



TORCHWOOD

LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY

SAHIYA



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Long Night's Journey into Day

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New Who, Torchwood | NC-17 | Romance; Ten II/Jack Harkness/Ianto Jones | 37,000 words

Stranded in Cardiff by his Time Lord twin, the human Doctor must carve out a life for himself at a Torchwood still reeling from losing two of their own.

Betaed by: fuzzyboo03 and Canaan Alexander

Warnings: None

Spoilers: None

Notes: This is, of course, an AU. It assumes that the events of "Journey's End" and "Exit Wounds" happened relatively close together (within a few weeks, at least). Many, many thanks to my betas Fuzzyboo and Canaan, without whom this story would not be what it is. All remaining mistakes are, of course, my own

For a totally schmoopy sequel, check out [The Right Touch](#).

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Chapter One

The Hub was a disaster.

Ianto sighed and leaned on his broom, surveying the main floor with resignation. It had never stopped being a disaster, actually, after everything that had happened recently with Gray and John Hart, but now there were bits of blown-up Dalek everywhere, too. He'd sent Gwen home to Rhys hours ago, so now it was just himself and the mess.

He was sweeping Dalek casing into a dustpan when he heard the lift activate. He emptied the dustpan into a bin, wiped his hands on a rag, and went to greet Jack.

He wasn't alone. A disturbingly familiar man in a blue suit and trainers, with hair that stuck up every which way, was with him. He looked around with alert, intelligent eyes as they descended.

"Blimey, Jack," Ianto heard him say. His voice echoed off the walls of the Hub. "You've built a proper Batcave down here, haven't you?"

The voice was the nail in the coffin. Ianto's heart sank. Jack had sworn to him that he'd be back, that he wouldn't just leave them again, especially now, and Ianto had believed him. Here he was, as promised, but Ianto wasn't sure it boded well that he'd brought the Doctor with him. On the other hand . . . Jack didn't look pleased. He didn't reply to the Doctor's remark, and they descended the rest of the way in silence.

"Welcome home," Ianto said, when they were close enough he wouldn't have to strain his neck to see them properly.

"Thanks," Jack said, stepping off the lift. The Doctor followed, glancing about to take everything in until his gaze landed on Ianto. Then it sharpened, focused. Ianto fought the urge to loosen his tie. "How're things here?"

"Bit of a mess, but nothing we haven't seen before. Everything's sorted, I take it?"

"Oh yes," the Doctor said brightly. "No more Daleks or planets in the sky. The weather's going to be terrible for awhile, but it's not as though we'll much notice here in Cardiff, is it?"

Ianto wondered if that *we* meant what he thought it did. He glanced at Jack. "I don't believe we've been formally introduced."

Jack gave an exhausted sigh. "Ianto, this is the Doctor. Doctor, Ianto Jones. How many messages from UNIT?" he added, looking, if it were possible, even more weary.

"Only six or seven dozen."

"Right. If you'll both excuse me." He turned, trudged up the stairs to his office, and shut the door. Ianto stared after him, a little stunned. Jack had been cold to everyone lately, but that had been downright frigid.

The Doctor cleared his throat. Ianto glanced back at him and raised an eyebrow. The Doctor shoved his hands in his pockets. "Don't take it personally. It's been a long day. Lots of history for Jack."

"I see," Ianto said, looking him up and down. History, indeed. "So. You're the Doctor."

He gave an awkward little side-to-side hand wave. "Sort of. Depends on how you define selfhood, really. I've all his memories, so if that's what we are, then yes, I'm the Doctor. On the other hand . . . only one heart," he

pointed to his chest, "and if you were to shoot me with that gun I see you're carrying, I would stay quite dead."

"Good to know," lanto muttered.

"I'm a human-Time Lord metacrisis. I'm the Doctor, but . . . human." He grimaced, as though the word tasted sour. "I expect I'll get used to it."

"I expect so," lanto said, automatically. He glanced up at Jack's office again. "If you don't mind my asking, why are you here?"

"Ah." The Doctor rocked back on his heels. "That's an interesting story. My other half's a bit of a prat, you see, which probably means I am as well, but he's the one who decided he didn't want to look at me every day, some rubbish about genocide as though *he* hasn't - well, anyway, he wanted to dump me in the other universe with Rose, but Rose wasn't having it - quite right, too, I don't blame her the least bit for it - so he brought us both back, and now, here I am." He shoved his hands in his pockets again. "Don't think it did Jack any favors, seeing Rose again, especially since now they're -" he waved his hands expansively, if vaguely "- out there, and he's here. Not that he doesn't want to be here," he added hastily, "but, well . . . anyway. The prat asked him to come with, but only because he knew Jack'd say no."

lanto frowned. "I see." There was a lot of garbled information there, but he thought he'd managed to parse the relevant bits. He hesitated, wanting to be very careful in how he asked his next question. "So you're here permanently, then?"

"So it seems. Jack promises me you're not like that lot at Canary Wharf."

lanto managed to control his flinch. "No, definitely not."

"I suppose it's as good a place as any. Jack's a friend, and there's the Rift, of course. The 21st century is an interesting one. If I'm going to be in one place and time for the rest of my life . . ." He shrugged, glancing away. lanto watched in fascination as his gaze skittered over the Hub: the workstations, the pool, up to Jack's office, and finally back to the main room. It took lanto a few seconds to realize he was staring at the shards of Dalek casing still littering the main floor of the Hub.

"Sorry, I was just cleaning up," he said, moving to pick up his broom.

"Right," the Doctor said. "Er . . . can I help?"

lanto raised an eyebrow. "If you like. There's another broom in that cupboard over there."

They agreed to start at opposite ends of the Hub and meet in the middle. lanto kept an eye on the Doctor for the first few minutes, but whilst he did have the tendency to get distracted by shiny alien artifacts, he didn't seem inclined to do anything dangerous with them. lanto had to admit that things went much faster with two people. Within an hour, they had almost the whole floor clear of debris, and were able to start the actual mopping part of the post-crisis mopping up. lanto pushed his mop along on auto-pilot, iPod headphone in one ear and his other tuned towards Jack's office, and let himself drift. It wasn't as good as actual sleep, but it was the closest he'd come for at least a couple more hours.

At last lanto decided he'd had enough. The worst was taken care of, and the rest would keep until tomorrow, when he could press-gang Gwen. He wrung his mop out one last

time, stuffed his headphones in the pocket of his suit, and went to tell the Doctor to call it a night.

The Doctor was scrubbing hard at the floor, hair flopping down into his face. He was also, lanto realized as he came within a few feet, muttering to himself. lanto frowned.

". . . three-six-zero-zero-one-one-three-zero-five-three-zero-five-four-eight-eight-two -"

"Doctor," lanto said quietly. The Doctor startled, his head coming up. His eyes were wide and a little wild. lanto smiled nervously, and held his hands out, doing his best to look harmless. "I don't know about you, but I'm ready to call it a night."

"Oh," the Doctor said, looking around. "Yes, I suppose so. What time is it?"

"Just gone one. I was going to take Jack a cup of tea before I left." If he left. No telling what mood Jack would be in tonight. lanto was happy to offer sex if that was what Jack wanted, but he wasn't sure it would be. It hadn't been thus far, not since Gray. "Would you like some?"

The Doctor's face suddenly looked a bit pinched. He smiled, but it didn't come anywhere near his eyes. "Yes, that - that would be nice. I also - I . . ." He hesitated. The tips of his ears went pink. "I think I need to sleep. Just an hour or two, I'm sure, but my body seems rather insistent." He gave a brief laugh, as though he could not quite believe himself. "Is there anywhere I could - I mean, I don't need -"

"The sofa," lanto said, gesturing. "Make yourself comfortable. I'll bring you a blanket."

He made the tea as quickly as possible - herbal, of course, no caffeine this time of night even for him unless there was a crisis in-progress. He took a tray with three mugs and a small plate of biscuits out to the Doctor, along with a spare blanket. It was on the rough and scratchy side, but considering that the Doctor seemed to be planning to sleep in his clothes, lanto supposed it didn't matter.

Tomorrow one of them would have to take him out and help him buy a few essentials. He had nothing, lanto realized, watching the Doctor add an alarming amount of both cream and sugar to his tea. Truly nothing. The Doctor - the other Doctor, the one with two hearts who apparently *wouldn't* stay dead if lanto shot him - had dumped him here with only the clothes on his back. And so far all lanto had done was make him mop up Dalek goo.

lanto cleared his throat. The Doctor glanced up. "I'll give you a proper tour tomorrow," he said, "but for now the kitchen's there, and the loo's just there. Don't worry if you hear something flapping around in the rafters, that's just Myfanwy, the pteradon. She's friendly. If you need anything in the night, Jack sleeps in a room under his office."

The Doctor nodded, looking up at him. "Are you staying?"

"I'm not sure yet. I might be. Don't worry," lanto added, with half a smile, "even Jack can be discreet when he wants to be."

The Doctor smiled into his tea. "It isn't a problem. Thank you, lanto Jones."

"It wasn't anything. You helped me."

The Doctor shrugged. lanto wished him a good night and climbed the stairs to Jack's office,

tray in hand once more. He glanced back at the top and saw that the Doctor had stretched his legs out on the sofa so that he was propped up on one end. He held his mug of tea loosely and stared off into the distance. His lips were moving. No sound emerged that Ianto could hear, but he was certain that if he watched closely enough, he would see them form the shapes of numbers.

He turned away and knocked on Jack's door.

"Come in."

Ianto pushed the door open with his hip. "Tea, sir?"

Jack nodded. "Thanks." He held his hands out to accept the mug. "UNIT," he said, making a face at his phone. "I don't know why I bother." He took a long, slow sip of tea. "How's our guest?"

"All right, I suppose. He seems a bit . . ." Ianto hesitated.

Jack raised his eyebrows. "What?"

"Nothing. I think he's just exhausted."

"That makes two of us then." Jack heaved a sigh and set his tea down. He rubbed his hands over his face. "I'm sorry for just dumping him on you like that. It was wrong and I knew it, but I just - I couldn't -" He laughed. It sounded strangled. "So much of my past has dropped by to say hello lately. I really couldn't deal with him on top of everything else."

"You'll have to eventually, you know. You're all he has."

Jack shook his head. "Don't say that. Not even if it's true." He leaned forward and put his head in his hands, pulling roughly at his temples.

"God, I'm so tired. You'd think I'd be well-rested after a two-thousand year sleep, but it turns out that's not how this works."

Ianto swallowed. "Jack -"

"Sorry. Sorry." Jack straightened up in his chair, rolled his shoulders back, and looked steadily at Ianto. "You should go home, get some rest. You've been here for days."

Ianto bit his lip. "If that's what you want."

"I think it'd be best. Thanks for the tea."

"Of course." Ianto hesitated, then leaned across the table, cupped the side of Jack's face in his palm, and kissed him. "Get some rest yourself, all right?"

Jack reached up to cover Ianto's hand with his own. "I'll try."

Ianto stayed long enough to rinse the mugs and leave them upside down in the drainer to dry. Then he collected his coat and slipped quietly out through the Hub, pausing to give it a quick auditory check. It was making its usual night noises: hums and growls and rustlings, with the occasional purr from the mainframe. Tonight there was a trickle of water as well, as it seeped down from the downpour above.

Ianto held his breath and listened harder. Sure enough: beneath all of that, he could just barely discern a string of numbers being whispered into the dark.

". . . six-six-four-eight-two-one-three-three-nine-three-six-zero-seven . . ."

The Doctor woke gasping for air. Still half in the dream but starting to realize that it wasn't real,

he wasn't buried alive and choking to death on dirt, he forced himself upright, pulling in great gulps of slightly dank air and waiting for his respiratory bypass to kick in.

Except it didn't. And wouldn't. He didn't have a respiratory bypass anymore. He didn't have a second heart, either, nor a spare liver. If any of his organs failed, he was bugged.

"Bloody hell," he gasped, head spinning. He doubled over and put his head down between his knees. "Three-point-one-four -" he choked out, but didn't get any further. "Jack," he tried next, but his office, when the Doctor managed to lift his head to look, was dark.

It took him a long time to come down and even longer for the dizziness and disorientation to recede. When it finally did, he lay sprawled across the sofa, mostly on top of the blanket Lanto had given him. He felt wretched - utterly exhausted, but still too terrified to sleep.

He wanted Donna. She had always been so good with his nightmares. But Donna was gone. He hoped Rose had been spared watching it.

Donna was gone and Rose had chosen her Time Lord. The Doctor didn't blame her. But he missed them. Martha, at least, was within reach if he decided to call her. Perhaps he'd look up some of his other old friends, see what had become of them. He'd love to take tea with the Brigadier again. If Jack didn't want him, and the Doctor was beginning to think he didn't, perhaps he wouldn't be completely alone.

The Doctor choked out a laugh. What rubbish. Of course he was alone. He was more alone

than he had been in centuries. He ached with how alone he was, deep down where his second heart used to be.

He could no longer hear the TARDIS.

A thousand years together, and now she was gone. He doubted the other Doctor had even considered that when he'd decided his human twin would do "just fine" with Jack in Cardiff. All he'd cared was that he didn't have to look at his own genocidal face across the breakfast table every morning.

The Doctor rubbed his eyes. This wasn't doing him any good. He had to adapt. He *had* to. That life was over. He might never see the TARDIS again. He had to accept it.

It just . . . it hurt. Eventually it would either stop hurting, or he'd get used to it and not notice anymore. He had no other choice.

But tonight, he wasn't there yet, and he knew he wouldn't get any more sleep. He wrapped the scratchy blanket around his shoulders and waited for morning.

As it happened, he didn't have to wait nearly as long as he expected. Only a few minutes later - exactly how many, he didn't know, and wasn't that strange after a lifetime of being able to track time down to the very millisecond - the light in Jack's office switched on and Jack emerged, staggering down the stairs in t-shirt and trousers, his braces looping down by his hips. He paused at the bottom as he caught sight of the Doctor.

"Sleep well?" Jack asked.

The Doctor shook his head. "You?"

Jack shook his head. He looked away. "I need coffee. And we should talk."

The Doctor nodded. He followed Jack into the kitchen, where Jack brewed a pot of coffee. The Doctor accepted a mug, sniffed it, and poured half of it out in the sink to replace with cream and sugar. "How do you have any stomach lining left?" he wondered aloud.

Jack smiled faintly. "Ianto makes it most of the time."

"Ah." That made sense. The Doctor had scarcely been in any fit state to appreciate it, but the tea Ianto had made the night before had been impeccable. He seemed the sort of person who might invite that description on a regular basis. The Doctor had been called many things, but *impeccable* had never been one of them.

"So," Jack said, when they were seated across from each other at the small table. He opened his mouth, then closed it. "You're here," he said at last.

"So it seems," the Doctor said. He hesitated. "But I don't - I know you didn't - neither of us -"

"Just say it, Doctor," Jack said wearily.

The Doctor sighed. "Fine. If you'd rather I weren't here, please tell me." He sipped his coffee, cradling his mug in both hands to hide the fact that they were shaking. He had other former companions, other friends in this place and time. But while mopping the floor with Ianto, he'd started imagining himself here, thinking about the niche he could carve out for himself with Jack and his team. Of all his options, it was the one that filled him with the least dread.

Jack rubbed a hand over his face. "Doctor, please. I can't deal with anyone else's angst right now." He drew a deep breath. "We've had

a rough go of it here lately. I don't want to talk about it," he added, before the Doctor could speak. "Ianto will tell you, if you ask."

The Doctor nodded. "Fair enough. But you never did say . . ."

"Neither did you."

The Doctor frowned. "No, but - well, frankly, what I want is no longer a possibility. And this," he turned to gesture towards the main part of the Hub, "this isn't anything like what Yvonne Hartmann was running in London." He shrugged. "You know me, Jack. I love things cobbled together from spare parts that only work half the time."

"Well, then," Jack said with a sad smile, "you might work out here after all. And . . . we do need a tech. Do you want to stay, then?"

"I want to stay," the Doctor said cautiously, "if you want me to."

Jack said nothing for what felt like a very long time. The Doctor sipped his coffee. It needed more sugar.

"That's never been our issue," Jack said at last, his voice a bit rough. "I've always wanted you to stay."

The Doctor winced. Touché. "If it helps . . . it's not an problem for me, Jack. I can't feel you like he can. You're just you. Just Jack."

Jack smiled, but it wasn't a very nice expression - his lips twisted bitterly. "Well, I guess we're decided, then." He stood to put his mug in the sink.

"Jack," the Doctor said, twisting in his chair, "are you all right?"

Jack braced himself against the counter, his back to the Doctor. "No. You?"

The Doctor was silent. "Last night I was reciting pi," he said at last, "and I realized I couldn't remember more than about the two-thousandth digit. It just isn't there anymore." He shrugged. "On the other hand, I can't really fault existing."

"Yeah," was all Jack said. It occurred to the Doctor that Jack probably had days when he wished he didn't exist. Rather lot of them lately, he suspected.

Jack crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the sink. "I'm going to have lanto take you out today. You need clothes, personal items, a mobile. lanto's good at organizing that sort of thing."

The Doctor nodded. "Thanks."

Jack left. The Doctor stood and dumped his coffee down the sink. He ran the water to wash it down and splashed some on his face while he was at it. He would have liked to have a shower, but he didn't know where they were, and Jack hadn't offered to show him. lanto had said he'd give him a tour later. The Doctor supposed he could ask him then, if it didn't come up.

He sighed to himself. "This may have been my worst idea ever," he said aloud to the empty kitchen. And it hadn't even really been his.

Three hours later, that opinion hadn't changed. The Doctor had been nearly shot as an intruder by Gwen Cooper and come close to being mobbed by the pteradon, who was after the chocolate lanto had his pocket. To be fair, Gwen obviously felt a lot worse about almost killing him than Myfanwy did, and she made up

for it by giving him the second chocolate croissant in her bakery bag.

It was the first food the Doctor had eaten as a human. He nibbled cautiously, wondering if it would taste any different. He was unsurprised to find he could no longer take it apart molecule by molecule. But butter was butter and chocolate was chocolate, and after a few bites he found he actually enjoyed eating without analyzing. He bolted the rest of it and washed it down with a cup of lanto's vastly superior coffee.

"Thank you," the Doctor said at last, swallowing the last bite of croissant. "I'd no idea I was so hungry."

"You should be flattered. I was planning to squirrel that away in my desk as a guilty pleasure." Gwen leaned back in her chair, sipped her own coffee, and eyed him with undisguised curiosity. "lanto says you're the Doctor, but not."

"That's true. More or less. Mostly more."

"He also says you might be staying. For good."

The Doctor shrugged. "For a while. Jack says you need a tech."

Gwen's eyes shuttered. "I guess so. Tosh was a genius, and she had a lot of special projects going. I don't think the three of us could understand half of them."

The Doctor was finding that it was easier, as a human, to understand when he'd put his foot in it, and a lot harder to pretend he didn't care. He cleared his throat and tried to think of something appropriate. "I look forward to trying," he finally said, hoping it'd do the trick. Not that he anticipated it being very difficult.

Torchwood had undoubtedly got a bit of a boost from scavenged alien tech, but there was only so much a 21st century scientist, however brilliant, could do.

Then again . . . approximately a million digits of pi were suddenly missing from the Doctor's brain.

"Just be careful," Gwen advised, as she collected the napkins and used them to sweep crumbs off her desk and into the bin. "Tosh was mad about security, and the mainframe is very finicky."

The Doctor smiled. "I've some experience with finicky machinery. But thank you, that's good to know."

"Doctor," Ianto called from across the Hub. "Are you ready for that tour now?"

The Doctor stood. "If you are."

"The Rift predictor said it would be quiet today," Ianto said, coming closer with his own coffee in hand. Was that his second or his third cup? The Doctor wondered if he'd end up similarly addicted. "I thought we'd do the tour, and then Jack gave me the Torchwood credit card to take you shopping."

The Doctor shook his head. "You don't have to do that. Really, I have money. I worked for UNIT years ago, and it's all just been sitting there, collecting interest."

"Do you have any way to access it?" Ianto asked. "Bank card, for instance?"

The Doctor was forced to shake his head.

"Well, then that's something else we should sort. But for now, Jack's feeling generous, and I am not going to argue, especially not

when it means sushi for lunch. Come on, I thought we'd start at the bottom and work our way up."

The bottom turned out to be the vaults and the cells, filled with creatures Ianto called "weevils." They weren't a species the Doctor had ever seen before, but Ianto said they'd become a bit too common around Cardiff. Mostly they kept to themselves, but occasionally they got aggressive. The cells were the best Torchwood could do for them.

It was clear from his sideways glances and carefully chosen words that Ianto expected criticism from



the Doctor about this. As it was, the Doctor had to physically bite his tongue to keep from saying anything unfortunate. His Time Lord twin wouldn't have bothered, he knew; he would have simply laid into Ianto and later Jack for keeping these creatures locked up under these conditions. But the other Doctor might've had a way to offer them a ride home. He didn't. He was just as stranded as these poor creatures were.

"How unfortunate," was all he said. Ianto let out a breath that was not quite a sigh of relief, and led the Doctor upwards into the archives.

The Doctor was glad to eventually emerge into the relatively open space of the Hub proper. Ianto gave him a thorough orientation in the kitchen and other common areas, such as the conference room, and a more cursory one in the autopsy bay, which also seemed to double as a basic infirmary. Most of the equipment,

both domestic and alien, was already familiar to him, he was glad to see. Finally, Ianto led him onto the main floor of the Hub and pulled up beside one of the empty work stations. This one appeared particularly tidy, as though someone had given it a good dusting recently.

"Jack seems to have decided you're to be our tech. That means you'll be working at Tosh's station." Ianto nodded toward the computer and console.

The Doctor wondered just how recently Tosh had died. Recently enough for Ianto to look like this physically hurt him. "I don't have to. I'm sure I could work from one of the others."

Ianto sighed. "I don't think you could, to be honest. And Tosh wouldn't want her projects abandoned. She'd be honored to have you take them on, I'm sure. Now," Ianto clasped his hands together, clearly signaling that that conversation was over, "do you have any questions?"

"Just one." The Doctor smiled weakly. "Is there anywhere I might have a shower?"

Chapter Two

The Doctor looked less like death warmed over when he emerged from the showers. Ianto was relieved; he'd actually been worried when he'd come in to find the Doctor looking pale and wan, with some impressive bags under his eyes. He'd asked Jack if the Doctor had slept; Jack had blinked at him, as though he didn't understand the question, and finally said he didn't know.

The Doctor had perked up a little once Gwen plied him with food as an apology for almost shooting him in the head. But Ianto couldn't help but notice he lacked the same energy he'd had the night before - and he was pretty sure that was only a fraction of the energy he'd had as a Time Lord. Their tour of the Hub was uneventful, but while the Doctor seemed interested, he no longer seemed excited. Ianto was almost sorry. They could have used an infusion of enthusiasm.

Ianto himself had managed six blissful, uninterrupted hours of sleep and felt like a new man. Jack was right - it had been the best thing for him. Whether it had been the best thing for Jack was a different story. He'd looked nearly as peaked as the Doctor this morning.

It was lunchtime by the time Ianto and the Doctor managed to escape the Hub for their shopping trip. Ianto decided food should come first, if only because he'd been thinking about sushi all morning. The Doctor said he'd eat anything but pears, so Ianto drove them a few blocks to a little place Tosh had introduced him to. They'd come here for lunch a few times, usually just the two of them, and once he'd brought Jack. It hadn't been a proper date - they'd had the remote Rift monitor with them the whole time - but it had been a pleasant

diversion. Jack loved pickled ginger beyond all reason. He'd eaten gobs of the stuff that night, and tasted of it for hours afterward.

Ianto waited until they'd ordered and the waiter had brought their tea. "So," he said, then. "How are you doing so far?"

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. "Me? I'm fine. Never better."

"Right. You slept well?"

The Doctor shrugged and rubbed the back of his neck. "Well, you know. The sofa isn't great for my back. But it'll do."

"There's no reason you have to live at the Hub," Ianto pointed out. "Furnished flats aren't terribly hard to come by."

"Yeah." The Doctor drummed his fingers on the side of the table. "I think I want to wait on that a bit. Make sure I'm staying."

Ianto, who had just taken a sip of tea, raised his eyebrows. He swallowed. "I thought you'd decided."

The Doctor's eyes slid away from Ianto's. "Well, that depends on Jack. Not really sure he wants me here."

"Ah." Ianto paused as the waiter brought their miso and departed. He picked up his chopsticks and used them to stir the soup and pluck a tiny piece of tofu from it. "It's like you told me last night. It's not personal. The last few weeks - well, believe me when I tell you that planets in the sky and Daleks everywhere were just the icing on the cake for us."

"Yeah, about that." The Doctor put his own chopsticks down. "He told me he didn't want to

talk about it, but I should ask you. What happened to Tosh and . . . Owen, wasn't it?"

Well, wasn't that generous of Jack, to leave that story for him to tell. Ianto rubbed the bridge of his nose. "It's a long story."

"We have time. I need to know, Ianto," the Doctor added, when Ianto said nothing. "I know it's hard. I'm sorry. But I need to know, especially if I am staying."

Ianto took a deep breath. "I know. Just . . . give me a minute. It's complicated."

In the end, it took the entire meal to tell the story. Ianto was pleased that his voice didn't shake, except for the very end, when he told the Doctor about the message Tosh had left behind. "She was the best of us," he concluded, wiping his eyes with a napkin. Their food lay almost untouched between them. "And Owen," he gave a brief laugh, "he was such an asshole, but I almost miss his bedside manner."

The Doctor was staring at him, eyes large and sad. "I'm so sorry. Really, Ianto, I - I'm so very sorry."

"Me, too." Ianto blinked at the rolls they'd ordered. He couldn't imagine eating anything now. "We should have them box this up. We can drop it off at the Hub on our way. Gwen'll be pleasantly surprised, at least."

The Doctor nodded. He was silent as Ianto paid the check, silent as they walked to the SUV, and silent as they drove back to the Hub. It was only when Ianto pulled into the car park that he finally spoke. "I shouldn't be here," he said, voice soft. "The three of you - you should have time with each other right now. I'm in the way. I'm making it worse."

"You're not," Ianto said firmly. "I can't speak for Jack, but I'm glad you're here. Gives me something to do besides stare at all the negative space. Leave if you have to, but not on my account."

The Doctor looked at him. After a moment, he nodded.

Ianto unbuckled his seatbelt. "Right, then. Just let me run this into the Hub."

The shopping trip was delightfully uneventful. The Doctor was fussy, but certainly no worse than Ianto himself. Ianto vetoed having six more identical suits made, but kept his mouth shut when the Doctor gravitated inevitably towards blue. The man obviously wasn't used to much sartorial variety. Ianto contented himself with choosing tasteful dress shirts and ties in a wider palette. He also sneaked one pair of jeans into the pile at the cashier. If the Doctor noticed, he didn't say anything.

Buying a mobile turned out to be even easier. The Doctor didn't care what he got, and Torchwood had certain requirements that limited the selection. Ianto went with an updated model of the one he owned and had the Doctor put on Torchwood's account. When asked what name they wanted the new line under, Ianto glanced sideways at the Doctor with raised eyebrows.

"What? Oh. John Sm - er. Noble." The Doctor paused, suddenly looking a little sad. "John Noble," he repeated. Ianto nodded to the saleswoman.

The trip to Boots was rather more trying. Ianto tried to move the Doctor along, but he seemed enthralled by the bins and bins of hygiene and hair products. Ianto hadn't known it could take

so long to select shampoo and toothpaste - or, God help him, gel and mousse.

"What do you usually use?" he asked, after fifteen excruciating minutes, when the Doctor finally declared that he didn't even know how to begin to choose.

"What? Oh, it's from the 54th century. Not really an option, I'm afraid. Still," he picked up a bottle of sculpting gel and read the label, "I suppose it's all more or less the same concept."

"Just so." Ianto plucked the gel from his hands, put it in the basket, and walked away. The Doctor shrugged and followed him up to the cashier. Ianto breathed a covert sigh of relief.

"How'd it go?" Gwen asked when they returned.

"Brilliant," the Doctor said, rocking back on his heels and looking a bit more himself - or at least, a bit more like how Ianto imagined his usual self was. "I have things!" He rattled the bags. "I'll just go put them away - er." He paused. "Or I would do, if I had a place to put them."

Ianto surveyed the Hub with his mind's eye and made an executive decision. "Clear out a cupboard in the autopsy bay for now. We'll figure out a more permanent solution later." The Doctor nodded and went off whistling.

Ianto leaned one hip against Gwen's desk.

"How was the sushi?"

"Delicious. There's still some left if you want it."

"Might do, thanks." Ianto glanced up at Jack's office. "Did Himself eat any?"

Gwen shook her head. "I'm really starting to worry about him."

"Me too." Ianto took a deep breath and straightened up. "All right. I'm going in. Er," he shot Gwen a glance, "don't come up for a bit."

Gwen blushed, faintly, but nodded. "What about the Doctor?"

Ianto glanced over his shoulder at the autopsy bay. "Neither of us had any lunch to speak of. See if he'll eat any of the sushi, and then introduce him to the mainframe. If he's anything like Tosh, that'll keep him busy for the rest of the afternoon."

Gwen nodded. "Will do. Good luck."

"Thanks." Ianto kissed her on the cheek and climbed the stairs to Jack's office. He paused just outside the door to shoot his cuffs and straighten his tie. He drew a deep breath.

"I can feel you lurking out there," Jack called through the door.

Ianto sighed. He opened the door. "Sorry, sir."

Jack shrugged. "How was shopping?"

"Fine. The Doctor now has an array of blue suits to choose from, with appropriate shirts and ties. Also soap, shampoo, deodorant, shaving cream, and hair gel. Here." Ianto stepped forward and handed him the Torchwood credit card, along with the receipts, stapled together. He let their fingers brush in passing - casually, but Jack would know better.

No reaction. Or if there was, it was only a small one, a slight flicker of Jack's eyelashes. "Thank you." Jack pocketed the card. "Was there anything else?"

Here went nothing. "Yes." Ianto slipped around the desk, insinuating himself between Jack's knees and the desk. He straddled Jack's lap and linked his arms around Jack's neck, before leaning in and kissing Jack slowly. Jack froze, kissed back briefly, and stopped. Ianto pulled away, only a little disappointed. He hadn't expected to get very far on the first try. But he had to get through to Jack somehow, and sex seemed easier on his fifty-first century sensibilities than actual conversation.

Jack let his head tip back to rest against the back of the chair. "Ianto," he sighed.

"Shh," Ianto said, running his fingers through Jack's hair. It felt greasy, as though he hadn't washed it in a couple of days. "You don't need to do anything. All I want is for you to sit back and feel good." He reached down to rub Jack's cock through his trousers, once up and once down. Jack shuddered faintly beneath him. Ianto hitched himself forward a few inches, pressed his forehead against Jack's, and rolled his hips. Jack's eyes fluttered shut. Ianto kissed him and undid two buttons on his shirt, just enough to reach in and pinch a nipple.

Jack's hand caught hold of Ianto's wrist. Ianto glanced up to meet Jack's eyes - unearthly blue and terribly sad. "This isn't going to work," Jack said hoarsely.

Ianto's insides froze up. "It always has before."

"That was . . . before. Ianto, I'm mean it's not going to *work*."

Ianto suddenly understood. He shifted a little, trying to be subtle, but Jack, of course, knew exactly what he was doing. "Oh," he said, too surprised to say anything else.

Jack smiled bitterly. "At least you didn't say, 'it happens to a lot of men'." He let his head fall back against the chair. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. *Jack*," Ianto said firmly, when he looked away, "I said, *don't be*. How long has it been?"

Jack looked away. "Since I . . . woke up. It probably wasn't the two thousand years in the ground, actually. Impotence is a known side-effect of prolonged stasis. A temporary one, thank God, but I don't know how long . . ." He swallowed, throat working painfully.

Ianto didn't bother to ask if Jack thought it might also be a side effect of severe psychological trauma. Instead, he pulled Jack close, the palm of his hand cradling the back of Jack's head. Jack made a wordless noise and tucked his face into Ianto's neck. Ianto closed his eyes and let himself breathe.

After a time, Ianto felt Jack's hands to come rest first on his waist, then on his hips, and finally on his thighs, exerting just enough pressure. Ianto sighed and leaned back.

"Work to do," Jack said.

Ianto smiled sadly at the irony. "I suppose so." He rebuttoned Jack's shirt and smoothed his collar. "Will you come downstairs for dinner? Please?"

Jack nodded. "Yeah. Pizza?"

"That's what I was thinking." He kissed Jack once more and stood, twisting out from behind the desk. At the doorway he hesitated, glancing back. "Jack? You'll tell me when you're ready, won't you?"

Jack nodded. "You'll be the first to know."

"I'd better be." Ianto gave him a smile he didn't feel and let himself out.

"Well?" Gwen said, once he'd trudged back down. "Any progress?"

Ianto shook his head. He glanced up at Jack's office and imagined Jack sitting at his desk with his head in his hands. He wondered what he should have done differently - if there was anything he could have said that would have helped Jack even the slightest bit. He suspected there wasn't. "I really have no idea."

She hesitated. "Do you think maybe I should try talking to him?"

"Maybe," Ianto said, trying not to sound overly dubious, "but not today. If you went in now, it'd look like we were tag-teaming him." Not to mention Jack might assume that Ianto had betrayed his confidence. "Leave it till tomorrow. But after that, if you have a good opportunity, be my guest. Just don't get your hopes up. He's . . . in a very bad place right now."

Gwen sighed. "Well, he isn't the only one. Are *you* all right, Ianto? No one ever really asks you."

"Oh," Ianto said, nonplussed. "Yes. I'm okay." Comparatively-speaking, it was even true.

Gwen didn't look like she believed him. "You know I'm always here if you want to talk, don't you?"

Ianto nodded. "I do. Thanks."

Gwen turned back to her work station. Ianto sat down at his own, determined to try and get a little work done. Torchwood never stopped, not even for personal tragedy. He glanced over toward Tosh's old station to check on the

Doctor, but he appeared wholly absorbed in the mainframe. Ianto smiled to himself and turned back to his work.

The Hub mainframe was *beautiful*.

Not as beautiful as the TARDIS, but quite a gorgeous piece of work nonetheless. The security protocols were impressive, but the Doctor was relieved to find that they posed no significant challenge to him. He bypassed them and spent the next few hours simply communing with her code. It seemed every time he turned around there was some elegant surprise waiting for him. The Doctor wasn't sure whom he loved more, the mainframe or Toshiko Sato.

At some point, a slice of pizza on a paper plate appeared at his elbow. He ignored it, not wanting to risk getting grease on the keyboard, and kept working, exploring, searching out all the secret dark places the mainframe had been guarding since Tosh's death. The poor thing had had no one to understand her, the Doctor thought sadly, no one who could even try. He didn't have a psychic link with her the way he had with the TARDIS, of course, but still, he fancied she was as glad to find him as he was to find her.

A light touch to his shoulder made him jump. "Sorry, Doctor," Ianto said. "I was just about to leave for the night."

The Doctor blinked. Then he blinked again, because his eyes suddenly ached and his vision was blurry, even with his specs on. "What time is it?"

"Almost eleven. You should eat something before you go to bed."

The Doctor waved this off. "I'm fine. I had some sushi earlier."

Ianto smiled. "That was seven hours ago. Come on, the mainframe will still be here in the morning."

"She's magnificent. You realize that, don't you?" the Doctor said, letting Ianto pull him out of his chair. "Tosh was a genius."

Ianto's smile dipped a little at one corner. "I know."

"But it's not just that. The mainframe is - I don't know what she is, actually. I've never seen anything like her, except possibly the TARDIS, but she's not at all like the TARDIS. She's not organic, she's one hundred percent AI, but brilliant AI, not that rubbish AI humans have all the way up till the Argale Alliance in 6551. You lot get some decent stuff in after that, but not like this. Where did she come from?" The Doctor automatically took the pajamas Ianto handed him, toothbrush and toothpaste laid neatly on top.

"I don't know. You'll have to ask Jack. Tomorrow," he added pointedly

"Ah." The Doctor looked down at the pajamas. "Right. Thanks."

Ianto patted him on the shoulder. "That's what I'm here for. Do you need anything?" The Doctor shook his head. "All right, then. Have a good night."

Doctor changed into his pajamas in the locker room and brushed his teeth at the sink. He had a headache, now that the euphoria of discovery had worn off, and he rather wished there was something more comfortable than a lumpy, ancient sofa waiting for him upstairs.

He suspected he needed to start taking care of his spine, if he wanted it to last. Sleeping at the Hub was convenient but uncomfortable.

And then there was Jack. Or rather, Jack's dreams.

The Doctor spat, rinsed his mouth, and raised his head to eye himself in the mirror. He sighed. He'd realized immediately upon hearing the story from Ianto that afternoon. It seemed that while he'd lost his time sense altogether and his memory was no longer what it had been, he was still psychic enough to hear when someone was silently screaming in the next room.

The question was whether he could do anything about it.

"Sorry, Jack," he said to his reflection, "it's just, your dreams about suffocating to death under Cardiff for two thousand years woke me up. Care to let me poke about in your brain?"

Right. That'd go over splendidly.

He suspected he'd have trouble falling asleep. The Hub was not quiet, and the Doctor was not much looking forward to the dreams. But the sounds of the Hub faded into white noise as forty-eight hours of near sleeplessness caught up with him. He was asleep before the tenth digit of pi.

He woke gagging on dirt, the smell-taste of it clogging his nasal passages, his sinuses, his mouth, his throat. He rolled to the side as his stomach tried to turn itself inside out and force itself up his esophagus. His eyes were open, but all he could see was *dark*. It was so dark and he was alone, alone with the dirt and his guilt, and he deserved this, he deserved every last moment of it, because he had *let go* -

The Doctor gasped and lurched to his feet. He was halfway up the stairs to Jack's office before the Hub came into full focus. He yanked open the door to Jack's office and staggered through. A room down below, Ianto had said. A trap door, yes, there.

There was no lock on it. The Doctor dropped through, noticing just in time that there was a ladder. Jack was thrashing around on the bed, making horrible, choking animal noises, like a dog being strangled to death. Haste made the Doctor clumsy, and he fell down the last three rungs. "Jack," he said, falling to his knees beside the meager little campbed. "Jack, wake up!"

The only response was more gasping. The Doctor was afraid Jack might burst a blood vessel from the strain. He grabbed Jack's shoulders and shook. "Jack - "

Stars exploded in front of the Doctor's eyes. He reeled back and landed roughly on his arse. "Jack, it's me," he managed. He reached up to feel his nose, felt a warm trickle of blood, but not the gush he'd expected. "It's the Doctor, it's all right, it was just a dream - "

He saw the second blow coming, but not in time to block it. It clipped his chin and knocked him back again. This time, he didn't get up right away. Jack loomed over him, black on blacker shadow. "Jack, stop!" he yelled. "It's me - "

"I know who you are!"

They froze. For a moment, the only sound was both of them gulping air. "I know who you are," Jack repeated, in a voice as dark as his dream. "How dare you - what right do *you* have to come down here, as though you ever cared about me?"

"I did - I do!" the Doctor said. He pushed himself to his knees. "Jack, I felt the dream - it woke me up - "

"Liar."

The Doctor stuttered to a stop. He stared up at Jack. He couldn't have looked away if he'd wanted to.

"You never cared," Jack said, voice rising steadily. "You never came - you were never there when I needed you! I *died* for you, and I keep dying for you, and you *never fucking come!*"

"But I'm here now." The Doctor staggered to his feet. "I'm here, Jack."

"Because you can't leave," Jack spat. "Too fucking bad. Get out."

The Doctor stepped forward, hands held palm-out. "Please, Jack, I know how much pain you're in. Please let me help."

The third blow landed on his cheekbone. The pain splintered. The Doctor went down to one knee, then scabbled back as Jack advanced. "You have no idea what kind of pain I'm in," Jack snarled. "*Get. Out.*"

The Doctor got out, hand over hand up the ladder, then down the stairs and out into the Hub. Up the stairs to the main door, through the tourist office and onto the Plass.



And into the pouring rain.

He was wearing pajamas. He was bleeding. It was two in the morning, he had no money, no mobile, and no one to call even if he did.

The TARDIS. I need the TARDIS.

The thought was a reflex, ingrained after so many centuries with her. All he had to do was get to the TARDIS and things would be fine. The pain of realizing afresh that she wasn't there, that she would never be there again, left him doubled over and gasping into his knees.

He couldn't stay here, he realized. Jack had told him to leave. He had to leave.

He wasn't wearing any shoes.

Chapter Three

Ianto sat up in bed, rubbing his face and trying to figure out what had woken him. He'd been having a nice dream for once, involving Jack, the stopwatch, and some whipped cream. Since his dreams were the only way he'd be getting laid for the foreseeable future, he really didn't appreciate having them interrupted.

Someone knocked at the door.

Ianto glanced at the clock. It was quarter after three. Ax murderers generally didn't knock, which meant . . .

"Jack," he sighed to himself as he swung his legs out of bed.

The knocking came again when he paused, halfway across the lounge, to turn on a light. "I'm coming," he called, then wondered if that had been very clever. Probably it was Jack, but life with Torchwood being what it was, an ax murdering alien that knocked wasn't out of the question.

Whatever. He was still too much asleep to care.

He yanked the door open. "Jack, what - " He stopped. No one was there.

"Sorry. Not Jack," came an exhausted voice from somewhere near the floor. Ianto dropped his gaze - and immediately dropped to his knees beside the Doctor, who sat slumped against the doorjamb. He wore nothing but pajamas, and those were soaked through, plastered to his skin. He sported an impressive black eye, a slightly bloody nose, and a bruise along his jaw that was just beginning to turn color. "Sorry," the Doctor repeated, when Ianto

simply stared at him in shock. "Couldn't stand up anymore." He gestured weakly towards his feet. Ianto followed his gaze and sucked a breath in through his teeth. They were practically shredded, bloody and battered, as though -

As though he'd walked for miles with no shoes.

Ianto dragged his gaze back up to meet the Doctor's. "You walked from the Hub."

The Doctor shrugged. His head lolled and landed against Ianto's shoulder. "S'not so far."

"Yeah," Ianto said. His arm came up automatically to circle the Doctor's shoulders. He was shivering. "On a nice day. *With shoes.*"

The Doctor was shaking harder now. "No time," he managed through chattering teeth.

Icy fear grabbed hold of Ianto's gut and squeezed. "No time before what?" he said, grabbing hold of the Doctor's jaw and making him wince. "Before what, Doctor! Is the Hub in one piece? Is *Jack* - "

"Jack's fine," the Doctor said. Then he laughed. "Actually no, he's not, but not the way you're thinking." He swallowed. "Please let go. That hurts rather a lot."

Ianto realized he was digging his fingertips into the bruise. He let go. "I'm sorry." He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "You swear that everything is as all right as it possibly can be at the Hub?" The Doctor nodded. "Nothing's blown up or flooded or fried?" The Doctor shook his head. "All right. Let's get you inside." He pulled the Doctor's arm across his shoulders and hauled him to his feet.

The Doctor gasped in pain and nearly collapsed, but Ianto held him up until he was able to take at least a little of his own weight. "I'm so sorry," the Doctor managed, voice tight from pain and cold, as they made their slow, shambling way towards Ianto's bathroom. Ianto carefully guided him around the area rugs. "Shouldn't've come, but I didn't know where else to go. You were closer than Gwen. Also wasn't sure what her husband would think of me showing up in the middle of the night."

"*Bloody Torchwood*, probably." Ianto helped the Doctor fall in a barely-controlled collapse onto the seat of the toilet and reached over to turn on the tap in the bathtub. "How'd you know where I live, anyway?"

"Read your personnel file this afternoon." The shivers were traveling the length of the Doctor's body. He wrapped his arms around himself and hunched over. "Ianto Jones, born August 18th, 1983. Survivor of Canary Wharf and Torchwood One."

Ianto straightened. "I see. I suppose you saw a few other choice tidbits in there as well."

"You mean the - " the Doctor's voice caught " - the Cyberman in the basement. Saw that. Can't believe Jack let you live."

Ianto thought of half a dozen things he could say to this, from the furious to the sarcastic. He rejected all of them in favor of honesty, if only because he was exhausted. "Me neither."

The Doctor looked up at him. "Glad he did, though."

Ianto didn't know what to say to that. *Thanks* was the only thing that came to mind, and it sounded asinine even in his head. He decided

to ignore it. "Try and get out of those pajamas. I'm going to turn the heat up."

"Thanks." The Doctor started unbuttoning his pajama top with clumsy, half-frozen fingers.

Ianto turned the thermostat to thirty and pulled a blanket off his bed. He caught sight of his mobile on the nightstand and hesitated, wondering if he should call Jack. The Doctor had told him nothing had breached the Hub. That left very few options for the source of his injuries. Jack might not be able to stay dead, but the Hub contained hundreds, if not thousands, of ways for him to do himself real harm if he was in self-destruct mode.

Ianto shook his head. He only had so many hands, and he had one non-hypothetical and very mortal patient right in front of him. Jack would have to help himself until morning.

The Doctor had managed to strip off his shirt and pajama trousers and maneuver himself over to the side of the tub. He had his feet in the water and was wincing in pain. "Bloody hell, that stings," he panted.

"Just wait till I clean them." Ianto set the neatly folded blanket on the toilet and reached around the Doctor to turn off the tap. "In you get," he said, helping the Doctor lower himself into the water. He tried to keep his touch as impersonal and professional as possible. He certainly didn't notice that the Doctor's body was thin, just shy of skinny. Nor did he notice that there was a smattering of light brown, slightly curly hair across his chest and down his belly. Certainly, he didn't happen to see what sort of cock the Doctor had.

It was impossible to tell in the bath, anyway, especially with poor lighting. But if it had been, Ianto wouldn't have noticed.

Fortunately the Doctor didn't seem to notice Ianto valiantly not noticing. He sank back into the water with a groan. "That feels so good," he whispered. Ianto smiled and soaked a flannel, then squeezed it out into the Doctor's hair. The Doctor sank lower, so the water was up to his bruised chin.

"We really should be icing your jaw. And your eye."

The Doctor shuddered. "No ice."

"But the swelling -"

"*No ice.*" He squeezed his eyes shut. "I was so cold. I've never been so cold."

"But you must have visited cold planets," Ianto said, gently swabbing dried blood away with the flannel. The Doctor's nose wasn't terribly swollen, but any pressure made him flinch.

"Very cold," the Doctor said, nodding. "But I was a Time Lord. A healthy core body temperature for me was fifteen degrees Celsius, and I could control it if I needed to. Now I'm a ludicrous thirty-seven degrees, and if I go even one tiny degree one way or the other all my enzyme reactions are thrown off."

Ianto blinked. "It does sound a bit inconvenient when you put it that way." He rinsed the flannel out in the water before wringing it out, folding it over, and laying it across the Doctor's forehead. "Now. You want me to do your feet in the bath or wait until you're out?"

"I'm never getting out," the Doctor mumbled.

"In the bath, then," Ianto said, mostly to himself. The Doctor was unresisting as Ianto picked his foot up out of the bathwater, dried it off with his fluffiest towel, and started swabbing it with antiseptic to clean out all the

dirt and grime that had worked its way under the broken skin. Fortunately there didn't seem to be any gravel to dig out. They'd looked much worse covered in dried blood and dirt, but he imagined they'd be painful for several days. Aside from the injuries, they were unusually smooth, with no calluses to speak of, nothing at all that would have protected them. He supposed that made sense; the Doctor's feet were, after all, less than two days old.

"So," Ianto said at last, "what happened?"

The Doctor lifted his chin just far enough to talk without getting water in his mouth. "Jack."

"That much I figured. Care to elaborate?"

Silence. Ianto managed to keep the eyeroll on the inside and focused his attention very carefully on the Doctor's foot. "You don't have to tell me. Only, it's four in the morning, you're in my flat, and I'm cleaning your feet, which you shredded walking here from the Hub. Also," he looked up and caught the Doctor's eye, "Jack's my . . . something." A weaker finish than Ianto would've liked, but he couldn't quite bring himself to say *boyfriend*.

The Doctor sighed. "It's not that I don't want to tell you. It's just not really my story to tell."

"Doctor."

"Fine." The Doctor pushed himself up so his bare shoulders peeked above the water, like two freckled islands. "Jack . . . is having nightmares."

Time to switch feet. Ianto lowered the one he'd been working on carefully back into the water and picked up the other. "Hardly surprising," he said.

"Yes, well . . . Time Lords are psychic. And it seems that Time Lord-human biological metacrisis are also psychic." The Doctor fell silent. Ianto glanced up to find his eyes focused unblinkingly on his foot in Ianto's hands. "I dreamed his dream. Twice. I woke up choking on dirt. Last night I didn't know. Then today we talked, you and I, and I realized. I couldn't - I couldn't stand by and do nothing when it happened again."

Ianto could see where this was going. "So you tried to wake him up," he guessed, "but he didn't know who you were, or he was still in the dream, and he got violent." He had seen Jack in that state, once or twice. It was terrifying. No wonder the Doctor had run.

The Doctor shook his head. "He knew exactly who I was." He sank down into the water again. "He was screaming, Ianto. Not out loud, but for him to project that strongly - he's in so much pain, and I'm making it worse just by being here." He turned his head and closed his eyes. "I'll call Martha in the morning. Perhaps I can stay with her or Sarah Jane until I get my financial situation sorted."

In silence, Ianto finished cleaning the Doctor's foot and lowered it into the water. "Thank you for telling me."

The Doctor opened his eyes. "Thank you for helping me." Ianto shrugged.

The Doctor insisted he could get himself out of the tub, so whilst he did that, Ianto unearthed his warmest pajamas from the bottom of his pajama drawer. He paused to cast a longing look toward his bed. He supposed two nights of uninterrupted sleep were just too much to hope for. But the Doctor had been yawning and groggy when Ianto had left him in the

bath, so perhaps they could both settle down quickly.

He blinked. Where, he suddenly wondered, was the Doctor going to sleep? The obvious choice - the sofa - was not the most comfortable one, and the Doctor was in dire need of deep, unbroken rest. As for the less obvious choice - Ianto's bed - he found himself not terribly enamored with the idea of sacrificing it on the altar of the greater good. The Doctor wasn't the only one who'd had a very long week.

"Oh, to hell with it," he muttered. It wasn't as though Jack could object on any level.

He found the Doctor sitting on the lid of the toilet, wrapped in the blanket Ianto had retrieved earlier. He was drooping, falling asleep where he sat. Ianto helped him into the pajamas and then pushed him back down onto the toilet lid. He crouched to apply antibiotic ointment to each foot and carefully tape gauze over the worst of the abrasions. When he was done, he knelt back and looked up at the Doctor.

It was, without a doubt, the most unguarded Ianto had ever seen him - far more so than when he'd been naked in the bath. His head was bowed and his eyes were closed, but there was something breathtakingly sad in his expression. His left hand rubbed slowly at the right side of his chest.

"Doctor," Ianto said, very quietly, "does your chest hurt?" The Doctor shook his head. Ianto reached up to cover the Doctor's hand with his own. "Doctor. Talk to me."

"No point. There's nothing you can do." The Doctor drew a deep, shuddering breath, and wiped his eyes with his free hand. "I'm sorry."

I'm just so tired. And it hurts. I didn't realize how much it would hurt, losing her."

lanto frowned. "Rose?" he guessed, based on what little he knew.

The Doctor gave a little laugh. "You would think that, wouldn't you? But no. I love Rose, but I've loved other companions, too. No, this . . ." He opened his eyes at last and fixed them on lanto's. "Imagine losing your soulmate, your home, and your - your . . ." He made a frustrated noise. "There's no word for it in English." He rubbed his chest again. "I never really thought it'd happen. She was always there. And now she's gone. And then I think, what am I without her? Am I even the Doctor?"

Realization dawned. "The TARDIS."

The Doctor dropped his gaze and nodded. "I'm sorry. It just comes over me sometimes."

lanto squeezed the Doctor's hand. "That's normal with grief. It'll get better with time. Sleep helps, too, I've found." He'd slept so much in the days following Lisa's death. Part of it had been physical and emotional exhaustion; he'd run himself ragged keeping her alive and the others ignorant. But part of it had been sheer escapism. He couldn't exactly recommend the method, but he could say from experience that it offered a certain relief. "On that note, it's time for bed."

The Doctor allowed lanto to help him to his feet. His head fell to one side to rest on lanto's shoulder as they shuffled slowly through lanto's overheated apartment. But at the doorway to the bedroom, he balked.

"No," he said, pulling away.

"Yes," lanto insisted, taking hold of his arm.

"You don't want to sleep on the sofa, believe me. I don't want you sleeping there either. It's a big bed. We'll share." The Doctor shook his head, stubbornly. lanto smiled, coaxingly. "It'll be warmer."

The Doctor hesitated. Then he nodded, and lanto sighed in relief. He really hadn't the energy for a longer argument.

He stopped just short of tucking the Doctor in. Instead he went to turn the heat down, so that neither of them would wake up sweltering. By the time he returned, the Doctor was in bed with the duvet pulled up to his chin, already sound asleep.

lanto un-set his alarm as he got into bed. He and the Doctor both deserved to sleep as long as they could - or until Jack called in a panic, whichever came first. lanto snorted quietly. As though there was any question about which would come first.

"Jack. Jack. *Jack*. Will you shut up and listen?"

The Doctor cracked one eye open just far enough to see lanto propped up on one elbow on the other side of the bed, hissing into his mobile. "He's fine. He's here. He wasn't in great shape when he got here, but - Jack. *Jack*. Christ." lanto threw the covers back and padded out of the room, feet slapping softly against the bare wood of the floor. The Doctor strained to hear, but his hearing was average for a human, and a twenty-first century one at that. He gave up and relaxed, letting his eyes slide shut again. It was not quite seven in the morning, according to lanto's bedside clock.

He'd dozed off again by the time Ianto returned, but he woke briefly as he slid back into bed. "Jack okay?" the Doctor asked groggily.

"Not in the slightest," Ianto sighed. "But he's well enough for now. I told him it was a long night and we're having a lie-in. Go back to sleep."

He woke again, much later, to the delicious and rather novel sensation of being clean, warm, and well-cared for. He stretched, still half asleep, and burrowed into the covers. The other half of the bed was empty, but murmurs from the next room let him know Ianto was in the flat.

It was ridiculous, the Doctor knew, to feel safer in Ianto's flat than in the Hub. But the back of his brain would not be reasoned with. All it knew was that he was comfortable, no longer teetering on the edge of mental and physical collapse, and the bed smelled like one of the few people who had shown him any kindness so far. The Doctor snuffled deeper into his pillow. Ianto might not be privy to Jack's 51st century pheromones, but he smelled lovely all the same. In fact -

The Doctor froze. Was that - it *was*! He lifted the duvet and sneaked a peek underneath. Flannel didn't hide much. Fortunately, the duvet would hide quite a bit more.

It was nothing, he told himself. Just a normal biochemical reaction, very common in the human male when he woke in the morning. It certainly did not mean that he was lusting after Ianto. Ianto was Jack's boyfriend-lover-partner-whatever, and according to the sexual mores of this place and time, that rendered him completely off limits. *Completely*. Not that it

even mattered, because he was leaving Cardiff today.

Just as soon as he pried himself out of this bed. Which would be happening any moment now.

This project was not advanced when Ianto padded back into the room, tossed his mobile onto his nightstand, and collapsed back into bed. The Doctor rolled onto his side to face him, pillowing his unbruised cheek on his hand. They looked at each other steadily over the intervening eighteen inches of bed.

"Is Jack all right?" the Doctor asked at last.

Ianto shook his head. "I think we established last night that *all right* is something Jack very much is not." He sighed. "He doesn't remember most of what happened. He woke up with bruised knuckles and had no idea where you were. It took me fifteen minutes to convince him he hadn't killed you and dumped your body in the bay." Ianto rolled onto his back and looked up at the ceiling. "It's bad enough that I took the liberty of ringing Martha."

The Doctor flinched. He'd been intending to do it himself, but for Ianto to do it meant he'd become something he'd never wanted to be - a burden. But what else did you call someone who showed up on your doorstep in the middle of the night, needed to be coddled and cared for, and then, on top of everything else, took over half your bed? Still, there was no denying that it stung, far worse somehow than the bruise on the Doctor's face.

"Thanks," he managed. "Did she say if I could stay with her? It'll only be for a couple of days."

"What?" Ianto glanced over at him, frowning. "Oh. I didn't ask her."

It was the Doctor's turn to frown. "Then what did you ring her about?"

"I asked if she'd mind terribly if we requisitioned her as a temporary replacement medic." Ianto rolled back onto his side. "We're none of us doing well. I'm a mess, you're a mess, Jack's the biggest mess of all. Gwen's a mess, too, in her own way. I'm afraid we're all just going to get sucked into one big downward spiral together."

"But Martha has what it takes not to be sucked in," the Doctor said. Partly through medical training, he reflected, and partly due to temperament. It was what made her so good in a crisis, what had allowed her to walk a world filled with tragedy for a year and come out the other side.

"Exactly." Ianto rubbed a hand over his face. "She said she'd be here this afternoon. I need to go to the Hub and warn Jack. He'll probably shout a lot. It's all right if you'd rather not be there."

The Doctor sighed. "I still think the best thing might be for me to leave. It seems to be what Jack wants."

"Jack doesn't know what he wants." Ianto pushed himself up on one arm and met and held the Doctor's gaze firmly. "Doctor. I don't know all of your history with him. But I do know that he hates it when you leave. So don't, this time. Stay."

Stay. It had never been his forte, staying. Especially not with Jack. He'd run from him on Satellite Five and he'd been running from him ever since, even when Jack was living and dying right by his side. He could run again, he thought. He could pretend it was for Jack's own good, run off to London, and spend the rest of

his relatively brief human lifespan avoiding Cardiff. Or he could . . . not.

"Okay," he said slowly. "I'll stay. For now, at least."

Ianto sagged back into the pillows. "Oh thank God." He turned his head to look at the Doctor. "You've just saved us all a world of grief. Thank you." He closed his eyes and let out a long breath. "Thank you."

The Doctor didn't know what to say to that. Fortunately, Ianto didn't really seem to expect an answer. They lay there a few minutes longer, neither of them speaking, just enjoying the warmth and comfort of the bed. The Doctor's arousal had abated with their conversation, but it returned now as a spark of heat in his belly. He could have fought it, but he didn't. He chose to let it simmer comfortably. He was human now, and this was part of it. And it was . . . nice. Pleasant. Pleasurable. Human noses were so insensitive, it wasn't as though Ianto need ever know. It was his body, his human body, and this secret was his to keep.

It was nearly noon when they got to the Hub. Gwen took one look at the Doctor's face and her mouth dropped open in a nearly perfect 'O'. The Doctor ignored her staring, retrieved a clean suit from his cupboard, and changed in the locker room. By the time he resurfaced, Ianto had gone up to see Jack and there was no way to avoid Gwen's gaze.

She crossed her arms over her chest and gave him an arch look. "Did you run into a door?"

"It's not as bad as it looks." It ached fiercely this morning, actually, and his feet were worse, but a double dose of paracetamol had taken the edge off.

Gwen pursed her lips. "I hope not. It *looks* like you got hit by a bus."

"Not quite."

She sighed. "Yeah, I know. Ianto rang me this morning," she added when he raised an eyebrow. "Seriously. Are you okay?"

The Doctor smiled. "I'm fine. Really."

Gwen didn't look like she believed him. "Well," she said, as voices rose upstairs, "I suppose everything's relative."

The Doctor was seated at his work station, deeply immersed in code, when the door to Jack's office opened and Ianto emerged. His face was perfectly blank, but there was a line of tension between his eyebrows and two more around his mouth. "Don't talk to me," he said, when Gwen started to say something. "I'll be in the firing range. And don't come after me unless the Rift explodes and starts raining weevils dancing the Macarena."

The Doctor watched him trudge down the stairs towards the archives and - apparently - firing range. Then, feeling someone watching him, he turned to look up at Jack's office. Jack gazed back, arms crossed over his chest. His gaze was hard and glittering, but as the Doctor watched it simply . . . fractured. Jack raised a hand and touched his own jaw, just where the Doctor's was bruised. Then he reached over and pulled the blinds shut.

Music, the Doctor decided. He needed music. Fortunately, it seemed that Tosh had worked to music as well, particularly classical. He unearthed headphones from a drawer, pulled them down firmly over his ears, and proceeded to bury himself in the mainframe. It was one of the most elegant pieces of pure AI the Doctor

had ever encountered, but that didn't mean it was perfect. There were still places where rough edges could be smoothed, like rubbing out the knots in the muscles of someone's back. It was just enough like doing repairs on the TARDIS to hurt, but it was also soothingly familiar. When things got rough, the Doctor tinkered. He always had done.

The Rift siren nearly made him jump out of his skin. He shoved the headphones off and winced as Jack thundered down the stairs to stand over Gwen's shoulder at her station. "Where?" Jack demanded shortly.

"Splott, looks like," Gwen said. "It just dumped . . . something. Possibly several somethings."

"Right. Where's Ianto?"

"Here, sir," Ianto said, a bit breathless as he emerged from the stairs, weapons in hand. He distributed them to Jack and Gwen.

"Spotless," Jack remarked as he checked the chamber of his gun.

"I should hope so, sir," Ianto said evenly.

The Doctor stood. "Jack -"

"You're not cleared for field work yet," Jack said, without looking at him. "Stay on the comms."

The Doctor sank back into his chair. "Right." He watched the three of them arm themselves and leave through the door into the car park. He pulled the communications system up on the computer to be ready when the others actually reached the site. Then he went and made a cup of tea. Tea made it easier to think, somehow.

Jack's field work line was as flimsy an excuse as the Doctor had ever heard - as though his entire life hadn't been one long stretch of *field work* - but the subtext was clear: Jack didn't want to deal with him in the field. Perhaps Ianto had been wrong. Perhaps Jack knew perfectly well what he wanted, and the Doctor wasn't listening, because the truth, if he were honest with himself, was that he didn't much want to leave. He couldn't say he liked it here, not yet, but he thought he could like it here. Cardiff was a bit, well, Cardiff, but life was about the company one kept, and he liked Ianto and Gwen. Jack was . . . rather more complicated. Jack was a force of nature unto himself, and the Doctor wasn't, not anymore. He wondered how Ianto managed. Perhaps he should ask.

The work would be interesting, if he stayed. Torchwood was Torchwood, but perhaps he could encourage the others to be a little less guns-now-questions-later. He had always excelled at asking questions. Particularly annoying ones.

He finished his tea, put the mug in the sink, and went back to his work station, where he sat fidgeting. The comms were silent. The Doctor tested that they were working, and Gwen confirmed for him that they were, but no communication came through. Either the three of them weren't talking at all - hardly likely, given what the Doctor knew of them - or they had their comms switched off so he couldn't hear them.

He swallowed. There was something about that that made him very uneasy.

He couldn't stay sitting, waiting for communication that might never come. He put his headset on so that he'd hear the others if

they came back on line and stood. The air down here smelled the same no matter what time of day it was. It was always dark, always cool, always a bit dank. The air filtration system was excellent, Ianto had assured him, but there was only so much it could do for a place that was really a hole in the ground. A cave. A tomb.

The Doctor crossed his arms over his chest and rubbed them. Torchwood never let go of its employees, not even in death. If he stayed - if the others allowed him to stay - this place would be his tomb, provided there was enough of him left to fill one of the drawers down in the vault. Was that better or worse, he wondered, than being left to rot? Jack had been buried alive for two thousand years. How did he stand it down here, night after night? Or was that the point? Did he choose the nightmares and the dark and the horrible weight of Cardiff pressing down on him even here?

A noise penetrated. The Doctor blinked. He was sitting on the floor by the pool, knees drawn up to his chest. He couldn't remember how he'd got there. His head was spinning, his heart was pounding, and he couldn't get his breathing under control. There was that noise again. It finally resolved itself into a voice. "*Doctor?*" it said.

Ianto. Thank all of Time it wasn't Jack. "Here," he managed. "Sorry. Sorry."

"*Where were you?*"

"Oh. You know. Loo." The Doctor rubbed his hands through his hair, then clutched fistfuls of it. It hurt just enough to make the room sharpen. "Sorry. Did you find it?"

"Yeah. Just space junk, Jack says. We're bringing it back for you to take a look. Never know what might be useful."

The Doctor nodded, then realized Ianto couldn't see him. He swallowed hard. "Yeah."

There was a brief pause. *"Doctor, are you all right?"*

What was there to say to that? Especially over an open comm that Gwen and Jack could hear as well. "Yeah. 'Course."

He could tell Ianto didn't believe him one bit, but the man was nothing if not discreet. *"Okay. Oh, Martha texted me. She's at the train station and she's just going to get a cab. She'll probably beat us home, so let her in, all right?"*

"Right. Yeah."

"We'll see you soon. Ianto out."

The Doctor yanked his headset off with relief. His hands were shaking, and his knees, when he managed to push himself to his feet, were like water. He collapsed into his chair at his workstation and dug his palms into his eyes until he saw bright white. A mess, Ianto had called him. He'd called himself a mess, too, to be fair, and said Jack was worse than either of them, but the Doctor rather thought he might modify that assessment if he could see him right now. It was probably a good thing he'd been alone for his little episode by the pool.

A good thing. Right.

A buzzer went off, alerting him that there was someone in the tourist office upstairs. The Doctor staggered to his feet to check the CCTV. "Please let it be Martha," he muttered, bringing up the footage for the tourist office.

It was Martha, standing at the counter and rifling through brochures. The Doctor had to stop and breathe for a moment, but then he was moving, almost running, to the lift. It seemed to take forever to reach the top, but once there he suddenly found himself struck speechless, so startled was he by the depth of his relief at the sight of her.

"You know," Martha said, without glancing up, "you really should have a few more of these for good 'rainy day' activities. All these lovely brochures for hiking in the Welsh countryside aren't going to be very useful to me today." She looked up with a smile. It froze.

"Hi," the Doctor said weakly.

She put the brochures down. "Hey there. Sorry, for some reason I thought it'd be Ianto."

"Nope. Just me. The others are out. The Rift dumped space junk in Splott." He tried to smile, but he didn't think he managed it very well. Ridiculous to suddenly feel like he might start crying. She was just so *Martha* in her red jacket with her hair pulled back. Sensible, brilliant Martha. He wondered how soon he could hug her without coming over all clingy.

Fortunately, she seemed able to read his mind. "Come here, you," she said, stepping forward with her arms held out. He couldn't help burying his face in her neck, once he was there. This, at least, was familiar. Hugging Martha.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled after a little while, aware that the embrace had gone on longer than was socially acceptable. He just couldn't seem to let go.

"It's all right." Her hand rubbed circles on his back. "God, you're so much warmer now."

He hooked his chin over her shoulder. "Yup. Thirty-seven degrees Celsius." He paused. "I think so, anyway. Haven't really checked."

"Well, then." She pulled away, but not too far - just enough to look him in the eye. "That's where we should begin, yeah? With a proper physical to get your baselines for everything."

He nodded. "Thank you," he whispered.

"Don't mention it." She reached down and gripped his hand to lead him into the Hub. "This is what friends are for."

Chapter Four

lanto balanced two cups of coffee, sugar, cream, and a plate of ginger-nut biscuits on a tray as he eased the door to the conference room open and then closed. Martha was sitting at the table, flipping through a file - test results, by the look of it.

"Here you go," he said, setting the tray on the table. He handed her a cup.

"Ah, yes. Thank you." She added cream and sugar and took her first sip. Her eyes slid closed in caffeine-induced ecstasy. "God, it might be worth accepting a permanent position here just for the coffee."

lanto sipped his own coffee, black. "Things not going well at UNIT?"

"Well, you know." Martha broke a biscuit apart and ate a crumb. "They asked me to end the world not that long ago, so we're having a few issues."

lanto winced. "I'm sorry. You do know you're welcome here - Jack would love to have you, and we need the help. I don't want to bring in anyone from the outside right now, not while we're all walking wounded."

Martha nodded. "We'll see. Tom's in London. I can't just up and leave."

"They need doctors here, too," lanto pointed out.

"I know." She smiled, a little tightly by lanto's estimation. "Anyway, enough about me. How are you?"

"Better than most, these days. Speaking of which," he nodded towards the folder, "how is he?"

Martha tapped the folder lightly with her fingernail. "I can't tell you much, I'm afraid. Doctor-patient confidentiality. He needs to be able to trust me."

lanto sighed. "I know. But I'm holding things together here with both hands and a ball of twine. There are things I need to know. Is he stable, physically? Mentally? Should we let him go out in the field?"

Martha frowned. "Yes, basically; no, not really; and I wouldn't."

lanto sat back. "Can you elaborate at all?"

Martha was silent, briefly. "He's actually doing fairly well, when you consider what a shock he's had. He's a different species, with a body that looks the same on the outside and is anything but on the inside. He's missing entire senses, lanto. Imagine how long it would take you or me to get used to losing our sight or our hearing. We might never fully adjust." She paused, twisting her engagement ring round her finger. "But that's not the worst of it, I think."

lanto nodded. "The TARDIS."

Martha raised her eyebrows. "You've picked up on that already?"

"He told me last night. He was exhausted and in pain, and I think it just was too much for him. I don't understand it - I always thought it was just a ship - but he seems to really be grieving."

"She's not just a ship," Martha said, very firmly. "I would never presume to say I understood

how she works, but she's a living thing, sentient, and I think she and the Doctor had - have - a very deep connection. Losing her probably feels like losing his right arm."

lanto sipped his coffee whilst he digested this. "So what you're telling me is that he's lost his sight and his right arm, all at once."

"More or less." Martha sighed. "I'm of half a mind to call the Doctor - the *other* Doctor - and tell him to get his arse back here to clean up his mess. He had no right to abandon him like that, and certainly no right to push him off on Jack. But I don't think it would help."

lanto imagined Jack's probable reaction to having both Doctors - and Rose, presumably - in the Hub. He grimaced. "I don't think so either. What's done is done, and now we have to deal with the consequences. And on that note, what is your prescription, Dr. Jones?"

Martha smiled. "I have three. Two of them literal - I gave him some mild sleeping pills, and something to help with anxiety. I'm telling you this," she added, "because I need you to make sure he takes them when necessary. I'm not sure he will do, on his own."

lanto nodded. "And the other one?"

Martha sat back and crossed her arms over her chest. "I don't want him spending the night in the Hub. Personally, I don't think any of you should. If it's necessary to have someone on duty at all times, you should take it in shifts, no more than two nights a week for any one of you. But after what happened last night, for both his sake and Jack's, I think it's very important that the Doctor sleep elsewhere. Jack would never forgive himself if he seriously injured him."

lanto was forced to concede that this made sense under the circumstances. He nodded. "I think Gwen has a spare room. I'll speak with her this afternoon."

"lanto." Martha was giving him a look.

"What?" he asked blankly. Martha went on looking at him. Realization dawned. "No, no, no," he said, shaking his head. "Martha, really. I just don't have the space."

"Let me tell you something, lanto," she said, leaning forward. "The Doctor and I spoke at length during his examination, and he hardly mentioned Gwen. He talked about Jack, and he talked about you. Right now you're the only one he trusts."

"He trusts you," lanto said, thinking about his one bedroom apartment and how there was barely enough room for himself, much less the Doctor. Not to mention their combined issues. "Is there a second bed in your hotel room?"

"Oh, no," Martha said. She stood and started gathering her paperwork. "Absolutely not."

"Why not?"

"Because I know my boundaries." She stood and looked at him, the Doctor's file under her arm. "Now, I'm going to speak to Jack, and then I'm going to speak to Gwen, and after that, you and I are going to have another little chat. Don't think I missed how you deflected my question about you onto the Doctor."

lanto sighed. "Very well."

"And don't try to hide in the archives," she added as she backed out of the room. "I'll find you and I'll be annoyed because I had to hunt you down." She poked her head back around the doorjamb. "Oh - and thanks for the coffee."

Ianto vented a sigh. Perhaps this hadn't been such a brilliant plan after all. Except . . . he suspected it was. As annoying as it might be to have someone asking all the questions none of them wanted to answer, he thought it might be the only way out for any of them.

Martha's talk with Jack was quieter, at least, than Ianto's had been. He kept one eye on the office door the whole time she was in there, but no noise was discernible. There was a bond between them, Ianto knew, though whether it was because they were both members of the Former Companions Club or because they both remembered the year Jack said had never happened, he didn't know. Perhaps Jack would listen to her where he wouldn't to Ianto.

Martha looked strained when she emerged, with a small line between her eyebrows and one at each corner of her mouth. Ianto sympathized; speaking with Jack was enough to give anyone a headache, these days. He watched her disappear into the loo and come back a little damp, as though she'd splashed some water on her face. But she was smiling as she stopped by Gwen's desk. Gwen laughed at something she said and stood, grabbing her purse and her jacket.

"We're going for coffee," Gwen said. "Anyone want anything?"

The Doctor, ensconced once more at Tosh's work station, shook his head without looking up from the "space junk" they'd dragged back to the Hub. "No, thanks," Ianto said. "Have fun." There was a bounce in Gwen's step as they left that had been missing for days. Ianto was less worried about her than he was about the Doctor or Jack, but she had lost Tosh and Owen, too. A couple of hours out of the Hub with Martha could only do her good.

He glanced up at Jack's office, wondering if he should try again. Their conversation that morning had been unpleasant enough that he had spent two hours in the armory, cleaning weapons until he'd thought he'd go blind. Perhaps Martha had mellowed him out, Ianto reflected. Or perhaps Jack was more annoyed with him than ever for calling her in.

Before he could make up his mind, the door to the office opened and Jack emerged, frowning. Ianto busied himself with some mindless tidying up so his staring wouldn't be quite so blatant and watched avidly out the corner of his eye as Jack came to a halt beside the Doctor.

The Doctor pulled his headphones off. "Jack," he said, a little warily. There was an awkward pause.

Jack drew a deep breath. "I'm sorry. About last night. I don't - I don't remember most of it, but I don't have to remember to know I hurt you. I wouldn't - I would never do that on purpose."

The Doctor nodded. The set of his shoulders relaxed. "I know, Jack."

Jack nodded. "Good." He started to turn away.

"Wait," the Doctor said, half-standing. Ianto sucked in a breath. "Jack, the reason I was in your room last night - I want to help you. You don't have to suffer like that."

"No," Jack said, expression darkening.

The Doctor stared. "Why not?"

"Because I said so!" Jack barked. "Is it so hard to believe that I wouldn't want *you*, of all people, poking around in my head?" The Doctor's head snapped back, as though Jack had struck him. "The dreams are my problem,

not yours." He turned away and took the stairs two at a time up to his office.

Ianto hesitated for half a second, then tossed his cleaning rag aside and chased after him. He reached the top just in time to wedge his foot in the door and keep Jack from slamming it in his face. Ianto squeezed through and shut the door behind him.

"Ianto," Jack said warningly.

"Why not?" Ianto demanded, arms crossed over his chest, back up against the door. "Why won't you let him help you?" Jack didn't reply. He turned his back on Ianto and started shuffling paperwork on his desk into random piles. "Dammit, Jack, why won't you talk to me? Why are you punishing yourself like this?" Jack's shoulders stiffened. Ianto's mouth fell open. "That's it, isn't it? *Why?* Wasn't two thousand years in the ground enough?"

Jack said nothing. Ianto ruthlessly allowed the silence to stretch. "I don't remember most of it," Jack said at last. He rubbed the back of his neck. "I remember a few deaths at the beginning, and then when Torchwood got me out - the dirt was -" He swallowed. "But most of it's a blank. Not enough oxygen for me to wake up all the way. I only remember a few."

"And those aren't enough? Jack, that's pathological."

"I know!" Jack burst out, turning to face him at last. "I know, Ianto, I know. You think I don't know?"

"Then let the Doctor help you. Please." Ianto's voice cracked, but he was past caring. "I miss you so much."

Jack shook his head, his expression stricken. "I can't, Ianto. I'm sorry. I can't."

Ianto looked away. For a long time, the only sound in the office was Jack's harsh breathing. When he could finally trust himself to speak, he asked, "Did Martha mention to you about the Doctor not sleeping here anymore?"

Jack nodded. "Seems like it's for the best."

"I think so." Ianto swallowed. "He's staying with me. At my flat."

"Oh." Jack was quiet. "Does that mean you'll also be staying at your flat?"

Ianto felt his face flush with anger. "Jack, what part of this conversation was supposed to make me think you care where I spend the night?"

Jack looked down at his feet. "You're right. I'm sorry. Ianto," he added, raising his head as Ianto turned to leave. "I really am."

"I'm sure you are," Ianto said evenly. He turned and walked away, down the stairs, across the Hub, and past the Doctor. Perhaps there were a few weapons he'd missed earlier.

The Doctor opened his eyes to the watery early morning light in Ianto's flat. He blinked a few times to clear away the gummy feeling and rolled over to check the time on his mobile. 6:25AM, exactly five minutes before the alarm was set to wake him. In the three weeks he'd been on Earth, in Cardiff, at Torchwood, he'd never actually heard the alarm. He woke at 6:25 every morning without fail.

The Doctor sat up, rubbed his face, and stood to fold the blankets from his "bed" and put

them away behind the sofa. His dressing gown lay folded over a chair, and he shrugged into it, belting it around his waist against the chilly Cardiff morning. Then he shuffled into the kitchen. He put the kettle on and decided that toast would have to do. This new body did not function very well on only four hours of sleep, he had discovered to his chagrin.

The kettle had switched itself off by the time Ianto emerged, flushed and damp from his shower. The Doctor forced himself to focus on buttering every last inch of the last piece of toast, studiously ignoring the two drops of water chasing each other across Ianto's collarbone and under his dressing gown. Ianto headed straight for the kettle and made the tea, while the Doctor carried the toast to the table and pulled an assortment of jam out of the refrigerator.

By mutual, unspoken agreement, neither of them said a word until each had taken his first sip of tea. Then Ianto sighed and said, "I hate early mornings after late nights. It's going to be a long day." The Doctor grimaced in agreement, but his mouthful of toast and strawberry jam prevented him from answering. "I was thinking, actually," Ianto went on, "that if the Rift behaved today, I might try and get Jack out of the Hub for awhile, maybe go to lunch or the cinema. Maybe both."

The Doctor swallowed. "That sounds like a good plan." He didn't add that he would consider it borderline miraculous if it succeeded. Jack had rarely left the Hub except on Torchwood business since the Doctor had arrived.

"You're welcome to come if you like," Ianto added, spreading apricot jam on his second piece of toast.

The Doctor looked down at his plate full of crumbs and tried to imagine sitting in a theater with Jack and Ianto, third wheel on an outing Ianto undoubtedly hoped would bear some semblance to a date. The thought made his stomach twinge. "Thanks," he said, standing to put his plate in the dishwasher, "but I'll pass. We're getting a supplies delivery today, and I promised Martha I'd help her sort everything."

Ianto nodded. "Well, if you change your mind, let me know."

"Of course," the Doctor said, and escaped gratefully to the shower.

The mirror was still fogged and the bathroom still smelled of Ianto's shampoo. The Doctor paused long enough to take a deep breath before turning the shower on and stripping out of his pajamas. These mornings with Ianto were becoming an exquisite torture. The Doctor should have been chafing at the domesticity, but he wasn't; in fact, he loved it more than anything else in his day. He loved how they'd split the morning duties: he made the toast, Ianto made the tea, and they loaded the dishwasher together. He loved that neither of them felt forced to talk if they were too brain-fogged. He loved that he was the one who saw Ianto straight out of the shower, face flushed from the heat and hair curling from the steam.

It was only here, during the ten precious minutes of real privacy he got every day, that he could admit any of this to himself. And it was here that he could imagine Ianto, only minutes earlier, savoring his own privacy by touching himself the way the Doctor was touching himself now, his hand slick with soap. He imagined Ianto leaning against the side of the shower, just as he was, the hot spray

hitting his back, stinging slightly, toes curling from the pleasure . . .

The Doctor forced himself to stop. He braced himself with both arms against the tile and breathed deeply. The fantasies were getting out of hand. He was skilled at quashing them, but he worried he might not have the willpower for much longer. Telling himself that Ianto was with Jack and had no interest in anyone else became harder as the weeks went by, and the Doctor watched Ianto become ever more frustrated and lonely.

He turned the water to cold long enough to shock the arousal out of his system, and then back up to warm for the rest of his ablutions.

They spoke little on the ride into the Hub, though the silence was not in any way uncomfortable. Ianto had the radio turned to a Welsh station; the Doctor leaned his head against the window, let the Welsh wash over him without comprehension, and watched Cardiff slide by outside. He tested the words out in his head: *I'm falling in love with Ianto Jones*. Terrifying and yet rather exhilarating. In his millennium of experience he'd never felt unrequited love. He would savor it for what it was, he told himself. No one need ever know.

That was the last good moment the Doctor had for the rest of the day. The mainframe, perhaps sensing that his affections and thoughts lay elsewhere, was entirely recalcitrant, and his sleep-deprived brain felt like it'd been replaced with cotton wool. Things got worse at noon, when he and Gwen bore unwilling witness to Jack and Ianto's muffled argument about leaving the Hub for lunch. Martha, who was in

the autopsy bay with the door shut, was spared.

"I hate it when the two of them fight," Gwen confessed, staring up the stairs towards Jack's office. "It's like . . . oh God, never tell either of them I said this, but it's like listening to your mum and dad fight, you know?"

"Er, no, not really," the Doctor said, with an embarrassed smile.

"Oh," Gwen said. "Sorry, I guess sometimes I forget - did you even have parents? I mean . . ."

The Doctor swiveled his chair around to face her and smiled gently. "It's okay. I had parents. Gallifreyan family structures were just different. Very stratified. If my parents argued, I never heard them. But I do think I see what you mean about Ianto and Jack."

"It's not that I think of either of them like a parent," Gwen said, pulling a face. "That would be disturbing. But when they're good, things are good." She paused to nibble on a nail. "Not to mention, Ianto always looks so miserable afterward. I'm glad you're staying with him. He's the sort to just live in his own head unless he has something to focus on."

The Doctor shrugged. "I'm not sure how much I help, really."

"You help," Gwen said with certainty. She hesitated. "I don't know how to put this, but I've watched you together a few times, when Ianto didn't know I was looking. He relaxes with you. It's like he doesn't have to keep his guard up."

The Doctor found himself with an inexplicable lump in his throat. He ducked his head. "That's

very kind of you to say," he said at last, voice a little tight.

"It's true. He's -" Gwen broke off as the door to Jack's office opened and Ianto appeared. "Firing range?" she asked, when he paused at the bottom of the stairs. Ianto nodded, and disappeared without another word. The Doctor stared after him, wishing he had the courage to follow. But he feared saying the wrong thing and tipping Ianto off. The Doctor's life in Cardiff was a house of cards he was building bit by careful bit. Ianto finding out the truth would be the gust of wind that'd blow the whole thing over.

Gwen turned back to her work. The Doctor spent a few minutes blinking tiredly at the mainframe's stubborn code before giving up and deciding to make good on the excuse he'd given Ianto that morning. Martha greeted him with a smile and a hug and gladly set him to work restocking bandages. He settled into their familiar, friendly banter with a sense of relief, and the knowledge that here, at least, no one expected him to be brilliant.

Not that he couldn't be brilliant, of course, if the occasion called for it. But on a Thursday afternoon with four hours of sleep, it was difficult to maintain.

"So," Martha said, after a few minutes, "I think it's time for me to go back to London."

It had not been a good day. The Doctor was already tired and feeling, for lack of a better description, overly human. This, he told himself, was why that simple sentence felt like a kick to the gut. "Now?" he asked dumbly.

She poked him, smiling. "No, not now. Not tomorrow, either. Early Saturday morning, I

thought. Tom gets off at two, and I'd like to surprise him when he gets home."

"Ah," the Doctor said. "Right. That sounds nice. I just thought . . ."

"What?"

He stared down at his hands, which were still full of bandages. "I thought you might stay."

Martha shook her head. "I'm not Torchwood. Not really. Not sure I'm UNIT anymore, either." She looked away, eyes distant. "Tom knows someone at Doctors Without Borders who could get us postings together. I think I might go save lives for awhile."

"That sounds like a great idea," the Doctor said, sincerely. He would be very sorry to have her so far away, but he could hardly find fault with that plan. "You're brilliant, Martha Jones. Have I ever told you that?"

Martha grinned. "A few times. I could always stand to hear it more." Her smile softened, and she gently turned him to face her. "Hey. You're brilliant, too. I know it feels like shoving a boulder up a hill most days, but you're adapting remarkably well."

He looked away. "I suppose so."

"Plus," she added with a smile, "you've got Ianto. You don't need me."

The Doctor blinked. "What does that mean?"

"Nothing at all," she assured him, but there was a highly suspicious twinkle in her eye.

"Martha, that's not funny," the Doctor said sharply. "Ianto isn't - he's a friend. And he's Jack's -" He waved his hand vaguely. "Whatever they are. I wouldn't - I would *never* -"

"Okay, okay!" she said, raising her eyebrows.
"Sorry, I didn't mean to hit a nerve. I know Ianto's a friend. You two have got close, is all."

"That's not all," the Doctor muttered, "and you know it."

Martha raised her eyebrows yet further. "Have you been holding out on me?"

"No. No, I haven't. I just . . ." He ducked his head. "I like it first thing in the morning," he said softly, fiddling with a loose button on his suit coat, "when it's just the two of us and we're not really dressed yet, or even awake. I like the way he stirs his coffee. And sometimes, when we're watching the news at night, he puts his arm along the back of the sofa, and the tips of his fingers touch my shoulder. Just sometimes." He looked up, shyly.

"You're going to be fine," she told him. "And I'm only a phone call away if you need me. Or a train ride, for that matter."

He nodded, smiling. "Until you move to the other side of the world."

"Until then."

"Have you told the others yet?"

She shook her head. "I wanted to let you know first. They'll be okay, though. They're doing much better."

The Doctor thought of Ianto's face as he'd come out of the office and wasn't sure he agreed. But whatever was wrong there, he didn't think Martha could fix it by staying longer. And otherwise, she was right. They were all better off than when she'd arrived three weeks ago. Well. Three of them were, anyway. He nodded. "Ianto's smiling more," he offered. "He even laughed yesterday."

Martha smiled, looking satisfied. "Gwen's doing well, too. She and Rhys are planning some time away."

"Good. Someone should get out of here once in awhile." Neither of them had mentioned Jack, the Doctor noticed. The exception that proved the rule. He stepped back, put his hands on his hips, and surveyed the autopsy bay. "I suppose I'll be running this place, too, now."

"You are the Doctor," Martha agreed.

"Hmm," the Doctor said, smoothing his hand along the countertop, then picking at a spot of something that clung stubbornly to the stainless steel.

"What?"

"It's just . . ." He looked up. "Am I the Doctor? I mean, I'm not a Time Lord. I haven't got a TARDIS. Maybe I should start going by John Noble, like it says on all my papers."

"Ah," Martha said, leaning against the counter. "I was wondering when the existential crisis would kick in."

"It's not a crisis," the Doctor said, annoyed by his own apparent predictability. "It's a fair question."

"I'm not saying it isn't." Martha cocked her head and studied him. "Do you feel like the Doctor?"

The Doctor considered this. "Yes. Most of the time. It's just - I'm not who I was."

Martha shrugged. "I'm not who I was, either, before I traveled with you. And no," she poked him in the sternum, "that is not an invitation for you to go all moon-eyed and melancholy

over how you ruined my life. You changed my life, I'll give you that much."

"You mean he did," the Doctor muttered.

"No," she said sharply. "You did. All those things he did, you did them, too. No one is the same person they were ten years ago. We change. That's how it is."

"You don't usually change species."

Martha rolled her eyes. "Don't be thick, it doesn't suit you at all. My point is that if you don't *feel* like the Doctor anymore, if it bothers you to go by that name, then fine, change it. Go by John, or give yourself a middle name and use that. But that's not what you're worried about."

The Doctor crossed his arms over his chest. "Oh? Tell me then, Dr. Jones, what am I worried about?"

"You're worried the rest of us of us think you're a fraud."

The Doctor blinked. "Oh." He hesitated. "Do you?"

Martha laughed suddenly. "No. Don't be silly. Come here." She stepped forward and hugged him. The Doctor held her back and closed her eyes. Even if he could no longer tell the entire story of her day simply by breathing her in, the beloved Martha-ness of her was still clear. She didn't bother with silly perfumes, but her shampoo smelled like orange blossoms and ginger.

"No matter what name you use," she murmured in his ear, "you will always be the Doctor to me. So if you're looking for permission to go on calling yourself that, you have it."

He tightened his arms around her. "Thank you."

She let him hold her another few seconds before pulling away to smile at him. "Well, then. Existential crisis over. My work here is done."

She left two days later, as planned. The Doctor made her promise she'd visit before leaving for some far-flung corner of the globe. Strange to think that after all the places he'd been, across all of time and space, rural China was now beyond his reach. Well - not completely beyond, but it would take some doing. He'd need a visa. A *visa*.

Two weeks after Martha's departure, the Doctor was spending Saturday evening in the Hub. The Rift had been quiet all day, and so they'd all been tinkering with private projects. Ianto had vanished in the direction of the archives hours earlier, and Jack was in his office with the blinds drawn. Gwen had managed to negotiate a few days off for her and Rhys's weekend away. The Hub was as silent as it ever got.

It had been one of the best days the Doctor had had since arriving at Torchwood. Everyone had been in a particularly amiable mood. He and Ianto had stopped for coffee and pastries on the way in that morning and lingered in the cafe for close to an hour, people-watching and speaking idly about nothing in particular. The mainframe had been cooperative, allowing the Doctor to make unprecedented progress in fine-tuning Tosh's Rift-predicting program. Most importantly, Jack had allowed Ianto to coax him out of his office for lunch. He'd been in good humor, even mildly flirtatious, and Ianto's relief that things might be returning to normal had been palpable. The Doctor was

relieved as well, even though it meant that it was well and truly time for him to find his own place to live.

He sighed and clicked the next flat listing. He could afford anything he wanted, now that he had access to his old accounts, but nothing looked even remotely appealing. Hardwood floors, granite countertops, recessed lighting, views of Cardiff Bay - none of it was what he wanted. He'd been fooling himself, he thought, staring morosely at photos of yet another tastefully dull luxury flat. He'd told himself he was adapting, but all this time he'd been sleeping on Ianto's sofa, thinking that as long as he didn't find his own place, none of this was permanent.

Or maybe that wasn't it at all. Maybe it was just that none of these flats had Ianto Jones in it.

He couldn't look at any more flats, he decided. It was just after eight o'clock - past time for dinner. Perhaps he could talk Ianto into leaving the Hub. It was a nice evening, judging by the number of people streaming past on the CCTV, and a new bistro had opened down by the water. They could get something to eat, maybe take a walk afterward -

Saturday night. Bistro. Stroll by the bay. This sounded an awful lot like a date.

The Doctor grabbed fistfuls of his hair and groaned. "Pathetic," he muttered. "Just . . . pathetic." He had done everything he could to put an end to his feelings for Ianto, but nothing seemed to work. Bloody human pheromones and hormones and out of control biochemical processes in his brain. As a Time Lord he could have controlled them with a thought, but as a

human they were entirely out of his hands. It was awful.

It was almost a relief when the Rift alarm sounded. At the very least it saved the Doctor from deciding between making a probable fool out of himself or ordering pizza *again*. Jack came thundering down the stairs, coat already on, just as Ianto appeared from below. "What and where?" Ianto asked, coming to a stop behind the Doctor's chair.

The Doctor tapped the keyboard, as quick with the mainframe as he'd been with the TARDIS. "Grangetown, it looks like. But it's moving west at a fairly fast clip." Very fast, actually. "It'll probably be in Butetown by the time we intercept it."

"Right." Jack looked at the Doctor. "Are you armed?"

The Doctor retrieved his stun gun from the top drawer of his desk. "Now I am."

Jack opened his mouth to argue. "No time!" Ianto said, shoving Jack towards the door. The Doctor grabbed his coat and the portable Rift monitor and hurried after them. Jack carried his Webley, and sometimes an energy weapon if the situation called for it. Ianto carried a handgun and a stun gun. The Doctor only carried a stun gun. He was working on building a new sonic screwdriver. When it was finished, he'd have that, too. It was enough, he told himself as he swung into the backseat of the SUV, no matter what Jack thought.

He buckled himself in as they tore out of the car park and concentrated on setting the monitor up to scan for the alien. It would be dripping in Rift energy this soon after coming through.

"How we doing, Doctor?" Jack asked, glancing in the rearview mirror.

"It's changed course slightly," the Doctor reported. "I think it's avoiding major highways, but it's still basically heading towards the water." There was no use getting a more exact fix until they got a bit closer.

lanto had one hand to his earpiece. "Police are reporting a - they're calling it an *injury incident* in Grangetown. Several, actually, all in the same neighborhood. People are describing a . . . " The Doctor glanced up just in time to see him make a face. "A *flying spaghetti monster*?"

"Well, that narrows it down." Jack caught the Doctor's eye in the mirror. "You thinking what I'm thinking?"

"If you're thinking Hrantingunnn'trepil." The Doctor frowned. It was harder to say that now than it had been before.

"Only thing I know with tentacles that can fly."

"It also explains why it's heading towards the water. Jack, we do not want it in the bay."

"No shit."

"Wait a minute," lanto broke in. "What's a hrungin - hantigoon -"

The Doctor took pity on him. "Just call it a Hranti. Everyone does. And it's more or less exactly what you said - a flying spaghetti monster. Except it also swims, and the spaghetti has venomous barbs."

"I see. I don't suppose they're friendly?"

"Not in the slightest," Jack said, looking almost pleased. The Doctor supposed he was glad for the clear-cut course of action. There was no

way to reason with a Hranti and Jack knew the Doctor knew it. "If this one takes up residence in Cardiff Bay, we're likely to see a drastic increase in people disappearing from the pier and off boats. Actually, there'll probably be an increase in disappearing *boats*. They're strong and fast, and I'm not sure how we'll deal with it if it reaches the water."

lanto nodded. "Then I guess we'd better beat it there."

"That would be wise," the Doctor said. "Make a left at the light, Jack. It should be in view in about two minutes." Less perhaps, at its current rate.

lanto held his hand to his headset. "More police chatter. People are being taken to hospital, at least two in critical condition. Doctor, you said it was poisonous?"

"Yes, but if we get one of the barbs I can synthesize the antivenin." He hoped. It certainly hadn't been a problem the last time he'd run into a Hranti. His seventh self, that had been, and oh, how annoyed Ace had been with him. "Stay on course, it should be just -"

"I see it!" Jack swerved to avoid a pocket of people standing in the middle of the road, staring upward. He came to a screeching halt and threw the door open, Webley already drawn. The Doctor and lanto followed just in time to see Jack take aim and fire, twice. The Hranti let out an almighty screech and fell to sprawl in a wide, disgusting pile across the pavement.

lanto stared. "Neither of you mentioned the mucous. Do you have any idea what that's going to do to the upholstery in the SUV?"

"Worry about that later," the Doctor said, as the Hranti's single, enormous eye snapped open to glare at them. "Two bullets in the body aren't enough. You have to aim for the eye!" He danced back as one of the tentacles slithered forward in his direction.

Jack had his gun in one hand, obviously trying to get a clear shot, but the Hranti was protecting its eye. "Doctor, you're the only one not properly armed. You're on crowd control."

The Doctor avoided a tentacle bent on strangling him. "Jack, have you ever dealt with one of these before?"

"I think Ianto and I can handle one alien! Keep those people back!"

"Jack - "

"That's an order, Doctor!"

The Doctor considered arguing, but it did look like between the two of them they would be all right. He watched Ianto fry a tentacle with his stun gun. It fell, numb and paralyzed, to the ground. The Hranti screeched and its tentacles waved wildly. The Doctor holstered his stun gun and turned away to round up the few civilians who had ventured too close. Children, mostly, staring wide-eyed with their fingers in their mouths. This was a residential neighborhood. Where were their parents?

"Work," one of them said around his own hand, when the Doctor asked. The kid never took his eyes off the Hranti.

"Then who's watching you?"

"M' sister."

"And where is she?"

"Watching telly."

A gun went off behind him, twice, and Jack broke into vociferous swearing. The Doctor turned in time to see Jack duck and roll away from a tentacle. The Hranti's movements were getting frantic and uncoordinated from blood loss. If Jack and Ianto could keep it busy for five more minutes, it might weaken enough to leave its eye exposed.

The Doctor pushed the child towards the nearest adult who seemed to recognize him and waved them all back another ten feet. They'd be retconning everyone later, he supposed, and wished briefly that Gwen were here. She was brilliant with people - and with the police, too, who were just arriving on the scene. The Doctor fetched his Torchwood ID from his back pocket and made his way over to explain the situation.

"IANTO!"

The Doctor's insides went cold at the sheer terror in Jack's voice. He turned.

The Hranti had one tentacle wrapped around Ianto's shoulders, pinning his arms to his sides. Ianto was already bleeding from a wound in his scalp. After a single, frozen second, the Doctor flung himself into a sprint, going for his stun gun just as a poison-tipped tentacle buried itself in Ianto's thigh. Ianto cried out and all the blood drained out of his face.

The tentacles around his chest loosened and Ianto crumpled to the ground in a bloody heap. He gave a strangled scream as the Hranti yanked the barbed tentacle out of his thigh. Jack snarled and would have rushed forward, but the Doctor grabbed him by the back of his coat and hung on.

"lanto is going to need that antivenin as fast as I can get it to him," he hissed in Jack's ear. "Getting killed and leaving me with one dead body and one unconscious one to transport back to the Hub will delay that significantly. Understand?"

He received another snarl for his trouble, but at least Jack stopped fighting him. The Hranti had struggled into an upright-ish position and was waving its tentacles aggressively. The Doctor yanked Jack's gun out of his hand, aimed, and fired three bullets straight through its eye. It folded instantly to lie in an oozing puddle of blood and goo.

Jack fell to his knees beside lanto. "lanto!" he said, cradling his face between his palms. "lanto, can you hear me?"

lanto dragged his eyes open. "Jack," he whispered. "Sorry . . . not fast . . . enough."

"Don't apologize." Clumsily, Jack pushed lanto's hair off his forehead. "How do you feel?"

"Very . . . strange. Like my . . . head's . . . too big."

"Poison and blood loss," the Doctor said, leaning over Jack's shoulder. "Bad combination. We need to get him back to the Hub immediately." Jack didn't move. "*Jack.*"

Jack shook himself all over and lowered lanto's head and shoulders back down to the pavement. "Right. You get him back to the Hub. I'll handle clean-up here."

The Doctor stared at him. "You're not coming?"

Jack glared. "Someone has to deal with the police and the civilians and the giant pile of alien goo in the middle of goddamn Butetown. You're the one who can reverse engineer the

antivenin. Speaking of which." Jack pulled a Swiss army knife and a handkerchief out of his pocket and proceeded to hack off one of the still-twitching tentacles. He wrapped it in the handkerchief and handed it to Doctor. "There. Now *go.*"

The Doctor had little choice but to do as he was ordered. He staunched the flow of blood from lanto's thigh as best he could - thank all Time the Hranti had missed the femoral artery, or the antivenin would have been moot - and then two of the police officers helped him load lanto onto a stretcher and into the back of the SUV.

"Jack?" lanto asked dazedly as the Doctor secured the stretcher so it wouldn't roll around while he drove. He was hot to the touch, and his breathing was fast and shallow. The skin around the wound in his thigh had taken on an unhealthy gray-ish cast.

The Doctor paused to smooth lanto's hair back from his forehead. "He's busy just now. You'll see him in a bit. Now, I'm going to give you something to help you sleep, all right?"

"Wanna see Jack," lanto insisted, raising his head weakly.

"When you wake up," the Doctor promised, praying he wasn't lying. He injected the sedative. lanto whimpered and fell silent.

Jack was standing by the Hranti corpse when the Doctor jumped out of the SUV to slam the back door shut. "You'll hurry back," the Doctor said, forcing Jack to meet and hold his gaze. "I just promised him you'd be there when he wakes up."

Jack's eyes flickered away. "I'll try."

It wasn't good enough and Jack bloody well knew it. But the Doctor didn't have time to argue. "Try hard, Jack," he said, seriously, levering himself into the driver's seat. He turned and looked back. "Try very, very hard."

Chapter Five

Ianto drifted in a gray fog, too exhausted to fully wake. He was vaguely aware that somewhere beyond the fog, his body was in a lot of pain, but at the moment this didn't bother him. At least, not until a familiar hand slid into his and Jack's voice said, "Ianto?"

Yes, rather a lot of pain. His thigh was a throbbing, burning spot of misery in a general landscape of *ow*. Ianto felt his eyes water. He tried to say Jack's name, but his tongue wouldn't work.

"Don't wake him," the Doctor's voice said. "The antivenin is working, but it's got a nasty kick to it. Better for him to sleep."

"What about the other victims?"

"I've already sent enough antivenin for all of them over to the hospital. They should all make full recoveries."

Jack's hand gripped his. "Good."

Ianto tried again to speak and failed. Oblivion tugged at him, but he resisted. Jack was touching him for the first time in weeks, and for that he could withstand a great deal. He felt the Doctor take hold of his other hand, thumb rubbing over his knuckles. That was nice, too. Ianto felt himself relax a little, despite the pain.

"He's going to be ill for a few days," the Doctor said, after some time. "He'll be all right on his own by Tuesday or so, but tomorrow and Monday he'll need someone to look after him." There was the slightest pause. Jack said nothing. "He'll want you with him," the Doctor added, almost angrily.

"You're so sure of that."

"Yes, I am. He loves you."

Jack laughed softly. "He shouldn't. I haven't been there for him in weeks. And today . . ." Jack's voice faltered. "He'd probably punch me in the jaw for saying this, but it's my job to take the poisoned tentacle in the thigh. I wasn't fast enough. I slipped up."

"And why is that?" the Doctor demanded. "You think sleep deprivation might have something to do with it?"

Jack was silent. Ianto felt tears leaking out the corners of his eyes. "He'd be better off with you," Jack finally said.

"Don't be an idiot. And don't pretend you can't leave the Hub for a couple of days. I'll stay here and watch the bloody Rift."

"That's not what I meant. I've seen you watching him. I know, Doctor. It's all right." Jack's voice was achingly sad. "You really thought I'd be angry?"

The Doctor was silent. "I didn't know," he said at last. "You're hard to predict these days."

"I know." There was a pause. "Doctor. He's crying."

The Doctor swore. "Break-through pain. I thought I had it under control." The Doctor's hand slipped away. Something cold and damp touched his arm, followed by the sharp sting of a needle sliding under the skin. "That should do it."

There was the sound of a stool scraping backward. Jack's fingers withdrew. The fog was already growing thicker, but not so thick that Ianto couldn't recognize the familiar brush of

Jack's lips across his forehead. "Take him home, once he's stable. Take care of him. And see," Jack's voice broke, "see if you can't be happy together."

No, Ianto wanted to say, but it was too late.

He woke to a quiet Hub and dry, itchy eyes that didn't want to open. He managed it at last, blinking them a few times for good measure. He felt awful, as though he had a bad flu - achey and feverish and nauseated. He turned his head, wincing as sore muscles protested, and saw the Doctor hunched at the counter, wielding a pair of pliers over his new sonic screwdriver. His specs were perched on the end of his nose and his tongue was caught between his teeth. It almost made Ianto want to smile. "Doctor," he croaked.

The Doctor looked up at once. "Ianto," he said, dropping his pliers and jumping up. He caught Ianto's hand in both of his. "How are you feeling?"

Ianto swallowed. "I've been better. But I guess I'll live. Er. I will, won't I?"

"Yes," the Doctor hastened to reassure him, "yes, of course. You'll be under the weather for a little while, but nothing too horrible."

Ianto nodded. He looked away, eyes roaming. "Was Jack here? I thought I remembered - but it might've just been a dream." It had felt like a dream. There had been pain, and Jack had been there, holding his hand.

"He was here. He's a bit tied up at the moment. That was a, er, particularly public incident. A lot of people had cameras in their mobiles."

Ianto grimaced. "Ah." He hesitated. "Do you think he might be back soon?"

The Doctor's eyes were sympathetic. "I don't know. He told me I should take you home. You'll be more comfortable there."

Ianto nodded, but his throat was suddenly aching. He sniffled and felt tears seep from the corners of his eyes into the hair at his temples. "I'm sorry," he said helplessly. "I don't usually - this isn't like me."

The Doctor stroked his hair. "Don't worry about it. You're running a pretty high fever."

Ianto gave a weak laugh. "And my boyfriend's a tosser."

The Doctor smiled weakly. "That, too."

Ianto looked away, biting his lip. "It's just . . . how long should I wait? How long makes me loyal and how long makes me an idiot?"

The Doctor shook his head. "I don't know."

"Yeah." Ianto slumped. His head was pounding. "Me, neither."

Ianto expected the trip back to his flat to be a misery, but the Doctor was gentle and efficient. In less time than he had thought possible, he was tucked into his bed. "Do you need anything?" the Doctor asked, standing a bit awkwardly in the doorway. It was very late - so late, in fact, that it was early - and the Doctor looked like he was about to fall over from exhaustion. Ianto remembered another night, when the Doctor had been the one injured and frightened. It had been so easy to share this bed.

"Stay," Ianto whispered. "Please, Doctor."

The Doctor was silent for nearly a minute. Then he nodded. Ianto lay awake and listened to him getting ready in the bathroom, brushing his

teeth and washing his face. He came back and slid into bed beside him. He had a folded-up flannel in hand, and he laid it carefully across lanto's forehead. "There," he whispered. He leaned over and turned off the light. "Pleasant dreams."

"You, too," lanto murmured.

Far from "pleasant dreams," it turned out to be a wretchedly *unpleasant* few hours for both of them, as lanto wandered through feverish dreams that left his heart racing and his head spinning. It was only made bearable by the fact that the Doctor was there each time he woke with an extra blanket or a fresh flannel. He never had to ask to know exactly what lanto needed, and lanto wondered blearily if this was because the Doctor was psychic or if it was because lanto was only the latest in a long line of humans he'd cared for. He decided he didn't care. He liked to think that Jack wouldn't have left him to suffer through this alone, but the truth, lanto admitted sadly, was that he just wasn't sure anymore.

The fourth time lanto woke, it was to vomit into the bin by his bed. He thought he would die of humiliation. There was nothing less dignified than throwing up, and lanto despised it. But the Doctor simply rubbed his back until the heaving stopped and then took the bin off to empty and wash in the loo. lanto wiped his streaming eyes on the bedsheets. There was no part of him that didn't hurt.

"I'm so sorry," he said weakly, when the Doctor returned with a glass of water for him. He rinsed and spat into the clean bin before sipping cautiously at it. "You shouldn't have to do this."

"Hush," the Doctor said, sliding back into bed. "I'm your doctor and your friend. Who else should be doing this?" lanto said nothing. The Doctor sighed. "I know. And I'm sorry I'm not him. But is it really so bad?"

There was a strange note of insecurity in his voice that made lanto hasten to reassure him. "You've been brilliant. It's not you, it's -"

"lanto Jones," the Doctor said warningly, "if you say, *it's not you, it's me*, I swear, I will leave you to clean up your own sick next time. You can't break up with me when we haven't even been going out."

lanto saw the moment the Doctor's brain caught up with his mouth. "I mean, I -" The Doctor clamped his mouth shut and stared at him in wide-eyed panic. A sudden, startled silence fell.

It was not, lanto thought, so much what the Doctor had said as how he had reacted to saying it that made several pieces of a puzzle he hadn't even realized he was building snap into place. "Um," he began uncertainly.

The Doctor shook his head. "Please don't. I - you know I'd never - I wouldn't even think - excuse me." He rolled out of bed and to his feet. "If you need anything, I'll just be on the sofa." He fled.

lanto lay in bed for awhile, thinking of nothing at all, really. Rain pattered against the windows. It had begun to pour around six, when lanto had woken up soaked in sweat and shivering uncontrollably. The Doctor had made him put a jumper on over his pajamas, and then he'd turned up the heat. The windows were starting to fog, he noticed. It was very warm in the flat.

Some indeterminate amount of time later - the clock said twenty minutes, but he wasn't sure he believed it - Ianto got up. He went to the loo first, to brush his teeth thoroughly and scrub away the dried sweat of a feverish night. He patted his face dry with a towel and eyed himself in the mirror. His hair was flat and greasy, his eyes were rimmed with red, and his stubble stood out starkly on his pale face. He turned away from the mirror.

The Doctor was on the sofa with Ianto's laptop open. "There's a building not too far from the Hub," he said, without looking up. "It looks all right. The office is probably closed today, but I'll go down there tomorrow and speak to them." He stared as Ianto knelt by the sofa, shut the laptop and set it aside. "Ianto, I really am sorry. I couldn't help it - I tried, you've no idea how I tried, but I just - I'm sorry," he whispered, even as Ianto cupped the back of his neck, threaded his fingers through the short hair at the nape, and kissed him.

The Doctor gasped in surprise against Ianto's lips. Ianto pressed on, tilting his head so their noses wouldn't bump, and let his eyes drift shut as he savored the simple human joy of shared breath and warmth. Then he pulled back a little and traced the Doctor's lower lip with his tongue. The Doctor's breath caught.

"Everyone's sorry right now," Ianto whispered, from millimeters away. "You, me, Jack. I feel like all any of us has done lately is apologize. You shouldn't be sorry about this. I'm not."

"Oh," the Doctor said weakly. His arms slid around Ianto's waist and tightened. "Thank you."

Ianto held him in response. The Doctor was so much smaller in his arms than Jack was.

Smaller, but not delicate, nor soft. He was hard angles and planes - not as aesthetically pleasing, objectively, as Jack, but intriguing. Ianto found himself entertaining the idea of mapping those angles and planes with his mouth.

But not today, it seemed. He started to feel light-headed with fatigue after only a minute or two. "I hate to do this," he mumbled into the Doctor's hair, "but I need to go back to bed. Come with me?"

The Doctor nodded and helped Ianto to his feet. Ianto wobbled a little, but the Doctor's hands were warm and steadying at his waist and elbow. "How long is this going to last?" he asked, hoping the Doctor knew what he meant. "I'm already sick of it."

"Couple of days," the Doctor said. "You'll be more or less back on your feet by Tuesday, but I don't want to see you at the Hub until Thursday at the earliest. Understood?"

"Yeah," Ianto said, collapsing onto the bed. He was shivering again. He held his hand out to the Doctor. "C'mere."

The Doctor crawled into bed, then hovered, unsure. Ianto tucked himself close and rolled onto his side so that they were spooned together. He picked up the Doctor's arm and drew it across his chest, clasping their hands together.

"Ianto?" the Doctor whispered in his ear.



"Mmm?"

"What are we doing?"

Ianto sighed. "I don't know yet. But this is nice, isn't it?"

The Doctor drew him closer and kissed the back of his neck. "Yeah. It is."

The next two days passed in a haze of self-indulgence. Ianto was too ill at first to properly appreciate the attention, but by Monday afternoon the nausea and fever had abated enough for him to enjoy the meals and tea the Doctor brought to him in bed and the soothing backrubs he offered without Ianto even having to ask. But best of all were the long, leisurely kisses that went nowhere and left him sleepily relaxed and content. He'd grown accustomed to Jack, who gave away physical affection freely and without hesitation - or had done, once. Ianto hadn't even realized he was starving for it until now.

Jack didn't call. Ianto carefully didn't think about it.

On Tuesday, the Doctor went into the Hub and Ianto moved out to the sofa. He watched telly, ate when the Doctor rang to remind him, and slept most of the afternoon away. Lather, rinse, repeat on Wednesday, with slightly less time spent sleeping and more spent contemplating the ceiling. By Thursday, he was ready to go back to work, but rather hoping it would be a light day. Paperwork, yes. Chasing weevils through the sewers, no.

He was going to have to talk to Jack. With this in mind, he carefully selected his clothes. Red shirt, pinstriped trousers and suit coat. Cufflinks. Jack always knew he meant business when he wore cufflinks.

So did the Doctor, apparently. Ianto noticed his eyebrow twitch when he saw them, but that was the only reaction he gave. The two of them were silent on the drive in, and once they'd arrived the Doctor disappeared into the autopsy bay with nary a word in anyone's direction. Gwen, who'd come over to give Ianto a hug and welcome him back, raised her eyebrows. "Everything all right?" she asked.

Ianto sighed. "Not sure yet. Is Himself in?"

"Think so. I haven't seen him."

"Right." He smiled brightly and kissed Gwen on the cheek. "Coffee'll be ready in just a bit."

He brought Gwen her usual cup before taking the Doctor's to him in the autopsy bay. He found him crosslegged on the floor, already deep into the workings of his new sonic screwdriver. "Tea," Ianto announced, setting it on the counter to keep it out of the way of delicate wiring.

The Doctor glanced up, blinking owlishly through his specs. "Thanks."

"Doctor . . ." Ianto hesitated. "I'm going up to talk to Jack."

"Ah." The Doctor carefully set the screwdriver down. "What are you going to say?"

"I'm not sure." Ianto crouched down beside the Doctor and gently touched his chin, forcing him to look him in the eye. "Look. I just wanted to say - you know that no matter what, I still . . ." He hesitated, unsure. *Care about you* sounded so trite, even if it was true.

Thankfully, the Doctor nodded. "I know. But you and Jack . . ."

Ianto smiled sadly. "Yeah. Me and Jack."

The Doctor looked down, picking up his screwdriver again. "Do what you need to. I'll be all right."

lanto sighed. "Right. Okay." He stood and picked up the serving tray, which held only two cups of coffee now.

"Come in," Jack called when he knocked.

lanto nudged the door open with his foot. The two of them looked at each other. Jack said nothing. lanto stepped inside, set the tray on the desk, and handed Jack his cup of coffee. Then he seated himself and waited.

"How are you?" Jack asked at last.

lanto shrugged. "I'm all right. Still a bit tired, and my leg gets sore when I walk up or down stairs. But the Doctor cleared me for light duty and daytime telly is even worse than I remembered, so here I am."

Jack nodded, glancing down at his cup, which he'd not yet tasted. He mumbled something.

lanto leaned forward. "What was that?"

"I said, I'm sorry."

lanto sat back. "For what?" Jack gave him a look. "My leg? How was that your fault?"

Jack's grip on his mug went white-knuckled. "I wasn't fast enough. All day I'd felt like my brain was working at half-speed, and then, when it really mattered -"

"Stop." lanto crossed his arms over his chest. "I wish you wouldn't take responsibility for everything. It's insulting to the people around you. I got hurt. If anyone wasn't fast enough, it was me. That having been said," he added, even as Jack opened his mouth, "if you actually

feel like your brain is functioning at half-speed, then that, sir, is a problem to be addressed." lanto punctuated this with a sip of coffee.

Jack looked down again. "I know." He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "I know that."

lanto shrugged. "At least this explains why you didn't call or visit whilst I was out."

Jack squeezed his eyes shut. "I'm sorry. We were so short-staffed -"

"Don't," lanto said sharply.

Jack swallowed. "Sorry."

lanto was abruptly sick to death of people apologizing to him. "Stop that. Stop apologizing. You're so bloody sorry but you won't do anything about it. I don't want to hear it anymore."

"I'm -" Jack snapped his mouth shut. lanto would have laughed if it'd been the least bit funny. "Okay," he said instead.

"Better," lanto said, judiciously. "Anyway, that's not why I came up here." Jack was silent, waiting. lanto took a deep breath. "The Doctor. He's . . . got feelings for me."

Jack didn't look the least bit surprised. "I figured something must've happened with you two. He hasn't been able to look me in the eye since he got back on Tuesday."

"It wasn't much, really," lanto said, and was immediately annoyed with himself. "Not that it's any of your business," he added. "But it was nice to be . . . touched. I haven't had much of that in my life lately."

Jack looked down at his hands. lanto could see him almost physically controlling the urge to

apologize. "I know." He swallowed. "You'd be good for each other."

"Probably. Too bad I'm in love with you. Yes, I said it," Ianto added, when Jack raised his head sharply. "I broke the unspoken rule." He laughed briefly. "God, we're like a snake eating its tail. The Doctor's in love with me, I'm in love with you, and you're in love with the Doctor."

Jack frowned. "What makes you think I'm in love with the Doctor?"

Ianto rolled his eyes. "When haven't you been in love with the Doctor?"

Jack fidgeted, picking up the piece of coral on his desk and then setting it back down again. "Maybe it's different now."

"Why? Because he's here? Human? Attainable?" Ianto shook his head. "I don't believe it."

Jack was silent for a long time. When he finally spoke, it wasn't anything Ianto had expected to hear. "You left one out, you know. Of your list." Ianto raised an eyebrow. "I'm in love with you, too."

Ianto didn't know what to say to that. It hadn't been in his script for this conversation. "Oh."

"I know I haven't, er -"

"No, you haven't," Ianto agreed evenly. "And I can't sit here and watch you hurt yourself, day after day." It was, Ianto had realized sometime Wednesday afternoon, very like watching his father slowly kill himself with alcohol: slow, agonizing, and inexorable. That Jack would survive it - that he had to - made it all the more obscene. "So this is what I came here to say." He stood, leaned over, and placed his hands to either side of Jack's on the desk. "I can't wait

any longer. Do what you need to do to get well, or I'm gone."

Jack stared up at him. "Gone?" he repeated, in a small voice that didn't sound like him at all. "What does that mean?"

"Gone as in *gone*. No longer physically here."

Jack looked stunned. Ianto thought he couldn't have surprised him more if he'd pulled a gun and shot him. "I'd have to Retcon you. You'd forget everything, three years of your life. London, Lisa . . ." *Me* went unsaid, but Ianto could read it in the hurt in Jack's eyes.

Ianto shrugged. "I'd prefer you didn't, of course. But it's up to you." Ianto put the coffee cups - both still full, but completely cold now - onto the tray. He turned to leave.

"Ianto," Jack said. Ianto turned back. Jack was clutching the coral again. "Where would you go?"

Ianto gave him a small smile. It only felt slightly bitter. "I don't know yet. I'm rather hoping not to have to figure that out."

Ianto didn't stop to talk when he came out of Jack's office. The Doctor tried not to over-analyze this; whatever had happened, it was between him and Jack. The Doctor had no right to demand anything of either of them, and a few kisses didn't change that. But they had been worth it, no matter what happened after this. The moment when Ianto's tongue had touched his lip and an electric shock had run straight through his body - he would never forget that. Ever.

He'd been too distracted all morning to work with the mainframe. His screwdriver was

nearly complete; there were just a few last fiddly bits to configure and some software modifications to make. It didn't have nearly as many settings as the ones the TARDIS had made him, but then, he supposed he didn't have as many either.

He was simply sitting and doing nothing - well, almost nothing - when Jack appeared. The Doctor saw his boots first and then the rest of him as he came around the autopsy table. "Hullo, Jack," he said, craning his neck back to look at him.

Jack frowned. "Why are you on the floor?"

The Doctor shrugged. "Wanted to spread out." He hefted the screwdriver in his hand. "It's almost done." He got to his feet, then crouched down to pick up all the little parts, careful not to leave anything behind. Jack watched him, silent. When the Doctor was done, he turned and the two of them stared at each other.

"Do you still think you can fix me?" Jack finally asked.

The Doctor didn't hesitate. "Yes."

Jack nodded. "Good. Do it."

The Doctor raised his eyebrows. "Now?"

Jack nodded. His eyes slid away from the Doctor's. "Ianto told me I either needed to let you help me or he'd leave Torchwood." He paused to clear his throat, but it didn't seem to help; when he spoke again his voice was still rough. "I don't want that."

It was several seconds before the Doctor even managed to nod. "I see," he said. Inane, he thought, completely inane, but what else could he say? He'd started to hope. That was his mistake. He'd started to think that maybe Ianto

could love him, too - but that wasn't this place or this time. Ianto wanted Jack and the Doctor had known that.

For a very brief moment, he felt nothing but spite towards Jack. He wanted to spit in his face, tell him that he wouldn't help him after all. But just as suddenly all the anger ran out of him, leaving him just . . . sad. It wasn't Jack's fault that the Doctor had developed inappropriate affections for Ianto. And it wasn't Jack's fault that Ianto didn't feel the same. He loved them both, and he wanted more than anything for them to be happy. Even if he hadn't, he owed Jack a hundred times over for abandoning him and neglecting him for years before this.

"Doctor?" Jack said.

The Doctor cleared his throat. "Sorry. I must warn you, I've not done this as a human. I'm fairly certain it will work, based on, er - "

"Dreaming my dreams."

"Yes. But I'm not certain."

"Well, it's not like it's going to kill me," Jack said with a grimace. The Doctor noticed that he didn't ask if it would kill him. He was fairly certain it wouldn't. At least 65% sure, and it wasn't as though he had much choice. He'd offered to help Jack, and help him he would. "Where should we do this?"

"Your room, probably. You'll want to sleep afterward."

Jack nodded. He turned on his heel and led the way out. The Doctor had no choice but to follow. "The Doctor and I will be in my office," Jack told Gwen on their way through. "Make

sure we aren't disturbed. If the Rift alarm goes off, you and Ianto will have to handle it."

Gwen's eyebrows rose. "Everything all right?"

"It's fine," Jack said snappishly, and mounted the stairs to his office without a backward glance. Gwen shot the Doctor a questioning look. The Doctor nodded and tried to smile reassuringly. It must have worked; she relaxed, sinking back into her chair.

The Doctor entered Jack's office just in time to see him close all the blinds. Then Jack pulled up the trap door and waved the Doctor down the ladder. The Doctor lowered himself through and glanced around with unabashed curiosity. The only time he'd been down here had been his horrible second night on Earth; it had been dark and he'd been distracted, so he'd noticed very little. As it was, the room revealed nothing of Jack. It was downright spartan, with terrible lighting and a bed that looked almost as uncomfortable as the sofa upstairs. The Doctor could not help but compare it to Jack's room on the TARDIS, a tasteful den of iniquity with splashes of personality everywhere: books and projects and sex toys and souvenirs. Would they get that Jack back, the Doctor wondered, once he did this? Or had that Jack been murdered by Daleks on the Game Station? This room hadn't got this way in the last six weeks.

Jack dropped down beside him. "Well?"

"We should lie down on the bed, facing each other."

Jack flashed him the barest ghost of his old smirk. "Always knew I'd have you in my bed eventually."

"Stop it," the Doctor said automatically, and had to laugh, despite himself. "Some things never change."

Jack was smiling slightly as well. "So it seems." His smile faded. "Doctor . . . if I forget to say so later, thank you. I know this can't be easy for you."

The Doctor held up his hand. "Please don't, Jack. You're my friend, and I hate seeing you in pain. Anything else is just . . ." He shrugged. "Irrelevant."

Jack was watching him closely. "It's not," he said at last, "but thank you for saying so."

The Doctor nodded, avoiding his eyes. "Lie down," he said, gesturing to the camp bed. "I'm not sure how long this will take."

Jack lay down without further comment or innuendo. The Doctor settled himself on Jack's dark blue sheets and reached out to lay his fingertips at Jack's temples, his thumbs brushing his cheeks. "Just relax. Anything you don't want me to see, picture a closed door in front of it."

Jack frowned. "I'm not a complete novice, you know."

The Doctor narrowed his eyes. "Who's in charge here?"

"Fine, fine." Jack closed his eyes. The Doctor closed his own in turn and felt his mind brush Jack's. Jack's barriers, ingrained through long practice and habit, flared briefly at the shock of intrusion before falling away.

Jack's mind was a mine-field. There were bright spots of pain everywhere, some of them old and scarred-over, some of them shockingly fresh. The Doctor kept to the ones Jack had

given him permission to heal: Toshiko, Owen, and, most of all, Gray. They were the psychic equivalent of sores that had become infected. They were bleeding and oozing, poisoning everything around them, even the good things. But the Doctor brought with him all of his love for Jack and over a thousand years of experience at forgiving people things for which they could not forgive themselves. In the face of that, these festering wounds were no match. It was easy, as such things went.

What was not easy was coming back.

He woke up blind and in excruciating pain, too terrified to move. He lay very still, taking stock limb by limb. He was not paralyzed; he simply couldn't see. He opened his other senses; he smelled the dank, familiar scent of the Hub and heard someone breathing deeply and evenly very close by. Jack, asleep, just as the Doctor had predicted. He tried to match his own breathing to Jack's, to lower his heart rate and calm himself down, but to no avail.

His nose felt congested. He sniffled and tasted blood down the back of his throat. He raised trembling fingers to his nostrils and they came away wet. Not good. His eyes watered from the crushing pain in his head. Death had been an acceptable risk, and far less than Jack had risked for him in the past. But he'd thought, somehow, that if it killed him, he simply wouldn't wake up. He hadn't considered that it would leave him bleeding and alone, wondering if he was dying and if so, how long it would take. He closed his eyes and tried not to be afraid.

When he opened his eyes again, he could see. Not well, nor very far, but enough to get up. He weaved as the headache flared afresh but managed to stagger to the tiny bathroom. The

light from the bare bulb was harsh and made him woozy. He squinted at himself in the mirror. He had one hell of a nosebleed. He sat on the toilet lid with his head tilted back, pinching the bridge of his nose and trying to stem the tide of blood with toilet paper.

Eventually the bleeding stopped enough for him to try moving. His sight had cleared as well, which he found encouraging. He threw the toilet paper away and washed his face with a flannel. He needed to leave the Hub, and he wouldn't get very far in the middle of the afternoon if he was covered in blood. His shirt was blood-stained, too, but he could hide it under his coat.

He climbed the ladder slowly, wary of the dizzy spells still assaulting him every few minutes. Once in Jack's office, he peeked through the blinds to locate Gwen and Ianto. Not on the main floor of the Hub. He opened the door and crept out. They were in the kitchen, by the sound of it. He retrieved his coat, disabled the outgoing alarm on the door to the tourist office with a few keystrokes, and left.

The wind off the water felt good on his face. He sat on a bench overlooking the bay and pulled out his mobile.

"Doctor?" Ianto answered.

"It's done," the Doctor said.

"What?"

"Jack. You'll find him asleep in his room. When he wakes up, he'll be your Jack again."

There was a long pause. "Really?" Ianto said at last.

"Yes."

"He came to you and asked?"

"I wouldn't have done it otherwise."

"No, no, of course not. I just . . . I didn't think he would." Ianto paused, and when he spoke again he sounded strangely hesitant. "Doctor, what should I do?"

"Go to him," the Doctor said, watching the gulls wheel and dive. "Hold him. Be there when he wakes up. He'll want you with him."

"Right." Ianto's voice was relieved. "Right. Thank you. Doctor. I really, I can't - just, thank you."

The line went dead. The Doctor put his mobile back in his pocket, stood - he had to steady himself on the back of the bench - and walked away.

He caught a cab to Ianto's flat. He had it wait while he went upstairs and packed everything he owned into two small bags, stopping twice to lie down when black spots threatened to engulf his vision. He stared at the ceiling and breathed slowly until they dissipated. When he thought he had everything, he went downstairs and asked the driver to take him to a small hotel on the outskirts of Cardiff. Tomorrow, he'd sort somewhere to live. Right now, he needed a place to sleep. His headache had got worse since he'd left the Hub.

Paying the driver wiped out his cash. He had to pay for the room with a credit card, which meant Torchwood could track him, if they wanted to. He didn't care anymore.

It took a small eternity to check-in and get a key to his room. His hands were shaking almost too much to get the card in the slot, but eventually he managed. He dropped his bags

just inside the door and stumbled over to the bed. He collapsed, head barely on the pillow.

The last thing he heard before he fell unconscious was the ringing of his mobile.

Chapter Six

Later, Ianto couldn't remember how he got from the kitchen to Jack's room beneath his office. His memory stopped with the Doctor's call and started again when he was on his knees by Jack's bed, cradling Jack's slack face between his hands. No pain lines, he noticed at once. They were gone, smoothed out in sleep as they should be.

With the Doctor's advice echoing in his ears, he crawled onto the bed beside Jack. He pulled the spare blanket over both them, tucked his head into the crook of Jack's neck, and waited.

Jack woke quietly - no gasp, no half-strangled yelp. It was so quiet, in fact, that Ianto didn't notice at first. It was only when Jack's hand moved, startling him, that he raised his head and realized Jack was staring back.

"Jack?" he whispered.

Jack blinked slowly. "Ianto." He raised his hand and stroked Ianto's face, eyes wide with a sort of luminous wonder. "It doesn't hurt anymore. No - I -" His breath caught. "I remember everything, and it hurts, but it isn't - it doesn't - oh God, Ianto, I've been horrible to you. And Gwen. And the Doctor - I *hit* the Doctor." He looked close to tears.

"Shh," Ianto said, pulling him closer. "It's over now. Everything's going to be all right."

"I know," Jack said, and Ianto had the feeling he really did. "I know, but I still - I did things, said things. Oh God, the things I said to Martha -" He squeezed his eyes shut, but opened them almost immediately to focus on Ianto. "I'm really, I'm so sorry."

"I know you are," Ianto said gently, "but I swear to God, Jack, if you don't stop apologizing and kiss me, I'll - mmph . . ."

Kisses, Ianto reflected hazily, were the best sort of apology. Especially kisses like these, tender and passionate by turns, until passion finally gained the upper hand. Jack was hard against his thigh and it was just about the best thing Ianto had ever felt. It made him giddy, breathless and almost light-headed with anticipation.

Jack rolled him onto his back and hooked a leg over Ianto's, hitching himself closer and conveniently giving Ianto a nice place to rub. It wasn't really enough friction, but after six weeks of nothing but quick, perfunctory wanks in the shower, Ianto didn't think it would take very much. He lifted his hips to let Jack open his fly and tug down his trousers, before returning the favor with unsteady hands.

Jack's cock was a familiar, beloved, and much-missed weight in his hand. "Lube?" Ianto asked. Jack pulled open the bedside table, rummaged a bit, and handed it over. Ianto drizzled some in his palm, and then some in Jack's. "Thought we'd keep it simple."

"No complaints here," Jack said, and kissed him again. Ianto slid his hand down the length of Jack's cock and back up again; Jack took up an identical rhythm on his. Ianto gasped into Jack's mouth, too overwhelmed by the sudden surfeit of pleasure to think anything beyond *more yes please now*. Jack was making beautiful noises in the back of his throat, his fingertips digging into Ianto's arm. Then his back arched. Ianto forced his eyes open to watch Jack's face as he came, and the sight of such unguarded, untempered pleasure there pushed him over the edge.

The two of them lay together in a happy, sticky jumble of limbs, Jack kissing every part of Ianto he could reach and stroking the ones he couldn't. Ianto himself felt too exhausted to move. It was more relief than post-coital bliss. Or possibly he was still weak from almost dying four days ago. He yawned and stretched. "Tired," he mumbled.

Jack kissed his shoulder. "Close your eyes. I'll get us cleaned up." Ianto gladly did as he was told, burrowing into Jack's pillow, then wincing and shifting as he hit a damp spot. Sex: fun but messy.

"Ianto. Could you come here?"

Ianto groaned and rolled over. "Why? I thought you were getting us a flannel." He could just see Jack in the doorway of the bathroom.

"There's something you need to see."

There was a note in Jack's voice Ianto didn't much like. He got up, suddenly aware that he was half-dressed and badly in need of that flannel. His suit would probably have to be dry-cleaned. Again. "What?" he grumbled, coming to a halt in the doorway.

Jack didn't say anything. He didn't need to.

There was blood everywhere. The sink was streaked with pink from a blood-stained flannel left lying out and there was a smear of crimson across the back of the toilet. There was a wad of blood-soaked tissues in the bin, and three perfectly round, red drops on the floor.

"Ianto," Jack said quietly, "where's the Doctor?"

Ianto couldn't take his eyes off those three red drops, shockingly vivid against the cheap white linoleum. "I don't know. He called my mobile."

"Shit." Jack went digging for a clean flannel, wet it, and tossed it at Ianto. Then he got one for himself. "Shit, shit, *fucking* shit."

"Jack, calm down," Ianto said, even as he wondered just where, exactly, the Doctor had been bleeding from. "He won't have got far."

Jack snorted. "This is the Doctor we're talking about. His ability to run away is second to none." He pulled himself up the ladder. Ianto cleaned himself up as much as possible, tucked himself back into his trousers, and followed.

Gwen appeared from the kitchen. "What?"

"Is the Doctor here?"

She looked surprised. "I thought he was with you."

Jack swore again. Ianto looked at the Doctor's work station. "His coat's gone," he said. "So are his keys and his mobile."

"But we would've heard him go out," Gwen said.

Ianto leaned over and tapped a few keys on the Doctor's keyboard. "Not if he disabled the outgoing alarm . . . which he did."

Jack raked his hands through his hair. "All right. Where would he go?"

"My flat," Ianto said.

"Wait, what's going on?" Gwen interrupted. "What's wrong with the Doctor?"

"We don't know," Jack said, almost angrily. "He fixed me - fixed my head, so I'm all right again, or at least as all right as I ever am - and I am so sorry, Gwen, for some of the things I've said to you lately, and as soon as this is over, I promise there will be some top shelf groveling - but -"

"He hurt himself doing it," Ianto said flatly. "There's blood all over Jack's bathroom." Gwen's hand went to her mouth. "He might go to my flat," he added to Jack. "He feels safe there."

Jack nodded. "Right. Gwen, stay here. Try ringing the Doctor's mobile. Ianto, you're with me."

"Shouldn't you wait to see if he answers?" Gwen objected.

Jack shook his head. "He isn't going to answer. When you're done with that, call Martha. Tell her what happened and that we need her here as soon as possible."

Halfway to Ianto's flat, Gwen called to let them know that the Doctor wasn't picking up, but she'd reached Martha, and she was on her way. "Good," Jack said tersely, and hit the gas. Ianto gritted his teeth and held on. He hoped like hell the Doctor was at his flat, but he didn't have many illusions about how his actions that morning must have looked. He wished now that he'd been able to find the words to make the Doctor understand that it wasn't about rejecting him, it was about needing Jack back, whole and healthy - and yes, his. That much, Ianto could not regret.

"Jack," he said, leaning into a turn so sharp, the SUV nearly took it on two wheels, "what are we doing to do about the Doctor?"

"What do you mean?" Jack asked, blaring the horn as he barreled through an intersection on the heels of a yellow light.

"I mean - you know what I mean. I mean after we find him."

Jack pulled into the driveway of Ianto's building and slammed on the brakes, leaving them parked diagonally and blocking any of his neighbors who wanted to enter the garage. "I think that's up to you," he said. He climbed out and came around the car to join Ianto in jogging up the front steps. "But from what I've seen in my very long existence, there's only one solution to a love triangle that leaves everybody happy."

Ianto wasn't sure whether he should sigh in resignation or just roll his eyes. In all honesty, it wasn't anything he hadn't already considered. There wasn't anyone or anything in this world that could make him give Jack up, save Jack himself asking him to - and possibly not even then - but he couldn't deny that the Doctor was . . . well, the Doctor. Kind and brave and brilliant, vulnerable in a way Jack hardly ever was. It seemed Ianto had a weakness for men who were not quite of this world. He just wasn't sure he could handle being in a relationship with *two* of them.

On the other hand, it might almost be nice to have someone to share Jack with. Jack could be exhausting on a day-to-day basis.

Ianto pushed the door to his flat open. "Doctor?" he called, even as Jack brushed past him and started going room by room. His gaze fell on the lounge. He froze. "Jack."

"He's not here," Jack said, emerging from by the bedroom. "I checked the bathroom, thought he might've passed out, but he's not -"

"I know. But he was." Ianto gestured toward the sofa. "His things are gone." He looked at Jack. "I've made a terrible mess of this."

"Well, if it's any comfort, you had help. It takes a committee to fuck things up this badly." Jack put his hand to his earpiece. "Gwen?"

"No luck?" she said.

"Yeah, he's not here. Could you track his -"

"Already did. I traced his mobile signal and cross-referenced it against recent activity on his credit card for confirmation. He checked into a hotel on the outskirts of town about twenty minutes ago. I have an address. Are you ready to take it down?"

Ianto pulled out his PDA. "Ready." Gwen rattled off the address. "Got it."

"Good work, Gwen," Jack added. "Thanks."

The hotel was not nearby. It was, in fact, about as far from the Hub as one could be and stay within Cardiff city limits. Even with Jack's driving and the lights on top of the SUV flashing, it took them nearly half an hour to get there. Ianto tried the Doctor's mobile multiple times as they drove, to no avail.

"Give it a rest, Ianto," Jack said at last, reaching over to put his hand on Ianto's knee. "He's not going to answer."

Ianto looked out the window. They were passing through suburbs now. "It isn't off. It rings."

Jack sighed. "I know." His hand squeezed Ianto's knee gently. "We're almost there."

They found the hotel, parked, and went in. Jack marched straight up to the front desk. "Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said, with a winning smile for the two men on duty. He pulled out his Torchwood ID and flashed it, then put it away and leaned on the counter. "I'm hoping

you can help us out. We're looking for a friend of ours. About my height, thin, brown hair that sticks up. We know he checked in here this afternoon, and we're worried he might be ill."

The two men looked at each other. *Don't*, one of them mouthed. *It's Torchwood*, the other one mouthed back. Ianto rolled his eyes and tried not to be too obvious in his pacing. "Only one man like that's checked in this afternoon," one of them said at last, to his co-worker's visible disgust. "He . . . didn't look like he felt very well."

Jack nodded. "Thank you. Room number?"

"Sixteen. I can get you a key if you like."

This was evidently too much for his co-worker. "David, what you doing?" he hissed.

"They're Torchwood," David snapped, none too softly. "What if that bloke's an alien? What if he's got - got some sort of alien disease and we're all infected?"

"No alien disease," Jack said cheerfully. "May we have that key, please?" David handed it over. "Thank you. Torchwood appreciates the help."

"Yes, thanks," Ianto added, just before he grabbed the key out of Jack's hand and took off down the hall at a dead run, leaving Jack to scramble to keep up with him for a change.

"Knock first," Jack said, when Ianto went to shove the key in the slot. "If he's awake -"

"If he's *conscious*," Ianto hissed, but he supposed Jack was right. If he was conscious, the Doctor wouldn't appreciate them barging in on him like this. Ianto knocked three times in rapid succession. No response. Jack nodded. Ianto jammed the key into the slot, pushed the

door open, and damn near killed himself tripping over two duffel bags that were lying in the entryway. He swore, kicked one of them aside, and looked up to see the Doctor sprawled unconscious across the room's single bed. He was very pale, almost waxen, and he'd fallen on his side, twisted uncomfortably. The front of his shirt was soaked with blood. Ianto's heart sank. "Oh, Doctor," he murmured, "what have you done?"

Jack pushed past him and picked the Doctor's wrist up in his hand. "Pulse is sluggish," he reported. "Help me check him for injuries." Ianto nodded and moved towards the head of the bed, checking the Doctor's head, neck, and shoulders as Jack checked his extremities. Everything appeared to be clear. Ianto carefully rolled the Doctor into a more comfortable position, lifting his head to place it on the pillow.

"I'm calling Martha," Jack said, turning away with his mobile.

Ianto hesitated briefly before seating himself on the edge of the bed. With one hand, he laced his fingers together with the Doctor's; with the other he reached out and stroked the Doctor's face. Was he even still in there? It seemed impossible that he could have sneaked out of the Hub, gone to Ianto's flat, packed his things, and then come here with a brain hemorrhage, but who knew? Looking at him now, Ianto knew the blood in Jack's bathroom had come from the Doctor's nose. Not good.

Jack snapped his mobile shut. "Martha wants us to take him to the hospital. She says she'll call and use her UNIT clout to order an immediate MRI. By the time she gets here, they'll be done or close to, and we can see what the scans say." Ianto didn't answer. Jack's

hand landed on his shoulder and squeezed. "He'll be all right."

"You don't know that." Ianto stared at the Doctor's still face. "This is my fault. I pushed you."

"He said yes."

"He had no choice." Ianto buried his face in his hands. "He couldn't not do it. Not and be who he is. And he knew how much I missed you." He swallowed. "He must have thought - I meant to talk to him, I tried to talk to him, but I couldn't - I didn't know what to say."

"Figure it out, then. Tell him when he wakes up."

"If he - "

"Don't," Jack said, firmly. "Don't do that. It doesn't help him."

Ianto nodded, forced to concede that Jack was right. Ambulance, hospital, MRI, Martha. He drew a deep breath. "Okay. Let's go."

The Doctor blinked his eyes open and found himself staring at the ceiling of the autopsy bay. He'd been having a dream, he remembered, a wonderful dream about flying the TARDIS. She was singing, and Martha was there, or possibly Jack, but they couldn't hear her. The TARDIS's song had always been their secret, something she could only share with him. He closed his eyes. It had been such a nice dream.

"I know you're awake."

The Doctor opened his eyes again and found himself staring at Martha. "What are you doing here?" His voice was rough, hoarse.

Martha pressed her lips together into a thin line. "Are you in pain?"

He blinked. "Not . . . really." He felt weak all over and had a headache, but nothing that truly counted as pain.

"Good. Then I am here," she said, in the very even, careful tone that meant she was furious, "because you're an idiot. Don't you ever, *ever* do that again, do you hear me?"

The Doctor blinked. Then he remembered: fixing Jack and waking up blind, with a horrible headache and a nosebleed that wouldn't quit. "Ah. That."

Martha was still glaring. "You could have died. You could have ended up a vegetable. You could have ended up *not you*."

He reached for her hand. "I didn't, though."

"Did you have any idea how dangerous it was? Tell me you didn't," she said, a note of real pleading in her voice. "Tell me you didn't realize."

The Doctor wanted to comfort her, but he couldn't lie about this. "I knew. I knew, and I decided it was an acceptable risk, for Jack's sake. And Ianto's. And, well, everyone else's, too. The world needs Jack."

Martha shook her head. "And it doesn't need you?" The Doctor shrugged. "Don't be an idiot. And don't be flip," she added, when he opened his mouth. "You've been in a coma for four days. Your neural scans were all over the map, we weren't sure you'd ever come out. You

scared us all to death. So don't joke, Doctor. Not about this."

The Doctor felt his mouth fall open. "Four days?" Martha nodded. She was exhausted, the Doctor realized now, really looking at her. Had she slept at all in those four days?

"I need to examine you," she said after several moments of silence. He nodded and allowed her to help him sit up. He obediently tracked her finger with his eyes and answered her questions. Did he know where he was, did he know who she was, did he know what had happened. He answered them easily, except for the one about how old he was. That one pulled him up short.

"Six weeks," he said at last. "Or somewhere over a thousand. I stopped keeping track a long time ago," he added, when Martha raised an eyebrow at this.

Martha nodded. She sat back.

"Congratulations, Doctor. You managed not to blow your brains out with this stunt."

The Doctor nodded. "Glad to hear it. Er . . ." He looked around. "Where is everyone?"

"Out and about. The Rift alarm went off about an hour ago."

"Ah." The Doctor picked at the fuzz on his blanket. Four days. Someone, at some point, had set up a real hospital bed in the autopsy bay for him, so at least he hadn't woken to find himself laid out on the autopsy table. "Did it work?"

Martha frowned. "Did what work?"

"Jack. I thought it worked."

"Ah. Yes. It worked," Martha said with a small smile.

The Doctor let his head fall back. "Good." He closed his eyes for his next question, not wanting to see the sympathy on Martha's face when she gave the inevitable answer. "And Ianto?"

Martha's hand gently touched his. "Has hardly left your side the last four days."

The Doctor's eyes snapped open. "What?"

"He wanted so badly to be here when you woke up. He's going to be very upset he wasn't. Jack spent a fair bit of time here, too."

"But . . ." The Doctor didn't even know where to begin.

"That's all I know," Martha said, patting his hand. "If you have other questions, you'll have to ask the two of them." As though on cue, the alarm on the entrance blared upstairs. Martha stood. "That'll be them. Do you feel all right for visitors?"

The Doctor nodded. He didn't feel well, exactly, but he thought he could stay awake at least a few more minutes. Martha squeezed his hand and climbed the stairs to the main floor. The Doctor lay back again and closed his eyes, listening for the sound of Ianto's shoes on the steps. When he heard them at last, he opened his eyes and smiled. "Hi," he said, a trifle weakly.

Ianto said nothing. He crossed the autopsy bay in four quick strides, seized the Doctor's face between his hands, and kissed him.

The Doctor was too stunned to do anything at first, and then all he could think was that he hadn't brushed his teeth in four days and he

must have the worst morning breath in the history of *ever*. He quickly decided to try not to breathe. Fortunately - or perhaps unfortunately - the kiss ended after only a few seconds. Ianto drew back and stared him down with an expression remarkably similar to Martha's.

"Never," Ianto said, voice trembling, "*ever* scare me like that again." He leaned his forehead against the Doctor's. "Please," he added, a little belatedly.

The Doctor nodded. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I didn't mean to scare everyone. I didn't think . . ." He trailed off, suddenly aware that under the circumstances he couldn't finish that sentence as he'd intended. "I didn't think anyone would notice," he said at last.

Ianto stroked a hand through the Doctor's hair. "You mean you didn't think anyone would care." The Doctor looked away. "Doctor, how could you think that? After everything?"

The Doctor swallowed. He felt perilously close to tears. "You told Jack that he either had to ask me to help him, or you would leave. Neither of those options seemed to . . . involve being with me. I assumed that once Jack was well again, you wouldn't - " His voice cracked. "That you would be otherwise occupied."

Ianto's lips were pressed together, much as Martha's had been. "There was blood all over Jack's bathroom."

The Doctor blinked. "Oh." Was Ianto mad that he'd ruined their reunion? But no, that didn't make sense. It didn't explain the kissing for one, nor the fact that Ianto had him more or less cradled in his arms.

Ianto sighed. "Never mind. Martha says you're going to be all right." He pressed his lips to the Doctor's forehead. "You should get some rest."

"I've been in a coma for four days," the Doctor protested.

"Yes, and you look it. Sleep, Doctor. We'll sort the rest when you're stronger."

The Doctor frowned. "There's something to sort?"

"Oh yes." Ianto was stroking the Doctor's hair again. It felt *lovely*. "Quite a lot, as a matter of fact."

"What - " the Doctor began, only to be silenced with a look. "All right," he conceded, leaning his head against Ianto's shoulder. He hesitated. "Will you stay?"

"Yes," Ianto said. "I'll stay."

The second time he woke, it happened slowly, as a gradual awareness that he was warm and safe, even if he was in the Hub and not at home. He lay still for awhile, trying to go back to sleep, before finally giving up. He rolled onto his back and realized that whilst the room was dark, a single light shone, illuminating the book in Jack's hand.

"Jack," the Doctor said, squinting against the glare. "How long was I asleep?" He pushed himself up on one elbow with a wince. He felt like it must have been a long time - he was sore all over, as from too much time in one position. But that could have been from four days in a coma.

Jack shut his book. "About eight hours. It's nearly three a.m. How are you feeling?"

He considered this question. He felt much better than he had when he'd woken earlier, if not quite normal. "Thirsty," he finally decided.

Jack filled a glass of water from the tap and handed it to him. "Careful," he said. "It's the first thing you've had by mouth in almost five days."

"Right," he said, and sipped at the water. "Thanks."

Jack moved his chair a little closer to the bed and sat down again. "And otherwise?"

The Doctor frowned. "Otherwise?"

"Martha was very concerned that you might have permanently damaged yourself."

"Ah. No, I think I'm fine. I've not really had the chance to check. But the truth is that unless something has gone very wrong I'll be hard-pressed to tell the difference between damage left by this and just . . . being human."

"A million missing digits of pi."

"Just so." The Doctor shrugged. "I suppose only time will really tell."

Jack nodded. "Martha also said that you knew the risks going in. Why didn't you tell me?"

The Doctor vented an exasperated sigh. "What should I have said? *Yes, Jack, I could fix you, but there's a statistically significant chance that I might give myself an aneurysm?* It'd have been the same as telling you no. I couldn't do that. The world needs you more than it needs me. This me, at least."

Jack crossed his arms over his chest. "That's a load of crap, Doctor."

The Doctor blinked. "No, it's not."

"Yes. It is. And that's not why you did it, anyway. You didn't risk your life fixing my head for the sake of the world or Torchwood or any of that." He caught and held the Doctor's gaze, and as much as the Doctor might have liked to, he couldn't look away. "You did it for Ianto."

"And for you," the Doctor said, softly. "I did for you, too, Jack. You both deserve to be happy."

Jack nodded. "Well. Thank you."

"You told me that already. Before."

"I know. But that was before I had any idea just how much you were risking." He leaned forward and rested his elbows on the bed.

"Now. Let's talk about how you're in love with Ianto."

The Doctor rubbed the bridge of his nose. "I thought we already did."

"That was also before. Back when I thought that if I just gave up everything in my life that felt good, eventually it would be enough." Jack sighed. "What I said is still true. The two of you would be good for each other - you'd be better for him than I am, at any rate. But I'm selfish. I want to be happy again. Ianto is sort of important for that."

The Doctor closed his eyes. He was suddenly weary beyond measure. "You've nothing to worry about, Jack. He loves you."

"I know that. But he loves you, too. Trust me, I'm right on this," Jack insisted, when the Doctor started to argue. "He was completely unbearable the last four days. I had to file my own paperwork. So." Jack leaned back. "You love him and he loves you. I love him and he loves me. Simple, easy. Most beautiful thing in the world."

The Doctor looked away. "I don't see anything simple about any of this."

Jack grinned - the first true, unabashed Harkness smile the Doctor had seen since he'd got here. "That's because you've spent too much time in the 21st century. From where I sit, there's an easy solution. But it all depends."

"On what?"

"You and me, Doc." Jack reached out and took the Doctor's hand. "We're not simple or easy. We haven't been either in very long time. But I've been in love with you for . . . well, the vast majority of my life. I think I fell in love with you when you saved me from my own stupidity and I watched you dance Rose around the console. You had my number from day one, and it was just - it was so exhilarating to know I couldn't con you. Terrifying, too. Sorta like sticking my head in the mouth of a lion and trusting that it wouldn't bite it off."

The Doctor gave a huff of amusement. "A fair analogy for that particular me."

Jack nodded, smiling sadly. "I still miss him sometimes. Bad moods, big ears, and all." He drew a deep breath. "So that's me. And that leaves us with . . . well, you."

The Doctor blinked. "You want to know how I feel about you."

"I think it's relevant, don't you?"

"Yes, I just . . ." The Doctor rubbed the back of his neck, marshaling his thoughts. Hope was beginning to bloom, and it was distracting. "I didn't like you at first," he admitted. "Couldn't trust you, either, especially with Rose. But you were so young, then, and so broken and so eager to try and be the man you thought I

wanted you to be. Then the Game Station happened, and you were so brave - you could have left, you had your vortex manipulator, but you didn't. You stayed, and you died for me." He reached up and lightly touched Jack's cheek, his jaw, his lips with the tips of his fingers. "I loved you then, if not before. But everything after the Game Station happened because I was afraid of you, too, and I'm still afraid of you."

Jack's hand gripped his tightly. "You said you couldn't feel it anymore. You said I didn't feel wrong."

"You don't. It's just you. Who you are, how you are. I'm not as - as big as you are now. It's like being afraid of the ocean." He cupped Jack's face in his palm, gently stroking his cheek with his thumb. His face was shadowed, preventing the Doctor from reading his expression. "You're still my Jack. But to answer your real question - I don't know. I don't know if I'm in love with you. I think perhaps . . . not yet."

Jack ducked his head. "I asked for honesty, didn't I?"

The Doctor sighed and let his hand drop to cover Jack's. "You did."

"What does *not yet* mean?"

"It means - it means *not yet*. It means that the possibility exists. It means that I want to try, with you and Ianto. I do, Jack."

Jack smiled - a quieter smile this time, a secret smile the Doctor had never seen before. "Good. Because you deserve to be happy, too." He hesitated briefly. Then he cradled the Doctor's face between his palms and leaned in.

The Doctor winced and brought his hand up to stop him. "Jack, don't."

Jack's eyes opened. He looked surprised and not a little hurt. "Sorry. I thought - "

"No, we should." The Doctor smiled ruefully. "I'd just really like to brush my teeth first."

Jack stared, then broke out laughing. "Right."

"Sorry," the Doctor said, pushing himself up. "I know it's not romantic."

Jack was still laughing even as he stepped back. "Go ahead," he said. "I'll wait."

"Thanks," the Doctor said, embarrassed. His legs wobbled when he stood, and he had to steady himself against the edge of the bed. He found his duffel bags, discarded on a chair in the corner, and unearthed his toothbrush and toothpaste. Then, ignoring Jack's hovering hands, he slowly made his way up the short flight of steps to the loo on the main floor, where he shut the door firmly.

Safely inside, he had to sit down on the toilet lid for a few seconds until a dizzy spell passed. Then he was able to stand and brush his teeth, paying special attention to the roof of his mouth and the back of his tongue. He rinsed and spat and immediately felt much better. He was rather sorry now for all the times he'd ignored his human companions' need to do things like this - minor ablutions that didn't matter until you suddenly couldn't remember how many planets it'd been since you'd last done them.

Just as slowly, he made his way back to the bed. Jack was sitting on the edge of the mattress, waiting for him. He reached a hand out over the last few feet and pulled the

Doctor in. But not, as the Doctor had expected, for a kiss. Jack simply held him, hand palming the back of the Doctor's head and holding him against his shoulder. "I'm so glad you're all right."

The Doctor turned his head just enough that his voice wouldn't be muffled. "Me, too." Jack's hand drifted down, from his head to his neck, and finally to his shoulders. The Doctor lifted his head and looked at him. Jack leaned in. This time, the Doctor closed his eyes and let Jack kiss him.

They came up for air some minutes later. "Possibility?" Jack asked - gasped, really - into the Doctor's ear.

"Oh yes," the Doctor said. He was dizzy again, but it had nothing to do with the state of his health. "Very strong, I should say."

Chapter Seven

It was with some trepidation that Ianto went into work the next morning. Jack had seemed so sure of himself the night before whilst discussing how to broach the idea of the three of them to the Doctor. "Let me do it," he'd said. "He and I have some stuff we need to talk about." Ianto had agreed, but once he'd gone home and started thinking about it, he hadn't been so sure. What, exactly, had the two of them needed to discuss?

He was the first one in, as usual. The Hub was quiet; Myfanwy rustling up in the rafters was the only noise he could discern. Ianto could see through the open blinds that Jack wasn't in his office, but it was early enough that he might still be down below, getting ready for the day.

Ianto forced himself to go through his usual morning rituals, rather than heading straight into the autopsy bay to make sure the Doctor hadn't run off in the night. He set the coffee brewing and washed the handful of dishes in the sink. At some point during the night, someone had eaten toast and jam, and someone else had made themselves a sandwich. This felt like a good sign. Ianto found himself smiling as he loaded up the serving tray with coffee for himself and Jack and tea for the Doctor.

At the threshold of the autopsy bay, Ianto stopped and stared, transfixed. Somehow, even in his best case scenarios, he'd not expected to find the two of them curled up together on the narrow hospital bed, the Doctor's thin frame tucked into Jack's larger one. Both of them were sound asleep.

Ianto would have been the first to admit that he was, by nature, monogamous; he knew Jack wasn't, but he'd always treated it as a case of don't-ask-don't-tell. He didn't want to know who, if anyone, Jack slept with, and it would have driven him mad to find Jack acting this intimately with someone else. Not so, now. Far from bothering him, the sight turned the pit of his stomach to liquid warmth.

He set the serving tray on the counter. Then he took Jack's cup and waved it under his nose, which twitched. Ianto smiled and did it again. Jack opened his eyes. "Good morning," Ianto said.

"Mmm." Jack reached up, hooked two fingers into the knot of Ianto's tie, and pulled him down for a kiss before accepting his coffee with a happy sigh. "This might not be my *very* favorite way to wake up, but it comes damn close."

"Not enough room on the bed for the other," Ianto pointed out quietly, with a glance toward the still-sleeping Doctor. He seated himself in the abandoned bedside chair with his own coffee and watched as Jack pushed himself carefully upright. The Doctor stirred, but didn't wake. "I take it things went well."

"As well as could be expected."

"He said yes?"

Jack cast a fond look down at the Doctor. "He said he wants to try."

Ianto nodded. "I suppose that's all anyone can ever honestly say about these things."

Jack looked at him over the rim of his cup. "And what about you? Are you sure about this?"

lanto frowned. "You keep asking me that."

"It's a fair question. This isn't your cultural norm."

"Neither are you," lanto pointed out. He looked at the Doctor. His fringe had fallen across his face, obscuring his eyes and making him look very young. "But yes. I'm sure."

"Good." Jack's hand found his on the edge of the bed. "I'm sure, too."

The Doctor opened his eyes. "What are you sure about?" he asked, groggily raising his head.

"Us," lanto said. "Tea?"

"Please." lanto passed him his cup. He wrapped his hands around it and breathed it in before taking his first sip.

"I was just double-checking that everyone is still on board the good ship *Threesome*," Jack said, with a little too much cheer for so early in the morning.

"He thinks one of us is going to panic," lanto told the Doctor.

"One of us probably will. But," the Doctor yawned, "I don't think it's going to happen today, at least not for me." He leaned his head against Jack's shoulder. "I like this," he murmured.

Jack hummed in agreement. "All it wants is a bigger bed so lanto could join in."

"Mmm," the Doctor said, eyes at half mast. lanto kept one eye on his tea, lest he spill. "It wants lanto's bed. I love lanto's bed," he added, with a sleepy smile. "Most of my best

memories since I got here have been in that bed."

Jack's eyebrows shot up. "Oh *really*?"

"Now you've done it, Doctor," lanto sighed.

"Have you two been keeping secrets?" Jack demanded.

"No," lanto said.

"Not very well," the Doctor said.

"Hmph," Jack said, at least moderately mollified. "Well, I can't argue with the sentiment. lanto does have a lovely bed, which we should christen just as soon as the Doctor feels up to it. But for now, I'm afraid duty calls." As though on cue, the alarm on the door went off, signaling someone's arrival - Gwen, by the sound of the shoes. Jack sat up and carefully swung his legs off the bed, dislodging the Doctor, who grumbled in protest. He kissed lanto, kissed the Doctor, futilely attempted to shove his hair into some semblance of order, and went to greet her.

lanto and the Doctor looked at each other. The Doctor patted the bed beside him; lanto took up the invitation with alacrity, sliding right into the warm spot Jack had vacated. They nuzzled, lips finding stubbled jaw lines and dimples and the corners of mouths, before finally settling into a proper kiss. A proper *snog*, actually, and quite a bit more than lanto had expected. For someone only recently comatose, the Doctor was certainly enthusiastic. lanto relaxed into the kiss and let it take him where it would.

A yelp from the doorway jerked them apart. lanto's feet were on the floor and his hand on his stun gun by the time he registered that it was Martha.

"You -" she sputtered, pointing a finger at the Doctor. The Doctor wilted, just a bit. Martha pressed her lips together, drew a deep breath, and tried again. "You are not medically cleared for sexual activity!"

The Doctor did some sputtering of his own. "It wasn't! We didn't! It's not -"

"Snogging on a bed?" she suggested, arms crossed over her chest. "Were you in cardiac arrest? Was Ianto giving you some strange Torchwood CPR?"

Ianto could not let that one pass. "Well, in a manner of speaking -"

"Stop," Martha ordered, holding a hand up. "I do not want to know." She put her hands on her hips and surveyed them both. Then she sighed. "Doctor, I'm going to take your vitals. If you're very lucky, I'll clear you to go home, where what you do is your business and not mine, thank God. Ianto, I'm kicking you out."

"Probably wise," Ianto said. He pinned the Doctor with his gaze. "Behave yourself."

"I have excellent motivation," the Doctor said, and smiled at Ianto in a way that made him wish Martha had overslept her alarm that morning.

"*Bloody Torchwood*," Ianto distinctly heard Martha mutter as he left.

Fortunately, it seemed Martha was not sufficiently annoyed to take actual revenge. She cleared the Doctor to leave, but not for active, or even light, duty. He was to go straight home and rest for at least three days. Ianto, after four days of *severe* distraction, found himself with a disaster of a Hub and a pile of paperwork that would no longer keep.

Jack was similarly occupied, and so they all had to settle for the promise of *later*.

"So," Gwen said, perching herself on the edge of Ianto's desk. Ianto was unsurprised, having noted her watching the Doctor's rather complicated leave-taking with avid interest. "Anything you care to tell me?"

"Yes." Ianto looked up at her. "What you're thinking, yes. We are." And then he waited, unaccountably nervous. This was Gwen, after all; she knew you didn't always control who you fell in love with or how many at one time. But she'd also chosen marriage and monogamy for herself in the end, and Ianto was aware that doing so could make people judgmental about those who chose differently.

"Well," she said, and then stopped. "I don't know what to say. I'm happy for you, I think -"

"Thanks," Ianto said dryly.

She gave him a look. "- but it does somewhat complicate the work environment. There are four of us here and the three of you are involved? That's going to be interesting, even by our standards."

If that was her main concern, Ianto thought, they would be okay. Not to mention that it was entirely fair. He smiled, with just a hint of smirk. "Would it help or hurt if I offered to let you catch us on occasion?"

Gwen laughed - and, tellingly, didn't answer the question. "Well, I am happy for you, if this is what you want."

Ianto nodded. "It is, I think. And we shall endeavor not to be too unbearable one way or the other." She snorted, shook her head, and kissed him on the cheek before heading back

to her desk. Ianto breathed a covert sigh of relief.

It was not often that they left the Hub entirely unattended. Jack lived there, after all, and if he couldn't be there, somebody else usually was. Leaving no one on-site entailed a certain amount of preparation. It was even later than usual by the time Ianto and Jack left, Ianto carrying the portable Rift monitor and Jack a Tesco's bag with certain key items from the top drawer of his nightstand. Ianto had raised an eyebrow and asked Jack just how adventurous he thought they were going to be this first time. Jack had raised an eyebrow right back and told him it paid to be prepared. Ianto supposed he couldn't much fault the sentiment and decided the Doctor was probably old enough not to be scared off by velvet-lined handcuffs.

Having picked up takeaway - Thai, for a change - and a bottle of wine on the way home, Ianto let them into his flat. There was no response when Jack called the Doctor's name, but his keys were in the bowl by the door and his shoes were tumbled in a pile in the lounge. Jack checked the kitchen, but Ianto remembered what the Doctor had said about his bed and thought he knew better.

"What should we do?" Ianto asked, leaning in the threshold of the bedroom. The Doctor was, dare he say it, *cute*, curled up in the center of the bed with his face smashed into Ianto's pillow. He almost hated to disturb him.

Jack kissed the curve of Ianto's neck, then drew a line with the tip of his tongue up to his ear. Ianto shivered. "First," he murmured, "I'm going to open the bottle of wine. Then I suggest you wake him up."

Ianto smiled. "Any preferred method, sir?"

"You know my preferred method." Jack gave Ianto's ear a particularly hard nip and disappeared. Ianto blinked. Before he could quite make up his mind on whether to begin, Jack returned, glass of pinot noir in hand.

"Why aren't you naked?" Jack asked, conversationally. He seated himself in the armchair by Ianto's bed and took a leisurely sip of wine. "Strip."

Wordlessly, Ianto unknotted his tie and began unbuttoning his cuffs.

"You could give me a bit more of a show," Jack said, sinking lower in the chair.

Ianto rolled his eyes but otherwise ignored him. He unbuttoned his shirt and shrugged out of it, toed off his shoes and socks, and finally skinned out of his trousers. He deliberately took the time to either throw each item into the laundry or fold it and put it carefully away. Finally, clad only in his boxers and undershirt, he padded over to Jack and held his hand out for the glass of wine. He took a generous sip. "How are we going to do this?" he asked.

Jack's pupils were already a little dilated as he looked up at Ianto. "Any way you want. Be honest," he added, when Ianto hesitated. "Nothing you say will hurt me."

Ianto swallowed. "I want to be with him. He and I - we've been - it's -"

"You don't have to explain." Jack held out his hand for the glass, which Ianto relinquished. "Do you want me to leave?"

Ianto actually gave this a few seconds' thought, knowing that too quick an answer would only lead to further questioning. "No."

Jack nodded. "Come here." He snagged Ianto's hand in his free one and pulled him in to straddle his lap. He found Jack already half-hard, and Ianto felt a delicious little jolt go through him when their cocks rubbed together through too many layers of fabric. Jack put his hand on the back of Ianto's neck and pulled him down for a deep kiss. Ianto moaned, head spinning from the sudden full-body flush of arousal.

Then, just as suddenly, Jack released him. Ianto blinked, disorientated and a little bereft. Jack smiled, soothing him by rubbing his thumb across the back of Ianto's neck. "That was just the warm-up. Go on. Be with him." Jack nodded toward the bed, where the Doctor slept on.

Ianto tried to think past his rather insistent erection. "And you're okay with this?"

Jack kissed him again, briefly. "I am. Now stop thinking about me. Pretend I'm not here."

Ianto nodded. He stood, turned away from Jack, and slowly stepped toward the bed. Ignore Jack, he told himself. This wasn't about Jack. It was about the Doctor, and if he was worrying about Jack the whole time, it would never work.

He pulled back the covers and slid into bed. The Doctor stirred, turning his face. There were red lines across it from the pillow creases. "Ianto?" he murmured, cracking one eye open. Ianto kissed him in reply. The Doctor kissed him back, languid and sleep-warm. His body was loose and pliant under Jack's hands as Ianto rolled him onto his back and slid half on top, tangling their legs together. Ianto moved his thigh just so. The Doctor's hips lifted.

"Mmm. That feels good," he murmured against Ianto's lips.

Ianto pulled away, just a few inches. "Jack's here. He's watching us. Is that all right?" By the darkening of the Doctor's eyes, it was more than all right. The Doctor nodded. "Anything you want, tell me. Anything you like, tell me and I'll do more of it. Anything you don't like, tell me and I'll stop."

The Doctor nodded. He bit his lip. "You should know that it's been a while for me. A very, very long while. Time Lords weren't well-known for their biological imperative."

Ianto raised an eyebrow. "Well, now I have to ask. How long?"

The Doctor winced. "Six hundred years? Maybe five? And it wasn't this body. Well, of course it wasn't, this body's only six weeks old." The Doctor's eyes slid away. "I'm sorry. You're used to Jack. This must be - "

"Hush." Ianto nuzzled closer, breathing in the Doctor's scent. "Let's not start with comparisons. We'll go slowly, and Jack will be there if we need him. He was very good to me when I panicked our first time. So I understand, a bit."

The Doctor nodded. He lifted his hand and brushed his knuckles against the side of Ianto's face. "Yes. I've always felt you did, somehow." He kissed Ianto, hands sliding around Ianto's waist to meet at the small of his back.

The Doctor had lived amongst humans off and on for centuries now. He loved them and their little ape brains, which achieved such extraordinary feats of courage, kindness, and

intelligence despite their undeniable evolutionary limitations. He had thought, after so much time, that he understood something of the human experience - of what, as a species, made them tick. They were explorers, like himself; they climbed to the top of the tallest tree and said, "Look, there's a hill, and on top of the hill there's a tree that's even taller than this one. Let's go climb it." They kept on climbing the next tallest tree, until eventually they climbed all the way to the stars, and then they just . . . kept . . . going.

Now, the Doctor was starting to realize that he'd been a fool. He hadn't understood anything. Humans were so much more complicated than he'd ever imagined from the outside - and their bodies! Their strange and wonderful bodies with their intricate biochemical reactions. Right now, for instance, Ianto was licking the inside of his hip bone, and somehow this made the Doctor feel deliciously shivery all over. He was making breathy, helpless noises, his feet scrabbling for purchase on the mattress, and that was before Ianto licked a broad swathe up the underside of his cock. Muscles tightened involuntarily; the Doctor's fingers curled into the bedcovers. Thirty seconds more of this and he was going to have his first orgasm as a human. It seemed foolish now that he'd not done a trial run on his own, so to speak. He'd never touched himself to completion, and he had no idea what it was like or what he'd be like. What if he was loud? What if he was *silent*? He didn't know which would be worse.

Then he slid out of Ianto's mouth with a faint *pop*. The Doctor raised his head and glared. "What are you doing?" he panted. "Go back!"

Ianto shook his head. "You were about to come."

"Yes, I know! Go back!"

In the corner, Jack chuckled. The Doctor scowled. Ianto smiled. "Relax. I'm not going to leave you like this. Roll over." The Doctor growled. Ianto's smile widened. "I promise you'll like it just as much. And if you don't, I'll go back to what I was doing before. How's that?"

Not at all fair, from the Doctor's perspective, but he complied anyway. He rolled over onto his stomach; Ianto gave him a pillow, which he hugged between his arms, and slipped another one under his hips. He wriggled to get comfortable. Jack made an appreciative noise, and the Doctor smiled to himself.

He heard the sound of a cap being flicked open, and then something wet drizzled onto his back, all the way down his spinal column. It tickled a little, but Ianto's hands quickly followed, spreading the oil out. Ianto straddled him, preventing the Doctor from rocking his hips into the bed, and moved from light touches into a proper massage. It felt pleasant, though not as nice as the blow job. The Doctor said as much. Ianto laughed and planted a kiss on the back of his neck. "Patience," he said. "This will help you relax. It'll make the next bit easier."

Relax. The Doctor sighed and closed his eyes, forcing himself to relax into the mattress. Ianto was very skilled at this, he decided after a time. He felt boneless and heavy, and the slight ache of his erection had faded into the general hum of pleasure suffusing his body. Just as he thought he might fall asleep, he heard the cap pop on the bottle of oil, followed by the faint sounds of Ianto coating his hands with it. A finger traced a line from the top of his spine all

the way down to his arse. He'd been expecting it, but it still made him jump.

Ianto stroked his hip with one hand. "I'm going to press in, just a little."

The Doctor turned his head to the side. "Um. Could Jack come over and kiss me?"

Ianto stroked his hip again. "Yes, of course. Jack?"

"Happy to oblige," Jack said. The Doctor closed his eyes and listened to Jack undressing. Ianto was stroking his arse, circling his opening with the tip of one finger, then dipping down to press the sweet spot just behind his testicles. The Doctor shivered.

Jack slid onto the bed beside him. "Roll onto your side," he said. Ianto shifted his weight off so that he could do so. "There," Jack said, and kissed him.

Kissing, the Doctor was quickly discovering, was not all the same. Kissing Ianto felt like coming home - like walking into the console room of the TARDIS after a long adventure on a new planet, or curling up in her library with a favorite book and a fire in the grate. Kissing Jack felt like the adventure itself - like stepping out onto the soil of a place he'd never visited before, or surfing the shockwaves from the birth of a star.

Kissing Jack was also sufficiently distracting that the Doctor was able to ignore, for the most part, what Ianto was doing. It wasn't as intrusive as he'd expected, in any case; Ianto's fingers were well oiled, and if it didn't feel good, it didn't feel bad either. It felt a bit strange, that was all, until Ianto added a second finger and pushed deeper, crooking

them. The Doctor's eyes snapped open and he gasped into Jack's mouth. "Oh. Ohh, that's - "

"Your prostate," Jack said with a grin.

"More," the Doctor managed. Ianto obliged, and the Doctor's eyes rolled back in his head. He buried his face in Jack's shoulder and groaned, barely noticing when Ianto slipped in a third finger. All he knew was pressure, and pleasure, and the wonderful spicy scent of Jack. He was moaning, completely undignified, and he did not care one whit. He was safe, cradled between Jack and Ianto.

Gradually he became aware that one of them had asked him a question. Not until Ianto removed his fingers completely was he able to parse what he'd heard. "Sorry. What?" he asked, dazed and more than a little confused.

Jack smiled. "I asked if you were ready."

"Ready for . . . oh." The Doctor craned his neck back to look at Ianto.

"Only if you want to," Ianto said, seriously.

The Doctor thought about it for a few seconds. "I want to. But I want to see you."

Ianto nodded. "We can do that." He nodded to Jack, who let the Doctor go so he could roll onto his back. Jack helped him adjust the pillow under his hips and lift his legs so they rested on Ianto's shoulders.

Ianto reached for the lube, but Jack got there first. "Let me," he said. The Doctor raised his head and watched with interest as Jack kissed Ianto deeply, stroking him with one hand. He wouldn't have minded watching them for longer, but Ianto shuddered and placed his hand on top of Jack's, stopping him. "Enough. I'll embarrass myself." Jack smirked and kissed

him one last time before stretching out beside the Doctor, propped up on one elbow.

The Doctor turned his head to look at him. "Any advice?"

Jack trailed slick fingers down the Doctor's cock. "Remember to breathe. If it hurts, say so and Ianto will stop. All right?" The Doctor nodded. Jack lay back, fingers playing almost idly across the Doctor's skin, pausing to pinch a nipple once, then again when it made the Doctor's cock twitch. Then he slid his hand down, across the Doctor's abdomen, and back to his cock, where he took up touching it again - not stroking in earnest, just enough to keep the Doctor interested and off-balance. He felt as though all his nerve endings were fizzing with energy; it was almost uncomfortable, but he wouldn't have missed it for the world. Or even for fifty of them.

Ianto sank into him, slow and careful. The Doctor made a noise he'd never heard from himself before, a sort of guttural cry. Ianto froze. "It's all right," the Doctor panted. "I'm fine." Ianto leaned forward, searching his face. The Doctor nodded. Ianto released a breath and pressed onward.

It seemed to take forever for Ianto to slide all the way in. Twice the Doctor asked him to stop, so he could close his eyes and remember to breathe. The second thrust was easier, and the third easier still. By the fifth, it still hurt a little, but it felt good, too, so good that he couldn't imagine ever asking Ianto to stop. He experimented with tensing certain muscles, and Ianto let loose a stream of filthy Welsh. Jack laughed and reached for the Doctor's cock again, stroking him steadily. The Doctor sobbed and squeezed his eyes shut. Ianto was gasping with every thrust, his breath and his rhythm

ragged. Surely this couldn't go on much longer; if it did they would both die. The Doctor wasn't certain he cared. It would be the best death he'd ever had.

On his next stroke, Jack did something involving his thumb and the head of the Doctor's cock, just as Ianto thrust forward and hit his prostate dead on. The orgasm the Doctor had felt building in the soles of his feet, the small of his back, the crown of his head rushed through him, whiting out his vision. For a moment, he *was* his body - his glorious, magnificent *human* body, which couldn't remember a million digits of pi but could make him feel like this. Ianto thrust once more, then stuttered to a halt inside of him. The Doctor forced his eyes open to watch Ianto's face as he came - eyes closed, mouth open, utterly enraptured and silent. Beside him, Jack was barely breathing.

"Oh God," Ianto managed, and collapsed across the Doctor's chest. The Doctor gave an undignified squeak. "Sorry, sorry," Ianto slurred. Jack helped them untangle themselves enough for the Doctor to get his legs down. The Doctor closed his eyes. He was still tingling, sparks of pleasure zipping from nerve to nerve.

"That was beautiful," Jack said, voice rough. He kissed the Doctor, kissed Ianto, and wrapped his arms around both of them as best he could.

The Doctor opened his eyes. "You didn't . . ."

Jack shook his head. "Don't worry about me."

Ianto made a protesting noise, but seemed unable to move from his place on the Doctor's chest. The Doctor decided that left the matter up to him. "Don't be daft," he said. "Where did the oil end up?"

"Under my hip," Ianto mumbled. He shifted just enough for the Doctor to reach it.

The Doctor drizzled some into his hands, then tossed it aside and reached for Jack. "Not much finesse, I know," he said, stroking Jack's cock slowly. He was hot and thick in the Doctor's hand.

"Finesse is," Jack's voice caught on a gasp, "overrated."

The Doctor laughed softly. "I'm glad you think so." He kissed Jack, gradually increasing the pressure and tempo of his hand, until Ianto leaned over and took the head of Jack's cock into his mouth. Jack gave a startled moan and thrust upward. Ianto hummed and took him deeper. Jack's hand gripped the Doctor's bicep; his eyes, when the Doctor looked up, were glazed and unseeing. The Doctor tightened his hand around the base of his cock, just as Ianto pulled up, cheeks hollowing out. Jack came with a deep groan that sounded like relief.

For some lovely, indeterminate amount of time, the three of them lay without moving. Then, slowly, Ianto shifted so his back was to the Doctor's chest, and the Doctor bent his knees so that they fit perfectly behind Ianto's. Jack sat up, but only long enough to pull the duvet over all three of them. He rolled over so that his chest was pressed against the Doctor's back, and draped one long arm over the Doctor and Ianto both.

The Doctor lay awake, listening to his partners breathe. Ianto fell asleep first, then Jack. Sleep tugged at him as well, but he resisted. He wanted to remember this feeling. Contentment was not something he'd ever had much experience with as a Time Lord. But for the first time in the whole of his brief existence, he

didn't ache in the place where his second heart used to be. He didn't want to run. He wanted to stay.

He closed his eyes and slept.

Fin.

