



Better Natures: Memory

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Better Natures: Memory

by Gray Shadows (in.the.afterlight@gmail.com)

New Who, Torchwood, Sarah Jane Adventures | PG | gen | 21,000 words
(contains some Gwen/Rhys, Jack/Ianto and Luke/Clyde)

Cardiff does get a lot of visitors, but when Donna Noble, Sarah Jane Smith, her young son Luke and his friend Clyde, and a group of randomly destructive aliens all descend on the city at once, what are an amnesiac Jack Harkness and an overstressed Gwen Cooper to do?

One of three thematically connected but otherwise completely standalone pieces in the Better Natures trilogy, with forthcoming pieces in the Supernatural and Merlin fandoms. Inspired in huge part by part 5 of "Nine Ways Donna Noble Had a Fantastic Life" (<http://butterflykiki.livejournal.com/tag/9waysdonna>), adapted to long-form with permission. And I stole one line in chapter two from the movie 'Get Real'.

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Chapter One: In Which Events are Laid Out, But Nothing Is Resolved

TRANSCRIPT: DATED 19 MAY 2009

HARKNESS, JACK. CAPTAIN. [H]

INTERVIEWED BY: JONES, MARTHA. DOCTOR. [I] [Name blacked out on original document.]

I: All right, as we begin, can you state for the record your name, rank, and position?

H: Jack Harkness. Captain. Any position you'd care to see me in.

I: I'll have to take that up with my husband. What position do you hold at Torchwood?

H: I'm the head of Torchwood-3, Cardiff.

I: What prompted the incident? In your own words, please.

H: There was a lab accident involving a new, experimental form of Retcon, the drug we use to induce amnesia in people who have gotten too close to discovering Torchwood's secrets. While it had no effect on the rest of Torchwood-3's agents, including new recruits Mickey Smith and Dr. Martha Jones, the new formula interacted negatively with a vaccination I'd received as a child in the fifty-first century.

I: Can you describe these negative effects?

H: At first it just seemed to fatigue me. I was physically tired in a way that I haven't been since that night lanto and I-

I: And after that? Stay on topic, please, Captain Harkness.

H: I was physically tired, and lanto took me back to his flat so I could rest in a proper bed. *Rest*, [name omitted], nothing else, although don't think I didn't try. Anyway, lanto had me back in his bed, and then he went off on a weevil hunt. I fell asleep, and after I woke up the other side effects became known: I'd lost my memory, going back approximately a hundred-fifty years -- not counting the two thousand years I spent in a semi-catatonic coma, buried underground -- to a point prior to my involvement with the Torchwood organisation. In fact, I assumed that I was working the twenty-first on a con, and that I'd blacked out a few days due to... overindulgence. It wouldn't have been the first time, after all.

Gunfire rang out across the Cardiff street, rubble scattered about from where the laser fire of the aliens across the way had come lancing toward him. Jack swore, strongly and vehemently, as he ducked back, glaring at his antiquated sidearm, wishing for his sonic blaster.

For that matter, why did he *have* an early twentieth-century pistol *instead* of his sonic blaster?

"Oi!" The call redirected his attention off to the side, forcing Jack to duck down further as a laser bolt hit perilously close to his hair. "What's all this, then? Aliens in Cardiff? I spend half my life *missing* aliens

everywhere I go, and the minute I get to Cardiff, there they are? Why would I have to go to bloody *Cardiff* to meet aliens?"

Jack stared for a moment. "Get *down!*" he shouted, glancing around just long enough to see that, yes, he could leap, grab her, and get behind cover right over there.

The woman shrieked -- and, ow, Jack thought, having that right in his hear -- as Jack tackled her. "Let go of me!" she insisted. "Let go of me *right now*, or I'm calling in the police, just you see if I don't! I have rights! You can't just go tackling innocent women in the street!"

"I said, get down! You get hit with one of those, you're going to wish it was just someone tackling you!" He reached into his greatcoat -- and why was he wearing a greatcoat? -- and pulled out a second firearm. "You know how to fire one of these?"

The woman glared at him. "I'm a quick learner," she said, reaching for it. "C'mon, give it here."



Jack hesitated a moment. Giving a gun to someone completely inexperienced could lead to disaster. Still, there wasn't much choice -- he couldn't take down the attackers on his own, and having a second person from a separate vantage point could make all the difference. "Keep to the cover," he ordered, as he handed over the pistol. "Keep down, and be careful." The woman nodded, and although she claimed to have no experience, Jack saw that the gun settled very well in her hand. He glanced around, and, there, yes, a lull in the incoming fire. He ducked and rolled, back to his original cover among the rubble, and went back to returning fire.

The solid retort of a second pistol began to sound, and when Jack took two spare seconds to glance over, he saw the woman, her hair practically blazing in the harsh streetlights, looking up just long enough to sight and fire. Her form wasn't great, but when he looked back he could see that some of her shots, at least, were connecting with the apparently impervious-to-pain attackers. He swore, and went back to firing himself. "We're going to need some help here!" he called. "We can't take them alone!"

"Tell me something I don't know!" The woman huddled herself back behind her cover, her fiery glare once again directed at Jack. "Tell me you've got an idea for that?"

Jack was about to reply when, all of a sudden, the laser fire ceased and in a woosh of teleportation, the aliens disappeared. Jack and the woman stood up together, looking around. "Something tells me we've not seen the last of them," Jack said. "Whatever they're after, I don't think they've found it." He walked over. "Captain Jack Harkness," he introduced himself. "But you can call me Jack."

"Oh, *can* I?" the woman said. "Captain of *what*, Mr. Harkness?"

"... Y'know, no one's ever asked me that before?"

The woman snorted. "I thought as much. Donna Noble, Captain Harkness. Now. *What the hell were those things?*"

The Hub was, at the best of times, a whirlwind of activity. People were running left and right, experiments were being performed, aliens were escaping (well, only that one time. ... Two times. ... Okay, it was four, but Ianto continued to insist that Lisa didn't count because she wasn't actually an alien) -- in short, it was *active*, with people involved in something at all times.

Right now? Wasn't the best of times.

Gwen stood on the upper walkway, looking out over the people below. There was a frantic energy to everyone's actions, the chaos not so much familiar, comforting, as it was hectic. Jack was missing. Jack was missing, and it was their fault.

She could tell that everyone was blaming themselves for it: Ianto, for taking Jack home and leaving him; Martha, for experimenting with the Retcon to begin with; Mickey, for not being able to find him on CCTV.

Gwen, herself, for not being there to help when Jack needed her most.

"Tea, ma'am?" Ianto asked, sidling up with a steaming cuppa. "I thought it might be more appropriate than coffee, given the current... situation. We're all a bit wired already, I think."

Gwen took the cup gratefully. "That's perfect, Ianto, thank you." A sip, first, and then a larger one. Gwen could feel the warmth spreading through her; she always did forget how cold the Hub could get. In fact, it usually happened when Jack wasn't around, she realised. "Any word?"

"Martha thinks she's found the trigger in the Retcon that caused the problem. It's one of Jack's 51st century immunisations, one of the ones she's working on adapting for general use, actually." He paused. "General Torchwood use, at least. It's certainly not something we want getting out for public use."

Nodding, Gwen stepped back, away from the rail, and moved towards the stairs. "And there was an interaction?" she asked, knowing that Ianto would be following behind. "Something she didn't catch before."

"Looks like." Ianto stepped off the stairs right behind her, keeping perfect pace. "She's working on an antidote, but she said the test sample is degrading on its own, so it's likely that the effects will wear off on their own."

"Good news for us. Mickey! Any progress with the CCTV?"

"Just about to call up to you! I've found -- there's a patch of rubble over a couple of streets, looks like a serious firefight. No one's there now, but if I had to guess, I'd say Jack had to have been there."

"You're probably right. Mickey, grab the portable scanners. You and Ianto are with me. Martha, give us a call if you find out anything else." Nods all around from the team -- her team now, Gwen thought to herself, but Jack's team forever. Jack's team *again*, once they found him and forced some sense back into his head.

Not likely, that, but a girl could dream.

As they moved out to the car, Gwen pulled out her mobile and hit speed dial. "Rhys?" she said, as the other end was answered. "I'm going to be a bit late tonight. Possibly more than a bit. Jack's gone missing."

Once upon a time, saying that she'd be late getting home would have been cause for a fight. Even after the Space Whale incident, there had been tensions between them around the subject of Jack. Now, though, things seemed to have settled down, even gone in an odd and interesting direction, if Rhys's reply was anything to go by. "Is there anything I can do to help?" Rhys asked, his voice a bit tinny through the handset's speaker. "Another pair of eyes, even?"

"Not right now," Gwen told him. "Mickey and Ianto are joining me, and we've only got the three scanners. But you might give Martha a call, ask if she could use your help in the Hub." Jack wouldn't have liked it, but Jack be damned. Torchwood was hers, at least for the moment. "And Ianto's had a long day, so if I think he gets too tired, I'll have you come out to replace him."

"Want me to bring tea by? I've made up some cheese toasties. It's not much, but I can make a few more for the boys."

"That would be lovely, Rhys. We're heading out to a rubble site on Westgate, over by the Millenium Stadium. Meet us there? Half an hour?"

She could almost hear Rhys nodding on the other end of the line as she climbed into the front passenger seat. "I'll be there," he told her. "You can count on me."

Like you can't count on Jack, Gwen heard there, whether Rhys meant it or not. She wondered what it meant about Jack that she thought Rhys -- in her head, at least -- might be right.

The flat wasn't terribly large and it was still cluttered with the detritus of moving, but Jack couldn't help but admire it. There were already a number of little touches present: a framed picture hung by the entrance, a very small spice rack by the stove, a half-written grocery list stuck to the fridge with a gerkhin magnet. An open box on the kitchen table held, he saw as he passed, a full six-person setting of blue-patterned flatware. "Donna, you said?" he asked, leaning back against the doorjamb into the kitchen. "Donna Noble. A fine name for a fine woman. I don't suppose you've got any coffee, Donna Noble?"

"Well, isn't that just a man!" Donna replied, rolling her eyes as she reached into a cupboard for a tin of Folgers. "He follows you home and what does he do, first thing in the door? Asks you for something!" She put the kettle on, filling it from the tap, and spooned coffee crystals out into two mismatched mugs: one a bit larger, with Tinkerbell -- the Disney version -- in a series of poses, and the other a plain black. "Now," she said, filling the two mugs with hot water and handing one -- the Tinkerbell mug, Jack noted with a smirk -- to him. "Are you going to tell me what the hell those things were?"

"I wish I could tell you," Jack said, honestly, "but I don't actually know myself. To tell the truth, I don't even know what I'm doing in Cardiff. Last I remember, I was in London, mid-twentieth century."

He got a look for that. "Mid-twentieth century? So now I'm supposed to believe that you're a time-traveler, am I?"

Jack shrugged. "Well, you don't need to believe it, but I'd be more than happy to show you my time-ship." He paused. "When I can find it." If it weren't for the fact that the Time Agency wouldn't have just dropped him in the middle of Cardiff with absolutely *nothing*, he'd have suspected that this was another of their mindwipes, just like the two years he was already missing. "I don't suppose you've noticed anything like that? No, I don't guess you would have. Trust me, if I knew where it was, I would be offering myself up as host, and showing you just how hospitable I can be."

Donna snorted. "I just bet you'd try it," she replied, and took a sip of her coffee. "Don't think you're getting anywhere *near* there with me, Spaceman." Jack wasn't sure at the time, but when she said that, a flash crossed over her eyes like an exploding star in the depths of space. He chalked it up at the time to a trick of the light; she was moving when she said it, after all, and surely it was just her eyes catching something reflecting in through the window from outside. Later, of course, he realised what it was, and why it was so dangerous.

"Ms. Noble, you wound me!" Jack exclaimed, one hand coming up melodramatically to his chest. "I would never dream of impinging upon your person in such a manner!"

"Yeah, say it to someone who'll believe you, Spaceman." Donna drained the last of her coffee and rinsed out the mug, setting it in the drying rack. "Well, if you don't know what those things are, and I don't know what those things are, we're going to have to find out," she said. "And we'll have to find a way to stop them."

Jack nodded, grinning. "You are a most singular woman," he said, thankful that, of all those he could have been stuck with in this century, Donna was who he'd found. "So I guess our first order of business is to find my ship? I've got a tracker in there we might be able to use."

"Oi, and go all over Cardiff looking for something that might not even be there? No way, Jack. No, first place we go is my bedroom." Jack opened his mouth to comment on that, but Donna cut him off. "Which is where my *computer* is, Spaceman. Keep it in your pants. We're going to use the internet."

Navigating the little car through Cardiff was a struggle at the best of times for Sarah Jane Smith, who avoided the city as much as she could. Today, however, proved worse than normal: having a street so torn up and rubble-strewn that it could have come straight from a war zone tended to make it difficult to drive down. She glanced in the backseat, where Luke and Clyde were asleep, leaning against each other in a pose that made Sarah Jane wish her camera wasn't packed away in the boot of the car; photographic evidence would have made wonderful 'blackmail' material. She would need *some* kind of embarrassing pictures to show any of Luke's dates in the future, after all.

Well, unless the date was with Rani, or perhaps Maria, Sarah Jane noted to herself. Or Clyde, she allowed, too, as Luke hadn't really given her any indication one way or the other as of yet. All three of them had seen Luke in *more* than his fair share of embarrassing situations. And been involved in them, too, more likely than not.

"Mum?" came the call from the back seat, the word muffled with sleep as Luke slowly woke up. "Why are we stopped? Are we there?"

"Not yet, Luke," Sarah Jane replied. "There's a problem with the road." She noticed a police officer waving at her, trying to get her attention. "You stay here in the car, with Clyde," she continued. "I'll be back in just a moment."

Luke nodded, already drifting back to sleep. "'K, Mum." Sarah Jane smiled at them and got out of the car.

The police officer was walking towards her even as she stepped away from the car, Sarah Jane noted. "PC Davidson, ma'am," he introduced himself. "I'm afraid you'll have to go around another way. This street's closed." He glanced around. "Obviously."

"May I ask what happened?" Sarah Jane said, already pulling out a notebook. "Off the record, of course."

"Gang-related," PC Davidson replied, and the speed with which he came up with the answer had Sarah Jane thinking that it was likely a canned response. "We're not commenting on it any further."

Sarah Jane looked around a little more carefully, using all her training to look at what was there. "Gang-related, you say?" she asked, taking a step towards one of the larger chunks of rubble. "I don't know that there are very many gangs around, much less in Cardiff, that are using laser weapons." She knelt down, running one hand along a scar in the rubble. "Melted. Ionising laser, if I don't miss my guess. So, PC Davidson, off the record." She pulled out her wallet and flipped it open, revealing her newly printed UNIT ID card. "I'll ask again: what happened?"

PC Davidson opened his mouth to reply, but before he could say anything a voice came from behind them, cutting him off. "Aliens, of course," were the London-accented words. "I don't doubt you expected anything less, Sarah Jane Smith."

Sarah Jane whirled around, shocked to be addressed by name, but the voice did seem familiar- "Mickey Smith! As I live and breathe, it's good to see you."

"I'll take it from here, Andy," Mickey continued, nodding to Torchwood's unofficial police liaison. "She's one of us. Well, kind of."

Sarah Jane laughed. "I'll never be 'one of you,' Mickey. Too many guns." She looked down, significantly, at where his sidearm was holstered on his belt.

Shrugging, Mickey waved over to a couple of people, a man and a woman, where they were coming up the street. "Oi! Gwen, Ianto, over here!" he called, before replying, "Don't I know it. But it's good to see you! And you're just in time. Jack's missing."

"Missing?" Sarah Jane stared at Mickey for a long moment. "Don't tell me he's gone off with the Doctor *again*."

"He's still in Cardiff. At least, we *hope* he's still in Cardiff. Experiment went wrong, and he's lost his memory."

"It was retcon." The woman had come up, then, and she was holding out one hand, smiling. "Hello, Ms. Smith. Gwen Cooper. It's nice to finally meet you face to face."

Sarah Jane shook Gwen's hand. "Sarah Jane, please, Ms. Cooper," she said. "I don't take much stand on formality." She glanced back at the car, glad to see that Luke and Clyde still seemed to be asleep. "Retcon, you say? That's the... amnesia drug you've developed, yes?" Her tone betrayed her distaste, but she understood the thinking behind why they'd begun using it. "Jack took a dose?"

"Oh, call me Gwen. Ms. Cooper has me looking around for my mother." A quick jerk of her head had Mickey sighing and going off to help Ianto. "And yes, it is, but no, he didn't. Accident with a new form. You know he's from the future, yes? Fifty-first century?"

"I'd heard something about it, yes," Sarah Jane replied, smiling softly. "Something about his... physiology interacted with the new retcon?"

"One of his immunisations, apparently, or so Martha says. She's working on an antidote, but she said it's likely going to wear off on its own."

Sarah Jane nodded, taking in the information. "Well, I'm in town on a story," she said, "but whatever I can do to help, I will." She paused. "What exactly does this have to do with the aliens here?"

Gwen snorted. "If you were looking for Jack, wouldn't *you* follow the trail of destruction?"

"... I suppose you have a point, yes." A sound behind her -- a car door closing. Not slammed, but loud enough. Turning, she saw Clyde coming towards her.

"Sarah Jane? What's going on?" he asked, looking around. "Don't tell me -- we come down on holiday, and there are aliens in Cardiff." Clyde laughed, holding out a hand to Gwen. "Clyde Langer," he introduced himself. "And if I don't miss my guess, you're Torchwood."

Sarah Jane looked stricken for a moment. "I'm sorry, Gwen. Luke told Clyde about Torchwood, I do hope--"

Gwen just shook her head. "It's all right. Jack's told us a bit about what you're doing, and if you trust your son and his friends with our secret, we can, too." She turned her attention back to Clyde. "Yes, I am Torchwood. Part of it, anyway," Gwen agreed. "Sarah Jane, why don't you go back to the Hub for now? I'll have Mickey take you down, and you can catch up with Martha. And see if you can't connect the Hub systems to Mr. Smith?"

"Well, I was in town to work on a story..." Sarah Jane replied, but a pleading look from Clyde made her trail off. "Well, all right. My story can certainly wait, and it is, after all, Jack. Clyde, back in the car, I'll be along in a minute. And do wake up Luke?" Clyde nodded and turned around, heading back to the car. "We'll head by the hotel first," Sarah Jane said, "so that we can check in. I don't want to lose out on my reservation. That won't take long, though, and then I imagine Clyde and Luke would be more than happy to spend some time in the Hub. You're under Roald Dahl Plass, yes?"

"That's right," Gwen confirmed. "Shall I have Mickey meet you there, then, and take you down? Or would you like him to come along so he can direct you through town?"

"Probably best to have him come along," Sarah Jane said. She knelt down again to pick up a sample of the rubble, a small piece that she slipped into her purse. "I'll just bring this along. If we can identify the weapon used, it might help us to identify exactly who -- or what -- it was shooting up a Cardiff street. Until later, then, Gwen?"

"Until later, Sarah Jane." Gwen smiled, and stepped away. "Mickey will join you at your car in just a moment."

A search for "aliens AND cardiff" had turned up far too many options to even begin sorting through, and "aliens AND cardiff AND lasers" hadn't narrowed the results by much. It wasn't until Donna was opening some pages at random and sorting through them that she started noticing a thread popping up far too often to be a coincidence. "Torchwood?" she asked. "Why does that sound familiar? You haven't heard of it, have you?"

Jack shook his head, although he had to admit, even if only to himself, that the name did sound familiar on *some* level. "Not that I can remember," he said, "but, hey, maybe it's something else I've forgotten."

The search continued. When they added Torchwood to the criteria, the results didn't narrow appreciably, but the top results started to look more and more relevant. There were people talking about invasions, and about the terrorist attacks that had struck Cardiff several months ago. There were

pages about rumours, some talking about the supposed 'Battle of Canary Wharf' -- "Oi, that was supposed to be mass hallucination," Donna said. "Something about chemical agents in the water supply." -- and a few bits and bobs about the former Lord Mayor who'd disappeared on the eve of her monumental, and fatally flawed, nuclear power plant project being opened. "Looks like there's a lot more going on in Cardiff than I expected." Donna closed the last of the tabs she'd opened, turning in her chair to face Jack. "But nothing about aliens opening fire in the middle of the day on unsuspecting passerbys."

"But at least we have somewhere to start, now," Jack pointed out. "If we can find more about this Torchwood, maybe start asking around, we might be able to track them down. It looks like a lot of people have different pieces of the puzzle, but not like anyone's managed to put them all together yet. What was that one place that kept coming up? Roald Dahl Plass? That might be the best place to start."

"It did sound likely, yeah," Donna agreed. "But first, there's something else we need to do."

"What's that?" As if on cue, Jack's stomach rumbled.

"That," Donna said, "would be tea. I'm famished, and it sounds like you're not far off."

Chapter Two: In Which Things Are Not Always What They Seem

It wasn't exactly typical to have kids around the Hub, but Martha couldn't help but smile at them as Clyde followed Luke around, the two trying to figure out what the various and sundry alien artifacts actually did. Ianto had objected, at first, to their presence in the Hub, but Martha insisted on Sarah Jane's assistance, and Sarah Jane insisted that the children be kept close by. Martha had gotten Ianto to relax when she keyed a recorder on them, although she'd not mentioned her real reasoning: there were a few artifacts around that no one had figured out yet, and for all that they were kids, they weren't *typical* kids. If nothing else, they were at least a fresh pair of eyes, and at best might figure out something on their own. "I have to admit," she said to Sarah Jane, who stood beside her, "I don't know how much of a basis in biology and physiology you have. Can you follow along with this?"

"More or less," Sarah Jane admitted. "I'm no expert, but I learn quickly. So this is the retcon chemical here?" She pointed to one string being displayed on the computer screen, a chain of molecules representative of the cause of one-half their current problem. "And this is the immunisation drug here." A gesture at a similar chain below. "You don't yet know why they're interacting?"

Martha nodded. "It looks like it might have something to do with the bits here and here," she said, pointing to two identical off-shoot bits on the chains. "It's a new thing on the aerosol retcon; it's what allows it to remain stable in a mist state. But if it's bonding there with the immunisation, then it might explain why the drug got through his system so quickly. Luckily, it appears that the bond isn't permanent -- in fact, the retcon appears to be breaking down the immunisation, at least in my sample, and then dissolving itself. It's being processed in the liver. After this is all over, we'll likely have to replicate the immunisation just so that we can get Jack protected again."

"There are worse things," Sarah Jane pointed out. "The memory loss could have been permanent. You're certain that when the retcon is processed, the memory loss will fade?"

"As certain as I can be without having him right in front of me," Martha replied. "There's only so much I can do with a non-live blood sample." She turned back to her work. "The problem now is finding an antidote. Not that we're likely to need one, but if we can accelerate the breakdown of the retcon in his bloodstream..."

"Then all the better for it." Sarah Jane glanced around the Hub. "Do you see the boys around at all?" she asked. "Luke and Clyde, I mean. I haven't heard them in a few minutes."

Martha glanced over at the monitor she was using to keep track of them, the one that was tracking the recording. "Looks like they're down a level," she said. "They should be fine, there's nothing too dangerous down there. They may stumble across the Quiet Room, and there's nothing in there to worry about. Just can't record them in there, that's all."

Up by Mickey's station, where, once upon a time, Tosh would be sitting, Mickey and Ianto were going over CCTV feeds. "Still nothing, Gwen," Ianto said into the comms. "We're tracking you fine, but there doesn't seem to be any sign of Jack in any footage for the last twelve hours."

"What about the footage from the battle itself?" Gwen asked. In the background, Ianto could hear Rhys speaking to someone -- perhaps a newsstand owner -- in a raised voice. Speaking *at* someone was, perhaps, more accurate. "He doesn't show up there?"

"As it happens, the battle footage itself isn't *in* the CCTV archives," Ianto replied. "We see some of the aliens show up -- we're still trying to find a match for their image in the archives, but nothing yet -- and then it goes to static. By the time it clears up, the aliens, and anyone who might have been involved in fighting them off, are gone."

"Which doesn't leave us with much to go on," Gwen pointed out. "Except -- Ianto, can you trace the CCTV footage, see if anywhere else has gone to static, either before or after the attack?"

Beside Ianto, Mickey, who was listening in on the conversation, thwacked himself on the forehead. "On it," he said. "Should have thought of that before."

"Mickey's working on it now," Ianto informed Gwen. "We should have results for you shortly."

"Call me back when you do," Gwen ordered. "And Ianto? We'll find him."

"That we will," Ianto agreed. "Never doubted it for a moment."

Gwen tapped off the comm and moved back towards where Rhys was arguing with the newspaper vendor. "Rhys? We've got a lead," she said. "Or might have, anyway. Ianto's going to call me back when we know more."

Rhys flipped off the man at the newsstand and stepped away with Gwen. "Sorry about that," he said. "I started to talk to him about rugby, and he..."

"Said something about your team?" Gwen supplied, smiling softly. "Oh, Rhys. Whatever would I do without you?"

"You'd miss out on cheese toasties, for one," Rhys replied. "Best cheese toasties in Cardiff, those are!"

They continued down the street, Gwen keeping one eye out for anything out of the ordinary. Rhys, for all that he continued rambling, was doing the same, she knew. "Rhys?" she began, at one point, and all at once he shut up and his attention was focused on her. "Do you hear that?"

It took a moment, but Rhys eventually nodded. "Kind of like... bees," he said, "with a kind of whine? Like you get sometimes with... A mains hum! That's it. Bees, and a mains hum."

"Yes, exactly." Gwen looked around, trying to track the source. "It's coming this way!" she said, as it got louder. "Quick, in here. Ianto!" she continued, reaching up to tap her comm headset as she all but pulled Rhys into an alcove between two buildings. "The aliens, they're back. Track our location, get the CCTV on it. We'll hold them off, but be ready in case we need you. We're not far from the Hub right now."

As she got his confirmation, she pulled her gun from the small of her back and handed it to Rhys. "I know you've not had much practice with these," she said, "and I'm sorry to force it on you now, but do you think you can handle that?"

It settled into Rhys's hand, and his thumb traced along the safety -- not yet flipping it off, but he knew, at least, where it was when he was ready to do so. "I think I can manage," he replied. "But what about you?"

Gwen reached down into her boot and pulled out a second gun, this one looking not at all like a modern handgun. "Always carry a spare," she said, and she flipped a switch. The gun began to spool up with an audible hum. "Besides, this one carries rather a larger punch than that one does."

Down the street came the sound of marching, and the buzzing whine began to make sense: the aliens who now approached were carrying large, heavy-looking blaster weapons from which the disconcertingly loud sound was being emitted. "Be ready," she said, "and if I say run, run, no questions asked, straight to the Hub, all right?" Rhys nodded, and the two of them sighted down their weapons -- Gwen with experience, Rhys with confidence born of too many action movies. "Fire at will."

She and Rhys began to take down the invading aliens, almost every shot of Gwen's firing true, brilliant bolts of arcing energy shooting from the tip of the gun to the invaders. Rhys's less frequent shots began a bit wide, at first, but by the fourth he was hitting aliens every time, natural talent (that, later, would have him sick to think about, these were living creatures he was shooting, even people of a sort) making up for lack of experience. Before long, the aliens had been routed, and while it didn't seem that any had been killed, there were very few among the small force that had escaped without any injury at all. "They won't be back soon," Gwen said. "Rhys, are you all right?"

Rhys was looking at the wall beside him, where a blast from one of the alien weapons had struck close to his head. The stone of the wall was melted away, a long, ugly gash, jagged-edged, betray what could very easily have happened to him if it had struck a few inches closer. "I think I'm going to be sick," he said, dashing back out onto the sidewalk and throwing up in a bin.

Gwen reached into her purse for a bottle of water and came up behind Rhys, handing it over. She surveyed the destruction around them. "Ianto?" she said, tapping her comm headset once again. "All clear. Any luck on your end?"

"We didn't lose CCTV," he told her, "so whatever caused the interference before, it seems to be centered around Jack somehow. Which is both good and bad. The bad news is that it means we'll have a harder time tracking him. The good news is that we *can* try and track him through the static signals on the CCTV. It should give us a rough area to work in, at least."

"Stay on that, then," Gwen replied, "and get back to me when you've got something more. Do you at least have a direction for us, yet?"

"It looks like he headed south from the site of the attack, so roughly towards the Hub," Ianto replied. "From there, we're not sure yet. I'll get back to you as soon as I can."

"All right, Ianto. If I don't hear from you before, I'll ring in an hour to check in. Gwen out."

Roald Dahl Plass wasn't quite what Donna had expected. There wasn't all that much to see there, nor things to do. There was, however, a little tourist shop thing that looked like it would hold brochures, pamphlets, and maps, little things of that sort. "Should we start there?" Donna asked her companion. "Or do you want to try somewhere else?" Jack was looking at the tower, his attention caught. "Jack?" Donna said, trying to get his attention. It didn't work. "Oi, Jack!" That was accompanied by a thwap on his arm. "You in there, Spaceman?"

"What? Oh, sorry," he said, and if Donna had paid attention she would have realised that he was a little calmer, a little less given to flirting (... only slightly less) than he had been when they'd met. He was certainly less exciteable. "Sorry, it's just... something about this seems familiar to me. Like I've been here before. But I can't actually remember it."

"Like *deja vu*?" Donna asked. "Happens to me all the time around London. Loads of places I hadn't been. There's a reconstruction of Pompeii in one of the rooms in the British Museum, and I almost started telling the curator how they'd got it wrong! Doesn't mean anything."

Jack gave her a long look. "I wish I had your confidence in that," he said, "but we already know that something's missing from my memory. Maybe it is related to this Torchwood. It's the best lead we have, isn't it?"

Donna nodded, and the two walked over to the tourist building, figuring that, if nothing else, they could ask whoever was there if they'd heard anything about Torchwood. Which, of course, was exactly when someone -- a tall-ish man wearing a suit and, Donna noted, the most flamboyantly pink shirt she'd ever seen on a man. "Jack!" he called. "You're back!" He glanced at the woman with him and rolled his eyes. "And up to your old tricks, no less," he continued. "But why've you brought her back here?"

Jack narrowed his eyes. "I'm sorry," he said, "do I know you? Do you know something about what's going on here?"

The man's face fell, Donna noticed, although Jack didn't seem to react. "I'm sorry," he said. "I thought your memory had come back. I'm Ianto Jones. We..." A pause, a mere moment's hesitation, but it was there. "... Work together," he finished. "And you?" he asked, turning to Donna.

"Donna Noble," she replied, "and I'll thank you to remember it. Do you know something about Torchwood? Or about the aliens who attacked earlier?"

Donna was too preoccupied to notice Ianto blanch when she mentioned that particular name. "I'm sorry, Ms. Noble," he said. "We do know something about the attack, yes, but not as much as we'd like. If you'll both come with me, I'll see what we can do about explaining things to you. As much as we can, at the very least." He smiled softly, sentimentally, at Jack. "I imagine you'll find the Hub interesting, sir," he said. "You told us once that even you found it intimidating, your first time in."

"My first time in? You make it sound like I'm something important around here."

"You are, Jack. You're our leader."

The Hub itself, Donna thought, was rather dank and a bit dim for her tastes, but as secret bases went she supposed it wasn't so bad. "And this is just... sitting here under the Plass, is it? Has been for how long?"

"Over a century, at this point," Mickey told her, a tall, dark and handsome that she'd been introduced to first thing upon getting down there. "Torchwood's been around since Queen Victoria, Torchwood-3 since not long after. We're pretty much the only ones left now, though."

"Must be lonely," Donna said. "I can't imagine what it must be like to be alone against the universe. And it's all on top of this... rift in time and space?" For just a moment, a sharp jag of pain cut through her head, and she winced, but Mickey had turned away and didn't notice. "Aren't you afraid it's going to... I don't know, fall in?"

Mickey shrugged. "I asked the same thing myself, actually," he said, "but it apparently doesn't work quite like that. The Hub is actually... not *physically* on top of the rift, it's not like the rift is below it. The rift goes right *through* the Hub, and through the rest of Cardiff. This is just the best place, really, to keep track of it. Kind of the center, I guess you could say. If something does happen, we're actually safest here than anywhere else in the city. Eye of the storm, that kind of thing."

Donna looked across the room where Jack was talking to Ianto, and a woman who'd introduced herself as Dr. Martha Jones. "And you're all responsible for taking care of anything that falls through?" she asked. "And Jack, too?"

"He's our leader," Mickey confirmed. "Has been for longer than I've been around. He's older than he seems."

An older woman, one who Donna hadn't yet met, came out of one of the tunnels, followed by two young men. Early teens, they were, if Donna didn't miss her guess. "Do-" she began, her eyes falling upon Donna, but she cut herself off. "You must be Ms. Noble," she said, instead, and there was something behind her eyes that Donna couldn't identify. "Sarah Jane Smith. It's a pleasure to meet you. I'd like you to meet my son, Luke, and his friend Clyde Langer."

"What, you've got boys working for Torchwood, too?" she asked. Jack, she noticed was eying not only the woman, but both boys, too, appraisingly. Sizing them up. "Oi, stop that, Spaceman," she said, "they're not even old enough to drink."

Jack held his hands up in a, "Who, me?" pose, and Sarah Jane just laughed. "It's all right, Ms. Noble. I'm rather used to it from Jack; in this instance, he's perfectly harmless. Although I suppose I should remind him that if he lays one hand on my son, I'll have his bollocks for earrings. As for working for Torchwood,

no, we don't work for them. We're associated on a more... informal basis. I don't hold with the guns, you see. Luke and Clyde do assist me; don't let their youth fool you about their capabilities. I do, however, do my best to make absolutely certain that they come to no harm."

"So what about me, then?" Donna asked. "Don't think I haven't noticed. Every one of you knows me somehow, but I haven't got any kind of gaps in my memory like the good Captain there, nothing to explain why I wouldn't remember you. What's going on?"

Glances all around, between Martha and Sarah Jane most significantly.

"That's something we can't tell you," Martha said, the first to speak up. "There are reasons, I will tell you that, but there's a promise we've made that we can't break." She hesitated. "And you, too, Jack. You made the promise. If you remember what you know before you remember the promise, remember it now. You promised not to tell."

"What do you mean, you promised not to tell? It's about me, and that means that I bloody deserve to know!"

There was a lull, as Donna stared everyone down, until finally Ianto -- with Gwen's still out on the streets with Rhys and Jack's incapacitated, he was the de facto leader of Torchwood -- stepped forward. "I'm afraid that for your own protection," he said, "we're going to have to put you both in protective custody, at least until you recover your memory, Jack. Ms. Noble, I regret the necessity."

"Oh, bollocks to that!" she exclaimed. "I'm leavi-AHH!" With a ear-splitting screech, Donna fell to her knees, clutching her head. "I'm leaving, I'm leaving, I'm leaving--"

Jack reached down, his hand going to her shoulder, and she stilled, her words quieting as she lost consciousness. "What was that?" he asked Martha, glaring at her as she moved to take Donna's vitals. "I think we deserve an answer, don't you?"

"You'll remember soon enough, Jack," Martha said. "We'll move you down into a cell for now, in one of the more quiet areas. It'll give you both a chance to rest. Ianto? Mickey? Would you help Donna, please?" Martha looked at Sarah Jane, worry in her eyes. Of everyone here, they were the only ones who had traveled with the Doctor for any length of time and still remembered it; Mickey, too, knew some of what there was to it, but he'd not been along anywhere near as long as either of them. Without Jack to help, this was going to be a lot for them both to carry. "I'll be down in a few moments myself, Jack, to take some scans, and bring you both some food. If I'm right about what's going on with Donna, then things may be a little worse than we expected."

Jack scowled, but nodded. "As long as the accommodations aren't too bad," he said. "I'm not about to sit around in some dank prison cell."

"Only the finest for our brilliant leader, sir," Ianto assured him, he and Mickey helping Donna to her feet. Even now, she was coming to. "VIP cells are this way. If you'll follow me?"

Sarah Jane and Martha watched them go, Luke and Clyde going off on their own again. "This is going to be difficult," Sarah Jane said. "And even moreso to watch it happen. Do you think she's breaking through?"

"That's what I'm afraid of," Martha said. "I'll take some retcon down with me when I go down to do the scans, enough to cover a couple of days. If what the Doctor told me is true, that should be enough to restore the blocks keeping her away from the part of him that she carries." One secret too many, he'd said, a too-short phone call after Martha had tried to reach Donna and her grandfather said not to call back, to never call back. "'One secret too many,'" she repeated, this time aloud.

"What was that?" Sarah Jane asked. "Did you say something?"

"Oh, nothing," Martha replied. "Just an old memory coming to the surface. Listen, what did the Doctor tell you about Donna?"

Sarah Jane sighed. "Only that holding him in her head, the way she was, was too much. That she'd burn out. 'Too brilliant for a human mind,' he said, and it sounded more like he was talking about the sun, or fire, than intelligence."

"Yeah, that's what he said to me." Martha moved back to her own console and began tapping away again. "I wish I knew how the biotransfer mechanism worked. There might be another way to solve it. Something that would bring the old Donna back without risking her life."

"If there is, you'll find it." Sarah Jane laid one hand gently on the other woman's arm, a gesture of comfort. "If there's anyone brilliant enough to match the Doctor, it's you. He speaks highly of you, you know. You were the only one of us who tried to contact Donna before he warned us not to, did you know that?"

"But that was months later!"

"He didn't think we'd try, somehow. I can't imagine why not." Sarah Jane stopped, took a moment to think about it. "Although I suppose I can, truly. Until you, I don't know that any of us have ever tried to get ahold of him before, after we left him. Or after he left us. You're an anomaly, Martha Jones, you and Donna Noble both."

Martha shook her head. "You did it, too," she said. "He told me about it, you and he working together at that school."

"Coincidence, nothing more," Sarah Jane told her. "I wasn't looking for him, I was following the case. He just happened to be there. You not only reached out to him afterwards, you made certain that you had a way to get ahold of him before you walked out of the TARDIS." She smiled softly. "We're all special in some ways, Martha, especially to him, but have faith in the fact that you're one of his best."

Martha flushed, blood rushing up to darken her skin. "Thank you, Sarah Jane," she said. "Coming from you, that means more than you could possibly imagine."

The first cells the group passed were, yes, dark, dank, and looked terribly uncomfortable. Donna was thankful that they passed by them on the way to another wing of the cells area. "I still can't believe you're locking me up," she said. "Doesn't it matter that I'm a British citizen? I have rights!"

"I do apologise, Ms. Noble," Ianto said, for the seventh time. "These are extenuating circumstances. I trust that by the end of the day, you'll either understand, or not remember this encounter." He winced when he said that last, knowing the instant that the words came out of his mouth that he'd spoken too rashly.

"Not remember?" Donna said, her voice reaching screeching tones. "Why wouldn't I remember? What are you going to do to me?"

Mickey opened the cell door and ushered Jack and Donna through. He looked worriedly at Jack, who'd been quiet, too quiet, these last few minutes. "Nothing to hurt you," he said, reaching out to key the general Torchwood code into the door lock. "I swear to you, anything we do will be for your own protection. Will you trust me on that?"

Donna looked around the 'cell', taking in her surroundings. The room was painted a pleasant, neutral colour, and there was actual furniture, not institutional metal hanging off the wall. Instead of the toilet she was used to seeing in prison movies, there was a small door off to a separate room, with toilet, sink, and stand-up shower. "Well, at least the accommodations could be worse," she said.

"Yeah," Jack agreed, but his tone belied his words. "All the finest in lush incarceration accommodations. Where's the room service menu?"

Sidling in behind him, Ianto moved to where a desk stood against one wall. He opened the drawer and pulled out a folder which, upon opening, was revealed to contain a number of take-away and delivery menus. "The phone only calls up to the main part of the Hub," he explained, "or to one of our comms if there's no one up there, but we'll order anything you want." He put the folder back down on the desk and looked seriously at Jack and Donna. "This isn't a prison," he said. "Not the way you're thinking. This is protective custody. This is where we put the people for whom it's too dangerous to go outside, or who might be a danger to those outside, but not to us. It's for your own safety," he insisted again, and Donna couldn't help but wonder whether he was trying to convince them or himself. "We're not going to treat you poorly."

Donna picked up the folder and began to thumb through it. "In that case," she said, and when she looked up she was startled to see that Ianto had already pulled out a notebook and a pen. "Right. In that case, can you get me a green salad and a vitamin water? There's a nice little deli- ah! Here's the menu."

"I'll just get a selection of dressings, shall I?" Ianto asked, already jotting things down. "And you, Jack? Anything for you? Or would you just like me to order you the usual?"

Jack stared a moment. "... The usual will be fine," he said, wondering what the hell it was he'd be ordering on a regular basis. "And I'll have a beer, thanks."

Ianto nodded. "It may take a few minutes, I imagine we'll all want to order something, but it shouldn't be more than half an hour." He nodded to Mickey, who stepped outside and began to head back up to the main part of the Hub. "Is there anything else I can get you two? There's a panel in that cupboard there that has access to the Hub's music database, so you can listen to most anything from Earth and a few of the surrounding planets, and there are a few hardcopy books in there, as well, and some hand-sets that'll get you into the Hub's literature database. No television, I'm afraid, but I wouldn't be surprised if Mickey's got some movies on there."

With that, and looking pained for some reason that left Jack and Donna both wondering, Ianto left, closing the door behind him. There was a very final-sounding ka-chunk as the deadbolt fell into place. "Well," Jack said, looking around. "There are worse places to be. What say we test out the bed?"

"Not if you were the last man on Earth," Donna retorted, "and there were no sheep."

Jack laughed at her. "This is Cardiff," he pointed out. "There very well *could* be."

Having heard that Jack was found -- with *Donna Noble* of all people, and Gwen had to wonder what serendipity or bad luck had managed that -- Gwen and Rhys had decided to stop in and grab a quick bite before parting, Rhys heading for the flat and Gwen back to the Hub. "Well, this day could have gone worse," Gwen said, sighing. "At least he's safe, now, and Martha assures me that his memory will be back soon."

Rhys nodded, and held the door of the chip shop open for Gwen to leave ahead of him. "Could definitely be worse," he said. "D'you want to keep looking for those aliens?" Rhys added, looking around. Their last encounter had only been a couple of streets over, but from the look of this one you wouldn't know it. "They might cause more trouble."

Gwen shook her head. "No, it should be fine," she said. "We've got a program running now, watching the CCTV for them. Now that we know for certain that the static was following Jack, for whatever reason, we don't have much to worry about with tracking the aliens."

Nodding, Rhys reached to the small of his back, under his coat, where he'd stashed the handgun that Gwen had loaned him, handing it back to her. "I'm well glad to be rid of this," he said. "Look, don't worry about making it home tonight," he continued. "If you want me to run over later with anything, though, don't hesitate to ask."

Gwen gave him a long look. "Not that I mind," she said, after a moment, "but why are you being so accommodating about this?"

Rhys shrugged. "I suppose it's because I know that... With you and Jack, there's never going to be any problems," he said. "You've both got this... thing, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't mind it, but I'm not second in your heart, I don't think, not to him and not to Torchwood. I may not be first alone, but sharing first place isn't so bad, after all."

Gwen couldn't help the smile that broke out over her face at that. "Oh, Rhys," she said, leaning up to brush her lips against his cheek. "I'll see you at home later," she assured him. "I may be late, but I'll be there."

"And that's why I don't mind you staying out," Rhys said. "Because I know that in the end, you'll always come home to me."

It wasn't a kiss on the cheek that Gwen went for that time, and the kiss, which grew more passionate by the moment, may have gone on far too long for standing on the sidewalk in public had there not been a small explosion down the street. Without even thinking about it, Gwen held the gun back towards Rhys, who took it from her and ducked down behind a bin. Gwen took out her spare sidearm and threw herself around the corner of a building. "Rhys! Back here!" she said. "We might be able to escape through this alleyway!" Rhys started to move, but ducked back when some blaster fire came far too close to comfort. "On three, Rhys! There's a brief pause when they recharge. One, two, three!"

Rhys practically jumped across the space between the bin and the alley, and he and Gwen took a moment to settle their hearts before they moved, sacrificing stealth for speed, towards the end of the alley.

Which was a dead end.

"Bollocks!" Rhys exclaimed, looking around for some place to take cover. "D'you think we can get back out?" he said, but it was too late. Already the aliens were at the head of the alley and turning in.

"We'll have to fight," Gwen said, ducking behind the garbage bin belonging to the chip shop. It, at least, would offer *some* kind of cover, and more than the flimsy boxboard that was the only other detritus in the alley. "We fought them off before, we should be able to manage it again. I just wish I knew what they *want*."

"You could try talking to them?" he asked, ducking into the alcove offered by the back door of the building on the other side of the alley.

Gwen started to roll her eyes, then stopped. They hadn't actually tried that, assuming that because there had been the previous firefight against Jack, the aliens were some kind of invader. But what if they *were* just looking for something? "Thank you, Rhys, you may have just saved us," she said, slipping her arc blaster into her sleeve and slowly standing up, hands in the air. "Excuse me!" she called, trying to look as non-threatening as possible. "My name is Gwen Cooper, and I'm a representative of this planet. May I ask what it is that you're doing here?"

The aliens stopped, and, in a very human manner, looked at each other in confusion. It was the first chance Gwen had to get a really good look at them. Their skin was a pale blue, and looked almost scaled, but not quite. They were the standard bipedal humanoid, leading Gwen to wonder why, exactly, that was such a popular form across the universe, and wore very little in the way of clothing, not that they had anything Gwen recognised as sexual characteristics to cover. One of them stepped forward, and said something in a series of clicks. "I'm sorry," Gwen said, "I can't understand your language. Do you have anyone who speaks English? Or another Earth language?"

There was a moment as the aliens spoke amongst themselves, and then one of the produced a device, a glowing orb that had a cable he -- she? it? -- extended to a port on the side of its neck. "I apologise," it said, and the voice that came from the orb was almost disconcertingly normal, a formal voice that Gwen wouldn't have been surprised to hear from any British butler. "We mistook this world as an aggressive one, and acted accordingly. We search for a thing of great importance to us, a secret long lost. Might you know how we could find it?"

"A secret?" Gwen asked. "What kind of secret?"

"A secret hidden in a song that was ending," the speaker explained. "It's- I apologise. There doesn't seem to be any way to translate it into your language. Is there anyone on this planet who might speak our language?"

In her head, Gwen swore most vehemently at the fact that Jack didn't have his memory. If there were anyone around who'd be likely to speak an alien language, it would be him. "Unfortunately, not at the moment," she explained. "There's a possibility that someone might come up, but for the moment we're stuck with the translator." She waved Rhys out of the alcove, and he moved up to join them. "We'll go by the Hub first, all right?" she asked, keeping her voice quiet so that the aliens, hopefully, wouldn't hear. "I don't want you out there alone with these aliens out on the streets, not if they're going about as open as they have been. And I don't want to be alone with them, either." Rhys nodded, and his hand went to his back, where he'd stashed the handgun once again. He didn't pull it out, not yet, but it was ready if he needed it.

"Okay," Gwen continued. "I work with an organisation called Torchwood. If anyone can help you, it will be us. Is there -- do you all need to come, or could we take only a few representatives? It will make it easier to travel about the city if you're not in a large group."

A few moments of the same clicking that formed their language, and then the speaker turned back to Gwen. "If you tell us where you would like to go," he said, "we can go there immediately. It's a go-places device," he explained.

"A go-places- a teleportation device?" Gwen asked, trying to clarify.

The speaker said. "Yes, a... teleportation device." He nodded formally. "How do you wish to be designated, Speaker for Earth?"

"You can call me Gwen," she said. "And you, Speaker?" It seemed best to try to use the same title.

"I am called Tek'var," said the Speaker. "Now, Speaker Gwen, if you will stand close? A few of us will accompany you and your mate to the place of your working as the rest return to the ship."

Gwen glanced at Rhys, who looked nervous, but her hand on his helped to calm him. "It'll be okay," she said. "Teleporting's not so bad, and if they speak of it so casually, they must rely on it enough to make certain that it's in good working order."

"If you say so," Rhys replied. "All right, we'll go with the teleport." He and Gwen stepped a little closer, and with a flash of light, the alley stood empty once more, a small breeze and a few rats the only inhabitants.

Chapter Three: In Which Things Go All To Hell

As Jack sat at the desk, reading something on the hand device Ianto had mentioned, Donna was taking the opportunity to lean back and try reading through one of the hard-copy books. Her head was beginning to throb, though, a slow, steady beat that seemed to sound almost of drums, as if someone was banging on a tympani inside her head. "Oh," she said, softly, as the beats grew louder, the pain grew stronger. "Oh, that's-

In a moment, Jack was at her side. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Is it the same thing that happened upstairs?" Donna shook her head.

"No, nothing so bad," she said. "Just a headache. It's already fading." And it was, she realised, the pain and the sound both fading into the background, and then gone. Something felt different, though, but she couldn't say what.

"If it happens again," he said, "we'll get some kind of painkillers for it, all right?"

Donna shrugged. "No real need," she said. "I'm not some weakling who needs to take something for a little bit of pain."

Jack considered Donna for a moment, wondering how much, if anything, she was covering up, but shrugged. "If you say so," he said, with a shrug. "I'm just..." He trailed off, and started to stare into space.

"Oi, Spaceman," Donna said, looking up. "You're just what?" She waved her hand in front of his face, trying to get his attention, but the look in his eyes when he snapped back made her wish he'd stayed 'gone'. "What is it?" she asked, concern lacing her voice. "What's wrong?"

"I-" Jack turned to look at her, panic in his eyes. "I remember dying. It's as if someone just... gave something back to me, but I really wish they hadn't. I remember *dying*, Donna. How can I be here if I've already died?"

Donna reached out, first to put a hand on his arm, then to pull him into a tight embrace. "There are answers out there," she said, "for both of us. And we're going to find them."

In the small room, barely big enough for two, Donna Noble held Jack Harkness as Jack did something he'd not done in almost as long as he could remember:

He cried.

Which made things even more disconcerting when the lights went out.

The first sub-level had been half-interesting to the boys, but it wasn't until they found the access to the next level down that Luke and Clyde found the stuff they *really* wanted to see. "What do you suppose

this is for?" Clyde asked, holding up a square of stiff, grey metal that was sitting out on a pedestal in the archives. "Some piece of an alien space ship?"

Luke shook his head. "It's a piece of 10 Downing Street," he said. "From the shelter around the conference room. The one that blew up."

"What makes you say that?" Clyde followed as Luke pointed to the pedestal, indicating a small plaque. "Oh. Well, if you want to be all *technical* about it," he retorted. "I still think it looks like a bit of an alien space ship."

Luke chuckled at his friend and moved along, further into the archives. He didn't expect that anything particularly dangerous would be out for he and Clyde to get into, for even though the Hub wasn't likely child-proofed, as it were, it wasn't likely that the dangerous stuff would just be lying about *anyway*, so he figured he and Clyde were pretty safe, no matter what they touched, as long as they were careful. "Well, there are some alien artifacts over here," he said, looking at a work table. There was an array of items spread out on top of it. Luke guessed they were waiting to be assessed and archived, given the forms sitting in front of them. "Be careful, though, I don't think they're sorted yet. We shouldn't mess with what order they're in."

Clyde nodded, reaching out to pick up something that looked like a small wooden box. "I wonder what this is for," he said. "Looks like a music box or something."

"Does it open?" Luke asked, leaning over to take a look. "Maybe we should take a look inside. We might be able to figure out what it is. That'll help them, right?"

Clyde smirked at Luke. "Now you're getting it, Luke." He fiddled with it a bit, but the top -- assuming the part he was fiddling with actually was the top -- was firmly stuck on. "Here, you try," he said, handing it over. "It probably needs some kind of special trick to opening it."

It was certainly pretty, Luke realised, although he was careful not to actually call it that in front of his friend. The wood was carved all over into an intricate design, and it took Luke a few moments to find an actual seam instead of something that just looked like one. He slid a fingernail into it, thankful for once that Sarah Jane hadn't caught him and made him clip them already, and levered it open, revealing the inside of the box. The disappointingly empty box.

"Well, ain't that just the way?" Clyde said, rolling his eyes. "Let's try something else. There's got to be something interesting in here."

Luke laughed. "If you say so," he said, but as he put the box down on the table, it began to glow, light emanating from inside. Within moments, it was the only illumination in the room as the Hub shut down, the sound of deadbolts locking down coming from every door around them.

Clyde, fear in his eyes, looked over to see a matching fear in Luke's. "Uh," he said, doing his best to put a brave front on for his younger friend. "Oops?"

Luke picked up the box again and tried to get the lid back on, but it was dissolving, fading away into a sparkling dust that sifted through his fingers. "Yeah, oops," he agreed. The box itself was crumbling now, too, but the light, now revealed to be a softly glowing orb that rose to float in the air above the table. It bobbed for a moment. Luke reached out to touch it, waiting first to see if there were any heat coming off of it, but when his finger passed through it he didn't feel anything at all. After a moment, the light bobbed up to hover over his shoulder, spreading illumination around him, enough to see a few feet in any direction, without interfering with his night vision. "Well, this will help a bit, at least," he said, hoping that it wasn't actually the light itself that had caused the apparent lockdown. "Now all we need to do is find a way out."

It wasn't Martha's first lockdown in Torchwood, but it was the first she'd not been warned about. Everything prior had been a drill. "Well," she said, thankful that the medical ward had emergency lights, "this could possibly have had worse timing, but I'm not sure what that would actually be."

Across from her, at the top of the stairs that led up from the medical bay, Sarah Jane was running one hand against the blast doors that had descended, designed to keep things from getting in and killing unsuspecting patients -- or to keep patients in and stop them from killing unsuspecting Torchwood employees. "Any idea how long this might last?" she asked. "I don't see any way out of here."

Martha shrugged. "It depends what caused it," she said. "Comms are down, so we can't get ahold of anyone else. At this point, we may just have to wait until someone comes along and stops the lockdown. Gwen's still outside, she'll have been notified when the lockdown started."

"But will she be able to get in?" Sarah Jane asked. "If it's a lockdown, surely that blocks outside access as well."

Martha nodded. "It does, but she's the best chance, probably, of any of us. No one else was on this level when we went into lockdown." She reached over and picked her take-away container up off of her desk, stabbing at her salad with her fork. "Garlic toast?" she offered.

Mickey looked at Ianto in the very, *very* dim illumination offered by his watch. "Well, doesn't that just *figure*."

The tears had passed, more memories returning, and Jack stood once again on his own. "There's got to be a way through the door," he said, fiddling at the panel that sat in the wall just beside it. "You didn't see the code Mickey used to get out, did you?" The memories weren't coming in order, Jack had said when Donna asked, but things were slowly becoming clearer. "I can't quite remember the override yet."

Donna shook her head, thankful for the little sphere of light that Jack had somehow kindled, pulling it out of his rather useful wrist-strap. "Sorry," she said. "My head was still a little foggy at that point." Another big of fog ran through her head, then faded; a sharp pain, then that, too, was gone. "But what if you... What are you doing?"

Jack was keying something else into the panel, running through a sequence of numbers that never seemed to end. "One of these days," he said, "I'm going to rewrite protocol on the override codes. There is *no need* for them to be seventy-two characters long." With a final flourish, Jack keyed in the last few characters of the code, and the deadbolt disengaged with an audible thunk. "There we go," he said, pushing the door open. "After you, Ms. Noble."

"All that come back," she said, "and you still don't remember who I'm supposed to be?"

Jack shrugged. "Even if I did," he said, "I wouldn't be able to tell you, remember? I remember Gwen now, and Ianto and Martha, although Mickey's still a bit of a fog. I trust them when they say there are reasons not to tell you." Trusted them, and remembered -- was starting to remember -- just a bit. A story of a woman changed, a woman in danger of burning herself out beyond any repair if she remembered, even if only for a brief moment, what she had been for a scant few hours.

"Oi, you're all the same," she said, stepping out into the hallway. She glanced down towards where the less opulent cells could be found. "I don't suppose the lockdown prevents any of the other... inmates from escaping?"

"Trust me, they're secure. There's not a single thing down here that could get through the lockdown blast doors."

"Says the man who's still only got half a memory." Donna walked to the edge of the illumination offered by the bobbing bubble of light. "Well?" she asked. "Aren't you coming?"

"I've got a better idea," Jack said, grinning. "Come this way."

"What's over there?"

"The armory."

The last thing Gwen had expected upon arriving just inside the tourist kiosk was a notification coming in over her headset that the Hub had gone into a high-security lockdown. "Martha?" she called, tapping her comm. "Mickey? Ianto? Can anyone hear me?" she asked. No reply. "Well, that complicates things. Rhys, could you check in the desk? Right hand side, second drawer down, just on the inside there should be a switch under a plastic cover. Can you flip it for me?" Gwen was already pulling some of the false cover away to reveal the other switch, hidden in a little alcove in the wall.

"Is this typical of your planet?" asked Tek'var. "I find it... most disconcerting to find such stringent security measures."

"Well, we are a secret base," Gwen said, smiling at the hiss of escaping air. It was good that she'd thought to try this first, otherwise the gas in the next chamber might have knocked them all out -- and who knew how it would affect Tek'var and his companions? "But no, it's not typical. For some reason, the Hub has gone into a total lockdown." She opened the door and waved the others through. "We'll have to try to get in," she said, "or at least see if we can contact anyone. I might have better luck if we're inside the Hub's lockdown shields."

Rhys watched the wall as they walked by. "Gwen?" he asked, pointing to a few irregularities in the wall. "That's different, isn't it? Have you painted in here, or is it something else?"

Looking to where he was pointing, Gwen stepped closer, running her hand along it. "No, you're right," she said, "it's definitely different. I'm not sure why. It might be something to do with the lockdown. There's so much about the hub, even now, that even Jack doesn't properly understand. Good eyes, Rhys."

Rhys preened, just a little. "D'you think it's trying to tell us something?" he asked.

"What, you think it's sentient?" Gwen asked. "Not that I'm aware of."

"I don't mean that," Rhys clarified. "But it could be trying to give us some kind of diagnostic, couldn't it? Like a readout on a computer."

Gwen nodded. "I suppose that makes sense. I just wouldn't have the first idea how to read it."

In front of them, Tek'var came to a halt. "Perhaps I may be of assistance?" he said, his creepy butler voice still coming from the orb he held. "It does seem similar to one of the more obscure writing systems on our home planet. If I may?" Gwen stepped away, allowing Tek'var to draw closer to the wall. "It appears your mate is correct," he said. "It does appear to be a diagnostic of some kind. There are some words unfamiliar to me, but it seems to be indicating that the sensors of the... Hub, as you call it, detected an unfamiliar energy and reacted with... security lockdown protocol Alpha-Tau-Ceti?" He shook his ears, an action so incredibly inhuman that Gwen was actually glad to see it; to this point, Tek'var had seemed entirely too human to be an alien.

"That sounds about right," she replied. "And that's the proper protocol for an unfamiliar energy. Does it say anything else about the energy?"

"Only that it's a small amount. Much less than I'd expect would set off any security protocol, much less one of this magnitude."

"We're fond of our security, here," Gwen said. "And you never know what's going to interact with something else. Well, let's keep moving," she continued. "Now that I know a bit more about what's going on, I may know something we can do about it."

Luke and Clyde hadn't yet managed to find a way out of the archives, but what they had found gave them a little more confidence. "This is so cool," Clyde said, hefting the rifle-shaped blaster he'd found in the mini-armory stashed in a hidden cabinet in the archive wall. "Too bad the comms aren't working. Why'd you say we should bring them along, anyway?"

"They're not working now," Luke said, "but if someone gets access, it's better to be wearing them and find out. It might help them find us later, too." He was kneeling on the archive floor, reaching into the depths hidden behind an access panel, trying to see if he could override the lockdown on the doors. "I think we probably caused the lockdown," he added. "I just hope no one's in any trouble because of it."

A moment, and then another, and there was a small hum as the door to the left of the access panel swung open. "Brilliant!" Clyde said, grinning at Luke. "C'mon," he added, taking Luke by the hand and half-pulling him out into the hallway. "Let's get out of here and find someone else. And see if they have any food, I'm starving."

Luke just laughed and followed along behind, thankful for the little ball of light that continued to bob along just above his shoulder.

The hallway they came out into wasn't the one they'd come in by, and, in fact, seemed to be one they'd not yet passed through. There was a door down to the next level, but Luke and Clyde went past it: they wanted to go up, not down. "I wonder why the comms *are* off," Luke added. "I don't know why they'd do that. Unless it's to prevent someone else from taking control of them?"

Clyde shrugged. "Who knows?" he said. "Anyway, I still think it's not worth-"

A crackle of static across the comms in their ears, and Clyde reached up in a hurry to turn his down. Luke just smirked and fiddled with his for a moment. "Can anyone hear me?" came the American-accented voice across the comms. "This is Jack, I think I've got these working again. If you can hear me, please respond."

Luke was reaching up to turn his earpiece onto 'speak' when he heard Ianto chiming in. "Ianto here, with Mickey," he said. "We're somewhere on the second level, not too far from the cells. We're trying to head back up to the Hub itself to see if we can break out of the lockdown, but we haven't got much light to make our way. How's everyone else?"

"Martha here. Sarah Jane and I are safe, but we're trapped inside the medical bay blast doors. I don't think we're going anywhere until someone turns off the lockdown."

A moment later, Sarah Jane came on the comms. "Has anyone seen Luke or Clyde? They were exploring when the lockdown started."

"I'm here, Mum," Luke said, and he could almost hear her smiling with relief. "Clyde and I are safe. We're on the second sub-level, just outside the archive. We found comms in with the weapon stash, and there's a little ball of light, too, that's decided to start following me around."

"Ball of light?" Jack asked. "From a little wooden box?"

"That's right; how did you know?"

Before Jack could respond, Ianto piped in. "That was one of the artifacts waiting to be entered into the system! How did you figure out what it does?" He paused. "Why were you fiddling with unknown artifacts?" Another pause. "Jack! Is your memory coming back?"

"Parts of it," Jack replied, and Luke was thankful for the distraction; he didn't want to have to explain to Ianto that he thought he might have *caused* the lockdown. There was enough time for that -- and punishment from his Mum -- to come from that later. "Not everything, but I remember everyone who works here except for Mickey, now. It's how we got out of the guest quarters -- I was able to remember the override."

"Yeah, the only who ever can," Martha snarked at him. "Whose brilliant idea was it to have a seventy-two digit override code?"

"Not mine, Miss Martha Jones, so don't get mad at me. Luke, Clyde? I want you two to stay where you are. Mickey and Ianto, if you can find one of the access panels, there should be a way to get you two some light. Ianto, you're most likely to know this -- do you remember the old Torchwood-1 emergency codes?"

"As if I read them yesterday, sir."

"Good man. Code 22-A should get you something to see by. When you get it, drop down a level to find the boys, and then head up to the main level. Donna and I will be up there as soon as we can. Has anyone heard from Gwen yet?"

"Not yet," Martha said, "but she may not have been able to access the internal communications yet. She'll have to get down past the first couple of security doors before she'll be able to get ahold of us."

"All right. Everyone, you have your assignments. Let's move." The comms clicked off.

A few moments later, Luke smiled as the channel clicked on once again. "Luke?" Sarah Jane said. "I've got a private channel now. Are you really all right?"

"I'm fine, Mum," he said, having expected this. He waved to Clyde to sit down, and he slid down the wall himself, settling down to wait for Mickey and Ianto. "Clyde and I are both fine. But I, uh, think I might have caused the lockdown."

"If you did," Sarah Jane said, "it's Torchwood's fault for leaving dangerous artifacts out where you could find them. But what makes you think you caused it?"

"It happened right when I opened the box," he explained. "The one that gave us the light."

There was a moment before Sarah Jane said anything more, and Luke wondered if the comms had dropped again before she spoke. "Jack recognised it," she said. "Which means that it's something he's probably familiar with. I don't see any way that that could have caused a lockdown."

"So you think it's something else?" Luke wasn't sure if that worried him, or if it was a relief. If he hadn't caused the lockdown, then what had?

"I can't say for certain," Sarah Jane replied, "but I think it's likely. Not something dangerous -- we'd have seen more sign of it by now if it were -- but something else, yes." Again, Luke could swear he felt her smiling. "When you get back up here," she said, "there's food for you. Fish and chips."

"That'll be good," Luke replied, and they both knew that what they were saying was something else entirely. "Thanks, Mum."

"You're welcome, Luke. I'll see you soon."

"You, too, Mum." The comm clicked off. "So," Luke continued. "I guess now we wait."

Clyde nodded, and he leaned against his friend. "Yeah," he said. "I guess we wait. Any ideas on how we could pass the time?"

Grinning, Luke leaned back against Clyde. "Maybe," he said. "But imagine if Mum found out."

"What, you think she hasn't figured it out already? She is an investigative journalist, after all. I bet she knew the first time we kissed."

Luke laughed. "She'd have said something, I think. It's not that she'd mind, at least I don't think she would, but she'd have let me know that she knew so that I knew she didn't mind." He took a moment to go back over that sentence in his head; it had got away from him a bit. "Anyway, I don't think she knows yet. If she did, she'd want to make sure I knew there were rules about what we could and couldn't do."

Clyde shifted a bit, bring his arm around Luke's shoulders. "Well," he said, "I'm not ready for anything more, and you're not ready for anything more. So let's just go with what we've got, yeah?"

"All right," Luke agreed, turning his head just enough so that he could lean up and brush his lips against Clyde's. "And maybe when we get out of this, we'll tell her?"

"Just as long as we don't have to tell *my* mum yet," Clyde said. "I don't think the world's ready for how she'll respond."

"You think she'll take it badly?"

Clyde snorted. "No," he said. "I think she'll start a local chapter of PFLAG. I don't think Bannerman Road's ready for that, do you?"

Snuggling in under Clyde's arm, Luke had to agree. This, anyway, was good enough for now.

Jack and Donna made their way through a hallway that looked, to Donna's eyes, exactly the same as the one they'd left. "Are you sure you know where we're going?" she asked. "I feel like we're going in circles."

"There should be an access shaft at the end of this corridor," Jack replied. "I think. It's not something that gets used at the best of times, and it's not like my memory's in the best of shape right now."

"Oh, that just fills me with confidence."

"Y'know, I think I see what he saw in you," Jack said, without even thinking what he was saying. When Donna stopped and turned to stare at him, he thought back over what he'd said.

"What *who* saw in me?" Donna asked. "Or does that have to do with whatever you all can't tell me?"

Jack swore under his breath, then shook his head. "I'm not even sure what that meant," he prevaricated. "It just slipped out."

Donna snorted. "Pull the other one, Harkness," she said. "If you're not going to tell me, at least do me the favour of telling me you're not going to tell me, like everyone else?"

"Okay. I'm not going to tell you. I don't even remember it properly yet, anyway. I definitely don't remember why we can't tell you. You're different, though. There's something..." Jack shook his head. "Anyway. This isn't helping. Like I was saying, there should be an access shaft at the end of the corridor. It should take us right back up to the main level."

Donna rolled her eyes. "One of these days, Spaceman, I'm going to get a straight answer out of you."

"That, Donna Noble, presumes that there's anything straight about me at all."

There was no way through. "We can't even get a comm signal through," Gwen said, swearing. "Not with how Mickey's upgraded the Hub shielding. We're going to have to wait for them to break the lockdown on their own. Which they should be able to -- there has to be *some* way for them to break it."

"What about Jack?" Rhys said. "He'd have the codes, wouldn't he? And you said that Martha said his memory would come back."

"We don't know how long, though." Gwen turned to Tek'var, and blinked. Something was different. "Speaker Tek'var? Is something wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong, Speaker Gwen. In fact, I believe that things are starting to be very right. If I may ask, will you and your mate accompany us to our ship?"

"I... Your sphere. It's changed colour." It was now glowing a very pale purple.

"As I say, Speaker Gwen. Things are starting to be very right. Will you accompany us?"

Gwen looked to Rhys, who nodded. "Yes," she said. "We'll accompany you." Within moments -- Gwen hadn't even seen or heard Tek'var do anything to signal it -- the teleport had enveloped them and carried them away.

When the world rematerialised around them, Gwen and Rhys found themselves on a well-lit deck, a large observation window open to their left showing the Earth below. "Brilliant," Rhys whispered, his eyes wide. "Have you seen this before, Gwen?" he asked.

She shook her head, her own eyes near as wide as Rhys's. "It's a first for me, too," she said. "Tek'var? What is it that brought you up here?"

"The song. We have found the song," Tek'var said. "It is time to search for the secret in the ending song."

"You said that before, that the secret was in a song that was ending. What do you mean? What kind of song?"

Tek'var turned to Gwen, bowing slightly towards her. "The song we all sing, Speaker Gwen. You have a song within you, as does your mate. And you carry a new one with you even now, just starting its first notes."

Gwen turned to Rhys, their eyes meeting, just as wide as before but for an entirely different reason. "You mean..." Rhys said. They turned back to Tek'var.

"I'm pregnant?" Gwen asked. She closed her eyes briefly, wanting nothing more than to hug Rhys and cheer, but this was *not* the time. Instead, she clutched his hand, sending what emotion she could through that tenuous connection.

Tek'var tilted his head, an action at once both entirely human and entirely alien. "I had not realised you were not aware," he said. "It is of little import at the moment. The secret is in a song that is ending. We must find the secret."

The secret was in a song that was ending. Gwen pushed aside thoughts of her pregnancy and turned that over in her head, looking back over the world. "But if the song is ending... That means the person is dying? What happens if you take the secret? Does the song end?"

"The song is ending," Tek'var repeated. "We must find the secret. The secret is in the song that is ending."

Gwen glanced around, let her arc blaster fall forward a little in her sleeve to rest just barely hidden, ready at a moment's notice. She saw Rhys slip his hand once more to the small of his back. "We can't let you kill anyone," Gwen said. "But if there's any other way to help you, we will."

Tek'var's people began to surround them. The strange clicks of their language rose up from them, growing louder and louder -- a chant, Gwen realised, that Tek'var was echoing through his strange translator sphere. "The song is ending," he said, and his people chanted in their own tongue. "We must find the secret." Over and over again. Gwen's eyes went around the room again, and she saw what she needed.

"Rhys," she said. "Hold on to me." Grabbing his hand, she lunged with the other for the large red button on the teleport control panel, trusting it to either take her where she wanted to go, or to where it had last grabbed them. Praying that it would work.

In a flash of light, Gwen and Rhys were gone. A moment later, her arc blaster detonated, destroying the teleport panel behind them.

Tek'var wouldn't be following them any time soon.

Chapter Four: In Which Things Come To A Head

It wasn't long before Mickey and Ianto, Luke and Clyde in tow, made it up to the main part of the Hub. "Mickey, can you see about getting the medical bay unlocked?" Ianto directed. "I'm going to see if I can get back in contact with Jack and Donna." Somewhere along the way, communications had dropped again, and though they'd managed to get back in touch with Martha and Sarah Jane, they'd lost track of their two remaining missing people.

Mickey nodded and moved to a darkened terminal, tossing out an, "Aye, mon capitain!" as he went. Luke and Clyde looked around, looked at the computers. "How's he going to do anything with the power off?" Luke asked, the little light still bobbing along above his shoulder. It moved a bit itself, almost as if nodding in agreement.

"They're not really off," Mickey explained, answering in Ianto's place. "They just look it. Part of the lockdown procedures." He finished tapping out a series of numbers on the keyboard, hit enter, and the screen lit up. "Aha! Jack's not the only one who can remember the overrides. Anyway, a few of the computers aren't shut down. As long as you're at one of those consoles and you know the override code, you can get access again. Which, remind me later, Ianto, to lock out Jack's access until he changes the overrides? They do *not* need to be seventy-two numbers."

"I'll keep that in mind," Ianto replied absently from where he was fiddling with the comms. Luke wandered over and peered over Ianto's shoulder while Clyde spied the takeaway containers and made a beeline.

"What if you swapped these two frequencies?" Luke asked, leaning around to point to two different figures on the screen. "Wouldn't that cut through the lockdown?"

Before Ianto could respond, there was a hiss, and a clang, and then the blast doors around the medical bay separated and pulled away. "Luke!" Sarah Jane called, rushing out and running over, pulling her son into her arms; the little light bobbed away for a moment before resettling. Luke laughed a little, hugged back, and then pulled away.

"Please, Mom, you're embarrassing me."

Sarah Jane pulled back, and brought a hand up to ruffle Luke's hair. "Oh, well, if I'm embarrassing you," she said, laughing in return. "All right, Torchwood," she said, looking around at the others. "We have a world to save. And please -- *no guns*."

Jack and Donna, flashlights in hand, walked through the corridor towards the access shaft. Jack held a weapon, too; Donna had declined one, claiming -- to Jack's surprise, given her previous skill -- that her lack of training would make her more liability than asset. She'd grabbed something else, he thought, although he'd not been able to tell what; a step behind him, she seemed to be fiddling with it every now and then before tucking it away again before he could turn and see it.

"It's like a dimmer switch," Jack said suddenly, stopping and turning to look at Donna. "I remember meeting you now, pretty clearly. It's like someone took a dimmer switch and turned it down. That's what's different about you."

"Oi, thanks for that, Spaceman," Donna retorted. "What's that even supposed to mean? Are you calling me dimwitted?"

Jack shook his head. "No, it's more like you were brighter, some how -- not in terms of intelligence, although maybe a little of that, too. It's like your personality isn't as bright. Like someone... turned you down."

Staring at Jack for a moment, Donna sighed. "Yeah, all right. That makes about as much sense as before you tried to explain it." She started walking again, taking the lead. "You're certain the access shaft is this way?"

"My memory's pretty much all back, I think," Jack said. "What I do have is perfectly clear. It's not all sequential -- some things about you are just flashes, without any context, and some of the things that happened around the same time. Around when I met you, I mean." He took a couple of jogging steps to catch up, but rather than reclaiming the lead, he matched Donna's pace, walked alongside her. "I wish I had more I could tell you, but that's all I've got right now."

It wasn't, but Jack hadn't lived as long as he had (before being rendered effectively immortal) without gaining some skill at lying. He *had* been a conman, after all.

As he walked down the corridor with Donna, memories of being on the Dalek ship washed over him: things he'd already remembered, that he'd already reclaimed, but that he was still trying to process. He remembered two Doctors, and seeing Rose again; Donna, more brilliant than he'd thought any human could be, hints of the Doctor coming through in her every word. A metacrisis, the Doctor had called it, a second-self grown from a hand thanks to Donna's inherent humanity giving it just the boost it needed.

But what had *happened*? he asked himself.

Donna stumbled beside him, and Jack reached out to steady her without thinking, dropping his flashlight. It went out when it hit the corridor floor, leaving them barely lit by Donna's flashlight. "What's wrong?" he asked, helping Donna reclaim her feet. Her free hand had gone to her temple, and her eyes were screwed shut.

"Headache," she explained. "Worse than before. It's passing, though." She steadied herself against Jack's shoulder. "Don't know why this is happening," she added. "Seems to be getting worse the closer we get to the Hub proper, though."

That, perhaps, was what worried Jack the most as they continued on their way: the Rift ran straight through the Hub, after all, and if *that's* what was interfering with Donna, if it was what was causing the headaches, was he just bringing her further into danger?

As most of the gathered crew sat huddled in the Hub, munching on lukewarm fish and chips by the light of Luke's hovering little friend -- with some effort, he'd 'convinced' it to separate from him and float in the center of the rough circle -- Ianto, across the room, suddenly exclaimed in success. "I've got it!" he called. "I can't reach Jack and Donna, but I've got Gwen on the comms. She and Rhys are on their way back here now," he reported, one hand coming up to touch his earpiece, "she's saying that the aliens may be invading and that we should prepare. They're not likely to negotiate, something about some kind of cult-like behaviour. A 'secret' locked away in a 'song that is ending', if anyone can figure out what that-- She's saying it's someone's life. That the aliens are saying someone is dying, or they're going to kill someone, she's not sure which, and that their death releases a secret they need."

As Ianto returned his attention to conversing with Gwen, the rest looked at each other nervously. "I'll head to the weapons locker," Mickey said, getting up. "Clyde-" At a look from Sarah Jane, Mickey quelled. "You stay here with Luke and Sarah Jane."

Clyde, dejected, sat back down, having already started to get up, but he didn't argue. He knew that, at the moment, at least, it was futile to try to get around Sarah Jane.

Martha stood up as well, and began gathering up the detritus of the meal. "You can all help me in the medical bay," she said. "We'll have to make some phonecalls. We have contacts in the local hospitals, they'll need to be informed of the potential invasion." Sarah Jane moved to help with the tidying, and Luke and Clyde nodded.

"We can do that," Luke said. "And -- is there anything else I can do to help? I'm good with computers."

From across the Hub, Ianto called out, "Come over here, Luke, I've got something I'd like you to take a look at." Luke glanced first at Sarah Jane, who nodded; Luke scampered over. "Sarah Jane," Ianto called after, "can I get you on comms? If there is going to be an invasion, we'll need someone coordinating with local authorities."

"On it," Sarah Jane replied, dumping her load of trash into the bin and following after Luke at a more controlled pace. Before long, everyone was occupied in their tasks, scattered around the main room of the Hub. There was a lot to do, after all, and potentially very little time to do it.

Jack stared at the hatch, wondering why the hell he couldn't remember how to open it. "I swear," he explained, "I *distinctly remember* this shaft being left open in all but-" He swore, this time most vehemently in six different languages: German, Spanish, a dead alien language, and three languages that hadn't even been created yet.

Rolling her eyes, Donna pulled out the thing she'd been fiddling with, revealing to Jack that it was a multitool. "All but this particular lockdown protocol, right?" she asked, leaning around him. "Get ready to pull the hatch open, I don't think this is going to work for long." The multitool emitted a high-pitched

squeal as she leveled it at the door and did *something*, and Jack heard the hatch pop open, just a bit. "Oi, *now*, Spaceman," Donna said, doing her best to hold the multitool steady as it began to shake in her hands. "This thing's about to fly apart! I didn't have much time to work on it."

Jack shook off his stunned expression and pulled the hatch wide. "What did you do?" he asked. "How'd you manage that?" The words with which Donna replied shouldn't have made him fear -- a call back, through time and space, to words he'd uttered once -- but they did, for what they meant, and what he now understood was happening the more time that Donna spent with him, in the Hub. The wince that she tried to cover as she replied:

"Oh," she said, casually tossing the now-sparking multitool over her shoulder. "I just made that a little more sonic."

Gwen and Rhys, a few minutes before, had rematerialised on the Earth's surface to find themselves only a few block away from the hub, in the shadows of a dark alleyway. Night was falling swiftly now, only the last dim vestiges of twilight remaining until full-dark. "We've got to get back to the Hub," she said, looking around. "There's-" She cut off, just as she was fitting her earpiece comm back onto her ear. "Ianto?" she said, tapping it. "Rhys and I, we're-" She stepped aside, explaining the situation, as Rhys stepped out of the alley, glancing around.

"We're clear," he told Gwen, as she finished up with Ianto and came up beside him. "No one's around." They left the alleyway behind, and ran -- near sprinted -- the distance to the Hub. Gwen found herself having to pull back just a little, to allow Rhys to keep up, which she rather expected; he didn't spend his time running after (or away from) invading aliens, after all. He wasn't doing too badly, however, certainly not for your average civilian, although Gwen supposed he wasn't really that, not anymore.

Not that she'd ever found him average in *any* department.

As Ianto advised her during the run, the Hub lockdown was coming down, bit by bit, and the entrance was at something much closer to the usual level of security. It was only a couple of minutes until Gwen and Rhys were stepping through the last doorway, the wheel rolling aside for them. "What are we at?" Gwen asked. "Is there any word from Tek'var and his people? Any demands?"

Ianto shook his head; he was standing at a console, Luke at his side, both focused on what they were typing and not even looking up at their entrance. "Nothing yet," he replied, finishing up his current task and closing the window before looking away. "As far as I can tell, they're just sitting in orbit. There don't even seem to be any transmissions coming in or out."

"The Hub sensors picked up the signature of there -- are they translator orbs? The spheres they carry, we caught some on CCTV. Crossreferencing brought up the Ood, but they don't seem to match." Luke turned away as well, his eyes wide. The little ball of light danced in front of him for a moment, and it caught in his eyes, making them dance, too. "Anyway, we've been able to track their energy signature,

and we're not detecting any on Earth right now at all, so they all seem to be, I don't know, waiting for something?"

Across the Hub, Martha looked up from where she and Clyde were finishing their phone calls. "Local hospitals are alerted to the potential influx of patients," she said, "and Clyde here's been making the calls through to police and fire. Sarah Jane, do you have the comms set up?"

From over at a desk where she'd been set-up, Torchwood-issue earpiece glowing blue in her ear, Sarah Jane nodded. "I'm ready to go online with local emergency, UNIT, and both the British and American armies, should this extend that far," she replied. She glanced nervously over at Luke, who was once again diving deep into some kind of computer code, something she couldn't follow. Of all places Luke could be, though, she figured this was likely one of the safest places he could be. "I do hope it doesn't go that far- Mickey Smith, what do you think you're doing? You are *not* giving a gun to my son. Or to Clyde!"

"I just thought- They need some way to defend themselves, in case-" Mickey, just returned from the armoury, did have the self-presence to look abashed. "Sorry, ma'am. Of course not."

They stood there, the gathered eight, and began to wonder when the world would start to end.

And they wondered if it might actually happen, this time.

There was a lull, then, things growing quiet as people waited for something, anything to happen, unable to fully relax in the tension of the potentially impending invasion. Luke and Clyde ducked away from their stations and took the opportunity pull off together and find a secluded corner. In the shadows, their faces were lit by Luke's illuminating companion. "It needs a name," Clyde said poking a finger at the light; it responded by doing nothing, letting Clyde's finger pass through just as it had Luke's, previously. "Something proper-like."

"A name? Why?" Luke asked. "It's just a light, and I'm sure I won't be able to keep it."

"Yeah, but it's yours for now, innit?" Clyde pointed out. "A proper name, yeah, like Spot, or Rover, or-"

Luke laughed, reaching up to gather the light into his hands, into which it obliged to be moved. "It's not a dog," he pointed out, holding his cupped hands up in front of his face. The light responded by dimming slightly; Luke wondered if it was to keep from straining his eyes -- if, perhaps, the light was conscious, even just a little. "I suppose 'Lighty' is out of the question?"

Snorting, Clyde nudged Luke's shoulder with his own. "Yeah, only if you're three," he retorted. "What about Clyde?"

"I've already got one of those," Luke replied, "and I'm more than happy with him." It was hard to tell, in the dim, though steady, light, against Clyde's dark skin, but Luke was rather certain Clyde was blushing.

"I think I'll go with..." Luke considered for a moment. "Bob." The light flickered a bit here, even as Clyde looked at him incredulously.

"Bob?" he asked. "All the names in the world -- in the *universe* -- and you go with Bob."

The little light, though, was -- yes -- bobbing in a way that seemed almost happy, right in front of Luke's face. "Why not?" Luke asked. "Besides, I think it- he likes it." In fact, the light was shifting to a rather satisfied shade of blue. "Do you think he's actually alive?" he added, a moment later. "Kind of sad to think of something alive being stuck in a box like that."

"Yeah, but he's out now." Clyde, too, found himself shifting his pronoun use. 'And we're going to take care of him now, yeah?"

Luke nodded, and leaned in to bump his shoulder against Clyde's. "Yeah," he replied. "I can't wait for Rani to meet him."

From off to the side, not far from where they stood in their secluded alcove, a voice cried out: "Oi!" it said, familiar and yet not at the same time. "This is *brilliant!*"

Across the Hub, almost as far away as you could get from the boys -- by coincidence, not design -- Gwen stood on the catwalk, watching over those below. Someone walked up behind her; she expected Ianto, as she turned, unused yet to Rhys's presence in the underground base, but she smiled when she saw him there. Her hand fluttered up to brush against her stomach; Rhys reached up, his hand covering hers, his warm strength reaching through her and touching, pushing away, the chill of fear in her bones. "I haven't even thought about it yet," she said, shaking her head softly. "I can't, not yet. There's no time."

"I know," Rhys replied, and where once he might have sounded angry, now his voice rang only with sincerity and understanding. "But there's never time, is there? We'll have to make time, if we're going to do this. We'll need to make time for us, for the baby. I wonder if it's a boy or a girl? A girl, I hope, with my eyes and your smile."

Gwen nodded, not able to speak, emotion choking her throat. Tears came up to her eyes. "Rhys, how can we do this? Aliens could invade at any moment -- that's my *life*, how can we bring someone, a child, into that life? Knowing that any moment, she could be taken away from us, or we from her, or--"

"Or him," Rhys pointed out. He reached up further, now, pulling Gwen close, embracing her. "Because we have to," he continued. "It's what we have to do, as humans. It's hope. We have to keep on hoping. There'll be a world for her. Jack's proof of that. The world never ended for him, and if it did you fixed it. You'll fix it. It's what you do."

There was silence between them a moment, a few quiet tears streaming down Gwen's cheeks. "It's too much," she said, her voice softer now. "Sometimes, it's too much."

Rhys's hands moved soothingly up and down Gwen's back. "Aye," he agreed. "It usually is, but that's all right. You're stronger than you thing, my Gwennie."

Silence again, until Gwen pulled away. She reached up, brushing away the tears on her cheeks. "Hope," she said. "You're right. We need to have hope."

"And that's what we'll call her, too, if it's a girl." Rhys smiled, his lips quirking up at one side. "And if it's a boy... We'll think of something."

Gwen opened her mouth to reply when, from below, there came a shout: "Oi!" it said, the voice both familiar and not all at once. "This is *brilliant*."

The access shaft led up further than it should. Jack was certain that they'd already passed six or seven levels up when it should only have been three or four, and he made a mental note -- hoping he'd remember it when this was all over -- to have Ianto and Mickey take a survey of the shaft, to see where the extra doors (on extra levels) went. "I don't suppose you see the top of the shaft yet?" Jack asked, and not for the first time. "Seriously, it shouldn't be going up this far."

"I'll tell you when I see it, Spaceman," Donna replied. "Which if you'd been listening you'd have- OW." She swore, a few words Jack didn't understand, which was odd as he knew most Earth languages and could at least recognise the ones he didn't know. "I think I found it," she replied, and with a grinding sound the hatch at the top of the shaft gave way, light streaming down from the now-active Hub. "Looks like they managed to turn off the lockdown," she reported, climbing up through the open end of the shaft. There was a little room first, windows in the door letting in the light. Donna reached down her hand to help Jack up the rest of the way. "The Hub's out there, isn't it?" she asked. "I swear, I can almost feel it." Her hand went up to her forehead again, and she wavered where she stood, leaning for a moment against Jack.

"Donna? What is it, another headache?" Jack asked. "Look, Martha should just be on the other side of that door, and if she's not, we can get her back--"

Donna shook her head. "No, I'm fine, I'm fine, I swear. Just give me a moment." And that was, in fact, all it took, as she seemed to regain her balance and righted herself. "Let's go on, shall we?" She pushed open the door and stepped out. "Oi! This is *brilliant*!"

Behind her, Jack couldn't help but smile, taking in the Hub again as someone for the first time, experiencing it anew through Donna's wonder. Certainly, she'd seen it before, on the way in, but something was definitely different now. "You like it?" he asked, one hand coming up protectively to Donna's shoulder. "Everyone!" he called out, seeing his team and their guests scattered around the Hub. "We're back. What's our status?"

Everyone jumped up at once. Martha rushed over, a scanner in hand, and she ran it up and down Donna's form even as the older woman walked forward, to the center of the Hub where the rift

manipulator stood. "This is-" Donna said again, cutting herself off. She reached a hand out, touching the air just to the left of the manipulator, facing it from where Jack stood. "There's something-" She grabbed at nothing, and when she pulled her hand down, the rift opened just a little bit, a tiny tear in time and space, and light streamed out, filling Donna's form; sound followed, surrounding her with heaven's chorus. "Oi, Doctor!" she called out, bathed in the essence of the universe. "I knew there was a way, you idiot Timelord! You didn't have to take it all! All it needs is the one secret!"

Jack watched as Donna stepped away from the rift manipulator and strode purposefully to the lift up to the plaza. Before anyone could react, it began to raise Donna up; before they could move after her, the light around her grew stronger, forcing them all to look away. "Mickey, Gwen, Rhys, up through the tourist centre *now*," he ordered. "Martha, grab any emergency equipment you think you might need. lanto, watch the boys."

"Captain Jack, sir?" Luke called. "Mr. Smith -- Mum's computer -- is reporting in, and the Hub systems are confirming. The alien ship has changed orbit, and it's hovering right over Cardiff." He paused, swallowed. "Their powering what look to be their weapons systems, sir, and they're broadcasting a request for the Singer to show herself."

Above the Earth, the last remnants of a long-lost alien race stopped their chant. Moments later, it began again: "The song has begun anew, and the Singer sings the secret. The song has begun anew, and the Singer sings the secret."

The initial group -- Gwen, Mickey, and Rhys, with Jack only a few steps behind -- clamored up through the tourist centre and burst through the doors. "Donna!" Jack called, catching up and racing ahead. "What's happening?"

Donna stood -- if 'stood' were the right word when one hovers in mid-air -- a few feet above the ground, just in front of the fountain; she was only, in fact, a few steps away from where Suzie had shot Jack, a year (a lifetime? a hundred lifetimes?) ago. The light from the rift swirled around her, mixed with brilliant music. "Here it is!" she called, laughter bubbling up out of her, a sound of pure joy. "Here is the song! Here is the secret!" Above her, the alien ship centred itself, flying low above them. "Follow it home! Take back your secret, take back your song, and let it lead you home, to the lost moon of Poosh!"

Jack stared in disbelief as the light rushed away from Donna, and the song behind it, and encircled the alien craft before shooting off into the sky, into space, towards what he could only assume was the aforementioned lost moon of Poosh. "Donna?" he said, and then swore as she fell, limp, to the ground. He ran forward, the others only a step behind. Martha, too, had arrived, her doctor's bag in hand, and though Jack had the longer stride, still Martha reached Donna first. "She's okay, I think," Martha reported. "Abnormally high brain activity, but nothing that seems actually dangerous. Mostly it's about

what I'd expect from a very strong human psychic. Her other vitals are stabilising... Correction, stable. Jack, do you want to help me take her down the lift? It's faster."

Wordlessly, Jack nodded, and he reached down to gather Donna's limp form into his arms. The trip down the lift seemed to take an eternity, even as Martha told him, "She'll be fine."

"Will she?" he asked. "What happened? Do you have any idea?"

Martha shook her head. "Not really," she replied. "The rift sealed back up after you ran out. Ianto's running diagnostics now, but his first reports were that it seemed to be operating normally. Aside from that, you'll have to wait until we get down there. Donna may have some answers when she wakes up."

Jack swore. "She remembers the Doctor," he said. "Do you think she's going to..." He couldn't bring himself to finish the sentence.

"It's a possibility," Martha admitted, "but I don't think it's likely. The Doctor didn't tell me much -- I don't imagine he told any of the rest of us anything more -- but what he did say, it made it seem likely that Donna would burn out completely. She's nowhere near that, now. In fact," she added, bringing the scanner up again as the lift touched down, "she's just sleeping, now. Perfectly normal human sleep. Brain activity's still running high, but nothing that worries me at all."

Everyone watched as Jack carried Donna into the medical bay; Gwen, Rhys, and Mickey ran in through the doorway. No one said a word, their breath held close as they waited for an answer, any kind of answer. Jack placed Donna down on the examination table, the best bed they had to offer in the Hub itself. "She's-" he began, but Donna stirred. Her eyes fluttered open, and she sat up.

"You all look like you're at a funeral," Donna said, rolling her eyes, but there were echoes of starlight, rift-light, dancing in them. "Honestly, what does a girl have to do around here to get a salad? Saving the world's not enough?"

Explanations waited a few minutes: Donna got her salad, Ianto made coffee and tea, and finally the group, all ten, gathered around the conference room table. "It was the biotransfer," Donna explained. "The biological metacrisis. When the Doctor locked away my memories, he didn't actually take it away from me. I just wasn't able to access it. My proximity to the rift began to break down the walls he'd put up, which was what was causing the headaches. Mind you," she added, "if I hadn't been near the rift, I likely *would* have died when the walls came down. I used the rift energy to... jumpstart things. The solution was actually really very simple, once I got down to it. The Doctor was too much for a human brain -- any human brain -- to handle. That doesn't mean that a human brain can't handle some -- even, in some cases, most -- of him."

"You used the rift energy, then?" Martha asked. "To boost your own body, your own mind, far enough to handle things."

"Exactly," Donna agreed. "I'm still human, mostly, maybe even more human than I was the first time I got the Doctor inside of me -- and Jack, don't think I can't hear you snickering. Really, though, I... fixed things. I'm not going to glitch out, now. There was one secret, one huge secret, that was stuck inside of me, something I couldn't bear to keep; I'd have been destroyed no matter what, if it stayed locked inside of me. The riftsong allowed me to release it. Somehow, the Poosheen knew that this was coming, I think probably through echoes in the time-stream, and they got here just in time to be lead back home."

There'd been a battery of tests, next, that Donna allowed Martha to perform, but each confirmed what Donna herself was saying: she was less than she had been for that brief, shining moment as the Doctor Donna, but not, perhaps, by much. Most importantly, she showed no signs of deteriorating, not even when Jack allowed Mickey to drive her back up to London to reunite with her parents. Proximity to the rift had brought her back to herself, but, it seemed, that same proximity wasn't required to maintain her.

Jack offered her a job, right off the bat, but she declined. "Not yet, at least," she allowed. "I've got a few things I need to do first." Her fingers running sparks down the rift as she hummed. "I'm the Singer, now; I've got a role to play in things to come. You'll see me again, though, and soon, I imagine. And don't be surprised if I've got a certain idiot Timelord in tow."

There'd been another meal before she left, the ten gathered once again around the conference table. Sarah Jane had finished her story, the one that had originally brought her to town, and her little car was packed and parked just above the Hub. Luke and Clyde, exhausted, were practically asleep in their chips.

Martha, Mickey, and Ianto bickered amicably about which movie to see that evening, as Donna had promised them a quiet night: no rift activity, no invasions. "It's the least I can do," she'd said, "and I think I actually can do it, just this once. A simple song, that one." Gwen and Rhys sat huddled, cozy, Rhys with a lager and Gwen a soda. Donna had congratulated them not long after waking up. "Would you like to know?" she'd asked, and at their hesitant nods, added, "Hope's a wonderful name. We can all use a little bit of that in our lives."

Jack stood back, a few steps away from the table, leaning against the wall. "How are you going to go?" he asked. "We don't exactly have a convenient TARDIS lying around."

"You mean you don't know?" Donna asked, honestly surprised. "The Hub, she's a TARDIS herself. Old, her, too old to travel any more, but faithful through the end, and that still a long time coming." Jack was floored, and the others surprised, too, but it did, they thought, individually, and in laughing comments, explain more than a few things about the base.

After they'd eaten, before their final goodbyes, Jack pulled Luke and Clyde aside. "Take good care of Bob," he said. "He shouldn't be a problem to feed at all -- just leave him out in the sunlight every couple of days and he'll be fine -- but light sprites can be fragile things. No microwave ovens, and don't let him get too close to the television." Luke had just nodded, eyes wide at the fact that he was going to be able to keep his newfound friend.

"Clyde," Jack added, "you take care of Luke, too. And neither of you let anything happen to Sarah Jane, okay?" They'd nodded again, both of them -- and when Jack whispered a couple of things into Clyde's ear that made him blush furiously before smiling and thanking him for the advice, Luke wondered if they were things he'd get take advantage of later.

Much later. A couple of years down the road later. There was plenty of time for *that*.

Finally, it was time for their goodbyes. Everyone saw Sarah Jane off first with the boys; there was afternoon traffic they wished to avoid on their trip back to Bannerman Road. As they drove off into the distance, Donna lead her way back into the Hub. "I'll make my own way," Donna said. "I'm the Singer now, like I said, and that brings... certain perks." She walked up to the rift manipulator and stopped just beside it. "Honestly, thank you all," she added. "I wouldn't be me again if it weren't for all of you." Her hand came up, and a soft, slow melody began to ring through the air of the Hub as she skated her fingers across the surface of the rift. She grabbed at nothing, and pulle that same nothing down, and the rift opened as if it were being unzipped. "I'll see you all again soon," she promised. "Don't let Jack get into too much trouble while I'm gone."

Before the others could say anything, she stepped through the rift and closed it seamlessly behind her. Only a few last notes hung in the air to prove that she'd been there.

"Gwen? Take Rhys home and have a quiet night in," Jack said. "That's an order. We'll discuss what's going to happen for maternity leave tomorrow. Ianto? What movie did you guys decide to see?"

Somewhere out in the universe, the Doctor grew suddenly very worried, and for the far-too-many-th time that he could remember, there was a woman behind him in the TARDIS when he turned around who hadn't been there a moment before

"Hello, Doctor," said the Singer, a rather pissed off smile on her face. "Remember me?"