aboard the Titanic," Alonso muttered.

Jack's mind whirled. "You're from the early nineteen-hundreds?"

"The early nineteen-hundreds?" Alonso struggled again, but Jack held him firmly. "What are you on about?"

"The Titanic sank in the north Atlantic Ocean in nineteen-twelve," Jack said.

"What's the Atlantic Ocean? Is that in the Fostrix Galaxy?"

Jack frowned. "Where are you from, Alonso?"

"Sto," the younger man replied succinctly.

"In the Cassavalian Belt?" Jack asked.

"Yeah," Alonso replied. "Why? Where are you from?"

"I've been to Sto," Jack said, ignoring the question. "Nice planet. What brings you to the outer reaches of the Milky Way? And what's the Titanic?"

"That's a long story," Alonso said.

Jack released his hold on the younger man, who turned around, massaging his shoulder and glaring at Jack. Jack shrugged, still pointing his gun at Alonso. "I've got time."

"Obviously you're a friend of the Doctor's, otherwise you wouldn't be obeying his orders. And anyone who is a friend of the Doctor is a friend of mine."

Jack raised an eyebrow, deliberating his options. Finally, he bent down and picked up Alonso's
weapon, pocketing it quickly. "Okay," he said, holstering his own gun. "But don't try anything stupid. It won't work."

Alonso held up his hands deferentially. "Like I said, you have the gun now."

"So, about the Titanic," Jack pressed.

"This isn't the best place to talk." Alonso looked warily around the bay. "I have a bottle of Rekkar in my room."

Jack chuckled. "The Sentarion alcohol? You're just full of surprises, aren't you?"

"Just thought we could talk somewhere more private."

Jack eyed the younger man. Is he flirting with me? he wondered again. Is he really just looking for a place for a private conversation? Or is he taking me somewhere more private to kill me? He considered the possibilities. Oh what the hell, he decided. Not like I have anything better to do. Besides, he can't permanently hurt me. He shrugged his shoulders again and smiled. "Lead the way, Alonso."

Alonso opened the magnetic door and they entered the corridor again. Jack followed the younger man through a series of corridors to a bank of lifts, which lead up to the spaceport's rental accommodations. Alonso used a key card to open another magnetic door. They entered a small room, furnished with two twin beds, a table, and two chairs. There was another door at the far end of the room, which led into a bathroom and shower area.

Alonso took off his coat and reached up to hang it from a hook on the wall, wincing slightly as he did so and clutching his side with his other hand. "Are you injured?" Jack asked, wondering just how roughly he'd handled the younger man earlier.

"Shot. About a year ago. Still gives me a twinge now and again, but I'll get to that."

Alonso walked over to one of the twin beds and grabbed the duffle bag lying on top of it. Jack's hand immediately moved to his gun, but Alonso unzipped the bag and extracted a glass liquor bottle containing clear liquid. He walked into the bathroom and returned with two glasses, setting everything down on the table. Jack re-holstered his gun and sat down in one of the chairs. Alonso sat in the other. "By the way," he said, unscrewing the bottle cap and pouring out two drinks. "I never got your name."

"Captain Jack Harkness," Jack said, holding out his hand.

Alonso looked up, startled. Then he stood quickly and saluted. "Captain."


"At ease, soldier," Jack said with amusement. "We'll forgo the military niceties for now. Sit down."

Alonso sat quickly and fumbled nervously over the drinks, pushing one clumsily towards Jack. "What's the problem Alonso?"

"You outrank me, sir," Alonso stated.

Jack felt a painful aching in his heart at the honorific, and his temper flared. "Don't call me sir," he growled angrily. "Jack is fine. Now tell me about the Titanic."
He watched as Alonso sipped his drink. Deciding that it wasn't poisoned or drugged, he took a mouthful from his own glass. The alien liquor was intense, burning a fiery hot trail down his throat and into his stomach. He sighed wistfully. It had been years since he'd had Rekkar.

"The Titanic was my first trip out," Alonso began. "A cruise ship en route from Sto. I'd just qualified and was only a midshipman. Our passengers were tourists, interested in experiencing primitive cultures. We were nearing a planet called Earth when it all began. We'd gone there to observe something called Christmas."

Jack snorted. "What is it with Christmas?" he interjected, shaking his head sadly.

"Seems a popular holiday on that planet," Alonso continued, oblivious to Jack's meaning. "Anyway, that's where I met the Doctor."

Jack listened to Alonso's tale of the Titanic, its sabotage by the company owner, Cyborg Max Capricorn, Alonso's part in saving the ship, how he was shot by the captain, and the role of the Doctor in saving both the ship and Earth. Jack smiled affectionately as he listened to the tale, wondering just how many times the Doctor had saved the planet. But he wasn't there for the 456, he thought bitterly, the smile turning slowly into a frown. He took another mouthful of his drink.

"The Doctor left me on the ship to deal with the aftermath," Alonso concluded. "It took months to get a tow to the nearest space station. Then there was the paperwork." Alonso groaned. "You wouldn't believe the paperwork! That was another few months. But it seems like the Doctor put in a good word for me, because out of nowhere, I was offered a job on one of the Shadow Proclamation vessels, and promoted to ensign."

"Sounds like the Doctor," Jack commented distractedly. Why am I here? Why does he want me to talk to this man? "So what's the Shadow Proclamation up to these days?" he asked disinterestedly, swirling the liquid in his glass.

Alonso grinned. "Oh, you know. The usual. Upholding Galactic law, maintaining peace and order in the galaxies."

Jack nodded again, watching the liquid swirling in his glass.

"We've only stopped over to refuel," Alonso continued, leaning forward enthusiastically. "We've been tracking this species all over the galaxy. They're nasty buggers. Like to use viruses to destroy humanoid species." The liquor had certainly loosened Alonso's tongue, and he was speaking rapidly, with a slight slur over his words. "Our scientists have been working on antidotes for the various strains. I don't really know that much about them. I'm only an ensign, after all. But they use a particular frequency to communicate. Four hundred and fifty-six megahertz."

Jack's glass dropped from his hands and shattered on the floor.
Thanks to my amazing beta riftintime, for not only editing, hashing out plot points, cleaning up my prose, and giving me ideas, but also for the continued support and feedback. You're my hero.

Fragments of Alonso's words echoed through Jack's mind as he sat motionless and completely dumbfounded. Viruses... antidotes... four hundred and fifty-six megahertz... He couldn't form a coherent thought.

Alonso jumped to his feet and bent down to collect the broken pieces of glass. "Leave it!" Jack's voice commanded. Alonso froze in his movements. "Sit down!" Jack ordered.

Alonso returned to his chair quickly, sitting up straight, a look of utter astonishment and mild alarm crossing over his features. Jack's mind raced. What does this mean? Was this the Doctor's intention? That Alonso would tell me something about the 456? But what difference does it make? It's too late. The damage is done... Is this about revenge? The Doctor doesn't believe in revenge... But I do... He'd never condone revenge though... What was his purpose?

"Captain?" Alonso asked softly.

Jack looked up at the other man, trying to pull himself together. "Tell me everything you know about the 456," he ordered.

"The 456?" Alonso asked.

"That's what we call them, after the frequency. The 456," Jack explained.

Alonso raised his eyebrows, pulling down his mouth in a considering moue. "I suppose it's as good a name as any," he stated. "We just refer to them as 'The Target'. You've encountered them before then?"

Jack nodded, his eyes closed, not wanting to give anything away.

"It's a wonder you survived."

"I'm resilient," Jack said tersely. "What else do you know about them?" he pressed.

Alonso gave him a few more details about the 456, all of which Jack already knew: their atmosphere requirements, their communications, their technology, their knowledge of virology. There was no new information. As Jack listened carefully, he began to wonder again why the Doctor had connected him with this man. There was nothing further to be learned. Jack sat thinking over everything that Alonso had told him. His contemplations were interrupted by the sound of light snoring coming from the other man. Alonso had dozed off.

Jack stood up and began pacing around the small room. Something was scratching at the back of his memory, like a name he couldn't quite recall. There's something I should remember... What is it? What would the Doctor have wanted me to discover? He began to recite everything he knew about
the Doctor. He's a renegade Time Lord from Gallifrey. He's over nine hundred years old. He travels, usually with a companion, through all of space and time, but he never crosses his own timeline... He doesn't believe in altering timelines... But that's not exactly true. He often changes events... but only to fix something that wasn't meant to happen...

Jack stopped in his tracks. *To fix something that wasn't meant to happen...* He stood rooted to the ground, his mind whirling.

_Is that what I'm supposed to do? To fix something that was never meant to happen?*_ He began pacing again. _What though? The 456? Were they never meant to come to Earth? But there's no way to change that, is there? No, that's too grand of a scale... It must be something else. Something smaller... Someone who wasn't meant to die? Steven?*_ He stopped again, an involuntary shudder coursing through his body. _He could barely get the thought out._

Ianto?

Again, something prickled at the back of his mind. Jack growled in frustration and sat down in the chair again. He reached over and picked up the bottle of Rekkar, refilling his glass. He took a mouthful and swallowed hard. The alien brew was stronger than the alcohol on Earth, and Jack felt his limbs becoming heavier, the room around him fading into a pleasant hue. He struggled to stay focused. _There's something... Something I know, but I don't realize that I know. Damn it! Why do you have to be so obtuse, Doctor? Why couldn't you just tell me?*_ He sighed heavily. _He sighed heavily. It would have to be subtle. He doesn't want to interfere... But he wants me to interfere somehow. He's giving me permission to change the timeline. But how? And why? And what?*_

He made a conscious effort to relax his body and clear his mind. He hoped that if he achieved a tranquil state, his subconscious would take over and point him in the right direction. He began to take deep, calming breaths, timing his exhalations to the quiet snoring of the man slumped across from him.

Eventually, he felt his mind slipping sideways, and he allowed his thoughts to wander at will. He soon drifted to memories of Ianto. _Such an amazing man... Clever, exciting, intuitive, witty, delectably handsome. So young, and yet so wise. And he always surprised me, even though we could practically communicate without speaking... I never knew how he was going to react to things. Jack smiled to himself. I remember when he caught me reading his diary... I thought he was going to be furious, but he just laughed... And then he gave me the diary as a gift... It's gone now, destroyed along with everything else in the Hub. Can't remember if he knew that I'd uploaded it into my Vortex Manipulator...*_

He flipped open his Vortex Manipulator and called up the file he'd saved, all that time ago. He pressed a button, and a large holographic image of the file coalesced in front of him, casting the dim room in a soft blue glow. His eyes quickly scanned the words, translated into Galactic Standard. He tried to ignore the pangs of sorrow as he re-read Ianto's innermost thoughts. He was on a mission, and he was looking for something in particular.

"Day 3 of Jack's disappearance. Jack came to me in my dreams. He was older. Does he get older?"

This is it, Jack thought, pausing momentarily. _That's what struck me as odd when I first read it. It was the wording of that sentence. He didn't write, 'I dreamt about Jack.' He wrote, 'Jack came to me in my dreams.' And he thought I looked older. But I remember that there's more...* His eyes moved
"I don't remember much of the details, but it was unlike my other dreams about Jack – which generally involve sex. I don't think there was any sex in this dream. It was different... He was sad. And I keep feeling like I've forgotten something important..."

"Found a strange mark on my arm this morning. Must have been one of the Weevils. Owen noticed it too – asked me if I'd had a blood draw recently. Weird."

Jack paused again. A mark on his arm... possibly a blood draw... What does that mean? Various notions were kaleidoscoping in his mind, but he didn't have enough information yet to form a coherent idea. He continued to read.

"Day 9 of Jack's disappearance. Despite my efforts, I had another dream about Jack. Again, it was unlike my usual dreams of him. The dream was strange, elusive... just out of reach, yet, it's in there somewhere, like it's buried away in my subconscious. Jack was different – older, broken, and sad. Why would I dream of Jack being older? And he was so terribly sad. That's the one impression I've been able to hold on to. It's very unsettling.

A phrase keeps going through my head today... "sine qua non"... Latin for "without which, nothing." It was originally a legal term, referring to something which is essential – a condition without which, it could not be. I don't know why I'm thinking about this – I can't remember reading it anywhere recently, or hearing anyone say it. It's hardly the sort of thing any of the others would say, and if they had, I would remember. It just seems to have popped into my head from out of nowhere. Brilliant, I might actually be going mad."

Jack re-read the last paragraph three times, his heart rate increasing with each repetition. I remember this... I was shocked when I read it before... and I wondered if it was just a coincidence. And part of me wondered... He frowned and leaned back in the chair.

Jack's mind drifted to far away memories of when he'd been a child. His family had been one of the first to settle on the Boeshane Peninsula. He'd only been a toddler and Gray a newborn when they'd immigrated to the remote colony, but his parents had often told the story of moving from their home planet.

They'd had to fill out endless forms, detailing all of the belongings they wanted to take to their new home. Some items, the governing body would reject, wanting tight control of all alien objects transported to the new planet. But there had been one classification on the form called the "Sine qua non." Colonists were requested to list everything, without which, they refused to immigrate. It was the deal breaker.

Jack's parents had laughed as they'd told the story, chuckling over some of the items their fellow travelers had listed as their sine qua non: their prized possessions, jewels or other family heirlooms, various foods or spices, plants, articles of clothing. Jack could still remember his father's laughing voice as he'd said, "The only things your mother and I listed were you and your brother Gray. You two are our sine qua non."

For as long as he could remember, that phrase held special meaning for his family. It had been their own private version of 'I love you.' The last time he'd ever said the words, it was to his mother, before he left the Boeshane Peninsula forever.

Jack's eyes focused back to the present, his nostalgia for his childhood receding once again into the background. The holographic image of Ianto's diary was still floating in front of him, and Alonso was still quietly snoring in the chair across from him. Is it a coincidence? he wondered again, or was
His eyes moved once more over the paragraph before he continued on. He realized that he was reading a part of the diary he hadn't seen before. He'd always meant to finish reading it, but something had always come up.

He tried not to linger over Ianto's pained words about Jack's disappearance, and the myriad of misunderstandings between them. *Oh, Ianto,* he thought, unable to stop the tears from forming, *we wasted so much time... I loved you even then... I should have told you.*

He roughly wiped the tears from his face. *Focus,* he told himself sternly. *You're looking for something specific.* He continued to scan the words until another entry jumped out at him.

"Day 15 of Jack's disappearance. Had another one of those dreams. It was so real. Like he was there. I could feel him, smell him, taste him... And I woke up, sweating, naked, and sticky in Jack's bed... His scent was all around me, like he'd been there... But that's nonsense. It's probably still lingering from just before he left. Jack and his damn 51st century pheromones. I need to wash the sheets again, preferably with some strong-smelling detergent.

_But he said those words in my dream. I'm certain he said those words. 'Sine qua non.' What the hell does it mean? Maybe I'm just going insane."

Jack furiously read the remainder of the diary, but there was no further mention of unusual visitations. There was much he wanted to consider in Ianto's words, but now wasn't the time. He pushed a button to close the file, and instantly the holographic image disappeared. He flipped the cover of his Vortex Manipulator closed.

_I visited him,* Jack realized. _Three times. I went back in time and visited him during the months I was away with the Doctor. I must have. 'Sine qua non' was a clue to myself..._ He ran his hands distractedly through his hair, and as they dropped down to his lap, he realized that they were trembling.

He sat looking at his shaking hands, forcing himself to admit something he'd never wanted to acknowledge before. _It's true. Ianto is my sine qua non._ He took a deep breath, letting the air out slowly. _Without him, I am nothing._

He closed his hands into fists. _Is this what you meant, Doctor? Can I go back in time and visit him? I won't be crossing my own timeline... I wasn't even on Earth at that point in time. But why? Why torture myself? Do I go back just so I can see him again and say a proper goodbye, or does the mark on Ianto's arm have something to do with it?_

Alonso let out a particularly loud snore and shifted positions in the chair. Jack's eyes drifted to the other man. _The Doctor wanted me to meet Alonso, to talk to him... So it has to be more than just a sentimental visit to the past... Viruses... Anti-viruses... "Our scientists have been working on antidotes for the various strains."_

Jack jumped up, ideas racing frantically through his brain. He paced twice around the small room. _Could it be? Is it possible?_ Blood was pounding in his ears, and his gut was churning violently. He made another lap around the small quarters, finally coming to an irresistible decision. _I have to try!_

He stopped beside Alonso and roughly shook his shoulder. Alonso awoke with a start. "Where am I? What day is it?" he muttered in alarm.

Jack ignored his disorientation. "Alonso, I need to get on your ship!"
Jack stood in deep contemplation in his humble, but comfortable quarters aboard the Shadow IV, one of several Shadow Proclamation vessels dedicated to maintaining peace and order in the galaxy. He ran his fingers over his Vortex Manipulator thoughtfully, wondering if he was making the right decision, or if it would end in disaster.

He'd spent the past two months with the scientists of the Shadow Proclamation. He'd connived, negotiated, bargained, and pleaded to obtain their help. The first hurdle had been finding a plausible excuse to get aboard the ship. After discussing several farfetched plans with Alonso, Jack had finally settled on the truth, or at least a version of it. Alonso had introduced him to his employers as a consultant. Since Jack had first-hand experience with the 456, he had valuable information to offer them.

Jack had been forced to endure several days of ruthless interrogation, repeatedly having to relive the heartbreaking events of those five days on Earth. It had almost been more than he could bear, but he'd reminded himself over and over again of his ultimate goal, and that had given him strength.

He'd carefully considered whether he should reveal his immortality. On one hand, it might have been an asset to discovering the particular virus used at Whitehall, and also serve as a bargaining tool with the scientists. On the other hand, he'd had no idea how the Shadow Proclamation would respond to the knowledge that an immortal being existed. He might be imprisoned, tortured, subjected to experimentation, or worse. It wouldn't have been the first time that Jack had been used as a guinea pig for malevolent scientific experiments.

In the end, he had decided against divulging the knowledge of his immortality, instead pleading ignorance of the reason for his resilience to the virus. He admitted to being from the fifty-first century and not from Earth, speculating that his body might have antibodies that twenty-first century humans had not yet developed. As he'd hoped, he was requested to submit to an examination by the Shadow Proclamation scientists.

It was about the testing that Jack had been the most uncertain. The scientists wanted to analyze his blood for the virus and antibodies used by the 456. Technically, Jack's blood should have antibodies to the virus, but Jack had no idea how his immortality actually worked. He didn't know if his body reset itself after each death, or if his body merely healed. The medical minutia was a bit beyond him, but from what he understood, every virus, bacteria, or other invader to the human body was fought by the immune system. And the immune system had memory in the form of antibodies, which could last from years to a lifetime. If Jack's body reset itself, his blood would not retain the memory of the virus used by the 456. If he merely healed, his blood would contain the information he so desperately needed.

But Jack took comfort in the knowledge that he did actually age, though it was at a fraction of the rate of normal humans. It lent credence to his theory that his body healed, rather than reset. Besides, he reasoned, if I reset, wouldn't I get sick from the same diseases over and over again, because my
immune system wouldn't retain the antibody memory? Heartened by his conclusions, and knowing he needed the cooperation of the scientists to carry out his plan, he agreed to the examination.

Jack had been taken to the laboratory of the Shadow IV, a pristine room with gleaming chrome surfaces, stark white walls, various beakers, vials, chemicals, computers, examination tables, and a variety of additional medical equipment. There he was introduced to the lead scientist, Dr. Edward Koch, and his research team. Dr. Koch appeared to be human, but his team was comprised of various alien races, some of which Jack had encountered before, and some which were entirely new to him.

Dr. Koch was an elderly, handsome man with elegantly styled, silver hair, and thick, horn-rimmed glasses that conformed smartly to and enhanced his striking features. He wore a neat, white, button-down shirt with a subtle blue pinstripe, along with a light blue, silk tie, underneath a crisp, white lab coat, buttoned closed in the front. He had a lusciously deep and pleasantly soothing speaking voice, as he shook Jack's hand firmly and introduced himself and his staff. Under other circumstances, Jack would have flirted outrageously with the handsome doctor, but he had neither the heart nor the inclination for his usual dalliance. His thoughts were focused solely on one man.

Dr. Koch had given Jack a full physical exam, with gentle, skillful, and professional hands, and Jack endured the exam with good humor, feeling somehow at ease under the care of this obviously experienced scientist. But when Dr. Koch explained that he was going to draw several vials of blood, Jack became uneasy. He watched apprehensively as the needle pierced his arm and tubes were filled with the dark red liquid from his body. He held his breath as Dr. Koch pushed the vials into the blood analyzer. This was the defining moment. If his blood held the evidence of the 456's virus, there was hope for his plan. If it didn't, Jack had no idea what his next move would be.

Jack was also concerned that his blood would hold some indication of his immortality. Owen had never found any such anomalies in the various samples he'd taken from Jack over the years, but although Jack was certain he could fool a twenty-first century human scientist with twenty-first century and limited alien technology, he was uncertain if the same could be said for a scientist with all of the advanced technology of the Shadow Proclamation at his disposal.

The blood analyzer whirred and beeped, and information began to fill the computer screen. The minutes ticked by interminably as Jack waited. "Huh," Dr. Koch finally said, peering through his spectacles at the screen.

Jack felt his heart skip a beat. "What?" he asked, trying to keep his tone casual.

"You have quite a number of antibodies in your system. Millions more than I've ever seen, as a matter of fact," the doctor murmured in his charming baritone.

"I've been around the block a few times," Jack quipped, hoping Dr. Koch wouldn't belabor the point.

"I see," the doctor commented noncommittally, keeping his eyes focused on the readouts on his computer.

"Is it there?" Jack asked hesitantly. "The virus from the 456?"

Dr. Koch stood up straight, removed his eyeglasses, and pulled a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his lab coat. He carefully cleaned the glasses with the cloth before returning it to his pocket and placing the eyeglasses back on his face, pushing them into position with a long, neatly manicured forefinger.

Jack watched the doctor's every movement intently, his heart beating rapidly in his chest and his
mind contriving various plans for dissemination or escape, if necessary. "I'm afraid it's going to take me some time to analyze your blood, Jack," the doctor finally stated. "You should make yourself comfortable," he added with a kindly smile. "I'll have someone show you to your quarters."

Jack nodded with a mixture of relief and disappointment. His hopes weren't yet dashed, but neither were they confirmed. He allowed one of Dr. Koch's assistants to escort him back to his room, mentally preparing himself for more monotonous waiting.

For the next three weeks, Jack waited as the team of scientists analyzed and sourced the myriad antibodies in his blood. Jack wasn't exactly a prisoner aboard the Shadow IV, but his presence was met with a certain amount of suspicion and wariness. He was confined to the sleeping quarters, the dining quarters, the laboratory, and a few other locations on the ship.

Alonso occasionally came to visit him, when his duties allowed, and Jack developed a fondness for the younger man. It was with Alonso's help that he was able to hack into the Shadow Proclamation computers, searching for the necessary information to repair his Vortex Manipulator. Jack wasn't certain that their computers, technologically advanced though they were, would contain any information on fifty-first century time traveling devices, but he had to try.

He'd been unable to understand the Doctor's reasoning. If he was giving Jack permission to alter the timeline, surely he would have also fixed Jack's Vortex Manipulator. But he doesn't want to interfere, Jack reasoned to himself. He's giving me permission to interfere, but he doesn't want to do it himself. He must know that I'll manage to find a way to fix it...

Initially, Alonso had been hesitant to get involved, when Jack had broached the subject of hacking into the Shadow Proclamation archives. He was unwilling to do anything that might jeopardize his position. But with continued cajoling from Jack and frequent mentions of the Doctor, he began to wear the younger man down.

It was over another bottle of Rekkar that Jack finally got Alonso to agree to help him. They had spent a companionable evening enjoying the liquor and exchanging various stories of their adventures, when Alonso, obviously emboldened by the effects of the Rekkar, suddenly leaned forward and kissed Jack full on the lips.

Jack was stunned, momentarily taken aback and unable to react. It had been over six months since he'd had intimate contact with anyone. The kiss he'd placed on Ianto's dead lips was the last kiss he'd either given or received. Alonso's lips were moist, warm, soft, and tinged with the hint of alcohol, and the intimate touch of another person was comforting to Jack's weary and grief-stricken soul.

For a brief instant, Jack considered giving into temptation. He was so very lonely. But the memories of mischievous blue eyes and beautiful Welsh vowels were too strong and overpowering, and it just didn't feel right. He's not Ianto... He gently pushed the younger man away with an apologetic expression on his face. "I'm sorry, Alonso. I can't."

"You don't find me attractive?" Alonso asked, failing to hide his disappointment and embarrassment.

Jack placed a reassuring hand on the younger man's knee. "It's not that," he assured him. "Another time, another place, absolutely. I'd be all over you like a cheap suit," he added with a smile.

"A cheap suit?" Alonso asked, confusion wrinkling his brow.

Jack waved his hand dismissively. "Forget it. Earth reference. What I'm trying to say is that you caught me at a bad time."
"I see," Alonso said, pulling his knee out of Jack's reach and looking around the room, apparently trying to avoid eye contact.

Jack sighed heavily. He owed Alonso a debt of gratitude, and he didn't want there to be bad feelings between them. He decided to confide in the younger man, at least to a point. "Alonso," Jack began, trying to catch the other man's eye, but Alonso steadfastly looked away. "I'm here because..." Jack paused, uncertain how to continue. "All of this... Working with the Shadow Proclamation, allowing them to interrogate me repeatedly, using me as a lab rat... I'm doing it... Well, I'm doing it to save the man I love."

Alonso's head snapped around, and he looked at Jack with what seemed to be newfound respect. "And breaking into the computer system is part of this plan?" he asked.

Jack nodded.

"No ulterior motive?"

Jack shook his head. Somehow he felt that words were not enough, so he remained silent.

"And the Doctor wanted you to meet me..." Alonso continued thoughtfully. "He must have wanted you to save this man."

Jack shrugged his shoulders. "Honestly, I don't know for certain. One never knows for certain with the Doctor, but I believe that was his intention."

Alonso slapped Jack affectionately on the back, grinning. "Why didn't you say so before? Of course I'll help you. Love is the most important and powerful thing in the universe. I'd do anything to further its cause!"

Jack was surprised by the other man's outburst, but he couldn't help chuckling at his naïve fervor. From that point forward, Alonso was his most valuable confederate, and he readily agreed to help Jack break into the Shadow Proclamation archives.

Jack also spent a fair amount of time in the laboratory with Dr. Koch, who insisted that Jack call him Edward. Edward was a serious scientist, but a kindly man, and an enthusiastic educationalist. He spent hours talking to Jack about microbes and antibodies, the human immune system, the immune systems of various other alien species, and the advancements of medical science over the centuries.

Jack eventually learned that Edward was human scientist from the thirty-fourth century. How he was transplanted to the twenty-first century or how he came to work for the Shadow Proclamation, Jack never discovered, but over the weeks they developed a camaraderie based on the mutual empathy and understanding of the experience of being displaced in time.

One day, to Jack's immense relief, Edward announced that he'd discovered the virus used by the 456 against Jack. "Are you certain that's the one?" Jack asked carefully.

"Positive," Edward beamed. "It matches a strain we've seen that species use before."

"Is there an anti-virus?" Jack asked hopefully.

"We're near completion," Edward replied happily. "With the analysis of your blood, we should be able to formulate a successful inoculation." Edward paused, and looked searchingly at Jack. "Strange that you were able to survive that encounter," he added meditatively. "It's designed to kill any human or near human life form within minutes."
Jack remained silent, unable to present a conceivable argument for his obvious resilience. Edward stared at him appraisingly, as if suddenly seeing Jack as an unusual and exciting genetic mutation, rather than a man. Jack's blood ran cold, and for the first time, he began to feel truly afraid of the doctor.

"I'd like to run some more tests, Jack," Edward finally said, breaking the silence. "If that's okay with you," he added carefully.

Jack needed any excuse he could find to remain aboard the Shadow IV, so he readily agreed, but he made a mental note to stay on his guard. While Edward appeared to be compassionate and benevolent, he was a biologist at heart, and Jack thought he perceived a hint of the ruthless scientist beneath the kindly and elegant exterior.

For several more weeks, Jack endured test after test after test as he waited, both for Alonso to find a way for Jack to hack into the necessary files in the Shadow Proclamation computer archives, and for Edward to complete the development of the anti-virus.

There were several other small details Jack needed to work out. He needed a way to keep someone in a hypnotic state. That problem was easily solved, however, as he cautiously broached the topic one day with Edward, who in his typical didactic fashion, told Jack about an alien pheromone, which had the exact effect for which he was searching. He even showed Jack the vial containing the substance. Jack made simple work of absconding with some of the specimen. He'd been a conman and a thief for years, and it was a simple, slight of hand trick to replace the vial with a similar container.

He also had to solve the problem of how much history he could safely change. He'd thought long and hard about this detail, trying to come up with a way that he could save both Ianto and Steven. He spent long hours alone in his quarters pondering the problem, turning it over and over again in his mind, but try as he might, he couldn't conceive of a way to save Ianto, Steven, and Earth from the encounter with the 456. He still had time though, and he hoped that a solution would present itself.

Finally, after almost two months, Alonso had been successful in contriving a way for Jack to search through the Shadow Proclamation archives. Jack had spent nearly a week combing through the innumerable files, searching for the information he required, but he'd eventually had to admit defeat. Although they obviously had remarkably advanced technology, they were still far from the fifty-first century technology of his Vortex Manipulator.

Although he couldn't repair the time traveling mechanism, he was able to make some small repairs to his device. Enough so that he could take the next step. It was that very step that Jack was contemplating as he stood in his quarters, running his fingers over the leather band, and remembering the past two months. It was something that had always been at the back of his mind. He had known from the beginning that it was a possibility, and that if all else failed, he might need to turn to it as a last resort.

Taking a deep breath, and wondering again if he was making a huge mistake, he pressed a button on his Vortex Manipulator and sent the signal.

He stood waiting with nervous anticipation, every fiber of his being on high alert. Several minutes later, the room was filled with a bright swirling light, which expanded, then collapsed again, revealing an all too familiar figure grinning smugly at him. Before Jack could react, the figure was upon him, and firm lips were pressed against his. Jack pulled away, wiping his mouth with irritation.

"I knew you couldn't live without me, Jack," said the unmistakable voice of Captain John Hart.
Jack looked at the other man appraisingly. John was still wearing the same red military coat, stained white t-shirt, jeans, and boots he'd had on the last time they saw each other. "Still Captain John Hart?" Jack asked pointedly.

"Still Captain Jack Harkness?" John retorted with a menacing grin.

They glared at each other. It had been part of their training at the Time Agency to use whatever alias was given without question, although Jack knew John's real name, and John knew his. "What the hell happened to you?" John asked. "You look like shit. And where the hell are we, anyway?" He looked around Jack's room with interest.

"We should go," Jack said quickly. "We can't talk here."

"Wait a minute," John said, wandering around the room, picking up various items and inspecting them. "You get me all the way out here... I'd like to at least know where I am... And when I am. Are we on a ship?"

"A Shadow Proclamation vessel," Jack said through gritted teeth.

"You're kidding me!" John said with a smile that Jack knew all too well. It meant trouble. "Sweet goddesses, how did you get yourself aboard a Shadow Proclamation vessel? Do you know how much technology they have? We're sitting on a treasure trove!"

John took two steps forward, grabbed Jack's face roughly and kissed him again. Once again, Jack shoved him away. "I knew you'd come back to me. The two of us, back to the old routine. Just can't resist all the glitter of the galaxies, can you?" He put his hands on his hips and glanced around. "Now, what kind of trouble can we get ourselves into on a Shadow Proclamation vessel?"

"That's not why I called," Jack snarled. "Besides, there's nothing in the twenty-first century that would interest you."

"We're in the twenty-first century again?" John made a sound of disgust. "What is it with you and this century, anyway? It's boring. These people are so primitive!"

"So take me somewhere else," Jack said evenly. "Anywhere you want to go, just not here."

"Now hold on," John said with a sly smirk. "We may only be in the twenty-first century, but still. The Shadow Proclamation..."

"Believe me, you don't want to mess with them, no matter what century," Jack said, cutting him off. "Now, let's go."

"Where's your sense of adventure?" John asked ruefully. "You get yourself a little team, a little bit of
responsibility, and suddenly you're like a fussy old man. Where are your dolly birds, anyway? Eye Candy and Doe Eyes? They lurking about somewhere, ready to put a few bullets in my chest?" He looked around expectantly.

Jack tried to hide the pain he felt from John's words. "They're dead," he stated coldly, deciding it was better that John thought Gwen was dead as well.

John looked at him, his face suddenly assuming a serious expression. "I'm sorry, Jack."

Jack nodded, averting his eyes. "Still," John continued. "That means you're free. Nothing holding you back now." He threw his arms up in the air dramatically. "You've got the whole galaxy to roam around in." He grinned ominously. "Where should we start?"

Jack's mind worked quickly. He hadn't been certain which tactic to use with John to elicit his help. His first inclination had been to tell him part of the truth, and appeal to their long acquaintance, along with the fact that he owed Jack. But another idea had presented itself. Maybe if he thinks I'm going to partner up with him again… he'll help me get my Vortex Manipulator fixed… It's worth a try. And we have to get out of here before we're caught. They might have detected John's arrival on the ship.

Quickly making up his mind, he smiled with enthusiasm he didn't feel. "Didn't you say something about making a fortune in the Vegas Galaxy?" he asked, hoping John would take the bait.

"Now you're talking," John said eagerly.

He flipped open his Vortex Manipulator and pushed several buttons. Jack took a few steps forward and put his arms around Hart. "Knew you couldn't resist me," John said with a lascivious leer, before pressing the final button.

Golden light began to swirl around them, and Jack felt tingling, an immense pressure on his body, the familiar tugging sensation in his chest, and the feeling of rapid acceleration, like falling from a building, as they were whisked through time and space.

As soon as they had rematerialized, Jack released John and stepped back, looking around. They'd landed in a lavishly furnished hotel room with flashing neon lights trickling in through the large window. A tourist spaceship flew by outside, and Jack could hear the loudspeaker on the vessel saying, "This is the famous Eiffel Tower Hotel and Casio. It's an exact recreation of a hotel on Earth, destroyed by the twenty-fourth century Cyberman invasion, with all updated fifty-first century amenities of course."

At least I'm in the right century, he thought to himself, trying to ignore the pangs of nostalgia he felt at being back in his own time. Now, how to get this damn thing fixed. He headed straight for the computer station and placed the cerebral interface on his head.

"So." John clapped his hands together and rubbed them eagerly. "Where to start? Should I call for some room service? It's been at least a week since I've had an orgy. What do you fancy? Humans? Aliens? A mix? I hear they have a new species with seventeen orifices. Seventeen!" He laughed excitedly. "Lots of places to put things."

"Not interested," Jack said tersely, calling up the holographic image of a screen and using his fingers to scroll through various files. Fifty-first century computers had neither keyboards nor monitors. "But don't let me stop you," he added as he began to search for a way into the Time Agency archives.

Jack was so focused on what he was doing, that at first he failed to notice the silence. However, it finally dawned on him that John hadn't said a word for several minutes. It was unlike him. Jack
looked up. John was staring at him with an inscrutable expression on his face. "What?" Jack asked nervously.

"What is this really about, Jack?" John asked solemnly.

Jack decided on the partial truth. He held up the arm on which he wore his Vortex Manipulator. "The time travel mechanism is broken. I need to get it fixed. I can't always rely on you for travel."

He forced a smile in John's direction, then turned back to the screen.

He felt hands on his, and John gently pulled his fingers away from the computer hologram. Jack looked at the other man. His face wore a genuine expression that Jack had rarely seen. "Is this about Gray?" John asked carefully.

Jack winced slightly at the mention of his brother. "No," he said, shaking his head.

"Then what is it?" John asked, still holding Jack's hand. "I'm not stupid, you know. I know you're never going to rejoin me. What is it you're after? I can't help you unless you tell me."

Jack was silent, uncertain how to respond.

"Come on, Jack." John squeezed his hand. "You don't spend five years with someone without getting to know them pretty well. I've never seen you like this before. Is it Eye Candy?" Jack completely failed to hide his shock at John's perceptiveness. "You love him, don't you?" John asked softly.

Again Jack didn't respond. This was a side to John that was rarely seen, and Jack didn't know how long it would last, or how far he could trust it. "I saw the way you looked at him," John continued. "I'm not blind. You're trying to go back in time to save him, aren't you?"

Jack stared at his one-time lover, a hedonistic and amoral thief, conman, drunk, drug addict, sex addict, and murderer. But rarely, there was another side to John, and Jack never knew when that softer side would emerge. He was speechless.

John lifted Jack's hand and flipped open his Vortex Manipulator. He pressed several buttons, beginning a diagnostic program. Jack watched silently as John worked on his device. "Hmm," John said thoughtfully. "You just need the access codes to the Time Vortex. Should repair both the time travel and teleportation functions. How long has it been broken?"

Jack shrugged noncommittally.

"Did it work the last time I saw you?"

Jack didn't answer. "Okay, the time before, when I conned you into helping me find those canisters. Did it work then?"

Again, Jack remained silent. "You could have asked me to fix it then, but you didn't," John said, staring hard at him. "You wanted to stay in that time, didn't you? For him?"

Jack could detect the jealousy in John's tone. His heart rate increased, wondering what John would do next. "For the little team?" John added with a sneer.

Jack just looked at him steadily. He had no patience with John's petty resentment. Either he's going to help me, or he's not. It doesn't matter what I say.

"Fine." John dropped his hand and lifted his own device. He pressed several buttons, then pulled
Jack roughly into his arms. "Where are we going?" Jack asked warily.

"I'm taking you back," John said.

"No!" Jack struggled in his grasp, but John held him tightly. "No," Jack cried again. "I need to fix it. It's my only chance!" he blurted out, his desperation momentarily getting the better of him.

The golden light swirled around him and once again the familiar tugging sensation told Jack that they were travelling through time and space.

They appeared back in Jack's room aboard the Shadow IV, and Jack pushed John violently away, feeling his heart sinking. *He's not going to help me, and I've run out of options.*

Jack felt tears burning at the back of his eyes, and he made a concerted effort to keep them at bay. Under no circumstances could he allow John to see that much weakness.

He sank down on his bed feeling completely defeated. He put his elbows on his knees and let his head fall into his hands. *He was my last hope. Ianto... I'll never see him again.* Jack swallowed hard at the lump forming in his throat.

"You really do love him, don't you?" John asked softly.

"Just go away," Jack grumbled miserably.

Once again Jack felt John pulling at his arm. Jack raised his head and allowed John to lift his arm. The other man pushed several buttons on his Vortex Manipulator, comparing the data to his own device. Jack's Vortex Manipulator made a rushing sound, then it pulsed and beeped three times. Jack stared at it in amazement, knowing that the device had locked onto the Time Vortex.

He looked up at John, his mouth hanging slightly open. "I guess you could say that I owe you one," John said, letting Jack's arm fall unceremoniously. "Now we're even. And don't come crying to me when it all goes to shit," he added sourly.

Jack ran a finger over the device, completely dumbfounded at the turn of events. "You fixed it?" he asked looking up at John in disbelief.

"Sure this is what you want, Jack?" John asked, a pleading note in his voice. "All the wonders of the universe at your disposal. Me..."

Jack looked into John's eyes. He could see the pain there, and the dim flickering of hope. He shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry, John."

John averted his eyes. "Well, it's your life. I just hope Eye Candy is worth it."

"He is," Jack said firmly.

"Yeah, yeah," John murmured bitterly.

"You do have your moments, John," Jack said. "For all your debauchery. Thank you."

John put his hands on Jack's face and tilted it up. He kissed Jack softly on the lips. "I always loved you, you know. Even though I know you never loved me. I envy him, this Ianto of yours."

Before Jack could respond, John pushed a button on his Vortex Manipulator, and the room filled with swirling golden light.
Captain John Hart was gone.

Jack breathed a sigh of relief and opened his Vortex Manipulator, checking all of the various functions. It seemed to be in perfect working order. He stood up and began pacing around the room. *But do I trust him? How do I know it will work? Gods only know if he really reprogrammed this thing. Could be he's sending me to the end of the universe… again! I wouldn't put it past him…*

He trailed a finger over the device again thoughtfully. *Do I dare use it? The last time I used it to travel through time, I ended up on Earth over one hundred years too early… And then it burned out… But if I have to wait one hundred years for Ianto, I'll wait, he thought resolutely. I'd wait a thousand years for him… I'd just have to avoid myself for all that time…*

He shuddered involuntarily. *I feel like I've spent so much time waiting… waiting for the Doctor… waiting on Earth to see Ianto one last time in the House of the Dead… waiting for the Shadow Proclamation scientists… Still waiting for them…* He sighed heavily. *But it's a risk I'm willing to take. Ianto's worth that, and more…*

His thoughts were interrupted by a light tapping at the door. "Come in," he called, dropping his hands to his sides.

The door slid open, revealing Alonso with a questioning look on his face. "Do you have a minute, Jack?"

Jack nodded, beckoning the younger man to enter. Alonso crossed the threshold and the door slid closed behind him. "So?" he asked. "Did you get in touch with that contact you mentioned?"

He'd confided in Alonso about his Vortex Manipulator, giving him a brief and heavily censored description of his tenure with the Time Agency. He'd also admitted that it was the Doctor himself who had deactivated the device, however they'd both agreed that the Doctor had introduced him to Alonso for a reason, and it must have been his way of giving his consent for Jack to alter the timeline.

After his failure with the Shadow Proclamation archives, Jack had told Alonso about the possibility of contacting John Hart, adding that man was a scoundrel and not to be trusted. "If he's such a scoundrel and untrustworthy, what makes you think he'll help you?" Alonso had asked.

"I don't" Jack had replied. "But we have a history. A long one. Besides, he owes me. I have to try."

Jack's thoughts returned to the present. Alonso was looking at him expectantly. The younger man had been nervous about Jack's plan to contact John Hart, and Jack knew that Alonso was there to check up on him. He smiled affectionately at his young friend. "Well," he said, holding out his arm. "Ostensibly, it's fixed, but who knows. Anything's possible with John Hart. I might be sent back to the age of the dinosaurs," he added with a snort. "And I'm not a big fan of dinosaur meat."

"Dinosaurs?" Alonso asked with a frown of confusion.

"I'll tell you another time," Jack said, waving a hand dismissively.

"So, are you going now?" Alonso asked. "Back in time?" he added.

Jack stared at him. "I suppose I could…” he said meditatively. "I mean… I'm going to have to test it sometime."

"Well, no time like the present," Alonso said, taking a step towards Jack.
"Yeah," Jack said, lifting his arm and flipping open the cover of the Vortex Manipulator. He programmed in the exact date, time, and location that he'd calculated weeks ago.

He stared down at the device, then looked up at Alonso. "Guess there's only one way to find out if it's really fixed," he said with a nervous chuckle.

"Guess so," Alonso said with a grin.

Jack looked down again at his Vortex Manipulator, which was flashing in readiness. His heart started pounding and his knees felt weak.

"I just wanted to say… well, to say good luck."

Alonso threw himself at Jack, giving him an awkward hug. Jack returned the embrace warmly. "Thanks for all of your help," he said pulling away from the other man and smiling affectionately at him. "If this thing doesn't work, I probably won't see you again."

Alonso nodded his understanding, a look of sadness crossing his features. "If, however, it does work, I'll be back in a flash," Jack added, grinning with more zeal than he felt.

Alonso smiled, and the two men stood looking at each other for several moments. "Well, go on then," Alonso said, gesturing again at Jack's Vortex Manipulator.

Jack chuckled and lifted his arm again. His gut was churning uncomfortably. All he had to do was push a single button. He looked at Alonso. "Safe travels," the younger man said.

Jack nodded, closed his eyes tightly, held his breath, and pushed the button. Once again he felt the familiar sensations of time travel. Then he felt his feet land firmly on a hard surface and all movement ceased.

He slowly opened his eyes, with a pounding heart and a clenching of his stomach, and looked around.

He was in his bunker, underneath his office at the Hub. He blinked several times as his eyes adjusted to the dim lighting. Then tears began falling freely from his eyes, and he bit back a sob.

Ianto was sleeping soundly in his bed.
Chapter Notes

This chapter corresponds to chapter 51, if you want to go back and read from Ianto's POV. Also, the song quoted here is from one of my favorite bands, Lamb. The song is called Gorecki, and of note, it's the song that's playing in the background of the scene with the stopwatch banter at the end of They Keep Killing Suzie. I thought the lyrics were particularly fitting.

Thanks as always to my most esteemed and cherished beta riftintime. You're brilliant!

Jack stumbled almost blindly to the foot of his old bed underneath his office in the Hub, where Ianto lay sleeping peacefully. He paused, staring at the younger man, unable to move or breathe. *He's so alive,* Jack thought woefully. *He's so beautiful and peaceful.* Tears were pouring down his face and dripping off his chin. He stood mesmerized, afraid to move, afraid to speak. *What if this isn't real? What if I've stepped into a dream?*

As he stood watching the reassuring rise and fall of Ianto's chest, he registered the well-known sounds of the Hub, and the familiar green-blue hues of light that seeped in through the hatch above. *I'm home,* he thought, with an intense pain in his chest. *This is the one place where I belonged, here in the Hub... with Ianto. And it's all gone now...*

Ianto stirred, opened his eyes suddenly, and stared blearily at Jack. "Ianto," Jack finally got his mouth to work. "My Ianto," he said, his voice breaking roughly over the words.

"Jack?" Ianto asked tentatively.

Moving almost instinctually, Jack fell to his knees and flung himself into Ianto's arms. He could no longer suppress the sobs. "My Ianto," Jack said again, holding Ianto as tightly as he could without suffocating him.

Ianto's familiar scent surrounded him and seemed to permeate his soul. He couldn't believe he was holding Ianto in his arms again. *If only the world could stop turning at this moment. If only I could stay here forever...* Jack remembered the words to a song he'd heard on Earth before he'd left the planet. They seemed so very poignant in that moment.

*If I should die this very moment, I wouldn't fear. For I've never known completeness like being here. Wrapped in the warmth of you, loving every breath of you. Still my heart this moment, or it might burst. Could we stay right here, 'Til the end of time, 'til the Earth stops turning. Gonna love you 'til the seas run dry. I've found the one I've waited for.*

There were so many things he wanted to say. He was desperate to say the words he'd never had a chance to say before, that he'd been too cowardly to say, that he regretted not saying for so long. He was desperate to tell Ianto that he loved him. *But I can't change the course of history. I can't tell him*
now. It might change our relationship. It has to play out the way that it has already played out.

But my gods, I made so many mistakes. I was so afraid of losing him that I didn't let myself love him. Not really... And when I did lose him, all I did was regret all the things I'd been too afraid to do. It was a horrible lesson to learn.

Ianto tentatively put his arms around Jack. "Jack?" he asked again.

Jack suddenly remembered his mission, and that Ianto couldn't believe this was real. He needs to think this is a dream... Everything depends on that... Jack had been prepared for his visit to Ianto for weeks. He'd been carrying everything he needed in his greatcoat pockets, not knowing when the time might come. He deftly pulled the vial of alien pheromone from his pocket and sprayed some in front of Ianto's face.

Then he held Ianto's face in his hands, and looked at him. He made a concerted effort to pull himself together. "This is a dream, Ianto," he said in a soothing tone. "You're dreaming."

"Am I?" Ianto asked in confusion.

Remember why you're here, Jack told himself firmly. Don't get distracted. You have to try and save him. You can't change the past. "Ianto, I need to take some blood from you. I can't explain. Will you let me?"

Ianto nodded with a dazed expression on his face.

Jack removed a syringe and tourniquet from his pocket. He took hold of Ianto's bare arm, tied the tourniquet around it, quickly found a vein, and as gently as he could, punctured the skin. He watched as the blood filled the vial, while fighting back tears. His blood is still flowing. He's alive.

When the vial was full, Jack removed the syringe and pocketed the equipment. Then he wrapped Ianto in his arms again. He wanted desperately to stay. He wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed with the younger man, hold him in his arms, and never let him go. Want to stay right here, 'til the end of time. 'Til the Earth stops turning...

I can't, he told himself firmly. If I stay, I may never leave again... And he'd remember. He can't remember. History has to play out as it has already. I can't interfere more than this. Aloud he said, "I can't stay, Ianto. I want to, but I can't. You won't remember this in the morning. This is a dream."

Jack kissed Ianto softly and tenderly on the lips. Then using all of his willpower, he stood and quickly punched the sequence of buttons on his wrist strap, afraid that if he lingered, his resolve to leave would waver.

Golden light swirled around him, and he kept his eyes locked on Ianto, wanting to maintain the image of the other man for as long as possible, drinking in the sight of him. "Ianto..." he whispered.

He felt the familiar tugging sensation as he was whisked through time and space.

Jack opened his eyes. He was back in his room aboard the Shadow IV, and Alonso was still standing exactly where he had been when Jack left.

"Did it not work?" Alonso asked.

"It worked," Jack replied, barely managing to get the words out before his legs collapsed beneath him.
Alonso must have caught him, because he felt the younger man guiding him to the bed. Jack sank down on the mattress, letting his body fall onto the soft sheets.

"Hey," Alonso said, alarm in his voice. "You okay, Jack? Are you injured? Did something happen?"

"I saw him... I saw Ianto. He was alive. He was..." Jack's voice broke, and he choked back another sob. He didn't want the other man to see his distress.

Alonso picked up Jack's feet and swung them carefully onto the bed. Then he sat on the edge and put his hand comfortingly on Jack's arm. "So your contact fixed your Vortex Manipulator after all. That's something then?"

Jack nodded, unable to speak. "Did you get the blood sample?" Alonso asked after a pause.

Jack indicated his pocket, swallowing hard against the rising sob in his throat. "It must have been hard... seeing him again," Alonso continued removing a handkerchief from his pocket and handing it to Jack.

"I wanted to stay," Jack whispered, gratefully taking the handkerchief Alonso was proffering and wiping his eyes. "I wanted so desperately to stay... but the longer I stayed... I... I was afraid I wouldn't come back."

Alonso nodded, making a murmuring noise of understanding. They'd had several conversations about time paradoxes and interfering too much with past events. Jack had said over and over again that he had to be extremely careful, that he couldn't change too much history, that Ianto couldn't remember Jack's visits, that he had to dismiss it as a dream. Otherwise, it might alter the course of their relationship, and then Jack would never be able to save him.

He'd studied Ianto's diary endlessly. He knew the exact dates, times and places that he'd visited Ianto, according to the detailed records the younger man had kept. He didn't dare push the limits. He had been a Time Agent for a long time. He knew how tenuous the thread of time could be and how easily it was to irreparably alter the course of history. *What is it the Doctor always says? 'People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually, from a non-linear non-subjective viewpoint, it's more like a big bowl of wibbly wobbly timey wimey stuff.'"Wibbly wobbly timey wimey," Jack muttered.

Alonso chuckled softly at the familiar phrase from the Doctor. "You did the right thing, Jack," he reassured him. "You had to leave. You couldn't stay. It might have changed too much."

"I know," Jack said, staring up at the ceiling. He was already afraid that he'd done too much, that he would never be able to save Ianto, that he would never see him again. *What if that was the last time... and I didn't say it?" But it was... one of the hardest things I've ever done," he added.

Alonso comfortingly squeezed the arm that he was still holding, and several moment of silence passed between the two men. "Jack?" he finally asked hesitantly. "Are you going to be okay?"

Jack shut his eyes and turned his face away, feeling another round of tears threatening to break free. "Yeah... but... can you give me a few minutes?" he asked. He appreciated the support from the other man, but he wanted desperately to be alone.

"Right, sorry," Alonso said quickly, rising from the bed and scurrying towards the door. "I'll leave you alone then."

"Hey," Jack called out, looking after the other man. Alonso turned in the doorway. "Thanks for all of your help. I really appreciate it," he said with sincerity. He held out Alonso's handkerchief, wanting

Friends… Jack thought contemplatively. I guess that's what we are. I never used to have friends… Not for a long time anyway. I kept losing people, so I tried to give up caring about anyone. I held myself at a distance from everyone I knew. Kept everyone at arm's length… It was Ianto's influence. Without him, I might have remained the cold-hearted bastard that Gwen always accused me of being. He softened me, brought me back down to earth… Reacquainted me with my humanity.

Tears trickled down his face, and he used Alonso's handkerchief to wipe them away. I spent so much time standing up on roofs… Standing above everyone, looking down on them. I never felt a part of that world. I felt it was my duty to protect it, but I wasn't a part of it… But Ianto… He changed me. He made me see things from a different perspective… He made me feel like I had a home, that I was needed, appreciated, loved…

And when I lost him, my heart turned so dark that I was able to sacrifice my grandson… Jack shuddered involuntarily, his stomach twisting in a painful knot.

But what was the Doctor's true purpose in leading me down this path? Jack asked himself for what seemed like the hundredth time. Why Ianto and not Steven? Or is there a way for me to save them both? Jack's mind returned again to the conundrum he'd spent so many hours puzzling over - the conundrum that his inexpressible guilt forced him to ponder again and again. Does the Doctor want me to save them both? Am I focusing on saving the wrong person? Is there something I'm not seeing? Some course of action I'm not taking?

"Argh!" Jack let out a frustrated groan and beat his fists against the mattress. "Why the hell do you have to be so ambiguous, Doctor?" he asked aloud. "I'm not sure if I know what you want me to do. I think you want me to save Ianto, but how could I not try and save my own flesh and blood as well? How could I be so selfish? Am I supposed to save both of them? But how? I can't see any way! How can I save both of them and still save the children of Earth from the 456? What am I missing? Why couldn't you give me clearer instructions?"

Once again Jack played through the events of the five days of war with the 456. He forced himself to examine every detail of both Ianto and Steven's deaths, looking for a way around the inevitable. If Ianto hadn't died, I wouldn't have sacrificed Steven. I couldn't have… Jack's mind came, as it always did when he considered the possibilities, to the seemingly inevitable conclusion. Was that what needed to happen? Steven had to die to save the world… So why do I get a chance to have Ianto back and not Steven? Alice will never speak to me again. I not only lost my grandson, but I lost my daughter as well…

"Once again Jack played through the events of the five days of war with the 456. He forced himself to examine every detail of both Ianto and Steven's deaths, looking for a way around the inevitable. If Ianto hadn't died, I wouldn't have sacrificed Steven. I couldn't have… Jack's mind came, as it always did when he considered the possibilities, to the seemingly inevitable conclusion. Was that what needed to happen? Steven had to die to save the world… So why do I get a chance to have Ianto back and not Steven? Alice will never speak to me again. I not only lost my grandson, but I lost my daughter as well…

Snarling in frustration, he sat up and rubbed roughly at his face. He'd been aboard the Shadow IV for two months, and he wasn't any nearer to feeling certain that he understood the enigmatic clues from the Doctor. But I know from Ianto's diary that I visited him three times and that I took a sample of blood from him the first time. His blood must be necessary for the anti-virus, he reasoned once again. We'll probably have to test the anti-virus on Ianto's blood to see if it's effective. He'd been over this a thousand times, but he still felt like he was taking a shot in the dark, and though he had the
semblance of a plan, it was the details that were still unclear. *How do I get the scientists to help me? Do I trust Edward Koch? Do I tell him my purpose, or do I just give him the blood for analysis? What's my next move?*

With a weary sigh, Jack stood up and moved into the bathroom. He splashed cold water on his face. Then leaning his hands on the sink, he stared at his reflection in the mirror. *John was right. I do look like shit. I look older… and worn… Just like Ianto described me in his diary…*

He pulled a towel off the nearby rail and dried his face, trying to decide what to do next. *I have Ianto's blood, so I have to go to the lab… I have to convince Edward to help me. It's the how that's illusive. What can I offer him in exchange? I can try to appeal to his sentiment – tell him I'm trying to save the man I love. It worked with Alonso… But Edward is a hardened scientist. I'm not sure he'd agree for an emotional motive… And what if it doesn't work? I can use the Doctor's name… I can argue that I've been cooperative with all of his experimentation on me… Will that be enough?*

Jack sighed heavily as he replaced the towel. He knew that he had one bargaining chip left. No one, not even Alonso, knew of his immortality. *But do I dare? What if he turns on me? What if he reports me to the Shadow Proclamation? What if he keeps me prisoner in order to study me? Would I be able to escape? Would I be trapped here for years? Should I confide in Alonso and tell him about this plan, that way he can help if they turn on me?*

Jack reached into his coat pocket and fingered the vial of Ianto's blood. *I don't have a choice. The Doctor put me on this path for a reason, and I have to trust him. I have to take the risk. I have to save Ianto.*

With renewed determination, he walked out of his quarters and strode purposefully towards the laboratory.
Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my wonderful and talented beta riftintime.

Jack paused uncertainly in front of the doors to the Shadow IV’s laboratory. He still hadn’t decided how to proceed with his plans. Every solution he came up with seemed to lead to several more problems. Hoping an answer would present itself, he punched the button, and the metallic doors slid open.

Jack stepped across the threshold into the busy hum and sterile smell of the laboratory. Edward was peering into a microscope, but looked up when Jack entered. "Ah, Jack. I was just going to call for you. We've been testing the anti-virus to that strain. We've had good results so far. Just a few more human subjects, and we should be ready for processing."

Jack stopped in front of the doctor. Before he had time to consider the consequences, he reached into his pocket. "Could you test the anti-virus on this blood sample?" he asked, holding out the vial of Ianto's blood.

Edward took the vial from Jack's hand and looked at him questioningly. "Whose is it?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.


"Where did it come from?" Edward asked, tilting the vial sideways and studying it closely.

"Does it matter?" Jack asked, hoping he had done the right thing.

"Well… no, I suppose not…” Edward said carefully, but his face held a look of suspicion, which sent a chill down Jack's spine.

The two men studied each other for several moments. Finally Edward set the vial in a test tube rack and turned to his assistants. "Leave us," he ordered.

All of his laboratory assistants stopped their work and quickly filed out of the room. When the door had closed on the last one, Edward turned again to Jack and indicated the chair next to him. Jack obligingly sat on the chair, but every muscle in his body was tensed and ready for action. "I think it's time you level with me, Jack," Edward said evenly, removing his glasses and polishing them with the handkerchief from his white coat pocket. "What is your real purpose here? I know your motives are not merely altruism. What is it you want?"

"The anti-virus," Jack replied. "I want the anti-virus that works on that blood sample." He indicated the vial of Ianto's blood. "That's why I'm here."

Edward pushed his glasses back on his nose and pocketed the cloth. "I see," he murmured thoughtfully, staring past Jack.

"I've been cooperative with all of your tests and experiments," Jack said, keeping his voice calm. "I
think that would be a fair exchange, don't you?"

"It's not the way of the Shadow Proclamation to part with our research," Edward said. "It would be more than my job is worth to let you leave here with a vial of anti-virus that we created."

Jack chuckled humorlessly. "Come on, Edward," he said, emphasizing the man's given name. "We both know it's not about that. I could easily walk out of here with a vial of the anti-virus without you knowing a thing about it."

"Like you did with that alien pheromone I showed you?" Edward's blue eyes looked piercingly into Jack's.

Jack was surprised, but he tried not to show it in his features. He kept his face set in an impassive mask. "I'm no fool, Captain Jack Harkness. And if all you wanted were the anti-virus, you would have pocketed it days ago. But you waited." Edward picked up the tube of Ianto's blood and studied it again. "You need me to make certain it will work on this man. Why?" He looked up at Jack.

Jack shook his head, unwilling to give away any more information until he had some answers of his own. "What is it you want from me, Dr. Koch?"

"Well, Jack," Edward said, carefully replacing the vial of Ianto's blood. "There's something unique about you. I can't quite put my finger on it." He leaned toward Jack and looked straight into his eyes. "I want to know your secret," he whispered, but there was something menacing in his tone.

Jack's heart beat faster, but he maintained his features in an expressionless façade. "And what is it you think you'll gain from that?" Jack asked, matching his tone.

Edward leaned back in his chair. "Knowledge," he said with a benign smile.

"Right…” Jack said skeptically.

"That's it, Jack," Edward continued, his face still maintaining its kindly expression. "Just knowledge. I'm a scientist. I thirst for knowledge."

"And you report to the Shadow Proclamation," Jack added.

"This could be between us," Edward said, straightening out the lapels of his white lab coat. "I certainly wouldn't tell them that I let you leave with the anti-virus."

Jack was silent, studying the other man carefully. It all seemed too good to be true, and in Jack's vast experience, when something seemed too good to be true, it usually was. His mind worked rapidly, trying and dismissing various options. Edward finally broke the silence. "I'll give you some time to think about it."

Jack leaned forward in his chair. "If I do this, there's something else I want from you, besides the anti-virus that works on that man." He nodded towards the vial of blood.

Edward crossed one leg over the other and smirked. "I had a feeling there would be," he said cheerfully. "Now we're getting to it. Name your price."

"I need something that will make that man's body shut down – go into some sort of hibernation that will resemble death – when the virus hits his bloodstream."

"Ah," Edward said, his smile broadening.
"And," Jack added, "A way of bringing him out of it."

"I see," Edward said, still beaming.

Jack sat watching Edward. He was disconcerted by the other man's apparent glee at his demands. There was no argument from the other man, no protestations that it couldn't be done, that what Jack asked was impossible. Jack knew that the medicine existed – at least in the fifty-first century it existed. He wasn't sure what a scientist from the thirty-fourth century was capable of producing. And he also wasn't certain he understood Edward's motives. He didn't trust the scientist, and he had a bad feeling about the situation.

"Let me see if I'm understanding this," Edward said, stroking his smoothly shaven chin thoughtfully. Jack idly wondered if he used to have a beard. "You want this man to have immunity to the 456 virus, but when he's exposed to the virus, you want his body to shut down, go into hibernation in order to resemble death. Then you want to be able to revive him when you choose."


"Can it be done?" Jack asked insistently.

"Oh, it can be done," Edward said with an amused expression on his face. He leaned forward again. "But what about my part of the bargain?"

Jack stomach churned uncomfortably. "You want to know my secret," he stated. "What secret do you think I'm hiding?"

"Don't trifle with me, Jack," Edward said, his voice turning hard and ominous. "I've noted several anomalies in your physical makeup. I want to know what I'm seeing here... and why. You tell me why and how your anatomy is so unique, and I'll help you with your..." He smiled and ran a finger over the vial containing Ianto's blood. "Project." He looked at Jack intently. "That's the deal."

"Who else knows about this?" Jack asked, playing for time. "That you've found anomalies. Your assistants?"

Edward shook his head. "My assistants are of the twenty-first century. Besides, I've done all of the more... delicate research on you myself."

Jack stood, deciding he needed time to think and plan before he agreed to Edward's demands. He pointed at the vial. "Run your tests. I'll be back this evening with my answer."

"Very well, Jack," Edward agreed. "But don't take too long to think it over. I might change my mind."

Jack narrowed his eyes, a feeling of revulsion towards the other man suddenly making his desire to escape from his company more insistent. He turned on his heel and strode out of the laboratory.

He stopped the first passing crewmember he encountered. "Can you tell Ensign Frame that I'd like to see him in my quarters at his convenience? No rush," Jack added as an afterthought. "We're in the middle of a really absorbing game of chess. Tell him I finally made my move."

Jack returned to his quarters and paced around the room thinking, until there was a tap on his door. "Enter," he called.

The door slid open and Alonso stepped inside. As soon as the door closed behind the other man, Jack used his Vortex Manipulator to scan for listening devices. It was a precaution he took several
times a day, but especially when he had any conversation with Alonso. Once again, he found no trace of any surveillance technology.

Jack indicated a chair and Alonso obediently sat, looking expectantly at Jack. Jack moved to the kitchen area and retrieved a bottle of hypervodka and two glasses. He sat down across from Alonso and poured both glasses, passing one to the other man.

As Alonso sipped his drink, Jack relayed the entirety of his conversation with Edward. When he'd finished, he added, "I don't trust him. I don't know what his plan is, but I feel like this is some kind of trap."

Alonso had listened in silence to Jack's story. He placed his glass back on the table and rested his arms on his knees. "What is it that he wants from you? I thought you already told him that you're from the future. Doesn't that explain the differences in your physical makeup?"

Jack shook his head. "No," he said, looking away from the other man.

"Then what is it, Jack?" Alonso asked.

Jack remained silent as he fought an internal battle. He hated talking about himself in the best of circumstances, and his distrustful nature deterred him from confiding in anyone as a general rule. But he needed Alonso's help. He needed to know that Alonso had his back. And, for whatever reason, he trusted the younger man. The Doctor trusts him, Jack rationalized, and that's enough for me.

Jack swallowed the contents of his glass and set it down on the table, refilling both glasses. "What I'm about to tell you is going to be a bit hard for you to believe. I don't know that I've ever told anyone, per se. Usually people find out the hard way… the shocking way. In fact..." He glanced over at his mattress where he kept his gun hidden. "I might have to show you."

"Show me what?" Alonso asked, picking up his glass with a nod of thanks.

"See, I spent some time traveling with the Doctor," Jack began. "And something happened to me. Long story. But, well, since that day… I can't die."

"You can't die," Alonso repeated, looking curiously at Jack.

"Well, that's not precisely true. I die, but I always come back."

"How?" Alonso asked before taking a sip from his glass.

"No idea," Jack replied. "The Doctor says I'm a fixed point. An impossible thing. It's something to do with the TARDIS and the time vortex." He stared at the other man. "You seem to be taking this pretty well."

Alonso shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. "I've seen a lot, and I've met the Doctor."

"True…" Jack said slowly. "But still, it's a lot to take in. I can prove it to you."

Alonso shook his head. "Not necessary. I believe you."

"You do?" Jack gaped at the other man.

Alonso nodded, sipping his drink again.

"I'm also hundreds of years old," Jack added, a bit chagrined at the other man's casualness.
"Well, you look good for your age," Alonso said with a smile.

Jack tilted his head as he looked at Alonso, a frown wrinkling his brow. He needed Alonso to know his secret because he needed his help. And he would have preferred not to have to shoot himself as proof of his immortality, but he couldn't help admitting to himself that Alonso's lack of surprise disappointed him. Ianto was right, as usual. I'm a showoff by nature... And he's not even the slightest bit surprised! So much for shock value.

"So there's something in your anatomy or your genetic makeup or your blood that piqued Dr. Koch's curiosity, and he wants to know your secret," Alonso speculated.

Jack nodded, still perplexed by the lack of reaction from the other man.

"And you're afraid, if he finds out, he'll imprison you, and treat you to endless experimentation... or report your secret to the Shadow Proclamation."

"That about sums it up. It was something I was afraid I might eventually have to use as a bargaining chip to get what I needed. You sure you don't want me to prove it to you?" Jack asked again, unable to hide his disappointment.

"If you'd like, but as I said, it's not necessary," Alonso said. He finished his drink and set it down on the table again. "So you're confiding in me because if you do this, and something goes wrong, you'll need someone to rescue you." Jack stared at the other man. "And your immortality has something to do with the Doctor," Alonso added.

Jack nodded again, picking up his glass and draining the contents. He was completely shocked by Alonso's reaction and uncertain what to say next. He'd expected disbelief, incredulity, argument, and maybe even terror. But this calm, unquestioning acceptance was extremely disconcerting.

Once again he refilled both of their glasses. Picking up his drink, he leaned back in his chair. His mind fell over itself trying to make sense of this latest turn of events. No one has ever taken the knowledge of my immortality with such apathy. Maybe he doesn't really believe me... Still, at least he knows now, and can help if I'm trapped in the lab... My immortality, he laughed ruefully to himself. My curse... gods only know what Dr. Edward Koch will do with the information. I'm risking a lot... I'm risking everything... And for what? A few more years with Ianto? He's still mortal. That's not going to change. There are ways of extending his life, but his lifetime would still be a blink of the eye compared to mine, and eventually I'll have to let him go... Why not now? Why am I doing this? There are so many things I regret, so many things I wish I had done differently with him, but won't that always be the case? Won't I always have regrets? And if I get him back for a few more years... even if it's a hundred years or more... what then? Won't it make letting him go again even more unbearable?

Jack slammed his glass down on the table so violently that the hypervodka sloshed out and spilled over the sides. "Maybe this is a huge mistake," Jack said angrily. "What the hell am I doing? Even if I get him back, I'll eventually just have to say goodbye again, and I don't know if I can handle it."

Jack jumped out of his chair and began pacing, his heart pounding wildly against his chest in his perturbation. "I've already lost so many people." He found himself saying aloud all of the things that had just spun through his head, almost as though he were unable to stop the flow of words once they had begun. "I kept myself emotionally distant from him, because I knew how it would end. And I've spent these past eight months regretting that, mourning the loss of what might have been, when maybe I had the right idea all along."

Jack stopped in front of Alonso, waving his arms expressively. "I'm immortal. He's not. Nothing I do
can change that. Even if I manage to extend his life… for what? Just so I can tell him all the things I
never said? Just so I can love him completely, only to lose him again? What's the point? I'll just have
to watch him die all over again, and the grief might rob me of whatever sanity I have left. Even if it
doesn't, I'll just end up more miserable and alone than I am now. I'm always alone, and I always will
be." Jack angrily swept the glass off the table and it shattered on the floor, the liquid seeping into the
carpet.

Alonso stood up, pushing Jack roughly in the chest. "What a lot of utter rot," he snarled. "You're
going to live forever, so you're never going to allow yourself to get close to anyone? To love
anyone? Is that it? What kind of life is that?"


"In all of your hundreds of years of living, travelling the galaxies, experiencing different times, that's
all you've learned?" Alonso glared at him, and once again, Jack was stunned into silence. "I feel
sorry for you," he went on. "And not because of your immortality. I feel sorry for you that in your
long life, you never learned the most basic lesson; that the only thing that makes man's life necessary
and meaningful is love. And it's always worth the risk. Some of us never get that, Jack, and you're
willing to throw it all away when things get complicated. You'd prefer to wonder what might have
been rather than remembering what was, because, what? It's easier? It's safer?" Alonso threw up his
hands in disgust. "That's the most pathetic excuse I've ever heard." He took a step forward and thrust
his finger into Jack's chest. "You're a coward, Captain Jack Harkness," he growled into Jack's face.
"And maybe you're not worth helping!"

Before Jack had a chance to respond, Alonso had stormed out of the room, leaving Jack alone once
more, staring after him in astonishment.
This chapter corresponds to chapter 52, for those of you who want to re-read Ianto’s
POV. Thanks as always to my most patient and sagacious beta riftintime.

Jack sunk back into his chair, still staring at the door where Alonso had stormed out moments earlier. He was more than a little surprised by Alonso’s outburst and also somewhat incensed. *He can’t possibly know what it's like for me, being immortal, outliving everyone I know, watching friends and lovers die over and over again, suffering endless grief over everyone I've lost. How dare he judge me.*

He clenched his fists in anger. He’d spent so long tormenting himself over his immortality, worrying about losing Ianto, agonizing over past lovers and friends. Alonso, with a few choice words, had completely shattered all of his arguments and made his struggles seem foolish and trite. *What the hell does he know about my life?*

Shifting uncomfortably in his chair, Jack leaned forward and poured himself another drink. Alonso’s words played over and over again in his head. *You're going to live forever, so you're never going to allow yourself to get close to anyone? To love anyone? Is that it? What kind of life is that?* Jack sighed heavily and took a mouthful of hypervodka. *And my answer was that it's an easy one. But is that really true? My life had been far from easy, and even though I've tried to stop myself from caring, it's never really worked.*

As quickly as it had risen, his anger faded away. He leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes. He had always been emotionally distant from Ianto. In the beginning of their relationship, he’d used the excuse of the Doctor’s return, knowing he would leave Earth when the Time Lord finally appeared. It had been easier to get close to Ianto then, because there was a definitive end in sight. *I thought that when the Doctor came, that would be the end of it… but of course it wasn’t. And Ianto had already managed to break through my defenses. He reawakened a part of me I thought I'd buried forever.*

Jack took another mouthful of his drink, taking comfort in the effect of warm fuzziness the alcohol was having on his consciousness. *When I no longer had the excuse of waiting for the Doctor, it became more complicated. So I used my immortality as a reason to keep him at arms length, knowing that eventually I would have to watch him die. They were all just excuses to save myself from heartache. But I was a fool... I've suffered so much heartache anyway, and I have so many regrets... I can't even find comfort in the knowledge that I made the most of the brief time we had together.*

Jack opened his eyes and looked around his quarters on the Shadow IV. *I'm here because of the Doctor... I think this is what he wants me to do... To save Ianto... Why? Because he wasn't meant to die? Because he's important to the future somehow? Because I screwed up? Even if I get him back, will I just make the same mistakes all over again?*

More of Alonso’s angry words ran through his head. *You'd prefer to wonder what might have been rather than remembering what was...* ‘Jack shook his head firmly. *No! I want to remember what was, not wonder what might have been.* He set his glass down on the table. *Alonso's right. I am a coward. I've been a fool. The worst kind of fool. I spent so much time regretting the past and fearing*
the future, that I forgot to enjoy the present. It's a waste. I wasted the time I had with Ianto. If this works, I swear I won't make the same mistakes again.

He rose to his feet. I need Ianto back. I'll do anything it takes. I'll risk anything to have him by my side again. He walked out of the room and headed for the laboratory.

As he made his way down the corridor, he encountered the same crewmember who had given his message to Alonso earlier. "How's the chess game coming?" the man asked with a smile.

"Tell Ensign Frame that it's check mate," Jack said with a grin, hoping Alonso would understand the enigmatic message.

Once again he strode purposefully into the laboratory. The room was empty save for Edward, who was sitting at his computer. "Jack," he said, without looking up. "Come to a decision?"

"Yes," Jack said. "Have you run your tests on that blood?"

Edward stood and walked over to him. He passed Jack a brown, leather container that resembled a case belonging to a pair of eyeglasses. With a questioning look, Jack opened it. It held a single syringe held in place by an elastic band, filled with a yellow-green liquid. Jack stared at the syringe, then looked up at Edward.

"The anti-virus works on the blood sample you gave me," Edward said, thrusting his hands into the pockets of his lab coat. "That's the anti-virus, plus a unique tranquilizer that will activate when it comes in contact with the virus, shutting the body down and putting it into hibernation. To twenty-first century technology, the body will appear to be dead."

"That's it?" Jack asked skeptically. "It didn't take you very long."

Edward shrugged his shoulders. I'd developed the tranquilizer ages ago. And it only took a few tweaks to change it to the specifications you mentioned."

Jack looked at him doubtfully. "How will I know that it works?"

"Well, Jack. That's the catch. After you inject it, you'll have to bring me another blood sample for testing. And you'll have to wait five days before you get that sample, to allow the body to absorb the anti-virus." Edward smiled benignly. "So you have five days from today, Jack. Then you need to bring me that blood sample, and you and I will talk about the price of this little experiment of yours."

Jack nodded tersely. Wordlessly he turned and walked out of the laboratory. He didn't need to wait five days. He could have returned with the sample in an hour. But he couldn't risk Edward discovering that he had a time travelling device. He would take those five days to make his plans with Alonso for escape, if necessary.

Jack walked slowly back to his room, a myriad of emotions plaguing his thoughts. I have the anti-virus in my hand, he thought running his fingers over the case in his pocket. Everything I've done has lead up to this moment... He pressed a button on the wall, and the door to his quarters slid open.

Once more he sank down in the chair and stared blindly around the room. His anticipation at the prospect of seeing Ianto alive again was interjected with feelings of deep trepidation. What if this is some kind of trick? What if I inadvertently change the timeline in some horrible way? What if all of this is for nothing? It feels... too easy. But I haven't paid the price for Edward's help yet, whatever that price may be. He's fixed it so that I still need him...

Jack mentally shook himself. It's a risk I have to take. There's no alternative. He flipped open his
Vortex Manipulator. According to Ianto’s diary, Jack next visited him in his flat, on the eighth night after he’d left with the Doctor. He carefully set the appropriate date, time, and location.

He rose to his feet, his stomach churning with a mixture of fear and excitement. Then he pushed the button.

When he appeared in Ianto’s bedroom in the long ago abandoned flat and saw Ianto asleep, breathing steadily, any remaining doubts Jack had about getting Ianto back completely vanished. He knew for certain that he would do anything, risk anything to have even one more day with Ianto.

As Jack glanced around the familiar room, his heart weighed heavily with yearning and regret. Ianto had given up his flat after Tosh and Owen’s deaths out of necessity, and it was just one of many things over which Jack had berated himself. *I never properly asked you to move into the Hub with me,* he silently told Ianto. *I should have done that. You shouldn't have moved there out of necessity. You should have known that it was because I wanted you with me always.*

Jack moved to the bedside and fell to his knees. He kissed Ianto’s lips and stroked his hair, saying his name over and over again, trying desperately to keep the tears at bay. Ianto opened his eyes and looked into Jack’s. "You're not my Jack," he whispered.

Jack was startled by the words. Suddenly remembering the alien pheromone, he reached into his pocket, feeling relieved that although Edward knew he’d taken it, he hadn't asked for it back. He sprayed it in front of Ianto’s face. "You're dreaming Ianto," Jack tried to make his voice deep, soothing, and melodic. "You're dreaming of a future Jack who's older and wiser."

"Oh." Ianto seemed to accept Jack's explanation without question.

"There are so many things I want to say to you, Ianto, but I can't right now." Jack went on. "I'm going to inject something into your arm. It's important, Ianto."

"Okay." Ianto murmured in an obvious trance-like state.

Jack stood and removed the case from his pocket. He took out the syringe and carefully injected the contents into Ianto’s arm. *Gods, please let this work,* he silently prayed. He gently massaged the muscle and replaced the syringe in the case.

He knelt back down by Ianto and kissed him again. "I'll need to come back to take more blood from you. You won't be surprised when I come to you in your dreams, Ianto. You'll just accept it. You trust me." Instinctually, Jack decided to insert a fail-safe. *Just in case this doesn't work, and I have to come up with another way to save him... I have his diary. I can find other times to visit if I need to.* "You're going to dream about me a lot while I'm away. You'll never remember the details in the morning. You'll just know that you dreamt of me."

"Okay," Ianto agreed without question.

Jack kissed him again and caressed his face tenderly. Ianto’s words still nagged at him, and he wanted to say something. "I am your Jack, Ianto," he whispered, looking into Ianto’s eyes. "I'll always be your Jack." His fingers brushed Ianto’s cheekbone.

He wanted so desperately to tell Ianto that he loved him. *I should have said it so long ago.* But there was something he could say. *Something that meant even more to him than the words 'I love you.' Something clicked in his mind, and suddenly everything - the time anomalies, the diary, the hint to himself - seemed to fall into place. He'd never said the words to anyone outside of his immediate family. No one had ever meant that much to him, in all of his long life. But Ianto was different. Ianto
was special. Ianto was his family. And he was no longer afraid. He'd spent too long being afraid.

He knew what it was like to lose Ianto and have to live with the regrets. He didn't want to regret anything else, even if his plan failed and history wasn't altered, he could have the comfort of knowing that he'd told Ianto how he felt, without altering the timeline. He looked into Ianto's blue, bleary eyes, dazed both from sleep and the alien pheromone. "Sine qua non," he whispered. *Without you, I am nothing.*

The urge to stay was overwhelming. Jack kissed his lips gently one last time, and then mustering all of his self-restraint, he stood up. Keeping his eyes locked on the man who meant so much to him, he once again had to drag himself away. He could no longer hold back the tears as he pushed the button on his wrist strap, and left the past behind once again.

When Jack reappeared in his quarters, he found an anxious-looking Alonso pacing the room. "Jack!" Alonso cried, running over to him and grasping his arms. "You're okay. I was worried when I got your message. I thought maybe Koch had you bound and gagged somewhere in the dungeons."

"There are dungeons on this ship?" Jack asked incredulously.

"You don't know the half of it," Alonso said. "I was worried…"

"I'm fine, Alonso," Jack said, with an attempt at a smile.

"You've been crying," Alonso said, peering into his face.

"I've just seen Ianto again in the past," Jack said, roughly wiping at his face and feeling slightly ashamed of his inability to control his emotions.

Jack quickly and succinctly told Alonso about his meeting with Koch and the anti-virus injection. "How do you know you can trust him and it will work?" Alonso asked.

"I don't," Jack said resignedly. "But I don't have a choice. At this point, I can't see another option."

Alonso nodded thoughtfully. "So we have five days to come up with a plan, just in case," he said, looking pensive.

"You're still going to help me?" Jack asked, genuinely surprised.

"Jack, I'm sorry for what I said earlier…"

Jack shook his head, cutting the other man off. "You were right. Everything you said was true. I've been a coward. I won't be a coward anymore. I already wasted too much time. Besides," he smiled at the younger man. "I admire anyone who stands up to me. You're a bit like Ianto in that sense. And a bit like another friend of mine called Toshiko. She had a quiet way about her, but she always told it like it was. Made no bones about it either. You would have liked her. You would like Ianto too, I think."

Alonso smiled in return. "I hope to meet him one day, this Ianto of yours."

Jack tried to smile again, but he couldn't quite make the gesture. Now he was certain that he would do anything to get Ianto back, the thought of his plan not working was utterly terrifying. *Only one more visit. What if it's the last time I ever see him alive? "I hope you get to meet him too," Jack said hesitantly.*

"Jack, what is it?"
He looked steadily at the other man. "What if it doesn't work? What if Dr. Koch is lying to me?"

"It will work, Jack," Alonso said with a confident smile, patting Jack affectionately on the shoulder. "Remember, you're here because of the Doctor."

"I know," Jack said. "But I don't trust Edward Koch. There's something sinister about that man."

"Agreed," Alonso said. "But you have me. Now, let's not waste time. Let's try and come up with a plan."

"Problem is, we don't know what Koch wants from me."

"Well, we can come up with various scenarios and try to devise contingencies for each one."

Jack looked at the man who had become such a good friend. He felt a surge of affection for Alonso. "Okay," he said with a genuine smile. "Let's get to work."
Chapter Notes

This chapter corresponds to chapter 53, if you want to read Ianto’s POV. My undying gratitude to my talented and wonderful beta riftintime.

For the next four days, Jack and Alonso worked together. They tried to consider every possibility and devise contingency plans accordingly. Jack felt certain that Edward's price would be a steep one, and his two gravest concerns were being secretly locked away to be studied and experimented on, or having his secret revealed to the Shadow Proclamation. Either way, he knew the results could be disastrous.

Jack spent some of the time teaching Alonso how to use his Vortex Manipulator. He had some pangs of guilt, as he'd never revealed that information to anyone, even Ianto. But he kept telling himself that it was necessary. They discussed at length whether Jack should wear the device to his final meeting with Edward, or if Alonso should keep it for him, in case things went badly. Both of them were still uncertain of the best course of action as the fifth day rolled around.

Jack spent the entire day pacing around his quarters. *This is the last visit,* he told himself. *This might be the last time I'll ever see him, ever touch him, ever hold him...* The thoughts played over and over again in his mind. *If only I could have more time... If only I could spend one last night with him... But I have to be careful... I can't risk altering the timeline...* His heart raced, and he alternately broke out in a sweat and then started shivering.

He hadn't eaten all day, and he'd barely slept all week. When he did manage to drift off, he had vivid nightmares. It was the same dream he'd had so many times before. He awoke on Earth, and there wasn't a living soul left on the planet. All creatures: man, beast, and insect were dead. He was utterly alone. Once he'd woken up screaming, his sheets soaked in sweat. After that, he'd given up trying to sleep altogether. A light tapping at his door interrupted his thoughts, and knowing it was Alonso, he gave the younger man permission to enter.

Alonso walked in carrying a plate of sandwiches. "You look terrible, Jack, and I'll be willing to bet you haven't eaten all day. I brought my supper along with yours. Now go take a shower, put on clean clothes, and then we'll eat something before you go."

"Not hungry," Jack muttered stubbornly.

Alonso set the plate down on the table and looked sternly at Jack. "Is this how you want Ianto to see you?" he asked evenly. "You might smell so bad that he'll send you away."

Jack gaped at Alonso, who pointed at his chest. Jack looked down at himself. His shirt and undershirt were damp and clinging to his body. "Guess I'm a bit nervous," Jack said, almost seeing the humor in the situation.

"You think?" Alonso asked with a grin. "Now go shower," he ordered, pointing to the bathroom.

"Yes, dad," Jack said sarcastically, grabbing clean clothes out of a drawer and walking into the bathroom.
When he emerged a short while later, clean, dry, and fresh, Alonso had seated himself and already begun on the food. "Eat," Alonso said, pointing at the plate.

"I don't think I can." Jack stomach churned in protest.

"You can and you will," Alonso said through a mouthful of food.

Jack sat in the chair opposite and begrudgingly picked up a sandwich. "When did you get so bossy?" he asked before taking a bite.

Alonso made a face at him, but didn't respond. As soon as Jack swallowed a mouthful, he realized he was ravenous. He quickly put away several sandwiches before sitting back in his chair, his stomach full. "Thanks," he said to the other man.

"No problem."

Jack stared thoughtfully at Alonso. "Why have you been so good to me?" he asked curiously.

"You're my friend," Alonso replied succinctly. "Isn't that what friends do? Besides, it gives me something to do. Wouldn't want things to get boring around here."

"Right," Jack said sarcastically. "Boring on a Shadow Proclamation vessel."

Alonso shrugged. "You'd be surprised. My job isn't all that exciting. But a love story… Now that's exciting!" He beamed at Jack.

Jack couldn't help chuckling. "I'm sure there's someone out there for you, Alonso."

"Yep," Alonso said. "This Ianto of yours... He have a brother? Or a sister? I'm not picky."

Jack grinned. "He has a sister, but she's married with kids."

"Pity," Alonso said regretfully. "I could have been your brother-in-law."

"Ah." Jack frowned thoughtfully. "Twenty-first century Earth isn't that progressive. In most places, two men can't marry."

"Really? Why not?" Alonso looked horrified. "How utterly primitive!"

"Tell me about it," Jack muttered.

"Hmm. Odd place, this planet Earth. Anyway, you have everything you need?" Alonso asked, abruptly changing the subject.

Jack indicated his greatcoat that was lying over the bed. "In my pocket."

Alonso nodded. "Well, you've eaten. You smell a lot better. What are you waiting for?"

"What if it's the last time?" Jack asked him for what seemed like the hundredth time.

They'd had this same conversation over and over again. Alonso was certain that it would work, but Jack was still skeptical and terrified. He assumed Alonso would give him the same response that he always gave; reassuring him, reminding him that the Doctor had set him on this path, that it was meant to be, so Jack was surprised by Alonso's response.

"Then make it a good one," Alonso replied without hesitation. "Be with him, Jack. Give yourself to
him. You have the alien pheromone. You can make him forget. Give yourself one last night, just in case."

"You don't think it will alter reality?"

"No, Jack," Alonso replied, shaking his head. "From what you've told me of the diary, it sounds like it's already happened."

Jack's heart leapt with anticipation, and he felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. It was as though someone had finally given him the permission he'd so desperately wanted. He breathed a sigh of relief. I can have one last night with him... If it's to be the last, at least I'll always have that to hold onto.

It was all the incentive he needed. He stood up, grabbed his greatcoat off the bed and thrust his arms into it. "Thanks," he mouthed before flipping open his Vortex Manipulator and pressing the button.

Jack opened his eyes. He was once again in his bunker underneath the Hub, and Ianto was sleeping soundly in his bed. He took the precaution of spraying the pheromone in Ianto's direction before pulling Ianto to his chest and holding him tightly. Ianto opened his eyes. "Jack?" he asked sleepily.

"You're dreaming, Ianto," Jack said in a gentle, hypnotic tone.

"I'm dreaming," Ianto murmured.

"Yes, you're dreaming." Jack wanted to take care of business first before he allowed himself to give into his desires. "I'm going to take some blood from you. You need to trust me."

"Yes, I trust you," Ianto whispered.

Jack removed the syringe from his pocket. He quickly and skillfully drew blood from Ianto's arm. Once he'd safely pocketed the vial and equipment, he kissed Ianto softly on the lips. Then he kissed him passionately, allowing himself to indulge in the very thing he'd worked so hard at denying himself.

At first, Ianto responded with enthusiasm, but then he seemed to become startled, as if he'd awoken from a dream. He broke off the kiss and looked at Jack searchingly. "Jack? What's happened to you?"


Ianto stretched out his hand and touched Jack's cheek. "Jack? Where have you been?"

Jack could see the bewilderment in Ianto's eyes. The alien pheromone had apparently worn off or been counteracted by Ianto's own emotions. He knew Ianto would have questions. As far as Ianto was concerned, Jack had left with the Doctor without a word or a backward glance. Jack knew Ianto was in pain and felt abandoned, and that he was the cause of it. Jack's already heavily burdened heart seemed to sink with the weight of the additional guilt. But there's nothing I can do. I can't give him any explanations now. History has to play out the same way it has already done. "Ianto, can you give me this night and not ask me any questions?" Jack asked, a note of pleading in his voice. "If you can do that, I can stay."

Ianto stared into his eyes, apparently having an internal debate. Jack held his breath as he waited. "Yes," Ianto finally agreed.

Jack took off his greatcoat and kicked off his boots. He then quickly took off his clothes. With a
pounding heart, he lay down naked beside Ianto and gathered him into his arms. Then Jack kissed him with all of the pain, guilt, longing, and love he'd been holding onto for so long.

Ianto broke off the kiss, and Jack could see the question in his expression. *I love you, Ianto Jones,* Jack thought, wishing he could say the words aloud, wishing he had said them on that fateful day when Ianto had been taken from him. Jack stroked Ianto's cheek tenderly. He could no longer suppress his guilt. "I'm so sorry, Ianto," he whispered. "I'm so sorry I didn't say it back." Jack's voice broke, and tears slid down his face. "But you knew, didn't you? You knew."

A look of confusion creased Ianto's smooth brow, but he remained silent. Instead he gently wiped the tears from Jack's face. Then he leaned in and kissed Jack again. *No more holding back,* Jack thought. *No more fear. I'm yours, Ianto Jones. Even if this is the last time I have with you…*

Jack slowly began to remove the T-shirt and briefs Ianto was sleeping in. He kissed and caressed every inch of skin he exposed as he removed the garments, wanting to worship and savor Ianto's body. Jack could feel the other man shudder, and he pulled him close, relishing the feel of their warm, bare flesh pressed together.

Jack turned them over so he lay on his back with Ianto on top of him. Ianto moved slowly against him as Jack caressed his back, kissing him with total abandon. He forced away the part of his mind that was constantly berating himself for the time he'd wasted. He only wanted to appreciate this last stolen moment with the man he loved. Nothing else in the universe existed except for him and Ianto, in that moment.

*I want to feel you. I want you to surround me,* Jack thought. He reached over to the drawer of the bedside table, knowing what he would find there. He grasped the bottle of lube and pressed it into Ianto's hand. Silently, Ianto took it from him and poured some onto his fingers. Ianto kissed his neck as he pressed a finger inside of him. Jack sighed and pulled Ianto close to his chest.

Jack stroked Ianto's hair and softly kissed every inch of his face as Ianto gently prepared him. Jack caressed Ianto's cheek with his thumb, as Ianto repositioned himself. Jack wrapped his legs around Ianto's waist and ran his fingers over Ianto's lips. Then he took Ianto's face in his hands and looked deeply into his eyes as Ianto entered him. *I love you,* he thought, willing Ianto to understand.

Jack pulled Ianto down into another passionate kiss as Ianto slowly began to move inside him. Jack kept Ianto's body close to his, wrapping his arms around Ianto as they found their rhythm. Jack kissed him tenderly as they moved together, tears falling from his eyes.

As they both neared climax, their breathing grew louder, but they were so lost in each other that they barely made a sound. The friction of their bodies and the intensity of their intimacy were enough to bring Jack over the edge. "Ianto," he whispered as his body found its release.

Moments later, with one final deep thrust, Ianto came inside him.

Ianto lay on top of Jack's chest as their breathing slowed, and Jack held him close, stoking his hair, his back, his shoulders, kissing every part of Ianto that he could reach. He forced his mind to remain fixed in the moment, to just savor the experience; because he knew all too soon it would be over. *My Ianto…* 

Finally, Jack rolled them so they were both on their sides, looking into each other's eyes. *I'll do anything to get you back. I will save you. And I promise that I won't make the same mistakes again,* Jack thought as he looked into the blue depths of Ianto's eyes. *You're the one. I never believed in that before, but I know it now… I've never been so certain of anything in my life…*
"That was… different," Ianto said, after a few minutes had passed.

"I was a fool, Ianto. I was such a fool." Jack wanted desperately to say more, but he knew the time had come. "But I can't let you remember this."

"What do you mean?" Ianto blurted out.

With a deft movement, Jack reached into his greatcoat pocket, which was on the floor nearby, and retrieved the alien pheromone. He sprayed some in the air. "You won't remember this night," Jack said in a soothing tone. "You dreamt that we had sex. That's all you'll remember."

"That's all I'll remember," Ianto repeated, his voice sounding dazed.


He watched transfixed, as Ianto fell soundly asleep.

With what felt like a tearing of his soul, he slowly moved away from Ianto. He quickly dressed as tears fell unheeded from his eyes. Then he stood looking at Ianto. The urge to climb back into bed with him and damn the consequences was so overwhelming that he actually took a step forward.

No! his conscience admonished. You cannot change the past. You've already meddled enough. If you don't leave now, you may never see him again.

It was the last thought that gave him the strength to flip open his Vortex Manipulator. "Sine qua non, Ianto," he whispered again as he pushed the button.

With a swirl of golden light, and the familiar tugging sensation in his chest, Jack was pulled through time and space, away from Ianto and everything he held dear.

He landed back in his quarters aboard the Shadow IV and glanced around the room. Alonso had obviously chosen to give him the privacy he so desperately needed. Jack staggered to his bed and collapsed, sobbing as his heart broke all over again.

For several hours he lay in his bed. He could still smell Ianto on him, and although he needed to bathe, he wanted the scent to linger for as long as possible.

When he finally collected himself and gathered his strength, he rose and showered. Alonso was to meet him at twenty-one hundred sharp, and he needed to be ready. He had to face Dr. Edward Koch and pay the price for his assistance.
Chapter Notes

Thanks also to my amazing beta riftintime for continued support, brilliant ideas and suggestions, and priceless editing.

At precisely twenty-one hundred hours there was a tapping at Jack's door. Moments later, the door slid open and Alonso walked in. "Jack?" he asked hesitantly. "You okay?"

Jack nodded, not trusting himself to speak. *Please don't let him ask me how things went with Ianto. I don't think I could bear it.* Alonso walked forward and placed a hand on Jack's shoulder. To Jack's immense relief, he only asked, "Ready to finish this?"

Again Jack nodded, grateful to the other man for his tact. He and Alonso left Jack's quarters and strode down the corridor towards the laboratory. Jack's nervous anticipation over what Edward had in store for him seemed to have faded. *Whatever happens inside that room, Ianto is worth it and more... I'll suffer anything for him...*

When they reached the door, Jack paused and glanced at Alonso. "Don't worry, Jack," he said with determination. "I've got your back."

"Thanks," he whispered and slapped Alonso's shoulder affectionately.

He took a deep breath. *For Ianto...* Then he punched the button on the wall panel, and the door to the laboratory slid open.

The two men entered the sterile, gleaming room. "Never been in here before," Alonso commented out of the side of his mouth. "It's very... clean."

Jack snickered and looked around. Edward was leaning over a microscope at the far corner of the room. He looked up as Jack and Alonso approached. "Ah, Jack." He smiled the familiar benign smile that made Jack's flesh crawl. "I see you brought a friend."

Jack was uncertain how Edward was going to react to his having brought Alonso along. "This is Ensign Alonso Frame," Jack said, introducing the two men. "Ensign Frame, this is Dr. Edward Koch."

As the two men shook hands, Jack reached into his coat pocket and retrieved the vial of Ianto's blood. Silently he handed it to Edward. "Five days from vaccination?" Edward asked, taking the vial from Jack's outstretched hand.

Jack nodded. "Well," Edward said, smiling again. "I'll just start running this before we get down to business."

Jack and Alonso glanced warily at each other as Edward loaded Ianto's blood into the analyzer. "Now." Edward clapped his hands together gleefully. "I take it that you brought Ensign Frame along for... moral support?" He raised his eyebrows with a smirk.

Jack remained silent, looking steadily at the doctor. "Well, it's your secret, Jack." Edward shrugged.
Jack reached into his pocket and removed the gun he'd placed there earlier. He held it up for Edward to see. He felt Alonso tense beside him. Edward tsked and shook his head with what appeared to be disappointment. "Jack," he chided. "You forget. I still have to make sure that vaccine worked on this man." He indicated the analyzer. "And I haven't yet given you the injection to revive him."

"The gun's not for you, Koch." Jack glowered at him. "It's for me. You said you want to know my secret?" With a deft movement, Jack raised the gun to his head and fired. Blackness fell around him.

Jack gasped and inhaled sharply, opening his eyes. They focused on Alonso, who had his hand on Edward's chest, apparently holding him back. Jack sat up, then slowly got to his feet. He grabbed his gun and stuck it back in his coat pocket. Inwardly he cheered at the look on Edward's face. I bet you weren't expecting that, you pompous bastard, he thought smugly. He'd been denied the shock and awe from Alonso when he'd told the younger man about his immortality. His flair for the dramatic had finally been satisfied.

Jack made a great show of dusting himself off and straightening out his clothing. "I can't die," he said, looking triumphantly at Edward.

Edward was silent as he stared open-mouthed at Jack. Jack snickered. "Not what you were expecting?"

"Not… quite," Edward stammered. "I thought maybe you had access to some advanced healing technology… but this…" He gazed at Jack, and Jack could see the look of hunger in the other man's eyes.

Jack's gut clenched in apprehension. I know that look. He thinks he's discovered the fountain of youth… "It's not a gift," he said aloud, taking a menacing step forward. "It's a curse. Imagine watching everyone you've ever loved die for all of eternity. I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy."

"But the medical implications of this could be…" Edward threw up his arms, and Jack caught the gleam of excitement in the scientist's expression.

Jack's spine tingled with alarm. "It's not medicine, Edward. It's not something that you can reproduce with science. I was never meant to be like this. I am wrong... a mistake." The words were difficult for Jack to admit, but he managed to keep his features fixed in a neutral expression. "Now what will it take for me to get confirmation that the anti-virus worked and for you to give me that injection to revive him?"

Edward stood in contemplation for several minutes, stroking his chin and looking appraisingly at Jack. Finally he smiled, and the smile was so sinister that Jack and Alonso exchanged anxious glances. "Well, Jack… I'm a great lover of fiction, as well as science. I admire the classic authors of the planet Earth. For example, I'm a enthusiastic lover of the Bard." He threw out a hand and quoted with dramatic enunciation, "Let the forfeit be nominated for an equal pound of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken in what part of your body pleaseth me."

"What the hell is he on about, Jack?" Alonso asked.

Jack glared at the doctor, recognizing the quote. "A pound of flesh? That's your price?"

The doctor beamed at him, and Jack felt slightly nauseous. "Well, just some tissue samples from here and there… Given your obvious flair for the dramatic, I thought you might appreciate the Shakespearean reference."
"Wait," Alonso said, stepping forward. "Tissue samples from where?" he asked, looking nervous.

"Oh, here and there..." Edward waved his hand dismissively. "Looks like it won't do you any permanent damage."

"Be more specific," Alonso said through gritted teeth.

"A loyal friend, Jack," Edward said. "And how does he feel about you risking all of this for another man."

To Jack's astonishment, Alonso lunged at the doctor. Jack moved quickly and was able to restrain Alonso before he did any damage. Edward laughed, and the sound send shivers down Jack's spine. "I see," Edward said. "Breaking hearts all over the galaxy, eh, Jack?"

Jack growled at the doctor. They locked eyes and stared at one another. A beeping filled the silence, and Edward turned and looked at the blood analyzer. "Well, well. Seems our anti-virus and tranquilizer combination worked perfectly. I have the injection you'll need in my safe. As soon as I get my pound of flesh." He grinned broadly. "I'll tell you the combination."

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd," Jack quoted ironically under his breath.

Edward chuckled. "It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes," he said, finishing the quote.

The two men stared at each other. "Jack?" Alonso asked tentatively.

"It's from The Merchant of Venice," Jack explained in a low murmur, not taking his eyes away from Edward. "William Shakespeare. Sixteenth century playwright from Earth. So," he said, raising his voice, "I give you your pound of flesh, and you give me the injection. Then I just walk out of here?"

"That's the deal," Edward said.

"And how do I know I can trust you to let me walk out of here after your... experiments." Jack practically spat out the last word.

Edward indicated Alonso, who was snarling at the doctor. "Well, you have your guard dog here to make sure I keep up my end of the bargain. Now, shall we get started? I can put you under so you don't feel any pain."

"No," Jack said, clenching his fists. "I'll stay awake, thanks all the same."

"I'm not a barbarian, Jack, contrary to your obvious opinion of me. I don't want to cause you pain."

"Local anesthetic will be fine," Jack muttered. He'd endured much worse torture in his long lifetime. He could handle pain, and he didn't trust Edward.

Edward shrugged. "It's your choice, but I warn you, I want samples from your skin, liver, spleen, kidneys, intestine, lungs... and heart." Edward smiled his eerily benign smile as he named the last organ. "That part might kill you... but then, that's not a problem for you, is it, Jack?"

"Let's just get this over with," Jack said with determination.

Edward walked over to one of the steel carts and patted it. Jack shed his coat and handed it to Alonso. Then he took off his shirt and undershirt, also passing them to the other man. His mind was working quickly as he undressed. Should I give Alonso my Vortex Manipulator or keep it on? He
might restrain me… And if his procedure kills me? With one last pause, he unstrapped his Vortex Manipulator and passed it to Alonso with a meaningful look. Alonso gave a minute nod in understanding.

Jack walked over to the steel gurney and hopped onto it. He waited until Alonso was at his side before he stretched out on his back.

For two hours he endured needles, probes, and scalpels as Edward claimed his pound of flesh. The local anesthetic did little more than take the edge off the pain, but Jack was prepared for that. Jack could see the look of horror on Alonso's face when Edward cut a particularly large piece of skin from Jack's abdomen, leaving the musculature underneath exposed and oozing blood. Alonso turned white when Edward drove an exceptionally long, large bore needle into Jack's right side, causing Jack to convulse and bleed profusely.

He tried to reassure the other man without speaking. They had discussed this possible turn of events, and Jack had tried to warn his friend to remain calm, to not be surprised by anything, and to stay on his guard. The last thing he needed was for Alonso to fall apart.

Jack endured the pain by thinking about Ianto. He allowed his thoughts to drift to their most recent encounter, just hours ago for Jack, but years ago for Ianto. If there's the slightest chance that I can see him again… kiss him again… hold him again…. hear his beautiful Welsh vowels… then all of this is worth it. He focused on the feeling of holding Ianto in his arms, and by clinging to that memory he was able to endure the torture without uttering a sound.

Finally, Edward paused. "I need to take a sample from your heart now, Jack. Sure you don't want anesthesia?"

Jack looked down at his ravaged body. He felt weak and lightheaded. He was bleeding from multiple wounds, and the steel cart was wet with blood. His chest and abdomen looked like he'd been mauled by a Weevil. Any man who could cheerfully do this to another soul, immortal or not, isn't to be trusted. "Positive," Jack replied through clenched teeth.

"I apologize if I kill you," Edward said with a grin.

Jack managed to glance meaningfully at Alonso before he felt a sharp pain in his chest, then a crushing sensation, like a weight had been set down on top of his ribcage. His breathing became labored and he gasped for air. Then darkness came.

Jack came back to life with an agonized gasp, and immediately he heard sounds of a struggle. He sat up as his eyes focused. Alonso and Edward were locked in a battle for the gun in Alonso's hand.

Jack jumped off the gurney, snatched his greatcoat from the floor and pulled out his weapon. He cocked it and held it against Edward's temple. Edward released Alonso and held up his hands in defeat. "He went for the gun as soon as you were dead," Alonso said, panting for breath.

"Can't blame me for trying," Edward said with a wry smile. "Think of the good you could do, Jack. Think of the medicine you and I could create together. Think of the lives we could save."


He marched Edward to the safe at the back of the laboratory. "I should report you to the Shadow Proclamation," Alonso shouted angrily, retrieving Jack's clothing from the floor.

"And say what, exactly?" Edward asked innocently.

"And how will you explain Jack's… condition to them?"

"Why would I have to tell them that part?" Alonso sneered. "I witnessed the cruel and sadistic treatment for myself."

"Oh, and you think they'll take your word over mine? A lowly ensign over their respected lead scientist?"

"You sick bastard!" Alonso started forward, but Jack stayed him with a look.

"Open the safe, Edward," Jack ordered.

Edward turned and punched in a code. The door clicked open, and Jack peered inside. There was only one item in the safe. He thrust Edward aside, trusting Alonso to cover him. He reached his arm in and removed another brown, leather case, similar to the one that had held the anti-virus. Jack opened the case and looked down at the syringe strapped to the bottom. It was filled with a clear liquid. He looked up at Edward who was being held at gunpoint by Alonso. "This is it?" he asked.

"That's it," Edward confirmed.

"This will revive him?" Jack pressed.

Edward nodded.

"How can I trust you?"

"Guess you'll just have to have a little faith, Jack." Edward smiled wryly.

"You have your tissue samples – your pound of flesh," Jack said.

"And you have the means of saving whoever this man is. I hope he's worth it."

"Then this transaction is complete." Jack closed the case.

He picked up several clean surgical towels from a nearby stack and did his best to wipe the blood from his now completely healed torso. Then he quickly pulled on his shirts and thrust his arms into the sleeves of his coat, carefully pocketing the case holding the hard-won syringe.

Jack nodded at Alonso, and they backed towards the door, both of them pointing their guns at Edward. "Think of the good you could do, Jack," Edward said again. "Think of all the people you could save if you were to let me study you."

"I think about the people I've saved every day, Edward. I've spent over a hundred years saving people. I've done enough, suffered enough, sacrificed enough." Suzie… Tosh… Owen… Torchwood…. Ianto… Steven, my own grandson. Their faces flashed before Jack's eyes. You know nothing of sacrifice, he thought glaring at Edward with pure hatred. "I'm not going to be your lab rat," he seethed.

He punched the button on the wall, and the door slid open. "Goodbye, Edward," Jack said as he and Alonso left the laboratory.

They hurried down the corridor, neither of them speaking until they were safely behind the closed doors of Jack's quarters. Without a word, Jack headed straight for the bathroom. He was still covered
in blood, and his clothing was stained beyond salvation.

He emerged several minutes later, clean and wearing fresh clothing - all remaining traces of Edward's torture removed. Alonso was still standing by the door, looking pale and completely appalled. He swallowed hard when he saw Jack, obviously forcing the horror of what he'd witnessed to the back of his mind. "Do you think the injection he gave you will work?" he asked as he handed Jack his Vortex Manipulator.

"I don't know, but somehow I think he's vain enough that he'd want all of his experiments to work." He strapped the Vortex Manipulator on his wrist. "Do you think there will be retribution for your part in this?"

"If there is, I'll report what he did to the Shadow Proclamation. He was in direct violation of at least six Galactic laws."

Jack thought for a moment, then he went to the bedside table and removed several sheets of blank paper and a pen. He hadn't been allowed a computer in his quarters. He moved to the table, sat down, and began to write. Silently Alonso sat down on the chair opposite.

Jack spent several minutes writing out a precise account of their last encounter with Dr. Edward Koch, omitting the part about the deal with the anti-virus and about his immortality, instead stating that he was from the fifty-first century and had a more evolved immune system, to explain Edward's interest in him. He signed his name at the bottom and handed the sheet of paper to Alonso.

Alonso read it quickly, then looked up at Jack. "Just in case you need to report him. You'll have my signed statement as backup," Jack explained.

"Thanks, Jack. I won't use it unless I have to."

"I know." Jack smiled at him.

"One last drink before you go?" Alonso asked with a hitch in his voice.

"I'd love to, but I think I'd better leave. We don't know what Edward will do, and it will be better if I'm not here."

Alonso nodded in understanding, but Jack could see the disappointment in the other man's eyes. He felt a pang of sorrow at having to say goodbye to his friend, but it was mixed with excitement and nervous anticipation at the possible fulfillment of months of planning. He slowly rose to his feet and Alonso followed suit. "You know how to send me a message?" Jack asked, indicating his wrist strap.

Alonso nodded.

"You'll let me know how things turn out? If you need help?"

"Yes, Jack. I won't mention that you've left. Your quarters will still be here. I'd like to meet him… Ianto… when it's all over. Will you bring him back?"

"One week from today at twenty-two hundred hours, if you send the all clear." Jack smiled and tapped his Vortex Manipulator. "Sure you don't want to come with me?"

Alonso shook his head. "I need to stay here. I have my duties."

"I understand."
Jack looked around the room. There was nothing there that he needed. He looked at Alonso, who was trying to surreptitiously wipe the tears from his eyes. "Alonso," Jack said, taking a step forward and pulling his friend into a firm embrace. "How can I ever thank you?"

"Just go save him, Jack," Alonso said as he returned the embrace.

They broke apart, and Jack flipped open his Vortex Manipulator. He set the location, leaving the time and date at the present. He looked again at Alonso, whose tears were flowing freely now. Jack patted his cheek. "We'll meet again. I promise."

"Goodbye, Jack."

"Goodbye, Alonso. And thanks for everything. You're a good friend."

With one last smile at Alonso, Jack pressed the button, and closed his eyes as the familiar tugging sensation whisked him through space.

He landed and opened his eyes as a bitter wind nipped at his skin. He pulled his greatcoat closed, buttoned it up, and buckled the belt around his waist. He looked around at the familiar bustle of London nightlife. He reached into a pocket and removed his mobile phone, which he hadn't utilized in months, though he'd had the foresight to keep it constantly charged.

He powered it on and dialed a number he hadn't used since before he left Earth. A familiar voice answered on the second ring. "Martha Jones. Voice of a nightingale," Jack said in greeting.

"Jack? Where are you? Gwen said you left the planet. Are you okay?"

"London. Outside of UNIT headquarters, actually. Martha, I need your help."

"Anything, Jack. What can I do?"

"I need to get into the UNIT morgue."

"Jack?" Martha asked with a note of anxiety in her voice.

"Ianto… I need to you to take me to Ianto's body."

There was silence on the other end of the line.
I wanted to give a very special thanks to my incredibly talented beta riftintime, who has added so much to this chapter, that it really deserves a co-author credit. You are truly my hero.

As Jack listened to the silence on the other end of the line, his heart started pounding in his ears and his stomach clenched painfully. *Oh gods, what if something has happened to Ianto's body?* He swallowed hard at the lump in his throat and croaked out, "Martha?" terrified of the response.

"I'm here Jack," Martha replied.

"Is there..." He swallowed again, unable to endure the thought of what might have happened. "Is there something wrong?" he forced out.

Sweat had broken out on his brow, and he gripped the phone with a trembling hand. Finally Martha said, "I don't understand why you want to put yourself through that, Jack."

Waves of relief swept over him, and he almost burst out laughing with the release of tension. His heart rate slowly returned to normal, and he wiped his moist brow with his free hand. "Martha, please," he said into the phone.

"I'll be there in twenty minutes. There's a café next door. Meet me there."

"Thanks," Jack said before disconnecting the call.

He strode across the street and pulled open the glass door of a bustling café. A rush of coffee scented air wafted through the opening, and Jack instinctually stepped backwards, letting the door close again. Tears burned at the backs of his eyes, and he sunk down into a nearby bench, taking a deep breath of the cool night air to calm himself.

As near as he was to fulfilling his dream, there were still so many things that could go wrong, and so many ways in which it could fail. He was by no means certain that he would ever see Ianto alive again, and the unexpected aroma of fresh coffee was too much for him to bear. It brought back vivid memories of Ianto in a way that his other senses were unable to accomplish. A single whiff of coffee could conjure up exceptionally detailed scenes in Jack's mind. *Something to do with the hippocampus*, he rationalized, trying to push away the painful visions and the emotions they elicited.

He decided to stay sitting on the bench outside the café as he waited for Martha, although the cold London wind bit painfully at his skin. As he sat, he tried not to let his mind wander. He was already so tense with excitement, anticipation, and terror, that he was afraid to allow his thoughts free reign. *It wouldn't do for Martha to find me a babbling idiot*, he thought wryly.

Instead, he watched the energetic passing crowds, speculating on the people's lives, trying to guess their individual occupations and habits by careful observation. It helped to pass the time and to restrain his raging emotions as he waited.

Finally, a familiar figure approached. Martha was wearing crisp, black pants, with a delicately
pointed shoe peeking out from the bottom, and a burgundy leather jacket zipped tightly against the still cool spring air. She looked lovely. Jack stood up, a grin spreading across his features. "Martha Jones," he greeted her.

"Jack!" Martha called as she approached.

She picked up her pace and flung herself into Jack's arms, embracing him warmly. Jack returned the embrace, taking solace in the exhilaration that seeing Martha always produced. He pulled back and looked at her. "You look good," he said. "Really good. Married life agreeing with you then?"

"Yeah," she affirmed with a genuine smile, but as she looked into Jack's face, the smile faltered. "You look…"

"I know," he said, taking her hand and kissing it, saving her the embarrassment of having to comment on his weary, haggard appearance.

"Jack," she began, gripping his shoulders with her small hands. "I really don't think this is a good idea."

"Martha, I need to tell you a story," Jack said insistently, looking around the busy street. "But not here," he added.

"We could go inside." Martha gestured towards the café. "Come to think of it, why were you waiting outside?"

"No, not the café," he said, unwilling to answer her question. "Let's take a walk. You warm enough?" he asked with concern.

"I'm fine. Still cold for this time of year. That's London for you." She shook her head with a look of chagrin. "But I'm sure you didn't come all this way to talk about the weather," she added with a tentative smile.

Jack proffered his arm, and Martha entwined her arm with his, clinging to Jack's elbow with both of her hands and pressing her body close for warmth. They began to stroll at a leisurely pace as Jack started to tell his tale, beginning with leaving Earth.

Martha only interrupted once when Jack got to the part about seeing the Doctor in the bar. "You saw him? Was he okay? What did he say? How did he look?"

"Only from across the bar. He looked like he always looks, but he looked sad… wistful… He didn't say anything to me. Just sent me a note," Jack explained.

Jack continued the story, telling her about meeting Alonso through the Doctor, and his discovery that Alonso worked on a Shadow Proclamation ship, which was tracking the 456 and working on the development of antidotes for their viruses.

"Oh, my God!" Martha interrupted, stopping abruptly, looking at him with wide eyes and a shocked expression. "That's what this is about... why you want to see Ianto's body... you're trying to get him back." She shook her head in obvious disbelief. "I know how much he meant to you, Jack, but you can't..."

"Yes, that's what I'm trying to do," Jack admitted, looking at her pleadingly. "But I need to tell you the rest. Please, Martha. I need you to listen to me."

Martha stared hard at him for a moment, but then nodded for him to continue. Jack took a deep
breath and they started walking again. He explained how Alonso had helped him to get onboard the Shadow Proclamation ship, his interpretation of the Doctor's message, getting his Vortex Manipulator fixed, the entries in Ianto's diary, his three trips to the past to visit Ianto, and his dealings with Dr. Edward Koch.

Martha gasped in horror as Jack mentioned what Edward had asked for in exchange for his assistance, but Jack dismissed her reaction with a wave of his hand. "You know I've endured worse. You were there… on the Valiant…" He stopped awkwardly, not wanting to dredge up those terrible memories.

"Let's not go there," Martha said quickly.

Jack nodded gratefully in agreement. He quickly finished his story, then looked expectantly at Martha. They had reached London Bridge and were leaning against the railing, peering out into the Thames. Jack waited, wondering how Martha would react to the rest of his story. When she was silent for several minutes, Jack finally asked. "What do you think? Did I interpret his message correctly? Is it Ianto I'm supposed to save? I tried to find a way to save Steven, but no matter how hard I tried… I couldn't come up with anything that could work. But you know him. You were his companion once too…"

Martha sighed and turned around, leaning her back against the iron rails. "Does anyone ever really know or understand the Doctor?"

"No, I suppose not," Jack said, feeling his heart sinking.

Martha must have sensed his disappointment because she reached out her hand and patted his arm. "I'm not saying you were wrong, Jack. I just don't know… I can't say for certain… I'm not sure…" She seemed to be struggling to come up with the right words. She took his hand in hers and squeezed it gently. "I just don't want you to get your hopes up, then be devastated all over again," she finally whispered. "I hate to see you in pain. This isn't what he would have wanted, Jack. Ianto would want you to let go and move on with your life. He'd want you to be happy."

Jack turned to face her. Ignoring her entreaty, he looked determinedly into her eyes. "Martha, I understand your reservations. You're not saying anything I haven't thought about myself. I can't be certain what the Doctor's intentions were, and I know this is a long shot. I know that there are a hundred things that could go wrong. I know there's no guarantee this will work… But I've got to try." He sighed, looking down at his feet, mustering his strength. "Martha, I love him. And I never got a chance to tell him. I was such a fool…" Jack's voice trailed off as his remorse threatened to overwhelm him again.

Martha squeezed his hand tightly. "He loved you, Jack. I'm sure he knew you loved him too." She paused, looking at him with an expression of undisguised sorrow. "You know how the Doctor feels about meddling, Jack," she said quietly after a moment. "That's why he disabled your Vortex Manipulator. We all have things we wish we could go back and change…"

"But he's always meddling with the timelines!" Jack argued.

To his surprise, Martha chuckled softly. "I can't deny that you have a valid point there. I suppose he knows when he can break the rules though."

"Martha, please. I've thought long and hard about this. I believe this is what the Doctor intended. He put me on this path by introducing me to Alonso. I don't know why he wants me to get Ianto back, but it's the only thing that makes any sense."
Martha looked steadily into Jack's eyes. He could see the trepidation there and the uncertainty, but finally she nodded. "I just don't want you to get your hopes up, Jack. From everything you've told me, this Dr. Koch isn't to be trusted. And if it doesn't work..." She stopped with a pained expression on her face.

"I understand the risks," Jack said determinedly. "And it won't be your fault if it doesn't work. But I've got to try, no matter how slim the chances."

"Okay, Jack." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "We might as well get started then." She glanced down at her watch. "Almost eleven. Most of the UNIT staff will be home by now, but there are always people about... I guess I could say that I need to examine you..." she suggested as they turned and headed back the way they'd come.

It took some finagling on Martha's part to get Jack into UNIT's headquarters without too many questions. Luckily, there were only a handful of people on duty at that time of night. Eventually, they entered the lifts, and Martha used her key card to access the basement levels.

As they took the lift down to the morgue, Jack's stomach started churning again, and he unbuttoned his coat, suddenly feeling overheated. Martha glanced at him with concern. "Jack..." she began.

"I'm fine," Jack interrupted her.

"You're determined to go through with this?" she asked, looking at him worriedly.

"Yes," he said without a moment's hesitation.

Martha frowned, but she didn't say anything further. The lift dinged and the doors slid open, revealing a vast underground space filled with walls of stainless steel drawers as far as the eye could see. Jack took a deep breath, willing himself to remain calm and focused. There were steel carts with hoses, drains, surgical equipment, and computers dotted along the center of the seemingly endless space. There were also several gurneys with resuscitation equipment, which Jack knew was for the cryo-freeze facilities.

Martha walked to the nearest computer and logged on. Jack looked over her shoulder as she typed in, "Jones, Ianto. Torchwood Three."

Jack felt a horrible clawing in his chest at seeing the typed words staring so coldly at him. How can such a precious life be reduced to this... Ianto...

Tearing his eyes away, he looked around the vast space again and shivered violently. His thoughts turned to all of the people he'd known who'd ended up like this... or worse... all the friends and colleagues he'd seen stored away in the Hub's morgue over the decades... so many lives brutally cut short. He shook his head firmly. He couldn't allow himself to become distracted by grief, or to dwell on the past. There will be plenty of time for that if... He refused to let himself finish the thought.

There was a soft beep and Jack looked back to see a string of numbers appear on the computer screen. Martha began to walk down the side of the room, peering at the numbers on the drawers. Jack followed her, allowing Martha to search for the correct location and trying desperately to quell his rising apprehension.

Finally after several minutes, she stopped in front of a drawer. Jack read the inscription. "Jones, Ianto. Torchwood Three. Cryo-freeze. No autopsy."

Martha glanced at Jack, who nodded, unwilling to trust his voice. She disengaged the lock and slowly pulled open the drawer. A cloud of dense, ice-cold air billowed out from the opening, and
Jack looked down into the frozen face of Ianto, barely recognizable through the heavy condensation covering the thick, blue glass of the cryo-freeze unit. A light was flashing on the small keypad on the surface of the glass, indicating the status of Ianto's frozen body.

Martha wheeled over a gurney and resuscitation cart. Then with one final glance at Jack, she hit a series of buttons on the keypad, and a green light began to blink insistently as the thawing process was initiated.

Eventually the fog cleared, and with a loud hiss, the glass cover lifted slightly and slid backwards. Ianto's body lay pale and stony on the sliding drawer, clad in a white hospital gown, and perfectly preserved, just as Jack had seen him on the day of his death. Jack stifled a sob as he reached down and carefully touched the cold, lifeless skin of Ianto's face. He looked so peaceful, and if not for the stark whiteness of his smooth flesh, Jack could almost have imagined he was merely in a deep sleep... that he would open his soulful blue eyes at any moment. Please, gods, let this work. It has to work. Everything I've been through can't be for nothing.

"Jack, we need to move quickly," Martha said.

Jack grabbed Ianto's shoulders and Martha took his feet. Together they lifted Ianto's body out of the cryo-freeze casket and onto the steel gurney. Martha quickly and professionally lowered the gown and placed electrodes on Ianto's bare chest. She covered the full length of his body with a warming blanket that Jack recognized as alien technology similar to one they'd had at the Hub, and turning on the equipment, she glanced at the readings on the monitor.

"Body temperature is thirty degrees," Martha announced as she looked back and forward between Ianto's body and the screen. "This blanket works quickly. Only a few seconds now. Hand me the injection."

Jack nodded and withdrew the case from his coat pocket, passing it to Martha. She opened the case and carefully removed the syringe. "Looks like an intramuscular injection. I suppose any large muscle will do," she murmured. She glanced at the screen again. "Thirty-six degrees… Thirty-six point five… Thirty-seven."

With a skillful movement, Martha plunged the needle into Ianto's upper arm. Jack clenched his fists, digging his nails painfully into his palms as he held his breath and anxiously waited. Seconds ticked slowly by. Nothing happened.

Jack stared dumbly down at Ianto's still-lifeless body. He was unable to form a coherent thought.

Martha removed the warming blanket and checked the readings again. "No pulse. No electrical activity. Might need a shock to re-start his heart." She turned to the defibrillator and grabbed the paddles. "Charging to two-fifty." She placed the paddles on Ianto's chest. "Clear!"

Once again, Jack stepped back. Ianto’s body lurched with the electrical shock, then fell back onto the gurney with a dull thump. Jack eyes moved to the monitor. The red flat line moved mockingly across the screen. "Charging to three hundred," Martha called. "She placed the paddles on Ianto's chest again. "Clear!"

"Charging to three-fifty," Martha called urgently, her voice wavering. "Clear."

"Charging to three-fifty," Martha called urgently, her voice wavering. "Clear."
"Please, Ianto. Please…” Tears were streaming down Jack's face as he clutched Ianto's hand desperately. "Ianto…”

"Jack, you need to move."

Jack tore himself away. "Clear!" Martha yelled again, and she shocked Ianto's lifeless body once more.

Jack looked at the screen, openly sobbing, and feeling like his heart was being torn from his chest all over again. The flat line continued to taunt him. "Please, Ianto,” he murmured in a choked whisper. "Please..."

Flat line.
This chapter was co-authored by my amazingly talented and charming beta riftintime.

From far away, he heard someone calling his name. He tried to open his eyes, but his eyelids were heavy and unresponsive, and his limbs felt like immovable lead weights. There was something he was supposed to be doing. Something important, but he couldn't seem to get his mind to function properly. His mouth felt dry, and his lips were cracked. He desperately wanted a drink of water.

He was conscious of an overwhelming feeling of profound sorrow, but he couldn't remember why or what. Something terrible had happened, but he couldn't recall any details.

He tried again to open his eyes, and they responded this time, slowly sliding open to stare into a painfully bright, stark, fluorescent light. He blinked several times as his pupils adjusted, wanting to turn his head away, but unable to complete the motion.

He heard the murmuring of voices. They sounded familiar, but he couldn't quite place them. Where am I? he thought. What's happened? Why can't I move?

As soon as the notion took hold of his thoughts, he realized that he was able to move after all. He squeezed his hands into fists, then allowed the muscles to relax once more. Someone was saying his name again. If only I could get my mouth to work, I could ask them what was happening… I could ask for something to drink…

His eyes moved to take in his surroundings. Everything was hazy but there appeared to be gleaming, chrome metal cabinets lining the walls, some medical equipment, and a computer keyboard and monitor on a cart near his shoulder. Am I in a hospital?

He used his hands to feel around. The surface he was lying on was smooth and cool to the touch. He frowned, unable to comprehend the tactile sensations. This doesn't feel like a hospital bed…

Someone was crying. He was aware of the person's utter agony. Is it me? Am I crying? He tentatively raised his hand to his face, but the skin was cool and dry. Why do I feel so incredibly sad?

He blinked again and continued to look around. This time he was able to turn his head slightly. The surroundings were foreign, yet there was something vaguely familiar about them. Have I been here before? How did I get here? Why did I come here?

Again he heard someone calling his name, and suddenly he recognized the voice. His heart swelled on hearing the sound. The presence of the distinct accent gave him a tangible sense of relief. He tried to move his lips to respond. He needed to speak, he was desperate to answer, but his throat was so very dry. He tried again, but he was only able to produce an incomprehensible harsh rasp. He swallowed several times and eventually managed to moisten his lips. Once more he opened his mouth. "Jack?" he called, managing little more than a whisper.

There was no response. The silence was deafening. Is no one there? I thought I heard Jack's voice. Am I dreaming? He tried again, louder this time. "Jack?"
There was a flurry of movement at the periphery of his vision, accompanied by frantic shouting. He couldn't quite make out the words, but someone was touching him, touching his face. He felt moisture on his cheek. A beloved, familiar scent surrounded him. He blinked again, and his vision finally cleared. He was looking into two very blue eyes, which seemed bluer against the redness of the surrounding sclera. They were filled with tears. "Ianto? Oh, my gods, Ianto?"

"Jack," he said again, this time with more certainty. He tried to smile, but he was uncertain if his attempt was successful.

He felt Jack's weight on top of him, and something moist and warm was pressed against his face. Jack was kissing his cheek, and sobbing into his ear. "Ianto. My Ianto… My sweet gods and goddesses, it worked!"

Ianto frowned. It was unlike Jack to use such a colorful oath. "Jack, move back! I need to examine him," a familiar female voice ordered.

He felt the weight of Jack's body lift away from his chest, and Jack grasped his hand. He tried to squeeze it reassuringly. He moved his eyes in the direction of the female voice. Two wide brown eyes were staring down at him, filled with shock and awe. "Martha?" he managed to croak out.

"Ianto! I can't believe it," Martha said in an incredulous tone. "We'd given up hope…"

She seemed to quickly pull herself together. She turned around and pushed a button on the computer. The screen came to life, and a rhythmic beeping began emanating from the speakers. "Heart rate seventy-five. Normal sinus rhythm." She put a stethoscope into her ears and placed the diaphragm against his chest.

Ianto shifted his eyes to Jack. His hand was over his mouth, and tears were falling unheeded down his face. "Jack?" Ianto asked, suddenly feeling alarmed.

"Ianto, I'm almost done here," Martha said gently. She lifted his shoulder and slid the diaphragm under his back. "Take a deep breath for me," she said in a calm, reassuring voice.

Ianto obeyed, inhaling deeply and letting the air out slowly. Martha leaned over him and slid the diaphragm of the stethoscope under his other shoulder. Ianto tried to turn so she could have better access. "Take another deep breath," she ordered.

Again, Ianto inhaled deeply, his eyes straying once again to Jack. Why is he so upset? What's happened? Where are we? And where did Martha come from? What were we doing? All at once, his jumbled thoughts gained clarity as though pieces of a jigsaw suddenly locked into place and the picture attained focus. Oh, my god, the 456! But they… I thought they killed me! Wasn't I dying? But… He looked around again. But… I'm here… I'm here with Jack and Martha… And… He looked down at his body. I'm wearing a hospital gown… but I'm not in a hospital bed… I'm on a metal table… The details of the room seemed to click into place. My god! This is a morgue…

A feeling of utter horror filled his soul. He looked at Jack, who still had his hand over his mouth, tears still sliding down his face, staring with utter incredulity at Ianto. Oh no… he didn't. Please god, tell me that he didn't. "Jack?" His voice still sounded rough, but he forced the words out. I have to know! "Am I dead? Did you use that bloody glove to bring me back?"

He saw Jack and Martha exchange looks. Mustering all of his strength, he struggled to sit up. Martha jumped forward to support his back and helped him rise to a sitting position. "Jack?" he bellowed, his voice cracking. "What did you do?"
Jack raised his hand and pointed at the computer screen. Ianto turned his head and watched the rhythmic blip of the electrocardiogram. He turned back to Jack, not understanding the implication. "You have a heartbeat, Ianto," Jack said, his voice breaking as he furiously wiped at his eyes. "You're alive. No resurrection glove, I promise."

"But..." Ianto's mind was working furiously. He remembered lying in Jack's arms, feeling the poison of the 456's virus coursing through his veins. He'd felt his body slowing down... he'd thought he was dying. He remembered Jack pleading with him not to go... not to leave him alone. Then everything had gone black. "But... but how?" he stammered.

Jack threw himself into Ianto's arms, almost knocking him off the table. Martha put her hands on Ianto's shoulders, breaking his fall. "Ianto, you're alive. I've got you back!" Jack sobbed against his neck.

Then Jack was kissing his lips, his face, his head, his neck. "Jack?" he asked again. "What the hell's going on?"

Jack started laughing. The laughter bordered on hysteria. "Jack, let me finish examining him," Martha said, pulling Jack gently away. She murmured something to him, which Ianto didn't quite catch.

Jack stepped back, but he didn't take his hands off Ianto. He seemed to be determined to maintain contact with some part of him. He moved out of the way for Martha, but kept a hand on Ianto's shoulder, then his thigh, then held his hand tightly. Jack never took his eyes off him.

Ianto endured Martha's examination, which was thorough and lasted for several minutes. Finally she stepped back. "I don't believe it," she said, her expression mirroring her words. "It worked, Jack. His physical exam is completely normal."

"What worked?" Ianto asked in frustration, glancing first at Jack and then at Martha suspiciously. "Will someone please tell me what's going on? And where are my clothes?"

"Oh, right," Martha murmured.

Ianto watched her walk to a nearby table, which appeared to have slid out from the wall. She removed a plastic bag from a shelf beneath. Ianto stared at the drawer, his mind finally registering the implications. He pointed a shaking finger at it. "Is that a..." He was unable to finish the sentence. "Was I... Oh, my god. Jack?" His voice held all the terror he felt.

Jack squeezed the hand he was still holding. "You've been in cryo-freeze, Ianto," he explained evenly.

"Cryo-freeze?" Ianto asked, blinking as he tried to assimilate the information. "But... the 456?"

"They're gone, Ianto. Dead. Hopefully never to return."

Ianto looked into Jack's eyes, and he could see as well as feel the profound sadness and regret. "Jack? What happened?" he asked in a fearful whisper.

Jack reached out his free hand and touched Ianto's face tenderly. "I have a lot to tell you," he said quietly. "It's going to take a while, but we can't talk here. Do you think you're up to getting dressed?"

Ianto's mind whirled, trying to piece together the small bits of information he had so far. He looked down at his body again with distaste. "I suppose hospital white really isn't my color," he quipped, smiling at Jack.
Jack threw his arms around Ianto again, and kissed his lips. Ianto returned the kiss, but only briefly. His mouth was still extremely dry. "Can I have some water?" he asked, his voice rasping again.

"I'll get you some," Martha said, setting the plastic bag containing his clothes down on the cart and walking quickly to a nearby sink.

She returned a moment later with a paper cup of water, which she passed to Ianto. "Only small sips," she warned as he took it from her gratefully.

Ianto wanted to gulp the water down, but he made a concerted effort to do as he'd been instructed. The cool liquid was immensely satisfying, and after taking several small sips, he passed the cup back to Martha. "I'll just put it here," she said, placing it on the nearby cart. "Just drink a little at a time. I'll leave you to get dressed."

She turned and walked to a far corner of the room, sitting down at another computer with her back to him and Jack.

"You think you can stand?" Jack asked.

Ianto nodded, and with Jack's help, he slid off the gurney and stood upright. He was grateful for Jack's support, because his legs felt weak underneath him. Jack removed his clothing from the plastic bag, and he helped Ianto dress. Once Ianto started moving, his strength began to return, and the stiffness of his muscles seemed to stretch out and relax.

His fine motor skills were still a bit slow, so he allowed Jack to knot his tie. When Jack had finished, he lovingly straightened the knot and gave the lapels of his suit jacket a final tweak. It was the suit that Jack had bought him. The one I was wearing when… Ianto's mind reeled again, but he tried to force the thoughts away for the time being. "There's my Ianto," Jack said, taking Ianto's face into his hands and leaning their foreheads together.

Ianto put his arms around Jack, and they held each other close, their cheeks pressed together. There were a hundred burning questions in his mind, but just for the moment, he wanted to hold onto the man he loved.

A polite throat clearing interrupted them. "I'm sorry boys," Martha said regretfully, "Really, I am, but we need to go before someone gets suspicious. I've already taken care of the computer files, but now I have two of you to sneak out of here."

"UNIT headquarters in London," Martha replied. "And I've got to get the two of you out of here without raising too many questions."

"Isn't there a back door?" Jack asked ruefully.

"Actually…" Martha looked thoughtful for a moment, then beckoned them to follow her.

Jack put a supportive arm around Ianto's waist, and they began to walk towards the lift doors. Ianto was a bit unsteady at first, but as his legs moved, his muscle memory slowly returned. They turned left at the lifts, and followed Martha down a long corridor that ended in a metal garage door. "Jack, can you do anything about the CCTV?" Martha asked before they neared the exit.

"Yep," Jack said, flipping open his Vortex Manipulator and pushing several buttons. "It will run on a
loop for the next two minutes.

Martha nodded, then walked to a nearby keypad. She punched in a code, and the door slid noisily into the ceiling, opening onto a dark, deserted alley. "We drop the alien bodies off here," Martha explained as they walked into the cool London air.


"I'm fine," Jack said, helping Ianto put his arms through the sleeves. "Besides," he said with a broad smile. "It looks good on you."

"I always did love this coat," Ianto said, grinning back at him.

He pulled the coat tightly around his body, breathing in deeply, taking solace in the reassuring scent of Jack, which permeated the wool and seemed to surround him. They began walking towards the street. Once they'd exited the alley, Martha stopped and turned around. "Do you have somewhere to stay, Jack?" she asked.

"We'll get a hotel room." He grinned at Ianto. "A nice one."

Ianto rolled his eyes, and Jack laughed, pulling Ianto close and pressing him to his chest. "Okay, Jack. My turn. You'll have him all night," Martha said with a grin.

Jack released Ianto, and Martha then pulled him into a warm embrace. "Be careful with him, Ianto," she whispered into his ear. "He's been through hell." Then in a louder voice, she said, "I'm so happy you're okay, Ianto. Call me if you need anything."

She released Ianto and smiled at him affectionately before turning to Jack. "I can't thank you enough, Martha," Jack said, pulling her into a hug.

Ianto eyed Jack's appearance thoughtfully for the first time since waking, studying Jack's face that was visible over Martha's shoulder. He looks so worn and haggard... and somehow older... Perhaps not in years, but in experiences, as though events have broken him somehow... But I feel like I've seen him this way before... Everything is so confusing. Will any of this ever make sense?

"Just take care of each other, yeah?" Martha said as she released Jack. She reached up and kissed Jack's cheek. "Are you going to be okay, Jack?" she asked in a softer tone.

Jack nodded and smiled, as though not quite trusting himself to speak. He hailed a passing taxi, opening the door for Martha. She climbed in calling, "Keep in touch, both of you," before closing the door.

They watched the taxi drive away, and they didn't have to wait long before Jack was able to hail another taxi. He held the door open for Ianto, who climbed in and slid over on the seat to make room for Jack. Jack climbed in next to him and called to the driver, "The W Hotel, Leichester Square."

As the taxi wove its way through the busy streets into London's West End, Ianto leaned his head on Jack's shoulder, and Jack put an arm around him. Ianto's mind still swarmed with hundreds of questions. Martha's whispered words and Jack's haggard appearance worried him deeply. Not to mention the fact that I woke up in a morgue, he thought with a nervous churning in his stomach. What horrifying facts am I about to hear from Jack? He was desperate to ask about Gwen and Rhys, Rhiannon and her family, and Jack's family, but he knew that Jack wanted to talk in private, so he held his tongue and tried to be patient.
The taxi pulled up at the ultra-modern hotel, surrounded by all the glitter and glamor of London nightlife. Jack paid the driver, and they climbed out of the car. They entered the glitzy foyer, and Jack ushered Ianto over to a nearby sofa while he went to the front desk to sort out a room.

Ianto sat down and gazed around the decadent chrome and mirrored interior as he waited for Jack. *Looks like the inside of a spaceship threw up on a seventies disco,* he thought with wry amusement, wondering why Jack had chosen this particular hotel. But his mind was so full of questions and disturbing speculations that he only gave his surroundings a moment of his attention, his thoughts quickly returning to the incomprehensible circumstances. *I was in cryo-freeze… Why? And for how long?*

His eyes wandered around the expansive foyer again, searching for anything that would indicate the date, but there was nothing to be found. Jack returned, and Ianto stood up. They walked silently to the lifts, and rode to one of the top floors. Jack used a key card to open a door, and they entered a large room with stark white walls, a large white bed and sofa, deep blue carpeting, and chrome light fixtures.

The temperature in the room was warm and comfortable. Ianto pulled off Jack's greatcoat and hung it neatly in the closet by the door. "Are you hungry?" Jack asked.

"No, not yet," Ianto replied. He was too preoccupied to eat. "I need to know what happened, Jack."

"I know," Jack said with a heavy sigh.

He took a deep breath, then sank down onto the sofa, patting the space next to him. Ianto obediently sat down next to Jack, and Jack took his hand. "Ianto, you've been in cryo-freeze for almost nine months," he said, looking into Ianto's eyes.

"What?" Ianto exclaimed sharply. He was surprised, but simultaneously relieved that it wasn't years. "Nine months? But…"

Jack held up a hand. "There's something else you need to know."

Ianto eyed Jack with a mixture of wariness and trepidation. Something in Jack's strange expression was causing his heart rate to increase with alarm. He tried to gauge Jack's emotions, but they were so jumbled that he couldn't discern a single distinct feeling. "Ianto…" Jack squeezed Ianto's hand, placing his other hand on top of Ianto's. "Almost nine months ago, you died in my arms."

Ianto's mouth dropped open, and he stared dumbfounded at Jack.
Ianto's mind seemed to crumble in on itself as he tried to comprehend the words Jack had just spoken. *Nine months ago, I died in his arms? But I'm sitting here... I'm alive aren't I? No resurrection glove? How is that possible? What did Jack do?*

He looked at Jack, searching his features for some hint of an explanation. Jack squeezed his hand reassuringly. "I'm going to tell you the story from the perspective of my timeline," Jack said. "Time is a funny thing... It's not linear like people think. The Doctor calls it 'wibbly wobbly timey wimey,'" he added with a sardonic grin.

Ianto tried to return the smile, but he couldn't force the muscles in his face to work properly. *His timeline? Non-linear?* His heart began to pound faster.

Jack took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "This is going to be very difficult for me," he began, his features twisting into an anguished expression. The pain in his eyes was so devastating that Ianto struggled not to look away. "After you... died..." He faltered over the word. "I had to do something... horrible. Inhuman. Depraved... heartless." He seemed to force the last word out. "The very worst thing I've ever done in my entire life... And that's saying something, as you know all too well. You may hate me after I tell you. You may get up from this sofa, weak as you are, and walk out of here, never to see or speak to me again..." Jack's eyes filled with tears and he roughly wiped them away.

Ianto stared at Jack in horror. *What the hell did he do to me?* Jack seemed to read his thoughts because he continued hurriedly, "No, nothing to do with you... Except for the fact that if I hadn't lost you... If I hadn't been in so much pain that my heart turned to stone... If you'd been there, and I'd had to look into your eyes... I don't think I could have done it."

Ianto felt an uncomfortable churning in his stomach. He knew too much about Jack's past to doubt his words about the appalling nature of this deed, whatever it was. He was terrified of what he was about to hear. He swallowed hard and nodded for Jack to continue, steeling himself.

Jack launched into a description of the events immediately following Ianto's death, starting with coming back to life in a room filled with corpses, and Gwen crying over Ianto's body. Jack told the story in detail, but factually, without expression, without excuses, and without disseminations.

As Ianto silently listened, his eyes grew wider with alarm and horror. When Jack reached the point of the story when he'd finally figured out how to stop the 456, Ianto began to feel nauseous, and the room wavered in front of his eyes. He had a feeling he knew what was coming, and he held his breath as Jack said, "We needed a child... it was one child or millions."

"Steven," Ianto whispered, his mind spiraling with the enormity of the realization.

Jack nodded, and the expression of self-loathing on his face was indescribable. The very air seemed to be thick with his guilt, regret, and wretchedness. Jack pulled his hand away from Ianto's and stared...
down at the floor. "I..." He was silent for a long moment. Then he seemed to wrench his eyes upwards, as though compelling himself to meet Ianto's gaze again. "I sacrificed my own grandson." His voice was rough and cracked as he forced the words out. "I'm a monster," he whispered, his face wet with tears.

Ianto stared at the man he loved, shocked and sickened by what Jack had endured. But he was certain about one thing. Jack was no monster. "Jack," he began, but Jack held up his hand to silence him.

"You said something to me before you died... but I don't deserve it, Ianto. I'm not worthy of it. There's no one in the universe that deserves it less than I do."

"Jack," Ianto began again, more desperately this time.

Jack shook his head, once again holding up his hand. "There's nothing you can say that I haven't already told myself. You can't possibly condemn me any more that I've already condemned myself, but I don't think I could bear to hear it from you... if... if you're going to walk away from me, Ianto, just do it quickly... please," he added with a desolate pleading in his voice.

"Jack," Ianto tried for the third time. He reclaimed Jack's hand firmly in his own. "I can't possibly imagine what you've suffered. I can't imagine the strength you possess to have made such a sacrifice. But I know how much it costs you. I know how much it tears you apart to make those impossible choices, and that choice was the most unbearable. You made the ultimate sacrifice to save the children of this planet. I am in awe of you, Jack. The world will never know the debt it owes you, but I do, and I promise I'll never forget it."

Jack stared open-mouthed at Ianto. "I..." he stammered. "I... thought you'd hate me, be disgusted with me... see me for the monster I really am."

Ianto shook his head firmly. He reached up with his other hand and stroked his fingers tenderly over Jack's cheek. "No, Jack. I see you for the truly great man you are."

Again, Jack gaped at him. Ianto held his hand patiently until Jack finally said, "I don't know what to say. It's not how I thought you'd react. You always surprise me."

Ianto's heart ached for Jack. He wanted to hold Jack, to comfort and reassure him, but he needed to hear the rest of the story first. "I know this has been eating away at you, but can I ask that you continue the story?" He paused and gave Jack's hand a gentle squeeze. "We can talk more about this later if you want."

Jack nodded and picked up the tale where he'd left off. Ianto cringed, and his heart continued to ache for Jack when he heard Alice's reaction and her silent disownment of her father. But he was immensely relieved to hear that his family, along with Gwen, Rhys, and their baby, were safe. There was a part of him that realized they all thought he was dead, but he quickly pushed the thought aside for the time being. I need to know everything else that happened... What happened to me...

Tears filled his eyes as Jack told him about the months that had followed the events of the 456 invasion. He imagined Jack roaming the Earth, utterly alone, and tormented with heartache and guilt. He hated when Jack was in pain, and the thought of Jack suffering so tragically tore at his very soul. Ianto squeezed Jack's hand tightly, as much for Jack as for himself. Jack's grief and despair were palpable, rolling off him in waves. Blinking back his tears, Ianto continued to listen.

Next Jack told him about the House of the Dead, and admitted that his sole purpose for remaining on Earth was to see Ianto again. Oh, God, no, Ianto thought. This isn't what I wanted. When my time...
was up, I wanted Jack to let go and move on. I wanted him to remember me... remember us, and what we'd shared... to look back fondly on the brief time we'd had together. But I never wanted this... I never wanted him to suffer. Ianto felt himself becoming distraught, but he tried to listen without interrupting. He was startled to hear that his father had been there, and he made a concerted effort to hold his tongue. But when Jack told him what he'd apparently said in the House of the Dead, that he'd blamed Jack for his death, Ianto could no longer remain silent. "I would never say that!" he said angrily.

"I know, Ianto." Jack smiled sadly. He tightened his grip on Ianto's hand and stroked his thumb gently over Ianto's wrist. "That's how I knew it wasn't really you. I knew you would never blame me for your death. That's when I realized that Syriath had reached into my memories and recreated you from my grief and guilt. That wasn't you. It was just a manifestation of my despair. That's how I was able to close the Rift, once and for all."

Ianto felt his mouth drop open. "The Rift is closed?" he asked in disbelief.

Jack nodded. "Sealed forever."

"Wow..." Ianto's mind tried to comprehend the implications of that particular fact, but it was too much to take in at once. He was reeling from everything Jack had told him, and he was still feeling weak and very thirsty. He squeezed Jack's hand again. "I'm sorry to interrupt, Jack, but I really need some water."

Jack jumped up. "Oh, that was thoughtless of me. I'm sorry."

He hurried to the bathroom and returned with a glass of water, which Ianto took gratefully. He tried to sip it slowly as Martha had recommended. Jack sat down again and resumed his story. After taking several more small sips, Ianto put the glass down on the table in front of them and grasped Jack's hand again.

Jack told him about leaving the planet, about the cold fusion cruiser that had given him a ride to the spaceport on the outer reaches of the galaxy, of seeing the Doctor, of meeting Alonso, of the realization that Alonso worked for the Shadow Proclamation and that they were working on antidotes for the 456's viruses. Jack told him about the entries in his diary, and his realization that he'd visited Ianto in the past. He told Ianto about how in desperation he'd sought help from John Hart to fix his Vortex Manipulator so he could travel back in time.

As Jack spoke, something seemed to click into place deep within Ianto's mind, as though something had been hiding there in the darkness, and a light had suddenly been turned on. "Of course..." he murmured. "You visited me from the future when you were away with the Doctor... I know... Somehow, I've always known..."

Jack nodded. "The alien pheromone I used to put you in a hypnotic state didn't erase your memories, it just buried them deep in your subconscious... made you think they were merely dreams. I couldn't let you remember. It might have changed the future."

Ianto wrinkled his brow in concentration, trying to wrap his mind around the information. "Wibbly wobbly timey wimey," he murmured.

Jack smiled. "You see that now, huh?"

"An adequate description," Ianto said with a slight shrug.

"The Doctor's usually are," Jack replied with a hint of wistfulness in his voice.
Jack went on to tell Ianto how he’d tried to decipher the Doctor's intentions, tried to understand why he’d introduced him to Alonso, how he’d eventually befriended and confided in Alonso, and how they’d both concluded that it was Ianto who Jack was meant to save. Jack quickly told him how he'd gone back in time on the three separate occasions indicated by his diary, and injected him with the anti-virus and a tranquilizer that would resemble death to twenty-first century science when the virus entered his system. "So you were never really dead, Ianto," Jack concluded. "Just in stasis."

At that point, Ianto jumped up and began pacing around the room, his mind racing. His hands were shaking, and his gut was twisting painfully. "Ianto? What is it?" Jack asked, looking up at him worriedly, the concern evident in his voice.

"How?… Why?…" Ianto couldn't seem to articulate what he was feeling, he was so overwhelmed by the enormity of what Jack had done. "How could I be the one you were supposed to save? How could I be worth saving? I'm not important." He stopped pacing and turned sharply to look at Jack. "What if you made a mistake? The Doctor doesn't even know me, Jack. Why would he want you to save me? It doesn't make any sense."

He was nearly hyperventilating, and he could feel sweat breaking out over his skin. The room seemed to tilt violently, his head swam, and his vision blurred. Jack jumped up and caught him as his legs buckled beneath him. He had a dim recollection of Jack sitting him back down on the sofa, pulling off his suit jacket, loosening his tie, and pushing his head between his legs.

Eventually the room stopped moving, and his vision began to clear. He was staring down at the dark blue carpet. His suit jacket was lying in a heap on the floor, and there was something white sticking out of the inside pocket. Ianto's eyes focused on the white object as Jack was urging him to take slow, deep breaths. He tried to comply, staring at the stark, white article that was such a contrast against the black, silk lining of his jacket. What the hell is that? he wondered as he breathed deeply and the throbbing in his head abated.

"I'm sorry, Ianto," Jack said apologetically. "I should have waited until you were stronger. This was too much for you to handle. You're probably dehydrated, and you need some food."

Ignoring Jack for a moment, Ianto reached down and slid the envelope out of his jacket pocket, then straightened up, still feeling slightly nauseous. "Take it easy," Jack said, putting a hand on his back to steady him.

Ianto stared down at the envelope in his hand. "What's that?" Jack asked curiously.

"No idea," Ianto replied slowly. "I don't remember this being in my pocket."

He turned it over. It read, 'Jack and Ianto' on the front in handwriting he didn't recognize. Jack looked over Ianto's shoulder and audibly gasped. Ianto looked at him, raising a questioning eyebrow. "My gods! That's the Doctor's handwriting!" Jack exclaimed, looking shocked as his eyes shifted between Ianto and the envelope.

Wordlessly Ianto held it out to Jack. "It's addressed to both of us," Jack said, not taking it from Ianto's hand.

They looked at each other. "What does this mean, Jack?" Ianto asked hesitantly, starting to feel woozy again.

As though understanding, Jack gently took the envelope from Ianto's hand and opened it with uncharacteristic precision. He pulled out a single sheet of folded paper. Ianto tried to focus on his
breathing, but he was feeling completely overwhelmed. He stared nervously at the paper, wondering if he could withstand any more shocking revelations.

Jack pulled Ianto close, putting an arm firmly around his shoulders. Ianto leaned his head gratefully on Jack's shoulder as the older man unfolded the sheet of paper with one hand and began to read aloud.

"Jack, you clever, clever boy! You did it! I knew you would! My time is almost up. You won't see me again – at least, not in this incarnation. So farewell, my friend. This is my parting gift to you.

Ianto, you weren't supposed to die. I couldn't interfere, so I gave Jack a nudge in the right direction. Jack needs you. Jack's important for the future, and you're important for Jack, thus you are important for the future too. I can't give you the immortality that Jack has, but there are ways to extend your natural lifespan. Jack will find ways to do that. He's crafty, that one! But don't concern yourself with feeling unworthy. This is how it was meant to be.

Jack, I'm truly sorry about Steven. I know this won't diminish your pain, but if you hadn't done what you did, not only would millions of children have suffered and died, but Steven would have been diagnosed with leukemia several weeks later. He would have died within six months – an excruciatingly painful death. You saved him and Alice from that suffering, and he died a hero, saving the planet, just like his grandfather. The planet Earth owes you a debt of gratitude, Jack. Do not allow yourself to become consumed by guilt. Let Ianto help you. He sees you for the man you truly are.

Take care of each other.

Doctor"

Ianto was beyond words. Even if he could make sense of his thoughts and emotions, he was certain that he wouldn't be able to put them into a coherent sentence. He watched as Jack set the sheet of paper carefully down on the table.

Both of them sat silently for several long minutes, lost in thought. Finally, Jack sat up straight and carefully withdrew his arm from around Ianto's shoulders. "Ianto, there's something I need to tell you," he said quietly. "Something I should have told you a long, long time ago."

Ianto looked at Jack curiously. Jack was gazing at him intently, his features set in a pensive yet determined expression. Ianto's heart started pounding, and his throat felt dry again. After so many disclosures, he was beyond overwhelmed. I'm not certain I can take much more. He tried to calm his already extremely frayed nerves. He picked up the glass of water and took several small sips before placing it carefully on the table again.

Jack waited until he'd finished and had turned back to look at him, then he took both of Ianto's hands in his own. Ianto stared into Jack's blue eyes, seeing such intensity of emotion that his breath caught in his throat. His heart continued to pound, but this time with a very different emotion.

"Ianto Jones," Jack said, looking directly into his eyes. "I love you."

Instantly, Ianto knew it was the truth. He knew that Jack had always loved him, that Jack would go on loving him, that Jack would love him until the end of time.

"And I love you, Captain Jack Harkness," Ianto replied with complete certainty, filling the words with all the depth and sincerity of his feelings for this unique and remarkable man.

Their lips met as though their souls had collided, and Ianto had never felt more complete.
Ianto and Jack spent the night lost in each other's bodies. Ianto dozed sporadically, his mind still struggling to process the enormity of everything Jack had told him, along with the startling contents of the letter from the Doctor. Every time he opened his eyes, Jack was staring at him, his lashes moist with unshed tears. "I can't believe you're here," Jack whispered, his forehead leaning against Ianto's. "I can't believe I've got you back," he kept saying over and over again.

They lingered in bed until late morning, unwilling to return to reality. Finally Ianto said tentatively, "Jack… my sister… and Gwen and Rhys…"

"I've been thinking about that too," Jack admitted. "What to tell them… Rhiannon will be easier. But Gwen…" He shook his head.

"I'd like to see them," Ianto said earnestly.

Jack rubbed his thumb softly across Ianto's cheek. Then he nodded. Reluctantly, they both climbed out of bed and stepped into the shower.

After they'd bathed and dressed, they checked out of the hotel and organized a rental car. Before setting off, they stopped at a nearby café to have a late breakfast. Ianto walked in and turned around to ask Jack what he wanted, when he noticed that the older man was still standing outside. Frowning in confusion, he exited the café again. "Jack? What is it?"

"I haven't been able to drink coffee since…" He trailed off with an anguished look. "I haven't even been able to walk into a café, the aroma is so overpowering."

"I don't understand," Ianto said, his frown deepening. "You love coffee."

Jack looked at him. "Every time I smelled coffee, I was reminded of you… and… I thought…" He seemed unable to finish the sentence.
Finally understanding, Ianto took Jack’s face in his hands and kissed him, probably for the first time truly not giving a damn that he was in the middle of a busy London street kissing another man. "I'm here, Jack. I'm not going anywhere."

He took Jack's hand, and they walked into the café holding hands. He didn't let go until he needed his hand to carry their food and drinks to one of the empty tables.

Jack moaned with pleasure when he took his first sip of coffee. "Wow, I've missed that. It's not as good as yours," he added hurriedly in response to Ianto's raised eyebrow. "But it's not bad."

Ianto smiled. He was simultaneously regretful and touched that Jack had given up something he took such pleasure in. He still felt overwhelmed by the lengths Jack had gone to in order to get him back. I can't believe he gave up coffee… Because it reminded him of me, and he believed I was dead… I never wanted him to suffer like that… I should say something… tell him somehow that when I die, he should remember the time we had together fondly, and move on…

He looked at Jack, who was sipping his coffee and making a face very similar to the expression he made when he climaxed. Ianto bit his lip as he tried not to burst into laughter. It felt good to want to laugh again after what was still very recent events from his perspective. He decided to let it go. He was here now. They were together. The past didn't matter anymore.

After finishing their breakfast, they collected their rental car and headed west on the M4. As Jack drove, he pulled out his mobile phone and dialed a number. He put it on speaker so Ianto could hear the conversation. The call connected, and they could hear a shrill voice yelling, "Mica, will you leave the bloody thing alone. Hello? Hello?"

Ianto smiled at the sound of his sister's voice. "Rhiannon?" Jack asked.

"Yes? Who's this? Are you selling something? I'm not interested."

"This is Captain Jack Harkness," Jack said, using his most official sounding tone.

There was silence on the other end of the line. "I was Ianto's…" Jack added, sounding less confident.

"I know who you are," Rhiannon snapped, cutting him off. "You got my brother killed," she continued angrily.

"Actually, that's why I'm calling," Jack said quickly. "As you know, some terrible events took place nine months ago, and Ianto was right in the middle of it. He held a top secret and very sensitive position in the government." He winked at Ianto. "For the safety of you and your family, Ianto had to go into hiding, and we put out word that he was dead."

"What are you saying?" Rhiannon asked, the shock evident in her voice. "Is this some kind of sick joke?"

"The danger has passed now," Jack continued in his official tone. "It's safe for him to come out of hiding and resume his life as he sees fit. We're very sorry for any pain and grief this has caused you…"

"Pain and grief?" Rhiannon's voice resumed her shrill tone. "First you get him blown up, and then you tell me he's bloody dead. Now you tell me he was in hiding? All this time? Do you know what we went through? What kind of government are you running? I'm going to lodge a formal complaint. Who's your superior? Telling me that my brother is dead! What am I supposed to tell the kids? What kind of…"
Ianto rolled his eyes. He knew Rhiannon was off on one of her tangents. "Rhi," he interjected. "It's me, Ianto. I'm fine. I'm sorry we had to put you through this, but it was for your own safety, and the kids," he said, reaffirming Jack's story.

There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. Jack and Ianto looked at each other. "Ianto? Is that really you?"

"It's me." Ianto smiled. "We're on our way to Cardiff. Should be there in a few hours. Then you can see for yourself that I'm alright."

"Oh… We've moved. Have a nice house now. You left us all your money in your will. Well, we thought you were dead… I suppose you'll want it back now?"

Ianto only just managed not to laugh. "No. The money is yours. I'm glad you could buy yourselves somewhere nice to live. Just give me your new address."

She recited the address, and Ianto ended the call as quickly as possible.

"That wasn't too bad," Jack said.

"You haven't met her yet," Ianto mumbled under his breath, feeling a stab of nervousness at the thought of his sister and Jack finally meeting.

"Well, now for the hard part," Jack said, his brow creasing with a look of concentration. He was silent for several minutes, apparently lost in thought, before he dialed another number. Once again, he put the phone on speaker.

"Hello? Jack?" Rhys' voice answered the phone. "Have you heard? I'm a father! We have a baby girl!"

"Congratulations, Rhys!" Jack said with a grin. "How's mum doing?"

"She's fine. She's gorgeous. They're both bloody gorgeous!"

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Are you calling from another planet?" Rhys asked suspiciously.

Jack laughed. "If you consider London another planet."

"Actually…" Rhys hedged.

Jack laughed again, and Ianto smiled appreciatively. He loved to hear Jack laugh. "I've got news, Rhys. And I was going to tell Gwen myself, but maybe it's better coming from you. I don't want to put the new mother into shock or anything."

"Bloody hell, Jack. What is it now?"

Jack paused, taking a deep breath. "Ianto's not dead."

"What?"

"It's a long story, Rhys, but tell Gwen it's to do with the Doctor. I think that will be enough of an explanation for her. We're heading to Cardiff now. We need to stop at Ianto's sister's first, but we'll be by after that. We're both looking forward to meeting the newest Torchwood operative."
"Over my dead body!" Rhys roared.

Once again, Jack burst out laughing and disconnected the call.

Ten minutes later, Jack's phone rang. Jack looked at the caller ID and grinned, passing it to Ianto. It read, 'Gwen Cooper.'

Ianto put the call on speaker. "Jack? What the hell did you do? Did you find another one of those bloody resurrection gloves and use it on Ianto?"

Both Ianto and Jack started laughing. "Ianto? Ianto? Is that really you? I can hear you! Oh, Ianto! What did Jack do? Oh, God, are you a walking zombie?"

"No, Gwen. I'm alive." He smiled at Jack. "No glove. No tricks. Just a little intervention from a fifty-first century time traveler with a working Vortex Manipulator."

"But how? When?"

"Congratulations, Mum!" Jack shouted.

"Sod that! I want to know about Ianto!"

"We'll be there this evening," Ianto said calmly, rolling his eyes with affection at Gwen's exuberance. "We'll tell you all about it then. We're looking forward to meeting your daughter," he added.

"She's gorgeous," Gwen said proudly.

"If she looks anything like her mother, I'm sure she's a knockout," Jack said happily. "We'll see you soon, Gwen."

Ianto disconnected the call. "Jack?" he said thoughtfully a few moments later, his mind beginning to turn to more practical matters. "I don't have any money."

It was disconcerting to realize the sum total of his worldly possessions consisted of the clothes he was currently wearing. All his savings had gone to Rhiannon, he no longer had a job, and everything else he'd owned had been destroyed with the Hub.

"Ianto, I have plenty of money," Jack replied, waving a dismissive hand. "You don't ever need to worry about that."

Ianto thought about Jack's casual statement. He felt like he should be worried, being beholden to Jack financially, but somehow it didn't seem to matter. So many things he'd have once worried about seemed inconsequential now. He just couldn't bring himself to care. He knew for certain that Jack would take care of him, no matter what. "Does that mean I'm going to be a kept man?" he asked coyly.

Jack grinned at him. "Oh yeah! I like the sound of that! You'll have to work it off in trade." He leered suggestively at Ianto.

"Oh, will I now?" Ianto asked, raising an eyebrow.

Suddenly Jack swerved, cut across three lanes of traffic, and took an upcoming exit off the motorway. Ianto grasped the handle on the door nervously. "Jack? What the hell are you doing?"

Jack drove for several minutes, turning down a tree-lined dirt road. The car bumped and skidded as he drove into an area of deserted woods. Finally he stopped the car, and grabbed hold of Ianto,
kissing him frantically. He pulled away, tugging at Ianto's belt. "We'll start that repayment plan right
now," he said, grinning mischievously.

They scrambled out of the car, laughing, kissing, and pulling at each other's clothing. Jack pushed
Ianto up against a tree, lifting him up so he was holding Ianto in the air, Ianto's legs wrapped around
his waist. Jack took him right there, thrusting into him and kissing his neck.

Jack had his hands wrapped around Ianto's bare thighs, holding him up, so Ianto stroked himself as
Jack drove deep inside him, hitting the sensitive bundle of nerves every time.

They climaxed almost simultaneously, amid a combination of heavy breathing, moaning, and
laughing. Then they shared a few lingering kisses before cleaning themselves up and getting into the
car again.

A little over three hours later, they approached the Severn Bridge. Seems to have withstood that little
incident with the aliens a while back, Ianto thought, smiling wistfully at the memory. He glanced at
Jack, wondering if the other man was thinking the same thing. But Jack had a serious expression on
his face, his forehead wrinkled with consternation. "What is it, Jack?" he asked.

"I just never thought I'd set foot in Cardiff again," Jack said quietly. "Too many painful memories."

Ianto reached for Jack's hand, intertwining their fingers. "I'm here, Jack," he said, squeezing his hand
reassuringly.

Jack smiled at him. "I know."

"Jack? What happened to the SUV? And all of the wreckage from the Hub?"

"UNIT," Jack said succinctly.

Ianto nodded. "I wonder if Myfanwy escaped. Any news on her?"

"Haven't heard anything. I'm sorry, Ianto… But there was no report of the remains of a pterodactyl in
the Hub wreckage, so that's something."

Ianto nodded, hoping their prehistoric pet had escaped the explosion and settled somewhere nice.
Maybe in the Beacons, he mused. She could feed on any lingering cannibals, he thought with a hint
of malicious glee.

About half an hour later, Jack pulled the rental car up at a white, two-story house with a lovely front
garden. Ianto looked around, feeling gratified that something good came out of his 'death,' and his
money had been able to buy his only surviving family somewhere nice to live.

As they got out of the car, the front door flew open, and Rhiannon came running out of the house.
"Ianto? Is it really you?"

She flung herself into Ianto's arms. He held his sister, who was crying on his shoulder. They had
never been close, but he could feel her relief and her joy at seeing him again, and he was genuinely
touched. She finally pulled back and looked at him carefully, wiping her eyes. "I can't believe it," she
said. "You look good. You look happy."

"I am," Ianto said, smiling at Jack.

Rhiannon looked at Jack, then looked at Ianto with a questioning expression. "This is the one?" she asked. "Your… boss? Your…"

"Partner," Ianto finished her sentence confidently. "This is my partner, Jack."

Jack beamed at him. Rhiannon shook Jack's hand. "Nice to meet you," she said politely. Then she turned to Ianto. "He does look like a film star!"

Jack put his arm around Ianto. "Did you tell your sister that I look like a film star?" he asked smugly.

"No." Ianto snorted. "Please! One of Rhiannon's friends saw us together. As if I would stroke your ego like that. If it gets any bigger, we won't all fit in one bed!"

"Come on, Ianto, admit it. You told your sister I looked like a film star!" Jack teased.

"Hardly," Ianto said with feigned dignity, trying desperately not to laugh.

"Well, come on in," Rhiannon said, smiling at them both. "I told the kids that you were a spy, Ianto, so they're a bit over-excited," she added, gesturing them to follow her inside.

Ianto rolled his eyes, and Jack laughed as they entered the house. They spent, what Ianto had to admit were the most pleasurable couple of hours he'd ever spent with his sister and her family. They had arrived in time for afternoon tea, and they all sat down together in the lounge room, Rhiannon fussing over them with food and coffee.

Jack quickly charmed everyone, even Johnny. Ianto was highly entertained by Jack and Rhiannon's conversation, both of them talking so much that they kept interrupting each other. Ianto was a hero in Mica and David's eyes, and he couldn't help feeling just a little bit gratified by their awestruck esteem.

Finally, Jack pushed back his chair. "I'm afraid we have to go. We have another stop to make. But I'm so glad I finally got to meet you all. Ianto talks about you all the time."

"Does he now?" Rhiannon looked skeptically at Ianto, and he tried to maintain an impassive expression. "That other colleague of yours… Gwen. She was under the impression that our dad was a master tailor."

Ianto could feel himself starting to flush with embarrassment, and he tried in vain to look innocent. But Jack simply laughed, taking Ianto's hand and squeezing it tightly. "Just one of Ianto's little jokes. Gwen never really got it. She can be rather dense." He smiled at Ianto.

Ianto looked at him with gratitude. Leave it to Jack to use his charm to smooth over an awkward situation.

They said goodbye to Johnny and the kids, and Rhiannon walked them out to the car. She hugged Jack, whispering something in his ear. "You have my word," Jack said, smiling at her.

Jack bid her farewell and climbed into the car. Rhiannon turned to Ianto. "Well, it's obvious that you two adore each other," she said. "I'm glad you found someone who makes you so happy. You deserve it after… everything."

Ianto hugged his sister. It would never be the apology that he'd always wanted from her, but he knew it was her way of acknowledging the events of their childhood. "He really loves you," Rhiannon said.
"I know." Ianto smiled.

"Stay in touch?"

"I will," Ianto promised.

He kissed his sister on the cheek, then climbed into the car next to Jack. They waved to her as they pulled out of the driveway. "I like her," Jack said, taking Ianto's hand. "She's got spunk."

"Yup, that she does," Ianto agreed.

"So… I'm your partner?" Jack asked with a sly glance at him.

"Would you prefer boyfriend?" Ianto asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Hmm…" Jack looked thoughtful. "Either one." He shrugged. "I'm easy."

Ianto opened his mouth to make a snide comment, but Jack interjected, "Don't even say it, Mr. Jones!"

Ianto stuck his tongue out at Jack, who chuckled with amusement. A short while later, they pulled up at Gwen and Rhys' flat. Gwen burst into tears at the sight of Ianto, throwing her arms around him. "I can't believe it," she said, over and over again. "I saw your dead body!"

Even Rhys gave him a stiff, manly hug and patted him on the back several times, and Ianto caught him surreptitiously wiping his eyes.

Gwen held Ianto's hand and clung to his arm as they sat down on the sofa. Rhys put their baby girl, Anwen, into Jack's arms, and he held her with obvious practiced skill, as he told them an abridged version of how he'd saved Ianto.

They stayed with Rhys and Gwen, talking late into the night. Gwen offered them the use of their sofa bed, which they gratefully accepted.

Ianto woke in the middle of the night, finding the other side of the bed empty. He pulled on his trousers and padded into the baby's room, seeing a light coming from the crack in the door. Jack was holding Anwen, singing softly to her.

"Jack?" he whispered.

"She was crying," Jack murmured. "And I know how little sleep new parents get, so I thought I'd give them a rest."

"You look like you've done this before," Ianto said, keeping his voice low and peering over Jack's shoulder at the baby sleeping in his arms.

"A few times," Jack admitted after a long silence.

Ianto looked at Jack. "Tell me about them sometime?"

"I will, Ianto. I want to tell you… about everything." He leaned over and placed a brief but tender kiss on Ianto's lips.

Ianto put his arm around Jack, looking down at the baby girl. There was a flash of light, and they both looked up in surprise. Gwen and Rhys were standing in the doorway. Rhys had a camera in his hand. "We wondered why she hadn't woken us up," Rhys whispered.
"You both looked so bloody adorable," Gwen added in a soft voice. "Couldn't resist!" She pointed at the camera with a wide grin.

Jack placed the baby gently down in her cot. "Is there anything you can't do, Jack?" Gwen whispered, leaning over to look down at her daughter.

"I'm rubbish at taxes," Jack joked.

The four of them stood looking at Anwen, sleeping peacefully. "You did good, Gwen," Jack whispered, kissing the top of her head.

Eventually they all made their way back to bed. In the morning, Jack and Ianto departed, heading out to shop for clothing and other essentials. Then they booked a room at the St. David's Hotel, where they stayed for several days, spending time with Gwen, Rhys, and Anwen, wandering around Cardiff, and making good use of the hotel bed.

On the fifth morning of their stay, Jack dragged a protesting Ianto out of bed in what seemed like the middle of the night, taking him to the rooftop of the Millennium Center. With Jack's arm wrapped firmly around Ianto's waist, holding him close, they watched as the sun crept above the horizon, filling the sky with a vibrant glow of orange and red.

A flicker of movement caught the corner of Ianto's eye, and he looked up, gasping in surprise. "Jack!" he said excitedly, pointing upwards. "Look!"

The familiar shape of a pterodactyl flew high above them. Myfanwy glided gracefully through the air, letting out a loud screech and eventually disappearing from sight.

"I'm happy she's okay," Ianto whispered, blinking away the dampness in his eyes as his mind drifted back to an abandoned warehouse where it had all begun for the two of them. It seemed like a lifetime ago.

"Me too," Jack murmured, pulling Ianto closer and embracing him tightly.

Later that morning they were having breakfast at the hotel when Jack announced, "We have a date tonight."

"Do we?" Ianto asked, looking at him in confusion.

Jack nodded. "There's someone I want you to meet."

Ianto couldn't get Jack to say any more about it until a few minutes before ten o'clock that evening, when he flipped open his Vortex Manipulator and pressed several buttons. "Ready for a bit of travelling?" he asked with a smile.

"Where are we going?" Ianto asked, looking skeptically at Jack's wrist strap.

Jack just grinned and held out his hand. Ianto took it tentatively, and Jack pulled him close, pressing their bodies together. "It feels a little funny the first time," he said, putting his arms around Ianto and pressing a button.

Ianto felt a tugging behind his navel, then a falling sensation as they moved through space. They alighted in a starkly furnished room that was sleek and bore the distinct traces of alien design. "Where are we?" he asked, feeling a bit unsteady on his feet.

"The Shadow IV," Jack replied. Ianto was trying to assimilate the information when there was a
tapping on the door. "Enter!" Jack called.

A young man in an officer's uniform walked in. "Jack!" he said excitedly, grabbing the other man and pulling him into a warm embrace.

"Alonso," Jack smiled, pulling back and looking at him fondly. "Good to see you."

"Is this him?" Alonso asked, turning to Ianto.

"Yup." Jack smiled proudly. "This is my Ianto. Ianto, meet Alonso."

Ianto politely stuck out his hand, but to his surprise, Alonso pulled him into an enthusiastic embrace. "I can't tell you how happy I am to meet you," he said with a wide smile.

"Er… thanks," Ianto replied, taken aback.

"He's gorgeous, Jack!" Alonso said looking at Ianto appreciatively. "But I knew he would be."

Jack laughed, and Ianto felt his cheeks growing warm. "Now tell me everything that happened," Alonso said eagerly.

Jack gestured towards the chairs, and they all sat down. Jack told the story of reviving Ianto with heartfelt honesty, and Ianto couldn't help liking Alonso, whose reactions were genuine and sympathetic. They chatted amiably for several hours, and Ianto found that he and Alonso had a lot in common, even though they were from different parts of the galaxy.

Finally they took their leave of Alonso, with promises to stay in touch.

Once again Ianto wrapped his arms around Jack as he pressed a button on his Vortex Manipulator, and they were transported back to their hotel room in Cardiff.

"Wow," Ianto said, feeling wobbly again. "That was… intense. You used to do that all the time?"

Jack nodded. "And we didn't even travel through time. We only teleported."

"Huh…" Ianto thought for a few moments.

Everything was so different. With Torchwood gone, all they had were each other. Ianto thought about the words in the Doctor's letter. He knew he was going to spend the rest of his life with Jack, however long that turned out to be. From what the Doctor had insinuated, it seemed like it would be longer than the average human. But he wasn't sure what that life was going to be like. Suddenly, anything seemed possible. Jack's words from what seemed like so long ago echoed in his mind. *The end is where we start from.*

It was a new beginning for both of them. He looked at Jack, who was gazing at him with open and uninhibited adoration. *Things have changed so much between us… All of the angst, uncertainty, and insecurity gone forever… We both know we truly love each other, that we're meant to be together, and we accept it unequivocally. We've come so far. Been through so much together… Where do we go from here? *" Jack?" he asked aloud. "What are we going to do now?"

"Well…" Jack paused. "We could settle down somewhere… buy a house…"

Ianto frowned. Jack had always struggled with domesticity, and while it would be nice for a while, he couldn't imagine that working for them long-term. He didn't want Jack to sacrifice his own happiness for his sake. And after everything they'd been through, he wasn't sure if he wanted that
sort of conventional life either. "Doesn't really sound like us," he said hesitantly.

Jack smiled at him affectionately. "The Rift is closed, but... there are always going to be other threats to the planet. We could rebuild Torchwood, hire a new team, and pick up where we left off," he suggested, watching Ianto closely.

"Hmm..." Ianto replied thoughtfully.

"Or..." Jack hedged.

"Or...?" Ianto asked.

"Or... we could see the universe," Jack said with a shrug.

Ianto stared at Jack as his mind slowly began to comprehend what Jack was offering him. All the wonder and majesty of the universe...

His face broke into an enormous smile.

~Fin~

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