



# TORCHWOOD



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# We All Fall Down

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New Who, Torchwood | R | Action/Adventure, Drama, canon pairings | 24,000 words

*Torchwood is separate from the government, outside the police, beyond the United Nations and detached from family. When someone comes at Torchwood through their families they have to make a choice between what they love and what they protect. With the threat on a personal level emotions are running high, and when secrets from the past are unearthed the team come close to splitting forever. But there's one last secret Torchwood is keeping that none of the team, not even Jack, knew about.*

Betaed by: pinkfairy727 and cailenbraern

Warnings: character death

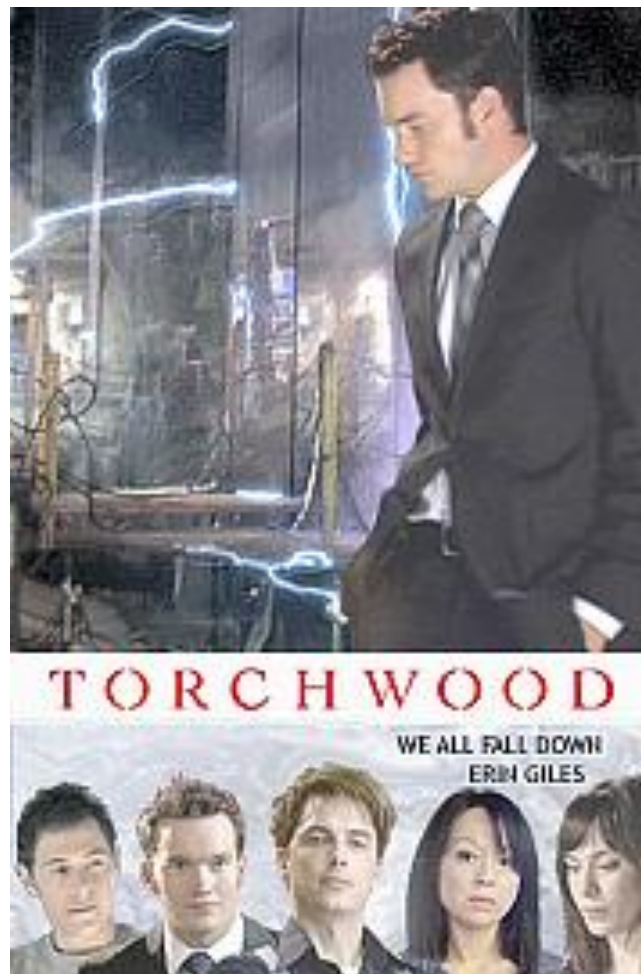
Spoilers: None

Notes: How I wrote this while writing my final year dissertation for my degree and moving house I shall never know (and not forgetting the complete lack of internet). All I know is that I wouldn't have done it without my cheerleaders and my wonderful betas who are always on hand with wacky ideas and much needed inspiration when word drought strikes.

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## PROLOGUE

The smoke was curling up into the dappled grey sky, blue light reflecting off the underside of it from all the emergency services vehicles present. The blue lights of the SUV were strobing against the cracked glass doors that led into the main atrium of the building. They'd long since run out of body bags, and smoke-blackened corpses were being laid beneath anything they could source.

Owen Harper, Medical Officer at Torchwood Cardiff, was standing vigil over the rows of corpses having just emerged from the building carrying a box full of alien technology. He forced himself to take more faltering steps towards the van that was parked next to the SUV, shoving the box inside. The van was nearly full now, odd-shaped pieces of alien technology, blackened by smoke and fire. He turned to watch as a soot-covered face let out a wail of sorrow and collapsed to their knees beside a blanketed mound of charred remains. He stood frozen, watching this woman's display of grief-filled horror, paramedics, police and firemen rushing by without giving her a second glance as she lay herself over the body that had no doubt once been her friend, boyfriend, possibly even more.

'That the last of it?'

Owen turned round to find Jack stood behind him. He remained untouched in a sea of carnage. There wasn't a hair out of place as Captain Jack Harkness stood there with his RAF greatcoat slung out behind him, hands in his trouser pockets as he looked straight at Owen, drowning out everything around him with his intense blue stare.

'Tosh is just bringing the last box.'

Jack nodded and turned away to speak to someone in black military garb. The woman was gone from her mourning place and Owen glanced round for a sign of any more survivors. All he could see were more bodies. He turned back towards Jack and his conversation.

'Any sign of her yet?' Jack asked.

'Preliminary reports indicate that she was one of the first compromised, Sir,' said the Soldier.

'Survivors?'

'Nineteen, Sir. We're still searching the building, though.'

'Any sign of *him*?' Jack asked. Owen didn't like it when Jack dealt in pronouns. There were already enough secrets at Torchwood without talking in pronouns.

'We know he was here, Sir, but if past events are anything to go on we believe he's long gone,' the soldier said. Jack sighed, dismissing the soldier with a nod and turning back to face Owen.

'Who's him?' Owen asked.

Jack wasn't paying attention; he was looking past Owen to Toshiko Sato picking her way through the debris, trying valiantly to ignore the dead bodies littering the entrance. She had a briefcase in one hand that she hadn't gone in with.

'That us?' Jack called to Toshiko.

'There's a lower-level secure archive that we can't get into. It's built tighter than a bomb shelter and has access codes that even I can't break,' said Toshiko.

'Don't worry. It'll be buried when they tear down this place,' Jack said. 'Come on, let's get back to Cardiff.' Jack slammed shut the backdoor of the van before moving around to get behind the wheel. Owen climbed into the driver's seat of the SUV, Toshiko folding herself into the passenger seat. The truck rumbled into life and Owen pulled in behind it as they drove through the road block set up, leaving the Isle of Dogs, heading back towards the M4 and leaving the fall of Torchwood One and disaster of Canary Wharf behind them.

## CHAPTER ONE

*Ring a-ring o' roses  
A pocketful of posies  
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!  
We all fall down.*

*21 months later*

'I wish you wouldn't come by unannounced.'

'If I came by announced then you'd make sure you weren't in.'

Alice Carter clung onto the doorframe for a moment longer before she finally let the door swing open wide enough to allow her father, Jack Harkness, entrance. He made a show of wiping his feet on the doormat and hanging up his coat as Alice shut the front door behind him.

'Is Steven in?'

'I'm picking him up later. He was at a sleepover last night.'

They stood through an uncomfortable silence in the no-man's land of the hall before Alice offered him coffee and Jack, out of politeness, accepted.

He perched on a stool at the end of the breakfast bar. Steven's schoolbag lay open in front of him, homework jotters and bits of paper creeping out across the surface.

'Steven's doing well at school?' Jack asked as he nudged a bit of paper slightly to reveal 18 out of 20 for a spelling test.

'He's doing okay,' Alice said as she shuffled all of Steven's schoolwork back into his bag and moved it out of Jack's reach.

'Just checking up on us then?'

Alice was leaning with her back against the work surface now, arms crossed in front of her as the kettle whined behind her.

'I was in the area, just thought I'd drop by and see how you were.'

Alice scrutinized him, as if by looking at him long enough she could read his true thoughts. She seemed to decide that he was telling the truth for the moment as she turned away to retrieve mugs from the cupboard.

'Everything's alright then?'

'We're fine,' Alice said without turning to look at Jack. 'We're fine on our own.'

Jack didn't need the meaningful look Alice shot him to read between the lines. Jack finished his coffee before it was even cool enough to drink and the engine hadn't even had time to cool before he was heading back towards the Hub.

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Toshiko was shifting through the detritus of the last week that littered her desk. Ianto had made a concerted effort to tidy round the piles of notes, wires, computer components and other assorted odds and ends, but it was clear he'd lost enthusiasm for his task since Toshiko kept finding wrappers for sweets she couldn't recall eating.

She deposited another fistful of wrappers in the wastepaper basket she'd dug out from under her desk, her eyes already scanning over another set of Rift readings from a week last Tuesday. She sighed, adding them to the growing pile on her chair that she needed to file. The next piece of paper made her stop.

She'd meant to write back as soon as she'd got the letter. She always meant to write back as soon as she got the letter, but it never quite worked out like that. She always seemed to have more letters from her mother than she'd sent to her. One thing or another always got in the way of Toshiko writing back. Most frequent was her inability to conjure the right words.

The number of times Toshiko wrote out a letter telling her mother everything that she wanted to tell her, everything she needed to tell her, only to screw it up and throw it in the bin. It was getting ridiculous. But Torchwood wasn't something you could drop in casually as a postscript at the end of a letter. She'd tried in her Christmas letter one year, but then after a couple of glasses of wine and *It's A Wonderful Life* on BBC2 Toshiko had decided that it was better if her mother never knew.

So letters became a vague amalgamation of what she and the rest of the team had been up to. She'd relayed the details of a holiday in Paris that she'd never actually taken because Gwen had failed to leave out any details of her and Rhys' exploits over a quiet morning at work. It would have been enough to make even Jack blush. She'd sent a fairytale story of a life that she shared with someone else; a doctor. But every letter was somehow harder to write, each lie something she could never get out of. Not that it mattered.

'Want me to file these for you?' Ianto asked, already picking up the pile of paperwork on Toshiko's chair.

'Please, Ianto,' Tosh said as she folded up the letter and slipped it inside her handbag. She'd write back to her mother tonight, assure her she wasn't ignoring her. Tosh was handing the last pile of paperwork to Ianto when the Rift alarm started wailing loudly and flashing on her screen.

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'Yes, I know I missed it last year as well,' Ianto said under his breath, looking out the window at the passing cityscape rather than at the rear view mirror where he knew Jack was watching him.

'I promise you I'll be round tomorrow,' said Ianto. Ianto shifted uncomfortably in his seat as Owen overtook a bus full of Cardiff City supporters heading in the wrong direction.

'I know her birthday's today, but-' Ianto tried not to sigh as his sister gave him a flea in his ear about never being about for anything. She was going down the old road of the kids not knowing him and as usual he had to resist the urge to blurt out that they weren't his kids. He knew giving them a tenner every time he put in a brief appearance was a poor substitute for his lack of presence at birthdays, Christmases and family BBQ's, but it was all he could think to give them to show he loved them. He sometimes wished his sister were as easily won over.

'Rhi-' Ianto tried to interrupt, but Rhiannon was quite happily ranting down the phone line now. Ianto could hear Johnny in the background giving her helpful suggestions of other occasions where Ianto had said he'd be there and hadn't.

'Look, Rhiannon, I've got to go. Wish Mica a Happy Birthday from me and tell her I'll take her out to Pizza Hut tomorrow,' Ianto said.

'You can tell her yourself,' Rhiannon told him brusquely before there was the shuffling of a phone being handed between people. Ianto started picking at the rubber insulation on the car door as Jack and Owen argued over the quickest way to Bryn-ty ffarm, neither of them paying any attention to the Sat Nav or Tosh's directions.

'Happy Birthday, Mica,' said Ianto when his niece made her presence known on the phone. She managed a mumble of thanks, but was clearly distracted by something else. Most likely a new game she had received for the Xbox.

'I can't make it for your birthday dinner tonight, but how about I take you out to Pizza Hut sometime?' Ianto may have promised his sister tomorrow, but he couldn't make promises he was most likely to break to his niece.

'Wall-E's on at the cinema,' Mica said in reply. Ianto had no idea what Wall-E was, but if Mica wanted to see it and it stopped Rhiannon from yelling then he'd happily sit through a film about forgetful fish, penguins that staged breakouts from zoos, food that fell from the sky or any number of bizarre and unbelievable cartoon occurrences.

'How about we go to the cinema and Pizza Hut then?' Ianto suggested, horns blaring outside the SUV as Owen ran a red light, Tosh's voice coming urgently through the earpiece in his other ear.

'Mica, sweetheart, I've got to go now, but I promise you I'll take you to Pizza Hut and to see Wally-'

'It's Wall-E,' Mica corrected.

'We'll go soon, okay?' said Ianto. The SUV was grinding to a halt as he opened the backdoor and followed Jack out into the blustery afternoon air coming in off the Bristol Channel. When Rhiannon got

the phone back off of Mica, who was enthusing about Wall-E and Pizza Hut, there was nothing but the dial tone.

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'Fucking hell,' Owen grumbled as he forcefully pressed the red button on his mobile, cutting off the caller for the umpteenth time that week.

'Bet you wish you hadn't given her your number now,' Jack said as he swept his gun from side to side in front of him, eyes roving blindly over haystacks and mutilated carcasses of cows.

'What?' Owen snapped in reply, veering to the left to avoid the mutilated remains of a heifer so he almost knocked Ianto into a bale of hay. Ianto gave an indignant harrumph before he moved ahead of their small search party, PDA in front of him like a shield.

'The girl you picked up in the bar, or club, or wherever else you go to pick up girls these days,' said Jack.

'Oh,' Owen answered after a long pause, 'Right.' He moved off to the left slightly to try and avoid the continuation of a conversation he didn't particularly want to have. Owen would prefer it if he had obtained a stalker, she would be easier to fend off than his own mother. Owen had no idea why she'd been calling him almost constantly over the last week or so. She'd had more conversations with his answering machine in the past week than she'd had with her son in his lifetime, which wasn't really saying much. She'd spoken to Ianto too. How she'd got a hold of the number for the Tourist Information Office Owen didn't know, but thankfully Ianto had thrown her off the scent and when Ianto had mentioned it privately in passing there had been no judgement.

It wasn't that Owen didn't want to speak with his mum, but he had a habit of idolising how phone calls with her would pan out. Of course, the first five seconds was built on the grounds of blissful ignorance until questions like 'How are you?' could be interpreted as nuclear arsenal to lob at each other around the twenty-second mark. It was why, some days, he secretly enjoyed Gwen's mothering approach to team building. While he was right there with Ianto, rolling his eyes, and laughing with Jack about how touchy-feely Gwen could be sometimes, the genuineness behind her asking after his health sometimes touched him and warmed him more deeply than a cup of coffee ever could. Even Ianto's coffee, which Tosh had described as being a hug in a mug on bad days, was a reminder that sometimes Torchwood was the only family he could rely on.

'Found it,' Ianto's call came from over the other side of the barn. He and Jack were standing over a mound of fur when Owen joined them, large enough to be a bear but with a trunk like an elephants. If Owen didn't know better, he would say it was a Woolly Mammoth.

'It appears the Woolly Mammoth is no longer extinct,' Ianto commented just as his PDA beeped in his hands, the Woolly Mammoth expelling its last breath from both orifices. Jack laughed as Owen wrinkled his nose and Ianto put a hand to his mouth.

'Well that was a short-lived comeback,' said Jack.

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'What's that noise?' Gwen asked. She was on the phone to her soon-to-be-husband, phone tucked under her chin, balanced on the one shoulder while she used both her free hands to type at her computer. She'd dropped the phone twice before he'd picked up.

'Smoke alarm,' said Rhys. He sounded dejected, but Gwen didn't pick up on it.

'Smoke alarm?'

'Dinner's burnt again,' said Rhys.

'I'm sorry, love, but I won't be home for dinner.'

'You don't even know what you're saying do you?' Rhys snapped back. Gwen stopped typing at her computer having typed in the words 'dinner' and 'sorry' into the search engine.

'I do, love,' Gwen said, scrambling for some form of apology that didn't sound like she'd already said it a thousand times. 'Rhys, there isn't anywhere else in the world I'd rather be right now than at home with you eating burnt lasagne.'

Rhys sighed down the phone instead of saying anything to disagree. 'Right, well I'll see you when I see you then,' he said before he hung up. The disappointed tone to Rhys' voice was somehow much worse than him ranting. She had her thumb on the redial button when the klaxon above the cog door went off admitting Owen, Jack and Ianto back into the Hub, struggling under the weight of a body.

She moved across to help, ending up taking up Jack's side as his phone rang and he wandered away to answer it, shutting his office door behind him.

## CHAPTER TWO

'So after last nights-' Jack broke off as a shrill ring sounded in the board room and the team as one turned to look at a blushing Ianto who was fumbling for his phone in his inside jacket pocket.

'Sorry,' he mumbled as he pulled himself to his feet, not answering his phone until he was in the corridor outside the boardroom. Jack's eyes followed him, watching as he spoke quietly down the phone for a moment.

'Jack,' Gwen prompted, looking up at him hopefully as she clutched her steaming mug of coffee to her chest. Her gaze flipped to Ianto briefly, like she was trying to lip-read what he was saying too.

'Yeah, so, Tosh, you've already put in the cover story to the police?' Tosh gave a short nod, only half listening to Jack as she continued to regard her computer with some interest, windows opening up at random on the screen behind Jack's head. Jack turned to Owen, not even managing to open his mouth before Owen was talking.

'I've autopsied the thing Ianto's calling Snuffleupagus,' from the look on Owen's face he clearly disagreed with this name, 'but with nothing to base it's physiology on - except maybe an elephants - I don't know it's humorous from it's gluteus maxims. I can't really say if it's normal behaviour for it to curl up in a barn to die after helping itself to an all you can eat farm.'

'What are we doing about the farmer?' Jack directed his question towards Gwen, but he was looking at Ianto who was taking his seat back at the boardroom table, avoiding Jack's eye.

'He's a dairy farmer so he thinks he lost most of his livestock to a foot-and-mouth outbreak,' Gwen replied, grimacing slightly as the remains of a mutilated cow popped up on screen behind Jack.

'Lovely,' Owen commented, and Jack turned to see what his team were looking at. He was waiting for some snarky comment from Ianto about aliens abducting cows, but it never came. When Jack turned back to regard his team, Ianto was still staring resolutely at the tabletop.

'Okay, Tosh, see if you can get a trace on where it came from, any Rift spikes in the last 48 hours. Hopefully we won't be expecting any more, but just in case. Gwen, follow up on that police report, smooth over any kinks with Cardiff's finest and see what you can do about compensation for Farmer Giles. Ianto, when Owen's done with the body perhaps you can get rid of it for him?' With Jack's words his team pulled themselves to their feet and started to file out of the conference room.

'Ianto,' said Jack, watching as Ianto gathered up his coffee mug and the tray that he'd brought them in on. Ianto didn't say anything but looked up at Jack, not quite meeting his eyes.

'Everything alright?' Jack enquired.

'Fine,' Ianto said, already turning out the room.

'Ianto,' Jack repeated his name and Ianto sighed when he turned back to face Jack.

'Interesting phone call?' Jack asked this time.

'Just Johnny,' lanto said, still avoiding Jack's gaze.

'Your sister okay?'

lanto sighed again, finally meeting Jack's gaze. He'd asked Jack once whether he was psychic and Jack had laughed, telling him that he was just good at reading people. lanto made a considerable effort to straighten his posture and chase away the worry lines on his face, but it was too late, Jack had apparently already read him like an open book.

'She's been taken into hospital. High fever and some other symptoms that Johnny was sort of vague on,' lanto muttered, swallowing nervously before looking away from Jack again.

'Take off.'

'What?' lanto looked up at Jack, almost dropping the tray he had placed under his arm as he shuffled nearer to the exit.

'lanto, she's your sister and she's sick. Go and see for yourself that she's okay. No matter what people say, I'm not a slave driver,' Jack tried to joke, 'Well, not all the time.' That comment raised a nervous smile from lanto.

'Hey,' Jack said, causing lanto to look up and find Jack well within his personal space now, a hand moving up the length of lanto's arm. 'Family is more important than Snuffleupagus.'

Jack managed a squeeze of lanto's shoulder as lanto inclined his head in acknowledgement before he turned away from Jack, heading out of the conference room. Jack followed him, watching as he moved to put his coat on, aiming to slip out with little to no fuss no doubt. Jack's attention was drawn to Gwen whom was now having an agitated conversation with a person on the other end of the phone. It looked like Jack was about to get his second piece of bad news for the day, and not in the same quiet way it had been imparted from lanto.

'Rhys is in hospital,' Gwen said after she'd hung up, her voice ringing across the Hub as she gathered her jacket from the stand.

'What happened?' Toshiko asked, turning from her screen to regard Gwen. Jack noticed her gaze falling on lanto who had already buttoned up his coat and had one hand on the handrail down to the exit.

'They said he was in a car crash, they wouldn't tell me anything else,' Gwen said, frantically scrabbling on her desk for anything she thought she might need, searching blindly for her phone before she realised she already had it in her hand.

'I'll give you a lift,' lanto said before Jack even had a chance to say anything. It was clear that Gwen was going to the hospital whether Jack gave her permission or not.

'Thanks, pet,' Gwen said as she followed Ianto down the stairs, her phone still clutched tightly in one hand, keys in the other.

'Both of you keep your phones on,' Jack managed to call after the sound of the cog door closing. Toshiko was already looking at Jack inquisitorially.

'His sister was taken ill this morning,' Jack said before she had a chance to ask the question.

'You don't think-'

'I do,' Jack interrupted, 'but let's see what the NHS can come up with before we go running around like a bull in a china shop.'

Toshiko seemed to consider this for a moment before she nodded hesitantly, turning away from Jack and back to her computer screen that was still collating Rift readings from the last 48 hours.

'Ianto?' Owen's voice came from the depths of the medical bay.

'He's gone out,' Jack called back, stuffing his hands in his pockets as he turned towards his office.

'Whatever you want doing you can do it yourself.'

Jack could hear Owen muttering obscenities to himself as Jack walked into his office, crossing the concrete expanse to his desk where weeks old reports sat awaiting his handwritten confirmation that he had at least given them a cursory glance.

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Gwen didn't even consider why Ianto had offered to give her a lift to the hospital. She spent most of the journey unthreading and re-threading her flat key onto her key ring while she tried not to think of Rhys lying in the autopsy bay shot, or worse - dead. She didn't bat an eyelid when Ianto followed her into the hospital, too intent on moving towards the desk to utter Rhys' name quickly to the receptionist, followed succinctly by her own name.

'If you just want to wait a couple of minutes I'll let someone know you're here,' the receptionist said not unkindly before she was looking over Gwen's shoulder to the next person she could help.

'Rhiannon Davies.'

Gwen jumped slightly when she heard Ianto's voice.

'Ianto?' Gwen enquired as the receptionist tapped away at her keyboard. Ianto didn't really turn to look at Gwen as he uttered something that sounded like, 'my sister'.

'She's just been moved up to a ward, but I'm afraid only family members-'

'I'm her brother,' Ianto interrupted, 'Ianto Jones, I should be down as one of her next of kin.'

The receptionist held Ianto's gaze for a moment, like she didn't quite believe him before her eyes flicked back to the screen. 'Shaw Ward, 22B. 7th floor.'

Ianto nodded his thanks before he was moving away from the glass prison of reception, looking around for a sign that pointed him towards the lifts, but Gwen was staring right at him, a look of shock on her face.

'You were already coming here?' Gwen asked.

Ianto nodded. 'Johnny - my sister's husband - called me to say she'd been brought in early this morning.'

'I didn't know-' Gwen left her sentence hanging, unclear what she meant. I didn't know that's why you were coming to the hospital? I didn't know you had a sister? I didn't know you had a life outside Torchwood? Ianto suspected all of the above judging by the look on Gwen's face. He could hardly blame her though, he played his cards so close to his chest with everyone but Jack that they weren't even sure what game he was playing.

'I'll come find you when I've checked on my sister,' he said, moving off towards the lifts and leaving Gwen stood in the middle of the carnage of A&E. Gwen watched him calmly waiting for the lifts, his hands in the pockets of his jacket as he stared straight ahead, no flicker of emotion on his face and she checked herself slightly, running a hand through her hair to calm herself.

'Mrs. Williams?'

'It's still Cooper. We're not married yet,' Gwen said politely to the Doctor she was now facing.

'I'm Doctor Fletcher.' They shook hands. 'Your fiancé was brought in this morning after the van he was driving collided with a car. He's got a few cuts and bruises, but otherwise was relatively unharmed in the crash. Our main concern is what caused the crash. Does Rhys have a history of fainting or headaches?'

'No, he's fine. He plays football on a Saturday,' said Gwen, as if she was trying to prove Rhys' fitness.

'We think he might have had a seizure, which would have caused the crash in the first place.'

'Seizure?' A pause. 'Are the other people alright? The one's in the other car that he hit?'

'They're being taken care of. We're going to take Rhys upstairs for an EEG to see what's going on in his brain, try and determine what's happening.'

Gwen nodded dumbly for a moment. She wished she'd brought Owen with her; he'd have been able to explain what was happening. 'Can I see him before he goes up?'

Doctor Fletcher nodded with the sombre air of a well-seasoned physician. 'Of course, but he's not woken up yet.'

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Owen's phone was ringing. Again.

'Owen,' Tosh called out to him before his feet started plodding loudly up the autopsy bay stairs.

'Yeah, I heard it,' he replied. He checked the caller ID before he answered it, something that he'd only taken to doing recently. Tosh figured that he'd had a bad one-night stand and now couldn't get rid of the poor hapless girl who thought it had been love at first sight. Serves them both right, Tosh thought bitterly as Owen turned away from her.

'Yeah, speaking,' he said quietly as he moved into the concealed corridor by the autopsy bay.

'I'm her son,' was the last thing Tosh heard before there was nothing but fragments of words that she couldn't connect floating out every so often before it was punctuated by another phone ringing. This one was in Jack's office, the door open.

'Jack Harkness,' he answered, voice light for a moment. 'What's happened?'

Tosh looked up, glancing towards Jack's open door, concern edging its way in as she heard the clomp of Jack's boots on concrete. She was expecting to be asked to search for something, to track down aliens or evil lawyers or collate Rift readings, but Jack just shut his office door, catching Toshiko's gaze for a moment before he turned away so she couldn't lip-read.

Toshiko sighed, turning back to look at her computer screen - a maze of intricate mathematical formula - before she glanced down at her own phone. She pressed the green call button to illuminate the background but all it told her was that her keypad was locked. She waited until it went dark again before she lifted her empty coffee mug from between two piles of paperwork and went to refill it.

## CHAPTER THREE

'Gwen?'

Gwen turned at the sound of her name to find Ianto stood by the curtain, looking in at her sitting beside Rhys' bed. Her hand was gripping his. Her sole attention had been focused on looking for any slight movement that indicated her fiancé was still in there.

'Jack called, he wants us to head back to the Hub.'

It shouldn't shock her really. It wasn't as if Jack had family, the job always came first in his eyes.

'He doesn't think this is a coincidence, he thinks it's something to do with us.'

And there it was again, the glaring neon lights that told her she'd unconsciously dragged Rhys back into her work and he'd got hurt. Again. The constant litigation of Home versus Work, of Rhys versus Jack, followed by the nagging voice that told her it would always be work, would always be Jack, even though she didn't want it to be. She loved Rhys, but Jack and Torchwood were like a drug you couldn't quit.

Gwen nodded once before she pulled herself to her feet, her hand still holding Rhys' as she squeezed it one last time. She leant over the bed, kissing his forehead in reassurance that she'd be back soon, but his eyelids didn't so much as flicker.

She sucked her bottom lip into her mouth, chewing on it slightly as she followed Ianto back through the carnage of A&E to the car park. His hands were shoved deep in his coat pockets, his eyes looking down at his feet as he paced slowly down the linoleum-lined floor.

'How was your sister?' Gwen enquired after the feeling of wanting to burst into tears had passed.

'Same as Rhys. Unconscious, unresponsive and deteriorating by the second.'

Gwen blinked furiously as they stepped out into the morning sunshine and Ianto started towards his car, a frown on his face that suggested he was trying to remember where he parked it. It was times like this that Gwen realised how alike Ianto and Jack were in some ways. They were both infuriatingly clam-like when it came to sharing feelings, when all Gwen wanted to do was blurt them forth.

'Is your sister's husband still with her?'

'Yeah.'

'Have they got kids?'

Ianto was busy fishing for his keys in his jacket pocket now, having found the car. He paused before he opened the car, Gwen's hand already on the handle to the passenger side. He was looking at her over the roof of the car.

'Why are you taking such a sudden interest in my family?'

'I just- We're friends, and I'm interested. Just because I'm worried about Rhys doesn't mean I'm not concerned about you and your family too, Ianto.'

They stood looking at each other over the roof of the car before Ianto pressed the key fob and got in, Gwen following behind.

'She's got two kids,' Ianto said as he pulled his seatbelt on and put the key in the ignition. 'David and Mica.'

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'Conference room in five minutes,' Jack greeted when Ianto and Gwen got back to the Hub. Ianto moved to rescue the coffee machine from a glowering Owen while Gwen followed Jack down the corridors to the conference room.

'What's going on?' Gwen asked.

'While you and Ianto were at the hospital I had a thought,' Jack said, even as Owen came stomping into the conference room.

'A whole thought,' said Owen. 'Wow.'

'Remind me not to let you interact with people until you've been spoon-fed caffeine,' Jack said. Owen glared.

'Your thought?' Gwen prompted.

'Rhys and Rhiannon are showing similar symptoms, yes?'

'Yes.'

'Well, Rhiannon and Rhys have never set eyes on each other, don't live or work anywhere near each other, don't shop at the same supermarket, don't know the same people. So how come they've got the same symptoms and yet neither you nor Ianto are sick?' said Jack.

'I- maybe they have had some sort of interaction, you can't rule that out, Jack,' said Gwen.

'What if it's Cardiff wide? Affecting the whole city?' Toshiko asked as she sat down at the table, her coffee mug already in her hands as Ianto, having followed her into the boardroom, passed out the rest of the mugs.

'I called the hospital. There's no other cases.' Jack cut in quickly. 'I think it's safe to assume it's just our families.'

'How do you know?' said Gwen.

Jack looked at Owen.

'I had a call from London. My mum's been taken into hospital with similar symptoms,' said Owen.

Toshiko looked suddenly fearful, glancing down at her mobile on top of the pile of papers in front of her.

'Go call them,' Jack encouraged and Toshiko got up with her phone and left the conference room.

'I don't understand, why attack our families?' Gwen questioned.

'To get our attention. They obviously know we're Torchwood, and want something from us, so I suppose we just have to wait for the ransom note.'

'But what if it kills our families before we get the ransom note?'

No one said anything, but it was clear they were all thinking it too. Toshiko came back into the room at that point, ignoring the uncomfortable silence. She didn't say anything, just nodded at Jack to confirm his suspicions.

'There wouldn't be much point in a ransom note then, would there?'

Something snapped in Gwen about how blasé Jack was being about all of this.

'How can you just sit there and calmly say we have to wait? Just because you don't have any family that's being affected by this!'

There was a flash of something in Jack's eyes, like he was going to say something, but he just folded his arms and pulled himself up to his full height at the head of the table, as if he had the final say on the matter. Which, he did - they didn't call him the boss for nothing.

'What else do you propose we do?'

'We could try and find out who's behind it? Make a list of enemies or something.'

Ianto snorted and everyone at the table turned to look at him. 'It would be far simpler to make a list of people who aren't our enemies.'

Gwen sighed in frustration. 'We have to do something.'

Jack surveyed his team, looking rather dejected as they slouched round the conference table.

'We could test them,' Owen said. 'If they've been infected with something and the hospital doesn't seem to know what it is, we've got better resources here, maybe I can come up with an antidote.'

'If they've been infected someone must have got to them somehow. I could check and see if any of them did anything out of the ordinary in the past few days. Check records, CCTV, credit cards,' said Toshiko.

'Talk to family and friends,' Jack put in, glancing round the table.

'What about looking into who's got it in for us recently?' Jack asked, looking at Ianto, who raised his eyebrows slightly in disbelief.

'Go through the archives, see if you can narrow it down to people we've pissed off recently, let's say the last six months,' Jack suggested. Ianto refrained from rolling his eyes at Jack, nodding instead.

Jack's phone was ringing again. 'Okay, Owen, you and Gwen head back to the hospital and see Rhys, see if the NHS has gotten any further in their diagnosis,' Jack said, almost absentmindedly.

Jack left the room first, his ringing phone clutched in his right hand as he turned left and disappeared down a corridor into a lower part of the Hub. Gwen and Owen followed after, already discussing whose car they were going to take. Toshiko methodically gathered up her bits of paper and her coffee mug, giving a wan smile to Ianto before she too left the conference room.

Ianto gathered up the half-drunk and finished coffee mugs and placed them back on the tray he'd brought them in on. He'd do the washing up before he disappeared into the archives for the foreseeable future. There was something about the mundanity of the task of washing up that Ianto liked. He could switch off for a while, taking pleasure in the simple task of scrubbing coffee stains from multicoloured crockery. There had been a time when all the mugs in the Hub matched, but breakages happened, joke mugs were given as presents and sets from IKEA replaced ones that Owen had grown alien bacteria in and forgotten to tell Ianto. Now, Ianto found it sort of quirky that none of the mugs matched, and everyone had their own personal favourites without having to put their names on them.

He pushed all the chairs back into place, switching the lights off before he left the room, tray placed precariously in the one hand.

'You can't expect us to-'

Ianto stopped in the middle of the corridor. He shouldn't be eavesdropping on conversations, not when his mother had always taught him it was bad manners. Not that she had been someone to lead by example.

'This isn't up for negotiation. Torchwood is not yours.'

Ianto headed back towards the main area of the Hub before Jack finished hanging up.

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'Hey, slow down,' said Gwen as a girl of about six or seven ran into her legs. Gwen had seen her slew out of a room further down the corridor on the ITU ward moments ago, dodging round trolleys and legs of other people. The only reason she'd run into Gwen was at the sound of her name being called by a large man with a broad Valleys accent.

'Mica!' The name sounded again and Gwen immediately recognised it as the name that Ianto had given for his niece earlier that day. Gwen bent down to the child's level, giving her a brave smile as Mica returned her gaze with watery blue eyes.

'Are you Mica?'

The girl nodded, almost guiltily as the man who had called after loomed over them.

'Mica, come on, leave this woman alone and come back and see your mam,' the man said, holding out his large hand to the little girl. Gwen looked up at him towering over the both of them, scuffed trainers not quite meeting his jeans, hooded zip up top stretched over his rotund form and Gwen surmised that this was Ianto's sister's husband, Johnny.

'Don't want to,' she told him with a pout, her hand now clinging onto the leather of Gwen's jacket.

'Mica, come on, stop playing stupid now,' Johnny said, patience obviously not his forte.

'I'm not stupid, that's David,' Mica told her father adamantly. Johnny looked like he was going to blow a fuse, just as another kid came out of the hospital room further down the corridor.

'Oi, Dad! We allowed to go to McDonalds?' David yelled down to his father.

'Is your mummy sick?' Gwen asked, watching as Johnny and David bickered out of the corner of her eye. Mica nodded in reply.

'Well, my boyfriend is sick too, and the doctors think that your Mummy and my boyfriend have got the same thing. But I know for a fact that there's clever people trying to work out how to cure them, so you don't need to worry, okay?'

There was a pause where David managed to declare his disapproval over not going to McDonalds that evening before Mica nodded again. 'So Mam's going to get better?'

'I promise,' said Gwen.

'Mica!' Johnny barked and Mica finally let go of Gwen's jacket and ran towards her father's outstretched hand, grabbing onto it.

'Who was that?' Owen asked as he came out of Rhys' room behind Gwen. He was looking past her to Johnny leading Mica by the hand back into her mother's room, David slouching behind them, scuffing his feet on the linoleum floor.

'Ianto's family.'

'Really?' Owen asked, looking sideways at Gwen.

Gwen had to admit she was a little surprised too. She didn't know why, but she hadn't expected Ianto's family to be, well, like that. She didn't know what she'd expected. Well-dressed people who read the Sunday Times and had afternoon tea? No, that wasn't what she'd expected, but she hadn't expected Ianto and his family to be so far removed from one another. In that moment she understood a little more why Ianto wore suits to work, and she wanted to tell him again that there was no shame in coming to work scruffy, and for the first time really mean it.

Owen was still looking down the corridor trying to get another glimpse of Ianto's family as he shouldered his medical bag.

'You get everything you need?'

'Yeah,' Owen said, patting the bag. 'You staying here or-'

Gwen looked back through the open door of Rhys' room. There was a mound at the foot of the bed underneath the covers that Gwen knew to be Rhys' feet. She shuddered as she felt cold feet against her own calves and the ripple of laughter shuddering down her spine.

'I'll come back to the Hub with you.'

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'You okay, Ianto?' Tosh asked.

Ianto was staring at the coffee machine like it held the answers to all life's problems. He had a glazed expression on his face, and if he was willing to be honest in that moment, no he wasn't okay. He was very far from okay.

'Fine, thanks, Tosh.' He gave her a vague disarming smile - no teeth, just a slight quirk of the lips. He could never pull off a Jack Harkness disarming grin.

'We'll figure this out,' Tosh said. She patted him on the arm a couple of times, obviously mistaking the worried look on his face for concern over his sister's wellbeing. He was currently more pre-occupied with the phone call he had overheard. He gave Tosh another smile that he dug up from the deep recesses of his emotional turmoil to try and reassure her. It seemed to do the trick. She gave his arm a squeeze before she retreated to her desk.

Ianto went back to trying to convince himself he had misheard Jack as he banally returned to his task of washing the mugs. Who would want control over Torchwood? Who knew enough about Torchwood to want control over Torchwood? Other Torchwood bases? Archie didn't seem the type bent on global power, and the prospect of him overseeing the whole of Torchwood probably had him wiping his glasses and muttering more furiously than usual. UNIT? True, they had been trying to get their hands on what was in the Torchwood archives for years, and they didn't exactly see eye to eye with Jack, although Ianto suspected that was more of a personal thing than actually something to do with Torchwood. Who did that leave? Aliens?

Jack appeared out of the corridor down to the boardroom. Ianto could see his reflection in the coffee machine as he passed by the water tower, great stomping footsteps on the grating announcing his presence and his mood to the Hub.

'Tosh, what have you got for me so far?' Jack barked.

'Um, nothing at the moment. Just busy trawling through the MoD files to see if they've got any planned bioterrorism-testing going on. Still trying to get into UNIT, they've updated their systems since, well-' Tosh blushed and Ianto quietly smiled to himself at the memory.

'Let me know as soon as you have. Ianto-'

'I'm just about to head down to the archives now,' Ianto interrupted. Jack nodded, his gaze holding Ianto's for a few moments before turning on his heel and disappearing into his office without another word.

Ianto headed towards the archives, logging onto the computer down there to check the recent phone records for the Hub and Jack's phone.

## CHAPTER FOUR

'Jack, can I have a word?'

Jack looked up from his desk to find Ianto stood in the doorway to his office. He wasn't standing there seductively, leaning on the doorframe in a way that suggested the word was most definitely sex. He wasn't even stood there with a mock-angry look on his face that said Jack had accidentally left dirty ring marks on the coffee table again, even though they both knew Jack did it on purpose. Ianto was stood in the doorway with a blank expression on his face that barely concealed the rising anger and Jack could already tell that Ianto knew. Ianto always knew.

Jack followed Ianto past Owen running tests on Rhys' blood, Toshiko who was still busy trawling through MoD files, and Gwen who was trying to help, but just kept staring at her phone every couple of seconds. She looked up hopefully at Jack and Ianto as they passed, but neither said a word to her.

Ianto stopped down one of the corridors to the archives and turned to face Jack, the mask slipping from his face as quickly as it was put there.

'Jack, you knew and you didn't say anything,' Ianto hissed, their noses almost touching where Ianto had Jack pressed up against the wall. Jack had made no move to struggle out of Ianto's shaking grasp on the front of his shirt.

'How could you not tell us? It's our families!'

'That's exactly the reason I didn't tell you. We've got a duty to the bigger picture here,' said Jack.

'The bigger picture?' Ianto asked.

'We're Torchwood.'

'Yes, because *Torchwood* is going to get us out of this mess.' Ianto lowered his voice slightly, his fingers still twisting in the fabric of Jack's shirtfront. 'How could you not tell *me*?'

'I would have thought that much was obvious.' Jack's voice a contradiction in terms, hard yet somehow gentle as they both stared at each other for a brief moment before Jack repeated himself. 'We're Torchwood, Ianto.'

'We're also human, Jack. We're not all immortal like you. Some of us have families that we don't see often enough due to Torchwood.'

'That's not Torchwood's fault, Ianto,' said Jack. Ianto let go of Jack then, stepped away from him so he was almost on the other side of the corridor.

'Have you told the rest of the team yet?' Jack asked.

'No.'

'Are you going to?'

'I think they have a right to know,' said Ianto. Jack nodded sombrely, tugging at his shirt, pulling it straight before he walked off down the corridor towards the boardroom. Ianto watched him go, letting out a slow breath as he steeled himself to tell the rest of the team that Jack had been keeping more secrets. The irony of a secret organisation having more secrets from each other than the rest of the world did not escape Ianto.

Ten minutes later Owen was the last to enter the boardroom, taking up a seat nearest to the door, impatience leaking out of his pores. 'What's this about?'

Jack didn't look away from Ianto, perched as he was on a table at the side of the room separate from his team, arms folded across his chest. Ianto was standing nervously at the head of the table just to the right of the screen.

'Jack's been lying to us,' he said.

'What's new?' Owen quipped in reply.

'He knows what's happening to our families.' Ianto paused to let that piece of information sink in as three sets of eyes turned to regard Jack in disbelief. Ianto didn't look away from the clock on the opposite wall and Jack didn't look away from Ianto.

'What do you mean, he knows? Did he get a medical degree in the last day?' Owen demanded.

'Someone is making our families sick. Someone called Jack last night to demand we hand over control of Torchwood Cardiff to them or our families will suffer,' Ianto said.

Gwen, as always, was the first with questions. 'Who is it?'

Ianto cleared his throat, but it was Jack who spoke first.

'Yvonne Hartman.'

Toshiko's brow furrowed in confusion, 'But she's-'

'Dead,' Jack interrupted, finally uncrossing his arms to come and stand in the middle of the boardroom now, beside Ianto. 'Yes, she should be, but she isn't.'

'Who's Yvonne Hartman?' Gwen asked, looking between everyone.

'She was the director of Torchwood One when it fell,' Jack said as the rest of the team tried to look anywhere but at Ianto. 'She died at the battle of Canary Wharf.'

'So what did you tell her?' Gwen asked.

Every single member knew the answer that Jack had given before he opened his mouth, but it wasn't until he let the word, 'No', slip through his lips did the full implication slip into place.

'What was I supposed to tell her?' Jack yelled above his already arguing team, and they all instantly fell silent.

'You should have consulted us,' said Ianto. Jack turned to look at him, standing as he was still at Jack's right hand side.

'And what difference would that have made, Ianto?'

'We would have at least had a say,' said Ianto.

Jack sighed. 'Look, I know you think I've betrayed you all-' There was a rumble in the ranks that suggested everyone was about to start yelling again, but Jack raised his voice slightly. 'Yvonne Hartman has tried this before.'

'When?' Tosh asked, being the longest standing employee under Jack's leadership that wasn't dead.

'Before your time. She tried to take over Torchwood Cardiff, wanted to rule it from London. Torchwood One had a whole different ethos.'

'If it's alien, it's ours,' said Ianto. Ianto was looking at his feet, thus avoiding the varying looks of pity that the rest of the team directed his way.

'Right, only they had other policies. Policies that involved testing alien viruses on aliens they captured. As well as their employees.'

There was a collective gasp in the room and Gwen actually covered her mouth with her hand as her eyes flicked towards Ianto again. He was pulling at a thread on the buttonhole of his shirtsleeve though.

'So, I should be looking for alien viruses and pathogens in Rhys' blood?' Owen asked.

Jack nodded.

'Jack, how the hell could you not tell us about this? You've had me running around like a headless chicken trying to find out what's wrong with our families and all this time you knew it was our own sodding organisation. Next you'll be telling me that the cure is probably in our own archives somewhere.'

'It's a possibility.' Jack's eyes flicked to Ianto for the briefest of moments, but Owen caught it.

'You knew about this?' Owen's glare had turned on Ianto now, all venom, nothing remaining of the sympathy that had once been there that had made Ianto feel like a sad pathetic bastard of a person. Now he was just a bastard in Owen's eyes, which he was more than happy to vocalise.

'You knew about all of this and you didn't think to even mention it?'

'I couldn't mention it any sooner than I knew about it.'

'Ianto, for fuck's sake, this isn't any time to hide behind your sarcasm. Torchwood One had - have - more secrets than even Jack, and *you*,' Owen gesticulated wildly in Ianto's direction, 'you have the nerve to say you knew them all along.'

'I'm quite sure there's many things at Torchwood One I didn't know about.'

'You knew about this, though,' Gwen said, finally shaking off enough of her shock to find her voice again. Silence reigned for a moment, the frantic ticking of the clock permeating the atmosphere. Ianto inclined his head slightly and immediately averted his gaze from Gwen. Gwen's quiet implication of disappointment was somehow much harder to bear than Owen's abrasive rage.

'I knew that they experimented on their employees, yes. I was one of their employees so it would be hard to avoid what was in my contract,' said Ianto.

'But you didn't know that this was Torchwood London now?' Gwen asked.

Ianto shook his head, swallowing past the building lump in his throat that tasted distinctly of bile and coffee. He could feel his hands sweating underneath the lights of the boardroom and the team's intense stare. Jack, as usual, came to his rescue.

'Ianto's part of our Torchwood now, my Torchwood,' said Jack.

'Are we all forgetting what he dragged out of that hell hole the first time around?' Owen said.

'Owen!' Gwen protested.

'What? I've got a point, don't I? How do we know this isn't him again?'

'Because I trust him,' said Jack.

'Yeah, 'cause your trust in people has got a great track record, Jack.'

'He has a point,' Ianto said.

'Ianto,' Tosh said, a look on her face that said he didn't have to do this.

'Torchwood London didn't just have a policy of 'If it's alien, it's ours', they also had a policy of 'If you signed a contract, you're ours'. They had no qualms about experimenting on staff any more than they did on alien species.' Ianto paused, turned to look at Jack. 'Owen's right, you can't trust me.'

'I can't trust anyone in this place,' said Owen before he turned and marched out of the boardroom. Toshiko got to her feet, shooting one last look at Ianto before she too left the room.

'I'm going home,' said Ianto.

'Ianto, you don't-' Gwen tried to say.

'I do.'

As Ianto made his way towards the exit, Gwen shot Jack an imploring look to say something to Ianto, to give him some kind of gesture that said they didn't all blame him. Jack just continued to stand there though, arms folded across his chest as he watched Ianto's retreating back.

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'Owen?' Tosh placed a hand on Owen's shoulder, startling him. He turned to look at her, rubbing his hand across his face to try and hide the tears that were obviously flowing.

'What?' he barked.

'I just wanted to see if you were alright,' Tosh said.

'Why don't you just mind your own business, yeah?' Owen snapped before pushing past her and moving up the autopsy stairs into the rest of the Hub.

'You still here?' Owen said to Ianto who had just emerged from the corridor to the boardroom. Ianto didn't rise to the bait.

'I'll save you the effort shall I?' Owen said, grabbing his jacket and exiting the Hub.

Toshiko emerged from the autopsy bay, hugging herself. She caught Ianto's eye, and even at this distance he could see there were tears forming at the corners of her own eyes. He looked away and followed Owen out of the Hub, opting to take the stairs in the vain hope that Owen was long gone by the time he emerged onto the boardwalk by the Tourist Information Office. Toshiko counted to 100 before she too left for the night.

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'You realise this is what she wants,' Gwen said from where she was stood in the doorway of Jack's office.

'I've seen the movies,' Jack replied without looking up from the paperwork that he was pretending to do. His focus was locked on the post-it note Ianto had left on top, though.

'So what are we going to do?'

'Have a research montage?' Jack suggested, finally looking up at Gwen. She managed a glare in return.

'I don't know, Gwen. Sometimes, I don't have all the answers.'

Gwen considered this before nodding slowly, as if making up her mind about something.

'What if we handed over control of Torchwood Cardiff?' Gwen asked.

'What?'

'Hypothetically.'

'Hypothetically or otherwise, that woman is not getting a hold of a Torchwood facility again. She opened up a bridge between two worlds and almost destroyed our reality with it.'

'But would she make the same mistake twice?'

'Are you seriously suggesting we hand over control of Torchwood Cardiff to her?' They were both locked in each others gaze, the conversation continuing without words for a moment.

'I can't lose Rhys again, Jack. I just can't.' Gwen turned, having said her piece now and followed in the rest of the team's footsteps, leaving Jack alone in the Hub.

## CHAPTER FIVE

lanto knew he should be at work, but at this moment in time he couldn't quite bring himself to face his colleagues. He was chewing on his thumbnail as he watched Mica sitting on the floor at the foot of Rhiannon's bed, carefully reading the book before her. She'd told him it was a school project. They were doing dinosaurs and extinct animals. She'd told him she didn't think much of the dinosaurs, but she liked the other animals, especially the birds.

It was the Sunday of a Bank Holiday weekend and Johnny had taken David to his football match while lanto said he would look after Mica. He'd never looked after Mica before, and it'd been a long time since he'd been in a position to take care of kids. Rhiannon used to babysit him when they were younger, and when she got a little bit older she'd babysat the kids next door too. lanto had never had any inclination to look after kids, and he felt awkward now that he hadn't offered before.

'This one's my favourite,' Mica said, pointing down at the Great Auk, which looked surprisingly like a penguin. lanto could only nod and smile in reply. But when Mica turned the page again he stopped her. The Woolly Mammoth was staring up at him from the page with its great white tusks, a baby in front of it that had yet to grow them.

'It's Manny from Ice Age,' Mica told him matter-of-factly. 'He died in-' Mica consulted her book, '10000BC.'

Manny. Snuffalupagus. It didn't matter. All that mattered was that the Woolly Mammoth had been extinct for 12000 years. Yvonne Hartman had been extinct for almost two.

'Mica, sweetheart, I just need to make a quick call. I'll just be outside the door, okay?' lanto was already rising to his feet, pulling his mobile out his pocket.

He was dialling before he even got into the corridor, but before it could ring once, he hung up, because the man he was calling was stood at the end of the corridor, hugging a blonde boy to his chest. He watched quietly as they said their goodbyes and lanto finally managed to interpret the look in Jack's eyes when Gwen had accused him of not having any family that were at risk. lanto didn't call out to Jack, didn't move for a whole minute before Jack was moving towards the bank of lifts at the end of the ward.

'I've got a theory,' lanto said as he stepped up beside Jack who was pressing the button to call the lift.

If Jack was surprised to find lanto at his right hand side he didn't show it. 'Oh?' was all he said, not even turning to look at lanto.

'Coincidences don't exist.'

Jack nodded, a sign for lanto to continue as much as one to say he agreed.

'So if coincidences don't exist then Snuffalupagus is related to what's going on as much as our families are.'

Jack finally looked at Ianto, the apology there in Ianto's eyes.

'If Tosh checks the Rift readings for when Yvonne called you, I'm willing to bet they match the ones for when the Woolly Mammoth came through.'

The lift came and went in the time it took for the light bulb to go on above Jack's head.

'The past's coming back to haunt us.'

Ianto nodded solemnly.

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'Right.' Jack clapped his hands together, an unneeded attempt to quieten his team down. They were all sat around the boardroom table in huffy antipathy. Jack had half expected Owen and Tosh to be in London by now, but they'd turned up to work on time, as had Gwen. Owen had scoffed when Ianto and he had wandered in late looking more than a little worse for wear. He was obviously drawing his own conclusions from their dishevelled appearances.

'I know we didn't all part on the best of terms yesterday,' Jack said. Owen made that irritating sound at the back of his throat that allowed him to voice his opinion on Jack's words without actually uttering a word himself. Toshiko shot Owen a venomous look that Jack didn't know she was capable of, throwing him off his train of thought slightly.

'But we need to put aside past grievances and work together now.' Jack paused for dramatic emphasis. 'We think the past is bleeding into the present.'

There was a hush over the boardroom, no questions for a moment as the team processed the information.

'It's not just the past though, things from the future are bleeding through,' Tosh said quietly, looking down at her un-drunk coffee mug before her. That threw Jack. He'd expected endless questions and demands for explanations, Ianto even pulling out his extinction analogy, but not confirmation.

'Tosh?' Jack prompted.

'Yesterday evening, after everyone had gone, I-' she paused, shuddered slightly at the memory and then wondered if she really should have said something because people didn't want to know their future did they? She'd read *Flashforward* where once people knew they were going to die they tried to do everything in their power to stop it.

'Tosh,' Jack tried again.

Toshiko took a deep breath. 'Last night I had to come back to the Hub because I left my phone. I found you and Ianto here.' Both Ianto and Jack looked at each other, confirming that neither of them had been anywhere near the Hub the previous evening. They hadn't even seen each other.

'The klaxon was going off and-' Toshiko stopped again, a hand reaching up to touch her cheek as if she could still feel the ghost of rubble thrown against it.

'I don't think I should tell you what happened,' said Toshiko looking straight at Jack, tears in her eyes.

Jack shook his head after a moment. 'No, you're probably right.'

Ianto was frowning, looking at Toshiko as if by power of osmosis he could figure out what she had seen the previous evening. It had obviously upset her and it obviously had something to do with he and Jack and some kind of threat, but what he couldn't fathom. He started listing all the various things that would set off the alarm.

'So the past and future are bleeding into the present. When this happened last time, it didn't end so well,' Owen pointed out.

'I don't understand. Why, apart from Tosh's experience last night, do we think that the past and future are bleeding into our time now?' said Gwen.

'The Woolly Mammoth,' Jack said, turning to Ianto, a slight smile on his face.

Ianto cleared his throat. 'The Woolly Mammoth became extinct in roughly 10000BC. They were distinguished by having much smaller ears than the modern elephant and-'

'Excuse me, but how is a history lesson on prehistoric animals relevant?' Owen interrupted.

'The baby woolly mammoth can weigh anything up to 220lbs and begins growing it's tusks since birth. It also looks exactly like that mammal you've got on your autopsy table,' said Ianto. 'Yvonne Hartman has also been extinct for roughly 21 months, and yet Jack spoke to her yesterday morning.'

'Oh,' said Gwen, sudden realisation dawning. 'So what's causing this?'

'More like who,' said Jack. 'Yvonne was the first inclination that anything was going awry. She called me two days ago, threatened me that if I didn't hand over control of Torchwood Cardiff and the Rift to her in London then she'd make me and my team suffer.'

'Why didn't you say something?' Gwen demanded.

'Because I thought it was an echo. Like I said yesterday, it's happened before. Yvonne wanted to harness the power of the Rift for Torchwood's own purposes,' said Jack.

'But shouldn't it be localised to the Rift? Why's it gone all the way to London and regurgitated our evil twin?' Owen asked.

'The Battle of Canary Wharf started because a hole was ripped in the world between two Universes. Not just the past or the future, but a whole other world. Something that big is going to leave cracks in it,' said Jack.

'So parallel universes are bleeding into ours too?' Toshiko asked.

'Not yet,' said Jack.

'I don't understand how she's doing this if you never let her in? Not this time or last. How is she getting through to us now if she's dead?' Toshiko asked, the rest of the team not sure if it was rhetorical or if she was actively searching out an answer from them.

'Unless she still is an echo of the past? Maybe that's all we're seeing, just echoes of the past and future, drifting through the Rift to our time,' Ianto said.

'Something must have caused it though?' Gwen questioned.

'And who better to have caused it than Yvonne Hartman,' said Jack. 'Ianto, I want you to go down to the archives and search through the files we've still got from Torchwood Tower. See if you can find anything on the ghost project. Toshiko, I want you to do the same. Some of their servers are still intact and I know we transferred a lot of it to ours after Canary Wharf.'

Both Toshiko and Ianto nodded, already getting up from their chairs to go and do their boss' bidding.

'Owen, I want you to get on with finding a cure for our families. Get Ianto and Toshiko to look into the biomedical research side of things at Torchwood Tower if you think that'll help,' said Jack. Owen too nodded, and left the conference room, purpose in all the team's stride now they had something to do other than sit around in a huff twiddling their thumbs.

'I could go give Ianto a hand down in the archives,' said Gwen.

'No, you and I, Miss Cooper, are going to do some good old fashioned police work, and possibly become Ghostbusters in the process.'

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'How are you getting on?'

Ianto looked up from the pile of papers that were slowly engulfing him to find Toshiko lingering at the entrance to the small annex in one of the mustier parts of the archives. Every form that surrounded Ianto had been signed and sealed - some of them scorched - at Torchwood One.

'Nothing conclusive.' Ianto threw a bunch of requisition forms on top of an already precarious looking pile. 'What about you?'

'Still trying to get in to some files, but I think someone hit the self destruct button at some point because there's whole chunks of files missing and irretrievable.'

Toshiko shuffled forward slightly and Ianto could finally see all of her as she carefully stepped in-between the only clear patches of floor to reach him. The toes of her shoes nudging piles of folders out the way as she tried not to spill the two cups of coffee she was carrying. She handed one down to Ianto

where he was sat cross-legged on the floor as he searched for a place to balance the hot cup and finding nowhere ended up resting it on his knee. Toshiko shifted a pile of manila folders off a wooden chair and sat herself down, apparently intent on staying.

'Thanks,' Ianto said, as he looked glassy eyed through the steam rising from his mug.

'You've been down here a while. I thought you could maybe do with the pick-me-up.'

Ianto smiled as he looked up at Tosh then, shifting the mug on his knee slightly as it started to burn through the thin fabric of his trousers. Toshiko was trying to flatten out the edge of a file that was singed at the edges so that they curled like some age-old treasure map.

'Do you think the files were deleted on purpose then?' asked Ianto, taking a sip of his scalding-hot coffee.

'Why?' Tosh asked, looking up. 'What else would have happened?'

""Battle of Canary Wharf" they call it. I wouldn't blame anyone if they did accidentally hit delete, or even on purpose, but there's still collateral damage.' Even Ianto didn't quite believe the words that were coming out of his mouth. He had worked there for Christ sake; the Torchwood Institute didn't do anything that wasn't on purpose, even if their intended purpose hadn't been to open up a bridge between two worlds.

'I suppose,' said Tosh.

Toshiko's eyes cast over the pile of papers to her left, searching out anything useful. The top sheet proclaimed the document below to be a list of the dead from The Battle of Canary Wharf. It was one of twenty-seven pages. The first name at the top of the page was one of seven hundred and ninety-six. She looked away to Ianto who was flicking through another pile of papers.

'I'm amazed we've got all this,' Tosh said.

'I think UNIT and Jack thought it was the best place to move everything that was left. Not that there was much.'

'No,' Tosh agreed. A van full, if Tosh remembered correctly. An entire Institute reduced to a truck full of files and scrap bits of alien technology. 'It always amazes me that Jack has so much control over UNIT,' said Tosh, more than a little forlornly.

Ianto looked up at her again, papers in one hand, coffee mug in the other, the ghost of a smile on his face. 'Jack doesn't really have control, more-' Ianto paused, searching for the right phrase. 'Leverage.'

'Leverage?' Tosh asked.

Ianto nodded. 'The Doctor.'

'You mean the reason UNIT keep their nose out of what we do now is because Jack name drops?' Toshiko wished she'd known a little sooner about the Doctor, she could have name dropped and saved herself endless nightmares of the walls closing in.

Ianto let out a hollow laugh. 'All those years he didn't even know where the Doctor was, but it kept us out of trouble.'

Toshiko laughed too. 'Well if he's going to be a liar, he might as well make an effort to earn the name.'

'A. A. Milne,' said Ianto, and Toshiko was surprised. Not that Ianto knew the quote, but that he didn't question her blatant browbeating of Jack.

'Do you think anything he tells us is the truth?'

'He's not the only one with secrets. We've all lied about our past,' said Ianto. His eyes were on her again, his gaze intense as if he could see every secret that she harboured in her soul.

'I'm just worried. UNIT are a law unto themselves, and they keep-'

'I'm not asking you to tell me your secrets, Tosh. I'm just saying that we're fallible. We're human. We're supposed to lie and sometimes our secrets are best kept that way,' said Ianto. Tosh let out a sigh, nodding slightly before she went back to sipping on her now lukewarm coffee.

## CHAPTER SIX

'What you doing here?'

Ianto looked up to find Owen stood in the doorway of his sister's room, bag slung over his shoulder and a cup of coffee already in his hands. Ianto could smell it from here, and it smelt heavenly, even if it was from Starbucks. Ianto needed coffee like he needed oxygen right now if he was going to get through the rest of this week.

'It's my sister's hospital room, I would have thought that much was obvious,' said Ianto blithely.

'Jack sent you home to get some sleep, though,' said Owen, putting his coffee down on the nightstand and placing his bag on the edge of Rhiannon's bed. Ianto didn't say anything. He couldn't find the energy at that moment to lie.

'What are you doing here?'

'Need some more samples and don't want to bleed Rhys dry. Gwen might get pissy,' Owen said, pulling on a pair of latex gloves. Ianto watched as Owen placed the needle in his sister's arm, feeling his eyelids scraping against his eyeballs. He was still staring at the spot the needle had gone in long after Owen had finished.

'Come on, I'll drive you back to the Hub. You can catch forty winks there,' said Owen, already doing his bag back up now the vials of blood were safely stowed.

'Owen-'

'Ianto, mate, you look like shit. Sleep deprivation isn't going to solve this one.'

Ianto tried to stare Owen down, but his eyelids were already drooping as Owen shouldered his bag and nodded his head towards the exit. Ianto hesitated before he dragged himself lethargically to his feet, pulling his suit jacket and tie from the back of the hospital chair. His hand rubbed at his stubbly cheek before he followed Owen out to his car.

Ianto jerked awake with a yell, almost hitting his head on the roof of Owen's car. There was a blare of a horn in the aftermath of uttered words of death, extermination and deletion.

'Christ, Ianto. You trying to give me a heart attack?' Owen barked. 'What the hell was that?'

'How long have I been asleep?'

'I didn't know you were.'

Couldn't have been more than a few minutes. They were still hemmed in by Sunday night traffic in the one-way system, currently lingering behind a Bay Car. Ianto scrubbed a hand over his face and turned to look out the passenger window at revellers making the most of an evening they wouldn't remember come Hangover Monday as they vied for pavement space.

'You alright?' Owen asked once the lights had changed to green.

'Fine.' Ianto didn't feel fine though. He stuffed his hands underneath the jacket that was lying in his lap to hide the fact they were shaking while he tried to coax his heart back into his chest and out of his throat. He tried to ignore Owen's fleeting glances and the stir of panic somewhere in the pit of his stomach. He distracted himself by counting Mini's. By the time they'd got back to the underground car park of the Hub he'd counted only three and was most definitely not thinking about Torchwood One or the Battle of Canary Wharf.

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'I know it's been a while since I've been out shopping, but I'm pretty sure that last time I checked WHSmith was not a theatre,' Gwen commented as she stared up at the flames engulfing the sign for the Empire Theatre.

'I was here,' Jack said, looking around the pedestrianised Queen Street that had been cordoned off in the late evening. There were a few stragglers having been left with the job of closing up, trying to get round the barricades the police had set up. Firemen were battling the blaze and Jack was stood there half-expecting to be run over by a tram. 'Not when it was on fire, but when they rebuilt it. I saw them rebuilding it in 1900.'

'Jack, that was over a hundred years ago. WHSmith was here this morning, how can a theatre be here now?' Gwen hissed, because the Chief Fire Marshal was heading their way now.

'Boy over there says I'm supposed to be reporting to you,' the chief said, broad Valleys accent shining through his soot-clad face. Gwen looked behind him to see Andy stood beside the cordon, arms crossed in annoyance. She left Jack to it and went to talk to her old colleague.

'Alright, Andy,' Gwen greeted, trying to smile. He nodded at her, moving away from his new partner. She was blonde, pretty and fairly young. Gwen took an immediate dislike to her.

'Should I be preparing myself for Roman Soldiers in the cells again?' Andy asked.

Gwen laughed. 'Don't be daft, Andy.'

Andy gave her a sceptical look that said 'don't treat me like an idiot'.

'We've got it under control,' said Gwen. Andy gazed round at the police tape cordoning off the main shopping street in Cardiff, crowds gathered at one end, half of Cardiff's emergency services fighting a roaring blaze that was consuming a building that had been demolished over sixty years ago.

'Yeah, looks like it,' said Andy. Andy's phone started ringing.

'Hello?'

Gwen turned away to watch Jack talking animatedly with the Chief Fire Marshal, no doubt making up some cock and bull story about the appearance of a building from over a century ago. It wasn't the first

odd occurrence that Gwen had witnessed today. She'd spent lunchtime trying to coax a shell-shocked family from an Anderson Shelter in Grangetown, insisting that the Germans were not about to drop a bomb on them.

'Mam, there are no wolves in Wales. It's probably just a dog, or-'

Gwen turned back to look at Andy, a frown on her face now.

'Alright, then it's a very big dog. Call the RSPCA and- No, I can't come round now, I'm working.'

Jack was waving Gwen over. She gave Andy a tight-lipped smile as he continued to try and placate his mum.

'Jack, we need to do something about this soon,' Gwen said as they strode purposefully back towards the SUV.

'I agree, I'm running out of cover stories.'

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'Jack, can I have a word?' Owen said before the cog door had even finished rolling closed behind Jack and Gwen. Jack nodded as Owen led him away up the stairs into the greenhouse, and the small lab Owen had set up there.

'Is Ianto okay?'

'What?' Owen asked, distractedly.

Jack nodded his head down towards the settee where Ianto was laid on his side, facing the back of the sofa.

'Yeah, he's fine. Just tired. Look, Jack, this is getting serious now.'

'It wasn't serious before?'

Owen ignored Jack. 'I went back to the hospital this evening to draw more blood samples from Ianto's sister.' Owen stopped talking, avoiding Jack's gaze.

'And?'

'And, it's not good.'

'I deduced that much from 'this is getting serious',' Jack said.

'They're dying.'

It took a moment for those words to settle in. They curled round the room, blanketing everything in a veiled layer of bitter darkness that touched Jack's very core.

'Something's breaking down the platelets in their blood, killing off the white blood cells. Very soon someone even so much as sneezes on the same floor as them and they're dead.'

'Is it affecting them all at the same rate?'

'I don't know, I can only really test Rhys and Rhiannon. It's hardly conclusive.'

'I can get you one more.'

'What do you mean? Fly me to London so I can get my mum's? We don't really have the time.'

'No.' There was a pause where Jack swallowed down the rising panic. 'There's an Alice Carter in the ITU ward just along from Rhiannon and Rhys. She's got the same symptoms.'

'But if there's someone else, this means it isn't connected to Torchwood. Jack, this could turn into a city wide epidemic if we don't-'

'She's connected to Torchwood,' Jack interrupted.

'How?' Owen's brow was furrowed, as if he was trying to recall the name Alice Carter from somewhere in the deep recesses of his memory.

Jack growled, already turning out of the room. 'Stop asking questions and just do your damn job, Owen.'

'Jack, you need to tell-' The greenhouse door slammed shut behind Jack and something inside Owen snapped. He was done with Jack Harkness and his secrets, done with Torchwood and the few people he needed to trust he couldn't. Not anymore. Owen pushed out the greenhouse door into the rest of the Hub.

'I took an oath, Jack!'

Jack didn't stop walking, but the usual sounds of the Hub seemed to dull slightly as Owen yelled after him.

'Above all, I must not play God.' Owen stopped just short of the stairs, staring down at Jack from the gantry where he had stopped by the sofa. Ianto was pulling himself slowly into a sitting position, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

'Torchwood members never take an oath, but I think we need one. I think you need one most of all, Jack. You can't play God in all this. You may be immortal, but you are every bit as fallible as the rest of us. You have to stop keeping secrets from us. Okay, you may think some of us are special enough to let us see a glimpse of the truth behind the great Jack Harkness, but you need to tell us what matters. You need to stop being pig-headed and thinking that this is all yours to bear. This is our families on the line here, Jack. Our families!'

There was silence in the Hub. Ianto was watching Jack, trying to catch his eye. Owen's chest was heaving as he watched the back of Jack's head, waiting for some kind of response. Tosh was looking at Owen, her hands frozen in midair above her keyboard. Gwen didn't know where to look - her gaze volleying between both Owen and Jack, waiting.

'She's my daughter,' Jack whispered, barely loud enough for Ianto to hear.

'What was that?' said Owen.

'Alice Carter, the woman in ITU with similar symptoms as Rhiannon and Rhys, she's my daughter,' said Jack, turning finally to look at Owen. 'I have a daughter called Alice and a grandson called Steven. That's my big secret, Owen.' Jack took a breath. 'So go fulfil the rest of your oath and find a cure before any of our families die, and I'll go do what I swore to do, which is protect this planet. I'll go and make the impossible decisions so that the rest of you are alive to go home to your families at the end of the day. I'll go and make the decisions that you all refuse to make, are too scared to make. Because someone has to play God in all of this, and it isn't going to be some higher power.'

Jack turned then, going into his office, leaving a stunned silence in his wake. Gwen moved to follow him, but Ianto got to his feet, reaching out to stop her.

'Leave him be,' said Ianto.

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'Jack,' said Gwen, knocking on the doorframe of his office.

'Haven't you lot gone home yet,' said Jack, not looking up from the report that was on his desk.

'Um, it's the morning,' said Gwen. Jack looked up at that, catching Gwen's eye for a moment before he looked to the clock on his desk. It told him that it indeed was Monday morning.

'We think we've made some headway,' Gwen said.

'Boardroom in five minutes, then,' said Jack, gathering up papers in a rough pile.

'We're already down there.' Jack stopped at that, watching as Gwen disappeared out the door of his office. He'd been sat in here all night, wallowing in his own self-pity while his team worked hard on a way to fix this. It twisted a knot in his gut.

Gwen was right. The whole team was sat there waiting for him when he arrived. It was like some kind of intervention, the way they watched him entering the room, waiting for him to take his position at the head of the table. His team looked as tired as Jack felt. They all had bags under their eyes that spoke of many sleepless nights. Their clothes were ruffled and creased, even Ianto wasn't his usual immaculate self. Both Gwen and Toshiko had their hair tied up, stifling yawns as Tosh squinted through her glasses at the laptop screen she had in front of her.

'What have we got?' said Jack, sitting down in his seat, too tired to stand now.

'Ianto and I have been searching through the Torchwood One archives for the past couple of days now, we haven't really found anything conclusive apart from the fact that Yvonne Hartman had big plans once she managed to find a way to harness the power of the Rift,' said Tosh, looking to Ianto to continue.

'The ghost project was only half of her plans. She wanted to use the Rift to harness the power of time travel. She wanted to be able to cross timelines back into the past and into the future. There's reports monitoring how the Rift works from London, they'd been hacking into the files at Torchwood Cardiff, collating them to try and find out a way to harness the energy of the Rift for time travel,' said Ianto.

'Only she never got that far, the battle of Canary Wharf happened and the files were lost when the building was demolished. Except Ianto discovered some blueprints for the sublevels of Torchwood tower. You remember those lower levels that I said were blocked off when we went to investigate the site?' said Tosh. Jack nodded.

'They held the servers for the building that contained some of the more classified projects. They're now buried under six foot of concrete, but they're still there and the majority of them are still functioning,' said Tosh, face alight for the first time in a while, the thrill of the discovery providing a flush to her pale cheeks.

'What did you find?' Jack asked.

'Yvonne only found out about the Rift a few days before Canary Wharf. The records say that they knew they were breaching the wall between two worlds with the ghost machine, and they thought they could achieve the same with the Rift in Cardiff. That was what pushed her into prolonging the ghost shift, what pushed her into-' Ianto stopped talking, swallowing briefly. 'She thought that she'd have the ultimate technology, be able to control time itself.'

'Idiot,' Jack said, leaning forward onto the table so his elbows were resting there, his head in his hands. 'So the calls, this is just an echo? Everything from the past and the future are just bleeding through to our time, they're all echoes?'

Silence, then ever so slowly, Toshiko shaking her head. 'No, this is-'

'I called her,' said Ianto.

'What?' exclaimed Jack.

'I called Yvonne Hartman. She's not an echo. She remembered being converted, remembered everything about that day, right up until she died.'

'Ianto, you can't-'

'She says she's caught between the past, the present and the future. She said that if we don't bring her and the rest of the Institute back properly then she can erase our families, permanently,' said Ianto.

'Her research, isn't there some way that we can-'

'No,' Jack interrupted Gwen. 'We are not going to use any of Torchwood One's research. Ever.'

'But, Jack, the only way we can stop this is by doing what we did before, opening the Rift fully to be able to close it and stop Yvonne and the rest of Torchwood coming back, stop everything bleeding into one and causing an explosion, or implosion,' Tosh said.

Everyone was talking at once, all immediately disagreeing with Toshiko, as they'd already been doing for the last six hours.

'Listen,' Tosh said, slamming her hands down on the table. 'We've been arguing about this all night. I can't think of any other way to do this. None of us could think of any other way to do this. So we're asking you, Jack. We're out of ideas.'

Everyone was looking at Jack now. Defendant for the prosecution. Jack's mind was blank.

'The one thing we can agree on though is that if we don't stop this then it's not just our families that are going to die,' said Owen.

'Yes, thank you for that Mr. always-looks-on-the-bright-side-of-life,' said Gwen, breaking the tension somewhat.

'What about making a void?' said Ianto, a sudden spark of realisation.

'A void?' asked Tosh, frowning slightly.

'Last time, in London, the Doctor, he created a void between the two worlds and just sucked everything that shouldn't be there into it,' said Ianto. 'I found your report in the archives,' Ianto added, looking at Jack.

'Is that possible? Could we do that?' Gwen asked, looking between Jack, Ianto and Tosh.

'He didn't create the void, there was a void ship and he just,' Jack made a sucking noise with his back teeth, 'sucked them back in.'

'Opening the Rift-' There was a sudden disapproval at Jack's words, everyone round the table vying for attention to get their say on how much they disapproved. 'Opening the Rift,' Jack repeated, raising his voice to be heard, 'would only work if we could turn back time too. We need to stop this before it happens. We need to go back before Yvonne finds out about the Rift and the possibilities it harbours.'

'I don't know how to harness the Rift so that someone can go back in time and stop her finding out,' Tosh said.

'What about this Doctor of yours? He has to have his uses,' said Owen.

Jack shook his head. 'We're on our own.' He turned to look at Tosh. 'You need to find a way, Toshiko.'



## CHAPTER SEVEN

'Jack, I'm not sure about this,' lanto said. They were standing in the corridor that led from the boardroom to the rest of the Hub. The rest of the team had dispersed to try and finalize plans.

'lanto, what other choice do we have?' Jack asked, sighing in frustration.

lanto shook his head, running a hand through his mess of hair. 'There has to be another way to do this. I mean, we're going back to before-'

'lanto, there is no other way. I have to go back and stop Yvonne before she gets her hands on the Rift readings. No one else but me can do this,' Jack said.

'It's only twenty-one months. Did you know that? It's exactly twenty-one months tomorrow since the battle of Canary Wharf?'

Jack nodded. 'I know.'

'You don't have to be the one who does this, I could-' Jack laughed, stopping lanto mid-sentence.

'Oh, lanto,' Jack said, sighing slightly as he stepped into lanto's personal space, his hands on lanto's shoulders, running down the length of his arms. He held lanto's gaze along with his hands for a moment before he pulled lanto into a hug he wasn't expecting. 'I'll live through the last twenty-one months and not age a day, whereas you'll have wrinkles. I don't want to see wrinkles on your face when I get back,' Jack said, his mouth next to lanto's ear. lanto's lip quirked; just the start of a smile. He tried to push away from Jack, but Jack held on, like he was scared he was going to forget what human contact felt like.

'Blink and you'll miss me,' Jack whispered, giving lanto one last squeeze before he turned and walked away, leaving lanto standing alone in the corridor.

-----

'Tosh, how are we doing?' Jack asked, striding up the stairs towards her.

'I've got a lock on when the Rift will next open, I can localise it to the Hub so that you can implement the Rift manipulator to close it behind you once you've gone through,' Tosh said, tapping away at keyboard commands as she spoke.

'Okay, good,' Jack said. 'Once you've done that I want all of you out of here. I don't want you all caught in the time loop too.'

Toshiko stopped what she was doing and looked up at him. 'But Jack,'

'No, buts. I can do this. Besides, after I've done my bit I get almost two years of holiday, whereas you lot have to come back into work tomorrow,' Jack joked. No one laughed.

'Are we sure this is going to fix everything with our families?' asked Gwen as she watched Jack now tapping away at the keyboard on her desk.

'If Yvonne never comes back then she won't be able to infect our families. It'll be like the last few days never happened,' Jack said.

'But we'll remember,' said Gwen. Jack stopped what he was doing and turned to look at Gwen, holding her face in his hands, smiling gently at her.

'You won't remember this, Gwen. I'll be the only one that will remember, being at the eye of the storm.' He smiled at her again as he brushed the tears that were forming at the corners of her eyes.

'I don't want to wake up tomorrow and find I'm working in Pizza Hut again, Harkness,' Owen said.

Jack laughed, but didn't say anything.

'That's it,' Toshiko said, stepping away from her monitor.

'How long until the next spike?' Jack asked her.

'Two minutes,' she replied.

'Then it's time for you lot to go,' Jack said, urging his team towards the cog door.

There were tears in Ianto's eyes as he stood beside a sobbing Gwen. His eyes weren't on Gwen though; he was watching Jack who had paused in what he was doing on the computer to watch his team leaving the Hub so as not to be caught in the epicentre of the blast. The lift doors were opening and Tosh and Owen were reluctantly moving inside, Gwen pulling on Ianto's sleeve a little to make him follow her.

He pushed away from her, moving back through the already closing cog door.

'Ianto, what are you doing?' both Jack and Gwen said at once. Jack was already moving round the computer stations and coming down the stairs to meet Ianto, grabbing at his forearms and pushing him back towards the cog door.

'You need to go, you can't stay here,' Jack said.

Ianto opened his mouth as if he was going to say something of great meaning and significance, something that Jack was sure he would remember no matter what. The words never came, were halted by a gasp of breath that Jack felt on his lips followed by Ianto's own lips. When Jack opened his eyes the lasting image of his team was Ianto's foot slipping out behind the closing lift doors.

*'Energy levels at critical.'*

Jack dashed back towards the computer terminals.

-----

Gwen was running. Her feet slapping hard against the boardwalk. Footsteps echoing out across the water as she felt the harsh pant of someone running beside her.

She was following the sprinting gait of a faster man than her as they ran up towards the Roald Dahl Plass, the earth shuddering beneath them as the ever changing rainbow spotlights that lit up the water tower blended into white. Gwen could feel the rush of blood in her ears and grey spots dancing before her eyes as she ran. Tears were stinging her eyes even as the earth split around her.

She screamed.

'Hey, you're alright, love.'

There was a hand on her back rubbing soothing circles as she blinked back to reality. She took in the alarm clock on her bedside table. Yesterday's shirt on the floor beside the bed. Her tie hung over the wardrobe door beside Rhys' work jacket.

'Bad dream, was it?' Rhys asked from behind her.

'Yeah,' she said. 'That running one again.'

Rhys chuckled slightly. 'The one where the worlds ending and you have to go back in time to save the day?'

Gwen wished she'd never told him now. He was mocking her dream when she felt so sure it was real. It felt so real. But the way Rhys said it made it sound like science fiction. Like something out of *Star Trek*. He was right though, she was just being daft.

She pulled herself from the bed and went to shower, ready to face another day of crime fighting in Cardiff working for Powys Constabulary. It wasn't exactly CSI, but it paid the bills.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

'You okay?'

Hands snaked round his middle, fingers dipping between the buttons on his shirt that he was trying to do up as he stared absentmindedly at his reflection in the mirror.

'Yeah.' Ianto sounded unsure to his own ears, even as a kiss was pressed against his cheek, nose rubbing against his freshly shaven skin.

'You sure? We can always skip work if you're not,' Lisa Hallett - soon to be Jones - said, a teasing smile on her face as she kissed the side of his neck. Ianto smiled too.

'In that case, I'm deathly ill and need a nursemaid on my deathbed,' said Ianto, giving a couple of fake coughs for emphasis. He turned to kiss her properly and she pushed him away.

'I don't want your germs.'

'I'm healed,' Ianto said, trying to make a grab for her again, but she continued to keep him at arms length.

'We're going to be late.'

'What happened to we can skip work?'

'Tell me what's bothering you and I'll think about it,' said Lisa as she disappeared into the bathroom. Ianto sighed, going back to doing up his shirt.

'Just this odd dream I keep having,' Ianto said.

'Yeah?' Lisa said, the shower already running.

'It's the same thing every time. The world's ending and I'm working with a bunch of people I don't know to try and stop it and the only way we can is to rewind time.'

'What about me? Am I not in your end of the world survivors club?' Lisa said, sticking her head out the bathroom door.

Ianto felt a sudden ache deep in his chest, like he was mourning Lisa, already knew for certain she was gone. He stopped doing up his shirt, his breath hitching slightly as he remembered the feel of blood on his hands and a great sense of guilt and betrayal that seemed to weigh heavy on his chest.

'No,' he said. 'You were already dead.'

He jumped slightly as Lisa pressed a kiss to his cheek again, her soft hand against his other cheek, already smelling of coconut before she'd even showered.

'Well I'm not, so you can wipe that maudlin look off your face. It's just a dream, lanto,' she assured as she disappeared back into the bathroom. He nodded after her, still not quite agreeing. He'd had the dream one too many times to dismiss it so readily.

-----

'My name is Owen Harper, and I'm an alcoholic.'

'Hello, Owen,' echoed throughout the small community hall Owen found himself in. It was his friend Jacqui that had bullied him into coming here tonight. He had no desire to give up alcohol anytime soon, not when the loss of Katie was so fresh in his memory. Two years wasn't enough time to mourn.

'I've been sober now for nine days.'

People were clapping and Owen felt like they were being patronising. He felt like a hypocrite himself. The number of patients he'd referred to AA meetings and yet he didn't even want to be here himself. They couldn't help him. No one could.

Owen still had the shakes. He still couldn't sleep properly at night. Jacqui had taken his car keys off him, had cleared out the entire flat of alcohol. She'd even taken the mouthwash from his bathroom cabinet. He didn't blame her. He was a mess, but he didn't know if he was ready to give up. He still needed the drink.

He couldn't sleep at night without a drink in him. He couldn't face the thought of Katie dead without the numb burn of alcohol sitting uneasily in his belly. He certainly didn't believe that a power greater than himself could restore him to sanity. The very idea was laughable.

'Welcome, Owen,' the group leader said, still clapping as he nodded at the person to Owen's right. Owen sat down on his hands to try and stop them from shaking.

He didn't know why he was here. He wanted to forget Katie, and alcohol was the only way to do that. He couldn't go to the pub anymore, the landlord wouldn't serve him and people would recognise him. He couldn't buy alcohol locally anymore for the same reason.

After the meeting he walked to the tube station and took the District Line all the way to Upminster. He wandered down streets he didn't know until he found a pub he'd never heard of. Just one more drink. He'd have just one more then he'd go home and he could sleep and then he could start again tomorrow. After he'd slept without dreaming of Katie he could start again.

-----

'Jack Harkness.'

lanto shook the man's hand, smiling at him briefly as Phorbis continued to introduce him to the rest of the team. He was from Torchwood Cardiff - not quite as kooky as the Glasgow branch, but still out in

the sticks and Ianto could see from the man's retro military attire that he was bordering on the more peculiar members of the Torchwood Branches.

'I'll leave you in the capable hands of Ianto Jones, he's one of our Junior Researcher's and he should be able to help you with what you need,' Phorbes said. He was giving Ianto a smile that clearly said this was still payback for Lisa choosing him. It had been over two years since the staff Christmas party where Ianto had been propositioned under the mistletoe, but Phorbes was clearly still licking his wounds.

'Ianto Jones, name like that you should be working in my branch of Torchwood,' Harkness said. The American accent and over confidence just added to the prospect of a day spent babysitting.

'This way, Mr. Harkness,' said Ianto.

'It's Captain Harkness. Note the stripes.' He indicated the stripes on his shoulder. 'But an ass like yours, you can call me Jack.'

Ianto smirked to himself. If nothing, it would certainly make Lisa laugh at the end of the day.

'I'll bear that in mind, Sir,' said Ianto.

'Sir, now is it? Maybe we'll stick with that for a bit.' Jack Harkness was leering now and Ianto hoped he wasn't giving off any signals that their trip into the archives was anything other than a reconnaissance mission. He didn't particularly wish to be fired with his hands down another man's trousers.

Not that he would consider shoving his hands down Captain Harkness' trousers.

Ianto cleared his throat, pulling at the collar of his shirt as he pressed the button for the lift to take them down into the archives. Harkness was still smiling at him, watching him with those piercing blue eyes.

'What is it you're after today, Sir?' Ianto asked when they were safely ensconced in the lift. Jack's hands were behind his back, throwing his coat out behind him and showing off his braces and gun holster, empty. He would have been forced to give up his gun at security.

'There's an artefact in your debris archive that I've been asked to look for by my branch,' Jack said.

'Can I ask what classification?'

'Delta Yankee Foxtrot One-Six-Five-Nine-Three Hotel Sierra.'

Ianto smiled, suitably impressed with Jack Harkness' recall. He didn't say anything, just reached out to press the appropriate button for the level of the archives they needed to be in.

-----

'You alright, love?' Rhys asked. They were at the International Market on the Plass outside the WMC, meandering through the stalls. Rhys had already tried olives, cheese, beer and some form of pie from somewhere in Eastern Europe. Gwen didn't feel hungry. It was the first Saturday she'd had off in a long time and she and Rhys had decided to spend a day being tourists in their own city, the sun cementing the idea.

'Yeah, fine,' said Gwen. She was looking back up the Plass towards the fountain that currently had strawberries plastered all over it, heralding the arrival of the Festival. She felt like there was something more to the fountain, like it was hiding secrets she should already know. The last three mornings she'd driven to work she'd ended up here, driven on autopilot until she corrected herself, driving back towards the City Centre and the Cathays police station she worked at. She felt like she hadn't walked the hallways in months.

'You just seem a bit distracted,' said Rhys.

'No, I'm alright.'

They were down on the boardwalk by the Cardiff Bay Tours. A Labrador was sitting in the only bit of shade, panting up at its owner while it eyed passing ice creams with hungry eyes. The Waterbus was coming into dock and Gwen was staring past the queue at the small Tourist Information Office. It had been months since she'd been down here, and yet it all seemed so oddly familiar.

'Let's go in the Tourist Office, see what else there is to do today, yeah?' Rhys suggested. Gwen wanted to laugh, wanted to tell him it wasn't even a real Tourist Information Office, but that was absurd. It had a large 'I' outside it, there were leaflets in bundles on the small desk inside and the wall behind the postcard stand certainly wasn't a hidden door to a secret base. She'd been reading too many of Rhys' crime fiction books again, it was making her paranoid and making her see things that weren't there.

She felt like she was missing something in her heart, though. When Rhys suggested it was a child, she laughed and Rhys got that horrible stomach-churning look on his face that made Gwen know they were going to have an argument.

Gwen slept round Trina's that night. When she went back after work the next day Rhys had cleared out his half of the wardrobe and left a note on the coffee table.

He'd gone to Banana's, was staying there until she decided what she wanted. He implied that he wouldn't wait around forever, no matter what his heart said.

She didn't call him. She didn't know what to say to him. She knew she loved Rhys, wanted to spend the rest of her life with him, but there was something nagging at the back of her mind like she couldn't quite remember if she turned the stove off or not. It was in every American tourist that asked her for directions, followed her down dark alleys at night, tapped her on the shoulder whenever they got odd 999 calls at the station and laughed in her face when large black Range Rovers rumbled past.

When Rhys called and said he couldn't wait any longer she still didn't know what to say. He cried. She didn't. She went for a walk and found herself outside the Welsh Millennium Centre, still feeling like she was missing something. And it wasn't Rhys.

-----

Ianto found the location he and Captain Harkness were searching for, but there wasn't the usual classification notes attached to the artefact in question. It was a handwritten note.

*'I trust you, Ianto Jones.'*

It was attached to a leather strap with a small computer embedded in it. It bore a striking resemblance to the one Captain Jack Harkness was wearing. Ianto picked it up, frowning down at the small object that suddenly started beeping in his hands.

'You all right over there?' Harkness called from three rows away. Ianto could already hear the stomp of his boots heading back this way.

'Ianto?'

Ianto couldn't find his own voice to answer for a moment. He wanted to press buttons, felt like he knew exactly which one's to press. But he'd always been taught never to press buttons without knowing the consequences. He didn't know if it was Jack Harkness' presence, but Ianto suddenly felt reckless. He pressed two buttons simultaneously as Harkness came round the corner into his row, an exact replica of the man shimmering into existence between them.

'If you're watching this then you've just met me, except maybe there's that niggling sensation somewhere that you've known me a lot longer. Listen to that niggling sensation, because I need you to listen to me.

'My name is Captain Jack Harkness and I'm the leader of Torchwood Cardiff in an alternate future. There's a Rift in Space and Time that runs through Cardiff and 21 months into your alternate future it's close to blowing up our base and taking South Wales, the World and possibly the rest of the Universe with it.

'I need you to go and destroy all records Torchwood Tower have on the Rift in Time and Space so that history can't repeat itself and then you need to go to Cardiff and turn on the Rift Manipulator and open the Rift wide. You have to persuade me that this is what needs to be done before the next ghost shift because if you don't then all alternate futures will cease to exist, including yours.' The image of Jack Harkness sighed, frustration in his voice when he started again.

'I know you've just met me, and I know you're making that face that is questioning my sanity. Again. All I can say is it's complicated, and I promise you I will explain everything when things are back to the way they're supposed to be. I'm sorry, but I need you to trust me, Ianto Jones, because I trust you.' There was a flickering moment where the hologram of Captain Jack Harkness threatened to start his speech

over again before he petered out, leaving the real one stood in his wake. His eyes were on the device in Ianto's hands.

'Where did you get that?' Captain Harkness barked.

'It was on the shelf, it-'

Harkness snatched the device from Ianto's hands, comparing it to his own, his fingers finding all the imperfections before they finally made it to the note that had been tied with string to the buckle.

'That's my handwriting,' said Jack. 'How did-' Jack sighed. 'Well he always did say time travel hurts the brain.' Jack laughed then and handed it back to Ianto.

'Which way to the secure archives?' Jack asked.

'What?'

'You heard me, we've got work to do,' Jack said.

'We? I don't even know if I-' Ianto lowered his voice. 'This is treason.'

'You know what they say, love the treason, celebrate the traitor.'

'Who said that? No one ever said that,' said Ianto, sounding somewhat frantic now as he shoved the wrist strap in his jacket pocket, trying to hide it from sight.

'Maybe it was hate the traitor. Always was a bit rusty on sayings, either way we've got work to do,' said Jack.

'No, *we* don't. *We* don't have anything to do. *I* have to go and finish filing these reports, then *I* have to go home and cook dinner, while *you* can go and do whatever it is you do. There is no *we* in any of this,' said Ianto. He had a wild look in his eyes and he was sweating profusely, but his hand was still caressing the wrist strap in his pocket, and his mind was already working out the quickest way to get from here to Paddington Station where he could catch the train to Cardiff. Jack Harkness was just watching him.

'I trust you, Ianto Jones,' he said.

And that was it. That look. Those eyes. That smile. That niggling sensation at the back of Ianto's mind that said trust him. And Ianto did.

-----

Day 1652. Or 1653. It was hard to tell in a place that had no windows. Only a door to the outside world. The only interaction was through a speaker and meals being pushed through a hatch in the bottom of the door like clockwork.

Toshiko Sato had no concept of time, let alone the calendar months that passed by. She'd long ago forgotten how to speak, how to use words to communicate. English and Japanese blurred the lines into their own language that Toshiko spoke to herself in.

Her skin had a sallow look to it. At least, she could hazard a guess that it did. She could now recite the whole of the periodic table in both periodic number order and alphabetic order. As well as number of electrons in the outer rings and descending atomic mass. She'd forgotten Gallium the first time and then spent the best part of a week trying to remember it.

She told herself stories. She spoke them out loud when she got scared. She made up fantastical tales about a knight called Jack who came and rescued Princess Toshiko from her tower. She told stories about a doctor named Owen who cured the Princess of her shyness. Stories of a woman called Gwen who taught her how to laugh and smile again. Stories of a man called Ianto who showed her that she was not alone in grief that pain and heartbreak came to them all and together they could smile and move on.

It wasn't real though. Toshiko was stuck in her prison, never to escape.

-----

Ianto was sure the silent alarms were going off as he snuck back out the secure archives. The shredder was still buzzing quietly behind him. It would be a long time before they figured out what exactly was missing and he would be long gone by then.

'All done?' Harkness asked where he was leaning against the lift doors.

'Yeah,' Ianto said, calling the lift to get them back to the office levels. 'What about you, did you get into the server room?'

Harkness tapped the wrist strap on his arm. 'All done.'

'Right,' Ianto said, taking a breath as he got into the lift. He was half expecting the lift to shudder to a halt and when it finally recommenced its journey, an armed escort would be waiting for them on the fifth floor to escort them to Yvonne Hartman's offices.

'Relax,' Jack said. 'If you think you've got away with it, then you've got away with it.'

'What if I don't think I've got away with it?' Ianto asked as the lift doors opened and Ianto dodged round the group of soldiers trying to get in. They didn't even so much as give him a glance.

'Have a little faith,' Jack said, smiling as he started striding down the corridor towards the exit.

'Ianto, where are you going? There's another ghost shift starting in less than an hour,' Phorbis called after Ianto who was walking briskly down the corridor after Harkness. Ianto didn't even stop.

'Sorry, special project for Cardiff,' Ianto said in a breathless rush. He almost tumbled into a group of women lingering as he turned into the atrium, Lisa in their midst.

'lanto!' Jack called.

lanto grabbed Lisa, kissing her fiercely, trying to remember every curve of her body, the taste of her lips, the smell of her hair and feel of her skin.

'I love you,' said lanto. He watched as she blushed, looking around at her workmates who were giggling.

'lanto,' she hissed her embarrassment.

'I don't care. I love you.' He kissed her one last time before he was crossing the atrium towards the exit, following in the wake of Jack Harkness' coat.

'Where are you going?' she called after him.

'Special project, I'll see you at home,' said lanto just as he pushed through the revolving doors.

'How are we going to get to Cardiff in less than an hour?' lanto enquired as he followed Jack across the welcoming tarmac outside the front of the offices, sunlight reflecting off the fountain there.

'Easily,' Jack said as he opened the door to a blacked out SUV that was parked in a disabled bay.

-----

Owen's doctor was Welsh. He smelt of coffee and had a dry wit to rival his own. Owen took an instant dislike to him.

'Why don't you tell me how you're feeling, Owen?'

Owen didn't want to discuss feelings, mainly because he didn't have a clue how he was feeling. He felt sober. That was about all he felt. He felt confused too, like this was all some sort of bad dream he was expecting to wake up from.

'All right,' Owen said, shrugging slightly.

'This week has been okay then?'

Owen had been going to see his mother in Reading last weekend and somehow ended up taking the train the whole way to Cardiff. He'd never been to Cardiff before, yet he felt like he knew the place. He'd called his mum, said he had to work, and spent the day down in Mermaid Quay in a coffee shop watching people come and go before catching the last train back to London. He'd felt reluctant to leave.

'Fine,' Owen said, non-committally.

The doctor made a couple of notes on the pad in front of him while Owen thought about going to Cardiff again that weekend. He'd take a book, maybe sit in the basin next the Welsh Millennium Centre. Wait for someone to find him.

-----  
'The front for your base is a Tourist Information Centre?'

'We're not going to play whose office is bigger than whose,' Jack said, unlocking the door. 'And you're a researcher, shouldn't you already know this stuff.'

Ianto didn't say anything, just followed Jack inside and through the secret door - still not saying anything, at least not out loud anyway - and down into Torchwood Cardiff.

'How long until the next ghost shift?' Jack asked, shucking off his coat as he moved through the cog door. Ianto's eyes fell on the water fountain, distracting him for a moment.

'Ianto, how long?'

'Eh,' Ianto looked down at his watch. 'Seven minutes.'

'Okay, I need you to pull up that grating and drag out the thick black cable and plug it into the Rift manipulator,' Jack said, pointing at the grate and then at the base of the water tower before he went to one of the computer terminals.

'Where's the rest of your team?' Ianto asked as he bent down on his hands and knees to pull the cable up.

'It's just me,' said Jack, tapping away at the keyboard.

'Nobody to run admin, no archivist, no second in command?'

'It's just me.'

Ianto paused in what he was doing to look at Jack.

'They died, okay. My team are dead. I'm the only one left, now will you plug that in before they're not the only ones dead,' Jack barked. Ianto re-animated himself, moving down to the Rift Manipulator and looking for somewhere to plug the cable in.



'Just by the lever, throw it once you've plugged it in,' Jack said. Ianto did as he was told and came back to stand beside Jack. He noticed there were still half drunk cups of coffee cluttering the desk, cold, untouched and growing mould they'd been left for so long. It was like the Hub was waiting for its team to return.

'Now what?'

'Now I just finish putting in the programme commands and then we can open the Rift fully, change everything back to the way it's supposed to be,' Jack said, typing in one last command before looking up at Ianto.

'I can't do this,' Ianto said. He was still looking at one of the dirty mugs, contemplating how alone Jack Harkness felt in all of this. There were tears in Ianto's eyes as his gaze moved to Jack Harkness, a man he had only just met, but felt like he had known a lifetime.

'The world isn't supposed to be like this,' said Jack.

'I understand that. I understand that there won't be any worlds if we don't do this. But, what if this alternate world isn't any better? Can you guarantee it'll be any better?' demanded Ianto.

Jack shook his head forlornly. 'I can't. But this isn't how it was meant to be. I don't know what it'll be like once we change things, but it was never meant to be this way. I can only hope it'll be better.' Jack glanced round the Hub with a melancholy gaze.

'I'm getting married. Lisa, I proposed to her last week. How can it be any better than that?'

'You'll know me,' Jack said, trying to joke. But this wasn't really the time for jokes. 'Maybe you'll still be getting married in this other world,' said Jack. Ianto, however, could already feel the overwhelming loss creeping around him again like a fire blanket, suffocating him. He wasn't getting married, he'd never had a chance to propose. He could smell the burning flesh, tears hot in the corners of his eyes.

'I've got everything to lose by doing this. Everything!'

'I know,' said Jack. 'And I'm so sorry, but we have to do this. If we don't do this there won't be anything. You've got to take the risk to give everyone else in the world a chance to still have everything.'

Jack stood aside, allowing Ianto to step towards the screen, putting the decision in his hands, rather than Jack's. Ianto took one last shuddering breath, the screen before him shimmering in his watery eyed vision before he tapped the enter key once.

Push buttons now, ask questions later.

## CHAPTER NINE

'lanto?'

lanto was still stood in the Hub next to the computer screen, Jack beside him. The rest of the team were stood around at different stations as if they'd always been there. The confusion only lasting a second before it all came rushing back to him. Jack reached out.

'No,' lanto said, voice hoarse, stepping away from Jack. 'You do not get to comfort me.'

Jack watched as lanto moved away, disappearing out the cog door.

'What happened?' Gwen asked. Jack just shook his head once before he finally looked up at the remaining members of his team. Toshiko was shaking as if she was cold, and Owen felt the strong desire for a drink as the overwhelming guilt settled uneasily in Gwen's stomach.

Jack was looking round at his team, not sure what to say to them when Owen's phone started ringing. He pulled it out his pocket with a shaking hand and answered it. Toshiko was hugging herself, looking down at the floor of the Hub in quiet contemplation. Gwen suddenly turned to her desk having patted her pockets down and started moving bits of paper around looking for her phone.

'That was the hospital. They're coming out of their comas,' said Owen as he closed his phone over.

'Good,' said Jack. He nodded a couple of times. 'We'll talk about this in the morning,' Jack said by way of dismissal. Gwen was giving Owen an imploring look as she searched blindly for her car keys on her desk.

'Come on, I'll give you a lift,' Owen said, pulling his car keys out his pocket. 'Tosh, come on, I'll drive you home too,' Owen said, reaching out a hand to her. She flinched, like she'd been hit and Owen pulled back, holding up his hands.

'Tosh?'

'I'm fine, I just need some sleep,' Toshiko said softly, following Gwen down the stairs towards the cog door. Owen looked back at Jack still stood in the middle of the Hub, watching his team leave. There was a haunted look on his face as his gaze moved round the disarray left behind, but he didn't move until long after his team had gone.

-----

Rhiannon looked away from her youngest as there was a knock on the doorframe of her hospital room. Her brother was stood there looking rather bedraggled.

'What are you doing here?'

'I came to see how you were doing,' said Ianto, taking a tentative step inside the room, his hands shoved deep into his pockets. Johnny was sat in the visitor's chair with David lounging over the arm. Rhiannon gave him a look that clearly said 'get lost'.

'Right, come on kids, we know when we're not wanted,' Johnny said, picking Mica up from the edge of Rhiannon's bed and heading out the room, David following behind.

'You alright?' Rhiannon asked once they were gone.

Ianto laughed. 'I could ask you the same thing.'

'Me, I'm fine. Said they want to keep me in overnight just to make sure,' said Rhiannon. She patted the bed beside her and Ianto sat down a little reluctantly. 'You look like you've been hit by a bus.'

'Feel a bit like it,' Ianto said, running a hand down his face. Rhiannon put her hand on his shoulder, rubbing it slightly.

'You do know it's supposed to be the other way round, with me being in the hospital and everything. You're supposed to be the one comforting-' Rhiannon broke off when she realised Ianto was crying, his shoulders heaving.

'Hey, come on, what's brought all this on, then?' Rhiannon asked. 'I'm fine, stop being silly you daft sod.'

Ianto couldn't stop crying now though. The grief that he had forced down inside him so many months ago was resurfacing as if the wound was fresh, as if it was only yesterday the battle of Canary Wharf had happened, only yesterday he had kissed Lisa for the last time, only yesterday she had died a cyberman.

'This isn't just about me, is it?' Rhiannon asked, when the tears had subsided somewhat.

'I-' Ianto stuttered for a moment, before he shook his head. 'Sorry.'

'Don't be sorry, you dumbo, just tell me what's up.'

'I can't, I need to get back to work,' said Ianto, already rising to his feet. Rhiannon sighed, watching as Ianto straightened his tie slightly.

'That it, is it?'

Ianto didn't say anything, just continued to try and straighten himself up.

'You promised Mica you'd take her out for her birthday,' Rhiannon said. There was a pause where Ianto stopped what he was doing.

'How about this afternoon?'

Rhiannon hadn't expected that to work, but her little brother was looking at her earnestly, running a hand through his hair to maintain some kind of semblance of order. Rhiannon had a brief glimpse of the boy she'd known growing up, hair unkempt and shirt never tucked in.

'Let me just finish off what I've got to do at work and then I'll come back here and pick her up,' Ianto said.

'Alright, I'll hold you to it,' Rhiannon said. Ianto nodded, mouth a thin tight-lipped line. He tried to give her a smile before he left the room but it fell flat. He was grateful Rhiannon didn't beckon him forth for a hug goodbye.

Jack was in the corridor when Ianto stepped out of his sister's room. He was standing outside a room further along the corridor that Ianto now knew held Jack's daughter. Jack stood waiting, watching Ianto instead of approaching him. Ianto hesitated, considered taking the stairs at the other end of the corridor rather than the lift before rationality won out, made him realise he couldn't hide from Jack forever.

'I need a lift back to the Hub,' Ianto said as he approached Jack, not quite meeting his gaze.

'Okay,' Jack agreed.

'I need a shower and some sleep, and I can't-' Ianto stopped, swallowing. 'I want to sleep at the Hub.'

'You can have my bed, I've got paperwork to do,' said Jack. Ianto nodded his thanks, finally meeting Jack's gaze. Jack nodded too, daring to reach out a hand and place it on Ianto's shoulder, guiding him towards the lift. Ianto couldn't resist looking back in the room they were stood beside before he left. Alice Carter looked exactly like her father.

-----

'There's someone here to see you,' the nurse said once she'd finished taking Rhys' blood pressure, nodding her head towards the door. Gwen was stood there, hugging herself, looking rather worse for wear. She had bags under her eyes that were red, either due to lack of sleep or because she'd been crying.

'They said I've been out for a couple of days. Missed the bank holiday weekend, apparently,' Rhys said as Gwen stepped into the room tentatively. Gwen nodded slightly.

'We win at the footie?' he asked.

Gwen shrugged. 'I'm sorry, pet. I don't know.' She didn't say anything else, didn't move any closer to the bed as the nurse left the room, shooting Gwen a reassuring smile.

'They want to keep me in overnight, just to make sure I don't relapse or anything,' Rhys said. Gwen nodded again before she burst into tears.

'Hey, come here, I'm okay now,' Rhys said, shifting over in the bed to make room for Gwen. She toed off her shoes and crawled in beside him, still crying as she rested her head against his shoulder, her hand clinging to the hospital gown with a tight fist.

'I'm so sorry,' she said, hiccupping slightly. She sniffed, releasing the gown so she could wipe her running nose on the sleeve of her leather jacket.

'What have you got to be sorry for, eh?' Rhys asked, although he already knew the answer. Torchwood. This had all been to do with Torchwood.

'Jack bloody-'

'Don't,' Gwen stopped him. 'Don't, Rhys, just don't.'

There was a quiet desperation in Gwen's voice that made him stop. It made him pull her closer and not say another bad word against Torchwood. Not for the rest of the day at least. As usual, Rhys was left to his own quiet contemplation of what Torchwood could have done to his girlfriend this particular day, but he reasoned it was more what they had done to him. There didn't seem to be any lasting damage apart from the emotional turmoil Gwen seemed to be going through now.

'I was thinking about songs for our first dance at the wedding,' Rhys said when Gwen's sobs had quietened some. She sniffled a couple of times and shifted in his hold so that her hair tickled the underside of his unshaven chin.

'I was thinking of something really classic, like Grease Lightening or something,' Rhys said. Gwen looked up at him to check he was actually joking before hitting him deftly on the arm. Rhys laughed, and Gwen was soon giggling into his shoulder as she wiped the tears from her cheeks.

-----

Owen rapped lightly on the doorframe of Jack's office, causing Jack to look up from the contemplation of his hands.

'You found Ianto?' he asked as his eyes scanned the room for the normally presentably Welshman.

'He's in the shower.'

Owen wanted to make some rude remark about the Captain not being in there with him, but if there was ever a time to make jokes, this wasn't it.

'Did you take Tosh home?' asked Jack.

Owen nodded, 'And I took Gwen to the hospital.'

A look of confusion crossed Jack's harrowed features. 'Then why are you-'

'Are *you* alright?'

Jack hesitated for a moment. It still surprised Jack sometimes when Owen revealed the side of him that was more than just medical training.

'Relieved.'

Owen nodded in silent agreement.

'Guilty,' Jack added, a little breathlessly. His hands were steepled in front of him now, but as he took a long shuddering breath he parted them to cover his face. The clinking of crystal against crystal pulled him sharply from his reverie, looking up to find Owen's hand offering him a glass of his own brandy.

'If there were ever a time for a drink, Jack, this is it,' Owen said, and Jack, despite himself, laughed.

'I think you might be right.'

-----

There was a knock at the door. Owen had left just over an hour ago and since then Toshiko had thrown open every window in her flat, causing a chill wind to rush through the place. Toshiko didn't care. She felt claustrophobic even in the middle of her open plan living room, sat as she was on the floor. The knock came again and the breeze rattled the door that she hadn't bothered to lock. She didn't like the feeling of being trapped.

The door opened and closed quietly, followed by the sound of feet padding across the carpet to where she was sat staring vacantly at one of the walls decorated as it was with pictures of family and friends and generic photographs of places by people she hadn't really heard of. She was gazing intently at one that depicted a generic sunset as if it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. There was an anticipation inside her that filled her up with excitement when she thought of seeing the real thing in a few hours even if the sun was hidden behind layers of strata and cumulus.

'Come here,' Owen said as he coaxed her to her feet, making her sit down on the settee. He went and put a couple of the windows on the latch, leaving some of them open. He returned with two glasses and a blanket that he wrapped around Toshiko's shoulders. Toshiko finally noticed the bottle he'd left on her coffee table. It was a good bottle of whiskey. Single malt. Unopened.

They drank in silence until Owen fell asleep. Toshiko prised the glass from his hand and put the half empty bottle in her kitchen. She covered him with the blanket he had brought for her and finally locked the front door.

She stood by her bedroom window for a long time, waiting for the sun to go down, glancing back every now and then to check that Owen was still there. She missed the sunset, but the sunrise woke her the next morning, illuminating her room through the open windows and blinds.

-----

'So, how did it work out?'

'It could have gone better.'

'It could have gone worse.'

Jack sighed. 'I suppose.' Jack shifted slightly, pulling his greatcoat further round him in an effort to keep the chill out before sitting down on the bench in the late afternoon fog that was settling over the bay.

'I still don't understand,' said Jack. 'I went back and erased all of Torchwood Tower's records on the Rift and it changed everything, but when Ianto changed things it sorted itself out. How?'

'A butterfly flaps its wings and light-years away a sun explodes. It's just the way it is sometimes.'

Jack sighed again, finally turning to give the man he was sat beside an exasperated look.

'It's all wibbly wobbly timey wimey stuff.' The Doctor waved his hands about in mid-air as if to make his point. Jack continued to glare at him.

'Logically, Ianto, being the one who was emotionally connected to Torchwood One was close enough to the blast radius when you opened the Rift to create a paradox which he benefited from, altering time so that the battle of Canary Wharf never happened. The others, also caught in the blast radius, couldn't imagine a life without Torchwood so returned to the point before you found them and continued to live as if they'd never been a part of Torchwood.'

It hit Jack then, how everyone's lives were better with Torchwood, something Jack had never thought before. Recently, after everything with Suzie, he'd seen it as condemning everyone to an early grave, but now he realised that he'd saved everyone from themselves. Without Torchwood, they were nothing, and conversely, Jack without his team was nothing. But Ianto...

'Ianto gave up all that to erase the paradox and thus erase the knowledge that Torchwood One had on the Rift. History now says that the Torchwood agent who had gone to Cardiff to monitor the Rift and Torchwood Cardiff locally never handed his report in when he returned,' said the Doctor.

Jack nodded, taking that piece of information in.

'One more thing before I go,' the Doctor said, reaching out for Jack's Vortex manipulator. 'Need you to leave Ianto a message.'

'Wait, if you're taking my vortex manipulator to plant in the alternate universe with a message from myself how do I get it back?' Jack asked, pulling his wrist away from the Doctor in worry.

'Ianto should still have it in his jacket pocket from when he got it out the archives in Torchwood Tower,' the Doctor observed.

'But if it's a paradox how are you going to get back to Torchwood Tower?'

'God, were you always this full of questions? Torchwood Tower still exists in all alternate realities. I'm just going to pop back in this timeline and leave it in the archives. Ianto will find it.'

The Doctor waited while Jack recorded his message.

'You could have helped, stopped all this from happening,' Jack said as the Doctor was getting to his feet to disappear in his little blue box.

'You don't need my help anymore, Jack. You just need a good shove in the right direction from time to time.'

'What happened to Torchwood is evil?'

The Doctor laughed. 'I'm an old man now, takes me a while to get used to change.' He turned to head back up towards the Plass where he had left the TARDIS.

'See you around, Jack,' he called over his shoulder as the tails of his coat disappeared into a pocket of fog that enveloped the ice cream shop. Jack turned back out to sea, watching as swans and ducks alike were swallowed up by the settling mist. He could hear the lapping of the water against the boardwalk as he watched the Waterbus emerging out of the mist, devoid of passengers for a change.

-----

In the dampness of the Hub, Ianto was knotting his tie, standing in the middle of Jack's office. He could hear the distant rumble of the cog door opening and presumed it was Jack returning from wherever he'd been. Ianto had expected him to be cocooned in paperwork when he climbed out of Jack's bunker after his all too brief nap. It hadn't really surprised him though when he'd found himself alone in the expanse of the Hub.

'Fancy grabbing something to eat?' Jack asked from the doorway of his office as he watched Ianto crossing over to the coat stand.

'I promised my niece I'd take her to the cinema and Pizza Hut,' Ianto said. Jack nodded, trying desperately not to feel abandoned by his team.

'I'm sorry, you know,' Jack said as he watched Ianto pulling on his coat.

'I know,' said Ianto, sorting the collar on his coat as his eyes met Jack's. He pushed his hands into his pockets and felt the roughness of leather next to his right hand. He pulled out Jack's vortex manipulator, regarding it for a moment before handing it over to Jack.

'I trust you,' Ianto said quietly, his mouth twitching slightly as the start of a smile he couldn't quite find the strength for. Instead he moved out of the office, past Jack towards the exit.

Jack watched Ianto leaving through the cog door, Ianto's words playing on repeat as Jack's fingers caressed his vortex manipulator. Jack knew they were supposed to be consoling but if anything they made him feel worse. Ianto had willingly opened the Rift and left behind the perfect life for a life with Jack Harkness. An unpredictable life that would certainly see the death of Ianto Jones, and never see him into old age with grandchildren clustered round him to hear bedtime stories.

Jack thought about going to see Alice and Steven, but Alice was right. He was dangerous. Torchwood was dangerous, and danger didn't go hand and hand with family, no matter how hard its members tried to make it. Torchwood may be the worst kept secret in Cardiff, but secrets were still buried deep at its core.

Jack placed the vortex manipulator back in its rightful place upon his wrist as he glanced down at the report sat squarely in the middle of his desk that had been sat there since early Friday morning. He finally picked it up, seeing the date as being a few days prior to the battle of Canary Wharf. It had the Torchwood logo stamped across the top, and the address for The Torchwood Institute in London beneath it. The subject of the report was the Rift in Space and Time that runs through Torchwood Cardiff and the plans to use it to harness Time Travel. Jack flicked to the back of the document and found Ianto's signature at the bottom.

Jack sat down at his desk with a sigh, pulling off the yellow post-it note that Ianto had attached to the front before he started to read.

*I did my duty for Queen and Country. Ianto.*

