



TORCHWOOD

Something More To Live For

By Rhi



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Something More to Live For

by Rhi (vipersweb@gmail.com)

Torchwood, Classic Who, New Who | PG for language, adult scenarios | gen with canon pairings | 28,000 words

In the aftermath of the episode of 'Meat' and in the midst of the anniversary of Canary Wharf, Ianto needs to decide just what he wants in his life. New opportunities are presented, old heartaches are revisited, and no one will be the same.

Betaed by: grass_angel

Warnings: None

Spoilers: None

Notes: Thank you first to my beta, grass_angel, who kindly took the time to look this over, make suggestions and advise on characterizations. Any remaining mistakes are my own. Thank you to the mods for running this Big Bang challenge once again. Thank you as well to my artist, Wihluta, for the artwork in this story. I have tried to write this story numerous times in the past two years. This is, in fact, my fourth attempt at doing so and my first at getting more than 1,000 words down. Like many of my stories, the idea for this came out of my reaction to a particular scene from an episode. In this case, the end of 'Meat.' This is a story meant to use the aftermath of 'Meat' and the anniversary of Canary Wharf as a catalyst for change in Ianto's life. Read into that what you will. After deciding to write this way back in 2008 and outlining it then, I realized that it wasn't the craziest thing in the world to think that the events of 'Meat' could have occurred around the one-year anniversary of the Battle of Canary Wharf. From that, spawned this fic. Of course, further research after this was written has shown my dates are off, possibly even by as much as a year. As this is au anyway, and there isn't, as far as I know, actual set dates for most if not all the episodes, I decided not to fuss overly much about it at the last minute. No knowledge of Classic Who is necessary to enjoy this as there is only a cameo appearance by Barbara Wright, one of the first Companions to the First Doctor. I hope you enjoy!

Art by dr_is_in (drisinlj76@gmail.com) and wihluta



From: Aileen Jenkins

To: Ianto Jones

Re: FWD: Memorial Service

Jonesy --

All set for this week?

God. I can't believe it. A whole fucking year since Canary Wharf. Wonder how much FOC (and god what a stupid acronym. Future Operations Committee -- how much more vague can they be?) is going to remind us that it can't happen again? Like we would let it.

Have you heard from any of the others? How about your team -- any of them coming up? Or are they still in denial about One?

UNIT will be making a showing. Everyone's been walking on egg shells since the email went out. Like I'm going to go nutters or something.

Anyway -- see you tonight, right? Here's hoping we can get plastered as soon as possible! *winks*

~Aileen

>>Aileen -- I would let you drive but I'm afraid we'd never get there. I'll pick you up at 6. Have you heard? Open bar! Wonder if they're >>telling us something? >>-IJ >>>Jonesy -- Are you going? Want to drive in together? Only I don't think I'll actually make it if I go myself... >>>~Aileen >>>>Memorial Service >>>>On July 19, 2007, Torchwood witnessed one of its greatest tragedies since its inception. Please join us on July 19, 2008 as we remember the >>>>brave men and women who lost their lives at Canary Wharf. For further details and to RSVP, please visit:
>>>>www.futureoperations.gov.uk/memorial

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From: Gwen Cooper

To: Ianto Jones

Cc: Jack Harkness

Re: Your upcoming time off

Ianto -

I asked Jack if I could have the next few days off to spend with Rhys. I could use a few days to pamper him, what with his gunshot wound, and now that he knows about Torchwood and what we do. Jack says you have off till Tuesday, but you probably wouldn't mind if you took the time off later. Be a love and agree? Pretty please?

Gwen

—

From: Jack Harkness
To: Ianto Jones
Re: Gwen's request

I know you requested the time off, but Gwen wants to make sure that Rhys is okay after everything that has happened these last few days. I'll let you have time off in a couple of weeks -- maybe we can check out that B&B you mentioned the other night? I'll make it up to you -- I promise.

CJH

Ianto closed his eyes and tried to breathe calmly. He shook his head and snorted before wincing as the bruises he had received the day before twinged. He *should* be used to Jack's insensitivity -- hadn't the aftermath of the last mission shown that? He could still hear the tightness and barely suppressed passion and hurt in Jack's voice as he told Gwen that *he* would know if Gwen left. Once again, Gwen bloody Cooper broke Torchwood protocol -- and Jack Harkness let her. He grimaced at the feeling of jealousy that welled up within him. He somehow doubted that if Tosh or Owen or he had wanted their significant other to keep their memories of Torchwood, Jack would be so accommodating. (Of course this would mean that the three of them actually had lives and the time and energy to meet people outside of the job. Torchwood was not conducive to developing normal relationships.) And really, the fact that Jack preferred to stalk Gwen and Rhys and brood that night, rather than comfort his lover -- who had been rough handled enough to elicit a few rather painful bruises, not to mention had nearly been shot -- had caused Ianto some consternation. He had rather thought that the two of them had moved into a deeper understanding with each other after their talk during the whole Tommy incident.

Apparently not.

He didn't quite know what to think. His lover wanted him to trade his days with Gwen because her fiancé was upset. And whilst Ianto had a lot of sympathy for Rhys, there was no way he was working the next few days. He couldn't quite believe -- and yet he also could -- that Jack had forgotten what this week was. Specifically, the week of July 19. One year since Canary Wharf, where nearly everyone that Ianto had worked with had died. Of all his friends from work, only one had also survived. She now worked for UNIT and, conveniently for him, was stationed at the UNIT base outside of Cardiff. Through Aileen, he had met other survivors, men and women who he had not known before Canary Wharf, but whom now he counted as friends. Friends who were among a handful of people who *knew*. Knew that not everything alien was shiny and exciting; knew that Torchwood did not guarantee a career to retirement and pension; knew the hubris man could drive himself towards, uncaring of the consequences; knew that Torchwood and Yvonne Hartman had nearly ended the world in a mad quest for power.

Closing his eyes, he considered his position and tried to remain calm. He wanted to go to Jack and yell at him for his insensitivity. That wouldn't help, not with Jack and his attitude towards his past. The survivors -- those who didn't end up sectioned or on permanent disability -- had gravitated towards positions within the government but not with Torchwood. Ianto had the sole distinction of remaining with the organization that had nearly destroyed the world, albeit with the one branch that had broken

from the whole operation seven years before the disaster. Aileen was among the seven survivors who had made the lateral transfer to UNIT. Two had moved to MI-5, whilst another three had shifted to positions within the MOD. Four had found postings within the prime minister's office. The remaining seven were either permanent residents of one of the hospices maintained for UNIT and Torchwood veterans, or on permanent disability. Three had committed suicide in the direct aftermath when the realization that nearly all their friends and co-workers had died, often in horrific and painful ways, had actually sunk into their consciences. All of the survivors who remained cognizant kept in touch with one another, intent on not losing the remaining few who actually *understood* what they had gone through. Their silent support had gotten Ianto through those first few months both before and after Lisa's discovery in the Hub's basement. Not that they actually knew about Lisa -- Ianto hadn't been so stupid as to involve anyone else in his schemes.

Aileen and Jeff had once asked if the members of Three were sympathetic to what he had experienced at One.

It took him a full five minutes to stop laughing long enough to reply.

Jack had never hidden his dislike of Torchwood One or his belief that it had received its just desserts during the Battle of Canary Wharf. Ianto was never certain if his extreme apathy towards One and the oh-so-very-few survivors resulted from his early experience at the hands of Victorian Torchwood (from all accounts Alice Guppy and Emily Holroyd were little more than petty tyrants and provided Jack with little choice but to work for Torchwood), or reflected the knowledge that Rose Tyler became forever lost to him because of it. He had never asked, mostly because he never spoke about his time at One. When he first inveigled his way into Three, he hadn't wanted to push Jack into firing him by bringing up One and the Battle. He had a responsibility towards Lisa and saving her meant he needed to remain with Torchwood. So when Jack or Owen or Suzie made comments that were more than a little crass and unfeeling, Ianto hid behind an emotionless mask and bit his tongue to keep from screaming at them. Only Tosh had ever offered him sympathy.

He knew and accepted that Canary Wharf represented the very worst of Torchwood: an egotistical head, convinced that anything alien belonged in the hands of Torchwood and none else; a group of people who played with things they didn't understand or the consequences of; an unwillingness to listen to the advice of others. This was the view Three had of One and Ianto instinctively knew that nothing he could say would change their mind. And since Jack had cut off Three from the infrastructure of One once he had taken over, Owen and Suzie and Tosh knew nothing about One beyond what imprecations and tidbits Jack had let fall in their presence. In the weeks following his employment at Three -- and as the sole refugee from Canary Wharf in their midst -- Ianto was given the pleasure of hearing their thoughts on where and how One messed up and how the world was better off with it destroyed. He did his best to ignore them and instead focused on cleaning up after them and making coffee and searching for *something* to help Lisa. It worked all too well and soon, Ianto became little more than a fixture, the team content to ignore that he had once worked for One. In their view, he became little more than the teaboy, a man who looked good in a suit, and with whom

Jack would flirt, and was surely hired for his looks and Jack's desire to bed him. He had no past to them.

It wasn't until the discovery of Lisa that they suddenly remembered his background. And as he knelt before her body, blood staining her and the floor, his hopes and dreams in shambles, he wondered if any of this was worth it. He was mildly surprised when, instead of a bullet to the brain or a dose of Retcon, Jack simply demanded that he relate every single step he took in the aftermath of Canary Wharf. Following that, the team, led by Jack, seemed content to once again ignore his past. No one spoke about Lisa or the fact he had almost killed them all. Tosh made an effort to speak with him and reach out to him while Jack eventually took to flirting with him once again. Soon enough, it was as if it had never happened. Ianto didn't know if that was to his benefit or not.

During the year-that-never-was, Owen and Gwen followed Saxon's orders and headed to the Himalayas. Both Ianto and Tosh had begged them to not go, but Gwen was so intent on proving that she could lead Torchwood in Jack's place, and Owen still felt guilty over opening the Rift, and both desperately wanted to find a trace of Jack, that they ignored their pleas. They trusted Saxon and believed him when he said that they were needed in the Himalayas. Tosh insisted on remaining in Cardiff, arguing that Ianto could not handle the Rift on his own, especially since it had only marginally calmed down in the weeks since Jack had disappeared. Eventually, Owen and Gwen gave up on trying to convince the two of them to join them and left, muttering deprecations under their breath about how they *should* be listening to Saxon because he knew what was right. Neither had an answer when Ianto asked if Torchwood was supposed to be above the law, why were they following an order by the Minister of Defence and soon to-be-elected Prime Minister?

Not going saved Ianto and Tosh from a painful death. Neither Gwen nor Owen made it off the mountain. Tosh and Ianto locked down the Hub as soon as Saxon exposed himself as the Master and set out to do what they could: Torchwood's purpose was to defend Britain against any and all alien threats, after all. The Toclafane qualified as such, and that placed their acknowledged master in the same category. They eventually sealed all the dangerous technology Torchwood had collected into the securest part of the archives before gathering whatever they thought would be most useful in the fight against their new and crazed Prime Minister.

Then they went to find like-minded people.

On the anniversary of Canary Wharf, Ianto hid with a few other Resistance members, attempting to evade the attention of the Toclafane and the Master while doing their best to foil his plans for world domination. That night, holed up in a church in the middle of the English countryside, he lit a candle in remembrance. To the others with whom he was sequestered it was no different than any other day, but to him it marked the first time his world ended. One year ago, the ghosts had emerged as Cybermen and laid waste to Torchwood Tower. He would find it ironic that a year out, the Earth was once again in danger of complete conquest, though this time the culprits were a crazed man and his shining balls of death, but he was too burnt out to care. Hours later, he was forced to flee as the

Toclafane descend upon them. As he ran through the woods, hoping to stay alive long enough to deliver this latest bit of intelligence to the next Resistance station, he wondered if any of their sacrifices were worth it.

And then the year reversed and it was if he had never lit that candle in memoriam.

When Ianto requested seven days off, he did it through the proper channels, getting the approval from his supervisor and forwarding it to FOC. Not surprisingly, they approved his request. He hated why he needed the time off but he refused to ignore One simply because to those with whom he now worked, Canary Wharf didn't deserve remembrance. And of course, it just had to be a shit week: almost dying - a gun to his head and the trigger pulled and it was only because it had been out of bullets that he now lived; thumbs, bruised from dislocation, which made it difficult for him to conduct some of his normal, everyday tasks; and Jack.

Jack had made it more than clear that of all the members of his team, Gwen held a place that the others couldn't assail. It annoyed him, more than he wanted to admit. He just didn't know if it irritated him more that he had so clearly misread the relationship he had with Jack, or that he had received barely disguised pity from Tosh and Owen. Gwen and Jack remained oblivious to it all -- as they were wont to do. Hell, Jack hadn't even corrected Owen and Tosh when they commented on how Gwen was the only one of them to have a relationship. More salt poured on an open wound.

He closed his eyes, leaned back in his chair, and considered what he wanted. Truthfully, Ianto didn't know what he wanted anymore. He had known only Torchwood for the last few years -- had grown to like his job, and the people with whom he worked. But in One, he could avoid people with whom he wanted nothing to do. Three just did not have the same numbers for him to do the same thing -- at least not successfully. And yes, he could (and did) hide -- in the archives, in the tourist office -- but the others constantly found him, if only to ask him to make coffee. He sighed.

A part of him just felt tired. Exhausted from everything he had seen and done in the last year. Knowing that his partner -- or whatever Jack considered himself -- didn't see fit to keep in mind a date as important to Ianto as Canary Wharf hurt. It made him question whether he even wanted to work for Three -- for Jack -- anymore. What was the point?

Months ago -- when Jack had first disappeared and before the incident with the Prime Minister -- he had met with Aileen, Jeff and Toby. Jeff worked on the FOC and Toby with the MOD. They had all heard about some type of disaster in Cardiff, and as soon as Ianto could manage it, he had dinner with them, in part to assuage their concerns for him. While he hadn't known Jeff and Toby at One, they, like all the survivors, had bonded over surviving Canary Wharf.

None of them understood why he continued to work for Torchwood.

"Isn't almost losing your life once enough?" Toby had asked.

Ianto had simply shrugged. "It's important work, and I like Three -- for the most part." He had refused to say anything more but, had caught the concerned looks they had all shared. "Look," he had begun, trying to reassure them, "I wouldn't stay if I didn't like it. Three is so different from One -- completely incomparable."

He had no idea if they actually believed him, but they left him alone about it. Conversation had switched over to gossiping about the other survivors. And for a few hours, Ianto forgot about the Rift and Jack and his colleagues, and just concentrated on being a young twenty-something.

Sitting up straight, he knew what he needed to do. His mouth twisted into a parody of a smile.

From: Ianto Jones
To: Gwen Cooper
Cc: Jack Harkness
Re: Gwen's Request

I regret that I cannot accede to Gwen's request. My plans can't be broken. Hope Rhys recovers.

See you on Tuesday.

-IJ

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From: Ianto Jones
To: Jack Harkness, Gwen Cooper, Owen Harper, Toshiko Sato
Cc: Colonel Edmundson, Sergeant Collins
Re: Upcoming Leave

Dear Friends,

As you are aware, I will be on leave from today at 1700 until Tuesday morning at 0830. During that time, I will not be available to assist with any incidents that might occur in the Cardiff area. Colonel Edmundson, head of UNIT - Cardiff, has graciously agreed to provide members from his base should Torchwood-Three have need for extra hands. Please contact Colonel Edmundson's aide, Master Sergeant Collins, if assistance is required. Master Sergeant Collins' details are located in the memo currently sitting on the Torchwood Three communal server.

I will only be checking my mobile and voice mail, intermittently whilst away. In the event of the world ending, I will be seconded to the UNIT-London office.

- Ianto Jones
General Administrator
Torchwood-Three

At precisely 1700, Ianto finished the last of his duties, hit send on the two emails he had drafted, and left the Hub, ignoring his colleagues, not that they noticed. The walk back to his flat didn't take too long and he arrived home with enough time to not only grab his already packed suitcase and laptop, but also to brew a flask of coffee for the ride to London. Aileen had recently commented that the thing she missed most about working for Torchwood was his coffee. He thought she exaggerated, but it didn't cost him anything extra to provide some for their journey.

He made sure he hadn't forgotten anything, before he loaded up his car, and headed towards the UNIT base on the outskirts of Cardiff. Aileen had promised to be waiting for him at the security gate, which meant he didn't have to go through the whole rigamarole of getting a visitor's pass simply to pick her up. He felt stressful enough about this trip and didn't need an additional security check on top of it all.

The drive out to the base took as long as he had suspected it would and to his relief, Aileen waited for him where she said she would. She stood flirting with the guard at the gate and he shook his head at her behavior. She rarely let anything get her down; even after Canary Wharf, she had quickly regained her equilibrium and had gone around to her fellow survivors, intent on making sure they didn't fall into despair over what had happened. Aileen constantly amazed Ianto: she mourned her lost friends and colleagues -- as did they all -- but refused to wallow at the loss and made sure that others didn't get lost in the aftermath. That most of the survivors even had regular contact with each other -- via e-mail, if not in person -- was due to her. And Ianto had to admit that if he had to choose which of the survivors he wanted to live closest to, Aileen made the top of the list -- and not just because she was one of his first friends at Torchwood. He can still remember how she had taken him under her wing when he first began there, a little overwhelmed with everything he had learned in orientation. Aileen had taken one look at him, and had adopted him on the spot -- despite not being in research.

Aileen had also introduced him to Lisa, and for that, he would always have a fondness for her.

"Ello there, Ianto!" Aileen greeted, as he got out of his car to help her with her luggage. She gave him a hug -- and given the sharp-eyed look she gave him, she noticed his wince. Owen had claimed his ribs were only bruised, and not broken or cracked, but still, they ached. Ianto already anticipated the numerous questions he would get about the bruises, lacerations and abrasions on his hands and wrists. It was typical Torchwood that he would have a crap week right before he took time off.

"Aileen," he murmured. "You're looking well." And she did. As a civilian consultant to UNIT, she did not have to wear the snazzy black uniform that its military members had to -- though it did not stop her from occasionally doing so. After all, as she put it, "Why should I ruin my own clothes?" Thinking of how many of his suits had been ruined -- all in the name of Torchwood, of course -- he rather wished that Torchwood followed a similar uniform policy as UNIT did. Today, she wore a rather fetching blue pencil skirt and white blouse. Funnily enough, her outfit complemented his own.

"I see you did it again," he commented, referring to how more often than not, Aileen managed to always wear something that in some way matched his own attire. It had amused their circle of friends at One to no end, especially once Lisa had confirmed that they didn't coordinate before coming into work.

"Hush, you!" she laughed. She held him at arms length, and he bore her scrutiny with calm patience born of long experience. "Hmph. You need to eat more, Jonesy."

Ianto rolled his eyes. "Yes, mam."

Aileen's eyes sparkled with merriment as she laughed again and swatted his arm in mock anger. "Oh, you!"

Before Ianto could reply, the guard that still stood at his station cleared his throat gently. "I'm sorry, ma'am, sir, but I'm going to have to ask you to not loiter." He looked very apologetic. Aileen merely shrugged, throwing him a smile.

"Ah! Private Thomas -- I told you to call me Aileen. None of this ma'am stuff."

"Yes ma -- I mean Aileen," Private Thomas blushed. Ianto hid his smile at the guard's blush. It looked as if Aileen had made another conquest.

"Come on, you Irish devil you... Let's be off. I want to get there sooner rather than later." He ignored the glare Aileen threw towards him and opened the car door for Aileen. Moving with exaggerated slowness, she finally got into the car and giggled as he bowed before closing the door. He shared an amused look with the guard, nodding his goodbye.

Time to head to London. Joy.

Tosh watched as Ianto left the Hub, moving discretely and quietly and sighed. Her heart went out to him; it didn't look as if he had any better luck in love than she did. She turned her attention back to her work, absently noting the ping that indicated a new message. Maybe she should have said something to Ianto rather than let him leave so quietly. All week she had considered speaking to him but each time the opportunity had arrived, she had ducked out of it, not wanting to cause him more hurt. As circumspect as he and Jack had been, she had known they had restarted whatever relationship they had had before Abaddon. She suspected Owen had guessed as well, given some of his pointed comments earlier this week after Gwen had stormed out and Jack had retreated to his office to brood over her ultimatum. At least the doctor didn't tease Ianto about it. Of course, he probably refrained from doing so out of self-protection. Ianto was really *vicious* when angered.

She glanced over the email that had just arrived, her eyes widening as she took a closer look at its details. That explained why he had left so quickly and without his normal goodbye to Jack.

"Wonder what that's all about," Owen ventured as he came up behind her. Tosh jumped in surprise.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"The email from Teaboy." Tosh frowned, wondering what he had seen that she hadn't. She re-read the email and shrugged.

"He's just being polite. Letting us know he'll be out of contact until Tuesday." Lucky bastard. It was only Wednesday, meaning he had a long weekend.

"Did you see who he sent it too?" Owen's arm flailed as he pointed at the screen.

"You're bored, aren't you?" Tosh asked, finally figuring out why the doctor was bothering her. He grinned in response.

"A little. Well. Also, want to be here for the fireworks," he said with a waggle of his eyebrows.

Tosh re-read the email and her eyes widened as she saw what Owen meant. "Oh..."

Owen looked smug. She hated when he looked that way. It made him insufferable. She sighed again, suddenly depressed. No matter what Owen did, a part of her desired him. Definitely needed to take lanto out for a pint and commiserate -- maybe he knew someone she could date?

"Now, why would he cc the commander of UNIT's base outside of Cardiff?" Owen asked, his voice lowering in conspiracy.

"For convenience sake?" Tosh hazarded a guess, even while knowing it wasn't likely. Whilst lanto hadn't exactly taken many days off in the past -- he had taken the odd one here and there -- he had never included UNIT in the emails he sent to the team. It probably didn't bode well.

"Tosh, you know as well as me that more's going on here. Gwen, for one, was bragging about how Jack was letting her take a long weekend, on account of Rhys getting shot," Owen said.

"But, with lanto gone..." They were already stretched and that was with five of them in the field; if the Rift remained quiet, they could do their job with four, but three would be pushing it. And if there was a genuine emergency?

Owen shrugged. "Who knows? But look!" and he jerked his head to bring Tosh's attention to Gwen. Gwen looked annoyed as she stormed towards Jack's office. "This should be good," Owen commented *sotto voce*.

She had to agree with him on that; Gwen provided a lot of entertainment simply because she insisted she knew best -- even when she didn't. She constantly opposed Jack and the decisions he made. Sometimes, she made a good point and the differing point of view she offered actually offered the best solution to whatever problem they faced. This was not the case all the time, however, and sometimes she tried to push them to do one thing when they all knew very well it wouldn't work. For some reason, Jack let her get away with antics he would not accept from anyone else. Case in point: Gwen's refusal to Retcon Rhys earlier this week. Tosh didn't rightly know how she felt about it -- she liked Rhys and he had helped. None of that meant that it didn't bother her that Gwen seemed to receive preferential treatment over the others.

The location for Jack's office didn't allow either of them to overhear just what Gwen had to say to him, but they could see her body language -- and she did not look happy. Before Tosh and Owen could

speculate on what exactly she had to say to the Captain, the Weevil alert rang out. Tosh immediately looked to see where and how many Weevils posed a threat.

"Tosh!" Jack barked out, coming down the steps from his office, Gwen behind him. "Stay here and coordinate. Owen -- you're with me and Gwen. Oh! And Tosh... get in touch with Ianto and find out just what the hell is going on."

Even as Tosh nodded her compliance, Jack led Gwen and Owen out the door and to the SUV. Before contacting Ianto, Tosh began her coordination efforts. As much as Jack (and to be honest, she and Owen) wanted to know what was going on, safety came first.

To his surprise, Aileen didn't immediately start to interrogate him about, well... anything. He had expected that she would demand to know why he sported injuries -- especially since, as far as she knew, he worked as general support and in the archives for Three. He hadn't quite gotten around to telling her about his promotion to field agent. He hid a grimace. He hadn't told her because he dreaded it. She already worried about him enough. More than once in the last few months, Aileen had suggested he take a lateral transfer to UNIT, or MI-5, or the MOD. He had resisted, for reasons he couldn't quite elucidate. Aileen worried about him and had even adopted him as her honorary brother in the aftermath of Canary Wharf. He let her because Jack and the rest of Three didn't seem to understand that not everything that came out of One was evil. Besides, she was one of the few people still alive who remembered Lisa as she once was and not the abomination she became.

Instead of chatting about the job, Aileen began a long and rambling conversation about the memorial service. "Obviously, the survivors, but who else do you think is going to show?" she asked.

"Well, I imagine representatives of Her Majesty. Probably some of the higher ups at UNIT and the MOD. The FOC," Ianto speculated.

"You're probably right there. No one from Three though?" she hinted, giving him a sidelong glance that spoke loudly of what she thought but wouldn't say.

Ianto forced out a laugh. "You're joking, right? Maybe Archie from Two will come down, but I'm it for Three." He tried to keep his bitterness from showing. He didn't know how successful he was.

Aileen opened her mouth to respond, when Ianto's mobile rang. "See who it is?" he asked her, since he couldn't answer it while not wearing his headset.

She grumbled good-naturedly as she answered for him. "Ianto Jones's phone. How may I direct your call?" she asked in a posh sounding voice, her Irish accent almost unnoticeable. She listened for a moment. "Please hold, I'll see if he can take your call right now." Ianto looked at her from out of the corner of his eye, his lips curled into a smile.

"Who's that then?" he asked.

"Someone named Tosh. She says she works with you," Aileen informed him.

"Fuck," Ianto muttered softly. "Better take it. Put it on speaker."

Aileen replacing the mobile in its cradle. "Just be quiet," Ianto warned her right before she hit the appropriate button. She made an exaggerated face at his admonishment.

"Hello, Tosh," Ianto greeted.

"Hi," she replied, her voice sounding a bit tinny from the speakers.

"What do you need? It's only been about an hour since I left."

"Jack wanted to know um... what's going on with you," she told him hesitantly.

Ianto sighed. He wasn't that surprised to find out that was why she rang him. His hands tightened around the steering wheel as he said, "I'm taking time off. He approved it months ago and my plans aren't flexible enough for me to change them at the last minute." He bit his tongue to prevent himself from saying anything about Gwen and her refusal to Retcon Rhys or the real reason he needed the time off. As much as he loved Aileen, she worked for UNIT and UNIT didn't need to know about internal matters within Three.

"Ianto..." Tosh began and he could hear the pleading in her voice.

"Look, Tosh," he said, interrupting her, "tell Jack that I'm sorry. But I'm not changing my plans because he thinks I should to favor someone else." That was as close as he could get to hinting at the true problem. "You can all survive without my coffee and without me until I return on Tuesday. Traffic is a bit of a bitch now, so I'll talk to you when I get back." He felt bad, leaving her to play messenger but not enough to stay on the line with her. Aileen cut off Tosh's protests and Ianto breathed out.

"I'm not going to ask," she said, sharing a glance with Ianto. "Not now. But we're gonna be talking about it, boyo. When we get to London and the others," she warned him.

A reprieve was still a reprieve and Ianto nodded.

"Now then, I noticed a thermos in here. Is that my coffee?" she asked. She twisted around in her seat and grabbed the flask, opening it and inhaling the delicious aroma.

"My coffee, but you're welcome to some of it," he said. She stuck her tongue out at him and helped herself to its contents, settling down for the rest of the journey.

As he continued to maneuver through the traffic, his mind went over the day's events and only half-listened to what Aileen nattered on about. A part of him wondered what Jack's reaction to his defiance would be. Another part of him knew it was a long time coming. And really... He had gone through the proper channels to ensure he had the time off for the memorial service, so there was no reason for him to feel guilty. Jack should really look at the fucking calendar. Then he wouldn't be surprised by something like this -- especially since he had received the same email he had about the

fucking memorial service. He breathed deeply, changing his focus completely onto the drive. He didn't need distractions. The journey to London lasted long enough.

Ianto rang off before Tosh could protest and she huffed in annoyance. Why did she have to play messenger? She did not delude herself in believing Jack would take Ianto's message well. Quite the opposite, considering he had her get in touch with him. She wondered why, if they were all supposedly adults, they acted like nothing so much more than infants! As she sat and fumed, keeping a watch out for any further dangers beyond the Weevils, she tried to figure out the best way to handle this. Clearly, Jack had expected her to work some type of magic and convince Ianto to delay his holiday until a later date; probably at some point after Gwen had reassured Rhys about her job and what had happened earlier this week.

She wondered when mediator went on her CV under 'experience'.

As she tried to figure out just what to tell Jack, the team finished catching the rest of the Weevils. "You got them all," she informed them.

"Good!" Jack grunted. She heard a door slam and assumed they had returned to the SUV. "Did you talk to Ianto?" he asked.

"Um... yeah," Tosh replied, nervous about his response.

"And?" he asked impatiently.

"He said he would speak to us on Tuesday."

"But what about Rhys and me?" Gwen sounded quite petulant. God! Tosh hated it when she acted like this, as if only she deserved to have a life outside of Torchwood just because she had a relationship while the rest of them didn't. She scowled at her screen.

"He said he requested the days off months ago. And went through the proper channels. He also said he couldn't change his plans," Tosh tried to soothe. Frankly, she didn't know why Gwen should even get the time off. That Rhys remembered anything about Torchwood at all went against every protocol in place. If the truth of what Gwen did bothered him to such an extent that Gwen needed an extended weekend, she should just Retcon him.

"Did he tell you where he was going?" Jack asked, voice tight with anger. Tosh couldn't tell if the anger was because Ianto hadn't complied with his implied order to return to the Hub and postpone his plans or something else. Maybe he regretted the open channel, as Owen ruthlessly teased Gwen about the change in her plans.

"No," Tosh said. She bit her lip. "He's gone with someone though." And she immediately wished she hadn't said a word as another round of exclamations erupted. Apparently no one had thought Ianto had friends outside of Torchwood. She was just as guilty as them. When the other woman had

answered Ianto's phone, it had startled her, and not because of the crisp politeness that had accompanied the greeting. She was mildly ashamed to realize that she had just assumed that because Jack was back, he really didn't do anything else outside of Torchwood. Clearly, she was wrong. "Look!" she finally shouted as they continued to overwhelm the channel with their protests. "I'm not his bloody secretary, alright? He said he was gone and that he would speak to us on Tuesday. I can't exactly ask him what you want to know, when he's not around."

"We're almost back at the Hub, Tosh," Jack informed her. "We'll talk then."

She sighed and really wished Ianto was here. It just didn't seem fair that Jack would yell at her for Ianto's actions. Or possibly, grill her about the mysterious woman with whom she had spoken to briefly. She glanced over to the kitchenette, where the coffee machine gleamed in its isolated wonder. She pouted and wished some of Ianto's coffee was still left. She had a feeling it would have gone a long way to defuse the situation. Or at least make it more palatable.

Jack slammed out of the SUV and directed Owen and Gwen to take care of the Weevils. He needed to speak with Tosh. He found her sitting at her desk and ordered her to follow him to his office. "Sit," he told her and she did, looking a bit apprehensive. He took a calming breath and reminded himself that he wasn't angry with Tosh. He just wanted to know what Ianto had actually said. "Alright. What did he say?"

"Like I told you earlier. He said he had requested the time off months ago and his plans weren't flexible enough for him to change them at such short notice." He noted that she bit her lip and fidgeted a little in her seat -- something she did when she was nervous.

"And?" he prompted.

Tosh sighed. "He asked me to tell you that he wasn't changing his plans in favor of someone else." No need to explain who the someone else was.

Jack leaned back in his chair and thought. He didn't understand why Ianto would be so difficult about the request. When Gwen had asked for a long weekend with Rhys, he had agreed she could take it - but only if Ianto was willing to postpone his own holiday. He had even offered to join Ianto if he did reschedule, trying to indicate to the other just how much he cared for him. After all, he didn't go on holiday with just anyone. Ianto hadn't even considered it -- if the business-like email he had received indicated anything. He had just finished reading the polite refusal to acquiesce with his suggestion when Gwen had stormed in and demanded he speak to Ianto about the whole thing.

He frowned and thought maybe he hadn't been clear enough about his intent. Both he and Ianto were still maneuvering around their relationship and he had hoped to pamper Ianto a bit after the incident with the whale earlier this week. He acknowledged -- to himself at least -- that he hadn't handled Gwen's ultimatum about Rhys very well at all. Ianto had disappeared soon after Gwen had stormed out and refused to Retcon Rhys. While he had spent the rest of the night in his office, he hadn't been blind

to the looks of disapproval from Tosh and Owen, and it was only later when he watched the scene again on CCTV that he realized he had sounded as if he couldn't live without Gwen. He had thought to apologize to Ianto the next day -- or at least explain what he meant -- but the other man had acted as if Jack's behavior hadn't mattered to him. He had been thankful for the lack of confrontation because it meant he hadn't had to delve deeper into his own feelings and wants and desires, so hadn't brought it up.

Now, he wondered if he should have pushed rather than feel grateful Ianto hadn't wanted to discuss their relationship. "Tosh..." he began pensively, fingers clasped in front of his face, "should I have forced Gwen to Retcon Rhys?"

She looked away from him for a moment and he grimaced, knowing the answer just from her behavior. She turned to face him again. "You should have, yes. But it's too late to do it now, so we'll have to live with it -- unless you want to Retcon Gwen too." She smiled briefly, seeming to know that that was not an option.

"Do you think that's why Ianto wouldn't postpone his holiday?" He hated how plaintive he sounded. He was Captain Jack Harkness! He shouldn't sound so unsure of himself.

"No," she replied, shaking her head. "Ianto wouldn't be so unprofessional. Besides, he's more creative when he wants vengeance on someone," she said, giving him a wicked grin. He smiled in response -- Tosh was correct in that. She paused as if she had something else to say but was unsure of its reception.

"Go on, tell me what you want to say," he encouraged her.

"You let Gwen get away with things you wouldn't let any of us. For the most part, it's fine. But Owen and I? We're not involved with you," she said carefully, holding her body taut with tension. "Ianto is. And... it doesn't look good, when you bend rules for her or... say things like what you did earlier this week when you don't do the same for Ianto."

Jack smiled ruefully at her. "Guess it's not a secret, huh?" He would quite promptly declare his relationship with Ianto to all and sundry -- if Ianto hadn't insisted on keeping it quiet for professional reasons. That was just an excuse though; none of their colleagues would ever accuse Jack of letting off Ianto lightly for anything just because they were together. Something more was behind his stated reason for keeping things quiet.

Tosh shook her head. "Not really. Ianto hasn't said anything, but it's obvious if you know what to look for." Jack gazed at her in speculation. He hadn't realized that and wondered if Ianto was aware that others knew about them.

"Talk to him when he gets back," she advised, sounding more comfortable than she had when she had first come to his office. "He might just need the time away and everything will be fine when he returns."

"You really think so?" he asked, trying not to sound as hopeful as he knew he did.

She shrugged in response. "I don't think he went on holiday because he was angry with you. I also don't think he went away because of Gwen. He probably couldn't change his plans."

Jack smiled tentatively. "Thanks, Tosh. Get out of here. It's past time for you to go home!"

She got up to leave before pausing. "You need to talk to him, Jack. Let him know where he stands with you."

He nodded in response and watched as she left. He wondered what it said that he had to get advice from someone to realize that his relationship -- or whatever it was he had with Ianto -- was in serious trouble. He should be able to figure it out for himself. Unfortunately, it seemed he didn't have that capability.

Moments later, Gwen slinked into his office.

"Jack?" she asked tentatively, a small pout on her lips.

"What is it, Gwen?" he asked tiredly. It had been a long day, and he had a lot to think about.

"Ianto's really gone for the rest of the week?" she asked, her eyes wide with slight disbelief.

"Seems so. You'll have to wait till next week for time off." She looked upset. "He has the time coming, and he did request it months ago," he explained to her. Or at least he assumed so. He hadn't actually taken the time to check. Ianto didn't have any reason to lie though.

"Oh," she said. She remained standing in front of his desk and he peered up at her.

"Anything else?" he finally asked, frustrated by the day and Ianto's behavior.

"No, I guess not," she said, sounding and looking disappointed. He really hoped she hadn't expected him to give her the time off despite Ianto not being here. She slowly walked out of his office and he sighed. Maybe Tosh was right. Maybe he did let Gwen get away with too much.

Gwen went home in a daze, her mind lost in thought over what had happened. She hadn't thought her request was a big deal when she had first asked Jack and then Ianto for the weekend off. She wanted - no needed -- to spend time with her Rhys, to assure herself that he had weathered his adventure without any further complications. It scared her more than she wanted to admit for Rhys to know the truth about Torchwood and her job. A part of her felt relief: she no longer had to lie to her fiancé;. No more making up excuses for bruises or scratches or ruined clothing or late nights or early mornings or cancelled weekend plans.

At the same time, she worried that Rhys would find himself in even more danger merely because he knew the truth about Torchwood. He had already been shot because of it -- what if something worse happened to him?

"I just want to make sure Rhys is okay," she had told Jack when she had made her request. "That he's really alright with everything."

"Understandable," Jack had smiled and she had preened a bit inside at seeing how much Jack seemed to respect the relationship she had with Rhys. She was the only one of them to have a relationship outside of Torchwood and it brought her no small sense of satisfaction to have something that *wasn't* Torchwood. Jack always reminded her to not let things slide with Rhys and this was the perfect time to make sure that didn't happen.

He had looked at his calendar and had frowned for a moment before giving her another of his trademark blinding smiles. "It looks like Ianto has booked off the rest of this week, but see if he'll postpone his holiday for you."

It said something -- something about both of them -- that neither of them had even considered for one moment that Ianto wouldn't postpone his own plans in favor of Gwen. Ianto hadn't said a word about his upcoming holiday so she had assumed he had only requested the days off to use up some stored holiday time. She had taken his acquiescence for granted, in part because Jack had. Jack, after all, would know Ianto's likely actions since he knew him the best of all of them.

Her assumption meant that she hadn't taken the time to discuss her request with Ianto -- hell! She hadn't even had the *courtesy* to make the request in person, just emailed him with the blind faith that he would agree. She frowned at her own selfishness. She had assumed that her desire to ensure Rhys had weathered the incident with the whale and the warehouse and his introduction to aliens and the truth about Torchwood -- that all of that had been understood by her colleagues and they wouldn't begrudge her the extra time off, even if it directly conflicted with the scheduled holiday of another.

She was wrong and in her arrogance, she had even stormed up to Jack's office and demanded -- demanded and not asked -- that he force Ianto to change his decision. No wonder Owen and Tosh had looked at her with disgust.

When had she become that person?

When had her own wants and desires supplanted her friends and colleagues?

"Everything alright sweetheart?" Rhys asked as he leaned over the sofa for a quick peck on the cheek.

"Not really," she admitted. Looking up, she gave him a sad smile. "Just thinking about a work thing."

"Is it aliens?" His eyes lit up with excitement, eager to share with her the truth of her position. He moved around the sofa to take a seat next to her.

She bit back a grin at his newfound enthusiasm for Torchwood. "No, nothing that simple," she sighed. "Just... I thought it might be nice, you know. For us to take a couple of days for ourselves because of what happened."

"Aw... that's sweet of you to think of me like that." He gave her that daft little grin she loved so much. "But...?" he continued hearing in her voice that things hadn't gone as planned.

She shifted on the sofa, pulling a leg up beneath her, and shaking her head, she continued. "Ianto blocked off the rest of the week and the weekend. He's not back till Tuesday morning." She wrinkled her nose in memory of her subsequent behavior. "I asked him if he would postpone his holiday, but well... he said no." She kept quiet about how she had reacted. She wasn't very proud of herself for it.

"Ah... Gwennie," Rhys hugged her to his side. "It was sweet of you to think of it, but we need to go anywhere. I'm fine spending time with you in Cardiff -- especially since I know what Torchwood's all about now. Don't fancy traveling with a bum shoulder either. No need to take someone else's time off. 'Sides, we've got our wedding next month and you've time off for that."

"You're right," she said, leaning her head against his side. "Guess I've been acting a bit silly about it and all."

"Nah... you were just thinking of me," Rhys told her and squeezed her shoulder with his good arm.

"Right," she agreed half-heartedly. For all that Rhys seemed happy to excuse her behavior, she knew she had amends to make at work. She needed to stop thinking only of herself. Jack had hired her because she reminded him that they were human, that compassion wasn't a foreign concept. Time for her to practice what she preached.

They made good time to London. After checking into the hotel, Ianto took a quick shower before meeting up with Aileen in her room.

"Jeff and Toby are with the others in the hotel's bar. They said we should join them," she informed him as he waited for her to finish fixing her makeup.

"Oh?" he asked with interest. "Who else is here?"

"Pretty much everyone who works and lives in London." It made sense. They didn't have to travel very far to attend the memorial. They had probably been propping up space at the bar since they had arrived. Never let it be said that the survivors didn't turn to drink to cope. There were worse things they could do, so most counselors just looked the other way.

"Any of your colleagues?" Ianto asked, just a tiny bit interested in her answer.

"No," Aileen said. She looked at herself in the mirror, fluffed her hair once more and turned to Ianto. "What do you think?"

"Gorgeous as ever," he complimented her. It was true. Aileen had let her red hair loose from the braid she had confined it in earlier. She wore just a hint of makeup, and had changed into a pair of nice denims and blouse. She looked very smart. And, proving how uncanny their connection was, she matched his own attire of denims and nice collared shirt. "We're a pair, aren't we?" he asked, a bit ruefully. She giggled in response, accepting his offered arm and followed him to the lift.

"We'll strike them dead," she commented.

"I hope not! Not this weekend," he replied, only half in jest. He really hoped no one had any hopes for planetary dominion, not this memorial weekend.

Ianto hadn't woken to a hangover as bad as the one currently making itself known to him in quite a while. As he lay in bed, trying to prevent nausea from overcoming him, he silently cursed whoever's bright idea it was to toast each of their fallen comrades. Not the sharpest of ideas, not when the list extended to a couple of hundred people. He groaned as he realized that the ringing in his ear came not from too much drink, but the bedside phone next to him.

"Lo?" he answered, fighting the urge to be sick as he reached over to answer the damned thing.

"Good morning, Ianto!" Aileen chirped. "How are we feeling this morning?"

"You're evil," he informed her, cradling the phone against his ear and the pillow.

"Oi! Don't you be mean, or I'll forget to remind you of the magic pill that's sitting on the bedside table!" she chided him. He turned his head and sure enough, next to a glass of water sat the bright pink pill some of the chemists at One had backwards engineered after discovering it cured all hangovers in a trice.

"You are a goddess," he thanked her profusely and leaned up to grab both the glass and the pill. At least that formula hadn't been lost in the destruction.

"That's what they all say," she said, laughter in her voice.

He swallowed the pill and emptied the glass of water. "Not that I mind you ringing me, but was there a particular reason?" he asked and place the glass back on the table. Fortunately, the pill hadn't made him sick up.

"Ha! Knew you would forget," she crowed.

"Forget what?" he asked, frowning as he leaned into the softness of the pillows.

"We're meeting Toby, Jeff, Amita, and Stephen for breakfast. You have forty-five minutes. I'll stop by on my way, 'kay?"

"Sounds good," he said. "And... Aileen? Thanks."

"You're welcome," she said, not needing an explanation for what precisely he thanked her. Sometimes it paid to have friends who understood him as well as she did.

He continued to lay in bed until the magic pill did its job. As he waited, he went through the agenda for today. They had the morning to themselves and a luncheon for opening ceremonies at one. Then, some more meetings until tea time, followed by another few free hours. At eight the Committee had scheduled drinks and dinner. A busy day, but no busier than the rest of the long weekend. They had the actual memorial service and big unveiling of a monument in remembrance on Saturday. As he took a shower, he cynically wondered if the majority of people attending this whole weekend had any true ties to the disaster.

He figured he didn't want the answer to that.

Jack woke alone in his bunk. Not for the first time this week either and that should have warned him. It might not be every night, but Ianto did tend to spend the majority of his nights with Jack. "Sometimes, Jack," he told himself as he entered his shower, "you need to pay attention to your people instead of waiting for the kick to the ass."

It was strange to enter the Hub and not find a mug of coffee waiting for him on his desk. No sound of tidying up or of feeding Myfanwy. If nothing else told him that Ianto wasn't here, that would have.

"Where do you think he went, girl?" he asked as he threw the pteradon some fish heads. She shook her head at him as she swallowed the treat. He smiled sadly at her antics. "Yeah_ guess I should be more patient. I just_ I just miss him. Wish he had told me where he was going instead of just leaving like that." He leaned back against the gantry and went over his own actions the day before, grimacing in remembrance. "Guess I can't blame him for doing it though."

Myfanwy screeched as she finished and flew away even as the Hub's alarm blared alerting him to the arrival of the first of his team. He sighed as he realized he couldn't just hide away anymore. Well, he could. He was the boss after all, but brooding wouldn't solve his problems.

Time to face the day.

The other four were already waiting for Aileen and Ianto when they arrived at the hotel's restaurant. They sat in the corner, isolated from the other diners; Ianto approved. He liked the illusion of privacy it afforded, especially since they would probably discuss things the public were better off not knowing.

"Look who's finally up!" Amita laughed as they joined the others.

"Blame Jonesy here," Aileen shot back. "Had to wait for Sleeping Beauty here to remember the magic pill."

"Oi! Enough of that," lanto grouched. He nodded in thanks as Toby handed him a cup of coffee and practically inhaled it, only grimacing slightly at its taste. The magic pill worked wonders, but a cup of coffee after a hard night's drinking got rid of any lingering feelings of unpleasantness.

"It's not as good as yours," Stephen teased, grinning as everyone nodded.

"No one does coffee as well as lanto!" Aileen said. "Got him to make me some from the trip here yesterday." She looked smug in her victory.

"And you didn't share?" Toby asked with a pout.

"Hell no!" Aileen said, grinning rather viciously and proud that she had gotten something the others hadn't.

"Children!" Amita reprimanded in a mock severe tone, shaking her finger at them. "Do I have to separate you?"

lanto just shook his head in amusement. Out of the sixteen or so survivors that had managed to remain out of hospice care or weren't Retconned, it was this group of people that he had become closest to. He knew the others, had socialized with some of them on occasion, but it was with this group that he could be himself in a way he couldn't with anyone else. Not even with Jack did he feel so comfortable. To these five, he was Jonesy, survivor of Canary Wharf. They would let him remember Lisa without forcing him to feel guilty for the actions he took in his misguided attempt to save her. And yes, they didn't actually know that he had taken her to Three in an attempt to reverse the damage, but unlike his colleagues there, they had no compunction about remembering the dead of One. It made him feel not so alone.

The conversation remained light hearted until after the waiter delivered their order.

"Time to get serious then?" lanto joked as he buttered his toast and the others leaned in closer for privacy's sake.

"I don't know about the others," Aileen said, "but I want to know what the hell happened to you, lanto."

Murmurs of agreement followed her statement, and lanto wrinkled his nose as he put down his knife and toast. "Figured you wouldn't ignore it." He sighed. "Alright then, got moved to field agent at Three."

"Fuck," Stephen gasped, his fork held forgotten in his hand. "They finally hire someone to do the admin and archives?"

lanto laughed. "You're joking, right? No."

They all just stared at him, until he shifted, a bit uncomfortable. "It's not that bad."

Toby snorted with disbelief. "Not that bad? Hell, you barely had time to meet up with us on the rare occasions we all try to. You're run ragged, and it's not that bad?"

"How long?" Amita asked.

Ianto shrugged in reply. "A few months. After Jack... went away for a bit, we needed someone else in the field."

"And that was you?" Jeff asked. "They couldn't hire someone else?"

"Yep." Ianto didn't want to start trying to explain the myriad reasons he had trained up as a field agent rather than Gwen or Owen trying to recruit someone from UNIT. Gwen had ultimately won the right to lead Three in Jack's absence (mostly through sheer bullheadedness and a general lack of desire on the part of Owen, Tosh, and Ianto), but her decision to keep the news that Jack had left Three to travel with the Doctor from pretty much every other agency had been one agreed upon by them all. After Jack's return, they had kept Ianto in the field, finding it easier to go out on jobs with five rather than four. Really, they needed to recruit more people, but Jack was so picky that Ianto didn't see it happening any time soon.

"So why do you look like shit?" Aileen persisted, hands wrapped around her coffee mug.

It figured she wouldn't let it be. Aileen never liked to let things go. "We were infiltrating a warehouse where some people were butchering a still-living creature," he began to explain. "Got caught by some of them; they tied my hands behind my back, and tried to kill me. Managed to work my hands free, but well.. you see what happened," he continued, gesturing with his fork to the abrasions on his wrists from the rope. "Received a few bruises, some cracked ribs whilst getting free. That's it."

"Promise?" Amita asked.

Ianto nodded. "Promise."

"Fuck, Ianto," Jeff said, shaking his head. "I don't know why you stay at Three. Haven't you had enough danger?"

"You're joking, right?" Ianto snorted. Catching everyone's gaze with his own, he realized they weren't. "Oh, come on, guys. It's not like some of you aren't in danger. UNIT isn't exactly safe."

"But we're in administrative positions," Aileen pointed out. It was true. Aileen worked in human resources, and Stephen was the liaison between UNIT-UK and the MOD. Toby was an analyst for the MOD and Amita did the same, but for MI-5. That left Jeff as a member of the Committee -- purely bureaucratic in nature.

Before Canary Wharf, Amita, Toby, and Jeff had all worked in the field, even if only part time. They had leapt at the chance of transferring to positions that didn't require them to risk their lives. Having survived one catastrophe that had led to the destruction of everything they knew, they had no desire to possibly entertain such an event again. This same line of reasoning had influenced the other

survivors to take safer appointments in the government and leave Torchwood behind. Only Ianto had stayed. He sometimes wondered if he had not had Lisa to worry about whether he would have followed Aileen into UNIT.

It was a moot point and he had forced himself not to dream of "what if" in the months following the end of Lisa and her tortured existence. "I like Three," he finally said. If it sounded a bit defensive, the rest were kind enough not to push him on it.

"Fine, fine, we'll leave you be for now, Jonesy," Aileen said and picked up her fork to finish eating. Ianto childishly stuck his tongue out at her.

The conversation resumed shortly thereafter, while Ianto paid attention to his breakfast.

"... so the Floxian ambassador is just standing there, frowning while holding the houseplant, and looking at Mr. M. like it's been mortally insulted. Mr. M. has no idea what to do, because he didn't read the briefing like we all told him to. I'm standing there, next to Trudy and a couple of the UNIT soldiers and we're all biting our lips to keep from laughing at him. Finally, Trudy takes pity on Mister M. and informs him that the ambassador thanks him for the gift and that smiling is considered a sign of displeasure. Mister M. immediately stops that nervous smile he gets and apologizes while frowning, since he figured the opposite of a smile is a frown. Then the Floxian ambassador starts laughing. Turns out, one of the higher ups had warned it about Mister M. and it decided to have a bit of a joke on him. Mister M. didn't find it nearly as funny as everyone else did," Stephen finished telling them.

"That's awful! How does Mister M. keep his position?" Jeff asked, face red with laughter.

"Fuck if I know," Stephen replied with a shrug.

"So, Jeff... it's your turn. What's going on with the Committee?" Toby asked, leaning his elbow on the table and raising an eyebrow in question.

They all turned their attention towards the only one of them who had yet to relate the latest gossip about their workplace.

"Yeah, Jeff! Do tell us. I've heard the most delicious rumors," Amita urged. Jeff looked a bit taken aback by the sudden predatory gleam in her eye, not ever having it turned on him, or at least so Ianto presumed.

"Damn. How do those rumors begin?" Jeff muttered, running a hand through his hair.

"You mean... it's true?" Amita gasped, her voice lowering to a whisper. "I just thought someone was having a bit of fun."

Jeff nodded in response. "Suppose it can't hurt to tell you. It's going to be announced later this weekend." He paused for a moment, seeming to collect his thoughts while taking a sip of his coffee. "The Committee's decided to reopen Torchwood-London."

Everyone looked at him in shock. "Really?" Toby asked; he looked as if he couldn't believe such a thing would happen.

"Yes. It's all really hush-hush, but well. Sir Bainbridge is planning on announcing it to a select few tomorrow."

"But... really?" Amita looked stunned. Looking around the table, Ianto saw that all of them wore similar looks.

"London was the second branch of Torchwood to open, after Torchwood House." Everyone nodded; they had all sat through orientation and had heard about the founding of Torchwood and its branches. "Anyway, some elements of the committee feel that re-opening a branch in London is important."

"But why?" Ianto asked. "I mean... aren't there enough agencies dealing with alien stuff in London? Why add another?"

Jeff shrugged. "They're not Torchwood. Look, the Committee might technically exist to reconsider the goals of Torchwood and figure out how things went tits up last year, but it's still supposed to rehabilitate Torchwood. I'm just surprised they waited so long to try something like this."

"It's about control, then?" Toby asked.

"You all know that the London branch was the elite of Torchwood. Two's little more than a joke, Four's missing, and Three? Harkness doesn't listen unless he feels like it. That leaves Torchwood House, which has served as the secondary archives for decades. The Committee wants to prove that Torchwood can be more than it was before. To them, it means re-opening London. More importantly, Sir Bainbridge managed to gain the Queen's support. It's going to happen, and happen soon."

The group remained silent for a moment, letting Jeff's announcement sink in. Ianto wondered what Jack would think. Considering his hatred of One before Canary Wharf, and that his dislike had only increased after that, he didn't think Jack would be too happy. He didn't like sharing his power; somehow Ianto didn't think the Committee was going to let Jack run roughshod over officials anymore once London reopened.

"How are they planning on recruiting?" Toby asked the questions they all had. "How big a place will it be?"

"They're planning on a small staff to start out with, but hope to increase the numbers within five years. They want to try and avoid some of the problems One had before." Ianto took that to mean that they didn't want another Yvonne to rise up.

Aileen exchanged a look with Jeff that spoke volumes to Ianto. "They're planning to recruit some of us?" And Jeff confirmed their own thoughts with his words. Who better to staff Torchwood-London than those who had survived its last conflagration that had all but destroyed it?

"Of course, I can't rightly say who," Jeff cautioned. "You'll find out soon enough."

No one really had anything else to say after that, and breakfast broke up soon afterwards. Toby joined Aileen and Ianto as they walked out. It was just after ten and they didn't need to return to the hotel for at least another couple of hours. By silent agreement, they didn't speak about what Jeff had told them until they reached Hyde Park. Somehow, whilst strolling through, the announcement had less of a sinister cast that it had in the restaurant.

"What do you think?" Toby finally asked.

"It shouldn't surprise me, but it does. It's only been a year, after all," Ianto said. He tilted his head to look at the leaves on the trees.

"You going to transfer back then?" Toby asked with no small amount of curiosity, hands in his pockets as they strolled along the path.

Ianto shrugged in response. "Don't really know. We just found out about it, and well. My life's in Cardiff now."

Aileen snorted and threaded an arm through Ianto's. "What life? You don't do anything but work!"

"Maybe, but I like what I'm doing." Besides, there was Jack and whatever they had with each other. Didn't that deserve some consideration?

"I find that hard to believe," Aileen retorted and squeezed his arm.

"Right, and what about you then?" Ianto asked, glancing down at her. "You in any rush to return to London?"

"Oi! No need to start fighting," Toby said and gently nudged Aileen in an attempt to calm them down.

"You're right," Ianto said, sighing. "Who knows if they'll ask us, or what they'll ask us back for."

"Still, it is London," Aileen commented, almost wistfully, a sad smile on her face. Ianto supposed it was because she didn't love living outside Cardiff. Aileen had had a very active social life in London. Cardiff had a decent night life in comparison to other cities, but it did not compare to London. While she worked in human resources for UNIT, she still worked somewhat irregular hours as she catered to not only Earth natives, but also friendly aliens to whom UNIT opted to offer sanctuary. In London, her irregular hours hadn't mattered much, but in Cardiff it did.

"There is that," Toby agreed. He hadn't moved out of London after Canary Wharf, so it didn't matter as much to him. For him, the decision would depend on making the choice to return to Torchwood_ or not.

"Oi, Gwen! Where'd you put that file from yesterday?" Owen shouted across the room from his desk.

"And where's that coffee you promised?" Gwen sighed as she looked through the files on her desk.

Owen had been like that all morning, seeming to find fault with everything she had done. She could only assume he resented her actions from yesterday.

Finally finding it, she walked it over to him and dumped it on his desk. "Here. And you can get your own bloody coffee. I'm not your servant." She turned and fled before he could say anything more.

"Being a little harsh on her, aren't you?" Tosh quietly commented as she watched Gwen flee rather than listen to Owen's increasingly harsh comments and requests. She leaned against the edge of his desk.

"She deserves it and you know it," Owen snorted, not bothering to look up from his screen.

"Does she? I didn't think you cared that much for Ianto," she said, arms folded across her chest and leg swinging in the air.

"I don't," Owen said. He looked up to where Tosh perched, his face devoid of all humor. "I'm tired of Saint Gwen. I'm tired of the way she just seems to expect everything to go her way. This thing with Ianto was the last straw."

"And you think by treating her like that, she'll change?" Tosh couldn't keep the sarcasm from coloring her voice.

"Don't particularly care," Owen shrugged and turned his attention back to his work.

Tosh sighed, turning and catching Jack's eye as she headed to the kitchen for some tea. Without Ianto here, she didn't want to chance the sludge that currently masqueraded as coffee. Jack looked unhappy; whether it was because of Owen's treatment of Gwen or Ianto's absence, she didn't know. She also didn't care. It wasn't her job to make sure he was feeling all right. They weren't school children anymore and someone needed to remember that. She'd give them until tomorrow morning before acting. She owed Ianto that much.

Gwen waited until lunch to speak to her teammates. If her conversation with Rhys had forced her to realize how she had been acting, Owen's treatment of her all morning had really brought it all into stark relief for her. This needed to end. "I need to speak with all of you," she announced as she entered the conference room with everyone's lunch. She ignored Owen's muttered 'why should we care' and took a deep breath. She could do this.

"I want to apologize," she said after she had handed out the ordered lunches. "I've not been acting nicely lately, expecting everyone to agree with what I want and need. That's not fair to you or me. So, I'm sorry."

"Ah... thank you, Gwen," Jack finally said, breaking the stunned silence that had fallen after her words. He looked around the table, catching everyone's eyes with his own. He took a deep breath, seeming to have come to grips with something himself. "Gwen's right. We need to stop caring only about

ourselves. All of us are guilty of it -- including me -- and it's starting to affect the team. Let's try to remember that we're responsible for each other's safety when we're out in the field." His blue eyes caught everyone in his gaze and they could see the command in them.

"It's nice of you to say that Jack," Gwen interrupted. She couldn't let him act as if she was only part of the problem, even if she wasn't wholly responsible for the current tension in the Hub. Her clasped hands were white with tension where she hid them under the table. "But, please. Let me finish." She took a deep breath and carefully considered the words she wanted to impart. She tried to meet everyone's eyes as she spoke. "Since I started working for Torchwood, I've pushed all of you and prodded for information that I shouldn't necessarily know. I thought I was special, that working for Torchwood gave me rights that no one else had -- even you guys. And Jack, you've let me act like that and so has everyone else. Even when someone said something to me, I ignored it, convinced I was right, that whatever method I pushed for was right, even when it wasn't," she gave a self-deprecating smile. "I know police work and yes, I'm better with people than all of you, but that doesn't make me a better than you. All of you have a lot more experience working with aliens and with Torchwood than I do and I forgot that. So I apologize for acting like that. You see," and here she gave a rueful smile, "I forgot something important: I forgot to listen. Oh, I'll take the time to listen to others -- the civilians or aliens -- but not you. Not my teammates and friends. I don't want that anymore."

"We all forget what we bring to the table," Tosh said, frowning slightly. "Not just Gwen, all of us."

"I suppose it's not all Gwen's fault," Owen grudgingly conceded. "Suppose we could push back more."

Gwen smiled at his disgruntled look. "I look forward to it."

Jack beamed at everyone. "Sometimes, I wonder why I chose each of you and then something like this happens and I remember."

The opening luncheon to the memorial weekend did not hold any surprises. Sir Bainbridge from the Committee gave an opening address, suitably solemn for the occasion. Each survivor sat at one of the tables, surrounded by politicians and administrators from around the world who had come to pay their respects to those who had fallen a year ago. Ianto only wished he could believe that they actually cared what had happened. For most of them, Canary Wharf was simply an object lesson to point to and assert that they would never let something like that happen under their watch. Few actually cared for the men and women who had died.

After lunch, Sir Bainbridge informed them that the smaller meetings -- "retrospectives" as he called it -- would begin in a half hour. Despite not really wanting to attend, Ianto had some small amount of curiosity to see just what fell into that category. He didn't think anything good could come out of it.

He was right. The afternoon sessions left a bitter taste in his mouth, and he soon deserted the attempt to both vilify and honor those who had worked and died for Torchwood.

Not surprisingly, he found a number of other survivors helping to hold up the bar in the hotel. He joined them and wondered whether his liver would actually survive the weekend.

"You know what their problem is," Toby slurred into his glass, "they're all a bunch of arses who don't have a fucking clue about what they're talking about."

It was a sentiment shared by most everyone. Hard to argue really, when most of the people attending the "retrospectives" didn't have a clue about what Torchwood had achieved, or even how Canary Wharf had happened. They just knew the aftermath. And like Jack and the rest of Three, they had judged and found One lacking.

Small talk and networking at a memorial service had always struck Ianto as being quite gauche. It seemed the Committee had ignored the latest etiquette book though, as those goals appeared to serve most of the guests' purpose. Ianto politely sipped his scotch, forcing a smile on his face, as he was passed from one group of guests to another. He felt like a one-trick pony, and he suspected that most of his fellow survivors did too. Everyone here seemed to want to speak to a survivor, to find out how he or she had managed to escape death. Never mind that almost none of them wanted to remember never mind speak about it; oh no. As a survivor, they must naturally wish to relay their innermost pain to complete and utter strangers.

"Ianto, this is Doctor Martha Jones," Aileen said, introducing him to a pretty black woman. "She just started at UNIT-London. Martha, this is a very good friend of mine, Ianto Jones."

"Good evening, Doctor Jones," Ianto greeted with a smile. She returned it, full fold.

"It is so nice to meet you!" she exclaimed. Ianto raised an eyebrow at that.

"Really?" he asked, confused at her enthusiasm. Perhaps Aileen had mentioned him to her. He felt like he should know her though, and he racked his brain trying to place her name. It sounded familiar.

"Oh yes! You're one of Jack's people, right?" she asked.

Of course. Doctor Martha Jones. One of the Doctor's Companions. He wondered how many people here realized that they had a minor celebrity present. "Yes, Doctor Jones. I work at Torchwood's Cardiff base."

"Call me Martha," she insisted. "How's Jack?"

Ianto shrugged even as he acknowledged Aileen's departure from his side with a small nod. "He was fine, last I spoke to him." Jack never really complained when he brought the man his coffee, so it would have been odd had he done so. And Ianto had avoided speaking with him before he left for London. He would have had a very different answer, he was sure, had he actually allowed Jack to confront him. Sometimes taking the coward's way out suited him.

"I'm glad! I was a bit worried he wouldn't be getting on alright," she confided to him. Ianto shrugged again, not really knowing how to respond and feeling uncomfortable. From her comments, he gathered that she was close to Jack, or at least close enough to care about his state of being. He wondered how that had happened until he realized it was Jack and of course he would know a pretty former Companion like Martha Jones.

"Cardiff keeps him busy, of course, but he's doing well," he finally said since she seemed to be waiting for him to respond.

"Good," she said, reaching out and grabbing his hand. "I want to introduce you to my parents. They'll want to hear how Jack is doing."

He barely bit back the astounded exclamation that rose to his lips. He could understand why Martha might wish to know about Jack; she knew the Doctor and was his most recent Companion if he had the Doctor's timeline correct. He didn't understand why her parents would care. Then again, he didn't understand any of it. Martha towed him along though, and brought him to a stately couple.

"Mum, Dad, this is Ianto Jones. He works for Jack," she introduced him. He smiled politely and answered their questions no matter how much they bewildered him. They had a lot of them, all centered around Jack and his sense of well being. He did his best to respond, while not giving away any of Torchwood's secrets. Supposedly, everyone who attended these services had appropriate clearance, but he had no desire to dispel the mystique that shrouded Jack's Torchwood. He owed Three that much.

While Ianto kept trying to escape, the Jones family seemed content on monopolizing his company. Every time he tried to extract himself, they drew him back in, wanting to know more about Jack, or to clarify information about the team. He found it a bit frustrating, but politeness and the fact that they knew Jack kept him from just abandoning them.

"Will Jack be joining you?" Francine asked, as if it would be natural for him to do so. Ianto looked at her incredulously.

"Jack wouldn't come. Not for this," he automatically responded. "He doesn't have much of an opinion of One." He gulped down some of his scotch, wishing Aileen, or Stephen, or any of his friends would rescue him from this. Glancing around the crowded room, he saw all of them busy with other guests.

"Really?" Clive asked, seemingly amazed. "But what about to support you?"

Ianto shook his head and laughed, a bit harsher than he would have liked. "Why would he do that for? He hates being reminded that I originally came from One. No, no, Jack... Jack's didn't even..."

Thankfully, before he could finish his sentence, Toby stumbled up to him. Why would Mister Jones even think Jack would come to this just for him? What did he -- did they since they all wore the same shocked look he did -- know that he did not?

"Ianto... a bunch of us are heading out. Join us?" he slurred. Ianto quickly propped him up. Poor Toby. This whole memorial was obviously too much for him.

"Maybe you've had a bit too much, yeah?" he said instead. "Let me help you to your room. We have another long day tomorrow." He turned towards the Jones family. "Sorry to leave before we're done talking, but I should really help Toby get to his bed." He tried to sound apologetic, rather than relieved. "It was lovely to meet you."

"You too, Ianto Jones. Give Jack our love," Francine said. To his surprise, both she and Martha enveloped him in a careful hug, and Clive gave him a hearty handshake. Friendly people, but then they knew Jack.

As he staggered with Toby out of the room, he missed the concerned looks the Jones family exchanged. If he had observed them, he would have realized that they hadn't been fooled by his non-answers. He had no way of knowing that Jack had spoken of his team whilst in the Master's clutches. Nor, did he know that Jack had told them all about Ianto. And what he said, didn't quite match up with what the young man believed Jack thought of him. It worried them.

But Ianto didn't see any of this. Instead, he concentrated on getting Toby to safety, before he said or did something irrevocable.

"What was all that about then?" Clive whispered to his wife as Jack's Ianto walked away with his friend. "Why isn't Jack here?"

"I don't know," Francine admitted, her brow furrowed as she considered the way Mister Jones had danced around the topic of Jack and his presence -- or lack thereof -- at the memorial. "I was hoping we'd see him."

"Maybe I should give him a ring," Martha said, her voice clearly betraying that she wasn't positive that doing so was the correct course of action.

"Perhaps Jack simply couldn't be here," Francine suggested. "After all, he did mention that his branch only has five agents. If his Mister Jones is here, he might not have wanted to risk being shorthanded."

"I'm sure that's why," Clive said, more to assure his wife and daughter than actually believing it. Not that his comment really worked. It just didn't make sense! Jack had bragged about his team so much, had made it very clear to all of them that he held Ianto Jones very dear to his heart. Why wouldn't he make sure to be here during a time when his lover would most definitely need him.

"Of course, dad," Martha agreed. "Still... wouldn't hurt to give Jack a ring and see how he's holding up."

Jack grinned as he saw the email in his inbox. An email from Martha Jones always put him in a better mood and he sorely needed some cheer. Gwen's speech the day before had released a lot of the tension in the Hub. She had even mentioned her plans to speak with Ianto when he returned. Hopefully that would solve the remainder of his staff problems. Well, after he apologized for his own actions -- or lack thereof towards Ianto. He happily clicked on the message and sat back to read and enjoy her email. He should really phone Clive, Francine, and Tish to check up on them, to make sure they were all still okay and healing from their time with the Master.

From: Martha Jones
To: Jack Harkness
Subject: [none]

Jack -

Mum and Dad were asking after you. Is everything okay? Met one of your people last night. You were right -- Ianto is hot! Where were you? Mum and Dad thought you'd be with him for sure. They're a bit concerned. Is the Rift that busy that you couldn't afford to take off too? How is Ianto handling the anniversary?

I start at UNIT soon. Looking forward to it, especially after, well, everything. I imagine it won't be like traveling with the Doctor -- hope it's a little less dangerous at least.

Mum says to give her a call. Tish sends her love.

Love,

Martha

Jack blinked. Then he blinked again. How the hell had Martha and her family met Ianto. *Why* had they met him? Where was Ianto that he had come across them? And what the hell did Martha mean by 'anniversary'? He wracked his brain trying to remember if something had happened around this time of year during the year of hell. Nothing came to mind. So what exactly had she meant?

Good mood gone, Jack proceeded to brood and try to decipher her message. He resisted ringing Ianto and finding out from him. He could wait until Tuesday. Honestly.

"This is Ianto Jones," Jeff smoothly introduced him the next night to the people he had brought him to meet. "Ianto, this is Sir Bainbridge and Ellen Ferguson. They are both member of the Future Operations Committee."

"It is a pleasure," Ianto said, pasting a smile he didn't really feel on his face and shook their hands.

"Mr. Jones, you remained with Torchwood after the tragedy, is that not so?" Ellen asked. She peered at him as if he were a rare butterfly pinned to a board.

"Yes, ma'am, I did. I transferred to Cardiff," Ianto confirmed, forcing a smile to his face.

"How do you enjoy working for Captain Harkness? I understand he's quite a character," Sir Bainbridge asked with a jovial smile.

Ianto smiled politely. "I enjoy it very much." No need to descend into the details of his relationship with Jack -- especially since he really had no idea what he wanted. Or what Jack wanted, which was really the big issue at the moment.

"Hem, hem... Yes. Now, you've probably heard the rumors, Jones," Sir Bainbridge began. "About how we're planning to reopen the London branch of Torchwood."

"Yes, sir. I had heard something to that effect."

"To put it bluntly, they're true." Sir Bainbridge looked as if this should please Ianto.

"I see," Ianto said, wondering what they wanted, as they looked at him expectantly.

"Obviously, we're still at the planning stages, but we plan to offer all of the former Torchwood-London members a position at the new office."

"Really?" Ianto asked, trying to sound surprised. How many of them would actually accept?

"Jeff here, has told us that you've worked in the archives, both at One and at Three," Ellen said.

Ianto noted that Jeff looked quietly smug. He wanted to glare at his friend, but opted instead to continue to smile politely. "That is true. I was a junior researcher at One and on occasion took a few shifts in the archives. Given my familiarity with the Torchwood archival system and upon my transfer to Three, I began to organize their archives, helping to integrate some of the new material they gained in the aftermath of Canary Wharf." What he didn't say was that before he arrived, the archives had been a mess and completely disorganized.

"Good, good. Good skills to have," Sir Bainbridge said with an air of pomposity.

"Yes, I suppose." Ianto restrained from rolling his eyes.

"It's not an official order yet -- can't be until we're a bit further along -- but we're going to offer you the head archivist position," Ellen said. She leaned in close to him, impressing on him the great honor they meant to give him.

Ianto's eyes widened in surprise. It was a big -- huge -- promotion and not something he had expected. "Wow," he said. "That's um... that's quite an offer."

They beamed at him. "We want to start out right, Jones. Someone like you, who knows the value of what we find and how best to care for it. You would be a great asset," Ellen said.

"Thank you, sir, ma'am," Ianto said. "It is certainly more than I expected. Thank you for the consideration." Why he was the right person for the position and not someone else, he had no idea but he was too stunned to question it.

"Of course, you'll have to keep it hush-hush. We're not ready quite yet," Ellen cautioned.

"Naturally, ma'am. Not a word out of me." He smiled as they took their leave, Jeff escorting them to their next victim, and made a note to hunt him down after all this and find out just how such a position could even possibly come his way. Yes, one of his job titles at Three included that of archivist, but he knew that more senior people worked at Torchwood House. Shouldn't they have preference over him? Or perhaps none of them wished to transfer. From what he understood, once someone worked at Torchwood House, they rarely, if ever, opted to leave. At least that is what Jack claimed the one time Ianto had suggested he visit it in order to get help in identifying some mysterious objects in the archives. Needless to say, Ianto had never actually visited it.

"Good news?" Amita asked, startling Ianto out of his thoughts as she came up next to him, glass of champagne in her hands.

"Hmm... potentially," he said. "You?"

"Oh, yes..." she purred. "Dance?"

"Can't say no, when you ask so nicely," he told her. They placed their beverages on a nearby table; she laughed as he gathered her in his arm and twirled her around the dance floor. She filled him in on the gossip -- not that he had missed much in the three hours since the evening entertainment had begun, but he appreciated the gesture.

"Thank god this is all almost done," she muttered as the dance ended and the DJ announced that the evening was almost done.

"Not having fun?" he asked, sarcasm dripping from his voice.

She snorted in reply and leaned her head against his chest. He inhaled the scent of her shampoo and smiled. It had been far too long since he had held a woman in his arms. "Not exactly how I pictured remembering it, is all."

"Yep. Know what you mean." And he did. Nearly every single survivor had a brittle look to them, as if one wrongly spoken word could shatter them. The memorial service had descended into a bit of a farce, with people playing parts that they didn't quite know or feel comfortable in. Most of the survivors, all seventeen of them, had spent the last two days heavily medicated with alcohol -- or other substances. Even a luxury hotel did not have the thickest of walls, and the sobs and muffled screams of nightmares trickled through. As much as the Committee and everyone else might wish to believe, none of them had truly recovered from what they had lived through. They had merely papered over the wounds and forced themselves to continue moving. The last two days, with their inane conferences and discussions and small talk, had stretched most of them thin.

"One more event and then we can leave," she said, easily following the turn he led them into.

"But it's going to be the hardest," he warned before spinning her out.

"It'll be acceptable to break down tomorrow morning," she said as she returned to his arms. Ianto nodded in agreement. She was right. Tomorrow was the actual anniversary of Canary Wharf, and as such, they had services and a ceremony to unveil the memorial stone in remembrance of those lost. It promised to be a circus.

Ianto hated memorial services. This one did nothing to change his mind. The survivors all sat in a specially roped-off section of their own. Politicians and other government VIPs sat near them, happy for the photo op it provided them. It both angered and saddened him that, as with almost everything this weekend, the memorial service had little to do with the actual survivors and more to do with being seen and known. Not one survivor had been asked to speak at the service, though none of Ianto's friends minded. The entire ordeal of the memorial weekend had taken its toll on all of them.

Aileen currently had custody of his left hand; he was slowly losing feeling in it, her grip was so tight. Toby sat on his other side, face stoic and eyes staring blankly ahead of him. Only the way his fingers spasmed every so often against his leg alerted Ianto to the turmoil his friend felt. And they weren't alone. All of his friends hated having to attend the service even as they wanted to show their respect to their fallen comrades.

None of the pretty words spoken really helped. None of them came close to capturing how they all felt or what it was like. It didn't help that the officials -- those who actually knew the truth -- could explain that the men and women who died in the Tower had been killed by aliens. The added subterfuge to the already painful event somehow just managed to make everything worse.

And, as the list of the dead was read, Ianto closed his eyes, held onto his friends and waited for it all to be over.

It probably said something when the survivors all immediately trooped to the nearest pub to get trashed as soon as the memorial service finished. None of them -- not even Jeff, who as one of the Committee members should have remained -- stayed for the reception. It didn't take long for Ianto to find himself in a group that consisted of Jeff, Toby, Stephen, Amita, Aileen, and Cory. Cory worked for UNIT in their London HQ. He mostly knew her through Aileen.

"Fuck, Jeff. How can you stand working for the Committee?" Aileen asked as she worked her way through her third pint in an hour. She stared bleary-eyed at the equally blotted man.

"What else should I do? No way was I letting what happened be forgotten. At least working with them, I can try to make sure they don't fuck up," Jeff said, his hand wrapped around his own pint glass. His finger traced condensation on the table, making patterns that made sense to no one but him.

"There has to be a better way," Aileen insisted as only someone three sheets to the wind could. She leaned against Ianto for support and sniffed back tears.

"Yeah? Well I can't think of one. Unless I transferred to another Torchwood branch," Jeff reminded them, looking up with pained eyes. Pointing to Ianto, he continued. "I mean, hell. The only one of us to even stay with Torchwood is Jonesy here."

Ianto grimaced, not wanting the reminder. "Don't bring me into it," he said. He didn't really like the notoriety that came from that. Everyone seemed to think it meant he loved Torchwood. Unfortunately, that couldn't be further from the truth. It made him uncomfortable to hear people praise his dedication, when he had only remained for Lisa. Not that he could tell anyone that. And not like that had worked out for him.

"Jonesy," Cory asked, leaning across the table towards him. "Is what they say about Captain Jack true?" Everyone guffawed, seemingly happy with the change of subject. Ianto scowled because while he was happy to get off the topic of Torchwood and the Committee, he had no desire to talk about himself... again.

"What do you mean?" Ianto asked warily. It was an open-ended question and one he didn't really want to answer since he had an idea of what she meant. The answer was likely in the affirmative. He gulped down some of his pint in the hopes of delaying the conversation. Maybe a trip to the loo?

"You know... is he really that..." she waggled her eyebrows suggestively.

"I guess." Yes. Of course Jack's reputation preceded him. He was Captain Jack Bloody Harkness. No way was Ianto admitting how well he knew it first hand though.

"Have you ever...?" she continued, oblivious to the discomfort Ianto felt.

"Don't kiss and tell," Ianto said and stood, giving Aileen to Toby to hold. "Gonna go to the loo," he said, trying to make his excuses.

"Oh! But you did kiss!" Amita leaped into the conversation and prevented him from leaving.

Ianto studied the bar mat closely. He didn't really want to delve into his relationship -- or whatever the fuck it was -- with Jack. "I imagine all the stories you've heard about him are true," he finally said. The others laughed a bit at that.

"Why did you stay?" Aileen suddenly asked.

"What do you mean?" Ianto asked, a bit bleary eyed.

"Why didn't you transfer out?" She poked at Ianto, turning in Toby's arms to do so. Ianto frowned with irritation at her, still not sure what she meant. "UNIT would have snatched you up in a second -- more so since you started working at Three. And I'm sure the MOD or MI-5 or even the Prime Minister's office would have taken you, if you wanted. But you stayed with Torchwood. Why?"

Ianto could see that they all wanted to know his reasons. He certainly couldn't tell them the truth. He shrugged. "Why transfer when I know Torchwood?" he countered with a roll of his eyes.

"Yeah, but... everyone knows that Harkness separated Three from One after the Millennium," Stephen said. "He follows his own rules, rules very different from Yvonne's."

That was true. Standard rule of thumb at Three: if One had done it, Three wouldn't. "My sister wanted me near, and Three had an opening," he finally said. An opening he had forced Jack to make after stalking him for days and finally wooing him with a pteradon. He sipped his pint of beer. As for his sister? She knew he lived in Cardiff now, as opposed to London, but she certainly didn't see him any more often than she had before.

"Would you transfer?" Amita asked, twirling a piece of her hair around her finger.

He shrugged in response. "Maybe. I considered it, a few months ago." When Jack was gone, and he didn't know if he could continue to stay on if Gwen remained as leader.

"We had hoped. Well, a bunch of our higher ups had hoped," Toby said, nodding towards himself, Amita, and Aileen. "Hell, most of them hoped Harkness would remain gone long enough to woo you over to another organization."

"Really?" Ianto asked, a bit stunned that not only did others think well enough of him to want to recruit him, but also that they had known Jack had gone missing, and hadn't done anything about it.

"Oh yeah," Aileen confirmed and nodded vigorously. "Colonel Edmundson asked if I knew what it would take to bring you to us."

"Huh," Ianto said. He finished his pint and turned to the others. "Another round? Only... no more talk about me. Please, let's talk about someone else this time. I feel like all we're doing is dissecting my life." They laughed, as he had intended, but agreed. By the time he went to the loo and returned with another round, the conversation had moved to something a bit more maudlin as the rest of the survivors joined their table. Still, Ianto would rather talk about those who had died, even if he didn't know them, than his own life. It was far less complicated.

For once, a Rift alert hadn't ruined the weekend and Tosh hadn't had to go in to work. Not that she had done anything very exciting with her free time; she cleaned her flat, bought groceries that would likely spoil before she could use them all, picked up a new book that seemed interesting, and rented a DVD. She had taken a moment to consider going out for a drink rather than spending the night in but

decided the hassle of it all wasn't worth it. After trying a new recipe, she curled up with a bowl of food, a glass of a lovely Italian white, and turned on the telly.

"... year ago, the terrorist attack at Canary Wharf left close to eight hundred dead. The memorial service, held earlier today, was attended by representatives of Her Majesty and her government, as well as some of the survivors. Even now, a year after the horrific attack, no terrorist group has come forward to claim credit for the atrocity, leading some to believe it was the work of a yet unknown group, a fact the Prime Minister has denied. The site of the attack remains a testament to the loss of life on this day one year ago.

'We will not forget the brave men and women who died on this day one year ago. They were ordinary men and women, men and women who were simply doing their job when they were brutally and viciously attacked. We will not forget their sacrifice.'

The Prime Minister refused to answer questions about the investigation of the attack, simply stating that he was sure that Britain was not in danger from a repeat attack by these unknown terrorists. The memorial service ended with a list of the names of the dead and the opening of an official memorial at the site of the attack.

In international news...

Tosh gaped at her telly, her food forgotten as she finally understood why Ianto had taken the time off. Canary Wharf. One year ago -- today! Oh god! No wonder he hadn't wanted to switch his holiday with Gwen! But why hadn't he mentioned it to anyone?

Except... she frowned as she realized why he might have remained quiet. No one at Three had ever wanted to hear about One. Jack hated the London organization and Owen and Suzie hadn't been very kind when Ianto had first shown up. Then there was Lisa and no one wanted to bring it up. The poor man probably feared doing so himself! Why should he, when he would most likely be greeted by derision?

She hated that he didn't feel comfortable enough, even now, didn't feel sure enough of his position at Three and with the team to mention the upcoming anniversary.

She wondered if Jack realized the importance of the date.

The memorial service did not constitute the last of the planned weekend events. The Committee had planned another round of retrospectives for Sunday and Monday was given over to closing remarks and any last reflections on the event. Ianto and his friends endured it as much as they could before, as given their habit, disappearing to the local pub for some calming influence in the form of alcohol.

Jeff cornered him before he left on Monday. "What do you think about the job offer?"

"I... I don't know," Ianto ruffled a hand through his hair.

"We could use you," Jeff persisted. He looked tired and drawn. Ianto hoped he'd be able to get some sleep tonight.

"I'll think about it. Honest. Just... I'm not making a decision until it's official." It was the best he could offer.

A part of him desperately wanted to seize onto the offer whilst another part warned him that he shouldn't make the decision while so much remained uncertain back in Cardiff. Running away never did him any good, even if he hadn't really learned that lesson until it was almost too late.

"Do consider it, Jonesy. A lot of people would like to see you back in London," Jeff said and clapped him on the back.

"Jack!" Gwen shouted as she ran into the Hub Monday morning. "Did you see the news this weekend?" He raised an eyebrow in question. She huffed in annoyance. "I know why Ianto took the time off."

"You saw it too," Tosh commented quietly, following Jack to his office. Owen ghosted behind them, intent on furthering his curiosity.

"Yes. No wonder Ianto wasn't here," she sighed. "Poor Ianto! Why didn't he say anything?"

"Say what?" Jack asked tensely.

"Canary Wharf. One year ago," Tosh explained.

Jack closed his eyes at the words and sighed. "Of course," he said as if it explained so much to him. Maybe it did but he didn't share it with them.

Letting out a whistle, Owen shook his head. "Why are you all surprised? Fucking London."

"Quiet, Owen," Tosh snapped, angry at his reaction. She glared at him as she said, "London's not his fault."

"Peace, Tosh. I'm not saying it was. But we weren't ever friends with the London crowd. Why would Teaboy actually remind us of it?" He held up his hands as if to ward off an attack.

"But why?" Gwen asked, brow furrowed in confusion and not understanding the emotional currents that swamped Jack's small office. After Lisa, Jack had briefly explained what had happened to Torchwood-London. Owen had later added his own pithy comments about it, but she still didn't quite understand their animosity.

"I never got along with London and as soon as I became Director here, I cut off all ties with it. Yvonne wasn't too happy but she couldn't do anything about it. Her Torchwood was different. Very different," Jack tried to explain but was interrupted by Owen's snort of disbelief.

"London believed if it was alien, it was theirs. Hartman was a crazy bint bent on world domination and on resurrecting the British Empire using alien tech," he said.

"They weren't that bad!" Tosh protested, still angry at Owen's apparent lack of sympathy towards London and their wayward colleague.

"Yeah, they were," Owen said, scowling and his arms crossed. "I had more contact with them than you did and Suzie used to bitch about them to me all the time. Said they were a bunch of arrogant wankers who believed they had the right of things."

Jack held up his hand to stall the argument before it could get started. "Enough. London had its problems but they didn't deserve to die like that. At least not all of them." He turned a sober face to Gwen. "Eight hundred and twenty-three people worked in the London branch and only twenty-seven survived the attack. Ianto is one of them."

"How?" Gwen asked eyes wide with fascination and horror. She had heard the numbers bandied about before but the sheer scope of the tragedy still overwhelmed her.

"Ianto won't say," Tosh said with a shrug. "Unless he's shared it with you, Jack?" He shook his head in the negative.

"He doesn't like speaking about it," he admitted.

And really... who could blame him?

To Ianto's relief, Aileen didn't continue interrogating him on why he remained at Three on the return to Cardiff. He honestly didn't wish to revisit that conversation again. At least not any time soon. Instead, they spoke about the service and all that had happened in the last year. They talked about common friends and colleagues the other was familiar with and tried to keep the conversation as light-hearted as possible.

He dropped her off at her flat, where she hugged him good bye. "You know we worry about you. That's why we keep after you about Three." She held a hand up at his instinctive protest. "I know, I know. You like working there. But you work too hard there, and you haven't really convinced us it's worth it. You have options beyond Retcon. Don't remain there because you feel you have to."

Sighing, Ianto knew he had to give her an answer before he left. "I stay because I want to. I know you all don't understand why. Hell, sometimes I can't tell you why. I just..." he paused, trying to find the words to appease her. "For every moment I ask myself why I remain, there's another that happens and I can't imagine leaving or not working there."

"If you say so," Aileen sighed and closed her eyes. "Just... think about it," she urged and pulled him into a hug.

"I will," he said. And he planned to. If this weekend had accomplished nothing else, it had forced him to realize that his initial reasons for remaining with Torchwood were gone. Other possibilities -- as Aileen and the others had reminded him multiple times -- existed for him. He just needed to decide on what *he* wanted.

"Stay safe, Jonesy."

"You too."

What did it say about him that he had forgotten about the importance of this time of year? Standing on his favorite rooftop, hands in his beloved RAF coat, Jack looked unseeing over the Cardiff night as he examined his feelings and the actions of his lover. He didn't understand why Ianto hadn't mentioned the upcoming anniversary to him. Did he fear Jack's reaction that much? Was he ashamed of his work at London? Did he really think Jack would begrudge him the time off?

He had thought the two of them had worked past the insecurity that had accompanied their time together both before and after his return from the Doctor. While he hadn't actually admitted to Ianto that he cared for him a lot and saw them in a real relationship, he had thought his unspoken feelings had been understood.

Apparently not.

After the year as the Master's captive, Jack had wanted nothing more than to return to Cardiff and into the arms and bed of Ianto. To have the relative normalcy of leading Torchwood and keeping Cardiff safe. He hadn't expected to step right back into the place he had occupied prior to leaving but with a little time, some explanations (but not the whole truth), Jack had settled back into the life he had abandoned. He had even believed Ianto was happy with what they had. The other man spent a lot of his time in the Hub, keeping Jack company. Not that he had protested. He liked that the Welshman felt comfortable with what they had.

Ianto had wanted to keep their relationship from the others. Had he felt ashamed to be seen with him? Jack didn't know. He had assumed Ianto had felt shy about what they had and so had gone along with his decision. But he cared for Ianto. Cared for him more than he had cared for anyone else in quite a while. He had *thought* Ianto knew that. He had thought Ianto knew he could come to him with anything and he would at least listen, if not help with the problem.

While he hadn't spoken with Martha, he couldn't forget the email she had sent. What had she seen that he hadn't even noticed? And what would Ianto say when he returned tomorrow morning? He didn't know and that scared him more than he wanted to admit.

For Ianto's teammates, Tuesday morning held a certain weight; none had seen him since he had left so quietly the Wednesday before, slipping out of the Hub after sending two emails that hinted at something beyond the words he had written. A something none had understood until two of their members had taken the time to listen to the news on July 19. The realization for his actions left all of them a bit shaken and none were quite certain on how to react to their wayward fifth. Confrontation? Wait and see? Or, the Torchwood special: ignore until it endangered the world.

Ianto, of course, had no idea about any of this as he entered the Hub precisely at 0830 on Tuesday morning. The first indication he had, in fact, was when Tosh pressed a container of coffee into his hand. "Here," she said. "For you. You don't need to make us coffee as soon as you come back." She squeezed his arm and scurried back to her station, leaving behind a bemused Ianto.

"Okay..." he muttered under his breath. "Thanks Tosh!" he called out and she waved a hand in acknowledgment.

"Oi! Teaboy. Glad you're back. I alphabetized these," Owen said as he shoved a pile of folders into Ianto's arms, causing the other man to try and juggle the new folders with his coffee.

"Thanks?" Ianto wondered what was going on with his colleagues. The medic grunted and shuffled back to the autopsy bay. Peering through the rest of the main room, Ianto tried to guess which one would next try to ambush him. To his luck, however, neither Gwen nor Jack appeared.

"They're out on a Weevil retrieval," Tosh said as she saw him looking around. He nodded his thanks and headed to the archives.

He did not make a habit of taking time off; in fact, barring the four week suspension after Lisa, Ianto usually only took time off when the rest of the team had it as well. On the rare occasion when he felt far too ill to come into work, he had returned to his archives to discover it a complete and utter mess, quite reminiscent of its appearance when he first arrived.

Not this time, however. The archives looked as pristine as he had left them. Files and artifacts removed or retrieved in his absence were piled neatly on the desks he had procured for just this purpose. "Have I entered the Twilight Zone?" he had to ask himself, if only because it seemed so out of character of the rest of the team.

It made him wonder just what had happened whilst he was gone. And he knew just the person to pigeonhole and ask. It looked like he and Tosh were going out for some drinks later this week.

By the time Jack and Gwen returned to the Hub, the sedated Weevil in the back of the SUV, nearly half the morning had gone past. "Tosh would have called if he wasn't back," Gwen said, her quiet voice breaking the tension that filled the SUV as Jack drove like a madman back to the Hub.

Jack shot her a narrow look. "I know," he finally said, gritting his teeth. And he knew that Tosh wouldn't leave him hanging if Ianto had decided not to return. That wasn't the problem. For the first time in a while, Jack didn't know how he wanted to handle his relationship with Ianto. On a professional level, he had failed. And he knew it. But on a personal level? Miscommunication had clearly made its mark and that needed to be rectified too. Jack didn't want what he had with Ianto to end, but he also didn't know what Ianto wanted anymore.

After they had wrestled the Weevil into the cells, and seeing that Ianto wasn't present in the main area of the Hub, Jack bounded down to the archives, intent on speaking with Ianto. As he had thought, the other man had already begun to sort through whatever they had left on the long row of desks in the front of the archives.

"Ianto," he greeted. He waited until the other man had put down the object he had been examining and pulled him into a hug. "I'm glad you're back." He breathed a sigh of relief as he leaned into the hug instead of pulling away. Maybe things weren't as bad off as he had thought between them.

"I'm sorry, Ianto," he said as he pulled back enough to see his lover's face. He saw the curiosity engendered from his words reflected in his eyes and sighed. "I've handled a lot of things badly in my life and I'm not trying to make any excuses for how I've acted. I hated Yvonne and hated her vision of Torchwood." He tried to ignore the way Ianto stiffened in his arms and continued on. "My attitude has been unacceptable. However I feel about Yvonne and her Torchwood does not mean that everyone who died at Canary Wharf deserves to be forgotten. I shouldn't have put you in a position where you didn't feel comfortable telling me -- telling us, your colleagues and teammates -- about the upcoming memorial service."

"Jack..." Ianto sighed, his blue eyes looking away from him for a moment before returning. So many emotions hiding in there, so much Jack wanted to peel away from him and understand. "I get it. You -- none of you -- have ever really hid how you felt for One."

Jack interrupted him before he could continue and take the blame for something that wasn't his fault. He didn't even know if Ianto actually believed what he said. "No, Ianto. Stop. I am Head of this branch. I am the Director and I damned well know I got an email and a memo about this. And..." he took a deep breath and made sure Ianto could see the truth in his eyes. "I should never have asked you to switch your holiday with Gwen. It wasn't fair to you and I know you. You wouldn't have asked for so much time off unless you really needed it."

Ianto inclined his head in understanding? Gratitude? Jack didn't quite know but since the other man hadn't pulled away from him, he considered it at least a partial victory.

"I met a friend of yours in London," Ianto said, offering an olive branch before he pulled back from his embrace. Jack let him do so this time.

"Oh?" Jack leaned against the desk and let his eyes roam across Ianto's body.

"Hmm... yes. A Martha Jones? And her parents?" Ianto tried to sound casual but failed. Jack hid his smile.

"Ah yes--" Jack didn't precisely want to have to tell him about the email she had sent him calling him to task about his behavior so he thought quickly. "I met her while traveling with the Doctor."

"I see," Ianto said. "She seemed nice," he added, sounding tentative.

"She is. She's a very brave, very loyal, very beautiful young woman." He paused for a moment. "How was the service?"

Ianto shrugged and fiddled with some of the artifacts on the desk, not meeting Jack's eyes. "Same as any, I imagine. It was nice to see some of my friends and it... helped, really. To be with people who survived what I did. Who knew the same people as me." He finally looked up and gave Jack a small, sad smile.

"Do you spend a lot of time with them?" Jack couldn't help but feel curious about this. He was a bit ashamed to realize he didn't really know a lot about Ianto's personal life beyond Torchwood.

"When I can," Ianto said and traced the outline of an Erit disruptor.

That wasn't much of an answer but seemed to be all he was going to get.

"So, I know you just got back, but can I interest you in dinner tonight?" His heart leapt into his throat when, for the first time since he returned from traveling with the Doctor, Ianto actually paused to consider his request.

"Sure. We can pick up a curry or something and talk," Ianto offered after a long moment.

"Great!" Jack forced a big grin on his face and left Ianto to his work. He had to figure out just what to say tonight.

Gwen waited until she saw Jack returning to his office. Taking a deep breath, she prepared herself for what was going to be a painful apology. Somehow, having to personally apologize to one person was a lot harder than doing so to a group. Her other teammates had been gracious enough to accept her words and treated her the same afterward.

She didn't know if Ianto would do the same.

"Going to find Ianto?" Tosh asked as she passed by her desk.

"Yes," Gwen said, wringing her hands a bit with nerves.

"Good luck," the other woman said, pressing her fingers to Gwen's in a gesture of solidarity that she appreciated.

The walk to the archives seemed interminable, though it truly wasn't. She hadn't spent much time down here and it still spooked her a bit. It just seemed to exotic and dark and even a bit sinister.

"Ianto?" she called out as she finally entered the sorting room.

"Hello, Gwen," he replied, his head bent as he examined a file. "How is Rhys?" He looked up and gave her a polite smile that didn't reach his eyes.

"Oh, he's uh... he's fine. Healing nicely," she answered, a bit thrown by his question.

"I'm happy to hear that," he said, giving her another bland smile and returning to his work.

"Yeah, well... he's still excited about Torchwood," she fumbled and scuffed a toe against the cement floor. He was making this more difficult than she had expected.

Ianto finally placed the file down on the desk and faced her fully. "Can I help you with something?"

"Ah... actually, I came to apologize," she said, eyes wide and startled by his bluntness. "I've been acting like a real bitch lately. I'm sorry for just assuming you'd switch days off with me. I didn't uh... I didn't realize why you'd asked for the days."

"It's alright," he finally said with a small shrug. "You didn't know."

"Are you alright?" she asked, wanting to reach over to him and hug him or offer him some sort of comfort but knowing it wasn't appropriate of her to do so.

"I'm fine." She didn't know whether to believe him or not. She didn't see how he could be fine but then she didn't really know him very well.

"Okay, I'm... I'm going to head back now. I'm... I'm glad you're back," she gave him a friendly grin and left, not really sure what had happened -- but at least she had tried.

Ianto didn't know what to expect when Jack joined him after work; the older man had said he wanted to talk and he knew they had to, if only to put to rest all the uncertainties he held about what they had.

It didn't help that he didn't really know what he himself wanted.

Jack waited until they had finished eating before starting. Ianto could appreciate that, since he didn't really want the distraction of the food while discussing a difficult topic.

"I already apologized for failing you as the head of Torchwood-Three," Jack began. "I should have remembered but not just because I'm your boss. You're important to me and that means I should be there for you."

"What do we have, Jack?" Ianto finally asked. His hands clenched into fists below the table. He winced internally at the plaintive note to his tone.

Jack stared at him, stunned by the question.

"Are we just shagging?" Ianto persisted, starting to sweat a bit with nerves. "Or is it something more? Because I thought we had something but the way you act... sometimes I just don't know if I'm a convenience or something more."

"Oh no," Jack gasped and leaned forward, placing a hand around Ianto's arm. "You, Ianto Jones, are never just a convenience. I promise you that."

Ianto nodded. He could believe that or at least believe that Jack cared for him as more than just a shag. "I... you hurt me Jack. Last week and I..." he turned away from the gaze to collect his thoughts before returning to meet Jack's eyes. It meant a lot to him that the other man's eyes betrayed how anxious he was feeling. "I don't really know where I stand with you, Jack. You blow hot and cold with me. And sometimes I just don't know if you're with me because the one you truly want already has someone."

"No, no, no!" Jack insisted. "I want you. I want to *be* with you. I promise you, Ianto. There isn't anyone else I'd rather be with."

He wanted very badly to believe his lover, believe that Jack truly wanted him above all others. "Then why do you let Gwen get away with so much?" he finally asked and looked away. He half feared the answer but if one thing this past weekend had taught him was that he needed to *know*.

He could tell he had surprised the other man by the hand that tensed around his arm. Jack reached over and turned his face to his; he appreciated that Jack didn't just placate him with some trite answer.

"I... I don't *mean* to," he said. "I just... Gwen reminds me of someone, someone from my past. And it's difficult for me to just say no to her. I want her to be happy -- I want *all* of you to be happy. I'm terrified that one day you'll choose to leave me, leave Torchwood and I'll be alone again. Do you know this is my first team? The first team I got to choose? And so I cling." He gave a self-deprecating grin and looked uncertainly at Ianto. "But I *chose* you, Ianto. I want to be with you."

"I understand, in part, where you're coming from," Ianto finally said even as he hid his wince at Jack's words. Jack hadn't chosen him. He had chosen Jack to save Lisa and bothered him until he hired him. He buried his feelings deep within and continued. "It's just difficult sometimes, having to compete with all your ghosts. Especially when they're still among the living. The way you look at Gwen..." He paused for a moment and tried to collect his thoughts. "I try not to be jealous of her because I know how much you care for her. I know you care for Tosh and Owen and me but it just seems like you care for her more. It bothers me, Jack because I don't know what I mean to you compared to her. You hold yourself back from me, Jack. It hurts more than you think."

Jack winced at the mild rebuke. "I'll try to be better, I promise."

Ianto nodded and brought his hands back to the table. Jack removed his own hand and gave him a small smile.

"Why don't you want the others to know about us?" he asked. Ianto started and began to fiddle with his fork.

"I... I didn't know how serious you were about me, Jack. About us. After you left..." he trailed off, his blue eyes full of pain. Jack winced. The way he had left his team -- left Ianto -- to follow the Doctor hadn't been the best.

"I'm sorry about that. I wasn't thinking," he said. "I just wanted to find out what was wrong with me." He tried to put into words the chaotic feelings he had at the time. "I waited decades for the Doctor to show up so I could ask him why I couldn't die," he finally said.

"I know. You explained all that when you returned," Ianto said.

"Maybe, but you still find it hard to believe I came back for you, right?" Jack asked. He met Ianto's startled eyes with a sad smile. He reached out and traced his cheek gently. "I came back for you, Ianto Jones. For the others too, but mostly for you. I belong here, with you." He willed Ianto to believe him.

Ianto sighed and leaned into Jack's hand. "I want to believe that, I really do."

Jack stood up and knelt by Ianto's side. He cupped both of his hands around Ianto's face and leaned in. Softly, he pressed his lips against Ianto's, trying to put his feelings into the kiss. It was gentle, not demanding anything, simply a testament to what he felt. Ianto hesitated a moment before responding, his hands coming up to grasp Jack's arms. His mouth opened to Jack's ministrations, though he too refrained from deepening it into something more. This wasn't about sex; it was about comfort and assurance.

With reluctance, Jack pulled back and caressed Ianto's cheek. "Believe it," he whispered. Ianto sighed and nodded slowly. It wasn't exactly what Jack wanted... but it was enough for now.

"I spoke to Jack about us," Ianto told Tosh as they settled down with a couple of pints.

She nearly choked on her drink and coughed. "Sorry, I just thought you said you spoke to Jack about your relationship. I thought you two were content to pretend nothing was happening."

He shrugged and rolled his eyes. "Yeah, cause no one knew. I'm not naïve." He sighed and traced the condensation on his pint with a finger. "No, I truly did beard the lion." Or rather Jack had. His lover had proven so much more brave than he.

"And...?" she asked and leaned closer to him.

Another shrug and a half smile. "He insists he wants to be with me. That there's no one else."

"That should make you happy," she said and settled back into her chair.

"Ah... I don't know, Tosh. I don't know what I want. With Lisa... with Lisa it was almost effortless. We just *clicked*, you know? And Jack's so... so bloody complicated. I mean, I know he'd have no qualms with shagging someone else, if that was all we had, but it's not that anymore. I just don't know what we have -- or where we're heading," Ianto said. He gave her a wan smile, feeling tired.

"You should give it time," she said, crossing her legs under the table. "He's seemed attentive since you came back."

"I can't tell if it's because of guilt or something else, though," he said. He took a sip of his drink, feeling the alcohol burn down his throat.

"What do you mean?" she asked. She winced at the look he gave her in return.

"Come on, Tosh. The entire team forgot about Canary Wharf. Everyone did. And for you and Owen and Gwen, it didn't really matter, because none of you would have gotten the emails or memos about it and you all hated London and what it meant or didn't care about it because it didn't affect you. But Jack knew about the memorial. And he's supposedly involved with me and he still forgot. And that bloody hurt." He looked down at his pint and bit his lip. Tosh reached over and grasped her hand in his, leaning close to him.

"I'm sorry, Ianto. None of us should have forgotten, not Jack, not Owen, not me. All three of us worked for Torchwood when it happened. Everyone at London was our colleague, even if we didn't get along with them. And you shouldn't have to mourn alone." Tosh still felt guilty that she had forgotten such an important date to Ianto, especially since she considered him a friend and not just a work colleague.

"I didn't. And I have no idea if I would have wanted Jack there even if he had offered. It was difficult enough to go back without the addition of Jack there," Ianto confessed and accepted the comforting hand she placed over his.

"You met up with friends, then?" she asked. She really wanted to know more about the woman who had answered his mobile.

"Yeah. I drove up with my friend Aileen; there's a bunch of us who remain connected. Formed our own sort of support network. It helped," he said.

"I'm glad you weren't alone." Tosh was sincere in her comment. She couldn't imagine going to something like that by herself.

A comfortable silence fell between them while Tosh played with the glass in her hands. "Gwen came around and apologized to everyone while you were gone."

He raised an eyebrow. "She did the same when I returned. What brought that on?"

"I'm not sure. When you left she was not happy. But the next day, she came in and apologized to everyone," she said. It still surprised her, but more than that, it seemed like Gwen truly had tried to

change. The other woman at least attempted to listen to what everyone else had to say, even if she disagreed with them.

"I didn't think she would be happy-- which is why I didn't send *my* email until I left," Ianto admitted. "The sad thing is that I'd probably have agreed to postpone my holiday if it hadn't been that particular weekend."

"You're too good," Tosh shook her head.

"Not really. Do you know Jack tried to sweeten the pot to get me to postpone by offering to take me away another weekend?" He gave her a slightly wicked grin.

"No! Really?" Tosh's eyes widened.

"Yeah. It would have surprised me if I hadn't been so angry about it all," he said and slouched further into his seat.

"Ugh-- no wonder!" Tosh wrinkled her nose. "But still, that's good isn't it?"

"I don't know," Ianto said with a small laugh. "I've thought we were moving beyond casual in the past and then he'll push me aside for someone else. He said he chose me. And that does mean something to me. But..." He gave a little shrug as his words trailed off.

"You don't know if it's enough," Tosh concluded for him. She gave him a small and tired smile. "I wish I had advice for you, but I don't."

"Eh... I suspect everything will work out the way it's mean to." He just didn't know what that might be.

From: M. Ellison
To: Ianto Jones
Subject: Interview Day and Time

Dear Mr. Jones,

Sir Bainbridge and Ms Ferguson have asked me to schedule an interview with you for the position of Head Archivist at the newly reconstituted Torchwood-London. Interviews will be conducted between July 28 and August 1 in the Future Operation Committee offices. Kindly inform me of the best date and time for you as soon as possible.

Cordially yours,

Mary Ellison
Assistant to Sir Bainbridge, FOC
020 7946 0067

-

From: Ianto Jones
To: M. Ellison
Subject: Re: Interview Day and Time

Dear Ms Ellison,

I will be available on August 1 in the afternoon. As I will be taking the train from Cardiff, a meeting at 1530 would be best for me. Please let me know if an earlier time is preferred.

Sincerely yours,

Ianto Jones
General Administrator, Torchwood-Three

"I've been called into London," Ianto informed the team during lunch that day.

"What for?" Jack asked, eyes narrowed in suspicion. It couldn't be good news, if London had asked for Ianto personally.

"The Committee wants to speak to me," Ianto hedged, voice bland as he didn't want to alert Jack -- or anyone there -- to the truth. If he decided -- and that was still a big if -- to take the new position, he didn't want pressure from his current colleagues to remain in Cardiff.

Jack scowled as Gwen interrupted in curiosity "What's the Committee?" He wanted to know what they wanted with Ianto.

Owen snorted. "Haven't you learned anything? The Committee is the 'Future Operations Committee,'" he quoted with his fingers.

"They're an oversight committee formed in the aftermath of Canary Wharf," Tosh quickly explained, chopsticks dangling from her hand as she looked between Gwen and Ianto.

"I thought - " she began but was interrupted by Owen.

"Jack doesn't like listening to them," Owen said and shot a smug look to the Captain, who returned his look with a shrug.

"Jack can get away with not listening to them," Ianto pointed out. "He's Director of Three. I, on the other hand, am not." He gave a small smile. "Therefore, I'll be taking half a day on next Friday. I'll be back by Saturday morning."

"I could talk to them for you," Jack offered.

"No, no, that's okay," Ianto hastened to say. He fiddled with his own chop sticks, a sure sign that something more than just a talk was in the offing.

Jack frowned. "Are you sure? Or maybe I can travel with you?" He hated to sound as if he were begging, but he didn't like the thought of Ianto going alone without him.

"Great. A domestic," Owen grumbled under his breath, but Ianto heard him.

He stiffened. "I assure you, Owen that this isn't a domestic. Jack can't leave you all alone to the Rift. Tosh already mentioned we're going to be busy this weekend. Lord knows what we'd come back to if Jack went with me." He pushed the rest of his lunch away, finished with the conversation, even if Jack wasn't. "If you'll excuse me, I have some filing to do." As he left, he heard Gwen and Tosh berating the doctor while Jack remained silent and not the least bit hurt. It felt like they had taken a step backwards in their relationship. He ignored the concerned looks Gwen and Tosh sent him and left the conference room to brood.

Jack didn't see Ianto for the rest of the day. Just one more hint that things still weren't right between them. Despite their talk upon Ianto's return, the younger man continued to hold him at a distance. It bothered him. He had tried to make sure he didn't favor Gwen over others, had tried to put Ianto first in his life and at work, but none of that seemed to help matters. It was as if they were both treading water, staying where they were until something came along to decide them one way or the other. Jack knew, deep inside even if he refused to admit it, that Ianto wanted something more from him. He was a twenty-first century man after all, and had certain expectations that Jack tried to ignore.

He didn't know what to think, didn't even know who to go to and ask for advice. He knew Ianto would continue to slip through his fingers unless he acted; for so long he had taken for granted that he would remain at his side, that he was happy working at Torchwood. Working for him. He closed his eyes, overcome with feelings of bitterness. Why would Ianto want to remain when Torchwood had killed the woman he had loved? Where his colleagues ignored him more often than not, even if they had gotten better at including him now.

Where he didn't know where he stood in his own relationship.

Lost in thought, Ianto walked through Kensington Gardens; his feet automatically took him to the Peter Pan statue, an area that he had often frequented when he needed time to reflect and lived in London. There was just something about the statue that brought him peace, despite the sometimes crowded nature of the area.

Sir Bainbridge and Ms Ferguson had given him the weekend to make a decision on whether he would accept their offer. Before he returned to Cardiff and his team and Jack, he wanted to try and figure out whether he actually wanted to consider taking the position. It would mean a big change in his life should he decide to accept and it was not just having to move back to London.

Aileen had already phoned him and told him she had taken the position offered to her in the human resources department. "Amita, Toby, and Jeff are coming back too!" she had informed him. "You should accept."

A part of him was quite tempted by the offer. It did, however, require some serious consideration.

"You look like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders," a quiet feminine voice interrupted his thoughts. Looking over, he saw a woman of middle age with short black hair, liberally streaked with grey. She wore a comfortable pants suit and reminded him very much of a school teacher. "Sorry," she apologized with a small smile. "You looked troubled and well, I thought you might like some unsolicited advice. I'm a teacher and have been for decades. I'm certain any problem you have I've heard a dozen times before."

He gave her a laugh and inwardly shook his head. How could he tell this ordinary teacher about the crazy world of Torchwood with its aliens? How to explain it all? And yet, there was something about her that just invited confidence so he decided to take a chance. "I'm trying to decide whether it's worth it to consider a job offer I just received," he said.

"Did you interview for it?" she asked and leaned against the railing next to him.

"Sort of. I work for... another branch of the company. Started there about a year ago after, well... The company I used to work for was in the Canary Wharf Tower," he stuttered, his hands tightening on the railing before him.

She gave a small gasp. "I'm so sorry. My husband and I were horrified by what we heard on the news. It must have been awful," she said. She reached out and patted his back. Her sympathy, despite not knowing the truth of what had happened, rang more true than that of his colleagues in Cardiff and that bothered him a bit.

"Thank you," he said with a nod. He continued, "a small branch of my company is based in Cardiff and I was able to convince the Director there to hire me. Only now the... uh... the board has decided to reopen the London branch and they offered me a position there."

"And you don't know whether to take it," she said, nodding her head.

"Exactly." He turned his head and gave her another rueful smile. "Despite my initial reasons no longer being valid, I do like Cardiff, but..."

"But you also like London," she finished for him as he trailed off. "Is the position in London substantially similar to your current one?" she asked after he'd been silent for a while.

He laughed -- he couldn't help it. "In a very small sense, yes. In Cardiff I have a number of responsibilities that keep me very busy. In London, I'd be head of a department. A number of my friends from London have already agreed to return and well... I liked living in London."

"It seems to me that there's a lot of positives to accepting. What has you unsure?" she asked. A small breeze ruffled through their hair and she lifted her face towards the sun.

To an extent, the woman was correct: head of a department, living in a city he had once *chosen* to live in, working with friends and people who respected him, the pay raise -- all of it should have had him rushing to accept.

"A relationship, perhaps? Loyalty to your colleagues in Cardiff?" she suggested and looked towards him again. He could feel her gaze on him as he stared at nothing while trying to figure out how to answer her.

"My colleagues and I... well, I'll miss them but I don't know if I want to stay in Cardiff for them." He had, after all, only spent a year in Cardiff and while his relationships with Tosh and Jack were strong, that with Gwen and Owen tended to be fraught with tension. Beyond that, there was the whole shagging Jack aspect of it all that created problems. "I'm sort of in a relationship. I guess. I mean... we've been having issues. And, well... I just don't know where we are." He sighed and looked at the river before him, trying to discern an answer.

"Are you afraid you're making a decision in reaction to your relationship?" He looked to her, startled at how she managed to cut through his unvoiced fears and confusion. "Remember, I've been a teacher for decades," she explained with a grin.

"I suppose so. I, I just don't know where my relationship is going. But I also know if I take the position, I'm pretty much ending it. And I don't know if I want that," he said and dropped his head. Everything was confusing.

"Traveling to London doesn't take very long," she pointed out.

"Jack is a very busy man. He's actually my boss, which is a whole other issue. And he really didn't really like the London branch before Canary Wharf. I can't imagine he'll be thrilled to hear it's reopening, albeit somewhere else. I just... I just don't know what to do," he said, sounding plaintive even to his own ears.

They fell into a contemplative silence. "I won't tell you what to do. For one, you're a complete stranger. But, my advice for what it's worth, is to consider whether you want to base your future and your life on the future possibilities of your relationship. It's a difficult decision to make, I won't pretend otherwise. Life gives you opportunities but it is up to you to decide to take them or not. To decide whether the cost is worth it. And sometimes you won't know until years later," she said. She brushed a strand of hair out of her face.

She paused, seeming to collect her thoughts before continuing. "I know what it's like to make a decision that turns out to be life changing. Many years ago, when I first started teaching, I convinced my fellow teacher -- he's now my husband, but wasn't then -- to join me in talking to my student's grandfather. You would think that a simple conversation couldn't change your life, but it did. Ian and I didn't really realize how much it did change us until years later. Looking back, I don't think either one

of us would change our decision to speak with the man, but at the time, I know we often questioned our actions. It was probably the best thing we ever did." She had a strange smile on her face as if there was more to the story than the mere words suggested. Ianto wanted to know more, but he didn't feel comfortable pushing a complete stranger for intimate details of her life even if he had just asked her for advice.

He considered her words; it felt strange to speak with a complete stranger about something as life altering as this. And he knew it *was* a big change. If he took the position he would close a chapter of his life permanently. "I suppose in the end, it comes down to whether I think whatever I have with Jack is worth remaining in Cardiff," he finally put into words what he knew all along but hadn't wanted to admit.

"Well, I can't help you with that. I will tell you what I tell all my students who come to me when they're trying to figure out what to do and a relationship features prominently in the decision: namely, if the primary reason you take or don't take the new job offer is because of a relationship and only because of a relationship, be utterly sure that you won't regret it three months down the line."

He smiled. "Good advice."

"Well, young man," she said as she pushed back from the railing. "Good luck. I hope you make a decision that makes you happy."

"Thank you for listening. It's helped me put things into perspective," he said and turned to face her.

She offered her hand for him to shake, something he did immediately. He rather like the woman, for all that she was a stranger. After all, she had put into context the decision he needed to make; the truth she spoke was somehow easier to hear from a complete stranger than if Aileen or Tosh or anyone else really had told him the same thing.

He still wasn't quite sure what he was going to do, but he knew he'd have an answer for Sir Bainbridge and Ms Ferguson by Monday morning.

Jack knew as soon as he saw Ianto upon his return that his meeting with the Committee in London concerned more than a mere job performance review. Relations between him and Ianto continued to remain strained. Oh, they spoke to each other and even went out for dinner and shagged afterwards a couple of times. Despite that, Jack knew that they hadn't solved all their problems and Ianto continued to pull away from him.

Granted, the two of them had never really communicated well with one another, both before and after his little jaunt with the Doctor, so it shouldn't surprise him that things might still remain shaky between the two of them. He told himself he wasn't ready for the twenty-first century relationship Ianto wanted and that meant more tension between them.

The biggest issue, Jack decided, was that Ianto simply didn't believe him when he said he wanted the other man, that he *chose* to be with him and no one else. He had returned to Cardiff and Torchwood in part *for* Ianto. He wasn't the only reason for that decision though and Ianto picked up on it. And resented it as well he should. Nothing Jack did seemed to reassure him of his place in Jack's affections; he just didn't know what to do.

"How was London?" he asked the young man, eyes hooded with various emotions. Jack accepted the offered mug of coffee gratefully and leaned back in his chair.

"The same as always," Ianto replied. He seemed oddly hesitant.

"What did the Committee want with you?" he asked, not bothering to dance around the subject.

Ianto looked uncomfortable before sitting down gingerly in the office's other chair. "Have you been keeping up with some of the Committee's decisions lately?"

An odd question and it made him wonder just what he had missed while skimming the Committee's memos and reports. "Why?"

"They're reopening Torchwood-London," he said.

"What?!" He sat straight up, coffee sloshing over the side of the mug and burning his fingers. He shook the drops of liquid off his hand impatiently. He had never even considered that such an idea was even on the agenda for the Committee.

Ianto shifted in his chair and looked even more uncomfortable. "They want a Torchwood branch in London and they have the support of pretty much everyone."

"Were they keeping it from me?" he demanded, blue eyes flashing with anger at the thought. He had enemies but he had thought they'd gone to hide in the aftermath of Canary Wharf.

"I have no idea, Jack," Ianto said and rolled his eyes. "Not like I'm senior enough to know." He paused to consider Jack's question for a moment, pursing his lips in thought. "It's possible. They know how much you hated London and Yvonne," he finally answered.

"And they want you?" he asked.

"They offered me the position of Head Archivist," he quietly said, looking both bewildered and proud.

"Are you going to take it?" Jack felt his heart pounding as he waited for Ianto's answer.

"I don't know," he said, and looked a bit lost. He shifted in his seat, his hands smoothing a non-existent crease on his trouser leg.

"You don't know," Jack repeated, biting out each word as he did. He was livid. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, I don't know!" Ianto snapped as he tried to explain. He rubbed a hand through his hair and blew out a gust of air. "I told them I needed to consider whether I wanted to actually take it."

Jack snorted, not feeling very understanding at the moment. "Sounds like you've made your decision."

Ianto looked at him with hurt blue eyes. "No, Jack. It means I need to decide whether I want to remain here or return to London. I haven't made any decision, despite several of my friends urging me to accept it. I thought I might discuss it with you."

That surprised Jack. "Really?" he couldn't help but ask. He perked up a bit at the confession.

As his lips quirked in a smile, Ianto slumped in his chair. "Really, Jack."

Silence descended in his office; the water that trickled down the tower echoed loudly in the Hub. He knew that they stood on a precipice and he had no idea if they would go over it or not.

It terrified him.

"What's going on, Ianto?" he finally asked. For the first time in a long time he didn't bother hiding his confusion.

"I don't know," Ianto said and he looked as young as he was. "I... I first went to London to get away from who I was before I left. I know you hated One but I loved it there." Jack inwardly grimaced but tried to keep his distaste from his face. He wanted -- no needed -- to know what Ianto thought. "We both know why I came here," he continued, voice soft with discomfort.

Lisa. A topic they still didn't really speak about. Another instance of sweeping uncomfortable matters under the rug.

"I thought you liked working here," Jack said.

"It's not a matter of liking, you know. It's a big decision to make," he said and frowned with annoyance.

He couldn't deny that. "Head Archivist, huh?"

"Well, I think *only* archivist for the moment. The Committee is trying to avoid the mistakes of the past. They're starting small and have offered most of the survivors a position in the new office," he said. He sounded eager and there was a spark in his eyes that Jack hadn't seen for a while.

"It sounds good," Jack forced himself to say and tried to sound encouraging. By the look on Ianto's face, he had failed. He fussed with some folders on his desk and tried to figure out what to say, what would keep Ianto here, in Cardiff. With him.

"I need to know, Jack. I need to know where we stand with each other," Ianto said, voice calm and solemn. He looked Jack straight in the eye, not releasing his gaze. He wanted the truth.

It never failed to surprise Jack just how strong Ianto could be when it mattered to him. He might not push when it came to his everyday life, content to let things lie but when it was important, when it *mattered*, Ianto stood his ground.

It was one more aspect that he admired about Ianto.

He just didn't know how to respond to the question.

"I don't know what you mean," he hedged.

Ianto rolled his eyes. "Come on, Jack. You know what I want to know. Where is this thing between us going?"

"Where do you want it to go?" he tried to turn it back on him. A tactic that Ianto didn't seem to appreciate.

"Are we just shagging because it's convenient? Because we're both single and available and like each other well enough? Or is this, this thing between us something more?" Ianto pushed, even leaning forward in his chair a bit.

"I told you I don't want anyone else," Jack protested. "I chose you." He shifted in his chair, feeling uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation.

"So you like shagging me," Ianto scoffed. "But do you want more?" His eyes seemed to beg Jack for the right answer. His heart sank, because he knew that he couldn't give him the assurances he wanted.

"I don't know," Jack finally said. His words echoed in the room. He was scared. Terrified because Torchwood didn't mean a long lifespan and Ianto had already walked the edge of death so many times that he doubted the other man's luck would continue no matter how careful he acted. He had refrained from getting close to people that had the potential of getting past the barricade he had placed around his heart after realizing he couldn't die. And while he had, in the past, made exceptions, he hadn't allowed himself to even think of a real relationship since Alex had killed all of his team before himself in 2000.

He didn't know how to tell Ianto all this; more importantly, he didn't know if he could change, could let Ianto in deeper than he already was. Didn't know if he could try that twenty-first century relationship he wanted. At the same time, he didn't want to lose Ianto so he tried -- and failed -- to find the words he knew his lover needed to hear.

Ianto closed his eyes and sighed. "Thank you, Jack." He stood and gave him a small, sad smile. "I'll let you know what I decide before I tell the Committee."

Helplessly, Jack watched as Ianto walked out of his office, feeling like he had just lost something and not know what he could have done to prevent it without exposing himself to things he didn't want.

Logically Ianto knew he shouldn't base his decision to take the position on his relationship with Jack. At the same time, Jack made up so much of his life here in Cardiff that to not at least *consider* it seemed dishonest.

The woman he had met in the park had the right of it: remaining in Cardiff primarily because of Jack would only bring him disappointment if they did not both agree on the future of their -- dare he call it such? -- relationship. From a purely intellectual standpoint, he knew that Jack feared emotional intimacy. His inability to die meant he would outlive everyone: his team, his partners, probably even the Earth. And every time he ceased his vigilance of barring access to his heart, he ended up hurt.

But while his mind *understood* that concept, his heart ached for more. Ianto wanted normalcy in a life filled with the alien - both literal and figurative. He didn't necessarily want a female lover as he had come to grips with his own sexuality while Jack had left with the Doctor, but he did want the trappings of a real relationship. The type of one that included dating and meeting the family. Perhaps even marriage or civil partnership. Children. A dog or maybe a cat or some other sort of pet.

Of course as an employee of Torchwood, he had to acknowledge that children seemed unlikely since he would most not likely live long enough for that. And any pets he had would most likely go hungry or spend half the life in kennel because of his unorthodox hours. But he could still dream. Still hope that he would beat the odds.

And that was a huge attraction for accepting the London job. Here, his duties were split between general admin work, archival work, and field work. Statistically, field agents simply did not last as long as support staff or those confined to the inside of Torchwood. Add into the mix a team chronically short-staffed and it really just spelled disaster.

In London, however, he had a real chance of seeing retirement age.

At Three, Ianto worked six to seven days a week, from eight to sometimes as many as twenty hours a day. When he had asked Jack if what they had was a convenience, he didn't mean to imply that Jack only slept with him because Ianto was a case of last resort; rather, it was just easier to sleep with someone you found attractive who also knew what you did for a living. With Jack, he didn't have to pretend, he could be himself and Jack knew why he was in a mood when he had one.

And he knew that their relationship went beyond convenience. He thought he knew Jack well enough to be assured that he wouldn't keep coming back to his bed if Jack didn't feel something more than mere convenience. He just didn't know if it went far enough and given Jack's response this morning, he couldn't count on whatever they had developing into what he wanted -- into the relationship he wanted. Until Jack was ready to leave his fear behind, to accept what Ianto had to offer and to give Ianto what he needed... he just didn't see what they had becoming a success.

A sobering thought indeed.

As he stared at the notebook resting on his knees, a neat list of pros and cons on its lined pages, he knew what he would choose.

"I'll miss you," Tosh said as she hugged him. "Don't forget about us."

"I won't. Be hard to, when I need to organize the Institute's archives and will be coming down here often enough," he reminded her. She sniffed, blinking back tears and moved back to allow Gwen to take her place.

"Don't let anything slide," she advised, repeating the advice Jack often gave her. "And make sure you come and visit us even when your archives are set up." She gently hugged him and blinked back her own tears.

"I will," he promised and turned to Owen.

"Always knew you were a fancy git," the acerbic medic said. He shook Ianto's hand and even reached to pull him into a one armed hug. Ianto just smiled; it was still more than he had expected from him.

That left only Jack. Out of respect for what they had -- or perhaps a desire to remain out of the line of fire -- the team moved away to allow them some privacy.

"Jack," Ianto said. "It's been..."

"I know," Jack replied, a sad smile on his lips, his eyes shining with emotion.

"Right." Ianto bit his lips and gave a little laugh. "I'll miss you, Jack."

"Me too." Jack pulled him into a hug and he just breathed in, committing to memory the feel and smell of the Captain. "Be safe, Ianto Jones."

"I'll try," he whispered back.

"That's all I can ask." Jack moved back a little and rested a hand against Ianto's cheek before leaning in for a sweet and tender kiss. A kiss that didn't try to be sexual but was instead a manifestation of all their complicated feelings for each other. It nearly brought Ianto to his knees.

"I'll see you around, Jack," he finally whispered.

As he walked away from the Bay, leaving Torchwood-Three behind, he knew he had made the right decision.

And who knew? Maybe he'd return someday.

/fin



TORCHWOOD

Something More To Live For

By Rhi

