Picking Up The Pieces

by gmariam

Summary

After months of suffering in silence and a nightmare of blood and betrayal at the Hub, Ianto Jones had finally lost his girlfriend: he had failed. Yet there was one man who would help him pick up the pieces of his life: Jack Harkness, the man who had killed her, but wouldn't let him go.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One

Jack was impressed.

He didn't want to be impressed. He wanted to be angry, upset, or even just slightly irritated. Though he wasn't one to hold grudges for long, the entire team had been in grave danger—the entire world, really—by the presence of a Cyberman in the basement of the Hub. His Hub, the Torchwood he had worked so hard to build. Ianto had betrayed them all by bringing it there. Jack had been shocked and scared and hurt, even furious for a while, but he couldn't quite understand why he wasn't angry anymore...just sad, guilty, and reluctantly impressed.

He shouldn't have been shocked. He had known from the first week Ianto Jones had arrived that the man was good. Ianto had been at Torchwood London for only a few years, and even if his record had been unremarkable, just being there meant he was clever and hard-working and knew what Torchwood needed on a day-to-day basis. In the aftermath of Canary Wharf, Ianto had obviously tracked down Jack and practically forced him to offer up a job at Torchwood Three through the almost brazen set-up of a Weevil rescue, a pterodactyl to capture, and an incredible cup of coffee. That Ianto might have had other motives had caught Jack by surprise, but he should not have been shocked at what Ianto had accomplished. The man was stronger than he looked, that much was obvious, especially now.

It hurt, though: betrayal always did, though Jack was forced to admit to himself that a large part of that involved his own guilt for the part he had played in allowing it to happen. Ianto had thrown ugly words at him, most of which had been true, and though Jack rarely let it get to him, this time it did. He felt guilty for not seeing it sooner, for allowing Ianto to isolate himself from the team so completely—for not making the attempt to draw him out of his quiet shell. That's what they usually did at Torchwood, after all: kept to themselves. Ianto been working with them at the Hub for several months, and Jack had just assumed that Canary Wharf weighed heavily on him—that Ianto would warm up to them on his own time, once he had dealt with the demons of the battle. Jack had never asked about it, only taken for granted that Ianto would be all right on his own.

Jack had been wrong. That isolation had been Ianto's way of hiding the terrible secret he'd kept in the basement for so long. How had he managed it? How had he come in to work each day, knowing what was down there, what he had done? Jack ran a hand across his face in frustration, because in the end, he understood it perfectly well, and that was why he couldn't hold onto his anger. He too had done difficult things and kept his own secrets, and sometimes it was hell, but it was always necessary. Ianto had done what he felt was necessary: he had tried to save the woman he loved, and he had kept it secret to protect the rest of them. And that too was something Jack could not condemn, having loved and lost more than he he count.

Yet Ianto seemed to understand the consequences, at least, and had insisted on cleaning up, which was one reason Jack was reluctantly impressed.

"It's my problem, sir," Ianto had said, at first unable to look Jack in the face. Then he raised his head, clear blue eyes meeting Jack's with a strength of resolve he had been relieved to see in Ianto after the trauma the man had just been through. "I was the one who brought her here. I'd like to take care of it before I leave."
Jack had suspended him for a month. It had seemed the only thing he could do: Ianto needed to
time to deal with what had happened, and the rest of the team needed time to process it as well.
They would all have to rebuild trust. But Ianto had asked to do one thing before he left: to dispose
of all the cyber-conversion equipment in the basement.

"You don't have to. We'll take of it," Jack had told him, knowing it would be difficult.

"I can do it, sir," Ianto had replied, that same insistent tone to his voice Jack had heard during their
confrontations over Lisa. "I need to do it."

"I can help—" Jack had started, beginning to feel those first pangs of guilt for putting Ianto through
so much already. The Welshman had held up a hand and stopped him.

"Jack, it's my fault. I brought her here. I tried to save her, but I couldn't. I have to destroy what's
left. I'll be back tomorrow to finish what I started." He had turned and left without another word,
clothes and face still matted with dirt and blood, his shoulders stooped with grief. Jack had stared
after him before going up to his office. He poured himself a drink and contemplated again the
harsh words Ianto had thrown at him earlier that night, before Jack had sent him back inside to kill
his girlfriend.

Monster. The worst of them all.

Staring through the window at the mess of the Hub below, Jack wondered if it were true. He was
ruthless, to be sure. Brutal. Sometimes merciless. But he had seen enough evil in his life to know
that sometimes you had no choice if you were going to survive. It did not mean he liked it: it was
just that he, perhaps more than anyone, understood the threats they faced, and Ianto's actions had
put the entire planet in jeopardy. Once more, it gave Jack chills to contemplate a future where the
Cyber race spread out from the Hub, rebuilding itself with Rift energy and destroying the planet
he'd come to call home.

Maybe he had been hard on Ianto. Insensitive and unfeeling. He remembered the look on the
Welshman's face as he had held his weapon to Ianto's neck, forcing him to pick up the gun on the
floor and execute his girlfriend. Would he have really shot Ianto, as he had threatened? The
younger man hadn't been at the Hub for more than a few months, yet he had proven himself quick,
clever, and efficient, and an integral part of Torchwood Three. Could he have shot one of his own
team members to protect the planet? Could he have shot Ianto Jones to save the world?

The answer bothered him, and setting down his drink, Jack decided that he couldn't just sit there
and think about it, turning it over and over in his mind until it drove him mad. He was a man of
action, and right then the only thing he could think of doing was to start picking up the pieces of a
night gone horribly wrong for them all.

So he did.

When Ianto came in the next morning—same time as usual, dressed in one of his typical sharp
suits—he glanced up at Jack and gave him the barest nod, his face lined with exhaustion and
sorrow. He began to clean up around the sofa and other stations. And then without warning, he
stormed into Jack's office with a dark look on his face, just like Jack knew he would. Gwen quickly
excused herself.

"I said I would clean it up," Ianto began, his voice short and clipped. "Sir."

"I was bored last night," Jack replied casually, leaning forward on his desk. "I just did some light
housekeeping, mostly to keep the Rift Manipulator clear. You're on your own downstairs."

Ianto's face went through several emotions—anger, pain, confusion, gratitude—before settling into that blank mask Jack was so used to, but was finally beginning to understand hid much more. Straightening his shoulders, Ianto gave him a curt nod. "Thank you then, sir. I'll be on my way as soon as I've finished." He turned to leave, but Jack stood and called him back.

"Ianto, wait," he said, and the man turned with a reluctant sigh.

"Yes, sir?" he asked, and Jack bit his lip, unsure of how to respond. He'd rarely experienced this level of betrayal and discomfort with a member of his team before—at least, not as their leader, and not counting Suzie, who had shot herself before he'd had to deal with her crimes. He wasn't sure how to talk to Ianto now and found that he didn't like the feeling.

"I just…I just wanted to say I'm sorry. About Lisa."

The same straight face nodded at him, though Jack thought he saw the smallest tightening around the eyes, a twitch in the chin. "Thank you, sir. I appreciate your condolences." Ianto turned once more.

"And about some of the things I said," Jack continued before he left. "Yesterday.""You mean like threatening to execute me?" asked Ianto, turning slowly; the casual yet cutting tone to his voice almost sent a chill down Jack's back. Here was yet another surprise from their mild-mannered teaboy, this quietly cold manner; how else had Jack underestimated this man?

"Maybe," Jack replied, unable to resist flashing a grin. Ianto merely raised an eyebrow. "All right, that, yes. And a few other things, too." He came around the desk, intending to offer a hand or even a hug, but Ianto held up his hand first.

"Spare me the pleasantries, sir. I understand. Heat of the moment and all that."

"End of the world and all that," Jack replied. Ianto gave him a unreadable look.

"Perhaps. I hate to think that my girlfriend was capable of destroying an entire planet, however.""She wasn't your—" Jack started, but Ianto cut him off again, this time looking weary instead of angry. It seemed they had both moved beyond the fury of the previous day.

"I know that, Jack," he said. It always caught him off guard to hear Ianto use his first name; it was so often 'sir' that sometimes Jack wasn't sure how to respond when Ianto dropped the formality. He certainly liked it better. "I know it wasn't really her, not at the end. You don't have to keep reminding me."

"I'm sorry," Jack murmured. He finished walking around his desk and came to stand in front of Ianto. Up close, the man appeared gutted: he was pale, with dark shadows under his eyes and the hints of bruises still about his face and neck where Lisa—no, the Cyberman—had struck him, almost killing him. Looking into that face, so stoic and defeated at the same time, Jack was struck by the unspoken sorrow beneath. He remembered reviving Ianto, kissing him to bring him back from the brink; suddenly that moment came vividly back to mind, and he almost wished he could kiss away the pain he saw written across Ianto's face before him now.

Ianto seemed aware of the intense scrutiny. He coughed and ducked his head, then raised it again, as blank as ever. "I suppose I should apologize for some of my own words, then."
Jack nodded. "Like the monster bit?"

"No, not that part," replied Ianto blandly, and Jack wasn't quite sure whether or not Ianto was joking. There was no smile, but he did finally raise an eyebrow. "But you aren't the worst of them. There've been worse."

"I'll take what I can get, I suppose." Jack laughed dryly, stepping away. "Go ahead and do what you need to do. Let me know if you need any help."

"I'll be fine, sir," Ianto replied, and once more turned to leave. And once more Jack called him back, somehow reluctant to let him go.

"Ianto, you tell me if you're not this time," he said, and he tried to sound both firm and caring; he probably sounded more like an arsehole than anything. "No more secrets."

"No more secrets," Ianto repeated, staring straight at him with dead eyes. "You're really not one to lecture about secrets, Jack."

And with those bitter words, Ianto walked out, heading to the basement to destroy the remnants of the secret life he had hidden there for so many months. Jack watched him go, knowing Ianto was right. Secrets were sometimes all he had.

Chapter End Notes

This story starts the day after Cyberwoman and will probably run up to that first hint we have of something more between Jack and Ianto in They Keep Killing Suzie. As this is my first Torchwood story, I apologize for any glaring canon errors or Americanisms; kindly point me in the right direction, and I'll be happy to tweak them. I do hope you enjoy this story, no matter how many times it may have already been written by others. There is just something about this pairing that has bedazzled me, and in particular I will always wonder what the writers had in mind in bringing them together after what they went through in episode three. Thank you for reading!
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Two

It was harder than he had expected. Ianto had thought that cleaning up the wreck of the basement storage room would somehow help him alleviate the guilt and sorrow that ate away at him, gnawing at his gut like a constant, never-ending sickness. He had thought it would be the first step to putting it behind him, to moving on, but he had been wrong. It was a nightmare.

The bodies had been removed the night before, but there was still dried blood everywhere. The equipment itself needed to be dismantled and destroyed—melted, as per Jack's orders. Even Torchwood would not scavenge the horrible alien technology that stole a person's mind and body so hideously. And Ianto finally understood why, after seeing first hand what it had done to Lisa: it was too heinous to even exist.

It was brutal, backbreaking work, and it took him much longer than he had anticipated. He locked away the pain and sorrow though, determined not to break down, focusing almost mindlessly only on what he had do to and not what had happened there the night before. There would be weeks and weeks—months and years, even—from contemplating that horror and the consequences. Right now he just needed to destroy the physical reminders of what would always be painful memories.

He did think about Jack's apology as he worked. Though he had been at Torchwood Three for only a few months, he knew the apology was rare, but he also knew it was sincere. Jack Harkness had been nothing short of a bastard the day before, and Ianto wasn't sure he'd ever forget or forgive that his boss had shot his girlfriend. Yet somehow he knew that Jack truly felt bad. He had done what he had to do, but he hadn't liked it, not for what it had done to one of his teammates.

In some ways, Ianto understood. He had done what he had to do, and he too had hated betraying the people he worked with, especially Jack. He had scavenged the ruins of Torchwood Tower for whatever equipment he could find, then quickly set out for Cardiff to join Torchwood Three to complete his mission. He had been injured and likely in shock, but he had had only one thought, and that thought had got him through, pushing everything else into a small compartment in his mind that he had locked and buried. He had thought only of Lisa and her pain. Not his. Not anything else.

He felt it now. All of it.

Ianto did not regret coming to Torchwood Three. It was a remarkable place, Jack Harkness a charismatic if enigmatic leader. Oh, he had read the man's files in London, as much as he could gain access to anyway, before deciding how to approach him. There hadn't been much, but there had been enough for him to know how to get in. And he had: he had got a job, and he had found that he liked it. He was good at what he did there, and even if they didn't admit it, they needed him.

He regretted what he had done to them, though. He had held himself aloof when he could have been a part of the team, yet he had been so focused on Lisa, he couldn't let anyone else in, not even Jack with all his expansive charm or Tosh with her distant friendliness. When he had spit at his boss that no one had ever asked about his life, Ianto knew full well it was a two-way street: he hadn't offered it up. He had isolated himself to protect his secret, to protect Lisa, suffering alone in the basement.
As he finished the last of the damning work, Ianto stood at the door to the storage room and closed his eyes. Did he regret bringing her there? If he was honest with himself, deep down he did. He had failed to save her and only prolonged her pain. He had betrayed people whom he had come to admire and even care about. He had been the cause of two heinous murders. He loved Lisa, but she had suffered, he had suffered, and others had suffered, all because of him. Now all he had left was guilt and regret.

Knowing full well Jack Harkness kept his own secrets, Ianto idly wondered how the man dealt with the burdens that came from the type of lives they led working for Torchwood. He wondered if he'd ever be able to accept it, or if coming into the Hub every day from now on would only make it worse. Perhaps it was time to truly move on; perhaps he needed more than a month off.

"It looks good," said a voice behind him, and Ianto almost jumped to find his boss standing there, arms crossed over his chest. "I'm sorry you had to do it alone."

Ianto swallowed thickly before he shut the door and locked it. He handed Jack the key, fingers brushing quickly against the other man's before he slipped his hands back into his pockets, fingering the old stopwatch he kept there. "It's what needed to be done, sir."

"Cleaning up our shit, no questions asked?" said Jack, a rueful smile on his face. Ianto could only shake his head.

"Just cleaning up my own this time, sir," he replied. "I think I'm done here."

"Go home and get some rest, Ianto," Jack said, the closest thing to sympathy Ianto had heard in his voice since Lisa had been discovered. "Come back when you're ready."

Ianto stared at his boss, remembering his last few thoughts as he had stood at the threshold to where it had all fallen apart. "I'm not sure I will be coming back, sir."

Jack frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure Torchwood is the right place for me," Ianto replied with a shrug. "Not anymore." He moved past Jack and began to head for the stairway. Jack caught his forearm and pulled him around.

"What do you mean, not anymore?" he demanded. "You can't just quit."

"Well, yes, I can," Ianto replied, looking down to where Jack's hand was still gripping his elbow, warm and intense. "I didn't sign up for life, as far as I recall."

"I'd have to Retcon you. You'd give all this up?" Jack asked, motioning around with his other hand. "Everything you've seen, everything you've done?" He looked genuinely concerned, surprised even, and Ianto shook his hand off, stepping away.

"I've seen nothing but madness, felt nothing but sorrow, done nothing worth staying for." He paused to take a deep breath. "What's the point then?"

Jack frowned, stepping closer, and Ianto once more moved back, overwhelmed by the force of Jack's personality so focused on him. It didn't happen often, but when it did, it was powerful and uncomfortable in a way Ianto could not quite understand. "You can't go," Jack said, his voice intense. "We need you."

Ianto couldn't help but laugh bitterly. "You just need a good coffee machine, sir, you don't need me to run it." He leaned forward and lowered his voice. "I almost got everyone killed, remember?"
Turning once more without bothering to hear Jack's response, he started up the stairs to the main level of the Hub. Gwen and Owen were down in autopsy, Tosh was at her station as usual. Ducking his head to avoid speaking to anyone, Ianto grabbed the bag of personal items he had packed earlier and headed toward the tourist exit. Jack was still following him, though he was silent in front of the others.

"Ianto," he finally said as they stepped out onto the quay and into a grey afternoon. It was exactly where Ianto had once waited for him, cup of coffee in hand, practically begging for a job. He'd got the job, yet now here he was walking away from it, though his chest was growing tighter and tighter with each step.

"Jack, stop following me," Ianto said wearily, knowing that if he used his boss's name and not the obligatory 'sir' he'd catch him off guard. "I'm on suspension."

"I'm worried about you," Jack said, and he did sound worried. But then, he worried about them all, even when demanding the utmost sacrifices and acting like a complete bastard while doing it. Ianto had seen Jack push Tosh, push Owen; he had just never imagined what it would feel like for him, and it was not something he wanted to experience again.

"Don't be, sir," he replied, falling back on formality. "I'll be all right."

"You said that last night and came in looking like you'd been dragged under a lorry," Jack replied, trying to sound light. Ianto raised an eyebrow.

"That's about how I feel right now, sir. Accurate call." He turned and walked away, wanting only to get home, to change, to pour himself a scotch and settle into a miserable, lonely existence as he tried to determine what to do with his life now.

"Dammit, Ianto, stop walking away!" Jack exclaimed. "Why are you shutting me out when I'm just trying to help?"

"It's what we do at Torchwood, sir," Ianto answered, carefully formulating his next remark for maximum damage. "You also shot my girlfriend. I see no reason to let you in."

And it worked: he left Jack speechless on the quay as he quickened his steps and walked away. Jack did not come after him, and a small part of Ianto felt badly for that, but he pushed it aside, because he did not want to be pitied or rescued, not really. Brushing angrily at his eyes, he didn't look back, but Jack called out to him anyway.

"It's not over, Ianto," he shouted. "You're not leaving us. Not like this. I won't let you."

Ianto kept walking, unsure whether he wanted Jack Harkness to mean what he said, or simply leave him alone to pick up the pieces of his broken life.

The first few days were the most difficult of his life. He had grown so used to routine that suddenly finding himself without one was far harder than he had thought it would be. He did not need to get up, go into the office, start the coffee, and carry on with all the small things he did that no one seemed to notice but needed doing anyway. He did not need to sneak around and check on Lisa, adjusting her medications and sitting with her, always desperately hoping no one would find her but that he would find the cure.

So instead, he slept.

He slept late, then slept again when he got bored, and slept some more when there was nothing left
to do at night but watch bad television and sleep. Perhaps his body needed it, perhaps his mind. He
didn't sleep well—no, there were nightmares, naturally—but still he slept. Occasionally he'd step
out, get some food. He tried reading. He thought about calling Rhiannon, but something always
stopped him, so he just slept some more. And then he got tired of sleeping.

After about a fortnight he cleaned himself up a bit and headed down to the local pub. It had been a
while, and it actually felt reasonably good to get out and chat with some of the regulars he half-
knew from the few times he'd gone out to try and start a life outside of Torchwood. He was
enjoying a second pint when he sensed a familiar presence beside him and sighed.

"Evening, sir," he said without turning. "Tracking my mobile, then?"

Jack motioned to the barman before answering. "Just stopping by for a drink," he answered in the
overly friendly tone he had; Ianto could imagine the broad grin and half wanted to turn and punch
him in the face again, just as he had on the Plass the night Lisa had died.

"Ever been here before?" he asked instead, keeping his voice level.

Jack shrugged and grinned. "No, just wandered in."

"Funny coincidence, then," Ianto murmured, refusing to look at Jack. "Must be the Rift." He did not
need his boss following him to the pub; he did not want Jack following him anywhere.

"Fine, you forced it out of me," said Jack with that laugh that pulled everyone in; Ianto bit back a
sigh of frustration and annoyance, because he would not fall for it, not then. "I wanted to know
how you're doing."

"You could have phoned," Ianto pointed out, finally giving him a dry look. "Emailed—texted,
even."

"Would you have answered?" asked Jack.

"No." Ianto finished his pint and motioned for another, even though he didn't particularly fancy a
third. Yet if Jack was going to sit there and question him like a criminal suspect about his well
being since leaving the Hub, Ianto needed it.

"Then I'm glad I came. So how are you?"

"I'm fine, sir," Ianto answered. "And I don't need a nursemaid looking after me."

"Ianto," Jack said, leaning closer. "I'm not trying to be a nursemaid, or a nuisance. I'm just trying to
be a friend."

"Bit late for that, Jack," Ianto replied.

"Why?" Jack replied. "It's never too late for anything from where I see it."

"You would see it like that," Ianto said. He thought again about some of the things he had seen in
Jack Harkness's file at Torchwood London, and before Jack could go into anything about his own
life experience or his own losses, or what had to be done for the greater good, Ianto put down his
half-finished pint, threw some quid on the bar, and stood up.

"It's late. I've got to go. Lots to do tomorrow." Which wasn't true at all, and he regretted saying it as
soon as it left his mouth, because he knew Jack would call him on it.
Jack turned on his barstool. "Like what?" he asked casually, as if he was actually interested.

Ianto gave him a bland look, his insides twisting with the truth of it. "Lots of nothing. Good night, sir."

He left the pub, stepping into the cool fall night. He put his hands in his pockets, touching the watch there, and took a deep breath before setting out for his flat. The reality of his words stung, because that was his life now, without Lisa, without Torchwood: lots of nothing.

Chapter End Notes

All right, I'll be pulling in a bit from other sources now, things from the BBC website like the Captain's logs and such (the four week suspension here, for one). Plus a lot of speculation, missing moments that work into what we know. I just think there was much more to Ianto from the start, else how could he have managed what he did? And we saw so little consequence to the events of Cyberwoman that I'm convinced it must have all happened off-screen in the writers' heads. Well, maybe this was it. Enjoy!
Three

Jack watched Ianto leave the pub and turned back to the bar with a frustrated sigh. It had gone worse than he had anticipated: he hadn't expected Ianto to talk much, but he hadn't thought the man would just walk away either. He finished his drink, ignored the bloke who sat down in Ianto's place and tried to chat him up, then paid his tab and left.

He thought about Ianto all the way back to the Hub, about how much pain he must be in and how to help him, though he really didn't know how. When he got to the Hub, he was no closer to a solution. Everyone had gone home but Tosh, who was monitoring Rift activity at her station. She turned when he entered.

"How's he doing then?" she asked, knowing Jack had gone to see Ianto as she had reluctantly helped ping Ianto's mobile. Jack sighed in frustration as he took off his coat and threw himself onto the nearby sofa. Cold pizza littered the table in front of it, and he grabbed a piece just to have something to do.

"I don't know, Tosh," he finally admitted. "I can't tell. He barely talked to me and left so quick I hardly had a chance to talk to him. I don't know what to do for him. Anything on the monitors?" he asked, wanting to change the subject. He should have known he couldn't, not with Tosh.

"Nothing unusual, no," she replied, leaving her seat and coming to sit next to him. "Want me to try?" she asked.

"Try what?" Jack replied through a mouth full of pizza.

"Talking to him," she replied in that steady, calm voice she had. Jack sat up straighter. "We're friends, of a sort. I think."

"Yes, I would," he replied, laying a hand on her arm. "Tosh, that would be brilliant. Get him to talk about it. Get him to open up."

She glanced down at his arm and laughed. "That's not what we do here at Torchwood, you know," she said, pulling away and picking up a slice of pizza for herself. "Talk. Open up."

"That's what Ianto said," Jack replied, frowning. "Maybe we should. Maybe things like this wouldn't happen if we did." He wasn't just thinking of Ianto, but about Alex and Suzie and all the others he'd lost over the years because Torchwood tore them up inside. He couldn't let that happen to this team. They were too good, and he was starting to feel a strong responsibility for them. Fondness, even.

Tosh didn't reply, but swallowed and smiled at him. "I'll give him a ring tomorrow, then. See if he wants to have dinner or something next week."

Jack wiped his hands on a nearby napkin and leaned over to kiss her on the cheek. "You're wonderful, Tosh. And you're free to go home. I'll keep an eye on things here tonight."

She nodded and stood up to leave, then turned back with a smile. "He'll be all right, Jack. Ianto is
stronger than we give him credit for, I think. It's just that he just lost someone he really cared about, and he lost her twice."

"I know," Jack said. "I don't want this to break him, though. We need him."

Tosh nodded. "I'll do what I can, then."

As she gathered her things and headed out the tourist entrance, Jack thought about her words: Ianto was stronger than they knew. He had lost someone he cared about, and lost her twice. Jack could relate to that, having lost many people over the years. He had no choice but to be strong, because no matter what, he'd always come back to face whatever had defeated him, whatever he'd lost. Ianto didn't have that curse: he could walk away from it all. He could leave Torchwood and move on.

But Jack hoped he didn't, because he wanted Ianto back on the team.

A week later, Tosh came up to his office and told him Ianto seemed to be doing about as well as expected. He was still struggling, but getting better—talking more and getting out a bit. He missed them, but more than anything he felt guilty about what he had done. And again, Jack could relate: he too had done things that left him with a lifetime of guilt—regret he would never be rid of.

"Jack," she said, hesitating. "He's still thinking about not coming back." She gave him a sad look. "And I didn't know what to say, because can you blame him? This is where Lisa died. We're the ones who killed her."

Jack gave her a long look before he shook his head. "No, we killed a Cyberman. Lisa was gone long before we shot her. He'll understand that someday."

"Oh, I think he does, deep down," Tosh replied, leaning forward. "But that doesn't change what happened, or that it happened here." She paused. "Jack, he's starting to show some anger. Mostly toward you."

To his surprise, the thought made Jack grin. If Ianto was angry, it was better than depressed and despondent. It meant he was moving forward. "Good," he said, standing up. "Then maybe it's time I went to see him again."

He grabbed his coat and started toward the door, but Tosh stopped him. "I really don't think that's a good idea, Jack. Even Owen might be a better choice."

Jack laughed as he thought about the tension between Owen and Ianto; it must be really bad for Tosh to even suggest it, especially knowing Owen would likely laugh at the idea, make a bad joke, and refuse.

"If he blames me for what happened here, then maybe it's time for him to get it out," he said.

"He already punched you once," Tosh pointed out, and Jack laughed her off. "I can take it, if it will bring him back."

He turned and went downstairs, determined to have it out with Ianto once and for all, but Tosh followed him. "Jack, I don't think he blames you, not exactly. He blames himself. He's just angry at you for…well, I don't know, really." She shrugged helplessly. "He just seems to have focused it on you."
"I'm the one who held a gun to his head and told him to go down there and execute his girlfriend," Jack replied. "He should be pissed off at me. I can handle it. Really, I can." He put a hand on her shoulder. "Thanks, Tosh, but it'll be fine. I'll be back later."

He could feel her eyes on him as he left, determined to see Ianto and put things to rest. It had been almost a month, and he was ready for things to go back to the way they were.

He had never been to Ianto's flat, and once again Jack found himself wondering what it was like to have a life outside the Hub. Yet he pushed it from his mind as he stood before the door, bouncing nervously on his heels even though he wasn't sure why: he didn't get nervous, especially around his team members.

Ianto opened the door with a sigh, a grimace, and a scotch in his hand.

"Evening, sir," he offered, sounding reluctant to even offer the greeting.

"Evening, Ianto," Jack replied just as formally but with a forced smile. He pulled a bottle from the paper bag he had been clutching. "Need a refill?"

Ianto tilted his head as he took the bottle and studied the label. "Excellent choice. I suppose I'll have to invite you in."

"Thanks," Jack murmured as he stepped inside. The flat was sparse, with little furniture and boxes still stacked in the corners. A single picture stood on the mantle, a picture of Ianto and Lisa smiling outdoors, and a battered old stopwatch lay next to it. "New place?" Jack asked, though he knew perfectly well it wasn't; it just didn't look very lived in.

Ianto gave him that look of dry disdain he did so well. Jack had missed that look, as rare as it had been.

"Moving out, then?" Jack tried again.

Ianto glanced around and shrugged. "I never really moved in, I guess."

Jack wasn't sure how to respond. He knew without saying why that was, and as he practically lived in his secret underground bunker, he certainly couldn't criticize Ianto's lack of decorating.

"Mind if I sit?"

Ianto motioned a yes, moved toward a chair across from the sofa, then stopped. "I'm sorry—would you like a glass, sir? You've brought a good year."

"Thanks, Ianto." Jack looked around once more as Ianto stepped into the kitchen for another glass. He was slightly taken aback by the state of things, as he had assumed Ianto was as meticulous and organized at home as he was at work. Yet it seemed that Ianto, like them all, was not immune to what Torchwood did: it sucked away any sense of normalcy in their lives, rarely if ever enabling them to live as regular people did. Of course Ianto's flat was bare and empty: he had probably spent most of his time at the Hub, deep in the basement with Lisa.

Ianto returned, handing him a glass before going to stand by the mantle, where he picked up the stopwatch and toyed with it as he drank. Jack watched him as he sipped: Ianto looked at once both tense and relaxed, both angry and awkward, and Jack wondered once again why it was so difficult to talk to this man who had been on his team for several months. He should know him better, but he didn't.
"So how have you been—" Jack started, but the other man cut him off almost immediately.

"You know you're a bloody areshole, Jack," Ianto said, his voice flat but simmering with the anger Tosh had warned him about. Jack took a deep sip of the scotch—it was a good year, he remembered, even if Ianto hadn't even been born—and set it down slowly before replying.

"I'm sorry, but—" he tried again, and Ianto once more stopped him, setting down the watch and stepping forward with a slash of his hand.

"You follow me to the pub, you send Tosh to check on me over dinner, then you show up here with a bottle of thirty-year-old scotch and expect me to just suddenly be all right?" Ianto pierced him with a cold stare, and Jack took a deep breath to control his suddenly racing heart. Yes, there was indeed more to this man than any of them had suspected. Here now was the anger, and Jack readied himself to absorb it, and if necessary, the pain behind it.

"No, I don't expect you to be all right," Jack finally replied. "I know you're not, and frankly I'm terrified that you won't be if you don't let one of us help you."

"I don't want your help, Jack," Ianto snapped, knocking back his drink before pouring another. "You are the last person I want anything from."

Jack knew he could push people, and knew he had pushed Ianto hard, yet he still sensed that needed Ianto to say it—to get it out, or they'd never move on. "Why me, Ianto? Tell me—why me?"

Ianto's face twisted before he turned away, then turned back with cold, dark eyes, his finger pointed accusingly at Jack's heart. "You killed her. You ordered me to kill her. You even threatened to kill me…when all I was trying to do was save her."

"You couldn't save her." Jack had said it before, but he would keep saying it until Ianto believed it.

"I know that!" Ianto practically snarled, waving a hand in dismissal. "But I had to try, didn't I? I loved her. You didn't see what they did, you weren't there…you have no idea what it was like…" He trailed off as he became lost in dark memories.

Jack nodded to himself: so that was part of it. Survivor's guilt. "Then tell me," he said quietly. Ianto stared at him as if Jack had gone mad.

"No."

"Have you ever told anyone?" he asked. "About Canary Wharf? About Lisa—any of it?"

"Of course not," Ianto replied, his voice bitter and quiet. "It was classified and covered up."

Jack couldn't help but laugh. " Classified? I'm not talking about the alien details, Ianto. And even then, you could have talked to someone from Torchwood London, someone with clearance…" He trailed off at the look of scorn on Ianto's face.

"There were less than thirty of us, sir," he said, his voice bitter. "The rest were converted or killed. The survivors were like me, staggering from the ruins, abandoned and forgotten. Who was I going to talk to?"

"A friend, family— anyone." Jack stood and came around to where Ianto was standing. He put his hand on the man's shoulder and stared him in the eye, feeling a strange connection with the angry man before him. "Me."
Ianto's face cracked for just the smallest moment. He closed his eyes, finished the second glass of scotch, and brushed angrily at his face. Jack let go, poured them both another round, and sat down on the sofa once more. Ianto sat down on the other end and finally talked.

Chapter End Notes

Jack did say in the Captain's Log that he was going to spend more time with Ianto during his suspension. And the stopwatch...well, there's more to that. I like to work in the details. Thank you for reading!
Chapter 4

He started slowly, haltingly. Part of him didn't want to revisit that horrible night, and yet another part wanted to purge it, to let it go by unloading all his grief and pain and guilt. He almost felt a sort of vindictive enjoyment in throwing the unspeakable memories at Jack: he hadn't been there, he had no idea, and he had only made it worse. Ianto decided it was time for Jack Harkness to understand, to try and make the man feel something when so much of the time he seemed callous and unfeeling. Like he had been with Lisa.

But eventually Ianto found he couldn't go on. He poured another scotch and sat back in silence, letting his head fall back against the sofa and closing his eyes against the horror. To his surprise, Jack reached over and took his hand.

"I may not have been there, but I've met Cybermen. I've fought Daleks. I was even..." He stopped with that damn dry laugh, this time touched with bitterness. "I've been around. I can only imagine what it was like for you, but I do know how bad it was for me."

Ianto glanced briefly down at their hands, surprised at how normal it felt. Jack was a rather demonstrative man, showing a good deal of physical attention with all his employees, yet right then it was so comforting that Ianto didn't want him to let go, even if he was holding the hand that had shot Lisa; at least it was real, and surprisingly compassionate, at that. Maybe he had been wrong about Jack Harkness...or maybe he had had too much to drink to care.

"Sometimes I don't know how I survived, when so many others didn't," Ianto said, speaking mostly to the ceiling. "How we avoided them, how we got out."

"Yet you went back in," Jack said, prompting him.

"At the end, when it was almost over." He let his head turn toward Jack. "I had to find her, even if it was just her body. Instead I found her screaming in pain, half converted." He knocked back the rest of his drink and let Jack refill it, even though he knew he shouldn't; it wouldn't help him forget, after all. "Upgraded. Bloody bastards."

"But you got her out, kept her alive."

Ianto was starting to feel the affects of the scotch, but drank anyway. He wouldn't be able to continue if he didn't, because it got worse—so much worse.

"I tried, I tried so hard. I didn't think we'd make it, those first days." He took a breath to settle the break in his voice. "I tried to get help, but Torchwood Tower was destroyed. Gone. There was no one to turn to, and then I heard what they were doing to the survivors..." He shuddered before continuing. "So I went back, got as much as I could to keep her alive, and came here."

"To Torchwood Three." Jack said, and Ianto wasn't sure whether the statement was simply a neutral observation or a damning accusation. He let his head fall forward, because this was where his guilt grew even greater.

"I didn't know where else to go," he whispered. "Cardiff is my home. I thought Torchwood Three
could help. It was all I could think of."

"But you didn't let us help," Jack said, leaning forward with an earnest look on his face. "Why didn't you let us help?"

Ianto shook his head. "I don't know!" he said, finally dropping Jack's hand and standing somewhat unsteadily. He paced over to the mantle and stared at Lisa's picture, then picked up the watch, turning it over in his hands to try and focus. "I didn't know you, for one. I was scared, probably in shock, for another." He took a deep breath. "And maybe deep down I knew...knew there wasn't anything you could do for her. That there wasn't anything I could do."

"You still called Dr. Tanizaki," Jack pointed out.

"I had to try," Ianto said, running a hand through his hair and not caring how mussed up it must be now. "She was in so much pain, and I couldn't keep her down there forever." With a sudden rush, he turned back toward the sofa. "Jack, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I forced you to give me the job, that I hid her in the basement, that I put everyone in so much danger—"

"Ianto." Jack cut him off. "I know that. I do. But it's over now. You have to let it go, move on."

Ianto threw himself into the chair instead of returning to the sofa, letting his head fall to his chest as he toyed mindlessly with the button on the watch. It had stopped working after Canary Wharf, destroyed in the battle, yet another hateful reminder of that horrible day. "How?" he asked, then looked up into Jack's piercing eyes. "How do you live with such horror, Jack? So much grief? So much guilt?"

He wasn't just asking about himself, and Jack knew it. The other man drew a deep breath before answering. "Because I have no choice. And as far as I'm concerned, neither do you. We need you back."

"You don't really need me," Ianto murmured. "Just Retcon me and be done with it." The alcohol was really beginning to hit him: he felt tired and relaxed all at once, and could barely keep his eyes open.

"I'm not letting you do that, Ianto," Jack said. He stood and helped Ianto out of the chair.

"Are you sure you haven't already, sir?" Ianto mumbled. He felt strange—light-headed and dizzy and unsteady on his feet as Jack led him toward the bedroom. He was vividly aware of Jack's strong body against his.

"I wouldn't use it without your consent, you know that," Jack replied. He was very close; Ianto remembered the night they had caught Mfanwy and how Jack had smelled, pressed together against the doorway, and then again, after they'd fallen to the ground. What had Jack said that night? Something about 51st century phermones? Was that all it was?

"I don't know anything about you, Jack," Ianto replied, the liquor loosening his tongue. "None of us do, and we all wonder. Constantly."

"Nothing to wonder about," Jack replied with that disarming charm he had. Ianto shook his head, though it hurt so he stopped.

"You're not a very good liar, sir," he said. "I've seen your file, you know. Well, bits of it. Most of it's too classified for anyone but UNIT and the Prime Minister, it seems."

They were standing in Ianto's bedroom, Jack's arm wrapped around his waist, Ianto standing
loosely against his side. Jack helped him to the bed and gently laid him down.

"The only thing you need to know is that I'm sorry," Jack said softly. "I'm sorry this happened to you, and I'm sorry it ended the way it did. I need you to believe that."

Ianto nodded groggily. "I do, Jack. That doesn't stop me wondering, though."

Jack smiled as he brushed the hair from Ianto's face and leaned down to kiss him on the forehead. Even half conscious Ianto couldn't deny his surprise at the spark that ran through him at Jack's gentle touch, and he could tell Jack felt it as well, for he pulled away quickly and stepped back with a crooked grin.

"You keep wondering, Ianto Jones. Maybe that will bring you back."

He halfway wanted to reach out and take Jack's hand before the other man walked away, but he didn't. The room was spinning, and he likely would have missed. Why had he had so much to drink, anyway? Bloody Jack Harkness and his bottle of scotch—and there he was, walking away without a care in the world once again.

"You're still an arsehole, sir," Ianto murmured, sleep overtaking him.

"You're welcome," Jack replied softly. He shut the door, and Ianto let the spinning darkness overtake him. He probably wouldn't remember any of it in the morning anyway.

When Ianto woke the next day, he was still in his clothes. His head pounded and his mouth tasted like dry cotton and the stopwatch in his hand had pressed a mark into his face. And then he remembered why, and with a groan, he stumbled out of bed and into the kitchen only to find his boss sitting at the table reading the paper. Which meant that Jack hadn't used Retcon on him after all.

"Good morning," Jack said, glancing up with a broad grin. "I was going to make coffee, but thought you might punch me in the face again if I touched anything."

Ianto just stared at him for a moment before shaking his head, slightly stunned to find him there. "You'd be right, then. I would." He tried to straighten his clothing and fix his hair a bit as he walked toward the counter to begin his morning routine. Jack stood up behind him.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, almost sounding apprehensive.

"Like hell, sir," Ianto replied.

"It was good scotch, though," Jack replied.

"It was," Ianto agreed, turning around and finding Jack uncomfortably close. "You seem unaffected as ever."

"I didn't have as much," Jack replied. "Maybe next time."

Ianto ignored that last remark, not really wanting to know what next time meant. Instead he looked Jack up and down. He appeared the same as he had the night before, which wasn't unusual given his proclivity for old military dress, but Ianto was fairly sure Jack was in the exact same clothes.

"Did you...spend the night, sir?" he asked, halfway dreading the answer. Jack grinned.

"Don't worry, I crashed on the couch."
Ianto gave him a doubtful look. "Why? It's not the most comfortable sofa in Cardiff."

"No, it's not," Jack laughed. "But I wanted to be sure you were all right."

"For Christ's sake, Jack, it's not like I haven't had a hangover before," Ianto grumbled. He moved around the kitchen, albeit a bit slower than usual, wishing Jack wasn't watching his back so closely.

"And you don't need a nursemaid, I know," Jack replied, throwing back words from the pub. "How about a hangover pill?"

Ianto turned and gave him a skeptical look. "A hangover pill? Let me guess, alien technology?"

Jack tossed him a small vial, which he caught effortlessly in spite of how wretched he felt. "No, I developed it myself. Bit like the Retcon only you keep your memories, just not the headache."

"Brilliant." Ianto set it down and turned away, wondering if he'd prefer the other. "But unfortunate." Jack seemed to be reading his mind.

"Trust me—you don't want it to be Retcon," he said.

"You don't know that," Ianto murmured.

"There are some things you shouldn't forget," Jack said. "Lisa is one of them."

Ianto nodded, not wanting to talk any longer than necessary or he'd just get angry again, and anger drained him; he was tired of feeling angry. "Thank you, sir. I'll be all right now." He could still feel Jack's eyes boring into his back, though, and turned around once more. "Really."

"Are you coming back then?" Jack asked, hands crossed over his chest. "To Torchwood?" Ianto shrugged.

"I don't know. I've still got another week of suspension to decide, haven't I?"

Jack nodded, then narrowed his eyes before grinning. "I know just the thing to help you decide. You and me. Weevil hunting. Tonight."

"What?" Ianto didn't think he'd heard Jack right. Weevil hunting?

"Weevil hunting. I'll be back with the SUV later. Tosh said there was an unusual number of sightings last night, so let's see what we can clean up."

"Sir, I don't think—"

Jack left the kitchen headed toward the door, Ianto following him somewhat helplessly.

"No excuses, Ianto. Just be ready."

"Jack, I don't want to—"

Jack whirled and put a hand on his shoulder, gazing intensely into his eyes. "I need you, Ianto," he said, and Ianto stared back, wide-eyed, trying not imagine that Jack meant anything more than needing him at Torchwood, making sure everything ran smoothly, including the coffeemaker.

"Take Owen," he finally managed. "Or Gwen. She could use the practice."
"Gwen's got the night off, and Owen's working on something else." He leaned so close that Ianto was unexpectedly confused by Jack's nearness. "I want you. I'll be here at ten."

"All right," Ianto murmured, and he stepped away from the powerful hold Jack had on him, refusing to identify what he had felt. "Fine. I'll be ready."

Jack grinned. "It'll be just like the first time we met," he pointed out, and Ianto couldn't help but smile back as he remembered saving Jack from the Weevil in the woods so many months ago.

"I can see why you'll need me then, sir," he replied, earning a snarky look from his boss. To his surprise, Ianto felt slightly better. Maybe Weevil hunting was exactly what he needed: fresh air and aliens and Jack Harkness.

Yes, he could do that.

The first night they rounded up a pair of Weevils who'd come up and started hanging out around a local park. They tag-teamed them, one of them distracting the beast while the other sprayed it, then together tossing them back into the sewers where they belonged. They had a good chase after a third, but lost it when it ducked into a large tunnel and escaped.

By then the sun was almost coming up, and Jack dropped him off at his flat. Ianto thought about asking if Jack wanted some coffee, but decided he was too knackered to deal with it. He'd worked off a good deal of the negative energy he'd been feeling for so long chasing after the Weevils, and he was exhausted. Jack still had to go back to the Hub, and Ianto wondered how he'd make it through the day on little to no sleep.

"So was it good for you too?" asked Jack as Ianto stepped out of the SUV. Ianto rolled his eyes, but allowed a small smile in answer. He was once again reminded of the first time he had met Jack Harkness, chasing after a Weevil out in the woods. Ianto could have sworn the beast had bit Jack, but when he had reached out toward the wound, it had been gone. One of the many secrets of Jack Harkness.

"Same time tonight, then?" asked Jack, and Ianto glanced at him in surprise.

"Are you feeling a sudden need for vengeance against Weevils, sir?"

Jack grinned. "No, I just want to get out a bit more. Fresh air can do wonders for the body and soul."

Ianto nodded slowly as he thought about how much better he felt, then pushed the guilt from his mind: he was allowed to feel better, even if it involved alien hunting in the backstreets of Cardiff with his boss. "Same time, then. Maybe we'll do a bit better and get a few more."

They caught four that night and five the next. They celebrated with breakfast at dawn, laughing over the chase they'd been led on, before Jack went back to the Hub and Ianto went back to crash at his flat. He slept the entire day, woke up for dinner and cleaned up, then headed to the pub for a quick bite to eat before Jack picked him up again.

Three nights out with Jack had apparently done him a world of good. He found himself talking and even laughing with the girl behind the bar. He wasn't sure if he was relieved or annoyed when Jack phoned his mobile earlier than expected; the girl just gave him a cheeky grin.

"Boyfriend, then?" she asked, clearing away his half-eaten food. Ianto felt a flush creep up his face.
"My boss," he replied. "Been called in to work." Which was mostly true: he was working, just not officially. The girl winked as he left, and Ianto tried to shake the uncomfortable feeling he'd had from both her comment and her look. He headed out to the curb, where the SUV pulled up within minutes.

"Come on," said Jack, grinning broadly. "We've got something better than Weevils tonight."

Ianto climbed in the passenger door and glanced around the SUV. "Shouldn't the others be here, then?"

"Nothing we can't handle," Jack replied as he pulled away. He did not offer any details, however.

"Are you going to tell me what we're looking for, perhaps?" Ianto finally asked as the car sped down the street. "I like to be prepared when I meet a potentially deadly alien species."

Jack laughed. "You know, you do know how to drop a line."

Ianto inclined his head, trying not to get flustered by the odd compliment on something that came naturally. "I try my best, sir."

"It's nothing new, though," Jack continued, turning quickly, as if in a hurry. "Although I don't know if you ever met one up in London."

"I was in research, I never met much of anything," Ianto replied. "What is it, then?"


"I've read about them, sir," Ianto shrugged. "We had one in London before Canary Wharf, although not in Cardiff as far as I'm aware, at least according to the archives."

"It's been a while in Cardiff," Jack confirmed. "But Tosh found a small Rift spike followed by some strange police reports, so we need to check this one out." He grinned. "Have some fun."

Ianto half rolled his eyes as he glanced out the window. "If you say so, sir."

They drove in silence for a while, and Ianto was surprised to find that it wasn't uncomfortable, in spite of or perhaps because of all they'd been through together. He was alone in the SUV with his boss on his way to find and contain an alien creature, and he was perfectly all right with that. It almost felt normal. It certainly felt better than sitting around his flat. He touched the stopwatch in his pocket as he tried to remember what he'd read about the Hoix. Though it had been broken for months, he took it everywhere, a sort of comfort item, as well as a reminder of the past and a way to focus his thoughts. Unfortunately, he was too distracted by other things to think much about the Hoix.

Jack pulled into what appeared to be an abandoned block of old office buildings. Again Ianto was reminded of those first days he had met Jack, when he had lured him to Mfanwy. Jack seemed to be remembering that as well: he gave Ianto that cheeky grin, Ianto rolled his eyes again, and they climbed out of the SUV.

"What's the plan, sir?" Ianto asked as Jack took several things from the back, including several weapons. He handed Ianto two guns—one standard issue, and a rather odd-looking one that Ianto had not used before.

"We'll try to stun it first if we can," he said. "That's this one. Press here." He wrapped his hand
around Ianto's and demonstrated, standing almost a bit too close for comfort, though Ianto wasn't sure he minded.

"I do know how to hold a gun, sir," he said. If his boss lingered a bit longer than necessary, Ianto tried not to think about why, or the way it made him feel. He slipped the real gun into the back of his jeans and kept hold of the stun gun, weighing it in his hand to gage its accuracy. "Even a pretend one."

Jack finally stepped back with a laugh. "Right. Let's go, then. Last report Tosh picked up was that it was wandering around here somewhere."

It was like something from a strange dream, or a movie, even: sneaking around an abandoned old office park in the dark, side by side with guns held at the ready. Ianto tried to keep his breathing steady, to stay calm and steady and not embarrass himself. Jack had brought him into the field for a reason, and Ianto did not want to let him down.

He caught Jack looking at him more than once. "What is it?" he finally asked after the third odd glance. "Do I have something on my face?"

Jack just grinned in that way he had. "No, I'm just admiring your pluckiness."

"Pluckiness?" Ianto shook his head. "Really, Jack, I'm not some eleven-year-old boy wizard."

"Okay, fine," Jack whispered back, stepping quickly around the corner. "I was admiring your—"

He never got to finish, for suddenly from behind them came a long, low growl, and they whirled to find the Hoix standing there, jagged mouth of teeth open in a snarl. Jack fired a shot, but the creature had already turned and ran, and they took off after it, twisting and turning and running like mad. Ianto was fairly certain he heard Jack laughing as they ran.

And then suddenly it stopped and turned toward them. Yet before either of them got off a shot, it charged instead, hissing and spitting and bowling them both over. Ianto felt sharp claws rake across his side as it ran by, ripping his shirt and flesh, and he fell to his knees with a painful shout, dropping the stun gun. Jack jumped up and turned toward him, obviously uninjured, his own gun still up and ready. His was face white as he knelt next to Ianto.

"I'm all right," Ianto gasped. "Go after it. I'll be fine."

"No," Jack said, "I'm not leaving you here. It could come back. Let's get you back to the SUV first, then I'll see if I can track it again."

He helped Ianto stand before moving forward to survey the area, making sure it was clear to retreat. Ianto swore as he clutched his side, then swore again in Welsh as he noticed a shadow in the dark. "Jack!" he shouted, grabbing his gun from behind him and wincing in pain. "It's right behind you!"

Ianto raised his arm to take the shot, but just as Jack turned, the Hoix barreled into him and knocked them both to the ground, and the bullet flew right through the air where they had stood. Ianto heard a sickening crunch when the two hit the ground and limped over, gun still drawn.

The Hoix was straddling Jack, who appeared to be unconscious, blood pooling from a deep gash by his ear; then again, Ianto had heard enough stories to wonder if Jack Harkness was actually seriously injured. The beast turned as Ianto approached, baring its teeth in a hideous, feral grin.

"Get off," Ianto snarled, idly wondering if the creature had any idea what he was saying. "Or I'll
He never had the chance: a second creature came barreling out of the darkness and knocked him sideways to the pavement, grinning and growling as the gun went flying from his hand. Ianto pushed it off him, and they began to tussle on the ground.

He wasn't sure how he'd survive against two if Jack didn't come around and the other alien attacked. He kicked at the Hoix he was battling, desperately trying to avoid its teeth, and began to crawl frantically toward his gun. The second creature was still straddling Jack, licking its lips but watching the fight as if enjoying the show first before going in for its own kill.

"Jack!" Ianto gasped. "Wake up—come on, wake up, dammit!" His fingers scrambled for the gun, but he couldn't reach it. He felt the creature standing over him, felt its foot on his back, and knew it was over: he was about to be killed by an ugly, slobbering alien from the other side of the galaxy.

There was a gasp and a grunt from beside him: the alien that had been straddling Jack flew backward, Jack sat up, and the Hoix with its foot on Ianto's back was suddenly blasted away as well. Ianto scrambled to a sitting position, his hand grasping reflexively at the gun behind him.

"That was close—" Jack started, before Ianto shouted, "Jack!" He raised his weapon and fired at the creature rising behind Jack. It fell backward with a groan; for good measure, Jack turned and pumped another round into its twitching body.

"Really close," Jack amended. Ianto let his head fall to his knees as he felt the uncontrollable beginning of hysterical laughter deep in his chest.

"Ianto," Jack said, kneeling next to him. "Are you all right? Are you hurt?"

"Yes and yes," Ianto replied, glancing up with what he knew perfectly well was a ridiculous grin. How else could he react? He was used to doing a lot of things at Torchwood, but shooting rampaging aliens off Jack Harkness was not one of them.

"Let me see," Jack demanded, standing and holding out a hand to him. Ianto took it, and once again, if Jack held on a bit longer, Ianto tried not to notice, even though he did. He stopped laughing and waved the other man off.

"I'll be fine, it's just a scratch." Really, his side was on fire from where the Hoix had mauled him, a deep scratch running around the entire turn of his abdomen, and the rest of his body was sore from wrestling with the creature on the hard pavement. At least he hadn't been bit by those teeth; that would have likely severed an artery. As it was, he could hide it until he could get home to clean it up. "And you? I thought it knocked you clean out. I heard it."

"It did," Jack replied, avoiding his eyes. "Can you help me drag these two back to the Hub? I want to let Owen have a look before we dispose of them."

Ianto glanced distastefully at the alien bodies littering the pavement. "This is when I really wish I knew how do a Hover Charm." Jack gave him a funny look, but didn't say anything as they picked up the first body together. It weighed far more than a man, and they both grunted their way back to the SUV, then did the same with the second body. By then Ianto was embarrassed to find himself winded, though he suspected it was mostly from the pain. He couldn't resist peeling up his shirt to see the damage: it was ugly.

"You said it was a scratch," Jack said, staring accusingly at him. Ianto hurriedly pulled down his shirt and gave him a tight smile.
"Nothing a bit of iodine and gauze won't fix, sir," he replied, trying not to grind his teeth as he stepped into the SUV. Jack looked concerned.

"I'm taking you to the Hub," he said, starting the car.

"I'm suspended," Ianto reminded him, leaning back.

"I'm ending your suspension. You need to have Owen look at that."

"I need my flat and my bed and I'll be fine." He turned toward the driver's side. "Please, Jack. I don't want to go to the Hub."

Jack was still and silent as he pulled away. "Ever?" he asked quietly. He actually sounded worried, or disappointed.

"No," Ianto answered after thinking about it. "Not ever. Just not tonight, not after that."

"Then I'll expect you back on Monday." He'd never forget the look on Jack's face: broad grin tinged with relief and joy and maybe, just maybe, something else.

But he didn't think about it on the way home. He gripped the stopwatch in his pocket as he tried to ignore the pain in his side and stay awake. He thought about Lisa and about Torchwood One, about the Hub and Tosh and even Owen and Gwen. He thought about the Rift and Mfanwy and his coffee machine and everything he'd seen and done since arriving at Torchwood Three, and he realized he was ready to go back. Someone needed to do something about these aliens roaming the city, after all. He might prefer to do it from behind a desk, a computer, and an earpiece, but he would sort that out later.

He did not, however, think about Jack, because something felt different, in a way he was not prepared to sort out at all.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, I couldn't resist the buddy chase: it was such a vivid scene in my mind, I hope you could picture it too. I also couldn't help referring to my other big fandom. And I am not an alien expert so hopefully the Hoix worked. Did you think Jack had actually Retconned him? Catch any other details? I'm trying—and having a blast. I really appreciate the reviews, thank you so much for reading!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Five

Although he wanted to call Ianto when Tosh picked up some Weevil sightings across town, Jack knew Ianto needed a night off. His injury had looked painful, even if he hadn't admitted it. Jack had dropped Ianto off the previous night, once again insisting that he go to the Hub to have it looked at, but Ianto had continued to refuse. Jack had even offered to come in and help, but Ianto had maintained that he would be fine and left awkwardly, limping inside while Jack watched with concern and the barest hint of unfamiliar confusion.

So he called on Owen instead and made quick work of it. Yet somehow, it wasn't the same, wasn't as…fun. Or maybe fun wasn't the right word for hunting aliens from the sewers, but being out there for several nights in a row with Ianto had been completely different than going out with Owen. Jack had worked with Owen for years, and worked well with him, yet he had felt a quick connection with Ianto in the field that first night that was different. The Welshman may have had little experience outside the office, but he had done well, and they had just clicked somehow, following one another's lead naturally—much like they had when Ianto had appeared in front of Jack's SUV one dark night, dragging him out to capture Mfanwy.

And yet Ianto had stayed in the Hub after that, working diligently at his station, making coffee and cleaning up—and talking care of his cyber girlfriend, of course. Maybe he had preferred it that way, in order to be close to Lisa, but Jack knew the man could do much more.

After sending Owen home for the night, Jack set the Rift alarms to wake him if anything unusual happened, then tried to get some rest. It wasn't as hard as it sometimes was for him to fall asleep, as he was exhausted from five nights of alien hunting. Yet his sleep was restless; he had nightmares, his past pushing through when he least expected it, and woke sweating and uncomfortable. After calming his racing heart, Jack decided to forget about trying to sleep, got dressed, and headed upstairs. He was standing at his desk wishing he had a good cup of coffee when he heard a sound behind him. To his surprise, it was Ianto.

"You shouldn't be here," he said, in spite of being glad to see him.

Ianto motioned at him with the folder he was carrying. "Neither should you." Jack wondered if he was referring to more than being awake, or at work, so early. Ianto left and headed out to his station, and Jack followed, curious. He came up behind him and laid a hand on Ianto's shoulder, hoping to show his support; Ianto gave him an odd, almost contrite, look.

"What have you got?" Jack asked.

"Funny sort of weather patterns," Ianto replied, sounding unsure.

"Weather patterns," Jack repeated. "Is that what you came in for?"

Ianto shrugged in reply. "Just thought I'd get an early start."

"It's five in the morning," Jack returned, giving him a skeptical look, "and I told you to start Monday. That's tomorrow."
"Why wait?" Ianto asked, still studying the computer monitor. "I knew there'd be loads to clean up and catch up on. I'm positively dreading the state of the coffee machine." He glanced over his shoulder. "And I couldn't sleep. So what are you doing here?"

"I'm always here," Jack replied with a shrug of his own. "And I couldn't sleep either."

Ianto studied him closely. "Are you all right?" he finally asked, his face concerned. "You hit your head pretty hard out there the other night."

"You know me—not even a bump to show for it," said Jack, earning a raised eyebrow in response.

"Secrets, Jack." Ianto murmured, and Jack frowned before he brushed it off, even though he couldn't help but wonder what particular secret Ianto was referring to, given he had many.

"You can run your hands through my hair if you don't believe me," Jack said, curious if Ianto would take him up on such a cheeky offer. The look on Ianto's face surprised him, as if he were actually considering it, though Jack couldn't tell if Ianto was serious or exercising his dry sense of humor. Then the other man turned away.

"No thank you, sir," he said, back to his formal self. "Not sure I'd want product all over my hands."

Jack laughed, then stepped back as Ianto moved to another station. "What about you? How's your scratch?"

A flash of pain seemed to cross Ianto's face before he shook his head. "Fine, sir. Nothing I can't handle." Yet Jack noticed that Ianto was moving stiffly and was suddenly concerned.

"Like hell you can't," he said. "Come here." Ianto just gave him an exasperated look, so Jack reached out, took Ianto's hand, and pulled him closer. Ianto didn't resist until Jack pulled his shirt from his trousers, exposing a livid bruise and a long claw mark, red and raw, visible even through the large bandage Ianto had applied. Ianto stiffened and glanced up at the ceiling.


"Yes, well, that's not unusual for Torchwood, is it?" he murmured enigmatically. He stepped back and pulled his shirt down. "I was actually hoping Owen might take a look at it, since I couldn't sleep and all."

"He probably won't be here for a few more hours," Jack said. "You really want to wait that long?"

Ianto grimaced as he tucked his shirt back in. "Not really. It's not particularly pleasant."

"Come on, let's go down to autopsy." Jack almost took Ianto's hand, but decided against it at the last moment. Ianto followed him, though with a reluctant and slightly embarrassed set to his face.

"I'm not dead yet, you know," he replied, sounding more flippant than dry for once and earning a shake of the head from Jack.

"That's a deep cut, Ianto. We should have got you back to the Hub immediately." They were in the autopsy room, Ianto standing awkwardly as he glanced around, Jack trying to think of what he needed to do to help.

"Lie down," he ordered. "I think Owen's got some new alien antibiotics around here somewhere. Shaped like stars and hearts."
Ianto sat on the table but did not lie down. "You're joking."

"This is Torchwood. Didn't you have alien drugs in London?"


"Then what are you complaining about?"

"I'm not complaining," Ianto replied, sounding slightly defensive. "Just...protesting."

"Lie down," Jack told him again. "And what are you protesting?" He pulled up Ianto's shirt again, and the man flinched.

"That, for one," he gasped. "It does hurt a bit, Jack. Go easy."

Jack tried not to grimace: it really was an ugly wound. He could clean and wrap it, but he still needed Owen to look at it later, to make sure there wasn't anything else that needed to be done. Who knew what sort of interstellar germs a Hoix had under its claws, after all. He didn't tell Ianto that; the Welshman was pointedly looking away.

"Now who's keeping secrets again?" Jack said quietly as he worked at cleaning the wound. Ianto turned to look up at him almost instantly.

"Tell me how you hit your head so hard you should probably be in a coma, only you don't have a mark on you."

Jack stared down at him, wanting to be honest, but still holding back. He knew his team suspected things; how could they not, after working together for so many years? Only Gwen knew the most important truth though, and that was only because she had seen it, literally point blank. He'd had no choice but to tell her; why was he hesitating telling the rest of them?

"I'm different from you," he said, finishing up and helping Ianto sit again. "It's not that I can't get hurt, but I heal better. Faster."

Ianto nodded. "And did you pick up that ability in the 51st century perhaps?" he asked. Jack stepped back, slightly surprised, and Ianto gave him a rare smile. "You mentioned it the night we caught Myfanwy. I thought you might be joking, but I'm starting to think you weren't."

Jack felt his heart racing: so few people figured him out, he wasn't sure what to make of Ianto Jones suddenly starting to work out his secrets. He laughed, but heard the nerves just as well as Ianto probably did. "No, no I wasn't." He took a breath and grinned, forcing the confident exterior over the damaged interior. "But I'm not telling you everything, or else you'll stop wondering and leave us."

Ianto gave him a very odd look, which culminated in a sigh as he slipped off the table and began to tuck in his shirt and straighten his tie. "I don't think I'll be leaving Torchwood, Jack. Strangely enough, this is probably where I belong."

Jack put his hand on Ianto's shoulder, wanting to pull him into an embrace, but holding back for many reasons. "I'm glad." They stared at one another, long enough for Jack to feel something—something he'd felt before, something that was growing stronger each time he saw Ianto. He wasn't sure what it was exactly, but it was there, and he felt it more than ever in that moment. He was almost moved to act on it, until Ianto coughed and stepped away.

"Right. Thanks for all that, then." He turned abruptly to leave.
"You're welcome," Jack called, following him up the stairs. "It was sort of my fault, after all. And you should still see Owen."

"Of course I will," Ianto replied, sounding like his normally reserved self, if only slightly forced. "I don't want to find some sort of alien parasite growing out of the side of my body tomorrow morning."

Jack grinned sideways at him as they walked. "Some aren't so bad," he said. "In fact, some can be kind of fun in a kinky sort of—"

"Stop.″ Ianto gave him a pained look, but Jack could tell it was only for affect; inside he was fairly sure Ianto was at least smiling. "I do not need to know about your parasites, Jack."

"It's a good story!″ Jack protested.

"Let's just stick to weather patterns," said Ianto. "Maybe have something for the others when they come in."

"Sounds good to me," said Jack. And for the next several hours, they worked side by side, sometimes silently, sometimes with a bit of banter, and by the time Owen came in to look at Ianto's wound, they had something for the team to look at.

Yet more than that, Jack felt like they had come to an unsaid understanding about one another and what had happened in the basement, maybe even a forgiveness of sorts. And for Jack, he was starting to think that there might be something more as well.

Unfortunately, the new case ended badly. Jack had quickly realized what they were up against, and though it had killed him inside, he had known there was no choice, just as there had been none with Lisa. Jasmine was the Chosen One, and he'd had to let her go with the fairies or risk the entire planet. The others had refused to talk to him all the way back to the Hub, even Owen, who could sometimes be as cold-hearted as Jack. Yet the sight of an innocent child running off into the ether had rattled them all, and Jack knew it would be a few days until it blew over. If it blew over.

He was sitting at his desk, filing his report and sipping at a cold cup of coffee when Ianto came in. "Need a refill, sir?″ he asked. "Or something stronger, perhaps?"

Jack stopped staring into space and glanced at the doorway. "No, I'm fine, Ianto. Go home. Everyone else left a long time ago."

"Actually, I just saw Tosh out, sir," Ianto said, letting himself in, though he stood back a bit. "She told me about Jasmine."

Jack laughed bitterly. "And does she hate me for it?"

"No, she doesn't hate you," Ianto replied, hands in his pockets. "She's upset about it. I think they all are. It's hard to lose someone like that, especially a child."

"Or a grown woman," Jack murmured, thinking of Estelle, lying in her garden in the rain, dead eyes staring into the sky.

Ianto nodded as he moved closer. "Care to talk about it? I heard she was special to you."

"She was close to my father," Jack said automatically, thinking of the photos Gwen had seen at Estelle's house and his quick answer for her.
"Right," Ianto replied, his voice knowing. He sat down, arms crossed over his chest. "Gwen said there was a remarkable resemblance between you and your father."

Jack gave him a bland look. "I get that a lot."

"Secrets, Jack," Ianto murmured, and Jack was both irritated and impressed with Ianto's boldness, though he shouldn't have been surprised.

"Some secrets are mine alone," he snapped, even though he had once again told Gwen the truth when she figured it out, while still keeping it from the others. "I don't need to share everything."

Ianto stood, and though Jack thought the Welshman might have been offended by the harsh reply, Ianto merely inclined his head. "No, you don't. But if you need anything, I'll be here a while longer." He turned to leave, and Jack ran a hand through his hair, frustrated as he fought with himself. Losing Estelle—losing Jasmine—was hard; maybe he didn't have to keep everything to himself, not anymore. Maybe Torchwood was changing.

"Ianto," he called before the other man left the office. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap."

"Perfectly understandable, sir," Ianto replied evenly, waiting for him to continue.

"It's just that... she was a very special person." He took a deep breath and plunged on. "To me, a long time ago."

Ianto moved toward a table on the side of the room where Jack kept a decanter. He poured two glasses and brought one to the desk for Jack, sitting across from him with the other.

"I lost someone special too," he said quietly. "Tell me about Estelle."

Ianto was almost the last person Jack would have expected such compassion from, especially when Jasmine's loss was so similar to Lisa's death. And yet there it was, written across the Welshman's face along with his own deep sadness. And so Jack talked about Estelle, and Jasmine, and Ianto talked about Lisa, and together they mourned their losses, deep into the night.

I have tried to work this into Small Worlds as best as I could. Hopefully it worked. Now to work it into Countrycide, though one little thing is still throwing me so wish me luck. Perhaps I'm stretching it a bit with how much Ianto is figuring out and now knows about Jack, but I could see him keeping it to himself if he did. Hope you can too. This is about halfway done - thank you so much reading this and all the reviews and encouragement!
Chapter 6

Six

A medic had just finished treating his wounds, though Ianto was fairly sure Owen could give him a better exam back at the Hub. He sat and stared and wondered what the hell he was doing there, out in the field, dirty and beat up. It was wrong: it was all wrong.

He slipped a hand into the pocket of his jeans, but to his dismay, the familiar comfort of the stopwatch was missing—gone. It had either been taken or fallen out in one of the many scuffles he’d had that day. It seemed appropriate somehow. He'd left the office with the team and lost the one thing that mattered the most. Which was why he hadn't wanted to be there in the first place: he may have managed some Weevil hunting with Jack, and even taken down a pair of Hoix, but he was not cut out for field work with the rest of them, not like this.

Even the drive out there had been awkward. Ianto may have worked things out with Jack, but the rest of the team was still walking on eggshells around him. And then there was the excruciating conversation Gwen had started about everyone's last snog. Ianto had almost felt a smug vindictiveness when he had jumped in and mentioned Lisa, cutting down Gwen with his biting remark about forgetting it all. He wasn't even sure why he had done it, only it was probably true, and that had bothered him.

Then he had glanced up and caught the look on Jack's face, though he had been unsure what it was exactly. Anger? Hurt? Disappointment? Ianto had only felt weary then, wanting more than anything to be back at the Hub, doing his job where he belonged while they did theirs. Then they had found the body, and lost the SUV, and everything had gone to hell after that.

Sitting there watching the aftermath swirl around him, Ianto tried not to think about how that one exchange, that one look, might set back things with Jack. A part of him regretted it now, having come to an understanding of sorts with the man, yet a part of him simply didn't care; it was all too much, and it was Jack's fault.

"You all right?" asked Jack, slowly approaching the back of the SUV where Ianto sat. Ianto glanced up at him, slightly dazed feeling giving way to not even wanting to see Jack at that moment. Jack had dragged him out there, had insisted he join the team for a day in the countryside. How wrong he had been.

"No, not really," Ianto returned, and Jack just kind of stood there, obviously unsure what to say. It was in those rare moments that Ianto was glad to know that Jack Harkness had a conscience; the man wasn't infallible after all.

"What did the medics say?" Jack finally asked, sitting down next to him and following his gaze around the area as the police began the grizzly job of cleanup.

"Bruised ribs, laceration to the head, touch of shock." Ianto shrugged. "Just another day at Torchwood, I suppose."

Jack gave him a small smile, laying a hand on his knee. Ianto tried not to glance down in surprise when Jack massaged it. "I'm sorry about what happened at the camp," he said softly, and Ianto
knew Jack wasn't referring to the SUV being stolen. Just like that, any lingering anger from earlier was over, and in spite of his feelings about being dragged out there, Ianto was relieved. He nodded in silent acknowledgement, and Jack cocked his head toward the house. "You did good in there."

"I did nothing," Ianto replied. "I got caught."

"Everyone got caught," Jack pointed out. "You gave Tosh a chance to run."

Ianto gazed over to where Tosh was being treated. She glanced up and caught his eye and he smiled at her, suddenly more concerned for her than anything. What had it been like, crashing through the dark, trying to get away? He couldn't imagine her terror, mostly because he had been beaten unconscious. "It didn't work," he murmured. "Just got me knocked about even more."

Jack leaned forward, earnestly gazing into his face. "Ianto, that was an incredibly brave thing you did. You should be proud."

Although Ianto could tell that Jack meant it, it still felt patronizing. He shook himself of Jack's touch on his leg. "Ianto, I was at the Hub, Jack," he said, standing gingerly, hand held to his upper chest where his ribs still ached. "I could have coordinated this all from there, got you help when the SUV was lost, warned you what was going on instead of—" He waved his hand around. "—this."

Jack stood and put his hands on Ianto's shoulders, and it was all he could do to not flinch away from the contact. Jack could be so overwhelming sometimes. Did the others feel it too, or just him? Sometimes he didn't mind it, the intense attention, but most of the time it just confused him. Jack had shot Lisa, after all, and Ianto did not want to think about Jack in any other way than as his boss.

"Ianto, I'm glad you were here. For Tosh, for all of us. You got us the signal we needed, you got Tosh away. You can do this, you know."

"That doesn't mean I want to, sir," Ianto replied, stepping away.

Jack's face fell, as if he were fully aware of what he had done in bringing Ianto out there to experience such horror. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I just thought it would be good for us all to get away together. I didn't think it would be like this."

"I won't be scrapbooking it, that's for sure," Ianto returned. Though he wanted to cut him down even more, Ianto couldn't, not then. There had been too much darkness already that day, and Jack actually looked like he needed the support for a decision gone horribly wrong.

"I didn't know you scrapbooked," Jack replied with a quirk of his eyebrow and a grateful smile.

Ianto shrugged, letting a small smile pull at his lips even though he was still exhausted and upset. "I don't. I prefer diaries."

And then Jack's face broke into a broad grin. "Now there is something I'd like to read someday."

Ianto shook his head and focused on Tosh. He sat down beside her, and she rested her head on his
shoulder as the medics finished their work. Yet when he glanced up, Jack was still watching him, an enigmatic smile on his face.

They all drifted in late to the Hub the next day, except for Gwen, who stayed home to recooperate from her gunshot wound. Ianto donned his usual suit, relishing in the feeling of order and normalcy after a long day spent out of dress and out of routine chasing cannibalistic villagers in the Welsh countryside. He was still sore, but Owen's work with a few alien advantages in the Hub had helped him start to heal. A stiff scotch had helped him sleep.

Tosh was the last to come in, and Ianto spent a good deal of time talking with her before returning to his station, then deciding they all could probably use a strong round of coffee for the meeting that afternoon. Unfortunately, they were almost out, but as it was a rare sunny day in Cardiff, he decided it would be good to head out and pick up some more. He wanted to see the Bay, see something more familiar than rocks and fields and blood and death. He headed upstairs and ducked his head into Jack's office.

"I need to pick up some supplies, sir," he said. "I'll be back for the meeting." Jack was hunched over his desk, working diligently on something, something that looked vaguely familiar. He was so engrossed that he appeared to have barely heard Ianto.

"Jack?" Ianto repeated, knowing he'd get noticed that way. "Did you hear me?"

Jack glanced up, a tiny screwdriver in his mouth. He nodded and held up his hand, indicating Ianto should wait, then bent back to what he was doing. Ianto waited impatiently.

"As much as I'd love to stay and watch you tinker, I do have things to do," he said, hoping his point came through. Jack must have finished what he was doing, for he stood and hurried toward the door, whatever he had been working on in hand.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Ianto," he said, "but I wanted to finish this." And he held out a stopwatch—Ianto's stopwatch, the one he had thought lost in the village.

"Thank you, sir," he said, surprised. "Where did you find it?"

"I found it in that back room where they were holding you—almost stepped on it." Jack grinned. "I fixed it."

Ianto stared at him. "What do you mean, you fixed it?"

"I mean, it works. Try it." Ianto pushed the button on top, and to his surprise, the watch worked. For some reason, it brought out a myriad of unexpected emotions: he was relieved to have it back, glad to see it working again, and yet confused and upset by the change and what it might mean.

"Er, thank you," he said. "But I don't understand…"

"I've seen you fiddling with it, in your pocket. It looks old, so I gathered it was important to you." Jack waited for Ianto to nod before continuing. "I don't know if it was broken out there or a long time ago, but I wanted to fix it. A peace offering, of sorts."

Ianto stopped and started the watch several times, memories flooding back with each press of the button. "A peace offering, sir?"

Jack crossed his hands over his chest. "I know I've pushed you. First with Lisa, then with the Hoix, now with this. It's been a rough couple of months around here, between us…" He trailed off,
staring into Ianto's eyes, and Ianto hated that his heart sped up. "So a peace offering."

"I don't know what to say," Ianto murmured glancing down once more. Jack reached out and tipped his chin up; Ianto's eyes went wide, and Jack seemed to realize what he had done, stuffing his hands into his pockets.

"Well, a thank you would be nice," he said softly, then cleared his throat. "And maybe tell me why you carry around a stopwatch and not a pocketwatch like most normal men I know old enough to carry such a relic."

Ianto laughed, albeit slightly nervously. "There's not much to tell, Jack. It was my grandfather's, that's all."

"There's always more to story like that," Jack said. "Come on, what's the rest?"

Ianto sighed as he turned it over in his hands before placing it back into his pocket. "Fine, since I know you'll never stop."

"You know me well," Jack laughed.

"My grandfather gave it to me when I left for London," Ianto started.

"For Torchwood," Jack said, and Ianto nodded.

"Yes, for Torchwood. And it stopped working after Canary Wharf. Destroyed in the battle." He blew out a breath as the memories threatened to overwhelm him, but he was getting better at working through them, at acknowledging them without breaking down. "I've kept it, though, as a reminder. Because it still survived in one piece, even though it was broken."

Jack stared at him a long time. "Like you."

"Like Lisa. And like me, I suppose," Ianto replied, though he had never thought about it that way. "Thank you for fixing it, Jack. I'm not sure about the symbolism involved in that, but I appreciate it."

"I don't think there is any symbolism," Jack laughed. "It was just something I wanted to do. So what did your grandfather carry a stopwatch for?"

Ianto smiled, good memories washing away the bad. "Oh, he was an eccentric type, mostly. But we loved it, my sister and I—he'd time us racing, holding our breath, standing on one foot, that sort of thing." He paused and glanced up, meeting Jack's eyes. "Games and such."

Jack nodded slowly, and Ianto thought maybe, just maybe, Jack's breathing had increased, because he knew his had. "Lots of things you can do with a stopwatch," Jack said, his voice low and teasing.

Ianto held his gaze, a palpable tension between them that he almost couldn't stand to admit was there, it was so strong. "I suppose there is. I'm glad it's working then."

"Me too," Jack murmured, and Ianto finally coughed to release the tension before something happened—something he would likely regret.

"I should be going. Out for coffee, and maybe I'll bring back some biscuits." He turned to leave but Jack called him back. Why was Jack always calling him back—and why was he always turning around?
"You're more than coffee and biscuits, Ianto," he said. "Much more."

Ianto gave him a wan smile. "Thank you, sir. Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. But I know what I prefer." He felt like there was much more to what he was saying out loud, though he wasn't quite sure what it was, or if he actually meant it. Jack, however, simply nodded in understanding.

"I'm not sure about that," he said. "But we'll figure it out."

If there was an unsaid 'together' at the end of Jack's sentence, Ianto ignored it. He inclined his head and hurried downstairs, grabbing his coat before continuing out the cog door and onto the quay, where the sun and sea air quickly worked to calm his shaking hands. His heart was racing—and not from rushing out of the Hub.

Chapter End Notes

So that's my take on the stopwatch. Hope you enjoyed it! Also, that damn look in Countrycide about finished me, but hopefully I've fit it all together. Thank you for reading—leave a comment, yeah?
"So what do you think?" asked Jack, joining Ianto at the conference table and watching as Toshiko left the room. She stopped to talk to Gwen and Owen on the walkway; now there was a conversation Jack would have liked to hear, having a pretty good idea about what was going on between Gwen and Owen and knowing that Tosh must have heard it all in their heads.

"I think she'll be all right," Ianto said, glancing out the window as well. "She's upset, obviously. She really cared about Mary, or whatever her real name was."

"Mary used her—beguiled her to get in and get her transport," Jack said.

Ianto shrugged. "Doesn't matter. Tosh still cared for her, and she's still dead. You do seem to have a habit of—"

Jack held up a hand, knowing exactly what Ianto was going to say. "Don't. I had to do it. That alien had killed dozens of people since landing here."

Ianto turned toward him. "I know, but that doesn't stop it from hurting. For Tosh."

Jack just nodded, unable to meet Ianto's gaze. Ianto was the one team member who could relate most to Tosh at the moment, and Jack wasn't sure if Ianto was simply pointing that out or taking the opportunity to damn him again; he'd thought they had moved on from what had happened with Lisa, what had passed between them at the camp site up in Brecon Beacons. He didn't think he had misinterpreted things, but perhaps he would just have to live with Ianto always blaming him, especially when reminded of his loss.

Ianto turned back to his notes, not even glancing up, seemingly unaware of Jack's presence. Or, if he was, he was doing a damn good job of ignoring it. Jack coughed to get his attention.

"Yes, sir?" Ianto asked, glancing up.

"What about you? Are you all right?"

Ianto looked slightly confused. "Seeing as I hardly had anything to do with this case, I'd say yes, I'm fine."

"That's not what I meant." Jack leaned forward, elbows on the table. "Tosh could hear us, read our thoughts with that pendant."

"She said she couldn't hear you, sir," Ianto pointed out. Yet there was a guarded look on his face now, as if he knew what Jack was going to say next.

"Yes, well I'm—"

"Different," Ianto finished. "I know. Did you have a point?"

"She's worried about you," Jack said in a rush.
Ianto gazed placidly into his eyes before glancing back down at his papers. Jack had rarely met a man who could keep such a straight face at times; Ianto would make a brilliant card player if he ever took up gambling. Or maybe he already had.

"I'm fine, sir," Ianto said, sounding both weary and exasperated. It did seem like Jack was asking him the same question all the time, and that Ianto was always giving him the same answer. Yet, Tosh knew, she had heard it: Ianto wasn't fine. He was still in pain from all that had happened over the past few months, and Jack wanted to fix that. It was his fault, after all, and he'd tried, but obviously he had failed. Now more than anything he wanted—no, he needed—to help Ianto Jones.

"I'm worried about you," said Jack. "I know I keep going on about this, but I just don't think—"

"Jack," said Ianto, setting down his pen and closing his folder. "I'm fine. Yes, there are days when I'm not. There are days when I want to stay home and forget the last six months ever happened, that this place even exists. But I'm here, and I don't want to keep answering for my mental health to you. Can we just drop it?"

Jack found himself taken aback by Ianto's bluntness; he didn't know what to say. "All right," he started slowly. "But remember what I said, if you're not—if you ever need anything."

"I need some peace and quiet to finish this report," Ianto said pointedly. Jack sighed and stood. "Right. I'm going to check on Tosh again before she leaves. I'll see you later, then?" he asked, hoping Ianto would be around to broach the subject once more.

"I'll be here," he replied, already back at his work. Jack wondered if maybe Ianto was concentrating a bit too hard and couldn't help but smile to himself, even if it was a false hope. Ianto Jones had got under his skin; maybe, somehow, he had got under Ianto's as well.

Or maybe Ianto was shutting him out after one too many missteps. If that was the case, Jack wasn't going to accept that, not after all they'd been through.

It had been three days since Tosh had lost her alien lover, and things were slowly starting to return to normal. Tosh was obviously still upset, but she was isolating herself less and less from the others. Ianto seemed to be keeping a close eye on her, as Jack spotted them frequently together, talking, even heading out for lunch. He was glad to see his team supporting one another, yet if he admitted it to himself...he was slightly envious of their sudden bond, especially since he suspected they were bonding, in part, over something he had done to both of them.

Which was probably why he went down to Ianto's station after everyone had left, leaned against it, and casually asked, "Fancy a pizza?"

Ianto glanced up from his work. "I can order one right away, sir."

"Why don't we go and get one this time? Eat out somewhere?"

Ianto gave him a dry look. "Is that code for Weevil hunting, then? Because I've just started running a new algorithm for cataloging the archives and would rather not have to round up Weevils tonight. Or Hoix. Or——"

Jack laughed as he stopped Ianto from naming half the aliens who'd made their way through the vaults at some point. "No, it's not. I just don't feel like eating at my desk again. I'd like to see the bay for once and not just the inside of our lovely concrete cell."
"The water. Right." Ianto glanced at his screens, typed a few keys, and turned back with a nod and small smile. "Fine. I could do with a bit of fresh air myself, I suppose."

Jack had been almost certain Ianto would refuse. Now that he had accepted, Jack was not quite sure what to talk about, unusual as that was for him. So as they left the Hub and walked along the quay, he asked about the program Ianto was working on, even though he really wanted to ask how Ianto was doing; he was still worried, even after the blunt brush-off Ianto had given him. He knew, though, that Ianto would probably bite his head off if he asked again, so he held back, hard as it was.

Ianto glanced at him suspiciously, since it was certainly unusual for Jack to ask about personal project, but eventually he started talking about his work with the archives, even mentioning some of the things he had worked on at Torchwood in London, and they actually had a very nice conversation that didn't revolve around whatever was going wrong at the Hub that day. Jack found himself gazing at Ianto more and more, until the man turned and gave him a sharp look.

"You're doing it again," he said.

"What?" asked Jack, shaking his head of the more randy thoughts he was suddenly having, and grinned. "What am I doing?"

"Staring. Like I've grown a second head or something."

"Nah," said Jack, laughing off having been caught. "I've seen that before, it's no big deal."

They entered a local pub not far from the Hub and took a booth in the corner. After ordering two pints and a large pie, they settled in to wait, somewhat awkwardly, though Jack wasn't completely uncomfortable, just uncertain where things stood between them. Ianto sipped at his beer before finally speaking again.

"You know, I'm never sure whether you're joking or not when you say things like that. Alien parasites, double heads, those sorts of things."

"It's part of my roguish charm," Jack tossed back, and Ianto actually snorted, which caused Jack to raise his eyebrows in mock astonishment at the sound.

"It's bloody annoying," Ianto replied, setting down his drink and piercing Jack with a surprisingly perceptive look. "You and your secrets."

"Everyone has secrets," he pointed out. "You kept quite a big one for a while, and I imagine there are probably a few more hidden under that calm yet cutting exterior of calculated poshness."

Ianto raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Not like yours, I'd wager. Have you really seen a man grow a second head?"

"Yes," Jack replied without hesitating, though he couldn't help but smirk. Ianto rolled his eyes, clearly picking up on the innuendo.

"On his shoulders?"

"Yes." He may have seen the other too, but he didn't need to let anyone know about that particular night.

"Where?" Ianto fired back.
"Can't say. It was a long time ago."

"Everything was a long time ago for you, Jack," Ianto pointed out. "Are you really that old, or are you just a good storyteller?"

Jack almost spit out his beer. "A storyteller? Me?"

"You do like to tell a good one," Ianto replied in that deadpan manner he had.

"But I don't make them up," Jack protested. For some reason, the thought made him defensive. He had lived far too long for anyone to think he was just making things for the hell of it; he had seen and done things he sometimes wished were only stories.

"Then who are you, really?" Ianto asked, his voice casual yet persistent. "Where are you from? Or when?" Oh, he was smart, Ianto Jones. Only someone who had worked with a rift in time and space would ask that last.

Jack hesitated. He wanted so badly to tell this man his story right then, his real story, yet something held him back. He remembered something that Ianto had said to him, several months ago, when he'd left for his suspension after Lisa's death: that people in Torchwood didn't talk, didn't let each other in. Jack had started to let Gwen in, but that was different, somehow. Though he found himself wanting more and more to let Ianto in, he was fairly certain the man would run screaming if he knew half the truths of Jack's life, and for some reason Jack couldn't bear for that to happen.

"Look," Jack finally said. "I'm from another planet, in another time—will that do?"

Ianto was obviously trying not to look surprised, but for once he failed. "Depends. Where and when?"

"Doesn't matter," Jack said, waving his hand. Their pizza arrived and he stopped, obviously needing to watch his words in public. Torchwood had a bad enough reputation as it was.

"Why not?" asked Ianto after the waiter had left. "Why doesn't it matter?"

"I'm not going back," Jack shrugged. "I've been here a long time, and Torchwood is important to me now."

Ianto nodded, as if reluctantly accepting Jack's words. Maybe someday Jack would tell him more, but not that day—not over pizza at the local pub.

"So these things you talk about—they're all true, then? They're all real?"

Jack smiled wistfully. "The universe is an amazing place, Ianto," he said. "Trust me."

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "I've seen enough already to believe you, sir. It's also a very ugly place—dark and dangerous and cruel."

"There is still more beauty than you can possibly imagine. More wonder, more magic, more light, no matter how dark it gets." There were times Jack struggled to believe it himself, but he still knew it was true, deep down. He had learned that from the Doctor, so many years ago.

"If you say so, sir," Ianto replied, though he sounded only half-convinced.

Jack paused and gave him a thoughtful look. "You can call me Jack a lot more, you know."
Especially when we're not at work, actually working."

"I do," Ianto replied, finishing a slice of pizza and helping himself to another.

"Mostly when you need my attention," Jack pointed out.

Ianto tipped his head in rueful acknowledgement. "You're still my boss."

"But a friend too, I hope," Jack replied casually, almost afraid of the answer after all they had been through recently—there had been so many ups and downs he wasn't quite sure anymore.

"If you mean an infuriatingly enigmatic, strangely long-lived, galaxy-hopping friend, then yes," Ianto replied, and Jack burst out laughing. Ianto's humour was always dry, but more than anything, at that moment, it was reaffirming. Jack was relieved, because he sensed Ianto wouldn't have made light of it if he didn't mean it.

"I didn't hop galaxies much" Jack replied, continuing the banter. "I tried it once or twice, but it didn't work out."


Jack leaned forward, suddenly feeling much bolder than usual. "Maybe I'll tell you more someday, if you keep asking me deep questions over dinner."

He locked eyes with Ianto, feeling the sudden unexpected urge to pull the man forward and kiss him, yet knowing he could never do such a thing, certainly not there, in the middle of the pub. He thought he might have seen a similar look in Ianto's eyes, or maybe Jack only hoped he did, because he was finally realizing just how much he was inexplicably attracted to Ianto Jones.

And from the flushed look on Ianto's face as he cleared his throat and pulled away, covering his embarrassment with a long pull at his pint, Jack couldn't help but wonder if maybe Ianto felt the same way.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! We're getting there, yeah? Hope you enjoy the next bit.

*wink*
Eight

Ianto glanced up at Jack's office, idly considering whether he should go up and see if Jack wanted to get something to eat again. Their trip to the pub for pizza several days ago had been unexpectedly enjoyable, though Ianto was reluctant to admit to himself exactly why. He told himself it had been good to get out of the Hub, to enjoy a meal someplace other than at his computer station, to talk and laugh about things that didn't always have to do with the Rift and Weevils, to even begin to get to know Jack Harkness and his secrets a bit better. Yet that wasn't why, if he really admitted it, which he wouldn't.

But at the moment everyone was out, Jack was working in his office, Ianto was hungry, and maybe he could wring a few more secrets out of the man if he tried, if he flirted back a bit more…

Shaking his head, Ianto put those other thoughts from his mind. Jack Harkness making cow eyes at him was nothing, meant nothing. He did that to everyone, because he was Cardiff's biggest flirt—probably the biggest flirt in the galaxy, when Ianto really thought about it. And that unsettling thought derailed any notion of approaching Jack, so that Ianto turned back to his computer screen with a sigh, only to find his boss standing there, a bag of Chinese take-away in one hand.

"Dinner?" Jack asked with that cheeky, childish grin he had. Ianto felt his mouth fall open.

"How did you know…" he started, then just shook his head in mock wonder, though he was secretly, silently quite pleased. "Never mind. It must be the Rift—does funny things to people sometimes."

"I saw you looking up the menu on your computer," Jack replied with an eye roll and a shake of his head. "So I thought I'd take the initiative."

"And here we thought you only ate when we ordered out for you," Ianto said. Jack made a face at him, then cocked his head upstairs.

"Want to eat at the table? Wouldn't want to mess up your station."

"I'll just have to clean up the conference room instead," Ianto replied dryly, though good-naturedly. Jack turned and grinned at him again.

"I'll clean it up," he said, as serious as if he were making a solemn promise. "As long as you don't interrogate me again this time."

"What's the point then?" Ianto murmured. He was thinking about what Jack had said about asking deep questions over dinner and the intense look on his face when he'd said it. He'd almost thought Jack was going to reach across the table for him, had almost wanted him to until he'd forced himself to stop thinking about that particular scenario. Ever.

They entered the conference room, and Jack sat down in his usual place at the head of the table, pulling out the containers and setting them in the center. "The point is to eat something," he said, "seeing as it's been a long day today, and it'll probably be a long day tomorrow, and for some reason we're both still here. All business as usual at Torchwood."
"So we'll just sit here and eat in silence—if I can't ask any more of those deep questions?" Ianto helped himself to some food, enjoying the banter with his boss... no, with Jack. They were still at work, but they weren't working, just having dinner, so it could be Jack, because they were friends... weren't they? Nothing more, nothing less.

"We can talk about other things, you know," asked Jack.

"The weather?" suggested Ianto, tucking a napkin into his collar and ignoring the dozen other things that came to mind. "Gwen and Owen, perhaps?"

Jack pulled a face. "Nah. Let's just pretend that's not happening."

Ianto agreed about that, and they settled into a mostly comfortable silence punctuated by occasional conversation, a bit of laughter, and good food. It felt almost as normal as their trip to the pub, only Ianto did hold back from asking any probing questions since Jack didn't seem in the mood to answer them as he had the other night. Every so often he'd steal a glance at Jack, only to find Jack already watching him.

By the time they had finished, Ianto didn't want to leave, he had grown so comfortable, but it was getting late, and he still needed to finish whatever it was he had been working on downstairs, if he could remember. And he felt like he was starting to wear out his welcome, as Jack had grown quieter and quieter, so he stood and started to pick up the empty containers, if only out of habit and to have something to do beside think of things he shouldn't be thinking.

"Leave it," said Jack, leaning back in his chair. "I said I'd do it."

"Which means maybe next week if we're lucky," Ianto replied, continuing anyway, because that's what he did. He liked order and neatness. Jack reached over and touched his hand, stopping him. It occurred to him that Jack was exactly the opposite of order: he was chaos, and he was rubbing his thumb along Ianto's palm almost subconsciously, disrupting Ianto's sense of order in the universe right then.

"I'll do it," Jack said firmly. "You don't have to always clean up after us."

Ianto stared at their hands for a moment before standing straight and tucking them into his pockets to find the familiar feel of the stopwatch there, solid and comforting. "Fine, but I'll not have the others blame me if they're still here tomorrow and the room stinks of eggrolls." He smiled to soften the remark. "Thanks for the food, Jack. I appreciate it."

Jack stood and followed him to the door, walking close enough to bump into him more than once in the small space. Ianto tried not to let his breath catch in his throat, because he knew it was nothing, it was just Jack being Jack, but he couldn't stop the sudden buzzing in his ears, or the feeling in the pit of his stomach that something was different. Something was about to happen, and he wouldn't be able to stop it if it did, not this time. He didn't want to, if he was honest with himself.

He paused at the door, though he knew he should have kept going. Jack was watching him closely, the look in his blue eyes so intense Ianto couldn't bring himself to look away.

"You're welcome," Jack said softly. "And thank you."

Ianto frowned at him. "For what?" Jack stepped closer, and though half his brain was screaming at Ianto to open the door and step out, the other half told him to stay right where he was, relishing in the warmth of the other man's body, so near, almost pressing against him...
"For everything you do around here," Jack murmured. He was close enough for Ianto to feel the man's breath on his chin, and he couldn't help but shudder with...well, something, something he hadn't felt in a long time. "I know I don't say it enough..." Jack trailed off as he stared at Ianto, his intent—or desire—perfectly, utterly clear.

Ianto locked eyes with him, though his heart was racing. He didn't move as Jack's lips moved toward his. He didn't flinch as they met, and he didn't resist as Jack Harkness kissed him, surprisingly tentative yet strong.

Jack was the first to pull away, too, watching him guardedly, as if waiting for a reaction.

"Do you kiss everyone like that when you say thank you?" Ianto murmured, the first thought that came to mind flowing from his mouth. Jack grinned, his face still close enough for Ianto to touch, if he wanted to bring his hand up to run it along the strong jaw, the unexpectedly tender lips...which he didn't and most definitely would not, of course.

"Not usually," Jack replied. "At least, not until now."

Ianto coughed and groped for the door handle behind him. "Well, you're welcome, although I don't usually snog people when I say thanks, I tend to write a card or something."

"Ianto," Jack began, but Ianto cut him off before he could say anything, let alone apologize.

"No, it's all right, really." He found the knob, but couldn't pull the door open without stepping even closer to Jack, and his thoughts warred within over whether he wanted to leave anyway. "Quite a thank you, actually. I've never been thanked like that before."

"Ianto, I'm sorry if I—"

"It's fine, Jack," Ianto said, though it wasn't. "Really, it's fine."

"If it's fine, then why are you leaving?" asked Jack, and Ianto hated him for that. It wasn't fine: he had just kissed his boss, who was not only a man but the same man who had shot his girlfriend only months earlier. Confused didn't begin to describe how Ianto felt in that moment: all the pain and regret he'd been trying to deal with came rushing back, tempered with anger, only this time it was not directed at Jack, but at his own guilty conscience. Why couldn't he move on, be happy? Why couldn't he allow himself some semblance of a normal human life, with normal human contact? Why did it matter if it was Jack and he was a man and he was his boss and—

His thoughts must have played out on his face, because Jack took several steps back and dropped his hands into his pockets. "Shit, Ianto, I didn't mean to—"

"Yes, you did," Ianto said. "You always mean what you do, I think. But you don't always think about what it means to anyone else, do you?"

And once again Ianto experienced that rare occasion where he struck Jack Harkness speechless.

"You're right," Jack finally admitted. "I don't think about that enough. And I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable." He was gazing at Ianto with such an earnest look on his face, there was little choice but to believe him. "I don't want this to come between us. I meant what I said the other night about being friends."

"That was more than a friendly kiss there, Jack," Ianto murmured.

"That's how I roll," Jack replied lightly, earning himself a reproachful look from Ianto and toning it
"Look, I'm sorry if I overstepped my boundaries. I just thought that maybe there was something—"

"You thought right," Ianto interrupted him, but then he didn't know how to continue, what to say. Saying it would make it real, would mean he couldn't deny it anymore than he'd already tried. Yet if Jack was going to be contrite, then Ianto needed to be honest: Jack was right, there was something there, something they'd been dancing around for weeks, something Ianto couldn't deny after that kiss.

"I did?" asked Jack. The surprise in his voice made Ianto feel relieved, somehow.

"Yeah," Ianto looked up into Jack's eyes, his stomach rolling with nerves and desire and guilt and fear all at once. He thought he saw something similar pass across Jack's face, but then Jack stepped forward and crushed their lips together once more, and Ianto put it from his mind, burying his doubts as Jack's hands came up to his face and their tongues met with growing confidence. Ianto let his arms wrap around Jack's broad shoulders, run down his back to his hips, and surrendered himself to whatever was happening, whatever madness had gripped him and taken him past the point of no return.

"Is that a gun in your pocket or are you just glad to see me?" asked Jack, pulling away to nip at his earlobe, then at his neck as he loosened his tie. Ianto made an inarticulate sound—both at the tired joke in the middle of a serious moment and the intense feeling that swept through his entire body at Jack's deft touch. Apparently the stories about Jack Harkness were true; he'd never thought he'd be one of them, though. Ever.

"It's my watch," Ianto finally managed to toss back as Jack's hand began moving up and down his leg, finally resting on the small of his back and pulling him closer. "What's your excuse, since your gun is sitting on your desk?"

Jack grinned wickedly, Ianto returned it with a bold one of his own, and the rest was lost in another tangled embrace against the door.

Chapter End Notes

And so they've finally arrived. Two more short chapters to go, to get them through the initial "What the heck just happened?" and up to the "Lots of things you can do with a stopwatch." I like to be thorough. Hope I'm succeeding. Thank you so much for reading!
Nine

Jack found a cup of coffee waiting for him when he entered his office the next day, but no sign of its maker. Ianto's station was empty, his computer running some sort of program Jack could make little sense of, though he barely gave it a second glance. He tried not to appear as if he was looking for Ianto, but he was. He spent more time looking out the window of his office down into the Hub than anything else all morning; it was strangely distracting to not have someone around.

After not seeing or hearing from Ianto for several hours, Jack finally approached Toshiko and asked if she knew where he was.

"He's in the archives, I think," Tosh replied, barely looking away from her computer. "Said his archive program from the other night needed tweaking." She paused and turned to glance owlishly at Jack through her glasses. "He looked upset about it, actually. Or about something. Is everything okay? He seemed to be doing better."

"He is," Jack said, though after what had happened the previous night he wasn't so sure anymore; he might have really messed things up between them. "But I'll go check on him." Tosh nodded and turned back to her work. Jack watched her for a moment.

"Are you doing all right?" he asked. She gave him a soft smile.

"I'm fine, Jack. Thanks for asking." She was so engrossed in whatever she was working on that she turned right back to her computer and kept going. Jack nodded to himself, hoping he wasn't missing something again, and left for the archives.

The room was empty. It looked like Ianto had been there all morning: files were strewn about the floor with several half full cups of coffee littering the cabinets. Yet when Jack called Ianto's name, there was no answer, and he frowned, wondering whether they had crossed paths, or if the man had simply left the Hub to run errands in an attempt to avoid him. Because Jack was definitely feeling avoided.

As he was heading down the corridor back to the stairs, a thought occurred to him, and Jack turned around, heading toward the old basement storage room on a hunch. He was not surprised to find Ianto just outside, leaning against the open doorway with his hands in his pockets and staring into the empty room, his face dark with sorrow.

"Knicked the key, then," Jack said, coming up quietly behind him. He resisted the impulse to put his arms around the other man, because it was clear something was on Ianto's mind and Jack wasn't sure how the Welshman would react; he didn't even turn to look at Jack, just nodded in a slow, dull way.

"Found me, then," Ianto replied.

"I've been wondering where you were all morning," Jack said. "Thought I'd wait until lunch to see if you were officially avoiding me or just working hard."

Ianto glanced sideways at him. "Bit of both, sir."
"You don't need to call me sir," Jack reminded him.

"No, I do," Ianto said, turning back toward the room. "It keeps things straight in my head."

"What things?" Ianto didn't answer, so Jack followed his gaze into the dark storage room. After the horrors that had happened there, it would never be used again; he was surprised Ianto had even come there. Jack would have to hide the key better next time.

"Why are you here?" he asked quietly.

"Just thinking," Ianto replied, not offering any more. Jack bit back his frustration.

"About what?" he asked, trying to sound light and curious even though he was worried.

"About Lisa," he replied, then turned to Jack. "And you."

"I'm flattered," Jack murmured, and Ianto gave him a reproachful look. "Look, if what happened last night is making you uncomfortable, then we can forget about it. It doesn't have to happen again."

Ianto was silent as he shut the door, locked it, and handed Jack the key, just as he had done the day he had cleaned it out after Lisa's death. "That's the problem, Jack. It doesn't."

"Doesn't what?" asked Jack. Ianto leaned against the cold stone of the corridor and looked up, his face awash with confusion.

"It doesn't make me uncomfortable." He met Jack's gaze. "Just confused. And horribly, horribly guilty."

"Guilty?" Jack asked, then nodded to himself as he started to understand. "Because of Lisa."

"You shot her," Ianto replied bluntly. "Don't you feel guilty?"

Jack tried to hold back his first impulse to reply with defensive anger and kept his voice level. "I did what I had to do. You know that."

"I wasn't talking about that," Ianto replied, still holding his gaze.

"I don't understand," Jack said, which was a rare thing for him to say.

"Don't you feel guilty for…for what happened last night, for being with me when you killed my girlfriend? Doesn't that seem a bit sick, Jack?" Jack just stared at him, because it really hadn't occurred to him. He was a man who acted on his attractions, and he was attracted to Ianto Jones. Of course it would occur to Ianto, and maybe he was right: it was awkward at best, a bit warped at worst. Yet it was what it was, and Jack didn't regret it, even if Ianto was forcing him to look at it differently.

"Now I do," Jack murmured reluctantly under his breath. Ianto gave him a half smile as he turned to head down the corridor.

"So do I, Jack," he said as they walked. "And yet, I can't help thinking about it…about you." Ianto glanced sideways at him once more and sighed. "Even though I know I really shouldn't."

"I have that affect on people," Jack said, hoping the glib charm would at least earn another smile, but the Welshman just shook his head.
"You weren't supposed to have that affect on me," Ianto said. "I've seen it in so many others since I came here, heard all the stories, but it wasn't supposed to happen to me. I didn't think I'd be the one to end up as your one night stand."

"It doesn't have to be like that, then," Jack replied, earning himself another sideways look from Ianto, one that he couldn't read.

"But it's complicated, isn't it?" said Ianto. "Confusing."

"Why?" Jack asked immediately, though he could probably think of several reasons why a man like Ianto would feel that way.

Ianto was silent until they reached the archives, where he began straightening up the mess he'd made that morning. Jack stood silently, waiting for Ianto to speak, and when he did, it was in a rather flat, distant voice. "Because you're my boss. You're...well, you're a man. And you shot her, shot Lisa." He stood up straight and gazed straight at Jack, blue eyes full of pain and sorrow and the anger Jack had seen that night so many months ago. "You held a gun to my head."


Ianto cocked an eyebrow. "Doesn't really compare, does it?"

Jack offered a small grin, knowing when to hold back. "I suppose not."

"I wanted to see you dead. I was so sure you destroyed my life that night, ruined everything." Ianto turned back to his files, continuing to put them back into the cabinets, as if creating order out of chaos would help calm his troubled soul. Jack wanted to go to him, but still sensed that Ianto was not ready.

"You're putting it back together," Jack pointed out. "You came back, you're doing good work here."

"And now I'm feeling up my girlfriend's killer in the conference room," Ianto said, his back turned, head bowed, bitter voice cutting deep.

Jack was silent for a moment as he swallowed his first, reflexive response to snap back. "I wish you'd stop calling me that," he said instead, his voice low with unsaid hurt and regret.

"I wish it hadn't happened," Ianto returned equally as bluntly as he slammed shut the file drawer. "Then maybe I wouldn't be standing here, thinking about you when I should be thinking about her." He turned and gave Jack a look that was heartbreaking as he leaned against the cabinet behind him and let his head fall back. "Why, Jack? Why did this have to happen?"

Jack finally stepped closer, half expecting Ianto to push him away, but the Welshman didn't move, just continued to gaze at him with that same look in his eyes: grief, confusion, and yes, desire. "I don't know," Jack finally replied. "But I do know that it's okay for you to move on. You don't have to feel guilty about being with other people."

"Why, because it just happens?" Ianto asked bitterly, but he hadn't moved, and Jack inched closer, wanting to comfort him, to convince him that it was all right. "Because it's natural, it's normal, it's just two men having a—"

Jack stopped Ianto with a finger to his lips. "It's two people, being together. And if not us, then you go find someone else to be with, because you deserve it."

"That's the problem," Ianto said softly. "I don't want to find anyone else."
"Then I don't really see the problem," said Jack, stepping forward again so that he grazed against Ianto's legs, his lips moving closer almost of their own accord.

"You wouldn't," Ianto murmured, but he still hadn't moved away, and Jack knew the man wouldn't from the way his pupils were blown, the way his breathing had hitched as soon as they first started to make physical contact. They were connected, somehow, by the tragedy that had at first separated them with such guilt and fury, only now brought them together through understanding and compassion and mutual attraction. Ianto may have been uncertain of his choice, but he had made it, that much was clear. "And I wish I didn't."

"Then don't," Jack replied. He leaned in to kiss the man before him, relishing in the gentle touch of Ianto's lips once again, tentative just as they had been the night before, yet quickly growing more confident until without warning Ianto took Jack's shoulders, turned him around against the cabinet, and kissed him hard—passionately, even, his hands running across Jack's chest and back up to cup his face and almost take his breath away. Jack felt his body respond like it rarely did; it was one of the better kisses he'd experienced in a lifetime of both casual and meaningful sex.

Finally Ianto pulled away, looking surprisingly calm if slightly breathless for all his insecurity moments before. "It'll be our secret, Jack," he said. "A secret we keep together."

"It can be whatever you want," Jack found himself saying, wondering where that had come from. And yet he understood how hard it must be for Ianto on so many levels, and certainly it would be awkward for the others; Owen would definitely take the piss out of Ianto the moment he found out. "Forbidden office affair. It'll be fun sneaking around."

He teased at Ianto's tie, then let his fingers trace a path down the buttoned vest, all the while holding the man's gaze. Ianto returned the look, a grin playing at his lips, an unspoken challenge in his steady response. Jack wrapped his other arm around Ianto's waist and pulled him close, so that their hips met, and all the while they stared at one another as if daring the other to make the next move.

"Hips before lips then?" Ianto murmured, and Jack gave in, claiming his mouth with a growl while unbuttoning that damn vest, teasing and biting as Ianto returned whatever Jack offered, and then some.

If they both appeared an hour later in the central Hub a bit mussed up, hopefully no one noticed; it would definitely be fun sneaking around for moments like that.

Chapter End Notes

There had to be some inner conflict there, there just had to. Because everything Ianto said is true. So maybe this is how he reconciled with that. More from his point of view in the next, and final, chapter. Thank you for reading, and an even bigger thank you to Quiet Time for looking at a bit of dialogue for me and helping me out with keeping it in character! I've enjoyed our conversations very much, QT - thank you for your help!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

*Note: All dialogue in the second part is taken from the episode They Keep Killing Suzie, written by Paul Tomalin and Dan McCulloch. No copyright infringement is intended.

Ten

They were almost caught the following week.

Gwen and Owen had gone out to investigate a suspicious murder, and Tosh had offered to pick up lunch. So Jack had invited Ianto upstairs, only they had been forced to stop before they'd barely got started when Gwen and Owen returned very loudly and unexpectedly. Jack confidently headed downstairs to see what had brought them back early, while Ianto returned awkwardly to his station to think about what the hell he was doing. Again.

The problem was, he still had no idea, no matter how many times he turned it over in his mind.

He'd never kissed a man before Jack, had barely given it a thought before coming back to Cardiff and joining Torchwood Three. And now…now he was involved with a man, the man who was not only his boss, but who had shot his girlfriend only months before. The man Ianto had hid secrets from for so long, whom he had punched on the Plass and hated fiercely after that horrible night, for however brief a time.

Maybe it was time he stopped thinking of Jack in such limiting terms. Yes, Jack was their leader, but he was also more than that, to all of them. And over the months, he and Jack had become friends, in spite of or perhaps because of all that had happened between them. There was certainly a bit more there now, a strange, mesmerizing attraction; Ianto wasn't blind to that given all they'd explored with one another almost every night since they had first kissed in the conference room.

And yes, Jack had given the order to shoot Lisa, but they had all pulled the trigger, all four of his colleagues. Ianto had never really blamed the others, though, because they were just following Jack. It was Jack who had held a gun to Ianto's head not once but three times that day. It was Jack who had forced him to watch as Lisa was attacked by Mfanwy, who had forced him to go back in to execute his lover.

It was also Jack who had come to him, to see if he was all right when he clearly wasn't. It was Jack who had listened to him, who had dragged him out Weevil hunting as the best way he knew how to help, who had cleaned Ianto's wound from the Hoix and fixed his watch, and who had even started to open up about his own secrets as Ianto opened up about his. Secrets Ianto knew must weigh heavily on Jack, because the more he watched, the more he saw. The more he saw, the more he understood…and the more he understood, the more he felt: sympathy bordering on pity, and a loyal protectiveness he had not experienced for months.

Jack had helped him pick up the pieces of his life. Ianto had blamed him at first, but it wasn't Jack who had broken it: it had happened long before at Canary Wharf, when his life had been ripped apart and Lisa first taken from him. Ianto still didn't feel whole, not completely, but he didn't feel as lost either. He was finding his way again, in spite of how complicated the journey had been.

In the months since Lisa had died, Ianto had accepted her death as well as the manner of it. He had
brought Lisa to Torchwood because it was the only thing he could do, and Jack...well, Jack did all sorts of things that he believed were the only thing he could, things he didn't want to do, things that clearly hurt him to have to do. Ianto suspected that what he knew, what he saw, was just the tip of the iceberg: Jack Harkness was a well of deep secrets, and Ianto had learned for himself just how hard it was to live with a secret, how hard it was to live with deep loss and trauma. It somehow seemed natural for them to connect, as strange as it felt sometimes if he dwelled too much on their past.

Or maybe it was just what it was, something fleeting and physical and nothing more. And if it was that, then maybe that was all right too. Ianto had never thought he could be so attracted to another man, and yet there was something about Jack, had always been something about Jack, from the first time they'd met, that pulled him back, turned him around, picked him up.

Glancing up to clear the daze from his eyes, Ianto caught Jack watching him with a small smile. Jack motioned with his eyes back up toward the office and pulled an exaggerated sad face. Ianto rolled his eyes in response, but couldn't help the half smile on his lips as Jack winked. It was sort of fun sneaking around, if he admitted it. Forbidden office affair, indeed. Once more he wondered what the hell he was doing, but he decided he didn't need to know, not yet. At the moment it felt right and good. Someday he'd have to think about what it really meant, but right now, he just wanted Gwen and Owen to get up to their own business and leave already, so he and Jack could finish theirs.

Jack winked at Ianto as he turned back to Gwen and Owen, half-listening to what they were saying about the murder, a cut and dry Weevil killing they'd managed just fine on their own, as usual. He was already thinking about how to send them out again so he could finish what he'd started in his office with Ianto, only he was interrupted by a call from the Cardiff police—this one a double murder, and this time far more suspicious.

Reluctantly heading out with his team, Jack focused on the case, even as it grew more bizarre. When Gwen insisted on using the Resurrection Gauntlet—no, the Risen Mitten, according to Ianto—he let her give it a go, trying not to smile when Ianto pulled out his stopwatch to time the victims' trips back to life. It was all he could do to not laugh out loud when Owen made a joke about Ianto's stopwatch and Ianto replied with a dry, "It's the button on top." Only Jack knew why the watch was so important to Ianto that he always had it with him, ready for even grim tasks.

But then the case became more complicated, and the stopwatch came out again, only this time it was for Suzie. Jack never thought he would have to use the glove on one of his own people, let alone someone who had betrayed them. Seeing Suzie lying there put into prospective just how lucky he was to have Gwen on the team now—and Ianto. What Ianto had done in hiding Lisa seemed like so little compared to what Suzie had done, murdering innocent people to try and master the art of resurrection. Jack hated having to bring her back.

He hated having to kill her as well, but it had to be done. Owen discovered the link between her and Gwen, and once more Jack had done what only he could do: he shot her. Over and over, and still she didn't die, until Tosh and Ianto destroyed the glove back at the Hub. It was finally over. Suzie was dead for good, the glove was in pieces, and no one would be coming back anymore. This time Jack had killed one of his own, only he tried not to think of it that way, because she had betrayed them all. She wasn't one of them, not at the end.

After getting off the phone with Detective Swanson—he'd wanted to inform her the case was closed, after all her help during the rather embarrassing lockdown—Jack was relieved to see Gwen sitting with Tosh and Owen, pale but recovering from her near-death ordeal. He was even more
relieved, however, to find that Ianto was already down in the morgue, taking care of Suzie. Again.

"Thanks for doing this," he said as he entered the quiet room where so many bodies lay deep within the Torchwood underground. So much death, as if it was all Torchwood could ever offer—never life, never the happy ending.

Ianto didn't even glance up. "Part of my job, sir." Ianto hadn't known Suzie for as long or as well as Tosh or Owen, so he seemed able to deal with the sad undertaking better than any of the rest of them, and Jack was grateful for that.

"No, I should be doing it, but..." Jack trailed off with a sigh as he leaned against the wall. "One day, we're going to run out of space."

Ianto continued writing, glanced up, then back down, then met Jack's eyes with a mischievous look on his face that Jack was starting to recognize; Ianto's dry sense of humor applied to more than just clever comebacks in the Hub.

"If you're interested," he began. "I've still got that stopwatch."

Struggling to place the context of the unusual comment, given they certainly didn't need to time anyone coming back to life anymore, Jack shook his head. "So?"

"Well, think about it. Lots of things you can do with a stopwatch." Ianto kept a perfectly straight face as he tossed back the words Jack had used when he'd fixed the watch. In spite of all they'd just been through with Suzie, Jack couldn't help but grin widely, because he knew exactly what Ianto was thinking—really, he was surprised he hadn't thought of it first. Once again Ianto Jones was full of surprises.

"Oh, yeah. I can think of a few."

"There's quite a list," Ianto replied. Jack met his gaze before glancing at his wrist.

"I'll send the others home early. See you in my office in ten."

"That's ten minutes...and counting." Ianto gave him a small but confident smile and returned to his clipboard, then glanced up once more. "Oh, Jack? What do you want me to say on the death certificate?"

Jack stopped to consider it, even though he was already thinking about that stopwatch. "Good question."

"She had quite a few deaths in the end," Ianto pointed out in his typically dry manner.

"I don't know," Jack finally replied. "Death by Torchwood."

Ianto nodded. "I'll put a lock on the door, just in case she goes walking again."

"Nah, no chance of that," said Jack, turning to leave. "The resurrection days are over, thank God."

"Oh, I wouldn't be too sure," replied Ianto. Jack stopped, but did not turn around.

"That's the thing about gloves, sir," continued Ianto. "They come in pairs."

Jack turned slowly, a strange feeling fluttering in his chest. Pairs. Once again Ianto Jones had shown himself more perceptive than most with one simple comment. With a nod, he left Ianto to
finish with Suzie and headed upstairs to send the others home. He tried to put the thought of another glove from his mind, because the one they'd found had brought them nothing but grief. What would they need another for?

He wondered if Ianto had ever thought about using it on Lisa, after she'd died. Maybe he knew something about a second glove, something from Torchwood One. Perhaps Jack would ask him, just to be sure. It was disturbing to think that there might be another glove out there, or that Ianto might be keeping secrets. Jack did not want any secrets between his team anymore, not after all that had happened. And though he knew it was a double standard to keep his own, he did not want to think Ianto was hiding anything from him again. He liked the Welshman and whatever they had too much to keep any secret but their own.

Shaking his head of morbid thoughts, Jack convinced the others to leave, idly wondering whether Gwen would go home to Rhys or to Owen. He saw them out, then headed up to his office to wait for Ianto. The Hub was his home, and he was glad to have it to himself with Ianto that night to finally finish what they'd started before the past had come back to interrupt them.

Pouring himself a drink, Jack thought about how much their relationship had changed, from the Ianto's first days at Torchwood Three to the horrible night Lisa had died, through the shaky rebuilding of both a personal and professional relationship that had actually, surprisingly, finally blossomed into more. Grinning to himself, Jack recalled the moment Ianto had truly given in to his feelings, down in the archives, when he had declared it their secret and Jack had called it their forbidden office affair. He had no idea where it might lead them, but he did know that Ianto Jones was different. He was special.

Now to just get him up there already with that stopwatch so they could get started on that list…

Chapter End Notes

The End!

If you've read the transcript from the online BBC extras for this episode, Jack IMs Ianto to see what's taking him so long. And he does ask about Lisa and the second glove. But this is where I shall stop...for now. I set out to get them from the anger and pain of Cyberwoman to this seemingly out-of-the blue bit of innuendo in the morgue, and I hope I've succeeded. Thank you so much for reading this story!

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