



will happen to me

Do not worry Doctor...

A... that... and see

Journeys

Ryuosen

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Journeys

by *Ryuosen* (ryuosen@yahoo.de)

New Who, Torchwood | R for violence and implied sexual actions | None | 30,000 words

He wanted to go home, it was all he could think about. However trying to rescue his rescuer complicated things a tad more for Ianto than anticipated.

Betaed by: Teleen

Warnings: minor character death

Spoilers: None

Notes: A big thanks to my beta Teleen who stuck with me even when I was dead for weeks and threw all schedules out of the window. Page used for references is the tardis wikia.

Art by Fiendish_Thingy (crystalwebbart@yahoo.com) and Genie (in-the-bottle@livejournal.com)



Somewhere amongst the stars

The surface was unsurprisingly cold and inanimate as his fingers spread over it. Yet they were looking so real, laughing, waving to someone he couldn't see and more importantly they were together. It made him glad to see; that for the two of them there had been a happy ending. All the dancing around, those shy glances, the cold realization and in the end desperation, it had been worth it.

The corners of his mouth twitched slightly, almost forming a full smile. But then his face froze. Shivers crawled up his spine and he felt cold, despite the warm temperature of the planet.

The smile fell.

The time had come, he had obviously known that it would, but nothing could have prepared him. The confrontation, which would play out before him, was going to be ugly in the darkest sense of the word. He would be confronted with the things he had left behind a long time ago. Things he had spent years running from, visiting different times and places. All to avoid this.

Cowardly as it had been, he knew back then as he knew now, that it had been the best possibility. The best chance of offering them, all of them, a happy ending. He hadn't gotten one.

Okay, that was a lie, a bold-faced one, too. His happy ending had just been different from anything he had ever dared to imagine. Could ever imagine. For nothing had prepared him for the events, that fate or time had dealt him. And now? Now it was time to face the past that he couldn't deal with as everything had still

been so new. As he had intertwined hands and left those he held dear behind.

With that he pulled his hand from the smooth wall. He refused to turn around, he couldn't, not yet. The images displayed faded in an instant, but he had known that too. It was time to face him.

"Hello Jack, it's been awhile."

Silence was his only answer, but he could feel the turbulent emotions being played behind him; hate, anger, resentment, loathing and buried beneath it all love, sadness, and a burning drive to know everything, to understand. His gaze lost focus and for a blip all he could see, were the different ways this situation could play out.

"Have you come to kill me, Jack?"

And with that the man, known as Ianto Jones, turned around and faced the person, who had once been his captain and lover. Their gazes met.

Ianto smiled.

Cardiff, earth 2007

The ride back to the Hub had been spent in a tense silence. Owen, once more driving, had gripped the steering wheel tight enough that his knuckles were white. It was obvious that he didn't like the situation that they found themselves in, something Ianto could relate to. Whoever this "John Hart" was, Jack knew and considered him bad news. That alone was unsettling. Jack's instincts were usually topnotch.

He could already tell that it was going to be a long night.

Riding shotgun in front of him, Tosh was already tapping data into her miniature CAT scanner. He could hear her mumbling under her breath, naming possible coordinates of the cluster bombs. Gwen was silent next to him. She had briefly attempted to start a conversation, but her attempt had fallen on deaf ears. None of her companions had been in the mood for small talk. They were all too busy mulling over the latest development.

Ianto could already tell that a confrontation between Owen and Jack wouldn't be far off, while Tosh would be glad that their captain was back. Gwen, well Gwen seemed to be in emotional turmoil. On one hand she was probably glad that Jack was back, on the other she was certainly angry at him for coming back without an explanation, not that she wouldn't try and fail to wheedle one from him, and taking the command from her so effortlessly. As if she could fight Jack for it... Ianto suppressed a snort at the thought.

And what about him? Was he glad to have Jack back? He supposed so. Now their workload would be lightened and he wouldn't have to bear Gwen's scrutinizing looks anymore. He swore that if she asked him one more time about talking about his feelings he would put the entire team on decaf. Yet, he mused, he couldn't fault Gwen for caring, even though he had told her repeatedly that he and Jack had never been a couple in the first place. Not that she'd believed a word he'd said. Owen's description had been painful, but more correct. He and Jack had been using each other. All there was to it. For the most part, anyway.

The SUV came to a screeching stop, causing Gwen to complain loudly about Owen's driving skills again. Ianto, not wanting to be caught in the argument that was guaranteed to happen, hurriedly left the vehicle. He barely had time to shut door before Owen was already steering the SUV in the direction of the garage. Neither Tosh nor Gwen followed him. To each their own. Personally, he could go without the doctor's bitching for great amounts of time.

His gaze swept once over the Plass, but there wasn't anything out of order. Apparently Jack and "*John Hart*" had yet to arrive. They had left Jack quite reluctantly behind. He would, with John Hart in tow, find his way back to the Hub on his own. Over his and Gwen's protests, not that he had voiced his. Considering that Jack was the only one who knew their new guest, it was only logical that they would arrive together. It also gave them time to prepare for their arrival. It was an unspoken rule that Jack would bring John in via the elevator. In doing so, the so-called Time Agent would be vulnerable to their weapons, should he decide to do something dangerous. If Jack didn't push him off the platform first.

Shaking his head, Ianto walked towards the tourist office at a brisk pace. He couldn't afford to linger. This evening needed to go smoothly and that John Hart was bad news. He'd thought that already, but that didn't make it any less true now.

As he slid his key into the lock of the Tourist Office's door, Ianto stopped. Turning his head to the left, he wondered why he hadn't noticed it before. Someone had been bored again and decided to spray another graffiti onto the walls of the tourist office. He cursed silently. It was always such a hassle to have the wall cleaned and repainted.

Bad Wolf?

Painted in bright white letters, the words nearly jumped at him. Ianto frowned. It had to have been done while they had been hunting the blowfish. This morning it hadn't been there, of that he was sure. He was also sure that he had heard the words before. But no immediate connection popped inside his head. Meaning that it hadn't been personal or important in conjunction with Torchwood and aliens. Opening the door he made a mental note to call a firm first thing the next morning to have the mess taken care of. Luckily, he was in charge of the budget and knew that they still had money for that. How he hated to spend their budget for such stupid tasks. Closing the door behind him, his thoughts already wandered towards their more urgent problems, namely one Captain John Hart with Captain Jack Harkness coming in a close second. Hmmm, Hart's weapons would have to be confiscated too.

Ianto never saw the letters vanish as quickly and quietly as they had come.

somewhere amongst the stars

The first thing he had noticed about John Hart had been that he was definitely bad news, which had been confirmed only seconds ago. One minute the bastard was saying his goodbyes to Jack and in the next, he had grasped him and yanked him close before activating that wrist strap. Suppressing the feelings of sickness, he had felt his fingers digging into the ridiculous vest as he held on for dear life. With eyes probably resembling plates, he had watched the Vortex that had

twisted and whirled around them both as they traveled what had to be time and space.

I have a bad feeling about this...

Famous last words indeed. Not even a minute later, Hart's feet had connected with the ground before he had stepped out of the Vortex with Ianto in tow. The stench in the air had made him puke. Releasing Hart, he had doubled over and heaved until nothing had remained.

In hindsight, that had been his second mistake, right after trusting the bastard in the first place. But it had been too late. Only as the heaving had stopped had he looked up to see nothing but a destroyed landscape with Hart nowhere in sight. Turning around he had barely time to see the other Time Agent step into another portal.

"Sorry eye-candy. Seems that date with Jack will have to wait. Have fun..."

A chilling laugh and he had been gone, leaving Ianto behind on what appeared to be a foreign planet and time. At least the green-colored sky gave him that impression. Looking around, he tried desperately to see a living being or a civilization but there was nothing but plain hills. The red colored grass was ignored in favor of more looking around.

Nothing. He was alone.

Fighting the desperate urge to cry, he took deep breaths instead. Inhale, exhale and repeat the process.

He needed to stay calm, collected. Losing his head could kill him now. Inspecting the landscape once again, he noticed something.

Carefully he walked closer to the crater that was in the ground, head constantly turning around to make sure no wild animal had the chance to accost him. But there didn't seem to be any, he couldn't even hear the chirping of birds, if they had birds on this planet. He couldn't be sure of that, either.

Stepping near the edge of the crater he peered down and encountered what had to be a damaged spaceship. It was clearly the cause of the crater and looking more closely, he could still see the rising smoke in the air. The crash was recent, which meant there had to be life somewhere.

Maybe he could observe them for a few minutes to determine if it was safe to make contact or better to stay hidden. Due to Flat Holm, he had experience in dealing with aliens, but a select few didn't make him an expert. Learning from Jack had taught him that one tiny mistake could wind up pretty ugly if he wasn't careful enough. He needed to think, but seeing the gathering clouds, he resolved to find a shelter first. There was no telling if the rain was acidic and looking at the sky that might not be so far from the truth.

Looking around, he found something resembling a tree in some weird way. It would have to do. Hearing growling sounds that reminded him of thunder, he carefully climbed into the tree, seeking shelter beneath the huge leaves that covered the branches. Suppressing another yawn, he knew that he should stay awake but after another 48 hour shift at Torchwood, including updating the archives, chasing a blowfish and getting kidnapped by a deranged Time Agent, Ianto lost the fight pretty quickly.

With one last glance at the smoking ship he was asleep.

Cardiff, earth 2007

Jack's angry scream still sounded through her ears as the team was slowly walking to the nearest hotel. Their captain was stalking in front of them, his coat flapping like wings in the winds. No one was speaking, far too afraid to invoke Jack's wrath. If Tosh had to name his expression, she would be torn between murderous and rabid. It was the face Torchwood's that enemies were always graced with. She thought of the cannibals in the Beacons.

She suppressed a shudder. Jack was her hero. He had saved her when everyone else had treated her like a filthy animal. Less than human for wanting to save her mother, for holding the life of a loved one more dear than her country. Tosh had never wanted to see Jack like this again. Because moments like this reminded her forcefully of just what lurked behind that flirtatious and easygoing face. A man who wouldn't hesitate to tear his enemies to shreds or make the appropriate decisions to see it done.

She feared this version of her hero.

Next to her, Owen was just as quiet. His face was also pulled into an ugly grimace. But in contrast to Tosh's thoughts, his weren't on Jack. No, his thoughts were on the teaboy, the fucking teaboy, who had managed to get himself in a mess that seemed impossible to solve even by Torchwood. He was being unfair, Owen knew, but he couldn't bring himself to care. Just tonight Jack had come back, they had found the cluster bombs and saved Gwen from

her poisoning and either getting blown to bits or being forced to throw herself into the rift along with that former partner of Jack.

And John Hart had fucked their reunion up quite spectacularly.

He glanced at Gwen, who was gnawing at her lower lip in silence. Owen knew from the time that they had been sleeping together that she only did that when she was in deep thought. There was no need to wonder about what or whom she was thinking. Gwen had never been able to conceal her emotions. She was thinking about Ianto, too.

And their fearless leader - Owen scoffed at the thought. Fearless his ass, the man had run away, left them a right mess behind and now he was back and expected to be accepted like nothing had happened. Well not on his watch. He would be damned if Jack thought it was that easy. Not after all the crap they had survived.

The hotel they entered belonged to the most expensive ones Cardiff had to offer. Not that he cared at the moment, not when one of their own was in trouble. In silence he watched with the women as Jack booked them rooms. Owen could even make out the angry scowl as he accidentally said five instead of four rooms.

It would be entertaining to watch Jack tear Hart limb from limb the next time they met. And there would be a next time, Owen knew. What the other Time Agent had said and more importantly how he had looked at their captain. Gwen had the same look in her eyes when her gaze met Jack's and Ianto's was also fairly similar. In their own way they were all in love with Jack Harkness, he grimaced at the thought, even Tosh. Though she admired Jack more than anything because he had rescued

her from a torment without end. But in the end they all loved him, Hart in what appeared to be an obsessive love; Gwen with her image of Jack as a dashing knight in a military coat; and Tosh with her admiration and readiness to do everything for Jack.

And Ianto?

Ianto with those treacherous feelings that weren't entirely wanted. Owen could relate to that, hadn't his relationship with Katie not started the same way? In the beginning they had both enjoyed the sex and mutual pleasure that they derived from the others' company, but along the way their easy friendship had morphed into something more. He feared that that was what had been happening between Ianto and Jack, because inevitably it wouldn't last. Not in their case. The teaboy would get hurt and that couldn't bode well for the team. Owen liked his coffee always ready at the right moment, the cleaned autopsy bay and a well-stocked cabinet with the needed necessities.

Should something happen between them, things would change and Owen had never adjusted well to changes. Therefore it was best when everything stayed like it was.

Jack had finally managed to book rooms for them, his face frozen like a marble statue. At least he had managed to calm down somewhat. Currently no one would be in the immediate danger of getting shot by Jack Harkness. Not that the anger wasn't still there, because Owen could see it, the darkness lurking behind those blue eyes. He really didn't want to be Hart.

"Here, check your rooms. Meeting in mine in twenty minutes."

Jack had been pacing his room like a caged lion while he waited for the rest of his team to arrive. He growled at the thought that one member wouldn't be coming and resisted the urge to destroy something. Funny, it had been a long time since destruction had been an appropriate way to vent his frustrations, before his discovery of sex, to be precise. But now the thought of throwing a chair out of the 10th story of the building sounded incredibly tempting.

Rubbing the bridge of his nose, Jack sank onto the couch next to the window. He would kill his former partner the next time he saw him. But before that they had to get Ianto back.

Ianto... was he all right, was he still alive? Where had Mentior taken him? Why? Well that question he could answer, to hurt him, to get satisfaction of seeing the realization in his eyes. Mentior wanted revenge on him for running off all those years ago and Ianto ultimately paid the price for it.

Jack hadn't known the other Time Agent prior their assignment, only having seen him in passing. Mentior, which was his most used code name, had even back then had a reputation for being violent, aggressive, a good lay and most importantly being a genius. While he more often than not acted like a wild primitive idiot, he was able to observe his targets unhindered. Study their habits, their behavior, their wants and needs and when he was confident that he knew everything necessary, he pounced and ripped his victims to pieces. Like himself, Mentior hid in plain sight.

And now this dangerous enemy from his past had taken Ianto. Jack didn't know what to do. His Vortex manipulator had managed to lock

onto Mentior's last coordinates. At least they could trace him to his first stop, but there was no guarantee that he had left Ianto there. If Ianto died, it would be his fault. He alone was responsible for what had happened, hadn't he warned Gwen? She had nearly died for not listening and he knew that she hadn't listened to him.

In the end he had forgotten his own advice. He had stepped forward and hadn't even noticed what was going on, too focused on planning the date Ianto had agreed to, until Ianto's shout had alerted him. By then it was too late already, Ianto caught in the Vortex's force-field, reaching for Jack perhaps, before he was gone. His face, frightened and shocked, frozen into his mind alongside Mentior's last words.

Gray...

He had found his brother? Something that Jack had never managed to do. Of course it was probably a ruse to twist the knife that he had already stuck in his gut even deeper. As if taking Ianto hadn't been enough. Dare he imagine his administrator's fate? No, he didn't. For all the regrets he had over his time as part of the Agency, he had never been as bad as Mentior, especially when it came to.. to rape and torture. That thrice-damned bastard was an expert and Jack knew him to be cruel, but he could only hope that he decided to only kill Ianto and be done with it.

A knock startled Jack from his thoughts. He knew that he had told Toshiko and the others to meet here, but honestly, he just wanted to be left alone. However, the minibar would be allowed to keep him company. He desperately wanted to forget that this day had ever happened. Without waiting for his acknowledgment the door to his room was

opened and Gwen marched in like a soldier ready for battle. It earned her a brief smile. Toshiko followed at a slower pace, her hands clenched together. And Owen?

The moody bastard pulled a face like someone had died and Jack was hard pressed not to join him. None of them knew that death would be Ianto's kindest option, because there was no way to get him back. This wasn't the rift they were fighting, which could be predicted. Ianto wouldn't come back, not without help.

And they were helpless.

Reigning the urge to punch something, he gestured for the others to sit down. Owen, of course, was left standing. But Jack ignored his little rebellion for now, it wasn't important. They needed to make a plan; at least that was Gwen's idea and probably Toshiko's. Both wouldn't be placated with the simple truth. There was nothing they could do.

"So what are we gonna do, Jack?"

"Nothing!"

"What do you mean.." "There's got to be something we can do."

"We can't, isn't that right Jack?"

He nodded at Owen. Despite the ugly tone in the doctor's voice, he had gotten it right. Apparently their confrontation would come more quickly than he had anticipated. That was fine with him; Jack usually hated procrastination anyway. He looked briefly at the display of the Vortex Manipulator. The coordinates unsettled him.

"Owen's right. We can't help Ianto."

"Why not? You have the same thing as Hart. Why don't you follow him?"

"Do you really think that I would still be here if I could do that Gwen?"

He studied Gwen like a predator would a particularly unimportant prey. Normally he appreciated the fire and drive that made Gwen Cooper who she was, but in this very moment it only served to remind him how helpless they were. He fought the urge to pace up and down like some caged animal in a zoo, but it was a near thing.

"When we get back to the Hub, I could try to follow the energy trails. It might help us to find out where he has taken Ianto."

Clever Toshiko

She would be the one to think of a way to find Ianto even it would take her countless hours. Then more hours would be invested in trying to find the right peaks of rift energy and inevitably she'd have to concede defeat because even with the rift they wouldn't get Ianto back. Just as she would inevitably blame herself for failing in getting Ianto back. He couldn't let her feel that kind of guilt especially when taking into consideration that it was his fault.

"That won't be necessary, I managed to dock onto the general coordinates with my... "

Jack trailed off gesturing to his wrist strap. Toshiko's blinding smile was like another punch in the stomach area. She hoped dearly to get Ianto back. It made him glad to see that during his absence his team had only grown closer. The thought of them getting hurt because of

his choices was unbearable. Memories of their deaths were still haunting his nights even after the year had been rewound and he had been able to see for himself that they were all right.

"Then I will try to use the coordinates to see if we can use the rift to..."

"No!"

He could hardly bear to see their betrayed faces. But he would prevail. There was no way that he would allow them to risk their lives while trying to manipulate the rift. Their technology wasn't advanced enough to control the rift.

"Jack!"

"How can you say that!"

The exclamations were expected but he still winced. Jack knew that he sounded callous, forbidding Toshiko to use the rift, but it had to be done. Then pain blossomed on his cheek and he felt the coarse material of the carpet against his face. Looking up he was met with the enraged face of Owen rubbing his bruised knuckles. In the background he heard the angry voices of Toshiko and Gwen but he didn't care. Wiping the blood from his already healed lip he met Owen's gaze before speaking.

"Our technology isn't advanced enough. This isn't like trying to return Toshiko and me from the 1940s. Ianto won't be able to send us the matching coordinates because he isn't somewhere in our past, he isn't even on our planet anymore. Mentior took him through time and space. He is thousands of years in the future."

"Why don't you follow him then? It's the same as Hart's, isn't it?"

Owen pulled his wrist strap free holding his arm up. Jack yanked his arm free and sank into the armchair behind him. Frustrated he rubbed his eyes he couldn't let the team see just how hopeless the situation was.

"As I told Gwen before I can't! The Doctor deactivated the function to travel through the Time Vortex."

Only as he had already spoken, did Jack realize his mistake. While he had never talked with Gwen about the Doctor and the history of Torchwood he knew that both Owen and Toshiko had been informed by Torchwood One. As expected both looked up at the mention of the Doctor.

"The Doctor? Torchwood's number one enemy? Were you with him the whole time?"

Refusing to show just how angry it made him to hear the Doctor get called a criminal he settled for a nod. Having read the newspapers between the day he had jumped onto the TARDIS and the day the Year had been reset he was aware that Saxon had declared him an enemy of Great Britain and the Queen. Briefly he contemplated what he could tell the team without revealing the entire thing to them.

The Doctor..

"That's it."

Jumping up, startling his team, Jack nearly tripped over his coat which he had dropped upon entering the room. Ignoring the questions he pushed off the ground groping inside his coat pocket for his cellphone. He remembered seeing Martha giving her phone to the Doctor and he knew that it had been modified like Rose's had been. If he really had it, then their chances of saving Ianto had just

increased drastically. Nearly trembling he used speed-dial to reach Martha Jones. Maybe not all hope was lost.

"Martha Jones, voice of the nightingale..."

somewhere amongst the stars

Contrary to his first thought it wasn't his nightmare that woke him, no it was reality. The grinding screeching sound of metal clashing upon metal, noises that followed him around in his nightmares or his days, when he was feeling particularly self-destructive and needed to punish himself. However despite having dreamed about being back in the conversion unit, he realized quickly that the sounds were *not* coming from the machines in his dreams. With reflexes that had saved his life at Canary Wharf and during the last *weeks?* he had lived on the strange planet, Ianto threw himself off the tree.

And not a moment too soon.

The wood above burst into thousands of splinters as a ship crashed into the ground less than ten feet from his current position. It was of the same design as the first one he had encountered shortly after having been dumped by Hart. They even had some spare parts of it in Cardiff. Jack had told them upon finding them that the race was normally very peace loving, but could under the right circumstances, become quite ferocious.

They were called *the Bane!*

According to some Intel from UNIT, they had once tried to invade the earth by the use of soft drinks but someone, a Sarah Jane, had managed to stop the invasion in time. Ianto

couldn't be more grateful to the unknown woman for saving the world and lessening their hectic work schedule. There were plenty enough emergencies for Torchwood to deal with. They could do with one less.

Some time after finding the ship Ianto had taken to explore the area surrounding the crash site. Having found nothing but red grass, hills and a green sky Ianto had known that he depended on finding something inside that ship. Wildlife on this planet was sparse, in all the time he had been there he had only seen two or three aliens, which had resembled a blend between an elephant, a rat and a vulture. He wouldn't have dared to try and catch the thing even if he had had the means to accomplish the task.

Something that ugly couldn't possibly be tasty, could it?

After watching the ship for what seemed like hours he had approached it and tried to find a way inside, hoping to recognize something to help him survive. He had managed to enter the ship after fighting with the entry hatch for some time. In the end he came out victorious. The insides of the ship had been confusing and it had taken even more time to finally understand the system, which controlled the shutter like doors between the corridors.

Finally he had found something eatable in form of preserved meat and some kind of vegetables. Recognizing them from the Archives at Torchwood One he knew them to be very nutritious for humans. Also he had, with some luck, found a stream filled with bluish violet water nearby and the water had proven to be safe or he had yet to notice the side effects. It had saved his life.

During the time passed he had been forced to adapt to the circumstances he had been dealt with. His coat had been transformed into some kind of backpack while his tie had acted as a sling for his bruised arm for some time. Cutting the legs of his pants had been another necessary step after nearly having a heat stroke. The core temperature being far higher than the one on earth. Although he had no idea just how high it was.

All in all life had been bearable, if he could forget that he had been marooned on a foreign planet in an unknown time. But Ianto was nothing if not a survivor. He would prevail. John Hart would pay and he always found revenge to be a dish best served cold and now fate had either thrown him another boon or was about to punish him harshly. Crawling backwards to get as much distance between himself and the ship he desperately tried to find a place to hide.

No such luck, save for the trees which had been flattened the entire area was bare and he would stick out like a sore thumb.

Without knowing whether someone of the crew on board the ship had survived, Ianto kept his distance, fingers closed around the small dagger he had found inside the first wreck. It wouldn't do to be caught unawares. Ducking he crept around the ship. There a sure sign of life, he could hear the faint humming of the engine, someone was attempting to restart the ship. Hastily he backed away again.

Close proximity wasn't advisable when a ship was about to launch.

Yet the energy hum died with a spluttering sound and Ianto could say for certain that this wreck wouldn't be taking off anytime soon. He

couldn't decide if that was either a good or a bad thing.

Then, hearing the whooshing noise, that he related to the open and closing of a ship he had once studied in London, Ianto turned around. He came face to face with another human male, at least he appeared to be. The age couldn't be guessed but he was taller than Jack with pale skin and dark blond hair, which fell into a pointy face with sharp green colored eyes, high cheekbones, a sharp nose and a slim mouth. The man looked severe, haggard and nasty all at once. Ianto didn't like him.

"Well, well! What brings a human like you to this rock?"

"Circumstances outside of my control."

A sneer graced the other's features and he raised a blaster, aiming right at his head. Déjà vu much? The situation was exactly like his confrontation with Hart prior his kidnapping. Keeping his face blank he regarded the other human with a bored look, while discretely tightening the grip on his own weapon. Apparently the first time he would have to defend himself on this planet would be against his own species, assuming that the man was human.

"I wonder why I don't believe that? The butterfly people hired you, didn't they? They want you to help them stop the Bane!"

Ianto had no idea what that freak, at least he didn't wear nostalgia clothes like Hart, talked about. The Bane he knew, but the butterfly people? Taking precious moments he tried to remember if he had ever encountered the aliens before and very nearly choked on his breath.

Mary!

Tosh's lover.. or one night stand, yes that fit better. He remembered asking Jack about her after all was said and done. Tosh had been sent to Ianto's home while Owen and Gwen had been leaving together as well. If they had thought that neither he or Jack would notice their affair then they had been foolish but neither had said anything. Whatever Gwen and Owen did off the clock wasn't any of their concern and then he had asked about Mary for the report. He remembered now. Jack had spoken of a highly telepathic race with the ability to possess a human body. They lived in the Arcateen system.

"We're on Arcateen V, aren't we?"

"As if you didn't know that beforehand. Don't think you can fool me that easily."

Ianto glared at the man but staying quiet. He knew that he needed to handle this situation very delicately. Unfortunately he had no idea how to resolve it without proof that he had been dumped here.

"Why would I want to help the butterfly people? One of them tried to kill me once."

"Sure, a member of one of the most peaceful races tries to kill you."

He shrugged at that, not bothering to give an answer. The irony and sarcasm dripping from the sentence unavoidable. How to diffuse the situation? Ianto still had no idea. In the end he did nothing, choosing to wait for the stranger to make his move. Patience, was after all, one of his strengths. The other was circling him, blaster always aimed at his head.

"I wonder what you are after? What have they promised you? It's not as if they have much to offer with the exception of their Cesium depots. Did they offer you shares? They are ours!"

The grating voice was beginning to annoy him, tempting Ianto to take his small dagger and shut the man up, yet he reigned his temper. He had no doubt that the whole ensemble was a trap for him to walk into. The other wanted him to snap and attack, otherwise he wouldn't be using cheap shots to bait him or fish for information. Something about Ianto made the stranger uneasy and he wanted to know what. Swallowing his irritation he waited.

He didn't have to wait long, either the man was clearly a beginner at mind games, unlike Jack and Hart, or he had no patience. Either way suddenly the safety was off and Ianto dove to the side, rolling away. It didn't really matter, the shot was off by quite a margin and he was on his feet again and leaping.

With a tackle they both landed on the damp red grass, fighting for the blaster which was now caught between them. Now his roughhousing with Jack came in handy, there was a distinct similarity between the fighting styles. Yet even expecting the attack it Ianto's every bit of skill and speed to stay ahead. He needed the blaster fast. His life depended on it.

This time he wouldn't hesitate to pull the trigger, not this time.

A swing to his jaw, a moment of dizziness and suddenly he laid beneath the man, blaster pressed to his temple. Their gazes crossed and he could see the surprise in the green eyes as the lips formed a small "O". Then his eyes rested on Ianto's outstretched arm and the

Just focus on my voice. Blank everything else out.

He did as asked, taking deep breaths. Inhaling, exhaling and repeating the same thing over and over again until the background noises, *thoughts?*, faded away leaving only the musical voice of the alien behind. At least she wasn't attacking him like Mary had done. The sharp burst of anger and loathing took him by complete surprise, however he realized that while he received it the emotion wasn't reserved for him but for Mary. His thoughts had been read. Ianto didn't know whether to be glad that finally he had found someone who could understand him or that his thoughts were an open book for the alien.

Hello Ianto Jones, my name is Nowe...

It had probably just been a trick of the light however for a brief moment Ianto could have sworn that the alien, Nowe, had glowed like the sun. Without consciously realizing it he knew without doubt that his future had started to look up.

Cardiff, earth 2007

"You reached him?"

Tosh watched as Jack paced throughout the hotel room. After his initial joy at discovering a possible way of rescuing Ianto he had called someone named Martha Jones, a friend from UNIT and a former companion of the Doctor. She had been with Jack as well during his absence. Nowadays she was finishing her training to become a doctor herself, although UNIT had taken her without title and diploma. It either spoke volumes about her skill or their respect for the Doctor.

She wasn't completely sure what to think about the mysterious woman, but Jack was obviously very fond of her. "*A hero with nerves made of steel, she walked the earth once and saved us all!*", he'd said. On the other hand she was a member of UNIT and Tosh had long since decided to never have anything to do with the organization if she could help it. Now though there was no other choice, not if it meant that they had chances of finding Ianto.

Sharing a brief look with Owen, she mentally chastised herself. Jack had only spoken with Martha so far. There wasn't any reason to believe that she would have to come here at all. Her only task if you could call it that was to contact their mutual friend. From the joyous sound of Jack's voice she had also succeeded.

"Have you given him the coordinates? And he knows how important it is? No detours? He promised!?"

Meeting Owen's gaze she only nodded her head at him in silent acknowledgment. They both felt the complete inappropriate jealousy at the one-sided conversation, at the knowing tone as both Jack and Miss Jones spoke about the Doctor. Owen hadn't been as long on the team as she herself but they both had come to share everything with Jack. To face and acknowledge that there were parts of himself that he had shared with other but not with them, left a bitter taste in her mouth. Especially since she had met the Doctor in London once and knew what kind person he was.

"You are an angel Martha Jones. We'll wait for him to return Ianto to us then."

The cell phone was snapped shut and Jack turned around to face them with a bright smile

on his face. The tension in his shoulders was almost completely gone too. Tosh startled for a moment until she realized again that you didn't notice how tense Jack Harkness was until he relaxed. Uncertainly she returned his smile with a tentative of her own. Gwen had no such reservation but then again she was the most expressive of their team, laughing she threw herself at Jack hugging him briefly before letting go. Owen's reaction was more subdued but Tosh had learned to read him like she read the data of the rift manipulator. He was relieved too.

"So Ianto will be back?"

"Martha reached the Doctor. Apparently he just managed to escape from a bunch of angry officials from Catrigan Nova. But he promised to follow the coordinates and collect Ianto from wherever John left him."

No one mentioned the other possibility, that Ianto was already dead and a cooling corpse would be the only thing that the Doctor found. They all had heard as the other Time Agent had joked about murder rehab. Not the most comfortable thought in the world but for now they had good news.

"Well children, all we can do now is waiting therefore I order you all to enjoy the spa program this fine hotel offers. We still have at least 18 hours to spent here. Now off you go!"

Slowly Gwen retreated from his room, pulling Tosh with her while saying something about a massage and a mud-bath. The door closed silently behind them, leaving Jack and Owen alone in the room.

"So what aren't you telling us?"

Jack blinked seemingly surprised before sitting down with a sigh. Now Owen could see the weariness which had been hidden by the enthusiasm of getting Ianto back, it made him frown in ways that made him very unattractive. Something was wrong.

"I'm concerned. The Doctor entered the coordinates into the TARDIS. Hart dumped Ianto in the middle of one of the most bloody civil wars that broke out during the 51st century. Over three billion people died and the population totals at five billion people. The whole time period is filled with bloodshed and violence."

Owen said nothing anymore. There wasn't anything he could say to make it better. Neither he or Jack could do anything. It was now out of their hands and Ianto's safety had been placed in the hands of someone Owen had thought to be the enemy. It didn't fill him with confidence either. Offering the teaboy a brief silent prayer he stood and left the room. As helpless as they were at the moment, he could at least take advantage of the chance to relax for a few more hours. Remembering the file he had once read on the Doctor, Owen knew that their administrator wouldn't return as fast as they all would like.

"Fucking instant coffee, fucking teaboy....!"

Arcateen V, 51st century

Ianto could barely concentrate, sweat was running down his face, but he ignored it in favor of his self-assigned task. With meticulous precision did he unscrew the small case. Pulling the slim silver cover aside he stared at the

technology that made time travel possible. For a moment he thought of Jack and what he would have said, had he been able to see Ianto, now, about to throw his most likely only way home away. Would he have encouraged him, would he have been understanding?

Ianto didn't know and that thought worried him in ways he couldn't voice, not anymore. It had been a long time since he had even thought of Jack, of Tosh or Torchwood. He had deliberately tried not to. Life had changed since he had met Nowe, since he had returned to civilization and started to fight in a war that had changed his entire perception. Had colored it darkly.

The butterfly people had no physical bodies at least not as long as they were alive. Only in death did their gaseous form transmute into something solid filled with more blood than any other race Ianto held knowledge of. Since the beginning of the war, almost half of their population had died and he didn't know how many bodies he had carried off for burial. The fighting against the Bane resembled the battle of David against Goliath. Despite their enhanced strength and ability to fly, were Nowe and her people little more than annoyances for the huge cephalopod like aliens who shared their planetary system. As difficult as it was to admit but one thing had been clear from the very beginning.

The butterfly people would loose and be destroyed. Yet instead of rolling over and play dead they rebelled, fought until their last moment. Their pride wouldn't let them do anything else.

Ironically it was that what had shocked Ianto the most. His eyes which had once seen the world with optimism and joy had dimmed as he

witnessed atrocities committed for nothing more than profit. The Bane showed no mercy as they struck the butterfly people down like flies.

He had once joined Torchwood to do the right thing. Now he questioned if what he had been doing had been the right thing. Had Jack been doing the right thing? It had only been insinuated by Hart but Jack had never denied it. Torchwood's captain had once been just like Hart, just like the Time Agent who had sided with the Bane to get more profit.

You are slipping Ianto.

The bell like voice of Nowe resonated within his head and caused him to push the thoughts forcefully away. Living here had brought many changes, the butterfly people or Arcateenians were a highly telepathic race, using it as the only means to communicate with others. Without the pedant that Nowe had gifted him with, he would be unable to talk, while his mind was like an open playground for them.

Better.. now what are you doing?

"Trying to manipulate the Vortex Manipulator. You said that the Bane started the war and I bet that the Bane will say that the butterfly people are responsible."

What makes you think that?

It was funny to be the only one to speak out loud while the answers suddenly popped up in his head.

"The Time Agent I took this Manipulator off, he was boasting something about your natural resources. From what you told me they are manipulating history to their advantages and here we are. Two mostly peaceful races suddenly trying to tear each others throat out. Even considering that your tribes aren't exactly friendly, it still doesn't explain why you suddenly try to fight over your resources."

You make valid points, to think of the Time Agency. They are all vile creatures only interested in their own profits. It wouldn't surprise me.

Ianto only nodded, forcefully pushing the thoughts of Torchwood and Jack away. Thinking about him would only throw him in an emotional turmoil. He couldn't afford it now. Time wasn't on their side and he would rather spent his entire life here than be dead. Feeling the equivalent of a mental purr inside his mind he mused that he could even enjoy it, Nowe certainly didn't hide her fondness for him.

With renewed confidence did he lift the small tool and probed at one of the circuits, trying to find the right wave length.

somewhere amongst the stars

The humming sound in the background was like music to him as his ship sailed effortlessly through time and space bringing him closer to his goal. Funny to think that he hadn't even left the earth for a linear week before he got his first phone call from Martha Jones.

For a moment he had been delighted to hear from her only to deflate as she told him what happened. He had never liked the Time Agency and their agents even less bar Jack of course, who had proven to be a very good man. It was a shame that being near him was a challenge every moment when they were in the same room.

Feeling the TARDIS brush against his mind in silent apology he soothed her briefly before turning back to the monitors. He couldn't help but feel guilty for what the Heart of the TARDIS, the *bad wolf entity*, had done to Jack. The Doctor knew that ever since he had been on his own the TARDIS had searched for a perfect companion for him, who would be at his side for as long as he lived and remembering some of his friends that was quite a time.

Rose had been the first choice but the TARDIS had ultimately decided against her despite the Doctor's feelings for her. He didn't know why she had been rejected and his temperamental lady kept quiet about her reasoning, yet the entity had still used her as a vessel to change potential number two: One Jack Harkness.

However something had gone wrong leaving the Doctor unable to be in Jack's presence for little more than a few hours without getting violently sick. It hurt Jack and it hurt him immensely. While he had never acted on the feeling he held for him, it didn't mean that they weren't there. After the fiasco at the station the Doctor had forbidden the TARDIS to ever attempt such a thing again. He was responsible for Jack's fate and the following pain he had to endure. A cross that was his alone to bear.

For once the TARDIS had listened to him and despite being quite taken with Martha Jones

after getting to know her, nothing had been done. It was better to be alone and love a hundred companions than tying one to him for eternity. Although at the moment he was alone, having yet to meet a new exciting human that would travel with him and after the adventure that was the escape from Castrigan Nova, all he wanted was to relax a bit.

In fact he had already entered the coordinates for the Woodstock festival as Martha's call had interrupted him.

After hearing what had transpired, the Doctor had promptly forgotten about Woodstock and instead entered the coordinates which would lead him into the Arcateen system in the 51st century. A time marked by war and destruction and one of Jack's men had been left there without knowledge on how to survive. He hadn't had the heart to tell Martha that it was very unlikely that the agent, Torchwood or not, had survived the first week. No, he owed it to Jack to check it at least out.

Another check showed him something unusual and the Doctor was on it. It was some type of signal. The sender was unknown as was the ship that transmitted it.

Brown eyes wandering from the signal to the monitor with his current coordinates. It wasn't even a question. With the coordinates saved he could check Jack's agent out anytime he wanted and still be on time. Here was someone needing help and the Doctor might be the only one to give it.

Pulling the lever the TARDIS altered its direction and sped now towards new earth in the 51st century. This was something huge, he

could feel it on the tip of his tongue. Grinning widely he couldn't wait for a new adventure.

Arcateen V, 51st century

Ianto was quiet and kept his face an impassive mask, while he employed all the limited knowledge he had to scramble his thoughts. The two Agents, neither had offered his name, sitting opposite to him mirrored his behavior. Even with the pedant Nowe had gifted him with he couldn't read their thoughts. It made him wonder if Tosh had been able to read Jack's or if it was something all Time Agents were trained in. In all honesty he had never thought that he would be confronted with another Time Agent so soon. But considering that one of them had died at his hands he wasn't surprised. What bewildered him was that they had actually contacted him and Nowe at their home and requested to talk with him. It made him wary.

Time Agents, he had learned quickly, made demands. They rarely asked.

Pressing his wrist against his leg, he took comfort in the weight of the wrist strap against his thigh. He was at least not defenseless against them. Blades hidden on his person and the blaster inside the front of his pants assured that they wouldn't surprise him. Besides he knew that Nowe was flying above the building waiting for any excuse of the Agents to attack them. The knowledge that they had tried to ensure that their civilization would be wiped out made the normally gentle female angry beyond words. Any excuse would do for her.

"You asked to speak with me. What do you want?"

Ianto took pleasure in the small shudders that betrayed their emotions. Of course, after months on this planet, fighting everyday for his survival, living with his friends had rubbed off on him. Now he spoke pretty much like Nowe. He'd lost his native accent just like as he had when he'd left Cardiff to work and live in London. Part of him mourned the loss because Jack had always loved his voice and accent, another viciously pointed out why should he keep things for a man he would most likely never see again. Most of the time he agreed with the vicious one, it sounded suspiciously like Owen on a bad day. Not that there were much differences between good and bad days with Owen.

"Ianto, we've asked you here today because we have a proposition for you."

He suppressed the frown that tried to express his emotions. Every little twitch offered them chunks in his amour and they would be ruthlessly exploited. Ianto had to stay calm. So he did, merely tilting his head to the side as if to say that they men were allowed to continue. They were allowing him to believe that they left him with the reins, but he had dealt with Jack before and knew that it was merely an illusion to lull him into a false sense of security.

"We won't lie Ianto. You have done us a great disservice by fighting for the Butterfly tribe. Documents state that they had been wiped out by the Bane. You changed history in that regard."

"And ensured that even we would be unable to reverse your actions."

Ianto stayed silent. They had told him nothing new so far. The Time Agent he had killed sometime ago had said the same thing. It still made him angry, that self-assured smug voice telling him that people would be slaughtered for nothing but profit and that if needed the Time Agency would assist the Bane. One of the reasons he couldn't begin to feel regret over killing the Agent, guilt yes but no regret. The wrist strap he discovered later under the long sleeves was just a bonus. A lucky bonus, because without it he would have never been able to save his friends... and Nowe.

"I know that. What does that have to do with your proposition?"

The right man, Ianto called him "*arse number one*", frowned, his lips pulled in a thin line while the other just looked disapproving. Not that Ianto cared in any shape or form about the opinion of either. They were just annoying, even more annoying than Owen had ever been. All he wanted was to be done with this and head back to their city. Today they had planned on raising the tower to their cathedral. At least it looked like a cathedral with the small towers and the high windows.

"Ianto you showed quite a bit of talent. Now most Time Agents can, with practice, create a time-lock. However for an outsider neither of this galaxy or time, that's quite an accomplishment."

The feeling of dread he felt must have shown on his face because *arse number one* fell silent and offered him something to drink. Ianto would have very much liked something to drink but his intuition, honed since he started living with the telepathic Arcateenians, warned him of the man's intentions. With regret he declined the offer.

"You shouldn't be surprised. As soon as you activated Kish's Vortex Manipulator your genetic code was transferred to us. Just like the traveling functions were disabled with his death."

"We analyzed your DNA and imagine our surprise when it came back 100% human and 0% genetic enhancements. Such species are all but extinct since mid 22st century. Oh and your name is clearly of British origin even if it might not be your real one."

Outwardly he betrayed no emotion, yet his fingers slid over the blaster without taking his eyes off the two Time Agents. He had a bad feeling about the whole situation and not for the first time he wished that he had never agreed to this meeting. They were planning something. It was better to keep his guard up.

"It is a miracle that you as a plain human were not only able to operate Kish's wrist strap but also manipulate the technology enough to create a time-lock around a complete system of planets, effectively barring any interference."

"Your point being? You want me to stop interfering, send me back to my time?"

In other words you think I'm a primitive Neanderthal and quite surprised that I'm intelligent enough to operate your technology and manipulate it for my goals.

They should have met Tosh then. She would have stunned them into silence with the work she had done on her time-lock defense in the Hub. But now it was unimportant as he still didn't know why they had asked to meet with him and he was quickly getting annoyed.

During his continued stay on Arcateen V, Ianto had learned that bottling emotions up was never a good thing considering that the Arcateenians were highly telepathic. Learning to express his anger had been a tough lesson and had taken time. But now he was comfortable with his emotions despite keeping them close to his heart. "*Arse number one*" continued like Ianto hadn't said anything.

"You have proven that you're adaptable, intelligent and possess a certain skill with words given that you negotiated a treaty with the Bane who are among the most unreasonable aliens in six galaxies, even if they are peaceful for the most part."

"Therefore we would like you to work for us, not as a Time Agent but a mediator."

To say that he was stunned by the offer would be an understatement. Ianto had heard enough about the Time Agency, both from Nowe as well as the little bits from Jack and Hart to know that there was something very dubious about the Time Agency. Even without taking Nowe into account, he wanted to go home to Jack and the others.

"And if I decline your generous offer?"

Both men adopted displeased expressions and Ianto knew immediately that they both were used to getting their way. Making an effort to look relaxed he shifted slightly. He needed to be ready. His hand closed around the grip of the blaster.

And they never expected that I would decline...

"Why would you want to do that?"

Did he have to spell it out for them?
Apparently, without changing his expression, he replied in his blandest voice. Owen had always been annoyed when he spoke with him using that tone. It made him sound arrogant he'd said.

"Quite easy sir, my friends have only recently made peace and we're still in the middle of rebuilding. That aside I'm stranded here. I'm researching ways to return home."

He hoped that they wouldn't be able to discern from which year and area in Britain he was. His accent was gone, the suit he had once worn was destroyed too. Nothing but his DNA still remained of where he had come from. That and the Welsh he had learned and still spoke on occasion if only to remind him of home, of his vow to find a way to return.

The tensing of a muscle was all warning lanto had before one of them reached for his blaster. His leg kicked the table up causing the shot to hit the surface without harming him. Using the chair as a shield he drew his own blaster. He could only hear one of the man and that send him on edge. It meant the other had to have used his wrist strap! Shivers ran down his spine, shivers that he associated with the travel through time and space.

Firing at the arse still standing, he ducked. The other reappeared, blaster cocked. lanto threw himself aside and evaded the kick aimed at his back. His mind was screaming at Nowe, warning her of the danger, but she didn't answer. Distracted by the absence of her presence in his mind, lanto didn't notice the threat until it was too late. His body hit the wall and the barrel touched the back of his head before he could get up again. One hand pulled him roughly to his feet, taking care that his

blaster never had the chance to hit any of them. Leaning in close, lanto could feel the hot breath against his ear.

"Well lanto, while we cannot change the history of Arcateen V anymore, we can still kill a lot of them the ... old-fashioned way."

He stilled, the grip around his blaster going slack. Nowe's life couldn't be risked, lanto would never have it. In defeat he let his weapon fall to the ground. With his face frozen in an imperturbable mask he went over to the overturned table. After putting it back on its legs he sat on the chair again. With forced calm he awaited what was to come. As if nothing out of the ordinary happened the two Time Agents also took their seats again.

"I see you understand the benefits of working for us."

"Let me tell you about our working conditions."

His fingers clenched but he simply confirmed their statements with a nod. Every sentence they uttered enraged him. It was hard to think that Jack had actually once been one of them. He wondered what had happened to change him so profoundly while he listened to the working conditions of the Time Agency. He came to a surprising realization. Those two men shared quite a few qualities with Jack and John Hart too.

Yet at the same time there were nothing like Jack.

"So lanto, do you agree to the conditions?"

As if I have a choice.

"Sounds quite acceptable to me, sir. When will we leave?"

"As soon as you have said your goodbyes."

"Will you be waiting here?"

"No, we will accompany you lanto."

... and make sure that you don't try to flee!

Completing the sentence in his head, lanto had the strong urge to smack that smug arsehole and whip that smirk off his face. Very satisfying with swift following retribution for Nowe and the others. But one day he they'd pay and he couldn't wait for it to come. For now he would have to say his goodbyes and wouldn't that go down with Nowe.

somewhere amongst the stars, 51st century

It felt like years but at one point in his life lanto had come to appreciate irony. Now he just cursed it three times from hell or would if he had been so inclined. Life was playing tricks or the fates were toying with him. Either way it was maddening. His only hope of salvation and it was gone.

Vanished into thin air, or more like traveling through the Time Vortex.

At age 21, when he had just joined Torchwood, they had given him and other new employees a long winded lesson on the history of the organization. He was probably one of the few who didn't sleep through it. Ironically, the Doctor had been the one to interest him the most. An alien who apparently could not only travel through time and space but also change his face. The number one enemy of the Crown and the whole UK; he remembered wondering

why the Queen would ban someone who had saved her life, but figured that the day must have been a trying one. Discovering aliens, getting attacked by an alien and being saved by one, it was a miracle that she hadn't had a stroke.

Yet despite being banned, the Doctor continued to visit the earth, dance around Torchwood One like it was nothing and save their world.

And now he was the only chance that lanto had to get home. A denizen of the Crown and an employee of Torchwood needed the help of the Doctor to get home. He knew the chances of encountering the alien were slim to none, but his hope would die last. It was all he had left. None of the aliens working at the Agency would be caught dead helping him. They feared the repercussions too much and he couldn't count on his limited knowledge to repair his Vortex Manipulator and escape before the technology department noticed what he was doing.

No, he needed the help of an outsider and the only alien he knew, who could travel through time and space, was the Doctor. He really didn't appreciate the irony.

What was even worse, he had had a chance. Two weeks ago on the sixth moon near the Ood-Sphere in the 41st century and his partner/babysitter/prison guard had botched it. If he hadn't loathed Mentior before, he surely did now. The bastard and his awful flirting had detained him long enough for the TARDIS to vanish.

Frustration didn't even begin to cover the myriad of emotions he had been experiencing since leaving Arcateen V, leaving his friends,

new family and Nowe behind. Frustration that Mentior/Hart brought to a boiling point. So he did the only logical thing, he got drunk after the success of their mission.

And of course that had made everything even worse, if that was possible.

In his attempts to drown his sorrows in alcohol, he had forgotten two vital things. First, competing against Mentior was a bad idea because with his 51st century physiology he'd drunk him under the table, and second, alcohol in the 51st century was far more potent. The whole room had spun after the second glass and the rest, the rest was history.

"This is all your fault! If you hadn't dumped me on Arcateen V, I wouldn't be in this situation."

Hands had slipped over his shoulders in a suggestive way, but stayed strictly on his upper back. Mentior's face wasn't much more than a blurred outline right in front of his face. Ianto couldn't make out the expression on his face, he was far too wasted to see straight, but something about him had changed. He had watched people and their mannerisms long enough. Something was up, but he couldn't figure out what. It was like his thoughts were falling out of his brain as soon as he had formed them.

"You wound me eye-candy! I assure you I don't forget people of the handsome sort. Therefore I'm complete certain, that we've never met before."

Another glass was pushed in front of his face. Grabbing it, he downed the shot in less than two gulps. Otherwise he wouldn't have been able to stand the bitter taste the ale left in his mouth. Why was it that everything good on earth had to be twisted into something

unrecognizable in the future? Jack had certainly cherished the beverages the future offered, or so he had said.

"Whoa, eye-candy! Slow down or you'll be passed out before the evening's out. So what was that about me dropping you on Arcateen V?"

Giving Mentior a glare that had once told Owen, Gwen, Tosh and Jack that they were going to be put on decaf if they didn't stop their pushing, he slammed the empty glass down. Sadly the other Time Agent had yet to be introduced to his different glares, considering that this was their first official encounter. With a barely suppressed groan of annoyance he promptly ordered another drink.

"Don't play innocent you bastard. You knew from the second you landed on Earth, searching for radiation cluster bombs, yeah right. Why the hell did you kidnap me, was that jealousy? Because your 'husband' wanted to go on a real date with me?"

Staring into the new drink the bartender, some alien with lots of different colored fur, had served, Ianto didn't notice as Mentior's eye twitched briefly. His obsession with the face of Boe was widely known, especially after the disaster that was the time loop. And this puny little mediator didn't only know Boe, but also had been about to go on a date with him and he had messed that up? A wide grin replaced the prior contemplative expression. He needed more information.

"Why would I want to ruin your date and when am I supposed to have done that?"

Foolish as he had been, Ianto never noticed as Mentior interrogated him while steadily buying more drinks for him. Yet he himself nursed his

one glass for as long as he could before ordering another. This information was gold for him and he needed to get every bit that he could.

And Mentior had made him spill everything, every detail he had needed to not only kidnap him, but also how to find Gray. He had failed Jack and only realized it too late. He didn't even think of the Doctor, who had been so close and still so far. Sighing he sat down again, studying the data provided for him for his next mission.

Perhaps then he would find a chance to escape the seemingly hopeless situation he found himself in. Hearing a cheerful voice, he greeted the young Time Agent named Boe. Barely a day over twenty, Jack looked breathtakingly beautiful and carefree. He hadn't any idea of what would await him during his time with the Agency, of his almost marriage with Mentior or when he would try to become a better man than now.

Currently he was very much like a playboy, thriving on his dangerous assignments and the affairs he had during them. He was even a more of a flirt than in the 21st century, compared to this their Jack was positively tame. Owen's face would be priceless were he to witness their leader now and Gwen would probably faint away.

The door to the broom closet or the 51st equivalent opened and a very satisfied looking Boe stepped out followed by a panting alien Ianto didn't recognize. Shaking his head in amusement, he finished leafing through the documents he would need for his next mission before waving his goodbye, ignoring the leer Boe sent his way. While it was definitely tempting to sleep with the younger version of

Jack, he had no guarantee that it wouldn't be remembered and the mess with Mentior was already enough.

Besides he had a war to stop. Briefly wondering if the Time Agency and Torchwood weren't related in some fashion, work seemed to be endless in both jobs. With a sigh he left for his own apartment. He still had to get ready after all.

somewhere amongst the stars, 51st century

Even before the alarm went off, his hand was already hovering over the electronic device. Opening his eyes, he didn't need to know that the door had already opened and Elaine floated inside.

"Good morning master Ianto!"

Suppressing a yawn, he sat up and shoved the thin sheets aside. He would never get used to the 36 standard galactic hours and that soft mattress. Shouldn't they know that it was bad for their posture and the back? Apparently not.

".. morning Elaine.."

"You have a new case sir. The government of the planet Algol has requested our assistance. Apparently in the 4256 an unexpected civil war broke out and they now need our help to fix it. The planet's core is rich with ammonium. Your task will be to secure an alliance, either with the government or the opposing faction. Our continued access to the ammonium resources needs to be secured."

Wandering into the kitchen that belonged to his apartment, his hands went through the by now well-practiced motions of brewing himself a cuppa as he listened to the small floating AI.

Elaine, or rather Alpha Omega 346724577 IJ as her identification proclaimed her, went on and on about the new mission and his thoughts drifted once again to the advances technology had made during the last century. Elaine, for example, was a wonderful invention; even with his great organization skills, he had trouble keeping ahead of everything. Elaine solved that by always adjusting his schedule to be most convenient for him.

It was a pity that coffee machines weren't a part of the wonderful advanced technology. Had someone told him years ago that he would actually enjoy a cup of tea, he would have had them committed and probably put on decaf for blasphemy. Sitting next to the cooling station, the advanced version of a fridge, he wrapped the worn Vortex Manipulator around his wrist.

"Has the information already been sent to my account?"

"Not yet sir, some of the information is very sensitive. You're required to report to the headquarters for your briefing."

"Thank you Elaine."

"It's my duty sir. Do you wish for me to activate your will for the duration of your travels? The territory you'll be heading to fall under Omega A1. Therefore it's advised to activate it or compose one. Your will was last updated six standard weeks ago. Is that one still valid?"

"It is, please activate it."

Disposing of the cup, he stood. He needed to shower before the briefing and something to eat wouldn't be bad either. Since taking the job with the Agency he had lost five pounds, even with the gained muscles from the self-defense studies he had been forced to take. Being a

mediator was a far more dangerous job than he had thought, but considering that not all races were for the peace measures the Time Agency enforced, it shouldn't have surprised him.

"Your wishes have been registered. The timepiece mentioned will be stored in facility G Omega B15. Should you fail to return from your mission the item will be gifted to the benefactor, Time Agent No. 153, codename Boe. Is there anything else I can do sir?"

Aside from manipulating my Vortex Manipulator, so that I can't get home?

"No Elaine, that will be all."

"Very well, appropriate clothing for your mission has been delivered. It has been placed in your wet cabin."

Ianto watched as the AI floated away before stepping into the bathroom. During his time in the 51st century, he had taken to sleeping in the buff, as the planet's normal temperature was far too high for his tastes and for sleeping in thick tunics. And with Elaine being the only other intelligent being that lived inside his apartment, he could walk around without having to fear embarrassment in any form.

The bathroom or wet cabin as it was now called, looked much like the bathrooms from his time, yet subtly different. Instead of a mirror there was a screen that fulfilled multiple functions besides being a mirror. The sink had been replaced by something that Ianto still couldn't identify, but knew how to use and that was what mattered. Luckily the shower had survived the centuries following his own and had only been advanced for the better.

Briefly inspecting the small box that hovered next to the screen, Ianto used his hand to deactivate the security measures on the package. Inside were some sort of black tunic that reminded him uncomfortably of the preferred sleepwear of the 51st century before he discovered the slacks and another layer beneath it. All of the clothes were made from some sort of leather. Hopefully it was a species he hadn't met so far.

But first he needed a shower, one of the few luxuries he still could indulge in. Though Jack's absence took some of the fun out of it. As a mediator, he held enough importance in the organization that his water wasn't rationed. Not like for the rest of the population of their colony, where every average alien had barely enough water for a five standard minute shower. Water far hotter than what he'd been used to on Earth cascaded down his body, rejuvenating him. At least until a message popped up on the screen.

Another wave of his hand and the water stopped. Grabbing a towel, he noticed that it happened to be a voice message from Elaine. Confused, he opened it. What could be so important that the AI couldn't wait for until he had finished his shower?

"Sir, the Agency has rescheduled your departure. It's now one intergalactic hour early. Your briefing has therefore also been pushed forward. It begins in 30 standard minutes."

Cursing, Ianto hurriedly dried himself. That had to be Belias' doing, there was no other explanation. The alien was probably still sore that Ianto had turned him down three days earlier. Now he was trying to make his life

difficult. Ha, he was welcome to try, but no one beat him when it came to time management.

In a flash, he was dry and standing in front of the screen, calling up an image of the clothes he would need to wear on the mission and more importantly instructions on how to wear them correctly. The undergarments first, then the slacks, followed by the first under layer, now the outer tunic and then tying the whole ensemble together with the belt provided. Footwear was last; sandals made from some kind of wood. They were the least comfortable things he had worn on his feet to date and he knew already that he would be happy when the mission was finished.

With one last glance at his image on screen, he left the wet cabin behind. For once in a hurry, he calculated quickly how much time he would need to reach the Agency headquarters and if a meal would fit into the equation. With dismay he realized that it didn't.

"Lock the door behind me Elaine."

The door slipped shut before his sentence was even finished. The wooden sandals made loud noises as he ran towards the space station. While being a mediator had ensured that he lived in a better district than most, only the Time Agents had the right to live near the Agency itself. Ianto paid for it now.

Oh, he would wring Belias' neck and force-feed him to the gigantic slug alien that was supposed to live somewhere in the city's sewers. If there was one thing that Ianto hated almost as much as a bad cup of coffee it was tardiness. Distracted by the chaotic thoughts running through his head Ianto didn't even notice as he turned the corner and walked right into something that wasn't supposed to

be there. Only as a door shut behind did he realize.

A very familiar sound rang through his ears and for a few seconds he couldn't believe it, but it had to be. He would always remember the sounds the infamous alien spaceship had created as it had landed in Torchwood Tower and later on the Plazz. Did that mean? Taking a few more steps inside the ship he studied the interior with rapt interest. It had been one of the key interest in Torchwood's research and now being presented with it lanto had to laugh. Their scientist couldn't have farther from the truth if they had tried.

The question now was where was the Doctor? This was, after all, his ship. So logically speaking, he should be around. Following the twisting corridor, he realized that at least one account on the TARDIS had been correct. The ship appeared to be bigger on the inside. But where was the Doctor? There had to be something like a control center or something similar from where the ship was being operated.

The corridor twisted again and lanto somehow got the distinct feeling that someone was toying with him. It was almost as if a voice was laughing in his mind, but as he didn't wear Nowe's pedant, nor could he sense any living being around him, it made him once more question where the Doctor was. Then he sensed it, not a living being, but a consciousness. Something was definitely brushing against his mind and laughing at him.

His thoughts turned to the few tapes he had seen of the Doctor and how he had spoken about the TARDIS. What had he called it, a she? Yes, he had definitely called the ship a she and said that she was alive in a sense. So did that

mean...? Carefully, he tried to scatter his mind, only to find that the presence that touched him was enticing him with brief brushes and laughter. Only it eluded him, making it clear for lanto that the TARDIS had to be far more aware on a mental level than he was as a human.

This time he encountered a solid presence, though couldn't understand the words she apparently said to him, the only emotion that was clear was laughter. Frowning, he tried to imagine the Doctor in images rather than words. He had no way to know that he would be understood. Perhaps this worked better? Having only seen two different images of the Doctor he tried to picture them.

Apparently it worked, if the feeling of helplessness or sadness or something similar was to be believed. One thing was clear; the Doctor wasn't on board. This time his mind was eloped by a warm feeling. Confirmation, as far as he could tell.

And just like that, he suddenly stood inside what had to be the central room of the ship, if the structure was what he thought it was. While the other corridor had columns as well, this was central and something like a console appeared to be built around it. Not that he could make sense of the buttons, levers and screens.

Another small warm burst inside his head and he had to steady himself against one of the walls. A very disorientating feeling, even more so than Nowe, whose mental voice had been far stronger. But then he had had the pedant that controlled the mental backlash, which had been destroyed upon leaving Arcateen V behind. Now he had only his mental control and that was, compared to the mightiness the

TARDIS had to be, more than a little shoddy. At least he now knew why the TARDIS had effectively kidnapped him.

The Doctor had been kidnapped; by Jack, or rather an earlier variation of Jack.

On one of the screens he watched a surveillance tape before fighting the urge to ram his head against one of the walls. He could already tell that by the end of this rescue he would be barmy like the Doctor appeared to be. The thought earned him a mental slap or the equivalent of it. Or he would return to Cardiff, throw himself at Jack's feet and beg forgiveness for something that he had no control over. Either way, it certainly didn't look good for the Doctor. This younger version of Jack was less gentle and apparently still a ways away from the good man the Doctor, *a younger version*, would meet on earth during the second World War.

Time travel was confusing and he had long since stopped getting a headache over it. But before, it had never mattered because aside from Hart/Mentior no one had known him in the future. This though, was a younger Jack, and he couldn't know Ianto otherwise the timeline would be changed and that could have consequences. At worst the universe might even explode.

Now what to do?

He knew what the TARDIS wanted from him, she had picked him, after all, for that very reason. But could he do it? Could he match minds with one of the most stubborn persons he had ever met and come out on top, no pun intended? He knew Jack, but he didn't know this Jack. The one who thought of kidnapping the Doctor and attempting to blackmail the

Time Agency, of all things, would get him what he wanted.

Scratch the thought, that sounded exactly like something Jack would do.

And now it would be his task to make sure that the Doctor would go free because the TARDIS had been exceedingly clever. As soon as she had realized what was happening she had begun monitoring Jack's Vortex Manipulator and intercepted the message with the demands. On some level he could recognize the paranoia the TARDIS displayed for her owner. For the Time Agency, an alien with a ship made for space and time travel could be of interest and there was no guarantee that they would think him important enough to send a mediator in the first place. Ianto also knew that they most probably wouldn't, the Time Agency was far too self-absorbed. The task to save the Doctor was now up to Ianto.

Joy...

How could Jack even confuse the Doctor with Magnus Greel he would never know but he would deal with it. He always did. Ianto needed something to drink before he would even attempt to think about a possible rescue plan. Now, where was the kitchen?

Somewhere amongst the stars

The TARDIS hit the ground with an uncomfortable thud that nearly sent Ianto off his feet. Stumbling he held onto the structure around the main console to keep from falling over. In return he received a somewhat apoplectic response from the TARDIS followed by a series of images, that seemed pretty disjointed at first. However after mulling over

them for a few seconds Ianto eventually figured that without a Timelord to steer a TARDIS the ship was unable to operate smoothly.

For the conclusion he felt another burst of what he thought to be positive emotion or approval.

"Where are we anyway and when?"

Watching one of the panels for information he studied the sentence that popped up. Ianto couldn't read it, the only thing he managed to identify was the year: 51st century but the rest was written in a language he hadn't encountered before. Meaning he would have to wander the streets and search for some signs that were hopefully written in standard galactic English.

Peering into one of the corridors he hoped that his one led back to the entrance. While he had explored the ship for a few minutes he had yet to know where everything was located. It didn't help that he had quickly noticed that the TARDIS could change her interior outlook any time she wanted. Once she had already led him on a wild-goose chase as he had tried to find the bathrooms. She apparently had been very amused by it, Ianto not so much.

Fortunately for him he found the exist very quickly, the way being far shorter than he remembered from first entering the TARDIS. Not that he had paid attention then, having been in a hurry and only interested in arriving at the Time Agency in time for his briefing... and cursing Belias.

But now he needed to pay attention, he would probably be living in the TARDIS for a quiet a while. It would prove to be beneficial to know the layout of his current home but first he

needed to find out where he was. Pushing the door open he stepped outside.

The surrounding area was familiar and Ianto realized with a start that he was on new earth. He had visited the city during one of his missions once. In the distance he could even see the skyscraper where the negotiations had taken place. At the time he had barely worked two months for the Time Agency and the pain of separation from Nowe and his new family had been nearly unbearable. He'd barely paid attention to the planet back then.

Figures that it now come back and bite him in the ass.

With a sigh he stepped onto the street, at least his search for clues to his whereabouts had been concluded quickly, far more quickly than anticipated. However he shouldn't be surprised. Magnus Greel as the justice minister of the Supreme Alliance had his headquarters here, it was only logical to try to kidnap him at a place he frequented. The images the TARDIS had shown him had depicted Greel in a cabinet which surprisingly entailed almost the same functions as the TARDIS herself did. With it you could travel through time and space, unfortunately for Jack Greel had already been defeated by the Doctor several linear months before on old earth.

Thus the earlier version of Jack had confused the Doctor arriving in his phone box with Magnus Greel arriving in his time cabinet.

It meant nothing good for the Doctor, if the tape he had seen was anything to go by. The Doctor had very early noticed that the person kidnapping him hadn't been his Jack so he had never called him by that name. Instead he had asked for one and gotten Boe. Ianto knew

though that he wouldn't be able to call Jack that. Remembering the message sent by Boe, he knew that he would have to act as if he really had come in stead for the Time Agency and they would never call a traitor by his official Time Agent name.

He would have to find something else to call him. But before that he would have to find the place where Boe was keeping the Doctor. It would have to be a building with securing cells and very little windows. If Boe's paranoia was anything like Jack's then he would take no chances. He would ensure that his captive would be imprisoned where escape was impossible.

If you want Magnus Greel back, alive and unharmed, I suggest you follow my demands!

Ianto would have to research the buildings in the immediate area before devising an exact plan of action, though with the TARDIS foresight his cover was already in place. As an official mediator of the Time Agency he should be known to Boe and that would ensure that the former Time Agent wouldn't check too deeply in his current background. The Agency was nothing if not private and giving false facts to cover up something was nothing new. Boe wouldn't think anything of the fact that he was either listed as MIA or on a mission to Algol.

All he would need to do was either gain Boe's trust to get him to release the Doctor, which appeared very unlikely or he would need to gain access to Boe's missing memory in the Time Agency's storage. Either way he would need every ounce of skill he possessed to free the Doctor. He knew enough about Boe and

Jack to know that playing with him was gambling with his life and for once his cards didn't look good.

Stopping his aimless walk, Ianto couldn't believe his luck. There on the other side of the street was Boe. The bag in his arms suggested that he had gotten himself something to eat. Now all he had to do was follow him and find out where he kept the Doctor imprisoned.

As if sensing the stare Boe suddenly turned around. Their gazes locked and Ianto could see Boe's brow furrowing before he suddenly smirked. Ianto realized with a start that Boe had actually recognized him as he watched as the former Time Agent turned around and headed to the nearest possibility to cross the busy street.

In those precious moment Ianto contemplated running for now but eventually decided against it. He would have to face Boe eventually and while he would have rather done the first meeting on his terms, these circumstances made the whole affair far easier. So he stayed put and waited to be approached. Boe didn't take long, he had probably manipulated the stopping lights to be faster. Ianto wasn't so sure he appreciated that, he wished he had had more time to prepare himself for their first meeting. He'd have to make due.

"I didn't expect the Agency to comply this fast with my demands or that they would send one of their best looking ones."

Boe's face held the same expression as Jack's when he flirted, the small dose of leering served in addition to keep his adversaries off balance. Ianto, however, who had dealt with Jack for years wasn't impressed.

"Former Time Agent 49, you have committed serious atrocities against the Time Agency and the Supreme Alliance! You are hereby formerly relieved of your status as Time Agent. You are required to hand over your Vortex Manipulator peacefully and consent to have your memories removed."

Ianto watched with fascination as Boe grew angry. He suppressed a shiver at the quiet anger and ferocious emotions he could see in those familiar blue eyes, instead he kept his face carefully blank. For all intents and purposes unafraid of the other man. In reality however his fingers had already slid to his blaster and released the safety. While he couldn't kill Boe, it would disrupt the timeline, he could still seriously injure him and he would if push came to shove. Suddenly Boe laughed, loud and unpleasant. Ianto didn't react.

"I hope you don't expect me to comply to those ridiculous orders?"

"Protocol demanded that I say it. I'm Ianto, my mediator code is 2671985 and I have been sent here to negotiate for the release of Magnus Greel on behalf of the Time Agency."

It earned him another leer and the elevator eye. Boe's blue eyed gaze swept over his face and the chin length hair to the scar on his chin to his tunic, which he had changed prior leaving the TARDIS, and lastly his shoes which contained hidden blades inside the soles. Boe quirked and eye brow at that but his grin only widened.

"Call me Boe then, Ianto."

"Protocol has stripped you of all names you have used during your tenure at the Agency including the name Boe. If you are serious about the negotiations for your memories of

the standard year 5194 you'll abide by the rules of mediation. Is that acceptable, Vera?"

Ianto could hear the grinding of Vera's teeth but in the end he offered another grin that was as fake as the first one had been and nodded. He didn't comment on the name Ianto had given him, not that he would have gotten an answer, considering that he had copied Gwen when she had named John Hart.

"All acceptable. I suspect you want to see that I haven't killed Greel so far, don't you?"

"It would be most welcome."

Vera turned around and walked away, just a single motion with his head indicating that Ianto should follow him. Without releasing the blaster Ianto just did that, he didn't trust Vera not to have something up his sleeve. He had already noticed the higher concentration of pheromones and taken to breath through his mouth rather than the nose. Working with Mentior had revealed that some human could in fact control the amount of pheromones they emitted, Vera and Mentior among them. Unfortunately Ianto had also discovered that shielding or scattering your mind did nothing to avert the effects. He would have to be very careful.

Ianto didn't doubt for one minute that Vera wasn't above using any means to reach his goal, otherwise he would have never dared to kidnap one of the most influential people of the century and blackmail the Time Agency of a organizations. That or he was just plain nuts. He had yet to decide which one fit Vera better.

The walk wasn't long and Ianto to care to not only memorize the street but also the correct way, knowing that he would have to return here a few times at least to keep his cover and

talk with the Doctor. Perhaps the Timelord had his own ideas on how to free him. Though his first attempts had been unsuccessful. He frowned as he remembered the bruised face curtsey of Vera's fist.

No, this wasn't Jack and he shouldn't even dare to mix them up. If he did, he could make mistakes that might cost him his life and he had no desire to die just yet, thank you very much.

"We're here!"

lanto stared at the foreboding building. It had to be a remnant of the first revolution, erected during or immediately after the first civil war. The building had been built with bricks instead of the steel that would later be favored among many of the civilizations. As predicted lanto couldn't see any windows or doors save the entrance.

"Do you have my memory with you?"

"Regulations Vera!"

He wouldn't admit to Vera that he hadn't even thought about the memory yet, let alone planned to get his hands on it. Fortunately as a member of the Time Agency there were numerous regulations and rules that had to be respected when negotiating for something. It were those regulations lanto was now resorting to use. Hopefully they would deflect the curiosity for a while. Vera grinned in the way Jack did, when he knew he was being fooled but would allow it for the time being.

"Alright, alright no more questions about the memory. I will bring Greel into the sitting room. Wait there for me."

With that lanto was left alone in a huge bare room filled with nothing but two rooting couches and a small table. There was nothing to drink and he wouldn't request anything but resolved to bring something from the TARDIS for the next meeting. It made lanto wonder how long he would need to drag the negotiations out to get what he wanted. If Vera was cooperative then this whole affair wouldn't take long. His objective was simple: Return my memories and I will let Greel go.

Easy demand with an easy solution. Sadly lanto couldn't simply agree after the first meeting. The Time Agency was an organization full of simple-minded selfishly egoistic bastards who did everything for their own gain. They would never simply agree which meant lanto would have to pretend to not agree, meet with the Doctor talk with him about regulated things the Doctor most likely didn't know and be borderline rude to Vera. Until a believable amount of time had past and he could give Vera the memory and be on his merry way with a healthy Doctor in tow.

At least that was the rough outline of his plan. Now lanto would see if he could manage it.

Vera came back with the Doctor in front of him and lanto immediately frowned. The timelord still wore the clothing from the day he'd been captured which was one week ago. But lanto didn't call Vera on it, settled for frowning very disapprovingly as he stood to greet the Doctor. The renegade Time Agent would get the message loud and clear especially after lanto had already mentioned the regulations. Hopefully it would made things a little easier for the Doctor.

And if not, then Ianto would have to think of something.

For now he stood and walked over to the Doctor and bowed deeply. After all he wanted that Vera continued to think that he had one of the most important people in his hands. Outsmarting Jack had always taken a 150%, he wouldn't gamble, he would give his best from the start.

"Minister Greel I'm sorry that you had to endure this travesty. But rest assured that the Time Agency will do everything in its power to have you released from this unfortunate situation. I'm Ianto and my mediator code is 2671985. I will be negotiating with Vera for your earliest possible release."

In his thoughts he willed the Doctor to play along, to accept and nod with a grin. Anything to make his game with Vera easier for him. For once someone listened to his pleas as the Doctor's face adopted a solemn expression and he nodded with more dignity than Ianto had trusted the Timelord to have.

"I have been as well as the circumstances have allowed me to be. However it soothes me that I will soon be free again."

With that the Doctor took a seat on one of the ratty couches and looked expectantly at Ianto. He made a shooing motion towards Vera and sat down himself. Checking his Vortex Manipulator one more time to ensure that nothing would go wrong he opened his mouth. Words flowing in a language long forgotten from his tongue.

"The reports at Torchwood said that you spoke every existing language. Is that correct."

"Why yes I happen to speak every language, even Delphon and that is spoken with the eyebrows alone. You are Torchwood?"

"Yes Torchwood three in Cardiff."

"You're one of Jack's men? Wait you are Ianto Jones, aren't you? Jack had Martha call me to rescue you."

That earned him a flat look from Ianto, though he was really touched that Jack had apparently not been sitting around idly but tried to help him with every available method. To think that he had even called the Doctor to save him, it warmed his heart.

"Well Doctor it seems that I will be saving you instead."

The Doctor grinned, a wide goofy grin and took Ianto's breath for a few seconds though he had no idea why. Collecting his thoughts again he was about to speak as the Doctor interrupted him again, the grin now making him resemble the maniac Torchwood One had always made him out to be.

"I think we'll get along splendidly Mr. Jones. You are just brilliant, I can already tell."

Ianto shivered unconsciously and wondered why the sentence sounded like an omen to him.

new earth, 51st century

Stupid! Stupid!

Dragging himself forward, Ianto cursed himself in every language he knew and after nearly four years working for the Time Agency he had learned plenty of languages. He had known

that this wasn't his Jack, had seen it with his own eyes. This was *Vera* and Ianto had witnessed it firsthand! Yet he had still fallen for the old trick, just as stupid as Gwen. At least he had pulled away before too much of the gloss had been transferred onto his lips.

Not that his actions had stopped the effects of the lip gloss. It was like he could feel the poison crawling through his veins, trying to numb his body. He literally had to force his body to move. Only a small distance and it felt like a mile. Had Gwen felt like this, lying there in the container and waiting for death to come. No, it couldn't be the same. He was alone, Gwen hadn't been. At least she had counted on Torchwood to save her. Ianto didn't have such luxury. He would have to save himself.

Alone and his legs gave out.

Shifting his weight against the wall, Ianto tried his best to remain standing. Breathing felt harder and harder, as if someone was sitting on his chest, compressing his lungs. He could already see the TARDIS hidden next to the building, only a few more feet. If he made it into the TARDIS then he would be safe. He knew that the ship would help him. Incentive, he needed an incentive to continue to move!

Home

Home, yes home was good. He needed to remind himself why he did this. To save the Doctor and to return to Torchwood, he couldn't give in yet. He had to stand up and walk forward. Walking... it sounded so disturbingly easy. So why couldn't he walk forward? He felt his head fell against the wall, eyes fluttering shut. No, he couldn't give up yet. It would be over if he did and he wouldn't

be the only one to pay for it. Who would save the Doctor, if he died?

Jack would never forgive me...

His finger pressed against the wall as he pushed his body up. Stretching his legs, he put his weight on the wall and took a step and another. With each motion he made the TARDIS came closer and closer. As his head hit against the wooden door he sent a silent prayer to the stars. Carefully he took the key from the secret pocket in his overcoat. The warmth from the key calmed him as he slowly slipped into the ship. The door closed and Ianto coughed, he couldn't breathe anymore. Thoughts were spreading and he begged the TARDIS to make the way to the infirmary very short, otherwise he'd probably die on the way.

Warm tendrils crept into his mind and he sighed. He was safe now, no one would be able to hurt him now, not even Vera. How could he ever have confused the Time Agent with his Jack? They shared the looks, their partiality for secrets and their love for flirting. But aside from that they were nothing alike. Vera lacked the warmth and affection that shone from Jack's eyes whenever he spoke about someone he loved.

Two more steps was all he managed before his legs gave out again. Though this time it was final. With no time to brace himself, he connected painfully with the floor. Keeping his eyes open seemed such an impossible task. Twitching his fingers he tried to crawl further but neither his hands nor legs wanted to follow his commands. Around him he could hear sounds. Somewhere he registered and connected them with the shifting of rooms like the TARDIS was so fond of doing. Perhaps she was moving the infirmary closer to him.

He prayed that she did. Otherwise....

It was funny how he had always taken his hands and legs for granted, now he could feel neither. Forcing his eyes open he could only watch in silence as the coral like pattern changed. The control console rose from the grounds with Ianto as a silent witness. What good would that do? But before he could worry about it, he felt the TARDIS' presence inside his thoughts.

Under her gentle encouragements he managed to stand once more. Hands braced on the console taking all energy he had to remain upright. Head lolling forward he felt the numbness spread, then his breathing stopped. The poison had reached his lungs and now he would die of asphyxiation. It would be a long way to die.

He didn't want to die.

Dimly he was aware that one of the cases on the console opened. Then he saw it: Beautiful, never ending, melodious and consisting of millions of sparkles and strands in golden hues. It was more alive than anything else he had seen before. None of the alien he'd encountered came close, not even Nowe, this was all life and death in an eternal flowing river. Ianto couldn't even begin to understand what he was seeing but he knew that his time of suffering had come to an end.

The *being* inside the TARDIS spoke to him and he understood without hearing the words. All that was, that is and what would and could be flowed through him, destroying his perception of reality and time.

Bad Wolf

Now he understood the words written on the wall outside the tourist office. It all made sense. This had been decided long before he ever saw them. Anger, he wondered if he should feel it. The decision had been made for him and all Ianto could do now was to go along with that choice. For as long as it would take. Ianto never noticed as he finally collapsed onto the floor in front of the TARDIS console.

It had begun.

Ianto is late..

The thought unsettled the Doctor, who sat in fresh clothes already on the tattered couch, where he had sat every time he and Ianto had talked or drunk tea. Although the talks were just a cover to exchange information about Jack and to think of a plan to free him from Jack's clutches. All under Jack's nose who didn't speak a smidgen of Welsh and could only guess what they were talking about. During their first meeting he had tried to force them to speak in a standard language, something his Vortex Manipulator could translate which Ianto had rebuked by reminding him of some regulations. He was pretty sure that Jack hated that word with a passion he usually reserved for flirting.

Ianto had taken to call him Vera.

It was a good idea the Doctor supposed otherwise they would run into the danger of confusing this Jack with their Jack as Ianto had already two days ago when he had seen the two exchange a particularly intense kiss. The sight had made something burn inside his

stomach area and for a brief second he had wondered whether the stew Jack had given him hours prior hadn't been poisoned before he realized that he was jealous. And wasn't that the most ridiculous idea?

He was the Doctor, he wasn't jealous, he loved everyone of his companions, though some more like Rose or Martha and some less. But here he was and the worst thing he couldn't even begin to tell whom he was jealous of? Ianto for kissing Jack, for the affair he had with their version of Jack for kissing Ianto Jones who would make an excellent companion?

With a sigh he rose and paced around the room, the last weeks locked up inside the rotting building had done nothing for his patience. He was so used to action to throw himself headfirst into danger that sitting around doing nothing was the worst punishment someone could deal him. Luckily their plan was shaping up, at least according to Ianto. He figured that he had gotten closer to acquiring Jack's missing memory and that nearly a suitable amount of time had past which the Time Agency would deem reasonable to grudgingly give in to Jack's demands.

Then they would present Jack with his missing memory and skip off to the TARDIS. And after that he could take Ianto on a small trip to a nice planetary system as thank you for the rescue before eventually bringing him back to Cardiff in 2007. The thought made him uneasy and he wondered why. Perhaps because Ianto was something different from the usual companions he attracted.

Rose had been a young somewhat naïve woman with a will made from steel and a stubbornness to match. He had loved her

dearly and her loss had been tragic. Yet he was consoled with the knowledge that she was safe somewhere. Martha, another woman made from steel, however a different kind. One who planned and was patient enough to wait out for the right opportunity. Then there was Jack a handsome time traveler who flirted with anything that moved, even him.

Of course he had never acted on Jack's feeling, it would have only led to heartbreak with his long lifetime, which had been shortened since he started his travels. He still could remember his first incarnation which had held for over 450 years before the need to regenerate had come. Over double the time had passed since then and he had needed nine regenerations since then. A testimony to the dangers he faced and the chances he was willing to take. And that were just the linear years, he had really no idea how old he was but he knew should he ever decide to settle again then he would outlive any partner bearing Jack.

The very reason why the TARDIS had pleaded help from her heart, from the *entity* that lived inside her. However Rose had been unable to control the power the TARDIS had gifted her with and he had been forced to sacrifice one of his *lives* to save her. Jack was a different story he had survived the raw energy but without the entity he couldn't control the flow of time inside him either. The TARDIS had wanted someone who would stay at his side for as long as he lived and should he die, be able to die as well. It wasn't meant to be. By executing her plan the TARDIS and by extension he had ruined two lives in one go.

Rose would feel the guilt of what had happened to Jack for as long as she lived, the knowledge of damning him to survive everyone he ever loved and they both knew how

intensely Jack loved. Jack himself would even live when everything else had already died. A very cruel fate and while it would be possible to be together, Jack's unique relation to time or better said his lack of relation to time made it impossible.

In the end he would be lonely when it came to love and Jack would be lonely because he could never be completely honest with the ones he loved.

"What a pair we make..."

Trailing off he tasted the air again and his frown deepened. Ianto was never later and especially not more than one hour. Something had to have happened. Worriedly he glanced at the door behind him, where he knew Jack to be. The former Time Agent only reluctantly left him out of his sight for extended periods of time, where was Ianto.

It was then that the door opened and both Ianto and Jack entered. Hairs stood on his arms and neck as he felt the familiar energy cackle over his body. Out of habit he looked at Jack who studied Ianto intensely and with surprisingly frightened glances. Frowning he looked at Ianto and nearly felt both his hearts give out.

Invisible to anyone but Timelords was the time vortex and he had only seen it twice. The first time as a child along with the Master, who had gone insane from it and the second as he had looked into Rose's eyes during her possession by the *Bad Wolf entity* and now he was seeing it for the third one, flickering and swirling around behind Ianto Jones' gray bluish eyes.

Please no, TARDIS what have you done?

He ignored Jack's voice or what he was saying, all he could see was that the TARDIS had once again tried to make someone into something he wasn't. Mentally he had already said goodbye to this face and body, but remembering Rose and the danger she had been in made him forget everything. The Time Vortex would destroy the young man cell by cell. That he wouldn't allow to happen. Grabbing him by the lapels he pulled him down, ignoring the inevitable question and promptly smacked their lips together.

Nothing happened...

"Hey if you two are starting an orgy I definitely want to be part of it."

Separating their lips the Doctor simply stared somewhat confused at Jack who leered at them suggestively. Letting go the coat Ianto wore he sat down, face still frozen in surprise. What had happened? Even now he could feel the energy that surrounded him.

"Doctor, what was that?"

The no-nonsense tone of Ianto's voice brought him back from his complicated thoughts and he faced the mediator. Only to be drawn back to those eyes. They glared at him but he only saw the sparks of time and space that flashed behind them, the river that was time, unending and ever moving. Shaking his head he offered Ianto another grin before speaking.

"You were late, did anything happen? Inside the TARDIS?"

"When Vera kissed me the other day, he transferred poisonous lip gloss and I was dying."

He spoke with an unconcerned voice as if it wasn't a big issue that someone he cared very much about tried to kill him but the Doctor could see that it had rattled him. Perhaps even deep enough that their relationship after all of this would be affected. The Doctor dearly hoped that it wouldn't be the case. Ianto had been one of the reasons why Jack had lasted so long under the Master's torture.

I want to do it right Doctor, get home and go on a date with him, a real one.

"I managed to make it inside the TARDIS and she shifted her layout to help me. The last thing I remember was looking into the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Now everything has changed."

Hearing the odd pronunciation the last doubt of the Doctor was pushed away. Like Rose during her fusion with the *bad wolf* Ianto had lost the last traces of his Welsh accent. In addition he had cut his hair which now resembled more the cut he had worn during the year that never was. It made him wonder if he could now remember the year. Though he hoped not.

"You looked into the heart of the TARDIS. Ianto, you need to pass the Vortex energy over to me. It'll kill you otherwise."

His voice belied the urgency he felt, remembering how quick her, Rose's, deterioration had been. Hadn't he been able? No the Doctor didn't dare thinking about the implications.

"Now I can see all that was, all that is and all I can see. Do not worry Doctor, nothing will happen to me."

With a start he realized that golden sparks had begun to flutter around them, reminding him again of Rose but for some reason he believed when Ianto said that he would be alright. He didn't know why but the serene expression on his face might have something to do with it. Nodding in the end, he changed the subject all while staring into those beautiful eyes.

Seeing time flow behind someone else eyes made him remember how much he sometimes missed his people. It just wasn't the same when looking into a mirror but in another living being's eyes. He could stare all day.

new earth, 51st century

"And, back for another visit."

"After intensive debates the Time Agency has come to a decision."

He watched as Vera turned around, clearly surprised and suspicious. Ianto wasn't surprised. The Time Agency wasn't exactly known for their readiness to negotiate with terrorists or wannabe renegades. Vera was right to suspect foul play. In fact he was counting on it. He needed to be doubted.

"And what has the esteemed council of the Time Agency decided. Is the life of Magnus Greel important enough?"

"They reached a close majority. Your memory will be returned in form of a standard galactic chip. The implantation isn't our concern. Date of exchange will be in four standard days. Exchange will go according to Time Agency rules."

"Meaning yours or no rules at all."

Ianto offered nothing more than a smug smirk. Vera had been a Time Agent; they both spoke the same language. Not that their war was over, they just had changed the field. Besides, Ianto knew that he had already won this. Sadly, Vera had yet to get that memo. Leaning to the side, Ianto gave the Doctor a small wave. In less than a standard week the Doctor would be free again. And he... he didn't know what he would do then. Seeing possibilities seemed so complicated when the Doctor was involved. Probably because he was connected to time as well.

The Doctor attempted to wave back, but Vera and the special cuffs prevented him from doing so. He hated to watch how Vera treated the Time Lord, but until his plan was successful, he couldn't do anything about it. Not that it would take much longer. Satisfied, Ianto turned around and walked back to the TARDIS. He still had to prepare for the big day. Hopefully the TARDIS had hidden a laboratory somewhere as he had no desire to liquefy the few retcon pills he had in the kitchen.

Opening the door, he slipped inside the Time machine, relishing in the feeling of warmth and caring that seeped into his being. But at the same time it saddened him. Jack would never feel this warmth again. It was a pity. Ianto would have liked to tour the galaxy with them, the Doctor and Jack. From what the Doctor had told him it sounded like a great adventure, which for some reason involved lots of running. The TARDIS made a pained sound as he thought of Jack and he understood her enough to know that she mourned what had happened to him. She felt guilty for causing Jack's suffering, but no regret.

Jack becoming a fixed point in time hadn't been what she'd wanted. She couldn't have

known either, that Rose would be unable to control the energy of the Time Vortex. A big screw-up and Jack was paying the price for it. Not that Jack blamed either Rose or the TARDIS; he was far too forgiving for that. Ianto knew that he wouldn't have reacted like that. Though he and Jack now were almost in the same boat now. Both of them would live forever, as the TARDIS in all her eternal wisdom had decided that Ianto would make suitable companion for the Doctor. One who would stay with him as long as he lived and more.

The only catch being that the TARDIS hadn't seen it fit to ask him first, just like she hadn't asked Jack or Rose for their permission, either. But Ianto couldn't begrudge her the flaw, neither she nor the Doctor were perfect, far from it actually.

Turning to the left, he was greeted with a fully equipped laboratory. Ianto whistled in appreciation as he studied the inventory. For Owen, this would have been a dream come true, especially the equipment that had yet to be invented. Lifting one of the machines from one of the many tables, he nodded. That one he knew, Owen's beloved singularity scalpel. He knew how to operate it, but as there was no need it ended up being placed back where it belonged.

It took a few minutes before he found what he was looking for, holding a mortar and pestle that was meant for crushing small objects he set to work. The little pills broke and were quickly turned into a fine powder. Putting the pestle away he searched for another smaller bowl and filled it with water. Carefully he added the powder to it before mixing it to a clear liquid. Filling a bottle he cleaned away the remaining equipment. Retcon was a real

beauty when it came to application forms. Torchwood One had researched the drug and found out that it didn't necessarily need to be ingested. Applying it on skin worked just as well as long as the dose was concentrated enough.

Now he needed to find a standard galaxy chip. Hopefully the Doctor would have some in his toolbox. Even such an advanced ship as the TARDIS needed to be repaired from time to time, right? Now where to find the Doctor's toolbox. Resigning himself to a long search Ianto headed for the control room. The TARDIS' warmth surrounded him, reassuring him that what he was doing was the right thing to do, soothing away the guilt he felt for taking another part of Vera's memory.

There had been a toolbox and lots of chips but no galactic standard chip. Figures that what he needed wasn't there. But he knew that there was a galactic boiler in the kitchen. It would do.

Inside his head he could hear the equivalent of a laugh coming from the TARDIS. Apparently, she was just as amused as he was at the thought of the Doctor being back home and not being able to make himself a cuppa. He could already imagine the affronted sound that he would make. But for the Doctor to come home, he would have to sacrifice the boiler and he did just that. Dismantling the machine wasn't a problem at all, with the help of the TARDIS and the knowledge he had gained by working with Tosh, he extracted a galactic standard chip.

He studied the small construction while his other hand was busy preparing a good cup of coffee. If there was one thing that he had missed during his time working for the Time Agency, it was the coffee. Ianto had discovered

with much horror that coffee in the 51st century wasn't even coffee. The beverage that they had tried to push on him had appeared to be a blend of water and old fashioned motor oil, absolutely disgusting. Therefore he'd been surprised when the TARDIS had shown him a brand new coffee maker from the 21st century. With that she had won Ianto's eternal love and devotion.

Now he needed more information about the chip's makeup and programming. After that he could take a small nap before he visited the Doctor again. He had already told him much about their travels, but now he needed to learn what kind of person Vera had been when they had met, would meet... and he needed to hack into the Time Agency database. Without a time frame to work with, it would be mighty difficult to fake a memory if he couldn't get his hands on the real ones. After that he would still have to decide which parts of the chip could be coated with the new liquid retcon without having Vera suspect anything. Suspicious Time Agents were generally something that Ianto avoided. Especially after having worked with more than one of them.

Hooking his wrist strap up, he dove headfirst into the TARDIS' internal system which reminded him, strangely enough, very much of their computer in Torchwood. A few buttons and he had all the information he needed, at least about the chip. He still needed a few genuine memories. Hacking systems had only become easier the further advanced the civilization was. Ianto didn't really understand it. Perhaps it had something to do with pride, because the more evolved the species, the more arrogant they became.

The system of the Time Agency was complex, far more complex than even the system of

Torchwood One and it took every ounce of his skill and a bit of help from the TARDIS to remain undetected. Hacking in had become easier, staying hidden not so much. Carefully he browsed through the different files. Finally there it was an index of all Time Agents, active or dead. Though funnily enough there were no "retired" Agents and it made him shiver in a very unpleasant way. It didn't bode well for Vera, who was still listed as an active Agent currently stationed on ... he couldn't hope to pronounce the name... in the 34th century.

What would happen should they discover that he had gone rogue? Ianto didn't want to imagine it. Studying the profile a bit longer he made a simple but final decision. Tentatively he stretched his thoughts out and waited for the TARDIS to catch his wish. He didn't have to wait long, seconds later there was another presence inside the Time Agency's system working far more smoothly than Ianto ever could.

And no, he wasn't jealous of the sentient time ship, but envious, yes he could admit that he was envious.

Seconds later, it was as if Vera had never existed for the Agency. A very distinctive action, but taking the fluctuation rate of the Time Agency into account, Ianto knew that he had no reason to worry about it. Enough linear time had passed that all paper pushers had been replaced by now and none of the new ones would remember Vera at all. Paranoid bastards, the lot of them, but now someone would actually benefit from their habits.

Even better, now he could study Vera's memories without fear of being discovered. Luckily the Doctor and the TARDIS were on the side of good. He didn't want to imagine what would happen should the Time Lord ever

decide to follow in the Master's footsteps. The thought earned him the mental equivalent of a light slap and a very unhappy TARDIS inside his head. She clearly didn't appreciate him thinking of the Doctor in that way. Projecting a feeling of shame he turned back to the memories.

It was amazing how far technology had come during the last three millennia. The ability to transform simple protein chains into video files was breathtaking and more than a bit invasive. Then again, privacy was a concept that had been forgotten during the last two centuries.

For a brief moment, he hesitated. Did he even want to know what the Time Agency considered worth erasing? Probably not, but what choice did he have? None at all, he knew that. Vera or any other Time Agent might not know it, but the Agency could actually be reasonable. They didn't erase simple things or mistakes. No, they only erased memories when the Agent in question was considered to have become a liability or a danger to himself and others.

Which led him back to the question of what had Vera been doing? What was a threat to one of the most stable persons Ianto knew? Not to say that Jack hadn't had any weakness or didn't feel guilt, he felt them even more intensively than most. But at this time and age Vera was still as mortal as the rest of them, save himself perhaps. Well and his Jack, who must have left earth at some point and was, in this century, probably traveling through the galaxy. Ianto didn't know, he had never met *his* Jack during all the linear years he had spent away from earth.

What could have been bad enough to tip you over the edge?

Forcing his misgivings aside, Ianto resolutely opened the file and watched. At least the first half, then even he couldn't take it anymore. He barely reached the bathroom before his stomach forcefully expelled everything he had eaten during the previous day and night. Dear god, no wonder they had erased the memory. To live with that kind of knowledge... Ianto didn't want to imagine it. Washing his hands he splashed more water onto his face. Taking a deep breath he left the bathroom and returned to the computer.

It was a battle, marginally won, as he forced himself to finish the file.

He couldn't do it; he couldn't return Vera's memory. The knowledge would literally kill him. So there would only be one solution. Use the beginnings of the memory and by then Vera had to be knocked out and lose at least one more year of memories. Ianto knew Vera, remembered meeting Jack and he hadn't seen any recognition in his eyes, unlike Mentior who had definitely known him. Pity that he hadn't noticed his familiarity earlier. The only thing left was to talk to the Doctor. Perhaps he would know more about Vera's memory. It was worth a try.

But for now he needed sleep. Bidding the TARDIS a goodnight, he fell asleep on the cot that he had claimed as his own in between the kitchen and the library. It was too early to sleep in the room the TARDIS had offered him, only when the Doctor gave his okay. Only when they would visit the stars together, only then he would sleep there. With one last thought on Vera and the Doctor, Ianto fell asleep.

Ianto surveyed the scenery without much enthusiasm as he might have shown in any other situation but considering that the exchange would take place in less than ten standard minutes had him on edge. Logically speaking he knew that he had no need to be worried, he could see all that would be and was therefore prepared for everything that could happen but irrational fears weren't that easily beat.

They had chosen one of the city's few parks for the exchange to show that they were both, he and Vera, above trickery. Ianto hadn't forgotten what Vera had tried with the poisonous lip gloss that had nearly cost him everything. He was almost certain he might never forget and in a few minutes he would take Vera's memories of the incident, leaving him and the Doctor to be the only people to remember it.

Ianto didn't know whether he could go back to Jack and pretend it never happened. Only now having met Vera and knowing Jack he could see the changes that his former lover had undergone but he could also see the glaring similarities that shone with every smile and false word Jack uttered. It pained him he realized.

With a start he noticed that while he saw his own possible futures he couldn't see himself with Jack in many of them. Some showed him as he returned to work for Torchwood and became a field operative with the unique abilities he now called his own, others had him turn Jack down and leave to travel the world but only one let him experience the sensation of kissing a Timelord properly. Seeing himself running away from what appeared to be fish

on two legs and quiet evenings in a vast library with a cuppa and coffee.

Smiling Ianto realized that this was the one possibility he liked the most.

But before he could think on it some more he heard footsteps and turned around to face the Doctor who positively bounced along in the thin footwear Vera had provided him with and Vera who followed at a resolute pace he had once associated with Jack. Keeping his face blank he waited until the pair was barely a few yards away. Wishing both a good morning he adopted the strict voice he always used in negotiations. He didn't know if Vera had ever checked up on him but he wouldn't dare to mess this up so close to the goal.

"We are here to seal the bargain struck between former Time Agent Boe and the Time Agency. In return for the missing memory the former Agent will release Magnus Greel, Minister of the Supreme Alliance into my, Ianto's custody. Should either party decide to nullify the bargain now, the other party automatically acquires the right to open fire. Is everything understood?"

Vera nodded firmly, a small smile playing around his lips. Ianto knew that expression. The former Time Agent was satisfied that he had blackmailed the Time Agency and gotten away with it. He had no idea that Ianto was the reason he would never be hunted, that he would effectively be the only retired Time Agent. Lady Luck must really love Jack, she was constantly at his side.

"Good, here is the memory former Agent Boe wants. As proof of the authenticity I will show two minutes of the missing memory so that the former may be certain that it is the correct one.

After that I will place the galactic ship inside a box for safekeeping and place it in the agreed spot. Magnus Greel will then walk over to me while the former Agent gets his memory. Thus the transaction will be concluded. Anything else to add?"

"Don't bother with the box, just put the chip down. I have a memory implementer with me."

Nodding Ianto hid a grin. Everything according to plan. With quiet steps he walked over and placed the chip he had taken out of the small translator after showing the beginnings of the memory on a glass table that he had been planted there. Showing Vera that everything was according to their agreement he walked back to his old spot and waited for fate to take its course.

Vera unlocked the electronic sonic cuffs that prevented the Doctor from running away and kept an eye on him as he walked towards the chip while the Time Lord nearly skipped over to him, apparently relieved that the whole ordeal was over. Meanwhile Ianto fetched the small bag that Vera had thrown in their direction. Inside where the Doctor's possessions but Ianto was only able to recognize the banana. He gave the Doctor a weird look before watching Vera.

He had reached the chip and picked it up, studying the small device in his hands. Then Ianto saw it and before he knew what he was doing he tackled the Doctor to the ground the same moment as Vera drew his blaster and fired. The shot was off and he didn't get the chance to fire again as Vera slumped onto the ground. The steady breathing told Ianto that he had managed successfully to dupe the future Jack Harkness, again.

Carefully he pulled the chip from the slack fingers and destroyed it immediately. He never wanted to be tempted again to even think about what Vera had done.

"So Ianto Jones what do you think about going back to the TARDIS and after a proper shower, we'll make a quick trip before I bring you back to Cardiff."

"Sounds very tempting Doctor however I have something to take care of in Cardiff and that cannot wait. I will leave immediately."

"Ianto the TARDIS is a time and space ship, you'll still end there right on time."

Shaking his head he refused.

"No! It needs to be done immediately. They are my friends and I can't let them be killed by that monster, regardless what Jack might think."

The Doctor wasn't stupid and as Ianto had expected he connected the dots right away. He could see it in the way he held his head and the disapproving frown. Not that Ianto cared at the moment, not with the events playing out in the corner of his eyes each more gruesome than the next.

"You can't just do that."

"Watch me!"

His hand slid alongside the strings of time and space. Shifting through tiny little strands which encompassed a thousands of possibilities until he knew which had the best possible ending for them. Offering one last smile he left, ignoring the sputtering sounds the Doctor made.

Ianto had his goodbyes to make.

Cardiff, 27AD - 2008

Cardiff hadn't changed at all aside from the buildings of course. But at the moment there were no settlements and there wouldn't be for another few decades. Around 55 AD the first version of Cardiff Castle would be built and then centuries would pass. A long time to die and revive, it would be literally hell on earth for Jack. Ianto knew all too well how much he'd suffered after coming back from death.

Yet it had to happen.

Detached he watched as John Hart, no Mentior, appeared with Jack in tow. It made him wonder if Jack was really that oblivious to Mentior's feelings or if he chose to ignore them. Gray was waiting for them and it broke his heart a little more. Ianto didn't think he'd ever seen such a beautiful smile on Jack's face in all the time he'd known him; it radiated happiness like the sun. From the corner of his eyes he could see the possibilities playing out. Several featured him as he intervened in what was to come. He would never let them come true. It would change too much.

Quietly he watched as Gray revealed his intentions to Jack, as he landed inside his grave where he would live and die a thousand times before Torchwood would find him. Mentior threw his ring into the grave and Ianto smiled. Interestingly enough all possibilities included this action. Mentior was a backstabbing bastard and Ianto hated him for everything he had done, but he couldn't deny that the other Time Agent genuinely loved Jack. Something he didn't, not anymore. Gray and Mentior left, leaving behind a fresh grave and Ianto.

His footsteps carried him over to Jack's first resting place. He supposed he could have

interfered now. It would be easy to reverse Mentior's actions and then he and Jack would return and save Torchwood together. Instead he merely placed a single branch of Thyme on the freshly upturned earth. He hadn't fought the burial. Jack thought that by surviving this he could earn his brother's forgiveness.

Poor Jack...

Jack's possibilities were endless but there wasn't a single one where Gray had forgiven his brother for his part in his abduction. He also didn't know that Ianto wanted to see him punished too. For the crimes he had committed as a Time Agent, for threatening the Doctor, for nearly killing him, for being responsible, however indirectly, for his making and most importantly for killing Lisa. He had never forgotten what he'd said to Jack that day and now he would fulfill that vow by refusing to free him.

I owe you this Lisa I owed this to myself, to be able to make peace with my past before there is no turning back anymore.

Ianto walked away without looking back.

A few steps later, he watched with interest as around him the first settlement rose and fell. Time was speeding up, letting him experience history at an inhuman rate as if he was standing in the middle of a fast-forwarded movie. It reminded him a bit of his childhood when he and his father would go and watch movies in the "Electro", just without the color.

Then he stood in the middle of Cardiff for the first time in nearly five linear years.

For a few seconds he turned around and took everything in. It was just like he remembered. Standing amidst the panicking crowd of people he let the sounds, smells and images wash over him. This had been his home for so long. Ianto hadn't even known how much he'd missed it until he breathed Welsh air again. He was home, if only for a short moment.

Sadly he couldn't linger and explore, to see what had changed in his absence. There was a plan to carry out and lives to be changed. He supposed he should on some level feel guilt for what he was about to do. The greatest change would bring Jack pain, much more pain than the centuries under the earth had brought him. And yet, he would go through with it because in the end the lives of those he loved were worth more than a thousand of insane Grays.

In the darkness none of the fleeing pedestrians noticed his glowing eyes nor the golden sparks that floated around him. They were far too busy escaping the weevils that had come to the surface. He wondered how Gray had managed that. Perhaps he knew more about weevil physiology than Torchwood. It didn't matter either way, they had to go. His eyes traced the strings until he found the exact moment when Gray had activated the signal. Taking the strand between his fingers he admired the complex system of time and space before parting it. Multiple golden strands were born and he continued to pull and twist until he could hear a piercing sound very similar to the first one. Time played the sound again, just reversed.

With satisfaction he watched as the weevils began to scamper off, going back to hide in the sewers. The explosions aside, it was a job well done. All he now had was to inform the proper authorities. He didn't possess a headset anymore but with the wrist strap it would be

useless anyway. Selecting the number of Rhys' cell phone he waited for him to take the call. It took more than a whole minute before it was answered but Ianto had never been more glad to hear Rhys' voice.

"Gwen?"

"Not quite sir, but we've met before. I'm a colleague of Gwen."

You don't want to know how often I was forced to retcon you.

"Who are you?"

"Ianto Jones, sir."

"Ianto Jones has been missing for ..."

"Sir, I merely called to inform you and PC Davidson that, as you might have noticed, the weevil problem has been taken care of. Still Torchwood would appreciate it, if the police would keep a lookout for strays we might have missed. Thank you."

After finishing the sentence Ianto disconnected the call and turned around. One down three to go. With steady steps he walked forward into the direction of Torchwood. It was time to put things to an end and even if Jack didn't know it, death was the only mercy that Gray still could expect from this world. Living, surviving, had after all only brought him pain. Keeping this in mind, Ianto entered the tourist office. The team had never bothered to change his entry codes. He didn't know whether to be touched or call them foolish. Then again, Jack had never thought much of Torchwood One's rules. Anyway, it just made it easier for him.

For a few seconds he stood and allowed himself to see all that was. He remembered walking through the doors for the first time

after he'd convinced Jack to hire him. Then there was the first cleaning and what a nightmare that had been. Manipulating security so that even Tosh didn't notice a thing, smuggling Lisa into the bowels of the archives and skirting around Suzie. What fun it had been, how exhilarating and terrifying, he didn't regret working for Torchwood or meeting the others even for a minute. The same went for Nowe and the Doctor.

The sound of a shot pulled him forcefully out of his reverie. Not that he needed to hurry, he already knew what had happened, had seen the look of shock on Tosh's face a hundred times. Gray's face marked by indifference and dispassion as he stood a foot away from his friend's fallen form. The destruction of the computer system was next. With a calmness that wasn't natural he listened as Jack's brother taunted her and he smiled. Gray had just confirmed that Ianto's solution was his salvation. A pity that Jack wouldn't see it that way.

Then he heard it, the rhythmic sound of someone pounding against the metallic lockers of the crypt. He had produced that sounds once himself as he and Jack had played hide and seek. The night had ended with a rather spectacular series of orgasms against the wall of lockers. The sound confirmed that the timer on Jack's locker had been set off. Ianto had to admit it was truly impressive that Torchwood in the early 20th century had already been able to freeze people for such a long time.

He heard the quiet sound of footsteps as Jack's brother went to investigate the noise. In the meanwhile he could see Tosh struggling to pull herself down the steps leading to the morgue. Her strength was admirable. She was definitely the strongest of them. He couldn't understand

why the Doctor would think that he shouldn't interfere. Perhaps because he hadn't seen the future like he had. The possibilities after her death were filled with pain and suffering for Jack, for Gwen and for Cardiff. He couldn't let that happen. No, with the children in danger, Tosh and Owen would be needed.

Calmly, he walked over to Gwen's desk and pulled her reserve gun from its hiding place. Their former policewoman was very trigger-happy and had become an excellent shot during her time in Torchwood. It had caused her to always have an additional weapon ready. Now it would help him save them. Ianto was surprised that he still remembered the way to the morgue. In the last years he'd been on countless planets, seen thousands of places and spoke with hundreds of aliens and yet he had never forgotten his home.

Of course considering that his memory was near eidetic, it wasn't unusual. Standing a few feet away, he watched as Gray opened the locker and began to pull the casket out. Time to act. Aiming for the gun at his side Ianto pulled the trigger. The weapon was blown out of Gray's hand, causing him to face him. He looked surprised, clearly having not expected another person to be there. Ianto noticed that he didn't even seem to register the pain.

"Who are you?"

"Jones, Ianto Jones, sir. I'm the archivist of Torchwood Three. Though due to John Hart's interference I was unable to perform my duties for quite some time."

"Duties?"

Gray came closer and suddenly threw a blade at Ianto. Making no move to evade the projectile Ianto waited until it hit him. Getting

stabbed was a definitely uncomfortable feeling. With disinterest he watched as the blood welled up around the blade and dripped onto his outer coat. Hopefully the TARDIS would be able to clean that stain, he liked this coat. Closing his fingers around the handle he pulled until the blade came free. Ianto hadn't expected it to be so painful. Ignoring the disgusting squelching noise he dropped the weapon. It hit the floor with a clanking sound, but he ignored that too instead he answered Gray's last question and it would be his last, Ianto would ensure that.

"Keeping order at Torchwood Three."

His focus was on Gray who looked shocked for a second before turning around to get his gun. Not that it helped as Ianto was far quicker. Two shots and Gray was down for good. No possibilities existed for him anymore and he was glad for it. The pain Jack's brother had endured had turned him into a vicious monster without mercy. Hopefully now he would be at peace.

Jack was still pounding and rattling at his casket. Ianto had no doubt that he had heard everything; just like he had planned. He couldn't allow Jack yet to leave his locker. With a quick motion on his wrist strap the lock on the door was jammed. Letting the gun fall to the floor, he turned around. It was time to make sure that Tosh would get her happy ending even if that meant going against natural order.

Standing at the entrance to the morgue he could hear Tosh. The pain in her voice was evident but Owen didn't know that it came from dying instead of just her wounded arm.

Hearing her talk about their date that never happened made him sad. It reminded him all too much of the date he and Jack had planned and never gone on. Damn John Hart!

Sadly he couldn't see how his life would have gone, had he had the chance to go on that date with Jack. The chance was nothing more than a lost possibility.

Inhaling and exhaling Ianto composed himself. There was no use crying over spilled milk. It wouldn't change a thing. Numb, he watched as Owen's line went dead. Tosh looked heartbroken and he could relate to that. He had probably had the same expression on his face as Lisa died. Time to change that. Without any hurry he took the steps until he was within Tosh's view. Her surprised expression changed to that of shaky happiness. Of course she would be glad to see him even if Owen just died.

"...I.. Ianto.."

"Long time no see Tosh.."

"How..."

"That is unimportant right now. We need to take care of you."

He could see her emotions and wondered not for the first time how Owen could have been so blind and not notice what a great woman Tosh was. Luckily for the bastard, he would get a second chance. Carefully Ianto pulled her hand away to reveal the bloody wound that threatened her life. Most doctors, probably even Owen would have announced Tosh a lost cause. The amount of blood she had lost coupled with her injury was a nearly guaranteed death sentence.

But Ianto wasn't most people, not anymore. With nimble fingers he had pushed the blouse from her jeans to get a good look at her wound. The shot had gone right through her stomach but not high enough to hit the spleen. Still it looked nasty and Ianto was lucky that he got used to seeing carnage during the fall of Torchwood One otherwise he might have vomited at the sight of his friend's blood.

"Ianto.. it.. it's okay. Gwen and Hart..."

"They are safe."

Placing his hand on the wound he could feel the life seeping out of Tosh. It frightened him in a way he was unaccustomed to. During the war on Arcateen V he had faced death, often much more gruesome than Tosh's current condition. But before he hadn't been able to see time, ends and new beginnings. The thought of two children that would never be born because she died here, unimaginable. He wouldn't allow it.

"Ia... Ianto.. you.."

Now Tosh sounded scared and Ianto couldn't blame her. The golden eyes that were now a part of him did look a tad scary. Not that it would stop him, the sparks that encompassed time and space twirled around them, shutting the rest of the world out. Changing time was essentially always the same action. By reversing the flow of time the action would be undone. It made it far easier than speeding time up and less messy. Ianto despised messes. Carefully he pulled her close despite her protests.

"This will hurt, I'm sorry."

And hurt it did, Tosh's back arched, voice choking in broken sobs as Ianto let time spin backwards. The skin on her stomach was first,

destroyed cells being forced into existence again, stringing them together until a thin layer of skin formed. From there on it was all but repeating the same process over and over. It ended with the last layer of skin on Tosh's back. The gunshot wound never happened. Satisfied he pulled his hand away.

She collapsed in his arms still sobbing in pain. While he did his best to soothe her Ianto also knew that only one person could make her truly happy. It was time to visit Owen. Their reunion; he didn't know what to expect, so many possibilities and so little time. He needed to leave soon. Before Jack found a way to override the emergency lock he'd activated.

"This is goodbye, isn't it?"

Perceptive Tosh

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Jack won't forgive me for what I've done."

Not strictly true. There were possibilities where Jack had forgiven them. Ianto knew them, had knowledge of how to act to earn Jack's forgiveness. He just wouldn't do it. Jack deserved better than that and so did he. There would be a time when their conflict would be solved, but not as long as Tosh and the others lived. He would see to that.

"I have a gift for you."

Tosh's expression had changed to wonder now. It soothed Ianto. He didn't think that he could live with the fact that one of his best friends feared him. Offering her a smile he carefully let her go. He wanted Tosh to remember him like this because now he held nothing back, all

his flaws, all his feelings, all that he was. Then he was gone, Tosh's frantic voice in his ears.

Appearing in front of the Turnmill Nuclear Power Plant Ianto briefly checked the time before entering. Timing would be important in this one. Locked doors offered him no resistance as time froze around him with golden sparks lighting the deserted corridors. He ignored the contaminated water that under different circumstances would have sloshed around his ankles and poisoned him quite fast. He let his senses guide him, senses he didn't have before the entity that shared now his mind and body, that was *him* now that it had possessed and fused with him.

The new him, he had been afraid of himself in the beginning, of the sheer power the TARDIS had bestowed on him and of the responsibility that it entailed. It had taken time until he'd understood that he wasn't part of some carefully planned mission or higher purpose. When understanding had come, he hadn't known whether to be relieved or outraged at the TARDIS' audacity. Only after his mind had been clear again Ianto had recognized what the cause of all of this had been.

But before he could fall deeper in reverie, he stood in front of the doors that kept Owen locked in. The death chosen for him was the worst of all, very similar to being buried alive. Golden strands twisted up the walls and the barriers were no more. Owen was clinging to one of the control consoles, with the contaminated water already to his hips. What surprised Ianto was the peaceful expression on his face. Apparently talking with Tosh had freed him from his burdens. Coughing briefly he got Owen's attention who promptly frowned before muttering to himself. Ianto understood it nonetheless.

"Great, here I'm dying and my last vision is of the fucking teaboy."

Ianto rolled his eyes. Trust Owen to be a smart-mouth even in.. eternal death. He couldn't however, suppress the smile that rose. Owen being Owen made him glad in ways he couldn't begin to describe. With few steps he stood next to the undead medic who still glowered at him. Not that his reaction was uncommon. But Ianto wasn't in the mood for Owen's bullshit. He was operating on a tight schedule after all.

"Did you mean what you said?"

"What?!"

Heaving a sigh, Ianto reminded himself firmly that Owen wasn't deliberately annoying, at least not this time.

"Did you mean when you said; that you regretted not going out with Tosh?"

Owen watched him closely, face pulled in an expression of disbelief. It tempted another smile from Ianto, which he ruthlessly suppressed. He needed honesty from Owen and the doctor had problems with that when he was in a good mood. Giving him the impression that he was laughing at him wouldn't help. For a few moments, that didn't pass because Ianto didn't want them to, the room was filled with silence. Owen seemed to have realized that either this wasn't an illusion induced by radiation or simply didn't care. He nodded which was more believable than any words he could have used.

"If you had the chance, would you make her happy?"

That earned him an angry glare, but he was long since used to them. Instead he repeated

the question, again taking care to impress the severity of the situation in every vowel he spoke.

"Of course I would."

Raw pain, Owen was anguished over it and still... he had been able to make peace with himself. Ianto could respect that. Whips of power escaped him as he pulled the doctor closer. As much as he would be happy for Tosh, this part was especially unpleasant. Inhaling he gathered the necessary energy. Tricky too, too much energy and they would have another Jack and Ianto could do without that, too few and Owen would stay undead.

"Wha.."

Cutting Owen off, he exhaled. Undiluted energy of the Time Vortex poured from between his lips and spilled over. Ianto took care that their lips would remain connected despite Owen increasing efforts to separate them. He could hear his friend's pained noises; it only spurred him on. Since his resurrection with the gauntlet Owen couldn't feel pain anymore. Now he did, it was working. Digging his fingers into arm and chin he held on and endured the agony. It felt like exhaling liquid fire and only his pigheadedness forced him to suffer through the whole thing quietly while Owen glared into one of his golden eyes.

Then it was over and Ianto let go. Unsteady on his feet, he took hold of the very disoriented medic who looked like he just had survived another fight with the reaper. Time balled up around him and they were gone just as the rest of the contaminated water crashed through the broken glass.

He dropped Owen a few yards away from the plant. Golden sparks still puffed into existence

with every breath he took, but he was used to that happening and so it was ignored. Focusing on Owen he made a quick inventory of all things that classified one as a living being.

Heartbeat.. check

Breathing.. check

Circulation.. check

Active nerves.. check

Yes Owen now could pass as a human being, at least on the outside. It would be up to Tosh to make sure that he would match on the inside and considering how long she had been waiting for the chance, Ianto was sure she would succeed. Just as she had succeeded in building something utterly terrifying from wrong plans. Tosh was brilliant that way.

And I have been around the Doctor far too long...

"How did... did you?"

Owen had adopted the same expression that he had had on his first day of work: Utter suspicion. Not that Ianto was begrudging him that; it was merely annoying. Besides he saw no reason to explain himself. The clock was ticking and he had one more stop to make. It would be the hardest.

"Call it a goodbye present."

Leaving Owen where he lay, Ianto walked away. It surprised him that walking away from Owen was harder than Tosh. He and the doctor had never been friends; even calling them colleagues was pushing it. They were more two people who coincidentally worked for the same organization. Neither went out of the way to be nice to the other, more the opposite really.

How often had they annoyed each other? Ianto had lost count long ago. He stopped; he nearly had forgotten something.

"Oh and Owen, if you hurt Tosh I will do more than just shoot you in the shoulder."

Then he was gone again. He reappeared in the Hub near the entrance to the vaults that currently housed Gwen and John Hart. Seeing his other self walk towards the crypt, he knew that he wouldn't have much time. In less than two minutes Gray would be dead and another five for saving Tosh. Taking two steps at the time he opened the door separating him from the vaults. Inside was silence save for near inaudible footsteps. Ianto recognized them immediately. They belonged to John Hart or Mentior as he had taken to call him.

Mentior's pheromones reached him and reflexively started to breathe through his mouth. His time as a mediator had made him more paranoid than anything else. He knew from experience that neither Mentior nor Jack were above using them as their means to an end. It was better to be cautious because it hadn't taken long to discover that while he could control the effects to a certain extent, he wasn't immune to them. Pressing two buttons he opened the door to Mentior's cell and watched with an impassive face as the former Time Agent stumbled out.

Ianto couldn't help but feel smug as he took the flabbergasted expression in. Not that it lasted long Mentior was a professional and could change persona faster than some changed their clothes. The familiar leer and the broad grin graced the handsome face moments later. Back to that were they? He didn't think so.

"Eye-candy!"

"lanto!?"

Of course Gwen would overhear Mentior, he'd probably counted on it. Her face came into view through the small window of the good old-fashioned iron door. But he stayed quiet, taking her face in for a few seconds. Gwen had always caused mixed feelings inside him and still did. There had been times where the attention Jack had paid her had spiked anger inside him. Yet that lanto had long since been left behind. So he simply ignored her, preferring to focus on the bastard that was the source of all his troubles. Gripping Hart by the lapels of his jacket, he pulled him away from Gwen's cell. No need for her to overhear their talk.

"Want me all to yourself eye-candy and in front of audience. How naughty."

Mentior pushed his hips into lanto's, which merely earned him a glare and a raised eyebrow. Offering a playful pout Hart stepped back, hands raised in the universal sign for peace. The bastard had noticed quite quickly that lanto was armed and he wasn't.

"So what do you want eye-candy? Don't tell me you're still pissed off because of the whole me kidnapping you affair."

"No, it's not. You knew me before I actually knew you. Your reaction to me. I didn't notice it before but aside from the whole fuck me behavior you acted familiar as if you knew me. And of course you did because we had already met in your past."

Mentior's smile only widened. Taking a step back he clapped as if applauding him for his brilliance. Not that lanto found it funny. This

man was in some way the root of all that had gone wrong, but on the other hand he himself could also be considered that root. He had been the one to tell Mentior where Jack was as they had officially been introduced to each other on their first joint mission. So he also had to consider himself as the source of all that had gone wrong.

"Correct on all accounts. It got even better when we sent on that mission together and got drunk after your success. You told me everything. Where to find Jack, what to do and more importantly, how to get rid of you. Though you could have been a bit more detailed. Then I could have avoided the whole *fuse a bomb on my skin* or being forced to work for a sadistic psychopath."

"So sorry for inconveniencing you. But you are right, thanks to me you had the chance to get into Jack's good graces and you busted it. Which means that you owe me!"

Before Hart could even start his protest, lanto carried on. His grip only tightened on the ancient fabric. His voice a near whisper that was accompanied by small bursts of golden sparks. To Mentior's credit the light didn't appear to faze him at all.

"Luckily for you, you'll enjoy paying your dues to me because your task will be looking after Jack, properly mind you. The fact that you are truly in love with him is just a bonus. Make no mistake you will do as I say..."

"Or what?"

This time Mentior shuddered. He had a feeling that it wasn't eye-candy anymore who stood in front of him. In his time as a Time Agent he had seen much, one alien more outrageous than the next but he had never seen what stared at

him from behind once clear gray eyes. It cocked eye-candy's head to the side before invading his personal space completely. Eye-candy had always been taller but now he loomed over him in an entirely different way.

"All you have ever been and you'll ever be will end in the void. Believe me, you don't want that."

In the background John could hear the heavy footsteps that he associated with Jack. Ianto's head turned as well and then he was gone. Hart stumbled again before turning around, coming face to face with Jack, who looked just as surprised. He opened the door to the vault where Gwen was confined. Seconds later she was in his arms, obviously happy to be free. Then Jack turned to him and smiled, thanked him even. John knew that it was kind of pathetic, but he soaked the gratitude up like a sponge. Before he remembered the real danger that still lurked in the Hub.

"Jack, it's Gray. He's here."

And just like that Jack's face fell and held more sorrow than he thought possible. It made John suspicious. Had Jack been forced to kill Gray? He couldn't believe that. Jack had searched for Gray for as long as he had known him. During their time in the time loop they had been like a married couple and shared nearly everything. John knew nearly as much about Jack as about himself. Jack was unable to kill his brother, he felt far too much guilt for that. No, something else had happened.

"I know. It's been taken care of."

"What? But he.."

"Someone pretending to be Ianto shot him. I heard it."

Pretending? He didn't think so; he was pretty sure that eye-candy had been the real one. Aside from the whole golden glow and slit pupils. Perhaps he had been possessed by an alien. There were enough races after all and he had dumped him on Arcateen V. The Arcateenians could do that. But a possessed alien wouldn't have any interest in saving their asses or killing Gray. That eliminated the possessed alien theory, which meant Ianto had acted on his own.

Fucking hell eye-candy, what happened to you?

"But Ianto was here. I saw him."

"Gwen's right, I talked with him. He left somehow as we heard your footsteps."

Damn it, Jack had that look on his face that promised nothing good. He was like one of these earth dogs. He took a bite and wouldn't let go until he got what he wanted. John knew that he wouldn't be leaving this planet anytime soon. On the other hand it was the perfect excuse to hang around without rousing suspicion. Eye-candy had after all trusted him with Jack, even if he hadn't said anything. Jack's well-being was now his duty. If only for his own honor he would do as Ianto had ordered.

"Gwen we need to check on Toshiko and Owen. John you bring Gray into the morgue."

God he hated taking orders. On the other hand Jack had included him in the orders without thinking about it. Suppressing the smirk he nodded and went off to do as he was told. For now he would be a good boy. After all Jack liked good boys and more often than not rewarded them properly.

Cardiff, earth 2008

"You're not happy."

"Obviously not, you changed time!"

The accusation should have bothered him, should have infuriated him, and at one point in time it would have. But not now, not when he could see those hundreds of different possibilities playing out before him. Intricate lines, times, emotions, actions and people interwoven to one complete song, that would one day inevitably end. Another thought that should give him shivers and did not.

Closing his eyes, he relaxed, offering his partner a small smirk before opening them again and facing him. Ianto loved the small chocked sound that escaped that smart mouth, before he stepped closer. Effortlessly, he slid into the Doctor's space, his hands resting on bony wrists, keeping them near their hips.

"My foolish, foolish Doctor."

The smile had to be audible because those intense brown eyes focused on his own. He knew how much the Doctor liked looking into them. Not so much for the color, but for what he was seeing, for the whispers and promises that his instincts chanted into the alien's mind. And Ianto adored that mind, the immensely complex system of thoughts, memories and emotions that made the Doctor the Doctor. He knew without doubt, that he would never meet someone like him again.

"I *am* time, my foolish Doctor. I saw all that they had been, all they were and what they could be."

"You still decided for them. What they would be."

Ianto inclined his head, accepting the rebuke with grace, but wasn't deterred by it at all. For all his understanding of time, the Doctor knew barely a fraction. Much more than anyone else would ever know, but less than half, less than a quarter and even less than a tenth. He couldn't see them, not like he now could. Their fate hadn't been visible to the Time Lord and neither had the consequences. But Ianto could see them and that had made and that made all the difference.

His fingers slid upwards, over the overcoat, which had taken quite a beating in this excursion, until they rested on the man's shoulders. Luckily for the Doctor, the TARDIS appeared to have them in spades in that enormous wardrobe.

"I did. Yet there are still hundreds of possibilities for what they could be, I only took the decision this time. I will not interfere anymore."

He leaned even closer, the last words a mere shadow as he watched them puff against the Doctor's lips along with golden sparks that surrounded them in small clouds. The Time Lord shuddered and Ianto had trouble keeping the satisfaction to himself. He took a guilty pleasure in shaking the Doctor's composure, much to the alien's continued annoyance.

"Besides you would have mourned them, felt guilt over not being able to spare Jack the pain. Yet you wouldn't have interfered."

Behind his eyes, he felt past images slide forward, past realities. A ship hovering over earth and an old man silently weeping, wrinkled hands covering the eyes to hide any visible weakness, while whispering inaudibly: "*I'm sorry, I'm so sorry!*" On the floor, slowly

bleeding to death, a young brilliant scientist who had deserved so much more than the world had offered her. And right next to her, a screaming man, dying himself and not caring at all, but for the dead woman on the floor. Knowing that he would come back and she wouldn't.

"Well Toshiko Sato *is* brilliant. But that's completely not the point... *mmpf!*"

While the Doctor was a brilliant man, alien. He more often found himself in situations, where he either didn't come to the point quickly enough, or when talking was the last thing his partner appreciated. Fed up with either, Ianto pressed his lips against the still talking mouth, cutting the Time Lord off effectively. Not that the Doctor really minded, at least not until his telepathy picked up Ianto's stray thought. He pulled away.

"That's just cheating."

And no, the Doctor wasn't sulking at all. Not that it fazed Ianto. He had worked for Torchwood and the amount of scowls (Owen), shy smiles (Tosh), batting doe eyes (Gwen) and sulking/pouting expressions... (Jack) he had been given on a daily basis had immunized him pretty quickly against all kinds of reactions.

"All's fair in love and war Doctor."

"There's no need to insult Lyly's "Euphues" by flaying a perfectly functional proverb. Brilliant chap though, despite his questionable habits during writing."

Raising an eyebrow, Ianto felt the first slivers of annoyance flare inside his head. It wasn't that the Doctor was deliberately annoying him. Well maybe he was. But that wasn't the issue here. In a matter of minutes they had strayed from

the original topic and ended up on a completely different avenue. Ianto wasn't having it. Past realities whispered to him, chanted the Doctor's history, to help, to make him understand, to make him forgive and to make him stay. He understood, he knew the reason for all of this, and surprisingly resented neither the Doctor nor the TARDIS for it. He had been granted a gift, that couldn't be amounted to value in any shape or form. Now it was up to him to make good use of it.

"Lyly's "Euphues" isn't the issue here Doctor."

The Doctor's mood swings were still surprising for Ianto. The time it took for him to go from sulking to serious were less than the blink of an eye. He shivered as he became once more the center of the Doctor's attention. Sometimes it was hard to tell whether it should flatter or frighten him. The Time Lord was easily one of the most powerful beings alive. Yet for all his strength, his wisdom and knowledge, Ianto had no problems picking out his flaws and weaknesses. He had plenty of them. Neither he nor the TARDIS were omnipotent.

He was the living proof of that.

"I have shaped time. I molded it to fit my needs and benefit those I hold dear. That's all there is to it. And no, I won't reverse any of it."

Another disgruntled expression, Ianto knew that it was because the Doctor recognized the truth in his words. Plus the fact that there was nothing he could do about it. He hadn't had any say in Ianto's creation nor could he control him. The only thing he could do was trust in the TARDIS. It had been her choice.

Ianto had been her choice and they had to live with it.

"What makes you sure that you won't be tempted to bend time to your will again, should either of your friends be in danger of dying. When you join the team again."

It was a valid concern and Ianto recognized it as such. It was obvious that the Doctor spoke from his own experience rather than preaching something that he had no idea about. But the Doctor didn't know what had been decided long before they had met, long before Ianto had ever been dropped off in the wide of space and time. Ianto knew now that there was only *one* possibility for him. Everything had come in a full circle.

"I happen to be quite good at running."

At the Doctor's continued silence, which Ianto couldn't even begin to understand, he hurriedly continued.

"And I've never been to Barcelona, the planet not the city."

The Doctor stayed quiet and for a moment Ianto feared that his proposal, however informal, had been taken the wrong way. In fact, he was already composing a polite joke to cover his own embarrassment for daring to think that the Doctor would allow him to travel with him. Until his hands were unexpectedly tightly gripped and he was met with a version of the Doctor's smile that he hadn't seen so far.

It wasn't beaming or particularly shining, unlike most of the Doctor's pleased expressions, but the genuine happiness that he managed to convey lit his whole face. For one moment, Ianto imagined he could see a young carefree Doctor standing proudly alongside his friends in front of his home. The image vanished just as quickly as it had come, leaving the young man bewildered for a moment.

"Brilliant, you'll love the dogs. They've got no noses, but you'll love them anyway."

With that, Ianto found himself being pulled towards the TARDIS, which had been parked on the other side of the roof above "Jolyones Boutique Hotel". With one last glance at the Millennium center, the tourist office and the invisible Hub below, Ianto Jones intertwined his fingers with the Doctor's as they entered the TARDIS.

He was confident that eternity couldn't be spent better than this.

