Familiar Devils

by versaphile

Summary

The rift doesn't just bring Jack and Tosh back from 1941. It also delivers a surprise. DW/Torchwood crossover; AU from "Captain Jack Harkness" onwards, and S2 of DW.
Chapter 1

It's Captain Harkness' last night on Earth, and Jack can't just leave him like this. He turns back from the blinding glare of the Rift, turns and touches and kisses him. He pours out all the desire there's no time to confess or act upon, make the kiss mean as much as a glorious night in a dark bedroom, because Jack meant every word about cherishing those precious moments. You never know when your time will be cut short, when you'll lose everything in one sharp instant, when the people you love will be taken away. Time demands that he lose the Captain, but he refuses to have the regret of never tasting him.

And then it's over. He backs away, walks towards the rift. Looks back for one last salute, and then he and Toshiko hurry into the light, back to the twenty-first century. But as they pass through, something happens. There's a crack, a thunder, a terrible wind that whips up and around. He stops, staring into the whiteness. Toshiko hurries ahead, and he can't see her, but that doesn't matter because the hair on his neck is standing straight and he looks back for the Captain and something smashes to the left, to the right. Jack takes a step back and the ground falls away from under his feet just as something heavy and large slams into him.

His spine snaps in two places as he falls down the stairs. One of them is his neck.

He gasps back to life to the sight of the peeling ceiling of the hall and Toshiko's stunned, horrified expression. There's a heavy weight pinning him down, and he struggles and pushes it off. It's a body, a man in a battered orange space suit. Shards of what looks like pottery skitter across the tile as they're knocked aside.

"Jack," Toshiko gasps. "Are you-- Is he--"

"I'm all right," Jack assures her. He struggles up and kneels over the man. "I think he came out of the Rift."

The outer door opens to a relieved Gwen. "Oh, you made it. You made it!" She pulls Toshiko into a hug, then sees the man. "Jack, who's that?"

"I don't know," Jack says. Dozens of questions spring to mind, but the first one is the most important. He places two fingers to the man's neck, and then pulled his hand back in shock.

Gwen crouches beside him. "He's dead?"

"No," Jack says, but doesn't elaborate. "We need to get him to the hub. Now."

They bundle into Gwen's car, the two women in the front, and Jack sits in the back with their guest.

Jack still tastes the Captain, still carries the echo of his touch on his skin. His heart aches at the loss of him, even though they had only hours together. He thought that he'd have time to mourn, or just to catch his breath. The universe is rarely that generous, but this... this was the very last thing he would have expected, or even imagined.

Two heartbeats. Two.

But this isn't the Doctor, is it? The Doctor looks nothing like this. He should have close-cropped hair, big ears, a leather jacket. But Jack has heard a lot of stories about Time Lords, and he's seen the old photographs, the UNIT footage. This thin, wild-haired man must be the Doctor. But if so, where's his ship? Where's Rose? Why did he tumble to Earth the way Jack did all those decades
ago, with nothing but the clothes on his back?

Jack's spent a very long time preparing speeches for the Doctor, about how hurt he was at being left behind, about how much he misses him, about how angry he is that the Doctor turned him into this undying thing. He's dreamed of punching his lights out, and then hugging him hard, and leaving the dust of Earth behind at last. He didn't expect his first reaction to be worry and sympathy.

All those years of waiting, and the Doctor literally falls into his arms. If there is a god, he has a hell of a sense of humor.

If he has any lingering doubts, they're set to rest when the Doctor-detector springs to life the moment they enter the hub, beeping rapidly. The hand in the jar moves about in agitation.

"Now what's going on?" Owen appears, holding bloody gauze to his shoulder.

"Owen?" Gwen says, surprised. "Your shoulder..."

"Never mind my bloody shoulder, what's with that hand? Is it the Rift? And who's that?"

"An old friend of mine," Jack says, carrying the Doctor inside. There's lots of chairs but nowhere flat to put him, so it'll have to be the autopsy room. Not the coziest of places, but it'll do.

"It's not the Rift," Toshiko says, following after. "Well, sort of."

"Welcome back," Ianto says. "I shot Owen to stop him from opening the Rift."

"And see how well that worked out," Owen replies. "Nobody thank me or anything."

Jack leaves behind their bickering, and Toshiko joins him. "Can you get some blankets?" he asks.

Toshiko does, and puts them down to pad the metal bed. Once that's done, Jack gently lays the Doctor on top, then takes a step back and runs his hand through his hair. He has no idea what to make of all this or why the Doctor won't wake up. There's some dried blood in his hair, broken blood vessels in his eyes, but not many other clues. At least he's breathing okay, and as far as Jack knows there's nothing wrong with his hearts.

"Better get this space suit off," Jack says, and looks for the fastenings.

Together they strip off the orange suit, revealing not black trousers and a jumper but a rumpled yet stylish brown pinstripe suit. And a tie. He'd never imagined the Doctor would ever wear a tie. Though at least blue with purple polka-dots isn't dull.

He feels carefully for broken bones, and is relieved not to find any. It's strange to think that this is really the same man, whip-thin where he used to be sturdy, fine-featured instead of that rough charm Jack so loved. New clothes, new body. Is he really even the same man at all? No way to find out until he's awake.

It's suddenly hard to look at him. He covers the Doctor with the last blanket and tells Toshiko to stay with him, and goes out to his team. He sees Owen picking a bullet from his shoulder, and Ianto peering determinately at computer screens. Jack decides it's as good at time as any to interrupt. He needs a distraction.

"Gwen gone home?" he asks.

Ianto nods. "Back to Rhys."
"I knew we did the right thing, opening the rift," Owen mutters.

"Any news?" Jack asks.

"Rift's quiet so far. Still no sign of Bilis," Ianto says, though from his expression it's obvious he's expecting that to change.

"World didn't end after all, did it?" Owen says. "Good job you're a crap shot."

"I was aiming for your shoulder."

"He'll be back," Jack says, sticking to the matter at hand. He's not happy that the Rift was opened, and he's really not happy the Manger manipulated his team into it. It doesn't surprise him that Owen pulled the switch; he's been nothing but trouble since that aviatrix left. A bullet in the shoulder is the least of his problems, but team discipline will have to wait. "Whatever he wanted out of this, we just handed it to him. Tomorrow we take the fight to him."

"We will," Ianto says, firmly. He turns to Jack. "Your friend..."

"Still out," Jack says. "He fell straight out of the Rift. Don't know where or when he came from."

"Mind if I take a look?"

Jack nods, and Ianto goes over to the autopsy room.

"Sure, let everyone at him but the actual doctor," Owen says, testily. "And what do you mean, where or when?"

"You wanna save that bullet?" Jack says, sarcastically declining to answer. He hasn't been inclined to share his past before, and that hasn't changed now. As far as Torchwood is concerned, the man in the other room is just a displaced human. No one to worry about.

"Oh my god!" Ianto says, his distress clear from across the room.

Jack's first thought is that the Doctor is awake, and hurries over, Owen following after. But the Doctor is still out, and Ianto looks like he's seen a ghost.

"Jack, that's... that's him. From Canary Wharf."

"You know him?" Jack says, surprised.

"Yvonne Hartman put him on screen right before..." Ianto trails off. "That's the Doctor. My god."


Jack tilts his head back, mentally kicking himself. He knew the Doctor was at Canary Wharf. He should have known this would happen. Damn it. Has the Doctor already been there, already lost Rose? Is that why he's alone? Or is this before the Cybermen and the fall of Torchwood One on his personal timeline? Jack wasn't even in the country when it all went down, and only arrived afterward as part of the clean-up.

Sometimes time travel even gives him a headache.

"Wait a second," Owen interrupts. "Stop me if you've heard this one, but isn't he supposed to be the enemy? The big alien threat?"
"He's not a threat," Jack insists.

"Doesn't look like much," Owen sniffs.

"He was nice," Toshiko says, thoughtfully. "Though a bit confusing. Didn't he blow up 10 Downing Street?"

"I think so," Ianto says, still stunned. "After Big Ben. Everyone was talking about it."

"Sounds like he's the one Ianto should be shooting," Owen says, sourly. "If he's dangerous, we need to put him in the cells before he wakes up. That's where the aliens go, right?"

Jack rounds on him. "Don't you dare touch him. Don't even think about it."

"Hey, in case you didn't notice, I'm the one who brought you back," Owen says, heatedly. "Without me, you'd still be trapped in 1941, getting bombs dropped on you."

"You shouldn't have opened the Rift," Jack says.

"And that's the thanks I get," Owen says. "I save you, and I get shot for it. Meanwhile you're bringing the enemy right into the Hub! Taking lessons from tea boy?"

"Get out," Jack says, coldly. "Get the hell out of here before I do something I regret."

"Gladly," Owen says, and stomps off.

Nobody moves. After a minute, they hear the door clang shut.

"That went well," Toshiko mutters under her breath.

Toshiko offers to run some scans, and Jack allows it. They might not have much of a grasp of Time Lord physiology, but they can at least check for the obvious stuff, like radiation poisoning, alien parasites, that sort of thing. Jack really hopes she finds nothing. In the meantime he takes Ianto out of the room and hopes he'll stop looking so damn pale.

"Come on," Jack says. "I'll pour you a drink."

Jack could do with a drink himself. It's been a hell of a day, and doesn't show any sign of getting easier. The only reason he isn't reeling is that he hasn't slowed down enough to let himself feel it.

"So," Ianto says, when they're sitting in his office and the scotch has gone down with a burn. "How was 1941?"

Heartache stabs through Jack's chest, and just for a moment he wallows in it. "There were angels dancing at the Ritz."

Ianto frowns. "Sorry?"

Jack just shakes his head. "It was wartime. Dance music and men in uniform."

"Doesn't sound entirely terrible," Ianto says, quirking a faint smile.

"I suppose not," Jack replies, staring down into his glass. God, he'd so much wanted to stay there. But Captain Jack Harkness was fated to die, and he was fated to steal his name for a con. He's not
sure if he's angrier with Owen or himself or time. She always takes from him, never gives.

Well, not entirely.

"So, the Doctor," Ianto says, slowly, as if reading Jack's mind. "How long have you known him?"

Jack can't exactly answer that. "A while," he says.

"The declared enemy of Torchwood," Ianto says, looking at him curiously.

"Not this Torchwood," Jack says, firmly.


Jack had never considered that. "Did you?"

Ianto hesitates, then shakes his head. "He tried to stop it. Did, eventually."

"He wouldn't have wanted that to happen to anyone," Jack says, certain of that. The Doctor he knew would have been horrified by the Cybermen, and he can't see that changing even if everything else has.

Rose's name was on the list of the dead. Jack almost went to see her mother, a week afterwards, but couldn't do it. He'd made it as far as the courtyard of the Powell Estate and turned back. What could he say? Hi, I'm one of the people who travelled with your daughter into life-threatening situations? That would have gone down like a lead balloon.

Travelling with the Doctor was always dangerous. That was part of the fun. But more importantly, the Doctor made him want to be a better person. He had such a certainty about him, a clarity of purpose. He wanted to make the universe a better place, even if only a little bit, because even that little bit made all the difference. Jack had had nothing to live for, just revenge and the next con. He'd been bitter and angry. And then just like that, everything was wonderful.

He died, and Rose died, and even the Doctor died and came back as a stranger. And there's certainly not much wonderful about Jack's life now. It doesn't make him happy, but at least Torchwood keeps him busy.

God, he wishes he could sleep. He finishes off his drink, rubs his eyes.

"Tired?" Ianto asks.

"Been a long day," Jack says. He meets Ianto's eyes in a long glance, and sees the proposition waiting there. No doubt Ianto would like some comfort, too. With Toshiko busy, it would be easy to slip down to his bunker of a bedroom, so nice to have someone familiar to hold, touch, taste, to hear those sweet noises Ianto makes as he comes.

But he drops his eyes and looks away. He's never been remotely monogamous, but it feels wrong to have that when his heart aches for two other men. When one of them is lying unconscious just meters away.

Ianto gives a short, sharp nod. "I see," he says, and it's clear that he's hurt. Rejected. Sees a lot more than he gives away, but that's what Ianto is best at.

"Ianto," Jack begins.
"He's the one you've been waiting for," Ianto says, much too calmly. "The way you looked at him, and he's not even awake."

Jack wants to deny it, but he can't lie about this. "Yeah," he says, roughly.

Ianto nods. He puts down his glass and stands.

"Don't go," Jack says, hating this. Hating the stupid little categories people put themselves into in this backwards era. Love one gender or the other, love one person or the other, never both, never many. Jack has so much love, but everyone around him wants it tucked into the smallest boxes and parcelled out.

But Ianto keeps his face turned away. "I'll see you tomorrow morning," he says, tightly. "I hope your friend is all right."

Jack lets him go. There's no point in arguing about it, giving a little speech about the many forms of love. Ianto is hurt, and that's what's real for him. Jack will deal with it later, assuming there is a later.
Chapter 2

Jack pulls up the Rift monitoring program on his computer and stares at it until Toshiko knocks on his door.

"Hey," she says, quietly. "You okay?"

"Not really," Jack admits. "Find anything?"

"No," Toshiko says, and sits down where Ianto had been. "Which is good, I think."

"But he's still out."

She nods. "He could just be healing. He was definitely hit on the head, probably more than once. And falling through the Rift can't be healthy."

"Yeah," Jack says. He offers her a glass. "Drink?"

"No, thanks," she says. "Jack... About what happened at the dance hall. Not the kiss. When you fell, I thought..."

Jack's been waiting for this. Sometimes it's a problem, having observant people around him. He's been hiding what he is for so long secrecy is like breathing, but he doesn't want to lie to her. "You thought I was dead."

"Your neck was at this angle," Toshiko says, shuddering at the memory. "You weren't breathing. And then it was like... I can't even explain it. But you were alive again."

"I can't die," he says, feeling a faint relief at admitting the truth, just as he did when Gwen found out. "Actually, I can die, but I don't stay dead."

She isn't as surprised by the admission as he'd expected. "That actually explains a lot," she says. "That's how you were in 1941 before?"

"Yeah," Jack says.

"How long?" she asks, curious as ever.

"Too long," he says, and leaves it at that.

"The Doctor, is he..."

"No," Jack says. "It's not the same."

Toshiko nods. "I have so many questions. I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude."

"I know," he says, understanding.

"I'm sorry about the Captain. Leaving him must have been difficult for you." Toshiko has had her own troubles recently. Mary. Of course she understands. At least the Captain wasn't evil, only forever out of reach. But the heartbreak is the same.

"It was. Thank you," he says, meaning it.
"I could see why you liked that era," she says. "It was wartime, I know, but it was beautiful."

Jack just nods. He's tired of talking, had enough of it. Had enough of people wanting things from him, demanding information or guidance or importance. He knows that leadership is a burden he takes upon himself, but sometimes it makes him so weary.

"I should let you go," Toshiko says, sensing his mood. "If you like, I can stay tonight, watch over your friend."

"No," Jack says. "Go on home. I'll sit with him."

"Call me if you need me," she says, and gives him a sympathetic smile.

"Just the two of us, Doctor," Jack says, pulling up a chair in the autopsy room. He sits next to the bed and looks down at the Doctor's silent form. Takes his hand and holds it.

The hub is the safest place for him right now, no matter what Torchwood's supposed policies are. His team has been tricked into opening the Rift, and Bilis Manger is still out there. Was the whole purpose of this actually a trap for the Doctor? It could be, but Jack's not so sure. This feels like something bigger.

His hand is so cold, but the Doctor was always colder than a human. Room temperature, Jack once joked, but it doesn't feel funny now. Jack pulls the blanket up an inch, brushes some of that wild hair away from his face. Watches his chest rise and fall, slow and even. Jack thinks about fairy tales, Sleeping Beauty. Decides against it. He wants the Doctor to be awake when they kiss. If they kiss. Jack can't imagine what could keep him from taking the Doctor in his arms and kissing him senseless.

"Don't die," he whispers. "I haven't met this you yet."

It's past eleven when he finally takes a break and leaves his side. He opts for tea instead of scotch, and checks on the Rift while it steeps. Still normal, but he has a very bad feeling that it won't stay that way. Nothing he can do about it for now.

He sits back in his chair and blows on his tea. Still too hot. He takes the Doctor's hand again and shares the warmth from the mug.

After a few minutes, he thinks he feels a twitch. He sits up, suddenly alert, and leans over. "Doctor?" he says, softly.

He stares at the Doctor's face, willing him to wake up. And then, slowly, he does. A little crease between his eyebrows, a tightening of his lips. A fluttering of those dark lashes. The hand in Jack's moves, flexes.

"Where..." the Doctor mumbles, licks his lips. When he opens his eyes they're hazy, like he's having trouble focusing. He blinks slowly, rubs his face with his free hand. Tries to push himself up.

"Whoa there," Jack says, pushing him back down. "Not just yet."

Suddenly his eyes shoot open, big and wide. He sits up, pats at himself, touches his face, looks around. Sees Jack, and almost falls off the bed in shock. Jack catches him, pulls him back.
"Doctor, it's me. It's Jack."

"Am I dead?" the Doctor says, distantly. "But I can't be dead because you can't be dead and this really doesn't look like the inside of a black hole." He pushes free of Jack's arms and stumbles to his feet, wobbly as a colt. "Ohh, my head," he groans, and presses a hand near where he'd been hit.


"Torchwood?" the Doctor echoes, confused. "That's in Scotland." He slips into a Scottish accent. "Scotland, Scotty, monks and werewolves and giant diamonds and the Queen."


"No wood panelling," the Doctor says, back to the London accent that appears to be his normal one now. No more Northern charm. He peers at the tiled wall. "Might still taste like mistletoe."

Jack's jaw drops as the Doctor sniffs the wall, and then licks it. Oh god, what if he's brain damaged? "Um, you probably shouldn't do that."

The Doctor makes a face. "Or not," he says, smacking his tongue. "Blech. Is that tea?"

Jack offers him the tea. The Doctor drinks it greedily. "Oh, that hits the spot. Superheated infusion of free radicals and tannin. I should be dead. I was expecting to be dead."

"Sorry to disappoint."

"No no," the Doctor says, correcting him. "No no no. It's great to be alive." He grins suddenly, and his whole face lights up. "I've been sucked through a black hole! Never done that before. Hell of a ride. Literally, even. Cardiff you say?"

"Sorry, you lost me on black hole," Jack says, feeling like he's lost the thread.

"Designation K37 Gem 5," the Doctor says, perkily. "Rose thought it went to another universe but I didn't think it was big enough but look at me being wrong. Isn't it wonderful? I love being wrong. Is this another universe? Doesn't feel like one. Just been to one, so I should know. Could be wrong. Wrong again, wouldn't that be marvellous."

Jack frowns. "Wait, Rose was with you?"

"I believed in her," the Doctor says, suddenly distant. "That I would fall but she would rise. Far enough out the gravity funnel. I hope I was right. No way to know." And then just like that, his eyes snap to Jack, clear for the first time. "What year is this?"

"2008. February."

"Oh. I think..."

"Yes?"

"I think I should sit down," the Doctor says.

Jack hurries forward as his knees give out. He catches the Doctor, holds him close. "No more black hole rides for you," he says, lightly.

"Agreed," the Doctor says, faintly. His lashes flutter. "You're not helping."
"Sorry?"

"You're all... wrong, Jack. Hard to look at. It's like... you're still, and the universe is moving around you. Or the other way around."

"Yeah," Jack says, slowly. "About that..."


Jack should be angry with him. He should be demanding answers. But with the Doctor's slim body up against his, anger is the last thing on his mind. When the Doctor's tongue peeks out and licks his lips, it's an invitation Jack can't resist. He leans in, closes those bare inches, and does what he's been longing to do again for a hundred and thirty-nine years. He kisses the Doctor.

God, he tastes good.

When he forces himself to pull away, the Doctor looks like he's been hit upside the head for a second time. It's actually a really good look for him, all dazed and dark eyes and pink lips. Some of that dazed probably means Jack is taking advantage, but somehow he doesn't really care. A kiss is the least of what he's owed.

"Come on," Jack says, and tightens his arm around his waist. "There's more comfortable rooms."

"Is that a surgical tray?" the Doctor asks, warily, as Jack helps him up the stairs.

"Nobody's gonna cut you open," Jack says. No matter how angry he was with the Doctor, he wouldn't let that happen. He's been on the wrong end of scientific curiosity enough times to never want it to happen to anyone he cares about.

"That's a relief," the Doctor says, and definitely means it.

The Doctor asks for more tea, so Jack makes him a cup. He doesn't drink it, just bends over it, inhaling the steam. It keeps him quiet long enough for Jack to try and catch his breath, process what's happened. Rose is alive, trapped somewhere, in the future if that spacesuit was any guide. The Doctor knows about Jack's condition, which means answers, and soon. One kiss was absolutely, unquestionably not enough.

"How did I get here?" the Doctor asks.

"That Rift over Cardiff? You fell out of it."

"You didn't happen to see a big blue police box?"

"Sorry," Jack says, and he is. The Doctor's ship is more important to him than anything else in the universe. If it's lost, gone, that's a terrible blow.

"Right," the Doctor says, with a sort of cheerful resignation. "Not the first time. Could be worse."

Jack feels a terrible pang of sympathy. "Stranded time travellers. Welcome to the club."

The Doctor looks up, and there's guilt in his eyes. His mouth tightens, and Jack wonders if he's going to apologize, explain why he abandoned Jack all those years ago. "Do I get a member's jacket?"

Jack snorts. "Maybe a badge."
"If you've got any psychic paper, we can make one now," the Doctor says, lightly, then sighs. The tea is cooling enough not to steam, and he finally drinks it. When it's gone, he sets down the empty cup and sits back. Jack has to admit he does look better. The color is back in his cheeks.

"Is tea a Time Lord cure-all?" he asks, curious.

"Heals the synapses," the Doctor explains. "Half a planet landed on me, and then I was squeezed through a black hole and out a rift in time and space. Don't get through that without some neurological damage, I can tell you."

"But you're okay now?"

The Doctor nods. "I should probably take it easy for a day or two. I'd heal faster with the TARDIS, but..." He shrugs.

Jack wonders if he'll be able to make it without the TARDIS even after he's fully recovered. He already looks a little lost. It makes Jack want to hug him, but he restrains himself. If this had been his old Doctor, Jack's certain he would have at least been glared at for that kiss. But if there's anything he's learned in the past half-hour, it's that this definitely is not his old Doctor.

"So what's this Torchwood, then? Looks like a galactic flea market," the Doctor says, looking around. "Is that a pterodactyl?" he asks, alarmed.

"Don't worry, she's tame," Jack says, and peers at the Doctor. "You really don't know about Torchwood."

"Nope," the Doctor says. He pops his lips on the 'p'. "Should I have?"

The sinking sensation in Jack's stomach finishes its drop. "I think you're not supposed to be here," he says, slowly.

"Oh," the Doctor says. "Oh, dear."

"No kidding," Jack says, dryly. It doesn't make sense. The Doctor can't be stranded in 2008 and Rose stuck in the future if she's supposed to die in 2007 and the Doctor doesn't even know about the Torchwood Institute. That's not even a paradox, it's a total fuck-up. It's the kind of thing they scare trainee Time Agents with.

"Just have to make the best of it," the Doctor says, undaunted. "So tell me, Jack, what have you been up to?"

Jack opens his mouth to respond and finds he has no idea how to answer that, not with the Doctor looking at him that way, like everything's fine and he's happy to see him and isn't it a nice day today. "I've been waiting for you!" he blurts out. "Since 1869!"

"What were you doing in 1869?" the Doctor asks, frowning.

"Trying to get to the early twenty-first century," Jack says, as if it's obvious. "So I could find you."

"Oh," the Doctor says.

"Don't 'oh' me," Jack says, finally getting his dander up. The pretty face is a hell of a distraction, but even Jack won't be disarmed by it for long. "You abandoned me, left me ankle-deep in Dalek dust on that goddamn gamestation. And that's only the start. What the hell did you do to me?"
"Nothing," the Doctor insists, wide-eyed.

"I sure the hell wasn't immortal before I met you," Jack says, accusingly.

"It wasn't me, honestly," the Doctor says.

"Then who?" Jack asks, not taking evasion for an answer. "Cause it sure wasn't the Daleks."

The Doctor rubs his neck, and runs his hand through his hair in agitation. "It's complicated."

"I don't think either of us is short on time," Jack says, arms crossed.

"It was Rose," the Doctor sighs.

"Don't be ridiculous," Jack says, not amused.

"It was! I sent her away, and she came back, opened the heart of the TARDIS if you can believe it. Next thing I know, she's wiping the Dalek fleet back to its component molecules."

"Then you didn't set off the pulse?"

"No," the Doctor says. "No. I lost. Said I'd rather be a coward than a killer."

That's the Doctor he knows. Jack softens, just a notch. "She saved you."

"And you. She brought you back. Had no idea what she was doing and brought you back forever."

Jack takes this in. "You still left me," he says, letting out just a hint of the hurt he felt when the TARDIS disappeared.

"I know," the Doctor says, quietly. "There was too much going on."

"Too much going on?" Jack says, in disbelief.

"I had a slight case of dying," the Doctor replies, tartly.

Before Jack can react to that, the monitoring program starts beeping. He goes over to the computer and finds a spike in Rift activity. New cracks are starting to appear, splinters around the Rift.

"So much for taking it easy," the Doctor says, peering over his shoulder. "That doesn't look good."

"It's not," Jack says, tersely.

"What exactly have you been up to? And don't think I didn't notice that Rift manipulator."

"Someone's trying to mess with the Rift," Jack says. He turns to face him. "Bilis Manger, ever heard of him?"

"Can't say I have."

"Whoever he is, he's trouble. He trapped me in 1941 just to trick my team into using the manipulator."

"You were just there?" the Doctor asks, curiously.

"Just for a few hours," Jack says.
"Ah. I was wondering why..." The Doctor smiles crookedly.

"Why what?"

"Artron energy," the Doctor says. "You, er, tasted of it. Rather strongly."

"Yeah?" Jack says, voice lowering as he shifts closer. "So what does artron energy taste like?"

"Um, well," the Doctor equivocates, and licks his lip. His gaze flick between Jack's eyes and mouth. "Hard to describe, really. You'd need another two senses, and it's sort of tingly, not as much as electricity but--"

And that's when Jack gives in and kisses him again. Holds his arms, then slides one hand around his back, urging him closer. To his delighted surprise, the Doctor doesn't pull away, even though he's fully on his feet, even though this time it isn't taking advantage. The Doctor's lips move under his, a soft moan vibrating between them as Jack's tongue delves into his mouth.

When Jack dreamed of kissing the Doctor, he dreamed of a different man. He thought of someone slightly gruff, armored against Jack's advances despite his flirting tone and promised dances. He thought there would be walls he'd have to wear down. But this Doctor kisses sweetly, and his hands rest lightly on Jack's sides, barely touching but so very far from resisting. God, no resistance at all.

When the kiss ends, he rests his forehead against the Doctor's, heart beating fast. He hadn't expected this. He'd stopped expecting to get what he wants, stopped hoping.

"Jack," the Doctor breathes, sounding almost as turned-on as Jack is right now. "Is this a good idea?"

"No," Jack says. "But I don't care." He pulls back and meets his eyes, and feels a spike of lust at that dark-eyed daze.

"Your computer's beeping again," the Doctor says, reluctantly.

Jack releases him, tears his eyes away and looks at the screen. "Damn," he curses.

A phone rings, and the Doctor picks it up. "Torchwood," he says, smoothly, then grins. "Oh, is this UNIT? Wonderful! Is Bambera still there?" There's a long pause as he listens, and then hands the phone to Jack. "It's for you," he says, disappointed.

Jack takes the phone. "Harkness," he greets, then holds the phone away from his ear as the UNIT liaison loudly demands to know what Torchwood has done this time and how they're going to stop it. Jack would resent their blame more if it wasn't so accurately aimed.

While Jack is trying to smooth things over, another phone rings, and he waves the Doctor over to take it. This time it's the Ministry of Defence, and they're calling about UFOs over the Taj Mahal.

And then another phone rings.

The Doctor holds the receiver to his chest. "So this Torchwood operation," he says. "You said something about a team?"
Chapter 3

There's nothing like a good old-fashioned emergency to bring Jack's team into the spotlight. Jack just wishes that it was less of a glaring bright light of blame.

When Torchwood One fell, Jack moved in to pick up the pieces. This period of Earth history is rife with alien influence, and someone needs to be here to manage it, keep it from getting out of hand. Under Yvonne Hartman's reign, Torchwood grew too big too fast. It was so hungry for alien technology that it wasn't content to scavenge the leftovers of the universe but started attracting attention all of its own, shooting down alien ships and poking holes in the fabric of reality. When Jack rebuilt Torchwood, he deliberately made it a small operation so he could keep it firmly under his thumb.

It wasn't just something to do to pass the time. He rebuilt Torchwood in the Doctor's honor, in Rose's memory. He wanted to make something good rise from the ashes of Canary Wharf. Since landing ignominiously in 1869, Jack had been many things: a soldier, a con-man, a lover, a wanderer. What he hadn't been was a hero, and at last he found something that could allow him to feel the way he felt with the Doctor again. Like he was someone who was making a difference, making the universe a better place.

At least, that was what he was aiming for. His team being duped into opening the Rift is a perfect summation of how he's failed to hit the mark. He hand-picked every one of them, made sure they were the kind of people who needed a leader. He was never going to die, so it only made sense to become the immovable force at the center. Torchwood Three wasn't going to make the same mistakes as Torchwood One.

And then they went and did just that.

Jack's used to the military mindset, to people taking orders unquestioningly. He thinks in terms of lieutenants, foot soldiers, and himself always as a captain no matter what his rank happens to be. But his team is civilians, scientists, people with mixed loyalties and curiosity and not a lot of discipline. The closest to Jack's ideal subordinate is Ianto, the first one he chose, and even Ianto betrayed him over Lisa.

He wishes he knew how to make them understand. He wishes there was a way to force them to get in line without destroying the qualities that make them assets. He wishes he didn't always feel like he was failing at this.

Jack wanted the Doctor to be impressed by Torchwood, to be proud and pleased to have inspired it. From the frown on the Doctor's face, he doesn't think he's going to get that.

The Rift is fracturing all over the Earth, crazed lines spreading out from Cardiff. The past is bleeding through, bringing with it violence and fear and plague. It's all going horribly wrong.

"Oh look, it's the Beatles!" the Doctor says, suddenly smiling at the television. The picture shows the Beatles on the roof of Abbey Road studios, waving down at the crowd. "She's got a ticket to ride, but she don't care," he half-sings.

"Do you mind?" Owen says, sparing him a glare. "Some of us are trying to save the world here."

"Better the Beatles than more portents of doom," Gwen says.

Ianto politely declines to be offended.
"The Great Devourer," the Doctor muses. "Can't be that great if I haven't heard of him. You humans, always so eager for the end. If you don't find it you go looking for it."

"I did what I had to," Owen says, defensively.

"You opened the Rift without knowing what you were doing," Jack says, trying to not let his anger show and largely failing. "The rift is splintering because of you."

"If it wasn't for me, you two would still be in the 1940s," Owen replies, with equal fervour. "So are we gonna sit around singing Beatles songs or do something about it?"

"Of course we are," the Doctor says, all certainty.

"You know how to fix it?" Toshiko asks, hopeful.

The Doctor's confidence wilts. "Er, not as such," he says, and starts playing with a piece of alien tech. An ionic bobbler, which is appropriately enough a 34th century equivalent of a desk toy. "Not doing too well with the cosmic disasters lately," he mutters.

"The infamous Doctor," Owen says, tartly. "Some use he is."

"Hey," Jack says, rising to the Doctor's defense. "You want to help? Go out and bring those who've fallen through time back here. Put them into the vaults."

"And do what with them?"

"We'll deal with phase one first, then I'll tell you about phase two." Jack figures they'll have thought of something for phase two by then. Probably.

"You can't control time," Owen says, getting in his face. "You can't send them back! What are you gonna do?"

"We'll think of something!" Jack shouts, and regrets the outburst. Leave it to Owen to push him like this.

The Doctor hops to his feet. "He's got a point. Shouldn't be moping about."

Ianto's computer beeps before he can continue. "Priority one attendance requested at the hospital," Ianto says. "Mortality rate's gone through the roof. They're sealing off the area and designating it a hot zone."

Owen turns away from Jack and grabs his earpiece. "I'll go."

"That's more like it," the Doctor says.

"Tosh, go with him," Jack orders.

"Uh, no, thanks, I'm fine on my own," Owen says.

But Toshiko's already by his side. "And you'll be even better with me alongside," she says, ushering him out. "Shut up and come on."

The Doctor walks over to the Rift manipulator again, and looks like he wants to kick it. He was fiddling with it extensively before, lamenting the crude technology and the lack of both sonic screwdriver and TARDIS. As Jack's team had arrived, he'd barely waved at them, too engrossed for such trivial matters as other people. But to no avail: the manipulator isn't nearly advanced
enough to help, much less heal the damage done. The only outcome to using it again would be to rip the Rift wide open.

All things considered, they're taking the Doctor's presence in stride, but Jack attributes most of that to the far more urgent problems at hand. What's one somewhat notorious alien when the world is falling apart at the seams? Apart from curious glances and Owen's grumblings, the Doctor has failed to be a priority, and Jack thinks that's just as well.

"Did you have to pick on him in public like that?" Gwen asks, in a quiet but annoyed tone.

"All our actions have consequences," he replies.

"And all your staff have feelings, Jack, even Owen."

"Well, you would know," Jack says, and winces internally. He hopes the Doctor is too engrossed to eavesdrop, but with Jack's luck he doubts it. "Sorry," he says. He can hear the Doctor's disapproval in his head, the voice of his conscience suddenly so loud, even if the man himself is saying nothing at all.

"Tell him that," Gwen says, somewhat appeased.

To Jack's relief, it's then that her phone rings, putting an end to that particular uncomfortable conversation. While she's talking, the Doctor wanders back over, apparently abandoning the manipulator again for now.

"There has to be something else we can use," the Doctor says, frustrated but determined. "This place have an attic or a basement or something?"

"Better," Jack says, and it feels good to actually have something to offer. "I've got one heck of a vault. I'll give you full access to all the levels."

"Levels?" the Doctor says, eyebrows raised. "You have been busy."

"Jack, I need your help," Gwen says, hanging up her cell with a beep. "It looks like they've got a Roman soldier in custody down at the police station."

"We'd better go get him," Jack agrees. He pulls out his keyring and takes off a key, hands it to the Doctor. "Go down to level B5. It's bigger on the inside," he says with a wink.

The Doctor gives him a look, but Jack can tell he's amused. He gives Jack a little salute with the key and heads downstairs.

As Jack is leaving with Gwen, Ianto pulls him aside. "What do you think you're doing?" he asks, clearly upset.

"Trying to save the world?" Jack offers, not sure what this is about.

"The vault," Ianto says. "Full access. You know what's down there."

"Nothing he can't handle," Jack says.

"That's what I'm afraid of," Ianto says. "What if it's true? What if he destroyed Torchwood One?"

Jack has a niggle of doubt, but suppresses it. "He didn't."

"You weren't there," Ianto says, remembered horror in his eyes. "Everything was under control, and
then he came. He blew up 10 Downing Street, for god's sake."

"He didn't have a choice about that," Jack says, remembering how Rose told him the story. "He did it to save the world. He was in the building when it happened, almost died in the process. He's not going to blow up the hub."

"Fine," Ianto says, but it obviously isn't. "But he's trouble, Jack."

"There I agree with you," Jack says. "Look, keep an eye on things until I get back. This won't take long."

And indeed it doesn't. Jack has a short wrestling match with a Legionnaire, then Gwen helps haul him into the Jeep. They end up putting him in one of the cells in the second sublevel, since the first is already full of Weevils. He leaves Gwen to scan the soldier and goes down to B5.

The Doctor's been busy. There's a trail of opened boxes and abandoned gadgets, but none of them look useful for their situation. He's about to start opening a few himself when he hears the Doctor's voice, and it sounds upset. He hurries after it and finds the Doctor glaring at an empty space, cheeks flushed with anger. He whirls on Jack, eyes blazing.

"Did you see her?" he asks, urgently.

"See who?" Jack asks, confused.

The Doctor closes his eyes tight, and then the tension drains out of him with a sigh. "Rose," he says, sadly. "I saw Rose."

"She's here?" Jack says, looking around the room in surprise.

"She said she was trapped," the Doctor continues. "I was wrong. She wasn't far enough out. They were pulled in after me."

"Trapped in the Rift?"

The Doctor nods. "It can't be her. Don't you see, Jack, she's just a human. She couldn't survive what I did." He's distraught, and then in an instant turns cold with anger. "Someone's trying to manipulate me and I really don't like that."

The darkness in his voice puts a chill down Jack's spine. He'd seen the Doctor, his old Doctor, angry. He'd seen him furious. But it was nothing like this. He suddenly wonders if Ianto was right after all. This Doctor might actually be capable of destroying Torchwood One, if he had enough reason.

"Whoever it is wants you to open the Rift," Jack says, evenly. This has Bilis Manger all over it, but as far as he knows Bilis doesn't have the power to summon ghosts, real or false. They need more information, but first he needs the Doctor to calm down. "Did you find anything we can use?"

"No," the Doctor says, running his hand through his hair. "Just a lot of junk. Mostly weapons." The last word is an insult on his tongue. "What are you doing with all of this?"

"Most if it was from before I took over," Jack says. He never felt uncomfortable about sitting on top of an armory until now. He doesn't understand how the Doctor can do that, make him ashamed without even trying. Make him want to be someone better than he is, and not just a man of violence and harsh words. "Better in here than out there."
"Better destroyed," the Doctor says, and then his mood shifts again, and he's cheery. "How's your Roman soldier?"

Jack tries to keep up with his mercurial temperament. It's yet another change. "Asleep in his cell. Gwen's checking him over."

"I was in Rome recently," the Doctor says, heading out with a bounce. "Met a genie and Michelangelo taught me to sculpt."

Jack isn't even going to try to understand that.

When they reach the cell, Gwen is nowhere in sight. They go up to the main level, and find her at her computer, looking pale and flicking through the files from yesterday's adventure.

"It was him," she says, pointing at the screen. "Bilis Manger. I saw him."

"Here?" Jack says, immediately concerned.

"Downstairs. He said he was sorry," she says, worried herself. "And then just disappeared."

"Sorry for what?" the Doctor asks, peering at the screen.

"He didn't say," she says. "It was definitely him, Jack. Same clothes, everything."

"This guy gets around," Jack mutters.

"Coming through!" Ianto calls, enters the room with a thrashing, handcuffed Weevil.

"Another one?" Jack says.

"And more," Ianto says. He manhandles the Weevil downstairs.

"Thirteen more reports of Weevils on the loose," Gwen says, checking the logs. "We're going to run out of room."

"Everything's on the increase," Jack says. "They might be time-sensitive."

"Of course they are," the Doctor says, as if it's obvious. "You can't feel it? No, of course not."

"You can feel the Rift?" Gwen asks, surprised.

"Time disturbances," the Doctor corrects, and gives a theatrical shudder. "Ripples everywhere." He picks up a printout. "This Bilis Manger, he have a forwarding address?"


The Doctor smiles, and there's a shadow of a threat in it. "I think it's time we paid our Mister Manger a visit. Come on, Jack, you're driving."

Jack hurries after him, wondering why it feels so good to not be the one in the lead for a change.

The Doctor refuses to take an earpiece, and frankly is even uncomfortable that Jack is wearing one.
"They're useful," Jack protests.

"They're horrible," the Doctor says, firmly. "You lot'll do anything for an upgrade. Keep it up and you'll upgrade yourselves right out of existence."

Jack rolls his eyes. "It's just a phone."

"That's where it starts," the Doctor says, knowingly. "Just a phone. Then it's just an implant, just a download, until someone's overwriting your heads!"

"It keeps my hands free," Jack says, reasonably. "I'm not making you wear one."

"Humans," the Doctor mutters, and looks sulky.

"At least you've stopped calling us stupid apes," Jack replies.

"I decided you're not all that bad," the Doctor says, but doesn't elaborate.

Jack parks the jeep, and they walk to Manger's shop.

"I miss my coat," the Doctor says, plaintively. "Janis Joplin gave me that coat."

"The leather jacket?" Jack asks, though he doesn't see that going with the suit.

"Oh no," the Doctor says, with a hint of distaste, like he wouldn't dare wear that jacket anymore. "Lovely long tan number. Wonderful great pockets."

"Tell you what," Jack says. "After this is over, I'll buy you a new one."

"Wouldn't be the same," the Doctor says, but quirks a smile. "But thank you."

Jack smiles back. If they weren't about to confront a dangerous man, he'd be tempted to pull the Doctor into an alley for another long kiss. Hell, he's tempted anyway. If they all survive this, he plans on getting the Doctor somewhere private for as long as he can, because the way he melted in Jack's arms was far, far too good not to feel again.

"Timepieces repaired and refurbished," the Doctor reads aloud. "Nice sign."

Jack is on alert, ready for any sign of attack, but the Doctor blithely strides through the shop door and starts poking around like he owns the place.

"Tickety ticking," the Doctor says, tapping the face of one of the dozens of antique clocks. "And not one pair set to the same time. That takes effort, that kind of chaos."

"This stuff goes back centuries," Jack says, hands on his hips. "Scavenge from the past, sell to the present. Not a bad business plan."

"Bet you wish you'd thought of it in 1869," the Doctor says, squinting. "Wish I had my glasses."

"You wear glasses now?" Jack asks, surprised. But before the Doctor can reply they hear footsteps approaching.

"Hello again," Bilis says, walking down the spiral staircase in the corner. "And you've brought a friend." He holds out his hand to the Doctor. "I don't believe we've met."

The Doctor gives him a piercing look, holding it for what seems like too long before snapping into
a smile and shaking his hand. "John Smith," he says, cheerily. "Nice to meet you."

Bilis tilts his head, curious. "The pleasure is mine," he says.

"Quite a place you've got here," the Doctor says, looking around. "Quite a collection."

"Thank you," Bilis says, and Jack swears he sees a hint of wariness in his eyes. "Any of particular interest? Perhaps you'd like to make a purchase."

"Hmm," the Doctor says, considering. "Eh, I don't think so. Never had much need of clocks, myself. When's this from? 1893?" He peers at a golden shelf clock.

"1894," Bilis says.

"Ah, right. Crystal regulator, I'd wager. And a jewelled escapement, in mint condition, very rare."

Bilis' eyes narrow. "You have a very good eye for one who has so little need of clocks."

"Oh, you know me," the Doctor says, casually, and turns to him. "Like to keep my hand in, a bit of everything. For example, I've never met you, but I can tell quite a lot just by looking at you. Someone's been tampering with your temporal adhesion." He taps Bilis on the chest as he had the clocks. "Definitely not mint condition."

Bilis takes a step back. "Who are you?" he asks, half-demanding and definitely unsettled.

"Not important," the Doctor says. "But who you are, that's much more interesting. Fellow like you, bet you can barely stay put in any one place for too long. Slipping around, can't get your footing, I bet you'd grab onto anything if you thought it'd keep you still." He steps forward, closing the space between them.

"You know nothing," Bilis says, affronted.

"I know plenty," the Doctor replies, evenly. "Some people say I know everything, but the truth is even after all these years, I've barely scratched the surface. And that's what makes it exciting, don't you think? All those new things to discover. An almost endless universe, and all those trillions and trillions of years. Every time I turn a corner there's something new."

Bilis stares openly at him now, almost entranced. "It's a curse," he says, faintly. "I can see the whole of history, but I don't belong anywhere within it."

"Smart fellow like you, I bet you found somewhere to belong. Someone to belong to. Someone with power. They'd have to be really powerful to fix you, make you stick."

Bilis takes another step back, but the Doctor grabs his arm. Jack has barely dared to breathe during the exchange, but he prepares to lunge forward, to grab Bilis.

"What have you done?" Bilis gasps, staring at the Doctor in shock.

"Tell me who your master is," the Doctor says, sternly. "Why are you trying to open the Rift?"

"How is this possible?" Bilis says, looks down at the Doctor's hand. "No one can stop it, how have you done this?"

"Tell me," the Doctor demands.

"He is trapped in the darkness," Bilis says, distantly. "Cast out before time, chained in rock..."
"Before time?" the Doctor says, eyes wide. "What do you mean, before time? Tell me!"

"No!" Bilis cries, and wrenches himself from the Doctor's grasp. In that instant he vanishes, and the Doctor grabs angrily at the empty air.

"Gone," Jack says, reeling somewhat himself. Automatically he turns on his comm, speaks to Ianto. "Bilis escaped. Trace the temporal activity around this location." He turns to the Doctor. "What just happened?"

"Before time," the Doctor repeats. "The disciples of light. Chained to the pit for eternity in the darkness. Before light and time and space and matter. Before the cataclysm. Jack, we need to get back to the hub."

And just like that he's out the door, running. Jack snaps his jaw shut and hurries after.
"In the scriptures of the Falltino," the Doctor says, dramatically, "there is a planet called Krop Tor. The bitter pill. A mighty demon was tricked into devouring the planet, only to spit it out because it was poison."

"And this is relevant how?" Owen says, arms crossed. "The whole world is going to shit and you're telling horror stories."

"Who are the Falltino?" Toshiko asks.

"The thing is," the Doctor says, starting to pace. "The thing is, Jack, even if the story isn't real, it has power. Ideas have power. Humanity is panicking because of the idea of the end of the world, and enough panic and the idea will make it end."


"And prophecies are a favourite of this one," the Doctor continues. "Some may call him Abaddon."

"Abbadon," Ianto echoes. "It really is him?"

"Some may call him Krop Tor," the Doctor continues. "Some may call him Satan, Lucifer, the Bringer of Despair, the Deathless Prince, the Bringer of Night--"

"Stop, stop," Jack says, holding up his hands. "Who are we dealing with here?"

"The Beast, Jack," the Doctor says, eyes wide and sharp. "That's what I was up against. If I fell through, he did too. And our friend Bilis wants to wake him up."

"Jack!" Gwen calls from the entrance, her voice breaking the tension. "Jack, help me!"

Jack hurries to her, and finds she is dragging in an unconscious Rhys. "What happened?"

"I zapped him," Gwen says, distraught. "I had to. He's going to die, Jack. We have to protect him."

"Okay, okay," Jack says, appeasing her. He picks up Rhys with a grunt and slings him over his shoulder. "We'll keep him here."

"No, in the cells," Gwen insists. "It's for his own good. I saw the future. Bilis showed me. It was my apartment, exactly the same, the smells, everything."

"Bilis was here?" the Doctor says, catching her attention.

"Rhys was dead," Gwen says, on the verge of tears. "His blood... It was a warning, to keep him safe."

Jack has serious doubts about that, but what's done is done, and he can't have Rhys loose in the hub. "Okay, we'll lock him up until this is over." He carries Rhys down until they find an empty cell, and leaves Gwen to watch over him. They'll probably have to Retcon him later.

When he gets back, the Doctor and Tosh have their heads together over a computer screen. He goes over and peers over their shoulders, and sees a map of South Wales. "Tell me you have something," he says.
"We have something," Toshiko says, excited. "Look at this border," she says, pointing. "South Wales used to have an intensive coal industry. This whole area was filled with mines, much more so than the surrounding areas."

"What about it?" Jack asks.

"The Rift, Jack," the Doctor says, almost vibrating with excitement. "Don't you see? It's been here a long time, a lot longer than Cardiff. It was open all that time, millions, billions of years into Earth's past, and things keep on falling through. This end of the Rift is anchored right over here, right over the city."

"And if something big fell through," Toshiko adds, picking up the thread, "it wouldn't be taken or washed away. Big enough, and even glaciers wouldn't budge it."

"Krop Tor," the Doctor says, eyes alight. "Right into the black hole, took me along for the ride until the pressures shattered it. Bam, crack, chunks falling everywhere, and then whoosh! The Rift sucks everything through."

"You went through a black hole?" Toshiko gapes.

"One after another those chunks burst through the Rift, slam into the Earth, right into those continental plates. If they'd landed in the ocean, the Beast would have been freed when the chunks were subducted, but up here they were kept safe. Then the ice rolls back and all you humans start setting up camp, and then there's a town and then a city and we're on top of it, Jack, we're on top of Krop Tor!"

It's Jack's turn to gape. "That's where the coal is from," he says, stunned.

"Exactly!" the Doctor says, delighted. "And you know what else is down there? The TARDIS!" His grin is so wide it almost runs out of face.

Jack's happy for him, but he immediately sees a problem. "Buried under how many tons of rock? How do we find it? We don't have time."

"Not a problem," the Doctor insists. He reaches over and pulls out the Doctor detector, which is already wiggling madly. "We can use this! Just needs a bit of tweaking."

"And this tardis thing," Owen says. "We can use it to close the Rift?"

The Doctor's smile falters a fraction. "Well, not exactly. But I'm sure that once I have her back--"

"It's been down there for millions of years," Owen points out. "Maybe billions. Whatever it was, it's gone. A fossil."

The Doctor's not smiling anymore. "Possibly, but--"

"That's just great," Owen interrupts, his frustration bubbling over into anger. He turns to Jack. "Just great. The world's fucking ending and you're too busy chasing after your pet alien to care. Too busy digging up junk."

"Owen," Jack warns.

"Don't you dare," Owen spits. "Don't you dare, when the hospitals are full of fucking plague. We're helpless. All we're doing here is putting sticking plasters on gaping wounds!"
"What do you suggest?" Jack asks, tersely.

Owen holds out the blueprints for the Rift manipulator. "I suggest you lead us and you tell us what the instructions are."

"Forget it," Jack says.

"You're the big man here," Owen continues. "You keep all the secrets. Well, now's the time to tell us a few and tell us how the hell we're gonna get out of this!"

Jack's temper flares. "You want to know a secret? Right now there is no solution. I can't fix this. Because this was never meant to happen. The first thing you learned when you joined Torchwood was 'don't mess with the Rift.' But you disobeyed those orders and now everything that's happening is down to you."

"I only disobeyed instructions to get you back."

"And now people are dying."

"What? So I shouldn't have bothered?" Owen fumes. "Who the fuck are you, anyway? Jack Harkness? You don't even exist. We've looked. So if you're not even a real person, then why should I follow your orders?"

Jack's had enough of this. There's too much going on for him to indulge Owen's mood. "Get out," he orders. "Right now. I'm relieving you of your duty."

"Bollocks, you are!"

"You're done here," Jack says, coldly. "If I can't rely on you, if I don't have your complete trust, you don't belong here. That goes for the rest of you. Anyone who agrees with Owen, leave now."

Nobody so much as twitches.

"So now we know how it is," Owen says, stung. "So that leaves me 24 hours to savour the good times. Sometime in the next 24 hours I get retconned. All my memories erased."

"Jack," Ianto says, "Please, this has gone far enough."

Jack stares at him, and Ianto quietly backs down.

"So I guess this is goodbye," Owen says. He takes out his gun and sets it on a table. "Good luck with the end of the world." And with that, he storms out.

Jack can feel the Doctor watching him. No anger there, no reproach, but a quiet air of disappointment. That hurts worst of all.

With Toshiko's help, the Doctor works to figure out the most likely area where the TARDIS could be, based on what he knew of Krop Tor before it shattered and the geography of South Wales. Ianto supplies them with maps of the old mines and pulls a supply of spelunking gear from somewhere in the vaults. While the rest of them are preparing, Jack tests out the equipment, making sure nothing is faulty. The last thing they need is an accident down there.

He let Owen get to him. He's lost count of the number of times that's happened, but this was a big one. He knows he went too far, kicking him out when they need every pair of hands they have, but
it's too late to take it back. Besides, if he and the Doctor can't find an answer, they're all pretty much screwed. It won't make a difference if Owen is holding down the fort or drowning his sorrows.

Orders. Instructions. If Owen had ever learned the difference, they wouldn't be in this mess. And how dare they try to dig up his past, like Jack is a criminal and not their commanding officer. After all this time they still don't trust him.

He's not the one who opened the Rift. He's not the one who can't follow orders. He's not the one always sneaking away whatever alien tech catches his eye so he can kill people and bring back the dead or read people's minds or try to rebuild a cyberwoman in the basement. Even Gwen is falling apart, dragging her unconscious boyfriend into the hub and rambling about some vision. If the Doctor wasn't here, Jack would be facing everything on his own, the way it always goes down in the end. If his team doesn't trust him, he's damn well not going to trust them.

If they survive this, when they do, Jack's going to give Owen so much Retcon he's barely going to remember how to tie his shoes. And the rest of them, if any of them step out of line. He's started over so many times it'd be easy to do it again, a hell of a lot easier than the way things are now.

When his temper has cooled, Jack collects the gear and brings it upstairs.

"Any luck?" he asks.

The Doctor is bent over the Doctor detector, fiddling with the electronics. "Just about," he says. "Mind if I borrow your spare key?"

"How do you know I still have it?" Jack replies, still prickly.

The Doctor raises his head, and gives Jack a steady look. "If it helps, I'll say please."

Jack snorts, then relents. He slips his TARDIS key off the heavy ring, and hands it over. The Doctor drops it into the tank with the hand, then snaps the lid tight and presses a few buttons. "That should do the trick. One TARDIS detector, at your service."

"What's the range?"

"I've put in a booster, adapted in a few bits and bobs from downstairs. It shouldn't be any deeper than twenty kilometers, and I'm guessing less than half that, maybe a quarter if we're lucky."

"The problem is, the deepest mine in England was only 1400 meters," Ianto says. "There's almost no chance they go deep enough, and even if they did, the TARDIS isn't likely to be in a dug shaft. If it was, someone would have hauled it out by now."

"Let's hope not," Jack says. "So how do we get to it?"

Ianto places two blasters on the table. "These disintegrators. They'll clear a path, and should fuse the walls enough to keep them from caving in."

"Not bad," Jack says, taking one and examining it. "We'll need air."

"Already covered." Ianto holds out four small objects that look like noseplugs. "Oxygen generators. And masks to keep out the dirt and coal dust."

"Useful fellow you have here," the Doctor muses.
"Thank you, sir," Ianto says, with a private smile.

"Let's get going," Jack says. "The sooner we find the TARDIS, the sooner we can stop all this." He turns to Ianto. "We should be back by the end of the day, tomorrow morning at the latest. In the meantime, help where you can."

"I'm not sure there's much we can do at this point," Ianto says, soberly.

"Then wait for me," Jack says, meeting his eyes. "I'll stop this, one way or another."

"I hope you can, sir," Ianto says. The doubt in his eyes disturbs Jack, but he lets it go. It's too late in the game for pep talks.

They drive north, towards the edge of what used to be Glamorgan county. Jack still tends to stick to the old placenames, at least in his head. Even though he never picked up the accent, he sometimes considers himself more Welsh than Welshman, for all the time he's spent here. He bounced around the globe, but the Rift kept drawing him back down through the years. He couldn't stay away, not when the Doctor could arrive at any moment. He was waiting for him. For this.

The Doctor sits next to him now, looking at that hand in its jar, at the scenery, waiting himself for a sign. Jack's had that hand for two years now, and spent so many nights staring at it that he knows it better than his own. Glancing at the Doctor's hands now, it's so clearly a match.

"I never knew Time Lords could grow back body parts," Jack says, breaking the quiet.

"We don't," the Doctor says, absently. "Well, unless it's within the first fifteen hours of a regeneration cycle."

"How'd it happen? I heard something about a swordfight?"

The Doctor smiles. "A challenge. For the planet. I won, obviously."

"Obviously."

"That Sycorax got in a lucky hit. But I was lucky, too." He flexes his right hand. "What's Retcon?" he asks, suddenly.

Jack wasn't expecting that, but it was bound to come up eventually. "It's a drug. Compound B67. It erases memories."

"Use it often, do you?" the Doctor asks, lightly, but it's a deceptive lightness. Jack's learning how this new man works. The mercurial moods, the sudden smiles and the sharp looks.

"When we have to," Jack replies, evenly. "For their own protection."

"Even your friends?"

"They're not my friends," Jack says. "And Owen's not even on the team. I can't have him walking around with that kind of information in his head."

The Doctor looks at him. "You've changed."

Jack isn't sure whether the best response to that would be to laugh or cry. "Of course I've changed," he says, more loudly than intended. "I spent over a century waiting here. Do you know how many
"times I've died? First time I realized was in 1892. Got in a fight on Ellis Island. Man shot me through the heart, then I woke up. Thought it was kind of strange, but then it never stopped: fell off a cliff, trampled by horses, World War I, World War II, poison, starvation, a stray javelin. And you think I'd be the same man you abandoned?"

The Doctor looks out at the landscape, mouth drawn in a thin line. "When I met you, all you wanted was revenge because the Time Agency took two years of your life. Your memories, Jack."

"Two years is nothing," Jack says, coldly. "I don't need to guess at the kind of man I am anymore."

"Apparently not," the Doctor says, and there's pity in his voice.

"Let's just get this done," Jack says, restraining his anger. "We'll get your damned ship out, fix the Rift, and then you can skip off to the future again."

"Jack..."

"Leave it," Jack says, harshly, and for once the Doctor obeys.

As they near the old Bargoed mine in Caerphilly, the detector starts beeping slowly. "This is it," the Doctor says, straightening up. "She's down there."

Jack parks the car near the entrance to the shaft. They unload the gear and put on their coveralls and harnesses. Jack's anger has cooled by the time he helps the Doctor with his buckles and straps. Even at his angriest he couldn't bear to be responsible for the Doctor being hurt or killed because he was sloppy.

"Jack," the Doctor says, and rests a hand on his arm.

Jack stills, but doesn't meet his eyes. "What?" he asks, gruffly.

"I'm sorry."

Jack looks up, and there's a genuine apology on the Doctor's face. He looks down again, tightens a strap. "All set," he says, and reaches for his own harness.

"Let me help," the Doctor insists.

Jack raises his hands in surrender, and allows it. The Doctor is quiet as he tightens and secures and double-checks.

"I'm not the one who's running short on lives," Jack points out.

"Last I checked, dying hurts," the Doctor says.

Jack doesn't reply to that, but the gesture means something. It's a kindness, and Jack's had far too few of those in his life. He lets go of his anger. He needs to concentrate on the job at hand, anyway.

They put on the rest: helmets, lights, ropes and tools. Oxygen generators and disintegrators. They walk to the entrance and shine lights into the darkness.

"The pit is open," the Doctor says, softly.

"Doctor?"
The Doctor shakes his head. "Just remembering. That mad little voice. An act of faith." He takes a deep breath, lets it out. "Time to let go," he says, and steps forward into shadow.
It's a long way down.

By the time they reach the bottom of the shaft, their masks and clothes are black with coal dust, stirred by footsteps and loose rocks. Jack's deeply grateful that he doesn't have to breathe the air, and thinks of the men he knew decades ago, miners with black lung. He saw one cut open once, and his lungs looked like lumps of coal in his chest. Jack's glad he never died that way.

From here, the mine slopes down in a long curve, following the grain of the coal seam. The detector beeps quietly away, slightly faster than it did up above. They're playing hot and cold with the TARDIS, but once they reach the end of this mine the easy part ends fast.

The Doctor has been taking the lead, but when they come to a bend he stops, rests his hand against the wall. "We need to go down," he says, thoughtful. "If we keep walking we'll just get further away."

"Down it is," Jack says. "What do you think we'll be dealing with?"

"There should be tunnels, caves," the Doctor says. "This whole place is one vast network. Krop Tor shattered the plate, threw up boulders, and it never quite settled. Probably made the area vulnerable to earthquakes."

"Earthquakes. Great."

"We'll be all right," the Doctor says.

Jack wishes he had his confidence. "Stand back. Let's see what the range is down here." He raises his disintegrator and aims carefully, then fires. The solid rock melts away like ice in a sauna, and leaves behind a bumpy, slippery space about 10 feet deep and just tall enough for them to stand.

"Impressive," the Doctor says. He takes a tentative step, and his boot slides forward. He catches himself against the wall. "Watch your step," he warns.

"Wanna go next?" Jack asks, feeling a thrill of excitement.

"Oh yeah," the Doctor grins, and fires.

They melt their way through the rock at as sharp an angle they can risk. Any sharper of an incline and they'd end up sliding their way to the bottom. Eventually they break through to the first natural tunnel, and it's down to hands and knees for a crawl as the Doctor follows the detector again. It gives Jack a very nice view of his ass, framed by the harness.

Apparently his staring is noticed.

"Jack," the Doctor warns.

"Yes?" Jack replies, innocently.

The Doctor looks back over his shoulder. "Oh, never mind," he says, and shakes his head.

Jack smirks, and they continue on.

They try not to melt their way through too much rock. If the area is unstable, there's no way to
know what's load-bearing and what isn't. So they stick mostly to the natural path, only using the disintegrators when they're being led too far off-course or the way is blocked. It's slow going, but they make steady progress.

They reach a small cavern, and they stop to catch their breath, have water and a snack. They don't need their masks down here, so they put them away. The Doctor checks the detector. "Three miles down," he says. "I think we're about halfway."

Jack shines his light around, and it glints off drips of water, colonies of crystal. "Look at that," he says, softly.

The Doctor raises his head, and brings his light up to join Jack's. In the reflected glow, Jack can see the wonder in his eyes, the openness of his expression.

"You've changed, too," he says.

The Doctor raises an eyebrow. "I'd have thought that was obvious."

"Is it always like this?"

"I don't usually have this much fashion sense," the Doctor replies.

Jack thinks of the old photos he's seen, and can't disagree. "You're just so... different."

"Bad different?" the Doctor asks, and there's a wary look to him. Vulnerable, the way Jack has rarely seen him, in either body.


Jack sees a ghost of a smile, and then the Doctor is peering out at the cavern, changing the topic. "Calcium crystals, I'd wager. It took thousands of years for these to build up, maybe millions."

"Worth the wait," Jack says, but it's not the crystals he's looking at.

They continue on. It's warmer down here, deep inside the Earth. The Doctor's new body proves adept at squeezing through small spaces, clambering over rocks. There's a sort of lanky grace to him, and Jack can easily picture him dancing. Both kinds of dancing. There's not much to distract him from his imagination in this darkness, and he's only too happy to let his mind wander.

Maybe too much. He snaps back to himself as he hears the crack and groan of splitting rock, and then hears the Doctor's panicked gasp as the rock above them starts to give way. Jack acts before he can even process the thought of it, roughly pushing the Doctor forward and sending him tumbling. Heavy, sharp weights smash down.

Pain. Darkness. And then the rush back to life with a gasp.

He finds himself pulled from the rubble, his head resting in the Doctor's lap, and the Doctor's pale, stricken face looking down at him. His eyes are huge in the dim light.

Jack coughs, wipes his face. That was a doozy. "You okay?" he asks.

"Shouldn't I be asking you that?" the Doctor replies, and there's a tremor in his voice. He looks away, swallows. "I'm fine. Just bruised."

Jack pushes himself up, leans back against the wall. Looks back at the pile of rocks the Doctor must have pulled him out of. There's blood there, lots of it, shining black in the darkness. Blood on
the Doctor's clothes. Jack winces at the thought of how his body must have looked for those long minutes until the universe snapped him back into wholeness. No wonder the Doctor's shaken up.

"Sorry you had to see that," Jack says, apologetic.

"You shouldn't have done it," the Doctor says, tense.

"Saved your life?"

The Doctor just looks at him. There's anger there, anger that Jack sacrificed himself for him, even though death is just a brief inconvenience for Jack and not a life-changing event. "Just don't," he says, sharply.

"Why the hell not?"

"You have to ask?" the Doctor says, incredulous.

"Yeah," Jack says, and he's not taking no for an answer.

"It was bad enough--" the Doctor says, and cuts himself off. Looks away.

Jack frowns. "Bad enough what?" And then he realizes. "Bad enough the first time?"

"Yes," the Doctor says, quiet and pained.

Jack had never thought about it, but of course, the comm system. The Doctor heard him die. Death by Dalek, the kind of death no one comes back from, even Time Lords. Especially Time Lords.

No one except Jack, but the Doctor wouldn't have known that yet.

"I couldn't go back," the Doctor says, staring into the darkness.

"What did you tell her?" Jack asks, not needing to say her name.

"That you were rebuilding the Earth," the Doctor says, with a laugh that makes Jack's heart ache. "I'd just regenerated. It was the first thing I thought of."

"You couldn't tell her the truth?" Jack asks, and can't hide the hurt in it.

"I felt it when she brought you back," the Doctor says, hollow with honesty. "It made me sick. I couldn't tell her that."

"She didn't. I'm still me. She didn't change who I am."

The Doctor has no reply to that. Jack moves forward, closer, reaches out. "I'm still me," he repeats, cupping the Doctor's cheek. Turning his head to face him. Guilt and pain and sorrow, that's all Jack sees there, and he can't bear that to be the Doctor's burden. He leans in, slowly, and kisses him, the way he kissed him on the gamestation, but so much is different.

When he draws back, the Doctor's eyes are red, like he's about to cry. Jack sighs.

"You leave, Jack," the Doctor says, a break in his voice. "All of you, one way or another. I blink and you're gone."

"Doctor," Jack says, sadly.
"Please," the Doctor says. "It's hard enough without complicating things."

"So that's it, then?" Jack says, looking him in the eye even if the Doctor won't do the same. "You don't want to get hurt, so you run away?"

"It's worked so far," the Doctor says, wry and sad.

"Not from where I'm sitting," Jack says, firm but not unkind. "You deserve more than this."

"You don't know what I deserve," the Doctor says, with a flash of pain that takes Jack's breath away. This is about more than the short lives of humans, about abandonment on both sides. Jack thinks of the Daleks, the Doctor saying he lost. He feels like an idiot for not putting the pieces together sooner. Jack's been in enough wars to know the signs, had been even before he met the Doctor. He wonders how much Rose is aware of, if she sees past the surface bravado. She's so young, was so young. Jack puts flowers on the sidewalk of Canary Wharf in remembrance of her. The Doctor doesn't know it yet, but eventually the War will take her, too. And what will that do to him? He's already hurting so deeply. Jack can't leave him alone with that.

"I'm here now," he says, gently. "And if anyone's gonna stick around, it's me."

The Doctor gives him a look.

"I mean it," Jack says. "As long as you want me."

"You have a life here," the Doctor says.

"You have a time machine," Jack points out.

"In a few miles," the Doctor says, but the pain in his eyes has lessened. Pushed back again. Something that big is never gone for good, but he can't let it be everything. Jack understands that, too. There has to be something good. Happiness. Love. Or the pain will eat him away until there's nothing left.

"Then let's go find her," Jack says, giving him a smile. "I feel like saving the world. How about you?"

That coaxes a smile back to the Doctor's face as well. "Brilliant."

He's leaving. Jack's leaving. God, it feels good. Even if he comes back, returns to all the mess that Torchwood has become, he hasn't felt such relief since the Doctor pulled him off that Chula ship. It's probably not the wisest move given the fact that he knows about the Doctor and Rose's future, but he doesn't care about that right now. It's as if Earth's gravity is already releasing him.

Jack's mood is rubbing off on the Doctor, too. The closer they get, the faster the detector beeps, the more he perks up.

"We can't be more than a few hundred feet," the Doctor says excitedly. The detector is almost a constant beep now. "She's right below us!"

"Let's take a shortcut," Jack says. He points his disintegrator at the ground and watches the rock melt away. But instead of a tunnel, they end up with a hole, and below them a vast cavern. Jack holsters his gun and shines a light down into the darkness.
"Can you see her?" the Doctor asks, almost climbing over him to look himself. "How far is it?"
"We can use the rope," Jack says, and starts checking for the best anchor point. "Give me a hand."
Together they set up an abseil. Jack insists on going first, just in case. The Doctor is almost vibrating with impatience, but reluctantly agrees.

Jack slowly eases his way down. The cavern is enormous, so big his light barely reaches the walls. He thinks he can see some kind of carving, but it could just be a trick of the light.

When he reaches the ground, he clips off and calls up to the Doctor. "Your turn!"
"Coming down," the Doctor calls back, and gives an excited laugh as he shoots down the rope, too eager for caution. Jack grimaces, but the Doctor lands sprightly on his feet, immediately looking around, checking the detector. "This way!" he cries, and takes off, leaving Jack to chase after him.

Jack catches up to him at the foot of a pile of rubble. "Under there?" Jack asks, but the Doctor is already dropping everything and tossing aside rock after rock. Jack helps him, and after a few minutes the Doctor gives a whoop of delight.

"There she is!" the Doctor cries, delighted. "Big and blue."

It's just a patch of blue, but it's enough. They redouble their efforts, and soon there's a whole side of her revealed. And best of all, a dim light glows in her windows. She's still alive.

"Jack Jack Jack," the Doctor cries, overwhelmed with happiness. He pulls him into a great hug, so tight Jack can barely breathe. When he pulls back, he's wearing a huge grin, and his eyes are shining, and then he pulls Jack back in and kisses him.

It's Jack's turn now to be surprised, but the shock wears off in an instant. He wraps his arms around the Doctor and kisses him back for all he's worth, and this time there's no interruptions, no distractions, and Jack is damned if he doesn't seize this moment.

They don't stop. Jack takes the lead, but the Doctor is no blushing bride. Their conversation earlier must have released something in him, because he's devouring Jack like he's been starved of kisses for centuries. And it's entirely possible that he has. Jack's more than happy to oblige, and his hands wander up and down the Doctor's body, feeling the slim strength of him, the tension coiled within.

They don't need the harnesses anymore. Jack doesn't have to look to undo the buckles and straps, doesn't have to stop the Doctor's hungry kisses or needy touch. Their harnesses thump against the TARDIS, one after the other, and Jack's fingers reach for the buttons of the Doctor's overalls. Maybe it's too fast, but Jack's been waiting for this for lifetimes, and the Doctor isn't protesting one bit. He just needs to touch him with nothing in the way.

His hand slips inside, and there's that suit, just begging to be ripped off. Jack restrains himself, barely, and only pops open a few buttons, enough so that he can slip his hand underneath the remaining layers, rest his palm against the Doctor's chest, feel his heartbeat. He's been waiting for this for so long that every touch feels magnified a hundred times. The Doctor moans, and Jack feels it on his lips, his fingers, everywhere.

It's still not enough. The Doctor clings to him, but Jack eases him down, first to his knees, then his back. He lays the Doctor onto the TARDIS and covers him, pushing aside shirt and suit and overalls, slipping both hands around to feel his bare back. He wants to feast on the Doctor's body, taste every inch of him, but he can't stop kissing him and doesn't want to and god, he prays there's going to be more of this because he can't imagine having the Doctor so intimately and then not.
Doesn't want to imagine it.

Jack's already achingly hard, and pressed against the Doctor he can feel that he is, too, or at least getting there. Jack decides to help things along, and thumbs open his trousers, his zipper. And before he can stop to think, before the impulse has a chance to fade, Jack slides his hand inside, finds no underwear in the way, and grips the Doctor's cock.

Oh. Yes.

The Doctor's almost-frantic kisses slow, stop, replaced by a delicious gasp and moan. The only word for it is surrender, and Jack's more than happy to conquer him. He starts a steady, confident stroke that sets the Doctor writhing beneath him, hard in his hand and soft everywhere else and making such sweet little noises. Jack's had sex with plenty of species, but he's never had a Time Lord until now, and he relishes all the new things, the honey-salt of his skin, the shape of his cock, the double-pulse. There's ridges on the underside, and when he strokes them it makes the Doctor shiver.

"You like that," he murmurs, between kisses. "Feels good?"

"Jack," the Doctor murmurs, breathlessly. "Don't stop."

"Not going to," Jack says, secretly thrilled, maybe not so secretly. He leans in and kisses the Doctor's neck, nuzzles and tastes him, and this is better than his dreams, so much better and real and actually happening right now. He moves back up to kiss his mouth again, and the Doctor's hands grip at his coveralls, kneading the fabric but not wandering further, not reaching for any buttons. But that's okay, that's fine. It just makes it easier for Jack to concentrate on giving him pleasure.

In all this vast space, Jack's senses are narrowed to their bodies and nothing else. He briefly leaves the Doctor's cock to feel his balls, and finds the hair there soft, light; another difference. He grips them in his hand and massages, and oh yes, that reaction is the same, the Doctor's eyes rolling and a deep groan of pleasure. The Doctor's thighs part for him, so welcoming, and Jack lets his fingers press behind his balls, firm but exploring, and that makes the Doctor's hips rock forward in a way that makes Jack groan with want. It'd be beautiful to fuck him, but this isn't the best place for it, and Jack isn't so greedy that he'll push this too far. He doesn't know the Doctor's limits yet.

He concentrates on what he knows the Doctor wants, on his cock straining in Jack's grip. On kissing those bruised lips that he can't get enough of. He tries to pace it out, but he can't help himself. He needs more of those exquisite moans, needs to feel the Doctor squirm and buck against him, and all too soon the Doctor's breathing quickens and he quivers with arousal and a few more strokes and he comes with a sweet, soft cry, and again and again and again. When his hips finally slow to a stop, Jack pulls back to see his face, and he wishes he could freeze the moment forever. The Doctor in the afterglow, that manic energy spent, his face flushed and his expression of pure lust. He's beautifully devastated, and then the picture is broken by a smile that fills Jack's heart.

His hand is wet with the Doctor's come. He lets go of his cock, still hard but starting to soften, and Jack's own is so hard he has to do something about it. He undoes his overalls, his trousers, and pushes his hand inside to stroke himself. Just the sight of the Doctor is enough, the slickness of the come on his fingers. He won't need long. But the Doctor surprises him again, reaches down and touches his arm, stilling him.

"Let me," the Doctor says, and Jack almost comes right then. Almost.

Jack bites his lip and releases his cock, and the Doctor's long fingers slip in and wrap around and
start a slow, steady stroke. There's a little frown of concentration on the Doctor's face, but plenty of desire and what could only be love. It's Jack's turn to be conquered now, and so easily. He crouches over the Doctor and tries to hold himself together. He wants this to last. He's terrified of letting the moment end, of something happening, of losing the Doctor again. It hurts so much, the thought of that, like an iron spike in his chest.

The Doctor hushes him, cups his face with his free hand. "It's all right," he says, with all the confidence in the universe. "Stay with me, Jack."

"I'm staying," Jack says, blinking back tears he didn't even realize were there. "You're not getting rid of me again."

The Doctor smiles. "Can't get rid of you, Jack. You're a fact."

Jack laughs, and it's almost a sob, and he looks into the Doctor's eyes and sees so much there, and the Doctor's touch isn't the most practiced in the universe but that just makes it better, and Jack screws his eyes shut as orgasm wrenches through him.

He collapses against the Doctor, pushes himself to the side as not to crush him, and lies there, panting, reeling. He wonders if this really is the end of the world.

The Doctor pulls his hand free, and it's wet with Jack's come. He brings his hand to his face and sniffs it, licks a finger clean, and Jack curses as a bolt of lust runs through him. Fuck.

"Interesting texture," the Doctor says, considering.

"Oh god," Jack groans. "You're gonna kill me."

"Sorry?" the Doctor says, confused.

"Don't be," Jack says, suddenly serious. "Don't ever be."

The Doctor smiles. "I'm not."

"Good," Jack says, firmly.

They lie there for a few minutes, limbs tangled, recovering. Eventually the Doctor pushes himself up, wipes his hand clean and buttons his clothes. "Come on, work to do," he says, far too energetically.

Jack really wishes they could climb into bed and stay there for, say, two or three days, but the Doctor is right. They have a TARDIS to dig out, a world to save. He clambers to his feet, but can't resist giving the Doctor one more passionate kiss.

"For good luck," he says, and sets to work.
Once they clear away all the rubble, they find the TARDIS is lying on her front. Between the two of them, ropes, and gradually larger piles of rock, they manage to get her upright. She wobbles precariously, then settles into place. Jack collapses to the ground, exhausted, but the Doctor is already sliding his key into the lock. It clicks, and he disappears inside. Jack picks himself up and follows him in. No rest for the weary.

It's not quite the same as the last time Jack was here, but for that he can blame countless years of burial. There's no dust, but the air feels old, stale. There's a dim light where the console used to shine brightly.

The Doctor walks around the console, touching it, stroking it. That hasn't changed, and probably never will. "She's hibernating."

"Can you wake her up?" Jack asks, joining him.

"Yes," the Doctor says, and eases a dial to the right. In an instant, the air turns fresh, the lights come up. "Just the basics. She'll need a few hours before she's good for a trip, even just back to Torchwood."

"Not too bad," Jack says. He slides his arm around the Doctor's waist. "I think we can find a way to pass the time."

The Doctor chuckles, then frowns as a plaintive whine comes from the TARDIS.

"Jealous ship?" Jack asks, releasing him.

"No," the Doctor says. He strokes the console, presses a few buttons. "Easy, girl. I'm afraid you're upsetting her."

"Me? What'd I do?"

"It's not what you did, it's what you are," the Doctor explains. "You're sort of... impossible. She doesn't like that."

"Um, sorry?" Jack ventures.

There's another whine. The Doctor turns to him, apologetic. "Could you wait outside for a few minutes? I just need to calm her down."

"Okay," Jack says, trying not to take it personally. He pauses at the door and looks back to see the Doctor standing still with both hands on the console, his eyes closed. Communing, he guesses. He leaves them in private.

Jack stands outside the ship and shines his light around the cavern. There really are carvings on the walls, now that he has a better look. Massive figures, but they're broken, eroded. This was where the Doctor made his stand against, what? Some kind of demon? And now Bilis Manger is trying to wake it up. Which means it's probably still down here, somewhere. Jack shivers.

He turns back to the comforting sight of the TARDIS. Her windows glow brightly, the police box sign lit up against the darkness. Jack hasn't had a home since he left the Boeshane peninsula, but he thinks he might have found one here. Assuming she doesn't mind his impossiblyness, that is. She
liked him well enough before, and Jack even felt the tickle of her telepathic circuits when he was fixing her. Maybe she'll warm to him if he suggests a threesome?

The door opens, and the Doctor sticks his head out. "All better. You can come in now."

"That was fast," Jack says.

"Yes, well..." The Doctor actually looks embarrassed. Jack thinks that's a first. "She's very understanding."

Jack bites back a laugh. He has a very strong suspicion of how the Doctor convinced her. "Good to know."

The Doctor ducks back inside, and Jack's pretty sure he saw a blush on his cheeks.

When he walks back in, the TARDIS feels a lot more welcoming. He gives her coral an appreciative stroke as a thank you. "Think my old room's still there?"

"Should be," the Doctor says. "Been shuffled around a bit, you know how things tend to move, but that's fixed easily enough."

"Yeah," Jack says, thoughtful. "You know, I missed this."

"The TARDIS?"

Jack nods. "And you. And this. Saving the world."

"Haven't you been doing that?" the Doctor asks, looking at him curiously.

Jack shrugs. "It's not the same without you." And now it's his turn to be embarrassed, but it's worth it for the look on the Doctor's face. Jack walks over to him and rests his hands on his arms. Kisses him, just once.

"I don't think I deserve this," the Doctor says, quietly.

"You've got me anyway," Jack says. He suspects he's turned the Doctor's world on its head, which is flattering for his ego but probably a lot to deal with. He's never struck Jack as someone who's great with emotional stuff.

"I saw some carvings outside," Jack says, offering something that's more the Doctor's natural element. "Wanna see?"

"Shouldn't those be etchings?" the Doctor asks, wryly.

Jack laughs. "I think you'll like these. Come on."

"Oh yes," the Doctor says, peering up at the shadowy figures. "Ida's civilisation."

"Ida?" Jack asks. He's never heard of a race by that name.

"Ida Scott," the Doctor explains. "Science officer, Sanctuary Base Six. Wasn't hers, strictly speaking, more Toby's, but..." He looks down. "She died. Either before the black hole or in it. Probably buried down here, somewhere. Poor Ida. Does Neo-Classic have an afterlife?"
"Don't think so," Jack says, wondering what happened on Krop Tor before it fell. The Doctor rarely spits out a whole story, parcels it in bits and pieces, non-sequiturs. Maybe they're easier to tell that way.

"That's not their proper name, though. The Beast called them the Disciples of Light. A civilisation from before time, incredibly powerful. They're the ones that trapped it. Our devil."

"Before time?"

"That's what I said," the Doctor says, pointedly. "Shows how much I know. The Time Lords thought they knew everything, but... There was writing the TARDIS couldn't translate."

"I thought--"

"Exactly," the Doctor says. "All this, it was done a very, very long time ago. The universe was forty billion years old before the first sentient humanoids appeared. My people. But before that... the Guardians. The Old Ones."

"Gives new meaning to the word ancient," Jack says, feeling rather awed.

"My guess is," the Doctor continues, "this is a holdover from the universe before. If it had the power to orbit a black hole, it could theoretically survive the Cataclysm."

"So how do we stop it?" Jack asks.

"I have no idea," the Doctor says. "But they did. This is all that's left of them, but down in the pit, they were expecting me. Or someone, anyway. That's how I survived. Maybe they left a backup plan."

"Then we need to find it," Jack says, grasping that hope like a lifeline.

The TARDIS has enough power for the scanners to work. "Hm," the Doctor says, peering at the readout.

"What are we looking for?" Jack asks.


"You found something?"

The Doctor gives a bounce and then reaches into a compartment underneath the console. When he straightens up, he's wearing dark-rimmed glasses. "Glasses," he says, pleased, "and sonic screwdriver!" He holds out his sonic with a proud wiggle, then tucks it into his pocket and abruptly turns back to the scanner. "Oh, that's much better. Now, let's see what we've got. Hmm, nothing up above, not too surprising. But... yes, this looks promising."

Jack looks over his shoulder. There's another cavern adjacent to this one, on the other side of the carved wall. "That's our next stop. Anything else?"

"I'll increase the range," the Doctor says.

"So what exactly is this Beast?" Jack asks. "I mean, what are we dealing with here?"

"Well," the Doctor says, slowly. "You can take a look yourself."
Jack does. Miles and miles below them, deep in the Earth's crust, is a gigantic figure. The scan only shows a general outline, but that's enough. Jack can just about make out its horns. His eyes widen as the figure stirs. "It's awake?" he asks, alarmed.

"Maybe," the Doctor says, in a hushed tone, as if the Beast might hear them. "It was chained to the wall last I saw." Then, deliberately loudly, "Oh, don't worry. There's 18 miles of rock between us. That wee Beastie's not going anywhere."

"Unless Manger manages to open the Rift," Jack corrects.

"Only if your lot let him," the Doctor says. "Well, perhaps that Owen fellow. He seemed the impulsive type."

Jack snorts. "Remind me to change the access codes when we get back. Anyway, they can't, not without me. Retina scan lock. But that doesn't mean Manger won't find another way."

"Then let's get exploring," the Doctor says.

"Just one thing, Doc," Jack says, pulling at his filthy overalls. "Mind if I get changed first?"

The Doctor looks down at himself and grimaces. "Good idea."

"Last one to the wardrobe room's a rotten egg," Jack says, and takes off down the corridor, grinning.

Jack's still rifling through his old clothes when the Doctor comes out. He's clean and wearing a fresh version of the same suit, with a new tie and what could only be the much-loved tan coat.

"Nice coat," Jack says, admiring the fit.

"Thanks. Nice, um, nothing," the Doctor says, keeping his gaze firmly above waist level.

"Guess I'm not as fast a dresser," Jack says, unashamed. One of the perks of his particular brand of immortality means he always looks as good as the first day he died--which, frankly, was pretty damn great. He also, just maybe, might be eager to push the Doctor's buttons. He might have forgiven him, but that doesn't mean he isn't owed some payback.

"I found my spare Compact Laser Deluxe," Jack says, holding up an extremely small gun as he walks over to him. "Want to know where I used to hide it?"

"Jack," the Doctor warns, definitely squirming.

Jack doesn't stop until he's right in front of him. "I'll give you a hint," Jack says, taking the Doctor's hand and guiding it slowly down, down. He watches as the Doctor's expression goes from embarrassed disapproval to embarrassed shock to breathless want. As the Doctor's hand goes from resisting to tense to exploring, his long fingers curling and pressing behind his balls.

Jack had intended this to be a tease. He wanted to get the Doctor riled up, then reap the results later, once he'd had a good long simmer. He's not quite sure how the tables just turned.

He feels the Doctor hesitate, and before he can open his mouth to talk about this not being an appropriate time, Jack grabs him and pushes him against the wall, and pins him with a good long kiss, not stopping until he feels that resistance melt away as it has before. It's such a lovely feeling;
Jack's not sure he'll ever get enough of it, but he looks forward to trying.

"About this coat?" Jack murmurs. "It'll look even better on my bedroom floor."

The Doctor laughs. "The TARDIS was right. You really are impossible."

"You know, I didn't say you could stop touching me," Jack points out, and bites back a moan as the Doctor's hand wraps around his cock for the second time today.

"That better?" the Doctor asks, eyes intense.


The Doctor starts a steady, slow stroke. "Impossible and insatiable."

"That gonna be a problem?" Jack asks, meeting his gaze with as much seriousness as he can muster.

"No," the Doctor says, softly. "Not at all. Just... new."

"Good thing you like new."

"Yes," the Doctor says, mouth curling in a lopsided smile. His other hand runs down Jack's back, touching, exploring. He bends his head and licks Jack's neck right where it meets the shoulder, tastes and kisses his skin, tentative, curious, eager. Jack holds still, letting him wander. Jack's body is new territory for him.

Jack makes a noise of protest when the Doctor releases his cock, but then the Doctor moves around, takes hold of him from behind and nudges Jack's thighs apart with a suited knee. Teases his sensitive inner thighs with his free hand before slipping it back behind his balls again and pressing until Jack's hips buck and he groans.

"Not that new," Jack says, knowingly.

The Doctor gives a soft chuckle. "It's been a while. Lifetimes."

"I thought you danced with Rose," Jack says, unable to resist.

The Doctor stills, then resumes. "No."

There's something in his tone that makes Jack want to press for more, but he lets it go. When it comes to information, there's not much point in pushing the Doctor for it. He'll only clam up, and Jack doesn't want him pulling away. He turns in the Doctor's arms so he's facing him again, and kisses away the shadows that just snuck back into his eyes.

"We'll get her back," he says, gently. "It wasn't her, just Manger trying to spook you."

The Doctor just nods, not meeting Jack's eyes. He takes a few steps forward, pressing Jack against the wall, and licks a slow trail down his body. Jack lets his head fall back, loses himself in the sensations. Groans when the Doctor's tongue licks the head of his cock with a broad swipe. He's dying to grip that mussy hair and urge the Doctor to suck him as deep as that respiratory bypass will allow, but he keeps his hands at his sides, curled into fists. He looks down at the sight of the Doctor kneeling before him, the tails of his coat spread like wings, one hand firm around his cock and tongue lapping delicately at the head, and Jack thinks that if he was given the choice to actually really die, this would be his last request. Well, this and a long list of other things he wants
to do and have done to him, preferably as soon as all this Beast business is over.

After a few more minutes of teasing and much-too-gentle touches, Jack gives a groan of frustration. The Doctor smirks up at him. "Had enough?"

"Bastard," Jack says, lightly.

"I've been called worse," the Doctor says. "You know, I think I remember this bit now." And then he sucks the head into his mouth, and Jack cries out in pleasure.

Jack's hands finally reach out and tangle through his hair, and frankly it's like the Doctor styled it that way on purpose. It's just the right length for a solid grip, which is good because Jack's knees are starting to feel weak.

"Doctor," he says, warning him when he's about to come. But the Doctor doesn't stop, and keeps his cheeks hollowed and tongue busy until Jack's hips buck sharply and he comes with a shout. As soon as he can see straight, Jack pulls him up and kisses him, tasting traces of his come in the Doctor's mouth. He mentally checks off another item on his list.

There's a flush on the Doctor's cheeks and it goes very well with his swollen lips. Jack thumbs a streak of come from his chin and wonders if he'll be able to resist the Doctor long enough for them to actually get anything done. It's an even bet.

The Doctor's the one with the confident gleam in his eyes now. Smug bastard. "How'd you do that to me?" Jack asks.

"I could go into detail, if you like," the Doctor offers, dryly.

"Do you actually intend to get dressed?" the Doctor says. "Not that I mind your new look..."

"Obviously," Jack says, rubbing a hip against him.

"Come on," the Doctor says. "Big scary demon. Civilisation from before time. We can't just stay in bed."

"We haven't even made it to bed yet," Jack points out, but relents. "Okay, okay. Just gimme a minute." He extricates himself from the Doctor's arms and grabs some shirts and a pair of jeans. When the Doctor doesn't leave, he asks, amused, "You want to stay and watch?"

"I just want to see if you really can fit that laser down there."

'Wow' is the first word that comes to mind, but what Jack's seeing right now deserves something far grander. Even with damage and decay, the majesty of the cavern takes his breath away. No, not a cavern, a vast cathedral. He can only imagine how it looked all those billions of years ago, when it was new and gleaming.

Stalactites decorate the ceiling now, high above, with slow drips of water that's filtered down through miles of rock. Their flashlights barely penetrate the gloom, illuminating the broken arches one sliver at a time.

"Ida would've loved this," the Doctor says, his voice sounding hushed in the massive space. He
J.Jack can't help but agree, but the question is, does it have anything that can help them? The Disciples of Light captured the Beast once, but Jack doesn't exactly have the power to toss it into a black hole for a second go-round, and he doubts the Doctor would have much luck even with a fully-recovered TARDIS.

"How d'you think they did it?" he asks. "Captured the Beast. Something that size..."

"That's a very good question," the Doctor says, walking slowly around. "When I was down in the pit, there was this drawing... looked like cave art, to be honest. Doesn't quite fit with this." He shines his light on the remains of an exquisite carving, its fine detail lost to the ages. "The Beast terrorizing stick figures. One stood up to it, and then it fell."

"That's it?" Jack asks, disappointed.

"Pretty much. There were two vases, though. Glowing in the darkness. The trap, sealing it in."

"Why trap it? Why not just kill it?"

"How do you kill an idea?" the Doctor replies.

"How do you kill a beast that escaped a black hole?" Jack counters.

"I don't think it would have. The Rift saved it same as it saved me. I suppose we should thank your Bilis Manger for that timely rescue."

"Maybe," Jack says. He doesn't like the idea of being grateful towards Manger, who's been nothing but trouble. But he likes the idea of the Doctor trapped in a black hole even less.

"An idea is hard to kill," the Doctor says, ruminating. "That's all there was before this universe. Ideas. Good and evil in their purest forms. If the Beast came from then, maybe that's what it is. The original. And all those devils out there are just the echoes of it."

Jack suppresses a shiver. "Then what about good?"

"The Disciples of Light," the Doctor ponders. "I know a Guardian of Light, well, used to. But the Eternals are gone now."

"Eternals?" Jack asks, feeling out of his depth. He never did the cosmic stuff well.

"From the Dark Time. They travelled the trackless wastes of eternity, seeking enlightenment," the Doctor says, with wistful solemnity. "They used to need us ephemerals. Lived so long they forgot how to exist."

Eternity. That's what Jack has waiting for him. He wonders if he'll forget how to exist, too. There's just so much time ahead of him he can't get a grasp on it. Maybe that's just as well.

"Oh, hello," the Doctor says. There's a sudden light in the darkness. A vase, casting a golden glow on the Doctor, who's reaching out to touch it. "I wonder," he murmurs, and wraps his hand around one handle. His head snaps back, and he falls.

"Doctor!" Jack cries, and rushes to his side. "Can you hear me? Doctor!" He pats his cheek, feels his pulse. Fast but steady. "Come on, don't do this to me. Doctor!"
A sharp gasp, and the Doctor's eyes snap open. "That packed a punch!" he exclaims, and sits up. Shakes himself. "Telepathic flare is not my favourite delivery method."

Jack helps him to his feet. "There was a message?"

"And a free psychic scouring," the Doctor says, rubbing his head. "Not that my head needed more banging up, thank you very much."

"You're okay? What did it say? No, don't!"

The Doctor grabs the handle again before Jack can stop him, but this time there's no reaction. He hauls it off the pedestal with a grunt. "A lot heavier than it looks, too. Typical. Back to the TARDIS!"

Jack can do nothing but obey.

"I've met all sorts of gods," the Doctor expounds. "Fake gods and bad gods and demi-gods. Humans worship gods, but what do gods worship?"

"Themselves?" Jack offers.

"They usually have egos big enough but no," the Doctor says. "Gods worship ideas. God of this, god of that. It's the 'of that' that they're really after. The Disciples of Light were gods who worshiped."

"Worshiped what?"

"Shade your eyes," the Doctor says, and reaches into the vase. What he pulls out is so bright it's immediately blinding, a brilliant, intense blue-white that Jack can barely glance at out of the corner of his eye without pain. When the Doctor puts it back inside, Jack's vision is a patchwork of afterimages. He blinks rapidly until he can see the interior of the TARDIS again.

"I was right," the Doctor says, with a hint of pride. "The Beast is what you'd call a projection. It exists in dimensions beyond the standard eleven of this universe. What we see looks nothing like its real form, but our tiny ephemeral minds give it the shape it holds now. And we're not the first ones to find it, oh no, that's what the cave art was all about. Someone found Krop-Tor long before Sanctuary Base Six and decided to pass on the warning."

"So what's the light?" Jack asks, trying to keep up.

"The Beast is a projection of evil. This is a projection of good."

"It's kinda small. Can't we have a hundred-fifty-foot giant made of good?"

The Doctor smiles, amused. "It only looks small. They're actually the same size, which happens to be bigger than the universe by the way."

"Tiny ephemeral mind," Jack says, tapping his forehead. "Got it."

"Think of it as the point of a very long, very wide spear," the Doctor offers. "The point is the only part that we can perceive, but if that point enters the Beast..."

"It kills it," Jack says, suddenly excited.
"Well, not exactly. But it should blast it out of our plane of existence."

"Good enough for me."

They share a grin.

"And," the Doctor says, "while I'm being brilliant, I've been thinking about the Rift. Once we get the TARDIS to the hub, if I hook her up the Rift manipulator I think I can reverse the mechanism and close the Rift. Not for good, of course, but enough to heal the cracks, get things back to normal. Bit of luck and everything will be fine."

"That's great. That's wonderful!" Jack says, feeling an intense wave of relief. He takes the Doctor into his arms. "I ever tell you you're a genius?"

The Doctor considers this. "No, but feel free to start anytime." He looks so pleased with himself that Jack has to laugh, shake his head.

"How long until the TARDIS is ready?"

The Doctor peeks at the console. "Hm, thirty minutes?"

Jack gives him a hungry look. "That should be enough," he says, reaches down and squeezes the Doctor's crotch, rubs it.

"Think we'll make it to bed this time?" the Doctor says, slipping from enthusiasm to arousal.

"Not a chance," Jack says, and kisses him hard. There's only one thing on his mind right now, and that's returning the favor. His fists curl at the Doctor's coat, and then with a yank he tugs it off. "You wear way too many layers," he growls.

"Gonna do something about it?" the Doctor breathes, between kisses.

Jack gives that the sultry growl it deserves, and pulls open the Doctor's jacket, pulls it down, pinning back the Doctor's arms. Pushes him back until the Doctor's thighs hit the jump seat. Pulls each button of his shirt roughly open then pulls that down too, further restraining his arms and baring his chest but for that damned tie. Jack leaves that for now.

Cosmic battles might be the Doctor's area of expertise, but Jack's is bodies and lust and all the combinations of the two. The Doctor used his big Time Lord brain to solve their problems, and now Jack's going to make it melt out his ears.

He returns to kissing him, caressing that bare skin. It's distractingly good to hold him, and Jack could easily spend hours doing little more than that, just touching and tasting him. He can't quite get over the fact that the Doctor is his, but if this is all a dream he doesn't ever want to wake up. It's a shame they don't have more time right now, or they would be off to the nearest bedroom for much more than a quickie. So far the Doctor's proving equal to Jack's desire, his still waters running particularly deep, but somehow it's not a surprise. Jack's always seen this intensity in him.

Their bodies are pressed together, but Jack backs off just enough so he can toy with the Doctor's nipples, rubbing and squeezing and paying close attention to what makes him squirm the most. When the Doctor tries to reach out, either to stop him or encourage him, Jack pushes his hands back. Then has to do it again.

"But--"

Jack kisses him quiet, and reaches up and pulls off that tie. He has a better use for it, and a moment later when the Doctor tries to reach out again, Jack pins his wrists together behind his back and secures them with the tie.

"Jack," the Doctor protests, struggling a bit. But he quickly stops protesting when Jack opens his trousers and slips one hand inside. He lets out a soft moan and closes his eyes. Still nothing underneath, just the way Jack likes it; one less layer in his way.

"Let me make you feel good," Jack tells him. Kisses his neck, sucks lightly at that sensitive skin.

The Doctor gives a rumble of a laugh. "If you insist."

"Cheeky," Jack says, and squeezes his hardening cock until he groans. Tastes his way up the Doctor's neck as the Doctor's head tilts to the side, runs the fingers of his free hand just below the hem of the Doctor's trousers, teases with pushing them from the Doctor's slim hips. They're tight and cling to his ass like a second skin, and Jack gives in and squeezes and kneads one covered cheek. Feels muscle flex under his hand as the Doctor moves against him, hips flexing slowly.

Jack pulls back enough to look him over, check to see how hot and bothered the Doctor's become. There's definite progress, his neck arched and reddened where Jack has sucked at it, his lips parted, his eyes half-closed and hazy. But it's further down that Jack's most interested in right now, and he gives in to his desire and peels the Doctor's trousers down, down, pushes them all the way to the floor. Looks up at him, finally fully exposed, his erection curving out in invitation. Jack guides him to raise each foot in turn and tosses aside his trousers and shoes, then stands and pushes him back until his ass hits the jump seat. Jack moves without hesitation, one knee up on the seat, covering him and kissing him and running his hands up and down his body, nothing in the way, no distractions, just this. Just them. The Doctor at his mercy.

A dozen images flash through his mind, a dozen positions, a dozen ways to make him beg. Jack plans on christening every inch of the TARDIS, and he knows very well that there are no limits to the number of rooms it contains. He already knows where the first place will be that he fucks the Doctor, and that's going to be the hub, not the ship. He wants his final memory of Torchwood to be the feeling of the Doctor's ass around his cock, the Doctor held tight in his arms, sweaty and sated. That's what he wants to remember when he thinks of Earth.

He works his way downwards and the Doctor's thighs part for him, resting against his hips and then his sides. Strong thighs, all wiry muscle, and the insides smooth as silk. Jack's hands roam there, caressing and teasing, as he licks and nibbles the Doctor's chest. He rubs his thumbs at the crease of each thigh, just edging at his balls. He reaches around and pulls the Doctor's ass forward until he's slumped and his ass hangs over the edge. And then Jack falls to one knee and lowers his mouth down around his cock.

With the first suck, the Doctor's moaning really starts in earnest. "Jack," he groans, then trails off into whimpers as Jack's tongue probes at those sensitive ridges under the head. The honey-scent of him carries through to his cock, and when Jack laps at the slit he tastes not human saltiness but tartly sweet traces, a sharply-citric honey. Even here he is oddly cool to the touch. Despite Jack's extensive experience, he's had decades of only humanity to love, and the Doctor's alienness is fresh to his senses.

The Doctor's legs shift aimlessly against him, his body squirming gently. Jack backs off with a slurp to admire the Doctor's abandon, arms caught behind his back and body pale but flushed and marked where Jack has been. Jack hooks the Doctor's long legs over his shoulders and grips his ass
in his hands, kneading and caressing as he sucks him down again. Slips one finger between his cheeks and finds the tight ring of his asshole, rubs and probes gently until it opens enough for him to ease in a fingertip. Oh yes, just like that. He works his fingers back and forth in a shallow fuck, pulling at the rim to encourage it to loosen, to make the Doctor whimper and gasp.

Even though generally he prefers partners who know what they're doing, Jack does have a bit of a virgin kink, and the Doctor's earlier hesitant fumblings and tight ass hit it hard. This body of his is almost certainly otherwise untouched, almost brand-new and a veritable gift for Jack to unwrap and break in. There's just something exquisite to the combination of ancient mind and unspoiled body, to old wisdom and youthful, enthusiastic desire.

He eases his finger deeper, crooks it, and doesn't quite find the same thing he'd find in a human but it's close enough. It makes the Doctor cry out and buck his hips, which is the important thing. He stops ruminating and steps things up a notch, laves at the sensitive ridges until the Doctor is whimpering constantly and rubs at the firm spot inside his ass until his hips are twitching uncontrollably. A few good sucks and the Doctor comes hard, shuddering and crying out and spurting into Jack's mouth over and over. When he finally stops, he's quivering and gasping and slumped bonelessly between Jack's shoulders and the back of the jump seat, and looks faintly stunned underneath the post-orgasmic bliss.

Jack smirks at him and licks his lips clean. Gives the Doctor's softening cock a few laps for good measure, then lets his legs down one at a time, keeps him from sliding off the seat. He doesn't look like he could coordinate himself enough to stand up straight. Jack leans in and gives him a deep, thorough kiss.

When the kiss ends, the Doctor tries to put together words, but all he manages is an incoherent noise. He blinks slowly, licks his lips. Tries again. "I think... you succeeded."

Jack cocks an eyebrow. "In?"

"Making me feel good," the Doctor says, then gives a sloppy grin.

Jack smiles back and helps him sit up, unties his hands, pulls his shirt and jacket back up. Caresses the naked skin still on display, and gives his cock one more squeeze. The Doctor shudders and gives a sharp gasp, then a moan as Jack thumbs off the last strand of come from the head. Holds the Doctor's gaze as he licks his thumb clean, and relishes the spark of lust the action inspires.

The TARDIS pings, and suddenly the hum of her engines ramps up. The Doctor's eyes clear as he looks to the console, grins. "She's ready," he says, and pushes himself awkwardly to his feet.

Jack looks longing at his ass as he bends over the console, fondling her controls. Stands behind him and fondles his ass, unable to resist.

"Jack," the Doctor breathes, and Jack can see he wants to keep going too, but he's torn. And they do need to go back to the hub, sort out the Rift, get all those people back to their proper times. Jack reluctantly releases him, but gives him a look that promises that they'll continue this at the first available opportunity.

Jack finds the Doctor's discarded trousers and sneakers and offers them. "You might want these."

"Oh, right," the Doctor says, amused at himself, and climbs back into them. It's a shame to cover up that ass, but at least the trousers leave little to the imagination. Jack decides he likes the suit. Anything that clings this much can't be bad.
"Can we make it back to the hub okay?" Jack asks. The TARDIS has never been exactly reliable at the best of times, in his experience.

"It's a short hop," the Doctor says, confidently. "Just moving across space, not time. But after this she definitely needs repairs before she goes any further, and a good soak in Rift energy."

"That I can supply," Jack says.

"Hold tight," the Doctor warns, and pulls the dematerialization switch. The TARDIS's usual wheeze sounds almost painfully asthmatic, and when they reach their destination there's a shuddering halt. The Doctor winces and pets the console comfortingly. "Don't worry, old girl. We'll have you fixed up in no time."

Jack likes the 'we' in that. "I bet the vault has parts we can use. All sorts of stuff down there."

The Doctor buttons up his shirt and jacket, makes himself presentable. "Excellent. But first things first." He pulls out a cable from underneath the console. "I'll run this to the Rift manipulator. Right back."

Jack grabs him by the jacket and gives him another kiss. "Go save the world," he says, fondly.

The Doctor winks at him, then heads out the door, the cable taut behind him. Seconds later, it goes slack.

Jack's stomach tightens with sudden worry. The Rift manipulator can't be this close. He hurries after him, out the door, and his jaw drops in shock.

The first thing he sees is Ianto crouched over the Doctor, who's sprawled unconscious on the floor. Ianto's holding a stun gun and zapping the Doctor's already limp form, a wild look in his eyes. Madness. Panic.

The second thing he sees is Owen standing right in front of him, holding a gun straight at him, looking at him with fear and anger and desperation.

The last thing he sees is the rest of the team standing back, Gwen covered with blood and crying and Toshiko shocked and guilty. And then Owen shoots him through the head and Jack's vision slams to black.
Chapter 7

When the world snaps back, Jack finds himself on the floor, handcuffed. An alarm is blaring, lights flashing. He looks around for the Doctor and finds him in a similar state a few feet away, still unconscious. It'll take him longer to wake up than it does for Jack to die and return to life.

"He's awake," Ianto says, staring down at him. He looks betrayed and guilty at the same time. He looks up. "You were right."

"I'm sorry, Jack," Toshiko says. "We had to do it."

"Do what?" Jack says, angrily. He's weak, but his strength is returning fast. He pushes himself up with his elbow. "What have you done?"

The ground rumbles. The air is sharp with ozone as electricity sparks up the base of the water tower. A stream of energy bursts towards the sky.

"What we should've done in the first place," Owen says, staring. "We fixed it. We opened the Rift."

Everything's shaking. The hub is falling apart around them. Jack forces himself to his feet. "Take these off," he orders, holding out his cuffed wrists. Ianto is the one who obeys, and Jack takes the keys from him. He goes over to the Doctor and frees him, checks him over. Hauls one arm over his shoulder. "We need to get out of here!"

"I'll help," Toshiko says, taking the Doctor's other arm.

It's chaos as they run for the exit. The Doctor is a dead weight between them, and Jack isn't quite recovered. He staggers, then realizes. If the Rift is open, the Beast is free. And the only thing that can stop it is in a vase inside the TARDIS.

"Take him," he tells Ianto, and hands the Doctor off to him. "Don't you dare hurt him again."

Ianto withers under Jack's glare, and gives a short nod. He and Toshiko haul the Doctor onwards, taking him to relative safety.

Jack runs back into the hub, dodging falling masonry and electrical sparks, and lunges into the TARDIS. It's shaking in here, too, but the vase is upright on the floor where they left it. He braces himself and grabs the handle.

He wakes up on the floor with blood running out of his nose. The Doctor wasn't kidding about telepathic flares packing a punch. There was so much information in the message that Jack can barely begin to parse it, but the one thing he knows with overwhelming certainty is that if the Beast isn't stopped, the world really will end, consumed in purest hellfire.

He hauls the heavy vase out of the TARDIS, closes the door behind him so the ship will be safe, and hurries as fast as he can out of the hub.

When he reaches the Plass, he finds them standing there, stunned and reeling. The Doctor is sitting on the ground, Toshiko holding him upright. He's still out.

"Everything will go back to normal," Gwen says, holding herself. "That's what Bilis said. When I get home, Rhys will be fine."
Jack finally gets a moment to stop and be furious. He's gone for a few hours and his team completely falls apart. "It was a trap!" he yells. "Bilis tricked you, damn it."

"I don't care!" Gwen shouts back, tearful. "I just want him back."

"You left us," Owen accuses.

"I was finding a solution," Jack shouts at him. "Hell, we did find a solution. You should have waited!"

"The world was falling apart!" Owen yells back. "You weren't here. Somebody had to take command."

"People were dying," Ianto says.

"You have no idea what you've done," Jack says, and he knows exactly what they've done now, so painfully clearly. The Doctor didn't tell him that the message made him experience the massacre of gods, the terrible power of the Beast's evil in its raw form. The Doctor's far too good at hiding pain, at sacrificing himself to save others. Jack thinks about what he said, that he was dying on the gamestation. That he thought he was going to die to save Rose, and would have if not for Manger.

Jack can't die. That's the one thing that matters, really, when it comes down to it. It's the one thing he can offer to protect the people he loves.

The vase is heavy in his arms. He looks down at the Doctor, and feels a terrible pang. "Keep him safe," he tells Toshiko, and she nods.

Jack heads out into the streets, ignoring Owen's shouts. He hears thundering footsteps and heads towards them, certainty growing within him.

He almost runs right into Bilis Manger, who's staring up at the sky in confusion.

"Why isn't he listening?" Bilis asks, looking hurt. "I raised him out of the darkness. I gave him a feast of life. Why does he ignore me?"

Jack follows his gaze, and sees the Beast towering over the city, breathing out fire, snatching people and cramming them down his maw. There's no sign of the terrible intelligence he saw in the message. It roars without speech, destroys without thought.

"It's just the body," he says, connecting the pieces in his head. "You didn't rescue the mind, just the body."

"No," Bilis moans, distraught. "No, it cannot be!" And just like that, he vanishes.

Jack hurries on. The Beast is hundreds of feet tall, so he heads for the tallest building he can. Tries not to think about anything more than the next few minutes, but realizes with a start that the next few minutes might be all he has.

Pure energy from before the universe. Two opposing forces mixing. The message told him what will happen, and the Doctor did, too. The Beast will be blasted from this plane of existence. Even if Jack survives the explosion, this might be the last he sees of Earth. This might be the last he sees of anything.

It doesn't seem like such a bad thing. He finally had what he was waiting for all this time since his first death. He got his answers, he got his Doctor. He had one long, glorious day. His last request.
And after everything, after all this time, he'll die for the Doctor again. It has a certain symmetry to it.

If he has a regret, it's that he didn't say goodbye.

He reaches the roof and waves wildly at the Beast. "Hey!" he shouts, at the top of his lungs. "Hey ugly! Over here!"

The Beast gives a terrible snort, and stomps towards him, crushing people and cars and buildings. Fire blossoms in his path. Jack smells sulphur.

"You want a snack?" Jack shouts. "Come and get me!" And he steps out on the edge and waits, holding tight to the vase.

When the Beast comes, when its massive hand snatches him up, Jack screams. For all the years he's lived, he's never died by fire before, and god, it hurts. His nerves, his flesh are being seared away, but he clings to life, determined to fulfil his one final task. He only has one shot at this.

The Beast raises him up, laughing, and Jack forces his burning arm into the vase. The point in his hand sears flesh already seared black, but somehow he does it, pulls the point out in his fist and pulls his arm back and with the last measure of his will he throws the point right into the Beast's flaming maw. And then the Beast tosses him after it, and Jack is in the air.

Bare seconds before he tumbles dying into its mouth, before he is trapped within its body to be taken with it, there is an unbearable, total brightness. An unbearable, total shove. His flesh is flayed from his bones, his bones shattered, his atoms split. Jack's never died like this before, and in the last instant of consciousness thinks this really is the end, for good, no coming back.

And then--

--light.

air.

form.

I bring life.

Jack gasps back to existence and coughs, grabs at the ground, disoriented. Shakes himself, blinks, looks around.

He's alive. He's alive. He can't believe it. He laughs, laughs, hysterical laughter. Tears stream from his eyes, but he can't stop laughing. He's naked in a field and he's alive and the funniest part is that he's actually happy, actually relieved to still be in this crazy, impossible universe.

When he calms down, he steals some clothes from a washing line and walks until he finds a town. He's outside of Cardiff and it's been days since the Beast rampaged through the city and mysteriously exploded. He makes his way back with only minor difficulty, hitching a ride in a police car after strong-arming the officers with Torchwood.
The city center is a mess. It's not as bad as it was after the earthquake a few years back, since it's confined to a smaller area, but the fire damage and lives lost will probably add up to a harsher toll. There's a crater several blocks wide where he died. He gives a shudder and pushes the memory from his mind.

The fountain is still standing, which is a heartening sign. Jack quickens his pace and makes his way down into the hub.

The first person he sees is Ianto, whose coffee mug falls with a crash. He staggers back, pale, shocked. Reaches out like he's not sure if Jack is an illusion.

"Jack?" he asks, faintly.

"It's me," Jack assures him. Walks past. Heads past an astonished Toshiko and knocks on the TARDIS door. Makes a mental note to get his key back.

"He's not in there," she tells him. "Down in the vault."

Jack goes down. Follows the sound of grumbling, of things being tossed aside. He walks quietly, and finds the Doctor struggling through a pile of formerly-organized alien tech. Jack stays silent, just for the moment, and watches him.

The Doctor looks tense, drawn, tired. Down here where no one can see him, he's not bothering to hide how much he's hurting. It looks like the life has been wrung out of him, like he's lost something terribly important and now he's just trying to keep moving.

He's grieving. Jack knows exactly what that's like.

He steps out of the shadows and says, softly, "Doctor."

The Doctor's head snaps up and he stares in disbelief. Steps back, his expression closing just for a moment or two, and then shifting to warily hopeful. "Jack?"

"Sorry I took so long," Jack says, casually. "I was scattered all over--oof!"

All the air's knocked out of Jack as the Doctor bounds over and slams into him, holds him incredibly tight. Keeps holding him.

"Can't breathe," Jack chokes, patting the Doctor's back in alarm as much as comfort.

The Doctor's grip eases slightly. Just enough, no more. "Bastard," he says, voice tight.

"That's me," Jack replies, lightly.

"Stop dying on me," the Doctor says. "I mean it."

Jack eases himself out of the Doctor's grip, which is rather difficult. He meets the Doctor's eyes and sees anger and pain and grief and love. He sees a man who'd rather die himself than make Jack die for him.

"You were going to do it yourself," Jack says, knowing he's right and hating it.

"I knew the risks," the Doctor says, tersely. "It was my responsibility."

"Wrong," Jack says, firmly.
"It was," the Doctor insists. "That's what I am. That's what I do. I stop the monsters, whatever the cost."

"So do I," Jack says, calm in the face of the Doctor's agitation. "You wouldn't have come back from that."

"I'm not supposed to be here," the Doctor says, simply. "You said it yourself. I was supposed to die in the black hole."

"I never said that," Jack says, though he uncomfortably sees the Doctor's point. That doesn't mean he has to like it. He realizes even more uncomfortably that he should probably thank Ianto for zapping the Doctor so thoroughly before. If he'd been awake, he would have tried to go through with this... suicide-slash-world saving-slash-timeline correction. "What about Rose?" he says, tossing that grenade into the conversation.

The Doctor closes up. Pulls away.

Jack curses himself for pushing too hard, but knows it had to be said. "You can't leave her stranded in the future. We have to go get her."

"Maybe she's better off there," the Doctor says.

"What could possibly make you think that?" Jack asks, baffled.

"A prophecy," the Doctor says, quietly now. "She's going to die in battle."

Jack flinches. Shit. Canary Wharf. He covers it as best he can. "I didn't think you believed in prophecies."

"I don't," the Doctor says, though there's doubt in his voice. "I don't," he repeats, more certain this time.

"Then we should fix up your ship and go get her," Jack says, reasonably.

"That's what I've been trying to do," the Doctor says, with a weak smile.

"C'mere," Jack says, coaxing him back into his arms. Resting their foreheads together. "She'll be fine," he lies.

The Doctor thought he was dead for days, thought he'd lost Jack for good for a second time. His TARDIS is crippled, Rose is trapped in an uncertain fate in the future. It's no wonder he's in such a state, that he's so tense he's practically vibrating. Jack kisses him softly, tenderly. Nuzzles his cheek. Feels the puff of air of the Doctor's long sigh, feels the Doctor slump against him, weary, relieved.

"I bet you haven't slept for days," Jack says.

"Maybe," the Doctor says.

"Let's go find where the TARDIS hid my room," Jack says. He rests a hand on his back and guides him towards the stairs.

They've finally made it to bed, but this isn't quite how Jack had pictured it. The Doctor is beside him, against him, holding onto him even in sleep. Worry and grief are still clear on his face. Jack
wants to shake him for even thinking about facing down the Beast and certain death, but what would be the use? The Doctor is what he is. Jack will just have to watch out for him, even if that means protecting him from himself. That's a mission he's comfortable with.

Mere days ago he would have claimed satisfied turnabout on the Doctor's suffering. See how he likes it when someone leaves without saying goodbye. Not anymore.

He holds his sleeping Doctor for hours, touching him lightly, soothing away his frown with tender kisses. It's the first time they've been properly naked together, but for a change sex isn't the first thing on Jack's mind. He needs the comfort of simply being with him as much as the Doctor does. Knowing that he's alive and safe and that they have each other in every way possible. It makes Jack's heart feel full.

The TARDIS approves. He can feel the barest tickle of her at the edge of his mind, the way he has in the past; he has just enough telepathic sensitivity for that, but little more. He wonders how intimately she really is connected to the Doctor, how things work between Time Lord and TARDIS. Sometimes they've seemed like extensions of each other.

The Doctor is a mystery he's barely begun to unravel. But Jack knows his heart, and everything else is just details.

Finally the Doctor stirs. His grip on Jack tightens, then relaxes as he stretches out his lanky limbs, then curls around him again. He snuggles against Jack like he's his great big teddy bear, then opens his eyes.


"It's morning somewhere," the Doctor murmurs. Gives a sleepy smile. "This is nice."

"So it is," Jack agrees, to both. He strokes the Doctor's side, his back. Jack's always been a tactile person; holding him like this means more than any conversation. The trust in his body language means even more.

"I thought you were gone," the Doctor says, quietly.

"Nope," Jack says, as if it's that simple. And maybe it is. "I told you, you're not getting rid of me."

The Doctor doesn't reply to that, just tightens the grip he has on Jack's body. There's pain in his eyes, lines of tension sneaking back onto his face. Jack tries to soothe them away.

"Shh," he hushes, and kisses him again and again.

With his old Doctor, Jack never felt like the one in charge. He still feels the same when it comes to the cosmic stuff the Doctor's so good at. But in this, in bed, in love, Jack knows he holds so many of the cards. There's a brittleness to the Doctor here, a rawness of emotion, a deep vein of fear he normally hides far from sight. The Doctor isn't just out of his element, he's terribly vulnerable in a way that Jack simply isn't. He'll never know if the old Doctor would've been this way, but this one is, and this is the one Jack is with.

Soon enough the Doctor will slip back on that mask of bravado and few will be able to guess at what lies underneath. But Jack will know.
Chapter 8

When he's not helping the Doctor with repairing the TARDIS, Jack has to deal with repairing his team. But even as he struggles, he realizes two things. They're not his team anymore, and he's not the man to fix them. Probably never was.

His reunion with the Doctor, his latest death -- they've made Jack aware of what's important. Of trust, and how he's withheld it, and how foolish it was to expect his team to trust him when they barely knew more than his name, and even that is a front. He also realizes that when he leaves with the Doctor, he's not coming back.

The first thing he does is contact UNIT and work out an arrangement. There's good people there, solid contacts Jack's made over the decades. There needs to be a presence here to watch over the Rift. It's closed back up on its own, but it's going to be more volatile in the future. Someone responsible needs to be in charge.

He transfers Toshiko, Ianto, and Gwen over to UNIT personnel. Toshiko was headhunted from them anyway, so the transition should be fairly painless. They'll still work here, just with different badges. Owen... he doesn't know what to do about Owen. Yvonne Hartman's policy was mandatory Retcon, but he can't bring himself to do that anymore.

In the end, he writes up a recommendation, both good and bad, and sends it to their incoming leader. He'll let her make the decision, no doubt with a clearer head than Jack can manage.

Jack closes the book on Torchwood, at least for this time period. What's harder is saying goodbye to each of them. To Ianto. He knows he shouldn't but he puts it off, at least until the TARDIS is ready.

He finds the Doctor in the Fault Locater Room, doing a basic reality check. When they started the repairs, the status panels were full of red lights and flashing text, but now it's mostly green with a smattering of yellow. The TARDIS was buried in the Earth for millions of years, and even hibernation has its limits. Fortunately between self-healing systems, unlimited energy from the Rift, and the Doctor's loving care, she's almost ready to fly again.

"Do you have any mercury?" the Doctor asks, pulling his head out from behind an open panel.

"How much do you need?" Jack asks.

"Hmm. A thousand pounds?"

Jack's eyebrows rise, but he doesn't question him. "I'll have Ianto place the order."

"Some of the fluid links cracked," the Doctor explains. "She dumped half her reserves about 800,000 years ago."

"While I'm at it, you need anything else?"

"Nah," the Doctor says. "The hydraulic rams aren't up to pressure yet, and the time-warp anchorage unit needs jiggering, but once we top her off she should be just fine." He stands up, dusts himself off. There's an adorable smear of grease across his nose.

Jack licks his thumb and tries to wipe it off, but that just makes it worse. The Doctor scrunches his nose and pulls away, and Jack goes after him, and that somehow turns into a laughing chase around
the room, down the hall, and into the garden, where Jack finally tackles him to the ground. "Aha!" he cries, victorious. "Got ya."

The Doctor squirms under him, but Jack has him pinned. "You win," he relents, then a sly look crosses his face. "Now that you've caught me, what do you intend to do?"

"Hmm," Jack says, pretending to consider. "You are my prisoner. At my mercy."

"I can be a very wily prisoner," the Doctor replies. "Ask anyone. I have quite a reputation for it."

"I bet you do," Jack says, leans down and kisses him. Gets so involved with kissing him and touching him that the Doctor takes him by surprise and suddenly Jack is the one lying in the grass and the Doctor has him pinned.

Jack's more than happy to let himself be captured for a while. He's relieved and glad to have the Doctor back to his new-old self again, full of such energy and enthusiasm that it even tires Jack out a bit. Having Jack back, having his ship back, being so close to retrieving Rose -- it's all helped to wash away the grief and pain that so shrouded the Doctor on Jack's return. And Jack has learned just how tactile the Doctor is now, too, how eager he is to hug and hold and kiss and generally mess about whenever he tears himself away from repairs. Jack's happy because the Doctor's happy and vice versa, and they're stuck in one of the most wonderful feedback loops Jack's ever experienced.

The Doctor surprises him later that day. Jack is in his office, tying up loose ends, packing mementoes, when the Doctor comes in, hands in his pockets.

"I've been thinking," the Doctor says.

"I'd hope so," Jack replies.

The Doctor gives him a look, bounces once on his heels, then plops into a chair. "I've been thinking," he says again.

"About?"


Jack's exasperation fades into fondness. "Yeah?"

"Yes," the Doctor says, looking everywhere but Jack's eyes. "I didn't... I thought, you know, we should make it. You know. Formal." He jumps to his feet, gives a few nervous paces. Thrusts his hand out at Jack.

Jack blinks at it, then realizes. He's holding a chain, and at the end of it is a key. Ah, that's what he means by formal.

"Come with me?" the Doctor asks, hopeful and hesitant and glancing sidelong at Jack like he's not entirely sure of the answer.

Jack lets him squirm, just a bit, and then cups the key in his hand, takes it. Sees the relief in the Doctor's face, the gladness. Kisses him and doesn't stop for a few long, lovely minutes.

"That a yes?" the Doctor asks, lightly, when Jack finally pulls back.

"No," Jack says, and takes his hand. Opens the hatch to his bedroom. He tugs the Doctor down the
ladder after him.

It's not much of a room. They have to stoop because of the low ceiling, and most of the floor is taken up by a clothes chest and a mattress. Jack sits down on the bed and the Doctor joins him, looking at him with worriedly.

"You don't want to come?" the Doctor asks, failing to hide his hurt.

"I didn't say that," Jack says, gently. Pulls the Doctor close and kisses him until he relaxes again, and then starts to remove his jacket. The Doctor responds, reaching out to undo Jack's buttons. They undress each other slowly, not rushing the intimacy of the moment, the touches and kisses.

They lay entwined on the bed, naked, half-aroused and half-cuddling.

"I don't want to come," Jack says, as gently as possible. There's a flash of hurt in the Doctor's eyes, and he doesn't want it there. "I want to stay," he says, with absolute certainty.

"Stay?" the Doctor echoes.

"Yes," Jack says, brushing his cheek, his hair. "Ask me to stay."

The Doctor looks overwhelmed for a long moment, then collects himself. "Stay with me?" he asks, eyes bright in the dim light.

"I will," Jack says, and seals the promise with a kiss. A whimper escapes the Doctor's mouth, muffled between them, and then it's like a flash fire, a sudden spark in him running wild, like that first time deep underground. His fingers dig into Jack's flesh as he paws frantically at him, like he's trying to get so close he gets under his skin. And then just as suddenly he stills, holding Jack in a vice-like grip, as if afraid to let him go. And then another change, and his kisses are gentle, his touch almost worshipful. Jack accepts all of it without hesitation, keeps his own confident, steady pace, balancing the Doctor's whirling dervish.

The Doctor calms. "Sorry," he mutters, catching his breath.

"Don't be," Jack says. He holds the Doctor's gaze, tries to impart his feelings without words. Sees understanding in the Doctor's eyes, joy and hope and fear lurking underneath it all.

Live long enough and everyone around you is an ephemeral, gone in a flash and taking a part of you with them. Jack dealt with that by shutting himself away, sharing himself with no one. He didn't forget how to exist, but he tried his best to forget about love, trust, genuine friendship. It was easier to be alone than allow himself to be vulnerable to loss, and Jack hasn't lived nearly as long as the Doctor. He's been in many wars, seen and done unspeakable things, but no war as terrible as the Time War. For all their differences, it's in these things that they understand each other all too well.

The Doctor leans away and rifles through the pile of Jack's clothes, pulls out the TARDIS key. He takes the chain and slips it over Jack's head, around his neck. Lays the key flat against Jack's chest and traces it with one finger. The metal is warm against his skin. It's not just a key but a piece of the TARDIS, a piece of Jack's home, and so much more than that.

He takes the Doctor's hand and kisses it, kisses down his wrist and arm. Presses him down and leans over him and lets his key drag against the Doctor's front. Lets him feel it and know what it means: that neither of them will be alone anymore, for as long as they have.

"I want to fuck you," Jack says, low and thick.
The Doctor swallows. Says nothing.

"Ask me to fuck you," Jack says, holding his gaze.

"Fuck me, Jack," the Doctor says, roughly. "Please."

Jack groans. Thrusts his hips forward, grinding their cocks together. Reaches down and grips them in his hand, strokes them both at once. The Doctor's hands roam his body, so hungry for contact, for him.

"Turn over," Jack says, releasing him and reaching for the lube. The Doctor obeys, turns onto his front and spreads his legs in invitation. Jack can barely think for a long moment, then moves, slinking his fingers and pressing them into the Doctor's ass, stretching him and pushing the lube deep. He wants this to feel very, very good for him.

The Doctor's hardly what Jack would call submissive, but there's a delicious surrender to him at moments like this. Giving in to sensation, to Jack's expert touch. Just for a while that busy brain goes quiet and instinct takes over. He's all needy moans and gasps and flexing muscle, the thrust of his hips back and forth. Jack has twice spent hours driving him to the brink and back again, taunting him with release and making him beg. Forcing him to the point where he breaks and snarls with lust and shows just how deep his need for Jack runs. Jack loves that, the power of him that's buried inside surfacing in brief flashes, angry passion like a sudden storm that takes his breath away.

But that's not for now. He urges the Doctor onto his back again, pushes his fingers back inside and feasts on his body as he prepares him, runs his mouth over his balls and cock. Makes him squirm and moan. The Doctor's hands reach for him, bury in his hair, kneading like a cat.

Jack can't wait any longer. He pulls his fingers free, pushes himself up, crouches over the Doctor and gives himself a few readying strokes. Their eyes meet, and they don't need to speak, don't need anything so fragile as words.

With practiced ease, Jack hooks the Doctor's leg over his shoulder, pushes aside the other. Lifts his ass, spreads his cheeks, and eases the head of his cock inside, his stomach tensed and breathing shallow from concentration. He lets out a choked sound as his cock sinks inside, into that tightness, exquisitely tight even with days of Jack's exploring fingers stretching him. He can't rush this, but it's so hard to hold back when every part of him is aching to fuck the Doctor senseless.

He shifts his grip as his angle improves, as he fucks a fraction deeper each time. Stares at the Doctor's hands clenched in the blankets beneath, at his open mouth and arched neck, at the way he bends as Jack leans forward against his leg. God, he's beautiful like this. Jack considers himself the luckiest bastard in the universe for being the one to catch him.

As the Doctor loosens inside, Jack's strokes lengthen. His hips flex as he pulls back and then pushes deep, all the way inside, and the Doctor makes little cries of pleasure as Jack bottoms out. He stops and hauls the Doctor's other leg over his shoulder and then starts again, faster and harder, almost bending that thin, flexible body in half. Uses his free hand to grip the Doctor's cock and stroke it roughly. Jack's steady thrusts force breathless cries from him, again and again. He's determined to make him scream and clench and shudder with ecstasy.

Jack's not going to last much longer. It's too good, too much, he's wanted this for too long. His hand moves faster on the Doctor's cock, and he angles to hit those lovely spots inside him. Uses all the things he's learned about the Doctor's body and hears that perfect little gasp, feels him tense, sees that little furrow between his eyes and a few more strokes and the Doctor comes, moaning noisily,
every muscle tensed, clenching around Jack's cock, pulsing in his hand and streaking come all over himself and Jack's hand. Jack barely holds out until his climax ends and then lets loose, fucking him roughly, driving into him, teeth clenched with agonized pleasure, and then coming with a shout, his whole body flexing and moving as he pours himself out, burying himself against the Doctor, inside him, aching for him. And then collapsing beside him, panting, exhausted, released. They hold each other, kissing sloppily, both wrecked.

The Doctor is soft and drowsy in the afterglow. Jack pulls a blanket over them both and spoons up against him, holding him loosely but completely. The Doctor struggles to stay awake and adorably fails, giving a soft snuffle and burrowing against the pillow, a lazy smile on his face. Jack watches him sleep, contented. Waits for him to wake up so they can do it all over again.

The day after the mercury shipment arrives, it's time to go. The Doctor waits in the TARDIS while Jack says his goodbyes.

Gwen is the easiest. Maybe because she still feels guilty about her part in the Bilis Manger debacle, maybe because she knows the importance of the people you love. She wishes him good luck.

Toshiko is restrained. Jack had opened up to her in 1941, and they'd actually become friends during all of the madness. She says she hopes he'll visit, and to take care of himself and the Doctor.

He has to find Ianto before he can say goodbye to him. He's down in the archives, pointedly filing. Their relationship has been odd by twenty-first century standards. Co-workers with benefits is probably the closest description. It would have been more, should have been, but Jack was too shut down and Ianto too hurt from Lisa, too respectful of Jack's authority to demand from him. So Ianto took what Jack was willing to give, and for that Jack is sorry. Jack loves him, but he never let Ianto in the way it mattered.

He tells Ianto that, and Ianto nods. "I understand, sir. Thank you for telling me." It's a very polite brush-off, and Jack gets the message. He leaves him alone to lick his wounds.

He returns to the TARDIS and closes the door behind him. The Doctor is poring over the console, fiddling with this and tweaking that. "Everything ready?" he asks.

"Just about," the Doctor replies. Looks up at him. "You?"

"Yeah," Jack says, a bit sadly. He has regrets, but that's just something he'll have to live with. He shakes it off, joins the Doctor. They've already figured out when Krop Tor fell through the black hole, and the Doctor thinks that if they go to right after that, they'll be able to catch Rose in the base's escape ship without much trouble.


"Don't forget the hand brake," Jack says.

The Doctor gives him a look. "Of course," he says, and smiles with slightly dented pride. "Shall we?"

Jack takes a deep breath, lets it out. This is it. He nods, braces himself against the console.

The Doctor releases the brake, pulls the dematerialization switch. Grins as the familiar wheeze fills
the air, back to its normal timbre. There's a few bumps, but otherwise it's a smooth trip, and the moment they reach their destination the Doctor is a flurry of motion.

And it's done, just like that. A moment's work after over a century of waiting. Jack struggles to take it in.

"Ah, there they are!" the Doctor cries, and steers the ship in after them. "In a spot of trouble, from the look of it. Hit that button there."

"This one?" Jack asks, pointing. Presses it, and feels a jolt as a gravity tow engages.

"Yup, that's the one," the Doctor says, cheerily. He turns on the comm, speaks into the microphone. "Sorry about the hijack, Captain. This is the good ship TARDIS. Now, first thing's first. Have you got a Rose Tyler on board?"

"I'm here! It's me! Oh my God!" It warms Jack's heart to hear Rose alive, happy. He doesn't know how he's going to deal with Canary Wharf yet, but there's time for that later. "Where are you?" she asks.

"I'm just towing you home," the Doctor replies. "Gravity-schmavity. My people practically invented black holes. Well, in fact they did." He pulls a lever. "In a couple of minutes, we'll be nice and safe." His smile fades. "I couldn't save Ida, or the Ood. They went down with the planet. I'm sorry." There's a beep from the console. "Ah! Entering clear space. End of the line, mission closed. Meet you in the hold." He turns off the comm, grins at Jack.

A tricky bit of piloting, and the TARDIS materializes inside the hold of the spaceship. Seconds later the door opens and Rose enters, and then stops dead and stares in shock. "Jack?" she says, disbelieving. "Oh my god, Jack!" She runs up and leaps, tackles him. Jack catches her and spins her in a great hug, sets her down.

The Doctor holds out his arms. "Don't I get a hug too?"

"Oh, silly," Rose says, and hugs him tightly. "I can't believe it. What happened?"


Rose turns back to him, excited. "Oh, I've missed you," she says, and gives him another hug. "Where've you been? I want to know everything. It hasn't been long for you, has it?"

Jack's not sure how to answer that. "I'll tell you about it later," he says, giving her a warm smile.


"Tell me you're staying," Rose says. "Oh, it'll be great, the three of us together again."

"I'm staying," Jack says. He looks at her fondly, at the Doctor, at their ship. "It's good to be home," he says. And no matter what lies ahead, it is.

End.
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