



yesterday is
but today's
memory

etmuse

Chapter One

It wasn't the lost days that were really giving Ianto Jones nightmares. It was the fact that ever since, he'd suddenly been having flashes from another period of his life he'd thought was lost forever – his first ten years.

He'd long ago accepted that he was never getting those memories back, and most of the time he didn't even think about the fact that his early childhood was a complete mystery.

The first thing he remembered was waking up, wrapped in a blanket, under a tree in Bute Park. Not that he knew it was Bute Park at the time. Or the words for 'blanket' or 'tree'. He'd stayed huddled under the tree for a few hours, shivering in his blanket, before people started to appear in the park. Eventually someone had come over to him, and Ianto assumed now that they'd asked him if he was okay.

The words had sounded like gibberish to him, and he'd responded in a fragmented nonsense language that was the only thing that remained of his early years. Ianto still remembered a few of the sounds now, although he wasn't sure what they meant.

The next few days were a bit of a blur; Ianto didn't now remember any of the interviews by bewildered police officers or concerned social services staff. The records were in his file, but he'd never been inclined to take a look (he knew he could break into the supposedly secure records if he wanted to – Tosh had been giving him lessons).

It had been a few weeks before he'd gained enough of a rudimentary grasp of English to answer the simplest of their questions. That was when they'd discovered that he remembered nothing. Not his name, nor where he came from, nor how old he was. Nothing.

The details he held now – his name, his birthday – had all been made up by the social workers; they'd estimated his age using the results of a physical examination, and drawn a suitable date at random.

The GP assigned to him by social services had referred him to the hospital, and a neurologist there specialising in amnesia. He'd been taken there for several rounds of tests – blood work, CAT scans, EEG. None of it had provided them with a conclusive medical reason for his amnesia.

When taken in context with the extensive scarring across some of his body, and his limited language skills, his doctor and social worker had concluded that the only explanation was serious abuse. The neurologist had agreed that it was very possible that Ianto's brain had simply blocked out everything before his abandonment, seeking to protect him from the trauma.

If that was true – and, until now, Ianto had believed that it was – then he was glad he couldn't remember those years.

What he could remember of growing up, especially after his adoptive parents had welcomed him into their family, was happy, and that was good enough for him. It didn't matter that he had a missing decade, because those years weren't important.

At least, that's what he'd always thought. Now, he wasn't so sure.

None of the brief flashes were long enough for him to actually properly discern what was going on, but they were distinctive enough for him to recognise that these were not things he remembered from his happy adolescence here in Cardiff.

Along with the flashes came bursts of emotion, with some images bringing a feeling of contentment, of the warmth of being loved, and others bringing horrifying waves of terror.

He hadn't worked out yet how to reconcile all of these images with what he'd always believed about his childhood.

He had a feeling that the reality was ever so much more complicated.

"Ianto? Ianto! Are you okay?" Ianto came back to himself to find Jack standing close in front of him, looking concerned.

"Of course I am. Why wouldn't I be?"

"Well, possibly because you've been standing on this spot for a couple of minutes without moving."

Ianto sighed. "Oh." He looked around; save for Myfanwy, the Hub was empty. The others had all gone home. Ianto had been on the way out the door himself when it had hit him.

While it still wasn't enough for him to actually work out what was going on, the flashes had been a little more prolonged this time. If the trend continued, he might soon begin to get enough to piece together parts of his childhood, and there was a strong chance it wasn't all going to be good.

It was time to tell Jack what had been happening.

Chapter Two

Jack had, apparently, noticed Ianto's trepidation over what he had to tell; he had gently urged him down into his bunker and sat beside him on the bed before pushing Ianto to tell him more.

"Whatever it is, you can tell me," he murmured softly in Ianto's ear, wrapping an arm around the younger man. Ianto nodded, but he was still struggling over quite where to start. How far back did he have to go to reach 'the beginning'?

“You... you’ve probably noticed I don’t talk about my childhood much,” he eventually began. He felt Jack’s nod against the top of his head and took a deep breath. “Well, that’s because I don’t actually remember most of it.”

Jack pulled away a little, his confusion almost palpable. “What do you mean you don’t *remember* it?”

“Just that,” Ianto said. “I have no memory of my life until I was about ten years old. No one knows where I was or what happened to me before then.”

Jack shook his head. “But...” He paused. “You’ve mentioned your parents.”

Ianto nodded. “I was adopted when I was eleven. Which was incredibly lucky when I look back at it. Not many older kids get adopted; everyone wants the babies or the littlest kids.”

Jack shook his head. “How didn’t I know any of this? I mean, I read your records back when you were stalking me for a job, and...”

“Torchwood never knew,” Ianto said. “All of the social services records were sealed, wiped from my records completely; you wouldn’t know to go hacking if you didn’t already know it was there.”

That just confused Jack more. “But why?”

“Under the circumstances, it was deemed the safest way.”

Jack swallowed. “Circumstances?”

“I was found in a Cardiff park, had no idea who I was, couldn’t speak either English or Welsh. Old injuries that suggested abuse.”

Jack’s arms tightened around him again. “Oh, Ianto...”

Ianto brushed off the concern a little. “I don’t remember it though, is the point. As far as my mind is concerned, it never happened. It’s always just been a blank.”

Jack could clearly hear the unspoken ‘until now’ at the end of the sentence, as he twisted to look into Ianto’s eyes. “But not anymore?”

Ianto tilted his head from side to side. “Not entirely. I don’t actually remember anything properly, but... I’ve been having these weird moments. Flashes.”

“And you think they’re from your childhood?”

Ianto nodded. “Yeah.”

Jack thought for a moment, assimilating this information. “How long has this been happening?” He looked as if he was worried he had missed that Ianto had been going through something for months.

“Not long,” Ianto assured him. “A few weeks. Ever since those two days we lost.” He shrugged. “I think maybe something that happened in those two days knocked something loose in my subconscious. Or maybe it was the actual loss of the days. Whatever it was, something has changed in my head.” Something that Ianto wasn’t entirely sure he was comfortable with.

Jack dropped his head forward to rest his forehead on Ianto’s affectionately. “And it’s just flashes so far, right?”

“Yep. Although... they’re starting to get longer, more defined. I don’t know, but...” Ianto’s voice shook a little.

“But you think you might actually get a proper memory back,” Jack finished for him. “And that sort of scares you.”

Ianto sagged against him slightly. “Yeah.” He twisted back to lean against the wall, staring out into the dimness of Jack’s room. “I’ve been told for years that the reason I don’t remember is most likely because something terrible happened to me and my mind is protecting me.” He looked back at Jack, eyes wide. “I don’t think I want to remember and find out for sure. What if I remember and it’s so bad that I wish I didn’t?”

Jack was silent for a long moment before he appeared to come to some sort of decision. “I actually understand completely,” he told Ianto, sincerity shining through in his gaze. “A long time ago - over a hundred years now, in fact - I lost some of my own memories. Or well, not *lost* so much as had them stolen. Two years of them.”

Jack sighed. “I spent a while trying to get them back, doing all sorts of things in an attempt to persuade the people who stole them to give them back. The longer I’ve had to get used to it though, the less sure I am that I want them back.”

He brought a hand up to brush Ianto’s hair back. “I wasn’t always a very good person. I could have done anything during those two years; could have done some terrible things. And as cowardly and selfish as it might be to admit it, if I did something awful... I don’t want to know about it.”

Ianto nodded and allowed himself to be pulled into Jack’s close embrace. Jack squeezed him tight. “Whatever you remember, know that I’m here to help you through it,” Jack’s lips brushed over his ear. “If you need to talk about it, or just need someone to hold you, I’m here.”

Chapter Three

Ianto bolted upright in bed, dislodging Jack’s arm from around his waist as he dragged in deep shaky breaths. A bead of sweat trickled down the side of his face; Jack sat up next to him and wiped it away with a warm hand.

His arms came back around Ianto, and he pressed a tender kiss to Ianto's damp shoulder. "Canary Wharf or cannibals?" he asked, naming the two most common causes of Ianto's nightmares.

Ianto shook his head and tried to take a calming breath. "Neither," he gasped. He curled into Jack's embrace, drawing whatever comfort he could from the other man's presence. Jack's warm weight in bed beside him at night had yet to actually stop his once almost-nightly terrors, but he did help, and Ianto was grateful that Jack seemed so happy to doze next to him while he slept.

"It was... I... I don't know," he panted against Jack's chest. "I think that maybe... maybe it was a memory."

Jack rubbed a hand up and down his back and hummed encouragingly.

Ianto took a long breath in slowly through his nose, blowing out just as slowly as he forced himself to calm down. He closed his eyes and, concentrating on Jack's heartbeat under his ear to centre himself, he let his mind drift back.

"It was dark," he whispered after a few moments. "I was trapped in the dark. I don't know how long I'd been there, but I know I was alone. And so scared." He shuddered.

Jack's arms tightened a little. "I'm here. You're not alone. You're okay," he whispered to the top of Ianto's head. "I'm here for you."

There didn't seem to be any pattern or reason as to when the flashes would hit. He could be preparing coffee, filing, out doing field work or even, as he had discovered one unfortunately memorable time, in the throes of passion with Jack.

The sense of darkness was becoming a recurring theme. Darkness. Seclusion. And most of all, a gripping terror that had him breaking out in a cold sweat more than once.

As much as Ianto wanted to believe that all of the horrific flashes related to one relatively brief, but highly traumatic, incident, they were slowly becoming longer and more defined. And along with this came new feelings to join the fear – loneliness, desolation, hopelessness. Wherever he'd been held, whoever had kept him there, Ianto had the disturbing conviction that it had been a lengthy imprisonment.

Jack had become very reluctant to leave Ianto on his own for any extended period of time. If Ianto went back to his flat for the night, Jack would come too. He would make up excuses to come down and see Ianto in the archives whenever he spent a day down there. Ianto put up a token protest at the not-so-subtle coddling, but inside he was glad of it. He liked knowing that when he came back to himself, more often than not shaken and scared, Jack would be close by.

Most of the time, Ianto just wished the flashes would stop. He had survived this long without knowing anything of his early years, and if the terrible feelings he got from

these bursts of memory were anything to go by, he would be better off not remembering.

But then, just occasionally, there would be a flash that didn't leave him dry mouthed and shaking; a flash that gave him hope that not everything had been bad. A brief moment of brilliant sunshine, the sound of an ocean. Laughter, love, safety, comfort.

He came out of those flashes with a smile on his face. Jack would still sweep him up in his arms afterwards, and Ianto would savour the tender embrace, letting it help him hold onto the pleasant sensations from the memory for just a little bit longer.

He confessed the content of each and every one of those happy flashes to Jack in incredulous whispers late at night, trying to cement them in his mind. Trying to make himself believe that he *had*, as a child, been loved and cherished. Trying to make himself believe that the darkness wasn't everything.

Chapter Four

Ianto flopped down onto his couch and closed his eyes as Jack took off his boots at the front door. It had been a very long and tiresome day, and Ianto had insisted on their getting out of the Hub for the night. Well, insisted in so much that he told Jack he was going home; within ten minutes, Jack had gathered his things and been ready to accompany Ianto to his flat.

"Gwen cornered me this afternoon with questions," Jack sighed as he sank down beside him, as close as was physically possible without actually sitting on Ianto's lap.

"Hmm?" Ianto inquired, not opening his eyes.

"Apparently she was the nominated emissary from the rest of the team." Jack reached over to sooth the furrows from Ianto's brow.

Ianto opened his eyes and twisted a little to look at Jack. "About?"

Jack looked back steadily. "You, actually. They're worried about you."

"Oh."

"They've noticed something is different with you lately, and Gwen wanted to know what it was."

"What did you tell her?" Ianto wasn't worried that Jack would have betrayed a confidence without asking him first, but he was vaguely curious as to how he had managed to satisfy Gwen enough that she stopped pushing, at least temporarily.

"I said that yes, you were going through something, but you were dealing with it. And that if you wanted them to know, you'd tell them yourself. She seemed to accept it, but don't be surprised if she's not-so-subtly pressing you about it in a few days."

Ianto curled into Jack's side. "Thank you for trying, at least." Jack's arm came around him and held him closer. "I don't think I can deal with them all knowing yet, not when I don't understand it myself."

Jack pulled him in and kissed his forehead. "You don't have to tell them anything until you're ready. Even if you're never ready. This isn't a Torchwood matter, it's a *you* matter. It's entirely up to you."

Ianto said nothing, simply letting his eyes fall closed again and snuggling his head against Jack's chest.

For once, he went undisturbed by his emerging memories all night, sleeping peacefully in Jack's warm, comforting embrace.

Jack's arms were still tight around him when he was awoken by the gentle beeping of his alarm clock the following morning. His eyes opened, but he batted blindly at the snooze button anyway.

"Morning," he mumbled against Jack's shoulder, tipping his head up to press his lips to the corner of Jack's mouth.

"Mmm...morning," Jack replied softly, one hand coming up to cup the base of Ianto's skull as he pulled him into a proper kiss, warm and gentle and familiar; an easy kiss that did nothing more than say, 'Good morning. I'm happy to be waking up with you; I'm happy you're in my life.'

The alarm beeped again a few minutes later and Ianto sighed into Jack's mouth, pulling back. "All right, all right, I'm getting up," he muttered, rolling over and switching the alarm off.

Jack didn't bother to get up, merely propped himself up on his arms 'to enjoy the view' as Ianto got out of bed and headed for the bathroom, unabashed, after all this time with Jack, of his nakedness.

Jack waited until he heard the shower running before he climbed out of bed and followed him.

Leaving Jack to get dressed in the bedroom, Ianto went out to make them their first coffee of the day. He'd just taken the jug out of the coffeemaker when it hit him.

Crash

He startled back to himself as the coffee pot hit the floor, smashing into pieces and spilling scalding hot coffee all over his kitchen floor. He jumped back out of the way and turned to look for something to clean up with, the flash momentarily shoved to the back of his mind.

“Ianto!” Jack skidded around the corner of the doorframe, his shirt only half buttoned and his voice frantic. “What happened?”

Ianto spun to look at him, a cloth in his hand. “I dropped the coffee pot,” he pointed out flatly.

Jack stared at him for a long moment. “Yes, I noticed. That wasn’t what I was asking, and you know it.”

Ianto dropped a few squares of kitchen roll onto the puddle of cooling coffee to stop it spreading further. Kneeling down carefully, he mopped up the worst of the spill with the cloth before pulling a dustpan and brush out of the cupboard under the sink.

“Ianto.” Jack sounded a little impatient but Ianto ignored him, sweeping glass shards into the dustpan. “Ianto.”

“Just a minute while I finish here, Jack.” He gathered up the kitchen towel and dumped it, with the broken pieces of glass, into the bin. Standing up, he looked again at the area. It wasn’t perfect, but he doubted Jack would wait long enough for him to get out the mop.

His suspicions were confirmed a few seconds later when Jack’s hands cupped his cheeks, bringing his face around to meet Jack’s searching gaze. “Ianto?” His voice was softer now.

Ianto sighed and twisted out of Jack’s hands to go back out to the living room. Jack followed, and they resumed their positions on the couch from the night before.

“Was it bad?” Jack asked gently.

Ianto swallowed, freeing the images, sounds and feelings from the flash from the corner of his mind he’d pushed them into. He nodded.

“The darkness again?” Jack’s arm tightened around his shoulders as Ianto shook his head cautiously.

“Worse. I was...” He shivered. “It was different.” He looked round at Jack. “I don’t even know if it was real. Maybe it was just my mind mixing things up, but...”

“But?” Jack’s fingers moved constantly over Ianto’s shoulder, trying to comfort and calm.

“I think it was next to the ocean, the same place I’ve seen before. But... it was completely different. There were these... these creatures, and...”

He had to stop and take a few deep breaths. “They were coming at me, and then everything went black.” He shook his head again. “It just... it must be something from Torchwood getting mixed up in my mind, because... I don’t know.”

Jack cupped his cheek and pressed a kiss to his forehead. “Hey, it’s okay.” He pulled back enough to look into Ianto’s eyes. “Did you recognise the... creatures?”

Ianto bit his lip. “No. But they have to be something I’ve seen with Torchwood. They have to be. Because if they’re not, what does that make me?”

Chapter Five

Ianto’s visions – for they were too long now to accurately be called flashes – grew steadily more detailed and vivid over the next days.

Any hope Ianto had of the creatures’ invasion into his flashes being a construct only of his own mind was abandoned as he remembered more. Remembered how they looked, the piercing noise they made as they attacked.

Remembered things that had definitely never been seen or recorded in the Torchwood archives.

The visions of the darkness were back and, more than ever, he knew with absolute certainty that he had been kept there for a long time. Years, he thought, although of this he could not be sure. He remembered now that on top of the darkness and the loneliness, there had often been excruciating physical pain.

He didn’t remember quite what had caused the pain, but the more he *did* recollect, the more he was sure that he didn’t want to remember what tortures he had been subjected to all those years before.

Or possibly after, technically.

As the visions gained increasing clarity in his mind, and he had rid himself of the comforting pretence that it was all in his head, he realised that with the presence of the Rift, he could have started off more than just anywhere. He could have been any *when* too.

Pulled out of time and space and dropped in Cardiff, like so many of the artefacts and creatures it was now his job to recover. Not quite like the unfortunate victims Jack took out to Flat Holm but, he felt, closer to them in some ways than he was to anyone else in Cardiff. It was remarkable, really, that he’d come away so relatively unscathed.

Memory loss notwithstanding.

There was an entire universe out there, and it shook Ianto to realise that he had no idea where in it he had started out in life. Given his appearance and biology, he assumed that wherever and whenever it was, it had been a human settlement, but it was small comfort.

Jack was doing what he could. He was there to hold Ianto through his recurring nightmares; he listened patiently as Ianto puzzled through what the visions were

showing him; he did his best to assure Ianto that there were worse things than being born in another time and place.

“I was born three millennia and hundreds of millions of miles from here,” Jack whispered to Ianto the first time he confessed how terrifying the idea was to him, “and it doesn’t seem to have done me any real harm so far.”

“It’s all very well for you, though,” Ianto retorted. “You may not have been born here, but at least you know where you *were* born.” He sighed. “It’s not so much that I was probably born in another time period at minimum, but that I was born somewhere or sometime else and I don’t have *any* real clues about where that was.”

Jack held him closer and stroked his fingers through Ianto’s hair. “I wish there was something I could do to help. I wish I had the answers for you.”

“I’m not sure if I truly want to know, though,” Ianto confessed. “I don’t know what I’d do if I somehow found out that I have biological parents out there, in the future or whenever, who are still looking for their lost child. Parents I don’t even remember. I don’t even remember how old I was when I was taken from them.”

He blinked back unwelcome tears. “I don’t know why that suddenly bothers me so much. I’ve never been bothered about not remembering my biological parents before. Or about them having lost me. Why is it hitting me so hard *now*?”

“Well, until now you’ve believed you were abused and abandoned,” Jack reasoned, resting his cheek on the top of Ianto’s head. “You’ve only just discovered that you were taken from your parents instead. It’s understandable that you’d be a bit confused.”

“I wish I’d never started having these flashes,” Ianto said, letting himself lean against Jack. “Everything has become so much more complicated. I don’t even feel like I know who I *am* anymore.”

Jack pulled Ianto’s head back gently and met his eyes. “No matter who you were born, or where, or when, you’re still Ianto Jones. My Ianto. You always will be.”

The sincerity in Jack’s gaze helped Ianto centre himself a little, and he surrendered to Jack’s warm kiss, pushing all his troubling thoughts to the side for the moment and concentrating on Jack.

Ianto startled awake a few hours later, wrapped in Jack’s arms. He shifted slightly, and Jack immediately woke from his doze, turning Ianto to him with a concerned look on his face. “Okay? Nightmare again?”

Ianto shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts. “Not... not exactly. I was in the darkness at first, but then, I wasn’t, and the creatures were there but they weren’t attacking, and...” He sighed, and his confused gaze found Jack’s. “Then I saw John Hart.”

Chapter Six

“John Hart? Are you sure?” Jack asked quietly.

Ianto nodded in the dim light and sat up. “It was definitely him.” He caught Jack’s sceptical look. “I’m sure.”

“But... it doesn’t make any sense,” Jack said, sitting up too. “Why would John Hart be in your vision? In your past?”

“I don’t know.” Ianto shrugged. “I can’t even really say for sure that he *was*. Yes, I saw him in my dream, but unlike the creatures, John Hart *is* something that’s already there in my subconscious. Maybe my mind mixed things up. I know it wasn’t true with the other things, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it isn’t true here.”

“You think it’s possible?” Jack asked.

“It was a dream, Jack,” Ianto replied. “So yes, I think so. I hope so, really. I’m not sure what it would mean if it wasn’t.”

“You’re right,” Jack agreed. “It was probably just a dream. The subconscious does strange things to us when we’re asleep.”

He wrapped an arm back around Ianto. “Come on, you need a few more hours sleep.” He caught the uncertain look Ianto shot him. “I’ll be here if you have a nightmare vision, you know that.”

Ianto looked far from completely convinced, but let Jack coax him back down under the covers and into his arms. A few slow, soft and utterly distracting kisses later and he was peacefully slipping into a thankfully dreamless sleep.

There was a spate of Weevil attacks over the next few days, and since he hadn’t appeared in any more of the visions Ianto had experienced, John Hart was quickly forgotten and dismissed. They had much more important things to be concentrating on.

Even the frequency of the visions seemed to be decreasing, although they were more detailed every time. When nearly two days had gone by without him having a single flash or vision, Ianto began to wonder if whatever it was that had shaken loose in his head to give them to him in the first place had settled down again and that would be all he got.

He found that, as perturbing as the things he’d seen had been, he didn’t want them to stop. Not yet. Not now, before he had any actual answers. Before he even had any way of discovering any answers.

The lack of visions was disturbing him almost as much as the visions themselves had, at first.

Nearly another day had gone by before it hit him. He was cataloguing some old (but newly identified) artefacts in the archives when a flash came upon him so suddenly that he dropped the box of items he had been carrying down to the 'Harmless – Leisure Items' section. His whole body froze as his mind replayed the events from his childhood, in startling detail for the first time.

Screams echoed around him as a door opened and light shone into the small, dark hole he'd called home for – well, he didn't know how long. If it wasn't for the fuzzy lingering images of laughter on a beach, he'd have assumed he'd been here his whole life.

He cowered against the back wall. As much as he hated the lonely darkness of the tiny space, being taken out never led to anything good. Being taken out usually meant unspeakable torture and pain.

A figure stepped into the doorway, casting a tall shadow over him. He dared to look up, and was surprised to find that the outline was not that of one of the creatures.

If he was getting his hopes up, he'd even say it looked like another human.

*Whatever or whoever it was took a step forward and made a noise. He didn't recognise the noise, but understood that the man – for, as he grew closer, and was no longer blocking the light, it became apparent that it **was** a man – was trying to communicate with him.*

He hadn't truly communicated with anyone or anything in... so long. The creatures, however they spoke to one another, never spoke to their captives, and although he knew he wasn't the only one – he had heard the screams, seen the rows of containment units alongside his own - he had never seen, let alone interacted with, another prisoner.

He let out an involuntary scream as the man descended on him, gathering him up in strong arms. He was carried out into the bright light, where all around him creatures were chained and restrained, and other captives were being brought out into the sunshine.

He found the courage to lift his head and look into the face of his rescuer...

...and he came back to himself with a jolt. Two things were plainly apparent.

One: he'd clearly been 'out' for some time, as Jack had been in his office and was now wrapped comfortingly around him.

And two: he'd been absolutely mistaken in his assumption that John Hart's presence in his dream was the product of his mixed up subconscious.

Chapter Seven

Ianto curled against Jack a bit more, preferring his warmth to the cold of the archive wall they were sitting against.

“So it really *was* John Hart?” Jack asked incredulously, holding Ianto close. Ianto nodded against his shoulder.

“It was so detailed this time. And I was awake when it hit, so I can’t write it off as some mixed-up dream thing. It was him.”

“And he was, what, rescuing you?”

“Yep. At least, I assume so. It *felt* like rescuing. In theory, I guess it could have been a kidnapping of sorts, but even if it was, I don’t think it could have been as bad as the things I remember from being held by the creatures.”

“You don’t remember what happened after he pulled you out of the darkness?”

Ianto concentrated for a second, probing at the edges of the newly revealed memory to see if there was anything else there. “Nope,” he huffed when nothing appeared. “Although I don’t think I was much smaller than I was when I was found in Cardiff. I’m given to understand that children that age tend to grow quite quickly, so it can’t have been too long a gap in time.”

“Hmm...” Jack looked thoughtful for a long moment before sitting up straight as if something had just occurred to him. “You said there were a lot of people taking captives out of cells – do you remember anything distinctive about them? Badges, or uniforms or anything?”

Ianto’s brow furrowed as he thought hard, playing the scene back in his head. “Yeah, they did have uniforms, now that I think about it. They were sort of... sort of a cross between, I don’t know... between army fatigues and a Star Trek uniform. Not the original ones though, more like the Next Generation ones.”

Jack nodded. “Sounds like standard Time Agency raiding uniform.” He hummed thoughtfully. “We may have coned our way around a few galaxies for a while, but John never did cut all ties to the Agency in the same way I did. Didn’t have the same motivation to do so, I suppose. They must have called him back up to active raiding duty after we parted ways.”

“So you think I was rescued by the Time Agency?” Ianto asked. “Is that even something they would do? I thought you said they were more interested in temporal disturbances and timeline protection.”

“They are, mostly,” Jack confirmed. “But sometimes the Shadow Proclamation would requisition a squad for a mission that they considered the Judoon unsuitable for.”

“The Shadow Proclamation are like an intergalactic police force, right?” Ianto checked hesitantly.

“Sorry, yes, they are. I forget sometimes that you didn’t grow up with this stuff. And the Judoon are their uniformed force. Very good at storming in to arrest criminals by force; not so good when a slightly more delicate touch is required. That’s when they called in the Agency.”

Ianto nodded. "Right."

"It was quite rare, though; they only bothered when they thought it was particularly important."

"How did I end up abandoned in 20th Century Cardiff, then?" Ianto asked. "No, scratch that, I think I actually have a fair idea of how. Why?"

"Standard Operating Procedures," Jack said. "If a victim is rescued during a mission, either as the primary or secondary aim of said mission, they should be returned to their home planet and time period, unless it is unsafe to do so, or if their home planet has been destroyed by either natural or unnatural forces in the intervening time since their departure from said planet."

Jack spoke flatly, as if quoting from a set of written regulations long memorised. "If, for whatever reason, the victim cannot identify their home planet and time period, the procedure corresponding to an unsafe return environment should be carried out. A suitable safe location should be identified, and victim relocated to there."

"And late 20th Century *Cardiff* was considered a safe location?" Ianto said incredulously.

"I didn't say they were always necessarily very good at identifying relocation places," Jack clarified. "If you were taking them to a point in the past you were supposed to make sure it would be relatively safe for the majority of their expected lifespan, but most agents only checked about five years past the drop-off point for any major disasters in the area. There weren't all that many major rift events in your first few years here, so it would have come up as safe on that check."

Ianto sighed. "And I'm assuming that the administration of some sort of drug or treatment with a similar effect to Retcon was standard too?"

Jack nodded. "Got it in one. Occasionally the rule was waived if they were being returned to their home, but in cases of severe trauma or relocation to an earlier time period, it was absolutely mandatory."

They sat, curled close together in silence for a while, slowly digesting everything that had been revealed in the past hour or so.

"Jack?" Ianto eventually said.

"Yeah?"

"I know it's highly unlikely that they could have figured out *who* I was, before. But, well, I'm assuming that they'll have done medical tests and scans on me before they brought me here."

Jack nodded. "Of course."

“So they might have a little information on where I might have been from, originally. And, unless the creatures that took me had some way of travelling through time – and from what I remember, I doubt it – then whenever I was found would at least tell me *when* I’m from.”

Jack raised an eyebrow questioningly. “Very possibly. What are you actually suggesting here, Ianto?”

Ianto took a deep breath. “Do you have a way to contact John Hart?”

Chapter Eight

Jack pulled back a little and stared at Ianto in shock. “Are you serious?” he cried.

“Absolutely.” Ianto’s expression backed up the words.

“But... but...” Jack’s eyes cast around the vast room as if he would find the words he was looking for written on the walls. “You hate him! I know you do. I was, well, I was watching you rather closely at the time he was here, and I’m pretty sure I recognised the look in your eyes.”

Ianto nodded. “I don’t deny it, I’m a long way from being his biggest fan, but, in this instance, he could be helpful.”

The doubtful look didn’t leave Jack’s eyes. “I’m not sure *our* definition of helpful and *his* definition of helpful even bear any passing resemblance to each other.” He brought his hands up to hold Ianto’s shoulders and looked at him intently. “He tried to kill us all the last time he was here, if you remember. Hell, he *did* kill me.”

“He didn’t actually make any real attempts on *my* life, come to think of it,” Ianto said quietly, “although that’s rather beside the point. He was *there*. He’s the only one we actually know who might have a chance of being able to tell us anything more about what really happened that day.”

Jack took a deep breath. “In *theory*, as long as he isn’t out of range, I could leave him a message on his wriststrap using mine, just like he did when he first got here.”

The hope this response brought to Ianto’s eyes was unmistakable. “Really?”

Jack nodded. “The broken part shouldn’t affect its communications ability, although it might mean the range is even more limited. I don’t know, to be honest.”

“How limited is limited?” Ianto asked.

“It was never officially documented,” Jack replied, “but even when it was in top working order - before I left the Agency - I never managed to get it working more than 12 galaxies and 6 millennia apart. And you had to be in the same time period at the very least for it to give you near-instantaneous messaging.”

“But you could try?” Ianto checked.

“I could, but are you *really* sure you want me to?”

Ianto looked down at the floor they were sitting on for a moment. “If there’s even a chance he might help me find out a little more about where I came from before I ended up in Cardiff, I want to take it.” He chuckled mirthlessly. “It’s killing me not knowing anything, which is strange, because for years and years I haven’t cared, and then suddenly I’m having these visions and I really, *really*, need to know.” His eyes burned into Jack’s fervently.

Jack sighed. “Alright then.”

“Yeah?” Ianto’s eyebrows lifted in a combination of doubt, surprise and hope.

“I’m not completely convinced that it’s a good idea for Cardiff to get him back here, given what I remember about him, but you’re right, he might know something – or know where he can get some pertinent information if he doesn’t.” He brought one hand up from Ianto’s shoulder to cup the younger man’s cheek tenderly. “It’s important to you, so I’ll give it a try.”

Their eyes remained locked on each other for a long, intense moment before Ianto surged forward and, wrapping his arms tightly around Jack’s shoulders, captured Jack’s lips in a passionate kiss, burning with gratitude and affection. Jack snaked an arm around Ianto’s waist to pull him closer still and sank into the sensations of Ianto’s soft lips crashing into his own again and again.

“Thank you,” Ianto whispered hotly when he eventually pulled back. “Thank you for agreeing to do this for me.”

The corners of Jack’s eyes crinkled as he smiled softly. “Don’t you know by now that there isn’t much of anything I wouldn’t do for you?” He tilted his head to one side. “It may not prove to be wise, but it’s true.”

They waited until the rest of the team had gone for the day to even start figuring out how best to phrase the message they would try to send, let alone actually trying to send it. It took half an hour of rewrites and scribbled-out phrases to finally settle on something they were happy with.

Ianto re-entered Jack’s office with coffee to find him sitting at his desk, fiddling with his wriststrap and frowning.

“Something wrong?”

Jack looked up and shook his head. “No, no. Just... I haven’t actually tried to do this in over a hundred years. Just taking me a moment to remember how to select where I want to send a message to. I remember how to record the message, at least.”

Ianto set two mugs in the centre of the desk and walked around it to perch on the edge, looking down at Jack. “Does it save received messages somewhere after you view them?”

Jack nodded up at him. “Yes... why?”

“I’m assuming then that it also saves details about the sender of the messages.”

Jack nodded again, comprehension beginning to dawn in his eyes.

“So you could use those details to reply to.”

Jack smiled. “Ianto, have I ever mentioned that you’re a genius?”

Chapter Nine

Given that neither Jack nor Ianto could even be quite sure that John would *get* the message, they had no idea when or if he might turn up.

They had requested in the message that, if it was going to come, he should come to the Hub; they knew also that he if he checked the location of their transmission he could identify it as being inside the Hub, and simply follow those spatial co-ordinates to find them.

Taking all of this into consideration, they were unwilling to leave until either he arrived or it became obvious that he wasn’t coming.

They didn’t even particularly relish the idea of going to sleep – who knew what John could get up to in the Hub if he arrived while they weren’t paying attention. Under normal circumstances, there were intruder alerts that would sound the moment he arrived, but Tosh had wired the alert system into all of their mobile phones while Jack had been away – something Jack had fully embraced as a good idea on his return – so that particular alarm had been temporarily disabled.

Jack had just convinced Ianto to take an early evening nap on the sofa while he kept watch beside him when a floaty red-orange glow appeared in the middle of the Hub, next to the base of the water tower. Recognising it immediately, Jack shifted to stand up, waking Ianto where he had started to doze off on his shoulder.

Ianto startled for a second, looking around the Hub and spotting the disturbance. They were both on their feet, hand in hand and ready, when a shape materialised in the swirling light and solidified into John Hart.

The glimmer dissipated behind him as he took a step forward and grinned. “Let me guess, you changed your mind about that orgy?”

Ianto shot him a withering look. “Don’t flatter yourself. If you weren’t possibly in possession of some information very important to me, you would never have heard from either of us again.”

“Is that right, Eye Candy?” John smirked.

“That’s right,” Jack said firmly.

“So what makes you think that I have this information you’re looking for? Or that I’ll just give it to you if I do?” John swaggered over to meet them.

“You might do well to remember that, without us, you would probably be blown into little tiny pieces scattered through the Rift right now,” Ianto said scathingly. “And as to why we think you know something, we’ll get to that in due course.”

“Ooh, I’d forgotten how bossy you could be, Eye Candy. I like it.” John’s grin was almost feral as he gave Ianto a blatant once over.

Ianto glared back. “As flattering as your little nickname is, I rather prefer Ianto.”

“Alright, Ee-yan-toe,” John drawled, drawing the name out and mangling the vowels more thoroughly than Ianto had ever heard. “Why don’t you get on with telling me why you are so graciously allowing me to be here, then I’ll decide if I want to help.”

Jack and Ianto shared a look, and then gestured for John to lead the way to the boardroom. They sat close to each other at one end of the table; John sprawled in a chair at the other.

Ianto shot an entreating look at Jack, hoping that his lover would be willing to shoulder the brunt of the storytelling; Jack knew John much better, and might be able to use that knowledge to choose the details to tell that would be most likely to ensure his help.

“Basically,” Jack started, giving Ianto a small half-smile, “Ianto isn’t actually from around here.”

John looked between them sceptically. “Could’ve fooled me. You definitely *sound* like you’re from around here.”

Ianto inclined his head. “Well, I *have* lived here for as long as I can remember, but what I remember only goes back as far as being ten years old.”

“How do you know you’re not from here then?” John asked. “And what does any of this have to do with *me*?”

“When he says he doesn’t remember anything before he was ten, that isn’t 100% accurate. Until a few weeks ago, he didn’t remember a thing, but since then, that’s been changing.”

Jack took a breath. “Something happened here a few weeks back; we don’t know what but that isn’t really important. What *is* important is that ever since, Ianto has been having flashes of memory from his childhood – flashes that make it very clear that he wasn’t living in 20th Century Cardiff.”

John shrugged. "I'm still not seeing how this relates to me."

Ianto narrowed his eyes at him. "We're getting to that." Jack's hand closed over Ianto's and squeezed gently, giving Ianto the impetus to continue the story himself. "A lot of the moments I've remembered have shown me time spent in captivity of some sort, held by creatures I've never seen before. I have no idea how long I spent there, but I do remember some of being rescued."

John still looked distinctly uninterested.

"You were there," Jack said abruptly. "When Ianto was rescued, you were there, with an Agency squad."

John sat up a little straighter at Jack's words. "I was?"

Jack nodded. "Ianto remembered your face."

John thought for a second. "I think I remember the raid you're talking about, but what sort of information do you think I *have*?"

"Anything that might help us find out more about where and when Ianto was born."

"Sorry," John said, "don't have a clue. I wasn't involved in the processing of the victims after the initial raid."

Jack and Ianto's faces fell.

"I do, however," John continued, "know where I could find out."

Chapter Ten

"It's not just the active Agents number that has dwindled; every department of the Time Agency is pretty much gone now," John told them. "Including the admin and security departments. Any security that is left is dedicated to guarding the few inmates remaining in custody."

He grinned cagily. "All the paperwork and records are all stored in this big archive; I may have availed myself of a few things there in the past year or two. A lot of interesting stuff in there, and it's just so easy to get. A couple of locks, an unwatched security feed or two... it's so simple that it's barely even any fun." He cocked his head to the side. "Not that it isn't still fun."

"And the records from the mission that rescued me will be in there," Ianto said slowly.

John nodded. "Unless someone else has already 'borrowed' them, they'll be there. Pictures, test results, interviews – whatever they did, the records will all be in there, just waiting for someone to come along and take a look."

Ianto opened his mouth, ready to ask, but closed it again without saying anything. He had a sinking feeling that if he actually vocalised his request, John would refuse purely on the basis that he had asked. It had to be his own idea, or at least appear that way; John would have to offer or Ianto doubted he would actually do it.

None of them said anything and the silence in the room stretched on until it began to get a little uncomfortable.

“If I were to go and get the file on you, we could consider us even on the whole saving my life thing, right?” John eventually proposed.

Ianto and Jack exchanged a look; Jack nodded minutely. “Yes,” he said aloud. “I suppose we could.”

John grinned.

A sudden thought hit Ianto. “But how will you know which one is me? If I couldn’t even remember my own name, how on earth will you be able to identify my record?”

John gave him a disparaging look. “Agency policy forbids relocating more than one victim to the same location and time period. I just need to look for the kid they dropped in 20th Century Cardiff. Simple.”

Ianto, having searched through archives on information on a similar amount of information, wasn’t so sure it would be as simple as John made out, but decided not to make anything of it. If John believed that it would be easy, that was all that mattered.

Barely ten minutes later, they were back in the main Hub area and John was pressing a set of co-ordinates into his wriststrap. “Shouldn’t take me too long,” he was grinning. “In and out, I’ll be back in, oh, twenty minutes or less. Don’t get too comfortable without me.”

With that, he pressed a final button on his wriststrap and the red orange glow reappeared around him. As he began to fade out, he raised a hand in a mock salute.

“Do you really think he’ll actually be back in twenty minutes?” Ianto asked Jack once the vortex swirls had disappeared behind him.

“He could be back in five, if he could get the co-ordinate calculations just right,” Jack replied. “Time travel, remember? Doesn’t matter how long it actually takes him to find it once he gets there, he just needs to choose when to come back. Twenty minutes is a fairly safe interval to aim at though – we all had it drilled into us how disastrous it could be to actually cross our own timeline, so it was very rare for anyone to attempt to leave and return from a point in too short succession.”

Ianto nodded. “Of course. Duh. Why didn’t I realise that?” He ran a hand through his hair.

Jack pulled him into his arms. “Possibly because you’re more than a little distracted,” he murmured into Ianto’s ear. “Maybe even a little scared?”

Ianto dropped his head to Jack's shoulder and allowed himself to be held tight. "Maybe," he admitted quietly after several minutes. He nuzzled into Jack's throat and took a deep breath. "I just..."

He pulled his head back so he could meet Jack's gaze, resting his hands on Jack's shoulders. "What if there's something terrible in there? What if it turns out I'm... I'm... I don't even know what I'm scared I might find out. I've wanted to know, but now that the moment is actually arriving that I could learn more about myself, yes, I'm scared."

"It's going to be okay," Jack soothed, rubbing his hands up and down Ianto's back gently. "I told you I'd be here for you, didn't I? We'll get through this." He brought one hand around and caressed Ianto's cheek as he stared into his eyes. "Whatever happens, whatever this file turns up, I'll still love you, I promise."

Ianto swallowed hard as the sentiment was borne out in the intensity of Jack's gaze. "I..." He faltered, hoping that what he wanted to say was evident in his expression. The emotion had been palpably there between them in all their encounters for some time, but until now had remained unspoken. On top of everything else, for Jack to say it aloud now was a little overwhelming.

He swallowed again, and his words all ran together when he spoke. "You know I love you too, right?"

Looking so closely, Ianto could see the spark of joy as it diffused across Jack's face.

"I do now," Jack whispered back before leaning forward just enough to press a chaste kiss to Ianto's lips, a kiss that despite its chasteness was nevertheless suffused with the love they had finally admitted. "Love will get us through this, Ianto, just you see."

They were still clinging tightly to one another, exchanging occasional soft whispers, when John Hart reappeared a few metres away, a surprisingly low-tech manila folder in hand.

Chapter Eleven

"Well isn't this a touching little scene?"

Ignoring the mocking tone in John's words, Jack and Ianto didn't jump apart at his appearance. If anything, Jack held Ianto even tighter, attempting to soothe the nervous tremor he could feel beginning to work its way through the younger man's body.

He swept his hand across Ianto's back and pressed a kiss to his forehead; Ianto took a deep breath against his chest and the barely perceptible shaking ceased as Ianto centred himself.

Ianto pulled back just enough to turn his head to face John Hart. "Is that it?" he asked steadily, unwrapping one arm from Jack's waist to gesture at the folder.

John nodded but didn't move to hand it over.

With one final squeeze, Ianto extricated himself gently from Jack's embrace and took a step towards John, his hand held out expectantly.

John hesitated before giving it to him. "Before you read it," he started, "I just want to remind you that *you* were the one who wanted it. I take no responsibility for the contents."

Ianto paled but grasped the folder anyway.

"You read it?" Jack asked, resting a warm hand on the small of Ianto's back as he came to stand beside him.

"Some of it," John answered, looking at Jack. "I read what I had to. Enough to be absolutely certain that this is the information about Eye...anto."

Ianto was still holding the closed folder in a death grip, his knuckles growing white. He stared at the unmarked cover unseeingly, his teeth worrying his top lip nervously.

Jack swivelled to face him, running the backs of his fingers down his jaw line. "Ianto?"

Ianto looked up and blinked at him, his grip on the folder not loosening one bit. Jack could see that the combination of having the information literally in hand and John's comments had brought all the fear and worry back into Ianto's eyes.

He turned his hand around to cup Ianto's cheek. "Remember what I said," he intoned warmly. "Whatever is in this folder, I'm here for you. We can face anything together, *anything*."

Ianto nodded shakily, his face still pale but with an air of resolute determination coming over it. "I can do this," he said slowly, with only the faintest hint of a wobble in his voice.

"I know you can." Jack's lips quirked into an affectionate half-smile. "The only question really is where you want to do it. Conference room? My office? The sofa."

"Sofa," Ianto said quickly. "I want... I need..." He swallowed the rest of his sentence awkwardly, but Jack got the gist of what he was asking for and nodded.

"Sofa it is then."

They both looked around to look at John, who was watching them with a faint air of amusement. "Are you...?" Jack started.

"Oh no, I'm staying," John interjected. "I want to see this."

Jack frowned at him as the gleeful words did nothing to settle the butterflies in his stomach; the butterflies he suspected were nothing compared to Ianto's.

John stole Owen's chair from his desk to lounge on while Jack and Ianto settled on the sofa with the folder, Jack's arm wrapped snugly around Ianto's waist to provide the physical support Ianto had been unable to make himself actually ask for.

Ianto held the folder on his lap and took a deep breath before flipping it open.

There was a stack of papers inside, held in place by a small clip at the fold of the folder. On the inside of the front cover was a small transparent pocket; inside the pocket was something that, to Ianto, looked very much like an SD memory card.

Avoiding looking at the papers for just a little longer, he carefully removed it from the pocket and held it up. Up close, it looked even more like a contemporary memory card.

"It's a data chip," John Hart supplied from a few feet away. "All the information in the paperwork will be duplicated on there, and there is probably video footage of any interviews they did with you, too." He nodded at Jack. "Both of our wriststraps have the capability to play it in projection, if you want."

Ianto shook his head absently, his brain fixating on anything but the actual contents of the chip for now. "If all the data is on the chip, why store it in a folder with all of it in hard copy?"

"Never underestimate the hard copy, Ianto," Jack said beside him. "Even in the future, having it down on paper is still preferred." He smiled wryly. "It never runs out of battery, for one thing."

A small smile bloomed on Ianto's lips, and he set his shoulders resolutely, replacing the data chip and picking up the top sheet from the folder.

He skimmed briefly over the writing on the page and handed it to Jack. "I don't understand a word of this."

Jack read it over quickly. "Yeah, you wouldn't. It's in... well, I don't think the language was actually ever really used outside the Agency. They hoped it would catch on, become a universal language, but it never did. All Agents could speak it, but only because learning was compulsory on joining."

Ianto nodded. "So what does it say then?"

Ianto held the paper so Jack could point to the words on the page as he translated. "Name of victim: unknown. Date of... rescue is as close as I can translate that. Earth date 22nd July 5067. Race: Colonies Human. Age: Unknown; estimated at approximated 9.75 Earth years."

He paused, checking to see how Ianto was coping so far.

He looked a little startled, but not overwhelmed. "So that would mean I was born in... what... about 5057?" he said in a stunned voice.

Jack nodded and squeezed him slightly. “On a colony planet, they reckoned. Not so different from me, really. Only a few years younger, actually.”

Ianto nodded, oddly comforted by the thought that even thousands of years from his birthplace, he’d ended up with someone so close in Jack.

Jack turned his attention back to the page and went to the next line. “Description: see attached photo.”

He flipped through a few more papers in the folder and produced a small glossy photograph. He looked at it for a few seconds and then his stomach dropped into his shoes.

“Oh no. It can’t be. No, no, no, no, no.”

Chapter Twelve

Ianto leant over into Jack’s space and looked at the photo in his hand. “Well, I can say categorically that that’s definitely me,” he said, worried about Jack’s reaction. “Looks just like all the photos I have of me here from shortly after I arrived.”

Jack didn’t say anything, just stared straight at the floor in front of them in a shocked daze.

Ianto looked over at John and noticed that, in a sharp contrast to the grins of earlier, he looked distinctly uncomfortable.

“Jack? John?” He looked between them in confusion.

A second later Jack roused from his stupor and looked up at John too. A red haze started to descend over his expression; Ianto saw it but didn’t understand it; John shrank back a little – he obviously saw it too but Ianto had the feeling he had slightly more of an inkling about the cause.

“You.” Jack’s voice was low and dangerous. “You knew.”

John stood up and took a step back, shaking his head. “No.”

Jack tensed beside him; Ianto barely had a moment to react before Jack threw himself at John, gripping him by the collar of his coat.

“You did, you knew!” he growled. “You told me you’d found him. You told me, so you must have known!”

John staggered back another few steps under Jack’s onslaught. “No, no, I didn’t. I swear. Not for sure.”

“You saw that photo though. You must have known then.” The rage was starting to dissipate, to be replaced by a growing desperation.

“Maybe I suspected, but I didn’t know for sure, I *don’t* know for sure,” John said, pushing Jack’s shoulders back. “*You* don’t know for sure, not yet. It might not be.”

“It looks so much like him though,” Jack replied, deflating. “It’s so much like him, and the dates add up, and...” He swallowed hard. “It can’t be. After everything... it just can’t be.” He released his grip on John and turned back to look at Ianto, shaking his head.

Ianto hadn’t moved. He’d watched the whole scene with an odd sense of detachment. He had a strong feeling he was missing some, if not all, of the information required for the exchange between Jack and John to make any sense.

“While, given your reactions, I suspect that I’m not going to like the answers,” he started slightly shakily, “I have to ask. What’s wrong? What is it about a photograph of me as a ten year old kid that prompted... *that?*”

Jack sighed deeply and ran a hand over his face.

“I... this... I...”

He shook his head, taking the few short steps back to collapse on the sofa next to Ianto, his head dropping back to lean against the wall as he stared towards the ceiling so far above them.

“I spent years searching. Years. It’s most of the reason I joined the Time Agency in the first place. Everywhere and every when I went, I looked. Just in case. I never found him. I never...”

“Who were you looking for, Jack?” Ianto asked quietly, a suspicion forming in the back of his mind.

“Gray,” Jack answered, and Ianto was thrown back to the first time John had been there. John stepping back into the swirling opening in the Rift, telling Jack that he’d *found Gray*.

His eyes flew momentarily to the Time Agent, who had resumed his perch in Owen’s chair, before returning to Jack.

“He was...” Jack paused again and gulped. “Oh God, it was all my fault. If it wasn’t for me, none of it would ever have happened. None of this would be happening now. If I had only...” He broke off, his breath coming in deep pants.

Ianto reached out tentatively to stroke his arm. “You can’t blame yourself, Jack. I’m sure it wasn’t...”

“But it *was*,” Jack interrupted. “I was supposed to be looking after him. I was supposed to keep hold of his hand. But I didn’t. I let him slip out of my grasp and he fell behind and I didn’t even *notice*. And by the time I got back to look for him he was

gone.” He knocked his head hard against the wall in a blatant act of self-flagellation. “My fault.”

Ianto gripped Jack’s arm a little tighter. “Jack, it’s okay, I’m...”

Jack pulled his arm away roughly, sitting up and shaking his head fiercely. “No, it’s *not* okay. It’s not okay at all. I failed, and because of that my little brother had to suffer years of immeasurable torment. There’s no way I can make that *okay*.”

Ianto felt all of the wind suddenly drop out of his sails as the last of Jack’s words filtered into his brain. “Did... did you just say little *brother*?”

Chapter Thirteen

Jack slumped back down and nodded soberly. “Gray... Gray was four years younger than me, and I adored him. We fought, of course, like all brothers do, but we were really close. And then, when I was eleven, and he was seven, he was taken.”

He closed his eyes and his face crumpled for a second as the memory came over him again. “They’d come before, but they’d never been quite so vicious before. Dad told me to get myself and Gray to safety, and I didn’t. I was safe, but the creatures got Gray. Took him. I... I never thought I’d see him again, but...”

“But you think that I’m... I’m him, don’t you?” Ianto finished.

Both Jack and John nodded.

“Why? What is it in that report that makes you think that? What is it about that *photo* that makes you think that?” Ianto cried, upset and confused.

“I... It’s...” Jack paused and stood up. “Wait here.” He disappeared into his office, where Ianto could just make out that he retrieved something from a desk drawer and rummaged through it.

He walked back towards them a minute later, something in his hand. He sank back into the sofa and handed it to Ianto.

It was a photograph. Slightly creased in the middle where it had clearly been folded over for years, but the subject was still perfectly clear. A small tousle-headed boy grinned up at the camera, framed by seemingly endless sand dunes and brilliant sunlight.

Ianto focussed on the young boy and swallowed hard.

“That’s Gray, as he was the last time I saw him before he was taken,” Jack said beside him.

Ianto looked harder and had to take a deep breath. The smiling face looking back at him bore a remarkable similarity to his own, although significantly more so to his ten year old self than to him now.

He opened his mouth several times to say something, but no words would come out.

“It... *you*... might not be, though,” Jack said shakily. “I mean... there must be hundreds of little boys who look like that... thousands even. Maybe even millions!” A very tentatively hopeful smile started to grace his lips. “It could just be a coincidence!”

Ianto shook his head, unable to let himself believe in Jack’s hopelessly naïve and optimistic scenario. “Yes, but how many of those small boys that look just like your brother were taken and held by those creatures?”

“They might not even be the same creatures,” Jack insisted, clinging onto the idea by his fingernails.

“You said yourself that my description sounded vaguely familiar, Jack. There’s no point in denying it,” Ianto countered miserably.

“But that doesn’t mean...”

John chose that moment to rejoin the conversation. “Face it, Jack, it’s all just a little bit much to be a coincidence. Even the timing matches up – you told me you were born in 5053, which means Gray must have been born in 5057; the same year the Time Agency estimated Ianto was born in.”

Jack shook his head frantically. “We still don’t know for sure. Yes, the facts might all point in one direction, but there’s still no proof.”

Ianto looked at Jack and John in turn. “Well, there must be some way we can find out for sure. I mean... surely we can just do DNA testing or something like that...”

Jack’s eyes brightened. “Our DNA doesn’t match,” he said with certainty. “It isn’t even similar. Torchwood takes blood samples during the physical when you join, and DNA profiling is one of the things they run it through. Ianto’s DNA isn’t anything like mine. We can’t be related.” He grinned round at Ianto.

“Umm...” John interrupted Jack’s celebration. “Aren’t you forgetting something?”

Jack frowned. “I don’t think so.”

John just looked at him. “KamiTab?”

Jack deflated instantly. “Oh.”

Ianto was confused. Again. “KamiTab?”

Jack sighed and John took up the explanation. “It’s sort of a chameleon drug, administered whenever a victim is being relocated significantly out of what is suspected to be their home time period. Used quite a bit by spies going undercover too.”

“Chameleon drug in that it...?” Ianto wasn’t sure he liked the sound of this much.

“Changes your physiology so you will fit in completely, yes,” John replied. “Well, not really, if I’m to be completely honest. It doesn’t actually change *you*. It just changes what shows up in test results.”

“And it changed my DNA?” Ianto asked, wondering why that would be necessary.

“It changed what your DNA will show up as if it is tested, yes,” John nodded.

“But why? Do they think my real DNA being known in this time would cause some sort of break in the timeline or...?” Ianto trailed off, unable to think of another possible reason.

“Nothing that thought out. It’s a side-effect of the processes that do need to be done. They haven’t managed to figure out a way yet of masking the changes that need to be masked without also masking DNA.”

“So there’s no way of us finding out for sure?” Ianto wasn’t sure if this prospect pleased or dismayed him.

“I didn’t say that,” John smirked. “There *is* a reversal drug... and I know just where I can get my hands on it.”

Chapter Fourteen

John had seemed positively excited about the prospect of going to steal – or ‘acquire’ as he’d called it – a dose of the KamiTab reversal compound.

“They still have a permanent guard on duty at the chemical and drug storage facility,” he’d grinned. “Just the one, but it still makes it that little bit more fun to break into.”

Ianto had to wonder a little at what it was in someone’s personality that made breaking into a facility ‘more fun’ the higher the chance of being caught, but since in this instance it was motivating Hart to keep helping them, he didn’t comment.

A wide grin on his face, John had pressed a few buttons on his vortex manipulator and disappeared back into another swirl of Rift energy, leaving Jack and Ianto alone in the Hub.

The silence was deafening.

They looked everywhere but at each other, and an awkward pall descended over the Hub while they waited; it couldn’t have been more different to their previous wait.

Ianto wanted to say something, *do* something to break it, but there was nothing. Everything that came into his head was quickly dismissed; everything that came to mind would have been a perfect thing to say just an hour ago, back when Jack was *his* Jack and *he* was still Ianto.

But now, none of it was. Not when there was an all too likely possibility that their relationship could never be the same again.

He wanted to subscribe to Jack's optimism, wanted to believe it was possible, but he couldn't – and he suspected that deep in his heart, Jack didn't either.

He wanted, even more than anything else, to be able to run into Jack's arms and let them comfort each other – but that wasn't possible either.

Ianto paced nervously around the raised area, avoiding Jack where he remained slumped on the sofa, his footsteps sounding loud in his ears on the metal grating.

A movement caught his attention at the edge of his eye, and he spun around in time to watch John reappear, seemingly empty-handed. His relief at the other man's return surprised him slightly; his worry that he didn't seem to have returned *with* anything did not.

“Did you...?” he started anxiously.

John interrupted him, answering the unfinished question by pulling what looked to Ianto to be some sort of blister pack out of a pocket. “Ye of little faith,” he said, his voice full of mock hurt. “I even managed to swipe a pack of KamiTab itself too – much harder, by the way, because *that* stuff they still keep in a bloody safe. But I thought you might rather need it, after you've done your little test here.”

Ianto nodded gratefully. “Thank you. I hadn't even thought of it, but you're right. I can't exactly be wandering around with my 'real' DNA showing up on tests, not after all these years with whatever false result the KamiTab has been causing. And whatever else it changed, too. If nothing else, Owen would be bound to notice *eventually*, and I'd rather not have to answer *those* questions.”

Jack stood up and joined them, still studiously *not* meeting Ianto's eyes. “So, are we going to get this over and done with, then?”

Ianto nodded vehemently. “Yes. As soon as possible. Whatever the results, it can't be worse than this not-quite knowing, right?”

Jack made a sound in his throat that Ianto interpreted as uncertain disagreement.

“I need to know,” Ianto insisted. “I can't hang on like this, suspecting but not knowing.” He turned to John. “What do I need to do for the reversal?”

John held out what turned out to actually *be* a blister pack, no different to what Ianto would have expected to get off a pharmacy shelf in the 21st century. “Just take one of

the pills. They don't try to make these things overly complicated. Makes it simpler for surreptitious administration, too."

Ianto just nodded and took the packet, breaking out a pill and popping it into his mouth, swallowing instantly.

"How... how long does it take to work?" he asked. "And how will I know when it has?"

"They're usually pretty fast acting," Jack told him, staring at a point just over his shoulder. "So maybe 10 minutes at the outside."

"And there's no way of just 'telling'," John continued. "The only way to know is to actually take a sample and check it."

"So we wait."

"We wait."

If Ianto had though the long minutes waiting for John to return with the drugs were awkward, he decided then that he was wrong. *This* was awkward. He stared at the face of his stopwatch, waiting for ten minutes to be up and trying not to think of other, more pleasurable, times when he had done exactly the same thing.

"That's time," he finally said when it came around, his voice gruff.

The three of them made the seemingly long journey down to the medical bay, where Ianto hopped up to sit on the table.

Jack rummaged around in a drawer for a moment before coming up with a sterile swab, packaged in paper. He passed it back to Ianto without turning around to look at him.

Ianto took the sample and handed it back, not looking at Jack either.

The machine they had that could extract a DNA profile from a sample was, thankfully, alien-tech enhanced and could perform the extraction many times faster than anything any police department in the country – or the world – had access to.

Ianto's buccal sample was quickly processed and inserted into the machine, and they were faced with yet another uncomfortable wait.

The computer beeped when the sample was done, and they brought up Jack's profile from his file, and clicked open the new profile for Ianto the machine had just produced.

Both profiles came up on the screen for them to compare.

Ianto took a good look, and his legs promptly collapsed under him.

Chapter Fifteen

Jack pushed some papers around on his desk aimlessly. It wasn't even 6am yet, but he'd given up on even attempting to sleep over an hour before.

He realised with dismay that he no longer knew how to sleep even for a few hours without Ianto being there.

Ianto...

He wondered if the younger man was managing to sleep, or if he was lying awake, staring at the ceiling like Jack had been doing earlier.

Ianto had crumpled to the floor when the DNA results had been revealed, and Jack had nearly found himself on the floor next to him.

As it turned out, blind hope wasn't too effective a method for changing DNA profile results to say what you wanted them to. They had been crystal clear, and even an idiot couldn't have missed that Jack's profile and Ianto's new KamiTab-less profile shared more than enough genetic markers to mark them out as siblings.

None of them had known quite what to say; Ianto and Jack had both been in shock, and John had just seemed uncomfortable.

Despite this, John had been the one to finally break the silence. "So, uh... I should be getting going. Places to see, people to do and all that." He dug into a pocket and pulled out another blister pack, this one a different colour to the other. He tossed it onto the table in the medical bay and took a step back. "That's the KamiTab, when you want it."

He'd all but run up the short flight of stairs into the rest of the Hub, hastily pressing a sequence of numbers into his wriststrap as he went.

Jack didn't blame him one bit. If he could have escaped from the situation himself he would have. He wished there was a way both he and Ianto could escape from it, actually – some way they could go back to how it was before; some way to make none of this be true.

Ianto had found his feet barely minutes after John had disappeared, still unable to look at Jack as he grabbed the blister pack of KamiTab from the table. He had paused for just a second, as if he was considering saying something, but had said nothing, following John's path at a run, and in silence.

Jack had busied himself tidying up the medical bay, putting away the tech they'd used and concealing all evidence of the tests they'd carried out that evening. He had studiously ignored the charts displayed on the computer screen, closing the program and putting the computer into sleep mode before leaving the medical bay.

It was the work of mere minutes to replace the CCTV footage showing John Hart's presence with looped footage showing nothing of interest. Toshiko, he knew, could probably still find the original images if she put her mind to it, but he hoped he hadn't left anything that would stir her suspicions enough to make her look.

Confident that there wasn't anything that would seem immediately out of place when the team got into work in the morning, he had grabbed his coat and headed out of the Hub himself.

The roof on top of the Millennium Centre was one of his favourite places to stand and ponder the vagaries of life and death, and with good reason – usually by the time he'd spent some time up there watching Cardiff quietly go about its business, whatever problem was bothering him didn't seem so hard to deal with.

He'd spent nearly two hours up there, staring by turns at the city below and the stars above, before coming to the conclusion that it just wasn't going to help. He'd been just as confused and lost when he returned to the Hub as he'd been when he first climbed up there.

He'd stripped off and climbed down into his little bunker to try to sleep, but getting any real rest had proved impossible.

At least he could use the extra time to catch up on some of the paperwork he was, as always, behind on, but he just couldn't concentrate. He tried to think of anything else at all, but his mind was inexorably drawn back to Ianto, to Gray...to the fact that they were one and the same.

He still didn't want to believe it, despite the proof they'd been confronted with the night before. Didn't want to accept it. If he accepted it, then that meant it had really happened, and he didn't really know what to do with that.

The cog door rolled open, sirens blaring, just before 7.30am. Jack looked up from his contemplation of the grain on his desk to see who it was, surprised at how much time had passed while he steadfastly just *didn't think*.

He wasn't sure if he was relieved or disappointed when Tosh, not Ianto, walked through.

Chapter Sixteen

Although he didn't know what he would do when he saw him, Jack fretted until Ianto appeared in the Hub just after 9am. In a marked change from what had become customary, he was the last of the team to arrive; Jack wondered if that had been a deliberate move on Ianto's part.

Their eyes didn't meet as he walked through the door; Ianto was clearly just as unsure what to do as he was.

His coffee still landed on his desk, but without the quiet moment of conversation that he'd grown used to. Ianto also brought it into his office before he took round the tray of mugs for the rest of the team, instead of leaving it for last.

Part of Jack was dying inside at the difference one day could make, and Ianto's clear avoidance of him. The other part was relieved. He didn't have the words to express any of what he was feeling about the situation they found themselves in. He couldn't even identify what he was feeling, let alone talk about it.

He did find himself surreptitiously watching Ianto, though, without even conscious volition. Watching him, his mind trying frantically to work out how Ianto was coping.

If looks were anything to go on, Ianto felt about as bad as he did. There were dark circles under his eyes, and he looked pale. His suit was uncharacteristically crumpled.

In any other circumstances, if Ianto looked as distressed, Jack would have taken him into his arms and just held him until he felt a little better, no matter who was around. His arms almost itched to do so now, but he knew he couldn't.

They weren't who they had been just yesterday, and all the rules had changed. They had all changed, but the trouble was, no one had bothered to tell him what the new ones were.

The atmosphere in the whole Hub got progressively more and more awkward all day, and Jack knew that the rest of the team must have picked up on the fact that something wasn't right.

He realised that there was a part of him actually waiting – anticipating, even – a Rift alert. Or police reports of Weevils. Or... well... anything. Something that would take them out of the Hub and give him something else to concentrate on for a while, a distraction.

The Rift and police taps both remained stubbornly silent.

Jack, for the most part, remained in his office, still trying to force his mind to settle enough to complete some reports. They needed to be done, he told himself. He wasn't hiding from the team. Absolutely not. He was just busy.

But he couldn't deny that he had to take a deep breath and steel himself when he saw Gwen approaching the closed transparent door of his office.

She had that look on her face. The stubborn one she so often wore that said she wasn't about to give up easily; the look that told him she had just enough information to peak her insatiable curiosity but not enough to satisfy it.

Her dogged determination to get to the bottom of things – not matter what it took – was something he valued highly in her as a Torchwood employee; it had often proved useful on a case. When that same aspect of her personality was turned on him – and more specifically on his personal life, especially where it pertained to Ianto – he hated it.

He kept his eyes down-turned, trained on the papers scattered across his desk, as she shoved open the door without so much as pausing to knock.

“Okay, what’s going on?” she said bluntly as soon as she was fully through the door.

Jack looked up. “What’s going on with what?” He knew that he was being deliberately obtuse, and moreover he knew that *Gwen* knew he was being deliberately obtuse, but he really didn’t want to talk about this, and he hoped that she would pick up on that as well.

If she did, she showed no signs of caring, as she forged right on. “You and Ianto. What happened? And don’t try to tell me ‘nothing’, because something clearly has. The two of you have been inseparable, practically attached at the hip, for the last few weeks, and today, suddenly you aren’t even talking to each other. Plus neither of you look like you’ve slept. At all.”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Gwen,” Jack said firmly, since she didn’t appear to be getting the hint.

“But are you going to be okay?” Gwen persisted. “If you need me to, I can...”

“Look,” Jack interrupted exasperatedly, “yes, something happened with me and Ianto. No, I’m not ‘okay’, and I don’t honestly know if or when I will be again. But it’s also, frankly, none of your concern, so you can you please just let it – me – be?”

Gwen frowned. “I thought I was your friend. I thought we all were. I only want to help.”

He sighed. “I know. You are, and it *is* appreciated, it’s just... There’s nothing you can do, nothing any of you can do. This is something very personal between me and Ianto, and...”

He had to stop and take a deep breath to stay on top of his emotions. “I really can’t talk about it, so please, *please*, just leave it alone.”

Gwen looked somewhat peeved with his refusal to share, but nonetheless turned around and took a step towards leaving the office. The determined look hadn’t left her eyes though, which prompted Jack to call her back before she could actually leave.

“Oh, and Gwen?”

She turned back to look at him questioningly.

“Don’t go and pester Ianto about this just because I wouldn’t tell you anything.”

The slightly guilty flush that passed over Gwen’s face told Jack he’d been correct in his suspicions. He shook his head sadly. “If he feels *anything* like I do, bringing it up is *not* going to help. So just don’t. Please.”

Chapter Seventeen

Sounds in the darkness. Noises he didn't understand. Shuffling movements that he couldn't quite follow.

Pain. Pain everywhere. Pain beyond anything else he could imagine. Excruciating fire ripping through every limb.

*Something was being pushed through his skin – he couldn't identify what, only that it was thick, blunt, hot and it **hurt**. It hurt and it didn't stop and it was devastatingly familiar.*

This wasn't the first time he'd been subjected to this. It wouldn't be the last. He wished he could escape, but had long ago given up any hope if it really happening.

He couldn't even remember when it was that he last let himself indulge in a moment of optimism.

The pain was never-ending. The agonizing pain and the darkness. Endless.

Ianto gasped back to consciousness, a cold sweat dripping down his back as he sat up under the blanket on his couch. His breathing was coming in harsh pants, his chest heaving.

Instinctively, he looked for Jack's comforting presence, his calming embrace, before remembering why he wasn't there. Why Ianto was sleeping on his aged lumpy couch instead of his soft bed. The shivers that wracked his body grew stronger; a lump formed in his throat and he choked back a sob.

His fingers clenched around the thin blanket, wishing it was Jack's arms and knowing it couldn't be. A tear trailed defiantly down his cheek as he desperately tried to gain control of himself.

He cursed himself for allowing himself to become so dependent on Jack. He'd been dealing just fine with nightmares – even the horrific ones based on memory – on his own for years before Jack, but in the past months he'd become too used to him being there.

Too used to being able to wake up in the night and find a warm presence there, willing to listen if he needed to talk it out or just to hold him tight if he didn't. Too used to being able to bury his face in a strong chest while he calmed down enough to sleep.

Too used to having someone there who was only too willing to give him a distraction when he couldn't take his mind off the horrors his subconscious had brought up for long enough to drift off.

Not used to waking up alone and having to push the images to the back of his mind by himself.

He hadn't expected the nightmare. The visions and flashes that had so haunted him for so many weeks had been quiet for the last three days, as if finally getting some real answers about his childhood had silenced them.

He'd wandered about his flat until the small hours of the morning, trying to clear his still racing mind, just as he'd done the previous three nights. Eventually, *unlike* the previous three nights, exhaustion had overtaken him.

Unable to face all the memories that assaulted him in his bedroom, he had quickly grabbed a blanket from the linen cupboard and collapsed onto the sofa, hoping that he might finally get a few hours of solid sleep.

He looked at the digital clock readout on the VCR. That had been just under an hour ago, but he knew the chances of him getting back to sleep again now were small to non-existent.

When the clock ticked over to 7am and he still wasn't asleep, he gave up, got up and put on a clean suit. He tied his tie, and looked critically at his own reflection as he shaved. Four nights with less than an hour's sleep between them were taking their toll on his appearance, and he knew the rest of the team had noticed. He suspected Jack had 'had a word', probably with Gwen, as none of them had approached him to push for information.

Jack was at his desk when he got to the Hub, looking just barely better than Ianto felt. He wanted to go to Jack, wanted to ask him how he was, wanted to get the comfort from him he was so dearly missing, wanted to give Jack the comfort he looked like he needed.

He didn't. Steeling himself, and drawing on the very last of his energy reserves, he climbed to the coffee machine instead.

The Rift had the cheek to stay quiet for the fourth day in a row, and the team were sent home by six. Ianto slumped on his sofa, watching some mindless soap on the television and willing himself to fall asleep – he'd take the nightmares if it meant he got some rest.

He was still there, no closer to sleep, when his doorbell rang an hour later.

He wasn't sure who he expected to be on the other side of the door when he opened it, but it certainly wasn't Jack.

He froze in the doorway. "Hi."

Jack's Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed hard. "Hi. Can... can I come in."

Ianto nodded mutely and stepped to the side.

They stood in silence in Ianto's living room for several minutes. Ianto was confused as to why Jack was even there.

"I... I just..." Jack took a breath and looked hard at Ianto. "Are you sleeping okay, Ianto?"

Ianto shrugged diffidently. "Not really."

Jack nodded, smiling wryly. "Yeah. Me neither." He looked at a point over Ianto's shoulder for a second. "I'm sorry I haven't been there for you these last days," he murmured.

Ianto took an involuntary step closer, shaking his head. "I haven't exactly been there for you either," he said quietly.

"But I promised I'd be there for you, no matter what we discovered, and I haven't been," Jack insisted. "I left you on your own to deal with all this, and..."

"Not your fault," Ianto said fiercely, fully meeting Jack's eyes for the first time since they'd first come to suspect Ianto's true identity. "You've had to deal with it on your own too."

Jack's eyes bored back into his, and despite everything that had happened in the last few days, Ianto drew comfort from the concern and affection still evident behind them.

Silence fell over them once more as they looked at each other.

Neither of them moved for several minutes as they just stared, both starved for any sort of connection after days of deprivation.

Then, before either of them could pause to consider what they were doing, they were in each other's arms, lips locked in a frantic kiss.

Interlude

Ianto moaned into Jack's mouth as the older man stroked his tongue past Ianto's lips, tangling with Ianto's own, exploring all the sensitive hot spots on the roof of his mouth, as he'd done so many times before.

He pressed closer, his fingers finding Jack's shoulders and starting to push at the heavy weight of Jack's greatcoat, wondering vaguely why it hadn't been removed already.

As the coat slid over the top of Jack's arms, Jack pulled back, breathing hard. He shook his head slightly dazedly. "We shouldn't be doing this," he mumbled, stumbling back a step.

Ianto shoved Jack's coat to the floor and reached for him, pulling him back towards him. "Don't care," he groaned, kissing the corner of Jack's mouth. "Need you. Can't do this without you."

Any further protests Jack might have had were swallowed up and forgotten as Ianto fixed his mouth back onto his.

The only sounds in the room for the next several minutes were soft whimpers and moans, filtered through each other's mouths as the lip-lock continued passionately.

Ianto twisted them around and shuffled backwards a step, towards the bedroom door. Jack's lips broke away and trailed down Ianto's neck, alternating gentle nips with soothing licks, as they began a sort of stagger-step through the room.

Jack's braces were the next thing to go, pushed from his shoulders by fumbling fingers as they bumped through the bedroom door.

Jack pushed Ianto up against the wall just inside the bedroom door. He attacked the buttons on Ianto's dark shirt fervently, his lips following the movement of his hands as they explored every little bit of skin as it was bared.

Ianto's head dropped back against the wall, whimpering softly in pleasure as Jack's kisses scattered over his chest. His fingers tangled in Jack's hair, scratching against his scalp.

"Jack..." The name was drawn out in a moan as Jack's tongue tickled the sensitive muscles of his abdomen. "Please."

Jack straightened up, swooping in to capture Ianto's lips again as his talented fingers took over where his tongue had left off.

Ianto's fingers were shaking and scrabbling as he attempted to unfasten Jack's shirt. If he were a less fastidious person, he would simply have grabbed at the edges and pulled them apart, to Hell with what that would do to the buttons. But he wasn't, so he didn't, instead undoing each one as quickly as he could with fingers that wouldn't quite do as he asked.

Finally the buttons were all undone, and the shirt was quickly dispatched, dropped to the floor as Ianto ran his hands down Jack's arms and pressed closer.

Jack instinctively ground against him, hard against Ianto's thigh, the delicious friction rippling through Ianto's whole body.

Ianto's fingertips trailed down Jack's sides, pulling his upper half back just far enough and just long enough to tug Jack's T-shirt over his head.

There were soft sighs as they came back together for another deep and sloppy kiss, bare chests meeting for the first time in far too long as they writhed together against the wall.

Blood rushing in his ears, Ianto pushed Jack back a little and tugged at his belt. Jack swiftly moved to help him, fumbling slightly when his fingers trembled with desire.

Despite shaking hands, belts were quickly dealt with, tossed heedlessly into the dim light of the bedroom.

They stumbled away from the wall as hands reached for flies, aiming for the soft bed.

Ianto managed to wriggle out of both his trousers and his boxers on the way to the bed before twisting under Jack to land on his back.

Jack struggled to push his boots off as he pushed his own trousers past his thighs. With one boot and sock off, and the other proving stubborn, he gave it up and just squirmed out of as much of his trousers as he could with one leg stuck at the ankle, collapsing onto the bed, half on top of Ianto.

As glorious as the rub of their cocks together was; as much as he always loved the sensation of Jack's erection against his own, it wasn't enough for Ianto, it wasn't what he needed.

He stretched out an arm and dug into the nightstand drawer, pulling out a half-empty tube of lube and pressing it into Jack's hand. He rolled his hips in such a way as left absolutely no doubt as to his wishes.

Jack took the hint, slicking up several fingers and wasting no time in preparing Ianto.

Despite the many days since their last time together, Ianto didn't need much preparation. His body was aching for Jack as much as his soul was, and he relaxed quickly under Jack's ministrations.

Their eyes locked as Ianto settled back, crumpling the dress shirt still hanging off his shoulders, and opened himself to Jack.

Their groans echoed in tandem around the room as Jack sank deep into Ianto's body in one aching slow thrust. Fully seated, he rested his forehead on Ianto's and took a calming breath.

Ianto, however, was having none of it, and undulated under him, urging Jack to *move*.

Jack tried to keep a slow, strong pace, but that didn't last for long as the desperation and desire overtook them.

They writhed together faster and faster, their breathing growing quicker and shallower as they drove themselves closer and closer to the edge.

One of Jack's hands dropped from Ianto's shoulders to fist his cock; Ianto's hand came down to join it and they stroked in time with the ever increasing thrusts of their bodies.

“Ianto... Ianto... Ianto...” Jack repeated under his breath, the words coming out in barely a whisper.

Ianto was too breathless to make any sound beyond panting moans.

The peak was almost within sight; rushing towards it, Jack’s thrusts became more undulations than actual thrusts, his cock never really leaving Ianto’s body, just shifting against his sweet spot, faster and faster.

Jack lost control first, tripping over the edge with a guttural cry. Ianto followed moments later, every muscle in his body trembling with the strength of his orgasm.

They panted in each other’s faces as they slowly came back to Earth, sated and boneless.

Jack collapsed for a moment onto Ianto before rolling to the side. Sluggishly, Ianto shrugged out of his sweat-soaked shirt and Jack finally rid himself of his other boot, sock and trousers.

Unwilling to get out of bed, and without the energy to do so, they forwent a proper clean up, Ianto digging a box of baby wipes from the nightstand instead.

Their eyes were already closing as they curled around each other, falling into their first peaceful sleep in days.

Chapter Eighteen

Ianto woke up the following morning feeling refreshed and calmed. Intellectually he knew that – he glanced at the clock on the bedside table in front of him – six hours of sleep wasn’t enough to make up for four nights with none, but he felt better nonetheless.

He rolled his shoulders and snuggled further into the warmth of his duvet; he didn’t have to get up quite yet. There was a movement against his back, and he rolled over just enough to see over his shoulder.

Jack, for the first time Ianto could bring to mind, was still asleep, snuffling slightly into the pillow.

Jack.

In his bed.

Naked.

Shit.

The events of the night before came flooding back into Ianto’s mind with alarming clarity.

He felt slightly sticky and sore in all the right places – which, no, were all the *wrong* places.

He lifted his head slightly, enough to look around the room and see the myriad of items of clothing scattered around the room. He knew that if – when – he got up and went into the living room, he would find more of the same.

Shit, shittity shit shit.

He shuffled carefully forwards a few inches, until he lost all skin-to-skin contact with Jack. He instantly felt colder, but he knew it had to be done.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and swallowed hard. Gingerly, he eased out of bed, trying not to wake Jack from his slumber. The cool morning air sent a shiver through his body and he scrunched his toes against the cold laminate flooring.

Padding to the attached bathroom and closing the door firmly behind him, he took a look at himself in the mirror above the sink. Better than yesterday – definitely more rested – but not by much.

He barely waited for the water to heat up before hopping into the shower and washing swiftly. He towelled off and hesitated before going back into the bedroom.

Jack would almost certainly be awake by now; the plumbing in his flat was good, but not overly quiet. And he really wasn't sure how to face him; he didn't know what to say.

Realising quickly that, unfortunately, he couldn't hide in his bathroom forever, he tucked his towel more securely around his waist and pushed the door open.

Just as he'd suspected, Jack was awake, although he hadn't moved to get out of bed yet. He looked over at Ianto as he stepped into the bedroom, closing the bathroom door behind him and leaning with his back to the wall.

Jack's eyes automatically flicked over Ianto's near-naked body, and there was just a hint of a leer beginning before reality suddenly seemed to hit him and he checked himself.

His gaze rolled to the ceiling while Ianto's dropped to the floor – actually looking at each other was dangerous, as they had discovered all too well last night.

“This... that... should never have happened,” Ianto said quietly.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Jack nodding.

“We just got a little... carried away,” he continued. “It can't – it *won't* happen again.”

“No,” Jack agreed, almost inaudibly. “It was just... a mistake. An aberration. One last time to satisfy our trait-traitorous bodies.”

Ianto nodded. “One last time. Doesn’t have to be a big deal. We can... we can just forget it ever happened and, well... move on. Get on with our lives, figure out how to deal with all of this and everything will be fine.”

Although his voice was steady and decided, Ianto had no idea how they were actually going to do it. He already knew that just forgetting about the night before was never going to happen.

He had a sinking feeling that ‘moving on’ wasn’t going to be as easy as the words made it sound, either.

And figuring out how to actually - properly - deal with all the revelations of the past days? Might as well forget about *that* one. It still hadn’t even really sunk in.

He glanced up briefly and noted that, while Jack was nodding vigorously, he didn’t look any more confident or assured than Ianto felt.

Jack heaved a deep sigh. “I should...” He made a gesture towards the door rather than complete the sentence.

“Yeah.” Ianto nodded. “I’ll just...” He quickly grabbed clothes for the day from his wardrobe and escaped into the living room to dress, leaving Jack to rise alone.

There was the brief sound of a tap running in the bathroom, and by the time Jack emerged from the bedroom, fully dressed if a little dishevelled, Ianto had coffee made and was leaning against his kitchen counter, a mug in one hand and a half-eaten slice of toast in the other.

Putting down the mug, he turned back to his coffee machine, pouring some into a travel mug instead of the mug Jack usually used when he spent the night. He didn’t think either of them was up to making small talk for long enough for him to drink it, but he didn’t feel right letting Jack go without offering him his first mug of the day.

Their fingers very carefully did not brush as Jack took the mug, mumbled a thanks, and escaped.

Chapter Nineteen

Despite their agreement to pretend that their night together never happened, things between Jack and Ianto just became progressively more awkward over the next two weeks.

The only words they exchanged at all were if the team was actually involved in an active case, and even then, communication was kept to a bare minimum.

On quiet days, Ianto – even more so than before – would stay up in the tourist office all day, or hide away in the depths of the archives where no one was likely to try to *find* him, let alone bother him.

Jack, for the most part, did his own hiding in his office, burying himself in the paperwork that everyone knew he despised. When he ran out of paperwork – an event that surprised him more than anyone else, the first time it occurred – he would go down to the shooting range, or find a rooftop high enough that none of the others would dare climb up.

They both knew that the rest of the team had noticed something was wrong; despite repeated requests to just *leave it alone*, Gwen had persisted in trying to get each of them to open up. Tosh shot them worried and sympathetic looks by turn, and even Owen could be heard grumbling around the autopsy bay that ‘things around this place would be so much better if bloody Harkness and the tea boy could just get over whatever’s bothering them and go back to shagging all over the place.’

Despite this, neither of them were expecting the team to take any definitive action, and certainly not the action they decided to take.

“Hey!” Jack banged hard on the door to the conference room, so rarely closed at all, and now closed behind him. And locked. “What’s going on here?”

“What’s going on is that we’re sick of putting up with the pair of you like this!” came Owen’s voice from the other side of the door.

“You’re not getting out until you can sort things out!” That was Gwen. “Or at least find a way to be friends again.”

“And don’t bother trying to unlock the door with your wriststrap, Jack!” Tosh’s voice this time. Jack froze, his hand halfway to his Vortex Manipulator, and wondered how she’d known. “It won’t work, I made sure of that.”

Jack sighed.

“In the interests of letting you have your privacy,” Gwen’s voice again, “we’ve turned off the CCTV to this room.” She didn’t sound particularly pleased with this decision, and Jack suspected Tosh and Owen had had to convince her of that one.

“How... how will you know when to let us out, then?” Ianto said from behind him.

“Call one of our mobiles,” Tosh told them through the door. “We’ll turn the CCTV back on and decide if we believe you’ve sorted things out, and then we’ll let you out.”

There was a shuffling of feet on the other side of the door, and then silence. Jack beat his fist once more against the door and leant his forehead against it. Before he closed his eyes, he could just make out Ianto sinking into a seat behind him.

For a long time, neither of them said a word; they didn’t know what to say.

Eventually Ianto cleared his throat and his voice rang out quietly in the stillness of the room. “They do have a bit of a point. We need to find some way – any way – to at least be friends again.”

Jack took a deep breath and leaned harder against the door. “Yeah, friends.” He shook his head. “That’s sort of the problem, really.” Straightening up, he turned around to face Ianto. “Even knowing what we know... I don’t think I know how to go back to just being your friend.”

Ianto looked up at him and bit his lip. “Yeah,” he breathed. “Me neither.”

Taking three short steps, Jack took a seat at the large conference table opposite Ianto. He traced a pattern on the table-top with the tip of a finger. “So... what do we do about it, then?”

Ianto shrugged. “I don’t know. I wish I did. I wish I could just... turn these feelings off, feel what my head says I *should* feel, instead... but I can’t.” He sighed. “And I don’t even know if I *really* actually want that at all.”

Jack just nodded, knowing exactly how Ianto felt.

Silence fell over them again, although the awkward tension had dropped by just a notch.

Once again, Ianto was the first one to break through the quiet. “It’s just,” he exhaled, “I don’t even remember *having* a brother.” He shook his head in bewilderment. “How am I supposed to learn how to relate to you as one when I don’t even know what that sort of relationship is supposed to be like?”

He threw up his hands. “I don’t remember that life at all. All I’ve ever known, all that I really remember even now, is being Ianto Jones. Only child of Bethan and Jonah Jones. I don’t *feel* like Gray ...” His words stalled as he searched his memory for information he just didn’t have. “I don’t even know what your – our – real last name is. I can’t make myself feel like that person.”

“Pecjak,” Jack provided quietly. “That’s my real surname.” He swallowed hard. “*Our*... real surname. Pecjak.”

“Gray Pecjak,” Ianto tested out, shaking his head immediately afterwards. “Nope, still doesn’t feel like me. At all.”

Jack nodded, his gaze dropping to the table again as he did so. “You don’t feel like him to me either.” His eyes shot up again as if something suddenly occurred to him. “I mean, I don’t mean... you know what I mean.”

Ianto bobbed his head. “I know what you mean.”

Jack tilted his head to the side. “I have these memories of my little brother; playing with him on the beach, helping my dad teach him to swim, crawling into my mom’s lap together when we were both just little and scared of a storm.” He met Ianto’s gaze. “And I have all these memories of you; little moments - big moments - from these past couple of years. I just can’t reconcile the two.”

He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again, they were shining with emotion. “You’re Ianto Jones, the man I fell in love with.” He lifted his shoulders. “I don’t know how to make you anyone else.”

Ianto swallowed around the lump growing in his throat. “I don’t know how to *be* anyone else.”

Jack reached out a hand across the table between them. “Then why are we even trying? Why are we trying to make ourselves feel things we don’t? It’s only making us both miserable.” His eyes burned into Ianto’s. “I’ve hated these last weeks. Hated them. I don’t want to be without you until I have to.”

Ianto shook his head uncertainly. “We can’t change the fact that, genetically, we *are* brothers.”

Jack shrugged it off. “Who cares?”

“What?” Ianto’s eyebrows nearly hit the ceiling.

“You heard me, who cares?” Jack repeated. “If we’d never found out, we’d still be together, right?”

Ianto nodded, not quite sure where Jack was going with this. “Right.”

“And what else would it change, really? Nothing. Nothing at all. We could have gone your whole life without ever discovering the truth, and it wouldn’t have been important.”

Ianto blinked.

“Most of the social taboos surrounding it are based on the ancient genetic deficiencies that can arise if the couple reproduce,” Jack continued, “and it’s not like *that* was something we were planning on. Yeah, it wouldn’t have ever happened if we had grown up together, but *we didn’t*, and that’s not something we can change any more than we can change the fact that we’re technically related.”

He took a deep breath. “I’m insanely in love with you, Ianto, and that’s not going to change. I tried to stop, I really did, but I can’t.”

Ianto tentatively pushed one hand forward on the table, stopping and curling his fist before it could meet Jack’s outstretched one. “I tried too,” he admitted quietly. “And I couldn’t. I’m still as much in love with you as I ever was.”

Something brightened in Jack’s eyes. “Then let’s forget about all this mess and just *be together*,” he said fervently. “It’s not like anyone else who would care even knows.” His gaze turned pleading. “I miss you.”

Ianto finally stretched the final few inches to cover Jack’s hand with his own. “Together,” he whispered.

Jack twisted his hand under Ianto's and their fingers twined together.

Smiles began to creep shyly across their faces as they stared into each other's eyes.

"Together," Jack confirmed.